



## The Linchpin Issue Of the Christian Faith

By Jeffrey Breshears

Jesus was a gifted and charismatic itinerant Jewish teacher and religious reformer who came to believe that he had a divine mission to challenge the corrupt religious establishment of his day and break the yoke of political oppression imposed upon his people by the Roman authorities and their Jewish sycophants. As an ardent nationalist, he began to imagine himself to be the long-awaited Messiah, the spiritual savior and political liberator of the Jews, and he built his movement by deceiving his followers into thinking he could work miracles.

Jesus' core message was the coming "kingdom of God" – a political kingdom centered in Jerusalem that would overthrow Roman imperial rule and revive the power and glory of the Davidic kingdom of a thousand years earlier. Unfortunately – and inevitably – Jesus met the same fate as other would-be "messiahs" of the first century A.D. He was caught and summarily executed by the Romans as a seditious revolutionary.

But unlike all the other rival "messiahs" who came and went and were largely forgotten, there was a strange twist of events in the story of Jesus. His embittered disciples broke into his tomb and stole his body, waited 50 days until the corpse was unrecognizable, and then began proclaiming that he had risen from the dead. Over the next several decades they managed to convince thousands of gullible believers that Jesus was divine, and they manufactured a new religion in order to exploit his fame and

notoriety. To perpetuate the fraud, they composed four mostly-legendary accounts of his life – the so-called "four gospels."

Now, you're probably not convinced that this revisionistic interpretation of Jesus Christ and early Christian history is historically credible, and you might wonder where I got my information (or more accurately, misinformation). But if you assume it must be the product of the fevered imagination of some contemporary skeptic, you'd be mistaken.

Radical revisionism (or more accurately, historical deconstructionism) as it pertains to the life of Jesus and early church history is nothing new. The account I summarized above actually comes from Hermann Samuel Reimarus' *Fragments: The Intention of Jesus and His Disciples*, first published in 1774-78. In fact, there were numerous revisionist

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### The Areopagus Calendar

#### — Winter Seminar —

#### "The Historical Search for The Real Jesus"

Instructor: Dr. Jeffrey Breshears

Tuesdays, Jan. 11 - Mar. 29  
7 PM

Perimeter Church

— OR —

Wednesdays, Jan. 12 - Mar. 30  
7 PM

Mt. Bethel Community Center

Jesus Christ is the central person in history and the only one whose claims to divinity have been taken seriously by millions of believers worldwide for nearly two thousand years.

Yet there is widespread disagreement, even among Bible scholars, concerning the historical Jesus. Many contend that the gospel accounts of his life are unreliable and legendary, and that there is little correlation between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith" that Christians came to worship as divine.

This course critiques the pseudo-scholarship of radical Biblical scholars (such as the infamous Jesus Seminar) and challenges Christians to encounter Jesus not only as an historical person but as a living reality.

Among the topics covered are...

- The historical controversy surrounding Jesus of Nazareth;
- Controversies over the discovery of the "Jesus family tomb" and the Gospel of Judas;
- Was the resurrection of Jesus mythical, metaphorical, or historical – and why does it matter?
- What do we know about Jesus based on extra-biblical sources?
- Who is "the real Jesus," and how can we experience him personally?

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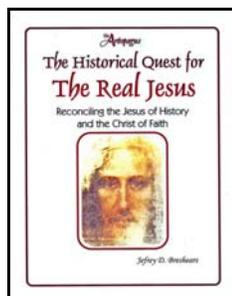
accounts of Jesus written by (reputedly) reputable scholars in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that challenged the historical/traditional view of Jesus as documented in the New Testament and the writings of the early church fathers. It's as if there is something both irresistibly appealing and yet appallingly repulsive about the Jesus of the gospels that fascinates skeptics and revisionists to the point that they feel almost "called" to alter the story in keeping with their own values and sensibilities. I suspect that it has something to do with the endemic human impulse to create God in our own image.

The question, "Who is Jesus?" is the core issue of the Christian faith and the nexus of our salvation. Apparently, Jesus considered it to be so vitally important that he made it a special point of emphasis in his ministry to his disciples, who would later become the leaders in the early church (ref. Matthew 16:13-17).

Until a couple of centuries ago, hardly anyone imagined there was a disjunction between the "Jesus of history" as portrayed in the New Testament and the "Christ of faith" that

Christians revere and worship as their Savior. But for the past two hundred years this has been an area of major controversy among Biblical scholars.

Our Areopagus winter seminar, "The Historical Search for the Real Jesus," is an in-depth survey of the history of this controversy and why it's so vitally important that Christians be prepared to defend the historical



reliability of the gospel accounts of the life and meaning of Jesus Christ. This is, in effect, the linchpin issue of the Christian faith that not only attests to the divine inspiration of the Bible but activates our spiritual salvation.

Join us this winter for this fascinating study as we analyze, critique, and refute the claims that skeptics put forth that undermine faith in the real Jesus of history and the living Lord Jesus Christ whom we can experience in the present.



Stuart McAllister speaks on "The Power of Hope" at our Christmas Dinner



Cindi Fain leads the group singing at our Areopagus Christmas Dinner on December 4



Dr. Anthony Bradley lectures on "The Liberation of Black Theology" in our December 21 forum

## The Areopagus Calendar

### — Winter Forums —

**"Intellectual Predators:  
How Professors Prey on  
Christian Students –  
And What We Can Do About It"**

by Dr. Frank Turek

TV and radio host,  
author of *I Don't Have Enough Faith  
To be an Atheist*, and  
president of CrossExamined.org,

Thursday, Jan. 20, 7:30 PM  
Perimeter Church

**"Three Christian Views on  
Creation and Evolution"**

Thursday, Feb. 17, 7:30 PM  
Perimeter Church

Presentations and discussions featuring  
proponents of Young Earth Creationism,  
Old Earth Progressive Creationism,  
and Theistic Evolution.

**"Must the Sun Set on  
America and the West?"**

by Dr. Vishal Mangalwadi

Thursday, March 17, 7:30 PM  
Perimeter Church

Is the decline of America inevitable, or is  
there still time to save our civilization?