

# Jesus: The Search Continues

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Credentials for the scholars who participated in this series.

# Jesus—The Search Continues

## INTRODUCTION

**Announcer**: When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Whom do people say the Son of Man is?”

**Dr. Craig Evans**: If I were a secular historian and looking at what Jesus is saying, I’d say this guy clearly thinks that he’s some kind of emissary from Heaven.

**Announcer**: They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

**Dr. Edwin Yamauchi**: There are also many implicit indications that Jesus was more than an ordinary human being.

**Announcer**: “What about you?” He asked. “Whom do you say that I am?”

**Dr. Darrell Bock**: I think that the voice addressed Jesus: “You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

**Announcer**: Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Today, Jesus’ question continues to challenge historians and theologians, believers and unbelievers, alike. Some still acclaim Him as the Messiah, the Son of God, as did His followers in the first century. Others declare that Jesus never said or did most of what is recorded about Him in the Gospels. Still, the search for Jesus continues.

## SEGMENT 1

**Dr. John Ankerberg**: Welcome. I’m John Ankerberg. And we’ve traveled to three continents to ask historians and archaeologists, “Is the Jesus of history the same as the Jesus of the Christian faith?” What can we really know about Him? Recently these questions captured the attention of ABC, resulting in a two-hour program entitled, “The Search for Jesus.” It was hosted by Peter Jennings. After it aired, we became aware that many scholars wanted to give a second opinion about what was said. You know about second opinions. If your doctor diagnoses you with a serious illness, and you question his diagnosis, you would not hesitate to ask for a second opinion. Well, many of the conclusions given about Jesus in the ABC Special didn’t seem to ring true, and so we decided to check with 13 other doctors and ask them for a second opinion. We even talked to a few of the same scholars ABC did, just to make sure we were hearing them correctly.

One such scholar was Dr. N. T. Wright, who taught at Oxford University in England for 22 years. He is presently canon theologian of Westminster Abbey, and is respected as one of the

foremost historical Jesus scholars in the world today. I asked him who he thought Jesus really was.

**Dr. N. T. Wright**: So, who was Jesus? Jesus was a prophet announcing the Kingdom of God, a first century Jewish Palestinian, announcing that God was now becoming King. Jesus believed that He was the One who was bringing that Kingdom in Himself, that He was Israel's Messiah. He believed that He had to do this through His own suffering and death and obedience to a vocation shaped by Israel's Scriptures. And He believed that in being and in doing all of this, He was the very embodiment of Israel's God come to redeem His people.

**Ankerberg**: Now, Dr. Wright's conclusions were not what most people came away with after watching the ABC Special about Jesus. Why?

You may have picked up a newspaper and read the opinions of a group of scholars referred to as the Jesus Seminar. Well, many people assume that the opinions of this group represent what most scholars think about Jesus. We decided to ask scholars in Canada, America, Europe and here in Israel how they evaluated the conclusions of the Jesus Seminar, and what they said might surprise you.

**Dr. Craig Evans**: [laughter] The opinion is not very good, to put it mildly. Continental scholarship, they either haven't heard of the Jesus Seminar or if they have, they dismiss it derisively. British scholarship, it's just the same way. "The Jesus Seminar! Oh, you must be kidding. Does anybody take them seriously?" That's the European response. I've seen that firsthand.

**Dr. Edwin Yamauchi**: Peter Jennings and others who investigate these matters should be aware that there is a wide spectrum of scholarly opinions and the Jesus Seminar represents a rather radical approach to the Gospels.

**Dr. Amy-Jill Levine**: ...both on the professional level and indeed people out in the churches, the Jesus Seminar model of a cynic, sage, a Mediterranean peasant has really not caught on.

**Dr. N. T. Wright**: My guess is that most British, French, German, Belgian scholars today, if they have heard of the Jesus Seminar, would simply say, "Well, I'm afraid that's some funny people in America and we're carrying on with our scholarship and we're not going to bother about that."

**Ankerberg**: What about in scholarly circles in our own country? Do they lead the way?

**Dr. Craig Evans**: No, they do not. They try to be influential and they've had positions of leadership at the Society of Biblical Literature. I'm an active member of the Historical Jesus section of the Society of Biblical Literature. Three to four hundred show up typically at their meetings. That's about ten times what typically show up at a Jesus Seminar meeting. And the Jesus Seminar guys, when they present their distinctive views like a non-eschatological Jesus or the gospel of Peter as a primary source for the other gospels, those views are simply—to put it with slang—"blown out of the water."

**Ankerberg**: Now, besides featuring the unsupported ideas of the Jesus Seminar, ABC also went to people on the streets in Bethlehem and Nazareth and asked **them** what they thought about Jesus. We discovered scholars weren't impressed with this approach either.

**Dr. Craig Evans**: Well, that might be cute for television, but it's of no probative value. It has no value whatsoever.

**Mrs. Claire Pfann**: I would say the ABC Special chose to begin from a skeptical view and chose to actually start with man-on-the-street interviews, which any credible scholar would have to laugh at. Why would we expect, for example, someone walking the streets of San Francisco

today to be able to talk with any kind of knowledge about the Gold Rush in California in 1848 or someone walking the streets of Ireland to be able to talk with any type of credibility about the Great Potato Famine? These people are not the people who have spent their lives researching and exploring the issues.

**Ankerberg:** Now, if someone wants to discover what Jesus **really** said and did here in the Holy Land 2,000 years ago, what historical evidence can they turn to? Well, as Peter Jennings pointed out, all scholars turn to the earliest books written about Jesus, and that's the four Gospels. And right here, the debate about Jesus begins. What kind of books are the Gospels? Can we trust them?

**Dr. Craig Evans:** Well, where you begin—you begin with your oldest sources, your oldest and most reliable sources. And, we've got them. We have four gospels in the New Testament.

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** And if we want to deal with the historicity of Jesus, then we have to immerse ourselves into the tools that are there for examining that. That includes the Gospels, the literary texts; it includes extra-biblical material as well; writings of other Jewish authors like Josephus. It includes archaeology and a study of biblical languages like Hebrew and Greek.

**Ankerberg:** Now, some scholars claim that the writers of the four Gospels were passionately-biased followers of Jesus, therefore it is doubtful that they accurately reported what happened.

**Dr. Craig Blomberg:** In the ancient world nobody had yet invented the notion of objective, dispassionate chronicling of history simply for history's sake. They wouldn't bother to retell the story to somebody if they didn't feel there was something that could be learned from it.

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** You can have history and theology together. Just think of the word "perspective" instead of "theology." What the Gospels give us is the perspective of the disciples and those who believe Jesus in terms of what He did and said. And granted, they have a bias, if you want to use that word. They have a prejudice. They are believers—there's no doubt about it. But they are trying to convince the reader: This is who Jesus was, this is what He did, and, in fact, this is who He is, as well, in the process.

**Dr. Craig Blomberg:** Simply because somebody believes passionately on a subject they tell about doesn't by any necessarily mean that they'll distort the facts. Sometimes the reverse is the case. A great modern day example are many Jewish historians of the Nazi holocaust, who have been passionately committed to never seeing such an atrocity reduplicated and for that very reason, they have very carefully and accurately chronicled the horrors in a way that the so-called revisionist historians, mostly Gentile, trying to downplay the atrocities, have not done so.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** And so just because the New Testament Gospel writers have a theological interest and that's what drives them to tell the story of Jesus in the first place, that doesn't disqualify their writing. It doesn't make it suddenly unhistorical or of no value.

**Ankerberg:** What would you say to a person who's really skeptical and says that Matthew didn't write Matthew; Mark didn't write Mark; Luke didn't write Luke; and John didn't write John?

**Dr. Craig Blomberg:** The sum total of the evidence that we have from the early Church Fathers is that the four men, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—that the NT is typically ascribed to, two of them apostles—Matthew and John, two of them companions of apostles—Mark and Luke, are in fact the people who wrote the stories about Jesus.

**Ankerberg:** Peter Jennings said in the special, "It is pretty much agreed among scholars that the Gospel writers were **not** eyewitnesses." What would you say to that?

**Dr. Craig Evans:** Well, two of the Gospel writers were not eyewitnesses. But, that does not

mean that they did not **know** eyewitnesses. Two of the other Gospel writers may very well have been, and that's Matthew and John. So, again, Jennings statement reflects what I think is a hypercritical stand that's entertained by **some** scholars, but not by all.

**Ankerberg:** Another statement that he made was, "In fact, the Gospels were probably written 40 to 100 years after Jesus' death." Where would you place them?

**Dr. Craig Evans:** Forty to one hundred years—that's way too far. I would put more like 35 to 50 years after Jesus' death.

**Ankerberg:** And if they are 35 to 50 years after Jesus' death, if He died in 30 AD and they're on the newsstands at 60 AD up to, say, 85 AD, what does that tell you about the content of those books?

**Dr. Craig Evans:** Well, the books are written within the lifetime of eyewitnesses, written within the lifetime of people who knew what Jesus said and did.

**Ankerberg:** We heard this over and over again from scholars: If the majority of New Testament books were written 35 to 50 years after Jesus died, then they came out when eyewitnesses of those events were still alive. It indicates the accounts must have been accurate, or they would have been rejected by both sides—those who loved Jesus and those who hated Him.

**Dr. Craig Blomberg:** And it wasn't just Christians who checked up on what was being said, there were plenty of still hostile eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus for the next generation, particularly in Israel, who, if the first apostles had gone around saying anything substantially different from what others knew Jesus did and taught, would have been very happy to intervene and to correct, and to, perhaps, snuff out this movement.

**Ankerberg:** We spoke about the historical accuracy of these books with respected Jewish archaeologist Dr. Gabriel Barkay, who recently was awarded the prize for archaeology in Israel.

**Ankerberg:** As an archeologist do you think that the writers of the New Testament anchored their stories in real historical events, real historical things that you've discovered in the past?

**Dr. Gabriel Barkay:** Yes, I do. I think that much of the evidence of the gospels mirrors a reality of 1st century of the common era.

**Ankerberg:** Then, we also talked to Dr. Magen Broshi, former curator of the Shrine of the Book, Israel's museum containing the Dead Sea Scrolls. He is a world-renowned archaeologist and scholar, having excavated the most recent discoveries of caves at Qumran.

**Dr. Magen Broshi:** I mean, the setting is absolutely accurate. Absolutely accurate. The geography is accurate. The mode of living, I mean, they couldn't have invented it, and they didn't have any need to invent anything.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** We can actually go to the place. It's a real place. It isn't some fairy-tale land somewhere. It isn't King Arthur and his round table. We can actually go some place and say, "This is where it all happened. In fact, look. We've actually dug up the very pavement where He walked." Things like that can be found.

**Ankerberg:** Respected Jewish archaeologist Dr. Hillel Geva has worked on some of the most important archaeological excavations in Jerusalem since 1967. He is editor of the leading Hebrew journal on biblical archaeology in Israel.

**Dr. Hillel Geva:** The New Testament is a very authentic, historical book. I mean, no doubt there is history in it: real history and authentic history in the book.

**Dr. Magen Broshi:** So this is, as I say, a time when there was still quite a number of eyewit-

nesses, of people that knew about the events first hand, and there is absolutely no fiction there. They are not historical novellas. They are as far as accurate as they could have done.

**Ankerberg:** Archaeologists have confirmed that Luke was so accurate that he cited facts about 32 countries, 54 cities, 9 islands, several rulers, and he never made one mistake.

Now, if the four Gospels are anchored in history, what about the birth of Jesus? At Christmas, Christians around the world look to Bethlehem as the place where He was born. But during the ABC Special, some scholars cast doubt as to whether Jesus was ever born there. So next, we will travel to Bethlehem to investigate this question.

## SEGMENT 2

**Ankerberg:** Our search for the truth about Jesus took us away from the safety of Jerusalem into modern-day Bethlehem. Though at times the area is politically unstable and sometimes war torn, its inhabitants are of humble origins, much like Joseph and Mary were 2,000 years ago.

We've come to Bethlehem to the Church of the Nativity. This is the traditional birthplace of Jesus. Some scholars claim that Jesus wasn't really born here and we wanted to get a second opinion. Others claim Matthew tells us Jesus was born in Bethlehem, while Luke implies He was born in Nazareth. Who is right?

Well, in the Gospel of Matthew, we are told, "...Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king." Then, in the Gospel of Luke we read: "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was with child. And it came about that while they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth; and she gave birth to her firstborn Son." It seems both Matthew and Luke clearly state Jesus **was** born in Bethlehem.

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** I think He was born in Bethlehem. In fact, again, let's take the alternative. What evidence is there that He was born in Nazareth. And my response would be, "Silence." There is none.

**Ankerberg:** One scholar who disagrees is Marcus Borg, the founder of the Jesus Seminar. He thinks Jesus was born in Nazareth, since He is called Jesus "of Nazareth" in the Gospels.

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** Well, I think that that's pretty much a silly observation. The fact that Jesus was called "Jesus of Nazareth" tells us less about where He was born than about where He came from as a young adult when He started His ministry. It tells us that He was known as Jesus of Nazareth because that's where He lived during His adolescence. It doesn't tell us where He was born. He was born in Bethlehem.

**Ankerberg:** Now, it's true that in order to tell the whole story of Christmas, it's necessary to put the two accounts together. Matthew and Luke each present information about what happened. But because they supply additional facts that are different, should we conclude with the critics that they have given us two contradictory reports?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** Well, the key combination is the idea: "Different equals Contradictory." And that's not the only way to look at it. You can have different accounts of the same event and they can have differences in them and not be contradictory at all. I often joke with my kids that if you

listen to my wife and I tell a story about the same event, we're not going to pick the same details. Now, some of it will overlap and some of it will be different. And part of what she tells you is going to be part of the story and part of what I tell you is going to be part of the story, too. And actually, there's great value in having those different accounts because they each penetrate the story at a different angle and in that difference of penetration you get more insight into the character and into the event. And it's not contradictory at all.

**Ankerberg:** Now, Peter Jennings stated that much of the information we have from this part of the world does not support either Matthew or Luke's account of Jesus' birth.

Claire Pfann is an expert on Jewish birth practices and the culture of Bethlehem during the time of Jesus. We asked if she agreed with the critical scholars who say that the account of Jesus' birth and early years presents a false picture of first century Jewish life.

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** I don't agree. I don't think that the Gospels present a false picture of Jewish life in the first century in the Holy Land. I think, if anything, Luke in particular endeavors to show us the norms of Jewish life.

**Ankerberg:** Luke presents both John the Baptist and Jesus as children who are circumcised on the eighth day in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Mary and Joseph are pictured as observant, pious Jews who bring Jesus up according to the Law of Moses and present Him in the temple. Luke also tells us that as a family, they went up to the great pilgrimage feasts in Jerusalem such as the time of Passover.

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** And later in Jesus' life, it's reiterated time and again, that it was his practice to go to the synagogue on Shabbat, on the Sabbath, and that he was pious and observant of Jewish traditions. I think that we see an enormous amount of material that authentically reflects Jewish life in the first century in the Holy Land in the Gospels.

**Ankerberg:** We also talked to respected Jewish archaeologist Dr. Magen Broshi, and asked if he thinks information from this part of the world supports what the Gospel writers say.

**Dr. Magen Broshi:** On certain things, they fit very well of what we know about the first century Palestine. They fit very well because they give us a good picture of what was happening here, and archaeology can prove it.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** Now, archaeology doesn't *prove* that Jesus was really God's Son. Source critical work and all that stuff doesn't prove those things. But what it does is, it shows that there is a historical foundation on which confessions of faith...or in the light of which, confessions of faith make perfectly good sense.

**Ankerberg:** Now, some scholars assert that the accounts of Jesus' virgin birth in the Gospels are similar to Greek and Roman mythologies. They point to the myth told about Caesar Augustus in which his mother was made pregnant by the Greek and Roman sun god, Apollo. Well, what about this?

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** Let's take a *Mystery* religion pattern or Hellenistic religion, a Hellenistic divine man pattern. These characters are not historical persons. They never lived in history, so what's the grounds for comparison? And I love the words of Plutarch, who, in his famous story of Isis and Osiris, he says, "Now listen, don't you guys think that this is a historical account. I'm telling you a story here!" And he says that twice. So, I think that's important that there's a contrast.

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** I mean, I think when I compare the virgin birth and its simplicity, you know: God comes to Mary and says, 'You're going to have a child' and basically does it, and there are

no—to use the Jennings example—there are no snakes that have to appear in the night to impregnate the woman. It's done just by the verbal command. See, it's the simplicity of the way in which the miraculous is displayed in the Bible.

**Dr. N. T. Wright:** Matthew and Luke both, I'm sure, knew that out there in the wider pagan world there were people who told stories about Alexander the Great being conceived when his mother was a virgin; about Augustus similarly, about various heroes and demigods. And since Matthew and Luke both want to talk about Jesus as the fulfillment of Judaism, which didn't have stories like that, this is really kind of a dangerous thing... dangerous ground for them to be getting into. And so I ask myself as a historian, Why would they do that, particularly when the obvious sneering retort to such a report is: "Well, we know Mary was just sleeping around with Roman soldiers" or whatever, which is precisely what some of the enemies of Christianity went on to say. So it seems to me that Matthew and Luke would not have included those stories unless they really believed that something very strange like this had happened.

**Ankerberg:** While questioning the accuracy of the Gospel writers, Peter Jennings implied Luke's account of the birth of Jesus could not be historical since the question remained, "Why would Joseph ever bring Mary on such a difficult journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, through the desert, especially when she was very, very pregnant?"

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** Well, there are just so many things wrong with that question, aren't there? Starting off, of course, with the fact that maybe she wasn't "very, very pregnant" at the time they made the journey. We pointed out in Luke 2 that it doesn't say that she was in labor when she was traveling to Bethlehem, it says while she was in Bethlehem she went into labor: "The time came for her to be delivered," number one. Number two: it's not that dangerous of a journey to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and we see that probably the practice was to travel in groups of people. It would be a three or four day journey. They would camp out under the stars. They would bring food with them. And there were not bandits on every side waiting to attack every traveler. So I think that we find a few basic presuppositions that are just our own modern skepticism and really don't deal with the reality of the fact that, if Joseph and Mary had come to live together as a married couple at this point, why on earth would he leave her at home when he faced a prolonged absence, waiting for the census to be accomplished?

**Ankerberg:** The big question for many people is, "Can we accept the miracle of the virgin birth?" We will talk more about miracles later, but for now, here's how an internationally respected historian who taught at Oxford approaches this question.

**Dr. N. T. Wright:** Now, of course, I cannot prove the virginal conception of Jesus, and I don't think you can prove it in the same way as I would prove the Resurrection—that you can't explain the rise of early Christianity without it. That forces me to hold my modern mind open to say, If God was really in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, ought I not to expect some other strange things as well? And when I then have these stories which look so strange and yet, Why would they do that?—maybe it really did happen. Because you see, as far as I know, nobody in Judaism was going around and saying, "Ah ha! Isaiah 7:14 – Messiah must be born of a virgin." I don't know that anyone was taking that text like that before, so it's not that Matthew had that text in mind and had to pin it on Jesus. I suspect that Matthew would have been quite happy not to mention that. But it's rather the case that he's got this story and he wants to find something in the Old Testament to go with it. And likewise, Luke, it's not the case that he has stories about angels and shepherds which he's wanting to pin on Jesus; rather, this is the stuff that he's got to work with.

**Ankerberg:** After Jesus was born, the Gospel accounts state that He grew up in the small

town of Nazareth. Yet, what do we know about His childhood and His relationship to his parents, Joseph and Mary?

**Dr. Claire Pfann**: When he was 12 years old and he went down to the temple, Luke tells us this wonderful story, he sat in the temple and he talked with the elders and the rabbis and the Pharisees, and they recognized that this child was extremely gifted, that this is the kind of kid who should be signed up to study in an academy, and really learn how to do the law. But, of course, Jesus' earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, said, "No way! You're coming home with us. You're living in this little town of Nazareth. You're going to learn a trade and you're going to help out with the family." And Jesus, in obedience, did that. He traded the classroom of the rabbinic academies for the classroom of Nazareth. And there he saw shepherds with sheep, farmers in their field, fathers with their children, and as he watched these events of natural life, he reflected on how they expressed principles of the kingdom of God. How they reflected the nature of God as a father, and when God then sent him out as Messiah, following his baptism, he was ready to talk to the every day people in language that they understood about the character of God. They didn't speak the language of the academies, they didn't speak the language of the great Halakah or the oral tradition. They understood what it meant for a woman to lose a coin, or what it meant for a father to forgive a child who had rebelled. And they could understand and accept the love of the Father, expressed through Jesus' teaching and parables.

**Ankerberg**: While growing up in Nazareth, Jesus could see a city called Sepphoris, the capital of Herod Antipas, only four miles away. He and his father Joseph might have been hired to do carpentry work there. Jesus knew His fellow Jews were being heavily taxed by the Romans, and He could see the stark contrast between the rich and the poor. Some scholars speculate that these early experiences led Jesus to become a political revolutionary or a "cynic sage."

**Dr. Ben Witherington**: The fact that Nazareth was next door to Sepphoris where lots of archaeological digs have taken place recently, and revealed a lot of interesting stuff, it is a question that we need to come to grips with. How much is proximity an issue in determining who a person is? I mean, I can go to Brooklyn and find Hasidic Jews living next door to Buddhists who are from the Far East. They live in close proximity to each other—but so what? It hasn't affected their belief systems very much at all. The fact that Jesus is a carpenter from Nazareth does not imply that he is a Greco-Roman person from Sepphoris, nor does it imply that he is a revolutionary like some of those folks from Gamala. You can have different kinds of persons all living together or in close proximity. The belief system is something else.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**: He clearly had a concern for people who were on the margins of society and who had been excluded. But, you know, Rome wasn't the big enemy. The bigger enemy were the spiritual forces working inside of people and through people and, if you will, behind people, that caused people to take advantage of one another. And, in many ways His message tried to touch **that** battle and **that** kingdom, if you will, and the Romans were just almost a side show.

**Ankerberg**: Scholars believe Jesus' public ministry may have been as short as one year and no longer than three or four years. If that's true, what did Jesus say in such a short period of time that would so drastically change the world? We will look at that next.

## SEGMENT 3

**Ankerberg:** After spending most of His life in Nazareth, Jesus traveled to the Jordan River to meet John the Baptist. John was a fiery preacher, calling the nation to repentance, and warning them that if they would not repent, God's wrath would soon fall on the nation. When Jesus was baptized by John, most scholars believe it marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, when He was about 30 years of age.

This is the Jordan River where the Gospel accounts say that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. But some scholars claim that we have contradictory accounts because the Gospel writers highlighted different aspects of Jesus' baptism.

Mark records that the voice from Heaven said, "**You** are my Son." Matthew tells us the voice from Heaven said, "**This** is my Son." Do we really know what the voice from Heaven said?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** I think that the voice addressed Jesus: "**You** are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." When Matthew wrote it and said, "**This**," he's bringing out the force of the historical event—God pointed out "This One" as the One He was going to work through.

Now, both statements are historically true and accurate. One gives the significance of what the wording was; the other gives the wording.

**Dr. Craig Blomberg:** People were very comfortable with a paraphrase, with a summary, with an abridgement, with giving what today we might call the gist of someone's words or intentions, and believed that that was completely faithful and a very appropriate way of recording what they said. The vast majority of the differences among the Gospels amount to nothing more than this.

**Ankerberg:** A short time after Jesus' baptism, Herod Antipas arrested John and put him in jail. Mark records, "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom and saying, 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.'" What did Jesus mean when He said the Kingdom of God was now at hand?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** Everyone who used the term used it to say, "God will one day comprehensibly rule this earth and will vindicate His saints." It always had that meaning. But around it, there were different conceptions of how that would work. Would that be Israel defeating her enemies? Would that be some great transcendent ruler coming almost, if you will, from above—a combination of those. And so when Jesus used the term, people understood basically what He meant.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** Well, I think Jesus gave His own spin to "kingdom of God" because He personalized it. It's right here, it's in your midst—and when He casts out a demon or heals someone, it's evidence that the kingdom of God has come powerfully right within the human sphere. And that was new. People had not heard of that before.

**Dr. N. T. Wright:** He thought that He was a prophet announcing the Kingdom of God. Not just announcing it in the sense that it might happen in a day or a week or a year, but saying "It's happening now under your noses." This was His prophetic message and He not only said it, He did it with the symbolic actions of healing and feasting and so on. And that's why He got into trouble because people didn't like it.

**Ankerberg:** According to Jesus, the Kingdom of God was present, but not yet complete. In Him, it had arrived in power, but would be fully consummated in the future.

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** When you say, "I, by the finger of God cast out demons," if I do that, you'll know that the dominion of God has happened in your midst. He's talking about a real

physical healing, a real person who has now been set free, saved, by the saving, redemptive act of God. This is involving real people in real time. It's not just what happens when you die and go to be with God. So, clearly enough, there's an "already" dimension to the kingdom of God right here in space and time, and there's also a "not yet" dimension to the kingdom of God in the future.

**Ankerberg:** Jesus also said that immediate entrance into the Kingdom of God was available to all who would turn from their sins and put their faith in Him.

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** He is talking first and foremost about the rule of God in men's hearts. And quite secondarily, and far off in human history in the future, there will be an earthly reign, but for the time being, what God wants to do is to conquer that most unruly of all items in the universe, the individual human heart.

**Ankerberg:** Did Jesus give enough information that, if the political leaders had heard it, He would have been in trouble?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** Yes, but I think that the reality was that Jesus wasn't a powerful enough figure from the way secular power is perceived to be a worry to the Romans. He didn't have an army; He wasn't a threat from that standpoint. He was much more threatening to the Jewish leadership. And the reason He was threatening to the Jewish leadership is, He was redefining and reconstituting how Judaism should operate. And, that was a challenge to their direct control over the religious authority that they possessed.

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** I do think it's right to say that there is a political edge to the phrase, "the dominion of God." When you say "God is the ruler of the world," you are implying the Emperor is not God, and he is not the ruler of the world. And whatever human rulers they are, they would be **under** the rule of God and they should not be making divine claims. So I think there is a political edge to this, but we must not miss the spiritual **heart** of the significance of this either.

**Ankerberg:** Jesus taught He was the King of the Kingdom of God, and only those who submitted themselves to Him would be admitted. Moreover, He frequently referred to Himself as the Son of Man, sometimes identifying Himself with the Prophet Daniel's divine preexistent figure who was given authority and an everlasting Kingdom on earth by God.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** If I were a secular historian and looking at what Jesus is saying, I'd say, "This guy clearly thinks He's some kind of emissary from heaven. This guy thinks He is the person described in Daniel 7 who is given authority and kingdom, and now on earth He's bringing it about." The evidence would point in that direction.

**Ankerberg:** But some scholars claim that Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God was not unique, that Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Essenes at Qumran were all preaching the same Kingdom message. To investigate this question, we left the Jordan River and traveled to the northwest shore of the Dead Sea to the site known as Qumran. Behind the community's ruins, you can still see the caves in the mountains where in 1947, a Bedouin shepherd discovered some ancient manuscripts. After that initial discovery, other caves were explored and the Dead Sea Scrolls have now revolutionized what scholars know about Jewish thinking and practice during the time Jesus lived.

**Dr. Stephen Pfann:** Here are caves 4A and 4B, in which the largest cache of scrolls were found. There were a group of Bedouins in September of 1952 climbed down inside and found as many as 800 scrolls in fragmentary condition, lining the bottom of that cave there.

**Ankerberg:** Scholars now realize that they have the very same kind of scrolls Jesus might have read from in the synagogue at Capernaum.

**Dr. Stephen Pfann**: There was one point where a Bedouin reached down into a jar like this and unrolled and found for the first time that we could see scrolls that are similar to the scrolls that they actually read and had in their hands, contemporary with the scrolls that they had in their hands back there in the 1<sup>st</sup> century that Jesus and the disciples could have read from.

**Dr. Weston Fields**: Well the documents from this place give a context to the New Testament that we didn't have before we found them and otherwise we don't have anywhere else.

**Ankerberg**: Why?

**Dr. Weston Fields**: Because from the Second Temple Period the years just before and after Jesus' lifetime we don't have any other Jewish documents, except the documents from Qumran, which can be dated and which are known to be contemporary with his life.

**Ankerberg**: As a result of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it can no longer be successfully argued that the events and beliefs described in the four Gospels were a product of Christian theologians centuries later. The Scrolls show us that many of the terms used only once in the New Testament were actually part of the Jewish vocabulary of that time.

**Dr. Claire Pfann**: The thing that modern scholars found very difficult to accept was that Jesus would have claimed that by raising the dead He was the Messiah, because no where else in Jewish writings were they aware of any time that the Messiah raised the dead, until they found another manuscript in Cave 4 at Qumran, number 521, which is called the Messianic Apocalypse. And in this text it says that the Messiah, when He comes, will raise the dead. And this is a Jewish text from the first century BC, written before Jesus was even born, that reflects a Jewish hope for a Messiah who will have the power to raise the dead, something which Jesus claims for Himself as proof of His Messianic identity.

**Ankerberg**: The Dead Sea Scrolls have also helped scholars understand the phrase, "the kingdom of God."

**Dr. Craig Evans**: It's a phrase that the Jewish people would have been familiar with. We know that now because we have constant references to God as king and His kingdom in some of the scrolls at Qumran. Also, in the Aramaic paraphrase of the Bible in Jesus' day, there is reference to the kingdom of God. And, so this would have been known in Jesus' day. So, Jesus is using a phrase that people understand, but He's telling them it's fulfilled now and He's demonstrating it in His own ministry through miracles, exorcisms, and so forth.

**Ankerberg**: We can now compare the information found in the Dead Sea Scrolls with Jesus' statements recorded in the Gospels and see that Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God differed from that of the Essenes and John the Baptist.

**Dr. Craig Evans**: Well, He clearly sees Himself as the proclaimer of the kingdom, and I think He understands Himself as that unique and special human being—or in Aramaic, "Son of Man"—described in Daniel 7. He is this "Son of Man" who has been authorized by God to proclaim the kingdom and bring it about.

**Ankerberg**: From the Scrolls at Qumran, scholars have also learned that anyone who wanted to join the Qumran community had to wait one full year before they could join in the daily purification baths, and they were required to wait three years before they could become full-fledged members of the community.

**Dr. Stephen Pfann**: They were the first to proceed with what you would call the baptism of repentance, where every act of piety toward God had to be preceded by an act of repentance or a perspective on their heart, to make sure that it was free from sin. This continued on into the

baptisms of John, of course.

**Ankerberg:** Is this a baptismal tank right here?

**Dr. Stephen Pfann:** And you can see here the many pools that we have that are immersion pools, baptismal pools, in which the Essenes had to bring themselves to their heart to check it out and then to immerse themselves to be purified before God so they could actively participate in the community affairs.

**Ankerberg:** Now, compare what Jesus taught with the Essenes and John the Baptist. The Essenes required a long waiting period and daily purification baths before giving admittance into their community. John the Baptist required people to show acts of repentance before he would baptize them. But Jesus admitted people into the Kingdom immediately, the moment they put their faith in Him.

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** John the Baptist, Jesus and the Essenes were probably not part of the same group, but they were undoubtedly aware of each other and of what each other taught. There are clear associations and links between John the Baptist and Jesus. And those connections were so strong that all four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles have to go to lengths to explain to us what their relationship really was.

**Dr. N. T. Wright:** John's baptism was a "one off," it wasn't a regular washing like the Essenes regular washings. And John was pointing to a messiah who was going to come, not back to a teacher of righteousness who would give you a tighter Torah. So there are differences between John and the Essenes but I think any Essene might well have looked at John just up the road and said, "Maybe this is actually what we've been waiting for." And then, I think it's quite possible that many Essenes might then have gone to Jesus. They would have found a movement which, like finding a cousin you didn't know you had, looks a little bit like family but also is doing some things radically differently.

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** The Essenes want to keep it controlled, inward, pure, holy and on time. John the Baptist takes it the next step and starts talking to people who are outside of the community to share with them the good news of the coming of the kingdom. But it is only in Jesus that the message of repentance and the coming of the kingdom are coupled with the outpouring of the miraculous power of God, which is the testimony, or the endorsement of the fact that it is through him that the kingdom is being manifested.

**Ankerberg:** That brings up the question, "Do scholars really believe that Jesus performed miracles?"

## SEGMENT 4

**ANNOUNCER:** John records in his Gospel: "A great crowd of people followed Him because they saw the miraculous signs He had performed on the sick" (Jn. 6:2).

**Ankerberg:** Now, the Gospel writers portrayed Jesus as performing many supernatural feats, such as healing the blind, turning water into wine, raising Lazarus from the dead, and feeding 5,000 people with just a few loaves of bread and some fish. But can it be said that Jesus **actually** performed the miracles recorded about Him?

**Dr. N. T. Wright:** It's one of the remarkable games of contemporary history on Jesus, that a

majority of current Jesus scholars, including many who are not Christian believers, agree that Jesus **did** do remarkable healings and that that is the main explanation for why He attracted crowds and drew so many followers. It wasn't just that His teaching was exciting, though it was. They came because things were happening—a great aunt who had been sick for 50 years. “Bring her and Jesus will heal her.” You know? That draws the crowds and would do so today if it happened here in Westminster.

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** Most scholars, the vast majority today, would say that Jesus did at least the healing miracles and the exorcisms. Then they add, he did something like these but they weren't truly supernatural. So now the question is, what data do we have for the supernaturalness of Jesus' miracles? I'd say again, you're looking at a lot of reasons here that are very respectful.

The miracles of Jesus are attested in all the gospel strata. They're in Mark, they're in special Matthew, they're in special Luke that these gospels have to themselves, they're in John and in they're in the source, whatever you do with it, that the scholars call “Q.” What you have in Matthew and Luke, that's not in Mark. Miracles are reported in all five levels and you know multiple attestation counts a lot.

**Dr. Amy-Jill Levine:** I do think Jesus was a miracle worker, along with several other miracle workers we have both in Jewish sources and in pagan sources. Would his miracle working have been attributed to God? Certainly by some, but as we even see in the Gospels, others would have said, “Oh, yes, we agree he did miracles, but he does them by the power of Satan.” The miracle working itself is unquestioned.

**Ankerberg:** But what reasons have compelled so many non-Christian scholars to admit Jesus must have performed miracles?

**Dr. Craig Evans:** I can remember, as a university student, the idea of any kind of a miracle story was pooh-poohed, it was laughed at. That's changed in thirty years. You can see it in popular culture, you can see it in the popular television program, “*Star Trek*.” Mr. Spock wants to be a machine. Right? He wants to be scientific. Science can solve everything. In the new series, the new version of it, you've got a machine who wants to be a human! You've got characters who want to be in touch with the inner spirit and channel and do all kinds of strange things. That show reflects the change that's taken place. In science, there's a recognition: “Hey! We don't have a closed universe any more. We have to be open. We're not real sure about our origins any more. Maybe there is something beyond the physical universe. Maybe there is a God. Maybe miracles **do** occur.” But that's a big change.

**Ankerberg:** Still, there are some scholars and historians who refuse to admit Jesus performed miracles.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** Members, for example, of the Jesus Seminar who are skeptical in their approach to the New Testament have made many of their presuppositions abundantly clear. They've listed them, for example, in the introduction to their edition of the so-called “Five Gospels.” And according to the Fellows of that seminar, the number one pillar of scholarly investigation of the historical Jesus is the presupposition of naturalism; that is to say, that miracles do not happen.

**Dr. N. T. Wright:** My history makes me say, “Hey, put that stuff on hold for a moment, just supposing Jesus of Nazareth really did rise from the dead. Don't start by saying, “Did He walk on water?” Don't start by saying, “Was He born of a virgin?” If you start with those questions, you go round and round in circles and you never get anywhere. Start by saying, “How do you

explain the rise of early Christianity?” and if it comes back and says, “It was Jesus’ Resurrection,” then you’re going to have to hold your mind open to the fact that the world—as Shakespeare said, “There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy.”

**Ankerberg:** But what can be said to the person who believes in the naturalistic theory that miracles **never** happen, therefore all history must be investigated from **this** assumption?

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** Now, since the story of the Gospels is, from start to finish, a story of miracles—the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the exorcisms, the healings, the clairvoyant knowledge of the future, prophecy, the Resurrection of Jesus—anyone who comes to the text with that presupposition is, of course, going to be **forced** to discount vast tracts of the text as being unhistorical. But it’s important to see that that conclusion is not based on the evidence; it’s built into the presupposition. If you come to the Gospels with the presupposition of naturalism, then, of course, what you wind up with will be a purely human Jesus.

So the issue there isn’t one of evidence. The issue there is one of presuppositions. What is the justification for this presupposition of naturalism?

**Ankerberg:** What needs to be noted is that the historical evidence **itself** indicates the naturalistic assumption that miracles never happen is **not** true. What is this evidence? It’s the fact that **secular** writers in history described Jesus as a miracle worker. These writers had no philosophical axe to grind, so unless Jesus was actually known to them through their sources as a miracle worker, they had no reason for describing Him as such. Examples of this are Josephus in his Jewish *Antiquities*, the Jewish Rabbis in the Babylonian Talmud, and the pagan philosopher Celsus who all cite Jesus as a miracle worker.

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** Now what’s interesting to me is that it’s not just the New Testament that claims that Jesus was a miracle worker. Later Jewish traditions, who rejected that Jesus was the Messiah, also attest that Jesus did miracles. It is also true that some of the later Greco-Roman sources as well, also attest that Jesus was a miracle worker. And then, of course, we have the famous testimony of Josephus to the same effect. So you know, do we have credible testimonies that Jesus did miracles? I think we do have some of those. Now if you have presuppositions that miracles don’t happen, then none of that’s good enough.

**Ankerberg:** In other words, those who refuse to look at the evidence because of their unproven naturalistic theory that miracles never happen cannot honestly deal with the historical evidence.

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** Well, I think these events happened. But, if you come to the text and you believe miracles can’t happen, you’ve kind of got a dilemma on your hands. You read these texts about Jesus multiplying the loaves or you read these texts about Jesus healing the blind, and you’ve got to come up with some kind of explanation of what goes on. In fact, the healing of the blind is an interesting one because in the Old Testament, blind people didn’t get healed. No one did that miracle. And that’s not one you can very easily fake.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** It would be bad methodology to simply dismiss these in advance before even looking at the evidence that they might have actually occurred. Otherwise, we could be ruling out the true hypothesis simply on the basis of a philosophical presupposition for which we have no justification.

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** To me, a naturalistic theory has to, by definition, fill in the blank. This is not a naturalistic theory: “Ah, you Christians are nuts! Things like this don’t happen. I don’t see miracles in my life and Jesus wasn’t raised from the dead.” That’s not a naturalistic theory, that’s

a denial. A naturalistic theory says, “No. I’ll tell you. Jesus didn’t rise from the dead. What really happened is \_\_\_\_\_...fill in the blank.” Now, for me, a skeptic has a naturalistic theory when he or she decides to fill in that blank. They’re going to take these facts and give an alternative explanation.

**Ankerberg:** Now, consider this about miracles. Facts from psychiatry, medicine, and science are supplying evidence which may indicate miracles are happening in our world today.

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** I think a seventh tie-in in favor of the miracles in the New Testament is that there are some very hard data I think that are difficult to explain away. I think of Marcus Borg who reports in one of his books on Jesus that there was a team of psychiatrists today or recently who could not explain a couple of possession cases by normal scientific means. I also refer to a double blind experiment with almost 400 heart patients in San Francisco where they were monitored in 26 categories and those who were prayed for were statistically better, statistically better in 21 out of 26 categories. And because the experiment was performed well, this was published in a secular journal, *The Southern Journal of Medicine*.

So, if you can see some things today, maybe you can’t say, “Oh, yeah. There’s a miracle right there!” But if it makes you **wonder** a little bit, I have to say, can we be so quick to condemn the things Jesus did in the first century?

**Ankerberg:** Science is also providing evidence that points to the existence of God, and if the scientific evidence points to the existence of God, then we must be open to the possibility miracles can happen.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** And it’s interesting to note that in modern science, for example, in physics, scientists are quite willing to talk about realities which are quite literally **metaphysical** in nature—realities which are beyond our spatiotemporal dimensions; realities which we cannot directly perceive or know but which we may infer by certain, as it were, signposts of transcendence in the universe to something beyond it.

**Ankerberg:** Many scientists now believe that the evidence for the Big Bang theory points to a simultaneous beginning for all matter, energy, and even the space-time dimensions of the universe. This evidence has led them to place the cause of the universe outside—that is, independent of matter, energy, space and time. This evidence calls for the strong possibility of the existence of God.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** If there is a Creator and Designer of the universe, who has brought it into being, then if such a Being exists then clearly He could intervene in the course of history and perform miraculous acts and so in the absence of some sort of a proof of atheism, it seems to me that we have to be open to the possibility of miracles.

To give an analogy, in the field of cosmology, the evidence indicates that the universe came into existence in a great explosion called “the Big Bang” at some point in the finite past. And many physicists are quite willing to say that that event requires the existence of a transcendent Creator and Designer of the universe who brought it into being. Now, when we come to the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, could it be that just this Being has intervened in history in a dramatic and miraculous way as Jesus claimed? Shouldn’t we be at least open to investigating those claims?

**Ankerberg:** Since there is multiply-attested historical evidence in the Gospels that Jesus performed miracles, and since there is evidence from non-Christian secular sources that Jesus was a miracle worker, and since psychiatry, medicine and science, are now reporting data that are signposts of something beyond what we know—is anyone justified in ruling out the miracu-

lous before investigating the evidence?

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** Perhaps these miracles in the life of Jesus are as it were signposts of transcendence to something beyond the universe, something greater breaking in in a dramatic way in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. And it seems to me that as open-minded people, we simply cannot exclude this in advance without looking at the evidence.

**Ankerberg:** So, assuming that there is good historical evidence that Jesus **did** perform miracles, what do they say about who He is? More importantly, what did Jesus think about Himself? Did He ever claim to be God? We'll turn to that next.

## SEGMENT 5

**Ankerberg:** After Jesus began His ministry, He moved to the city of Capernaum along the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists tell us that Simon Peter also lived here with his family. They have found the remains of Peter's house and determined that one of the rooms was used as a house church. We traveled to Capernaum and examined the ruins of a Jewish synagogue where Jesus opened and read the Scriptures about Himself and performed an exorcism. This synagogue overlooks Peter's house, possibly the very house where Jesus said and did something that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record.

One of the most startling statements that Jesus ever made was made right here at Capernaum when He said to a paralytic, "Son, your sins be forgiven you." The Jewish teachers of the Law were sitting there in the audience listening, and they said, "This is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"—which brings up the question, "Who was Jesus claiming to be?"

You have a day in the life of the Lord Jesus and in that account, early account, Jesus says to a man, instead of "Be healed," He says, "Your sins are forgiven," and they accused Him of blasphemy. And He told the religious leaders what?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** He told the religious leaders "That you might know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I say to him, 'Get up and walk.'" I love this story! The guy drops down out of the roof. His friends are there. Jesus first says to him, "Your sins are forgiven." He's lying there on the mat. He basically says, "That isn't why I came here. I mean, I appreciate the fact that you want to forgive my sins, but the reason I came here was so I could get up and walk."

And then what Jesus does is, He links sin and walking together so that you have an audio-visual of the sin claim, which you can't see, with the evidence of God's work through Him, so that when he gets up and walks, his walk talks and says, "Sin's been forgiven and look who did the forgiving."

And so in that context Jesus **displays** His authority and who He is.

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** The right to forgive sins, of course, is a right that only belongs to God, but Jesus in His healing power, whether He heals or whether He forgives sins, is still executing a divine imperative, a divine privilege.

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** And of course the crowd, or the Jews who were there, react negatively: "How in the world could he know this?" How could he... I mean he's not been to the

temple, he has not offered a sacrifice, he hasn't heard the pronouncement of the priest, "Your sin's are absolved." How could Jesus know that? How could Jesus say that? How would he dare say something like that?

Well, at the very least the Markan narrative is saying that Jesus believed that he had the authority to pronounce the forgiveness of sins. What kind of person had that kind of authority?

**Ankerberg:** Yes. And they called that blasphemy.

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** Exactly, which is the bestowing on yourself prerogatives that only God should have.

**Ankerberg:** But in addition to claiming He had the authority to forgive sins, did Jesus ever come right out and claim to be the Son of God in a **unique** sense that applied to no one else?

**Dr. N. T. Wright:** Jesus talks about Himself as the Son of God: "If you confess Me, My Father will confess you," whatever, or "before My Father who is in heaven." And then there are sayings about Jesus not knowing what the time of the destruction of Jerusalem is going to happen but "only the Father knows that and not the Son." So Jesus does talk about Himself as Son of God in ways which it doesn't look as though the early Church would have made up, like the famous saying in Mark chapter 10 where the rich young ruler says, "Good Master." And He says, "Don't call me good. No one is good but God alone." Now, the early Church certainly didn't make that up.

**Ankerberg:** Now, even if one uses the critics' own assumption that only those sayings of Jesus are credible which are found in multiple sources, the evidence still shows Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of God.

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** First of all, in Matthew 11:27—and its parallel in Luke—here we have a passage that comes from what the critics call "Q," early sayings document. Very, very early. They believe this predates the Gospels by decades. And yet in Matthew 11:27 and its parallel Jesus says, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom He will reveal Him."

Now, in that passage Jesus is claiming unique knowledge of God, and this is found in the very early "Q" strata, according to the way the critics arrange this, and that's a tough text.

**Ankerberg:** The Gospel writers also tell us that Jesus referred to God as "Abba." Is this evidence that Jesus thought He had a special and unique relationship with God?

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** We do have good, strong, historical evidence that Jesus prayed to God as "Abba," Father, and we have multiply attested pieces of evidence that he saw himself in some sense as God's special or unique Son.

**Ankerberg:** Tell the people what "Abba" means.

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** Well, Abba means "father." It means more than.... It's not quite like the familiar term "daddy," but it means "father dearest." It implies an intimate relationship with one's heavenly parent. And Jesus believed he had that unique kind of relationship which made him in some unique and special sense "the Son of God." And there's plenty of evidence for this. It's in the Synoptics and the Gospel of John, it's in the Pauline letters. It's all over the New Testament. It's one of the most characteristic things that's predicated of Jesus, that he was the Son of God.

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** So you have a statement in "Q," you have "Abba." And maybe the strongest statement of all—Mark 13:32. Now, if you look this up you're going to think, "Man! Is he nuts?" This isn't a verse about the Deity of Christ because Jesus is saying, "the time of My

coming.” He says, “That time, no man knows; the angels don’t know; not even the Son but the Father only.” The reason that’s a strong verse that Jesus is the Son of the Father or the Son of God is that He says He doesn’t know the time of His coming.

My point is this. If the Church is making this statement up and putting the words back onto the lips of Jesus, why doesn’t He know the time of His coming? Now, I think that can be explained traditionally because Jesus had a human nature/Jesus had a divine nature. But be that as it may, that sentence does not seem like it can be made up because it’s too embarrassing. Just say He claimed to be the Son of God. No. They had to say “the Son doesn’t know the time of His coming.” And that’s a rough sentence. So Jesus probably said it.

You’ve got a “Q” statement; you’ve got an “Abba” statement; you’ve got an “I don’t know the time of my coming” statement. And I think in all of those cases we have evidence that Jesus did claim to be the Son of God, as the Gospels proclaim.

**Ankerberg:** Further evidence of who Jesus claimed to be is found in The Sermon on the Mount. On a hillside near the Sea of Galilee is a place where Jesus is said to have preached this famous sermon. At the conclusion Matthew records, “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teachings, for He was teaching them as One having authority and not as their scribes.” What kind of authority did Jesus have?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** He forgave sin. He told the Jews what they could and could not do on the Sabbath. Now, the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. You don’t mess with the Ten Commandments unless you have authority to mess with the Ten Commandments.

He talked about who should and should not be associated with. He claimed that He could sit at the right hand of the Father. That’s not any person who gets to go directly into God’s presence and, if you will, park there. You’ve got to have a lot of authority and a lot of nerve to think that you can sit next to God.

**Ankerberg:** In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught, “You have heard that it has been said, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’” Everyone knew this was one of the Ten Commandments. Then He declared, “But I say unto you,” and added to what God had said. In doing so, He indicated His words were equal in authority with God’s.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** He had taught as one having authority, not as the scribes. And I think authority means not only He could make pronouncements and say, “Hey, I know you’ve heard this and I know you’ve heard that, but this is the way it is.” It’s His teaching style, but it’s also backed up with the way He commands unclean spirits, “Shut up and go.” They’d never seen that. Were there exorcists in Jesus’ day? Yes, Josephus tells us about a few. We know from other sources that there were exorcists. But, they had to do all kinds of rigmarole to get the spirit out. They would even burn incense that would go up a person’s nose to draw the spirit out through the person’s nose. Jesus would not bargain with the unclean spirit—that’s what they would do, they would argue. Jesus would just say, “Shut up and leave!” And, it happened. And people were just astounded by that. That’s an authority that we’d never seen before.

**Dr. Edwin Yamauchi:** There are also many implicit indications that Jesus was more than an ordinary human being. His claim to be able to forgive sins; His oneness with God the Father; and the import of this is the reaction of the Jews who tended to stone Him and cried out that this was blasphemous in His close identification with God the Father.

**Ankerberg:** Another question raised about Jesus is, “Did He ever claim to be the Messiah?”

**Dr. N. T. Wright:** It’s often said in contemporary scholarship, and has been for over a century, that Jesus couldn’t have thought He was the Messiah because only crazy people think like that

and Jesus was such a shrewd teacher, etc., etc. And the Jesus Seminar have often said, “Well, Jesus taught people humility and taught that they should be self-effacing, so how could He at the same time have given Himself such airs as to think that He was the Messiah?” That’s a complete misunderstanding of how first century Judaism works and of how Jesus’ vocation works. Not only was He announcing the Kingdom of God, by bringing it Himself, He seems to think He was not just a prophet announcing it, He was actually the Messiah.

**Ankerberg:** Did Jesus ever claim to be the Messiah?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** He accepted the confession of the Messiah at Caesarea Philippi. Now, He turned right around and began to explain what that meant because the disciples didn’t understand exactly what it meant at the time they confessed it at the starting point.

**Ankerberg:** What did it mean?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** Well, what it meant, of course, ultimately, was not just that He was going to be a victorious figure but that He was going to be a suffering figure. But in the context of Judaism, there was no category of “suffering Messiah,” at least to the best of the evidence that we have now.

**Ankerberg:** As a result of the information in the Dead Sea Scrolls, we know that some of the things Jesus said were a clear-cut indication to people in His day that He was claiming to be the Messiah.

**Ankerberg:** What do you say to those scholars that say the early disciples just invented the concept of Jesus being the Messiah?

**Dr. Claire Pfann:** I think that that is laughable in the face of Jewish literature from the second temple period. We have to look at the Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, to see the messianic hope that existed among Jews before the coming of Jesus. We recognize, of course, things like 4Q521—now, that’s Cave 4, Qumran, Manuscript 521—in which it says that when the Messiah comes, He will heal the blind; He will heal the lame; and He will raise the dead. We see the same claim given by Jesus Himself in Luke chapter 7 when John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you it? The real thing? Or do we wait for somebody else?” Jesus says, “Tell John what you’ve **seen**: the blind are healed, the lame walk, and the dead are raised.” This is a pre-Christian, Jewish messianic expectation that finds its fulfillment in Jesus.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** I think a good example of where the Jesus Seminar is inconsistent in their own criteria is the whole question of Jesus’ messianic self-understanding. They assume that this is the Early Church reading back into the Gospels. Here’s the problem with this. You have multiple attestation. Everywhere in the tradition, Jesus is regarded as the Messiah—in all four Gospels, in the Epistles, everything in the New Testament. And how in the world that could emerge in the aftermath of Easter, if Jesus had **never claimed** to be Messiah, had never allowed His following to think of that. Where does all of this come from? Multiply attested.

And also, another criterion is the criterion of **result**. How do you explain that? Or, another way of putting it is, “Where there’s smoke, there’s usually fire.” Everybody is calling Him the Messiah after Easter. Where did that come from? Probably from the “fire” of Jesus Himself in His ministry before Easter.

**Ankerberg:** So the historical evidence that we’ve examined indicates Jesus forgave sins, taught that He was the unique Son of God, claimed to be the Messiah, and performed the very miracles the Jewish people thought the Messiah would do. But after preaching in the villages of the Galilee, Jesus went to Jerusalem, the very center of Jewish life, and a week later, He was dead. Why? We’ll turn to that next.

## SEGMENT 6

**Ankerberg:** The Gospel accounts say that just before Passover Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. The Gospels say that He was greeted by crowds waving palm branches and hailing Him as the Messiah. But what about those who assert that Jewish travelers always erupt in celebration when they arrive in Jerusalem for Passover? They were just singing and shouting as usual. They weren't singing about Jesus.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** There may have been some people who greeted any pilgrim entering the city with those kinds of shouts, but they don't throw their garments down on the road; they don't take palm branches and wave them. And, they don't greet someone riding on a donkey this way. All of these things smack...anyone, **anyone** who knows Israel's history, they realize this guy's doing what Zechariah 9:9, the king who comes to the city humble, that's what He's doing. And the palm branches and the garments that are placed on the road—this is how they celebrated the entry into the city of other kings from Israel's past. So, they knew what they were doing. This was a messianic greeting on the part of many of these pilgrims.

**Ankerberg:** How many people were following Jesus when He came to Passover in Jerusalem? Some scholars featured in the ABC Special said Jesus only had 10 or 20 followers.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** I was astonished by that statement because one of the things that we read in the Gospel account is that the ruling priests wanted to make a move against Jesus but did not do so on account of the crowds, on account of Jesus' popularity. If Jesus had a following of 10, 15, or 20, then Jesus could have been seized easily right at the beginning of that final week, and they would not have had to conspire and plot and try to take Jesus at night by stealth because He would have had no following. And so the fact that they had to move against Jesus in a stealthy fashion shows that there were large number of supporters, both from Galilee, who accompanied Him south, and also recent converts, you might say, from Judea and Jerusalem themselves.

**Ankerberg:** Besides questioning the number of followers Jesus had, some scholars wondered why Jesus wanted to go up to Jerusalem at all. Wasn't He aware that He might be killed?

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** Oh, I don't think it would have taken a clairvoyant person to know that in a politically volatile environment, that if you go around doing the kind of things Jesus did, and saying the kind of things Jesus did about the coming of the kingdom of God, that you could anticipate a violent end to your life. There's no doubt about that.

**Dr. Craig Evans:** I think He understood that He was going to have to die, and no prophet dies outside of Jerusalem. And so, Jesus has this sense of prophetic destiny to complete and fulfill His mission. It was time to go to Jerusalem, and what better time than to go at Passover time—the time that celebrates God's deliverance of His people.

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** And that meant that He had to make certain declarations in the capital as the heartbeat center of the nation. And He also had to make claims of authority, which forced the choice. If you will go through the passages in the last week of Jesus' life, virtually every one of them is about some issue tied to the authority of Jesus, and/or God using Him as an agent, or some aspect of who His person is.

**Ankerberg:** When Jesus walked into the temple and turned over the tables of the moneychangers, was He a marked man from that point?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** Yes. I mean, absolutely. He's in the most sacred spot of Israel.

**Dr. Ben Witherington**: What he's done is he's interrupted the process, not only of tribute money that supports the institution and allows it to exist, the temple as an institution, but he's interrupted the process that leads to the sacrifices.

**Dr. Craig Evans**: There's not a chance in the world that Caiaphas would not learn of that and be very angry about it. But to size him up, Jesus has taken action in the temple precincts and shortly thereafter, perhaps the next day or however we are to interpret the time line in Mark, a delegation of ruling priests comes to Jesus and says, "By what authority are you doing these things?" I mean, they're still standing there and He turns around and says to His own disciples: "A man had a vineyard..." and He goes on alluding to Isaiah 5, tells this parable, but He introduces new characters into this parable. Isaiah doesn't say anything about farmers tending the vineyard—Isaiah 5. But Jesus does. And, of course, He's introduced the ruling priests into His parable, and they recognize that He's told a parable against them. He has answered the question, "By what authority does He do these things?," from God. In fact, more than that. He's God's Son who has come into the vineyard. And these guys, the ruling priests, are about to murder Him. And they go away saying, "We've got to destroy this guy. He is serious trouble because He has just indirectly threatened us with being removed and replaced. So that's it. It has escalated to the point now, we have...it's either Him or us. This town is not big enough for both of us. We've got to get rid of Him."

**Ankerberg**: Aware of the danger, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Some scholars in the ABC Special described Jesus as one who was deeply shocked and appalled at what He faced—a person who, because of fear, was on the edge of a complete mental and physical breakdown. It was further implied, Jesus could have easily escaped when He saw the soldiers coming for Him, but instead, decided to walk right into their hands.

**Dr. Craig Evans**: He's not committing suicide because He doesn't take His own life. But, there is some truth to that observation. Had Jesus wanted to flee, He could have fled. Jesus has informants—He knows to some extent what's going on in the city. He knew it was hot, He knew He had to be careful. There were secret arrangements made for the Upper Room. So, if Jesus simply wanted to save His life, if that was His objective, He would have gotten out of town a day or two before He was arrested. But, no, He wanted to fulfill His ministry. I believe He sincerely believed that His death was necessary to complete His task.

**Ankerberg**: Then Jesus was taken to trial. In Mark we have two: one at night, one first thing in the morning. We have the same thing in Matthew. In Luke we only have one Jewish trial, just in the morning. In John we have no Jewish trial at all. Do we have contradictory reports?

**Dr. Darrell Bock**: No. What we have here is selectivity. I think that Mark and Matthew are giving us kind of the full portrait. I think that Luke's giving us the *Reader's Digest* version and I think John, in connection with his usual style, is giving us trial scenes or interview scenes that we don't know about otherwise.

And again, in asking about the trial, this is a Grand Jury investigation; it's not a formal trial. Had it been a trial, they couldn't have met on a feast day. But because this is a special situation, an emergency situation, they've got Pilate right there in the city. They can finish the job in the weekend if they get on it. They get on it and they get it done because the last thing they want to do is to have Jesus imprisoned with His followers gathered in the city, wondering what's going to happen. They don't want this drawn out. They want to get it over with as quick as possible.

**Ankerberg**: Concerning the trial, Mark records: "The high priest arose and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' and Jesus said, 'I

Am, and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heavens.' And tearing his clothes, the high priest said, 'What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy. How does it seem to you?' And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death."

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** At that point, when the Jewish priest says, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" Notice what Jesus does. "Are you the Christ,"—Messiah—"the Son of God"? And Jesus says, "*Ego eimi*," "I am." And then He changes a Son of God question to a Son of man answer. He says, "I am the Christ, the Son of God, and you will see the Son of man coming with the clouds of heaven in judgment."

And the priest makes a formal declaration of blasphemy. He rips his garment. He says, "The rest of you witnesses can go home. We've gotcha."

**Dr. Craig Evans:** This is one case where Jesus Himself affirms explicitly His messianic identity and that, in my opinion, points to the veracity of the Gospels. If the Gospels are fictions, they're going to have Jesus walking around all the time saying and doing Messianic things. The Gospels don't do that and I think that's because the Gospels are restrained by what actually happened, what Jesus actually said.

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** Now, what set him off? In the passage there in Mark 14, Jesus says, "*Ego eimi*, I am the Son of God." Then He says, "And you will see the **Son of man** coming with the clouds of heaven." Number one is it's a virtual quote from Daniel 7:13,14. He claims to be the preexistent One who comes from the Ancient of Days to set up God's Kingdom. And secondly, He uses this enigmatic phrase, "coming with the clouds." That phrase is used dozens of times in Scriptures as a reference to Deity. And Jesus said, "That's Me."

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** But they also knew that throughout the Old Testament the one who was given the right to offer final judgment on the world was God himself. And so somebody who claims to come on the clouds and offer final judgment has got to be some kind of divine figure for sure. And this was the straw that broke the camel's back.

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** They ask Him if He's the Messiah because they need a political charge to take to Pilate. If He says He's the Messiah, they've got their charge, they can go to Pilate, they can say, "He's claiming to be a king—you've got to stop Him!" If there's one thing Rome doesn't care for, it's people calling themselves kings and gathering followers around themselves and, "That's your responsibility to stop." That's going to be the case they are going to take to Rome. Jesus says more. Jesus says, "Not only am I that Messiah, it's not just that, I am the One who is going to be given judgment authority and I am not on trial here—you are!"

"One day I'm going to come back on the clouds as the Son of Man and be the eschatological judge. And you're thinking about putting me to death?" It's quite a moment. It's a moment in which what the Jews hear as blasphemy comes up against Jesus' claim that God is going to exalt Him. And it's the crashing of two ideologies, right there in that trial scene.

**Ankerberg:** Did the Jewish leaders understand it that way?

**Dr. Craig Evans:** Oh, I think they very clearly understood it that way. That's why the High Priest rips his robes, screams "Blasphemy! We don't need any other witnesses." They all agree, they condemn Him to death, and He's handed over to the Roman governor for execution.

**Ankerberg:** Pilate reluctantly agrees to sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion, and it's an attested fact of history that Jesus died on the cross. But what happened next? There are certain historical facts that all scholars must examine to come to a conclusion about what happened to Jesus at the end of His life, and we will look at those facts next.

## SEGMENT 7

**Ankerberg:** Now, here's another question: Was Jesus buried in a tomb or thrown to wild dogs? Do archaeologists think they have evidence that shows where Jesus was crucified and where He was buried? To answer these questions and to get a clear picture of what happened to Jesus at the end of His life, there are certain historical facts which must be examined.

**William Lane Craig:** It seems to me that there are four fundamental historical facts which any credible historian must account for if he's to give a tenable historical hypothesis about the fate of Jesus of Nazareth. The first of these is the honorable burial of Jesus. The second of these is the discovery of his empty tomb. Third would be the post-mortem appearances of Jesus; and fourth would be the origin of the disciples' belief that Jesus was risen from the dead.

Now, with respect to the first of those, the burial of Jesus, the majority of New Testament scholars who have written on this subject agree that Jesus of Nazareth was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb.

**Ankerberg:** Scholars believe Jesus was honorably buried by Joseph of Arimathea because of the early historical evidence. Mark writes, "Joseph of Arimathea...went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate...granted the body to Joseph. And *Joseph*...took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb."

Jewish archaeologist Dr. Gabriel Barkay is considered to be the foremost authority on tombs in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus. I asked him if archaeological evidence supports the description given in the Gospels about the tomb in which Jesus was buried?

**Dr. Gabriel Barkay:** We have the fact that it was a rich man's tomb. We have, most probably, the allusion to the fact that it was outside the city of Jerusalem. We have the stone found unrolled three days later. We have very little, but all together we have about a thousand burial caves from the time of Jesus surrounding Jerusalem and the details that we have in the Gospels about the burial of Jesus, they fit well with the evidence that we have in the field.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** I was somewhat amused when Peter Jennings on the ABC Special said that according to the Gospels, Jesus was laid in the tomb by His mother and His friends. Now, if the story of Jesus' burial were a late developing legend that accrued over the decades in the early Christian church, that is exactly the sort of pious story that one would expect to find—Jesus was buried by His devoted mother and His faithful disciples. But that's not, in fact, what the Gospels say.

Instead, what the Gospels say is that Jesus of Nazareth was laid in a tomb by this enigmatic figure, Joseph of Arimathea, who appears out of nowhere in the Gospels, and contrary to expectation, gives Jesus of Nazareth an honorable burial in a tomb. Moreover, Mark tells us that this man was a member of the Sanhedrin, the very council which had just condemned Jesus to be crucified. And that Joseph singles out Jesus among the trio of men that had been crucified for special care by giving Him an honorable burial in a tomb rather than allowing the body to simply be dispatched into a common grave reserved for criminals. This is extraordinary and requires some sort of explanation.

**Ankerberg:** In fact, we discovered that archaeologists think the Church of the Holy Sepulcher may mark the actual site of the tomb in which Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea.

Obviously, this is the traditional site where Christians think that Jesus was buried. You were

asked to do the archaeological work, or part of the archaeological work on this site. Tell me, do you think this is the place where Jesus was actually buried?

**Dr. Magen Broshi**: Well, there is high probability. Very high probability.

**Ankerberg**: Dr. Magen Broshi is a respected Jewish archaeologist and scholar on the Second Temple period. He was asked to conduct the excavation at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for a rather unusual reason.

**Dr. Magen Broshi**: They invited me to participate in the dig. What was very important for them was that I was an infidel. I wasn't a Christian. They didn't want Catholics. They didn't want Greek Orthodox. They wanted somebody who was absolutely "neutral" and that was the case.

**Ankerberg**: Now, the evidence Dr. Broshi found while excavating at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre led him to defend it as the most reasonable place for the burial of Jesus. I asked him why.

**Dr. Magen Broshi**: For two reasons. One reason is that the tradition should be trusted. It was too important to be forgotten, and there was a Christian community in Jerusalem, around Jerusalem that would have carried on, handed it down from one generation to the other. And the second reason is that the area was a graveyard at the time of Jesus. It was a graveyard and there are several graves around here. There were more, but they have been obliterated by later building activity.

**Ankerberg**: All four Gospels report Joseph of Arimathea requested permission from Pilate to bury Jesus, and that His body was laid in a tomb cut out of solid rock. Three of the writers say the tomb was new; that is, no one had ever been laid in the tomb before. All four accounts mention a stone that was rolled against the entrance to the tomb. Matthew adds, it was a large stone.

The Gospel accounts talk about a stone that was rolled in front of the tomb. Does that make sense to you?

**Dr. Magen Broshi**: Why not? We found it.

**Ankerberg**: You found it?

**Dr. Magen Broshi**: Not here, in many other places, the rolling stone.

**Ankerberg**: How big were they?

**Dr. Magen Broshi**: Sometimes weighing more than a regular car. But being round, you know, you can roll it.

**Ankerberg**: Why did they put that in front of the tomb? To keep the robbers out, or....

**Dr. Magen Broshi**: To keep the robbers out, to keep the places of the tombs away from animals.

**Ankerberg**: In spite of the evidence for the honorable burial of Jesus, John Dominic Crossan said this in the ABC Special: "After Jesus died on a cross, he was thrown on a trash heap and chewed up by wild dogs."

**Dr. Gary Habermas**: I could say for the moment that it's interesting that virtually none of his friends have followed him, and that doesn't prove anything here or there, but maybe it's a hint that the data are not in his favor. One thing I would say to that is, we are devoid of a **single fact** that says that happened to Jesus. We have a **lot of reasons** to think that he was buried and that the tomb in which he was buried was empty—but nothing, not any fact, that says he was thrown into a common grave.

**Dr. William Lane Craig**: The historical credibility of the burial account of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea leaves skeptical critics in an extremely awkward position because, you see, if Jesus was in fact buried by a Jewish Sanhedrist in Jerusalem, as the Gospels claim, that means that the location of Jesus' tomb was known to both Jew and Christian alike. But in that case, it's impossible to imagine how a movement founded on belief in the resurrection of a dead man who had been publicly executed in Jerusalem could arise and flourish in the face of a tomb containing His corpse. So that those scholars who want to deny such things as the empty tomb, the Resurrection Appearances, also find themselves forced to deny the fact of the honorable burial of Jesus, despite the fact that this is one of the earliest and best attested facts about the historical Jesus that we have. It's extremely awkward for them.

**Ankerberg**: Some people say, "Well, the answer to that is that the disciples stole the body. That's why the tomb was empty."

**Dr. William Lane Craig**: Nobody says that anymore. That theory has been completely abandoned since the early 1800s. No responsible scholar holds to such a thing.

**Ankerberg**: But why have scholars concluded the disciples did not steal Jesus' body? And why have they abandoned the theory that Jesus didn't die on the cross, that He just fainted or swooned? And further, why have they given up on the idea that Jesus later revived in the tomb, somehow pushed aside the huge stone, and then appeared to His disciples, convincing them that He had risen from the dead? Well, scholars dismiss these theories because they were completely demolished by the liberal critic, David Strauss, over a hundred years ago.

**Dr. Gary Habermas**: But in his major work in 1835 in *Life of Jesus* he said the Swoon Theory is not going to work and the problem was this: It is self-contradictory. What you have from the "Swoon" is a living Jesus but not a resurrected Jesus, and here's how it works. Jesus should have died on the cross; He didn't. He should have died in the tomb; He didn't. He certainly can't roll the stone away. No problem. He did. Now, Strauss didn't believe in a guard, but for those who believe a guard is sitting out there, He works His way through the guards. But here's the problem for Strauss. Again, you've got: didn't die on the cross; didn't die in the tomb; couldn't roll the stone. He comes to where the disciples are. [*Knock, knock, knock*] He knocks on the door. What's this man going to look like? He's a human Jesus. He's been crucified. He's worked the wounds open again. He's bleeding from the scalp. His hair has not even been washed. I mean, you've got sweat and blood, and He's worked the side open again. And He's hunched over, He's limping, He's pale. And [*knock, knock, knock*]: "I told you I would rise again from the dead." One problem, Strauss said, with the Swoon Theory is, you get a Jesus who is alive, but you don't get a Jesus who is **raised**. Now, Strauss does not believe in the Resurrection, but he knows the disciples did. And the "Swoon" doesn't get you from A to B. You get this kind of Jesus: "Lord, come on in. Get a chair. Get a pail of water. Call the doctor."

To paraphrase Strauss, the disciples would have gotten a doctor before they proclaimed Him risen because here's Peter over in the corner saying, "Oh, boy! Some day I'm going to have a resurrection body just like His." And that, by the way, is the proclamation that is most tied to the Resurrection of Jesus: that believers will be raised. Now, again, Strauss doesn't think believers are going to be raised and he doesn't think there's a guard and he doesn't think that Jesus was raised, but if you can't get that belief on the disciples' part, it doesn't work. And the problem is, "swoon" can't account for the experiences that the disciples had that they thought were appearances of the risen Jesus.

**Ankerberg**: In addition, the second major fact which historians must evaluate is the empty tomb. All the early sources report Jesus' tomb was found empty, first by women, then by His

disciples, and finally, by the Jewish leaders themselves.

**Dr. William Lane Craig**: The majority of scholars who have written on this subject agree that the tomb of Jesus was probably found empty by a group of His women followers early on Sunday morning. That represents the historical core of the empty tomb narrative as we find it in Mark.

**Ankerberg**: Why do they find it credible?

**Dr. William Lane Craig**: The empty tomb story enjoys multiple independent lines of evidence. For example, as I've already indicated, the burial account supports the empty tomb story. If the burial account of Jesus is historically accurate, then the inference that the tomb was found empty is not very far at hand because the Resurrection faith could not have arisen and flourished in the face of a closed tomb.

Secondly, I think that the empty tomb story is also multiply and independently attested in early sources.

**Dr. Gary Habermas**: The empty tomb is preached very early. You've got Paul in 1st Corinthians 15 saying he died, he was buried, what went down is what came out, and what came out is what appeared.

**Ankerberg**: Why is that solid evidence?

**Dr. Gary Habermas**: Because critics, again, if you're using this methodology that says we'll use the facts that critics admit and facts which are well attested, Paul is admitted to being an eyewitness. The book in which his testimony appears is already early, about 25 years after the cross, but then the creedal passage that he reports, or that early tradition from verses 3 and following, 1 Corinthians 15, is earlier still. And in Galatians 1 and 2, he's got apostolic confirmation of his message from Peter and James in Galatians 1; Peter, James and John in Galatians 2. So you've got this intricate interwoven "an accredited, eyewitness messenger with an early book, with an even earlier creed"—and it's teaching our fact here in question: the empty tomb.

**Ankerberg**: Further, there is one final piece of evidence that proves Jesus' tomb was empty. The Jewish leaders themselves testified to this fact.

**Dr. William Lane Craig**: The earliest Jewish response to the proclamation of the Resurrection was not to point to the occupied tomb but rather to say that the disciples had stolen the body. It was itself an attempt to explain away why the body was missing. So that we have here evidence from the very enemies of the earliest Christian movement in favor of the empty tomb, evidence which is simply "top drawer" because it comes not from the Christians but from the very opponents of the early Christian movement.

**Ankerberg**: The historical evidence shows Jesus was crucified on a cross, His body was laid in a tomb that was cut out of solid rock, and three days later, that tomb was found empty. So, what happened to Jesus' body? We will turn to this question next.

## SEGMENT 8

**Ankerberg**: Historians believe that after watching Jesus die on the cross, His disciples fled in despair. The question that is raised is, what caused them to change their mind and proclaim Jesus was alive and that He was the Messiah, the Son of God?

**Dr. Ben Witherington**: Well, in terms of the psychological profile of the disciples, if we believe that it is true that they denied, deserted and betrayed Jesus, that they had given Him up for lost when He died on the cross, psychologically, something significant had to have happened to change all of their minds about this particular issue after the crucifixion of Jesus. Because remember, no early Jews were looking for a crucified Messiah. If you wanted to scotch the rumor that Jesus was Messiah, get Him crucified. That would prove that He was cursed, not blessed by God.

**Ankerberg**: Archaeologists have now found evidence of how terrible crucifixion was in Jesus' day.

**Dr. Randall Price**: This is the right heel-bone of Yohanan ben Ha'galgol down in the northern suburb of Jerusalem. He's a 30 year old man, about the age of Jesus. The nail pierces not only the bone but also contains fragments of the cross, the wood, because it was bent in such a way that they had to remove it along with pieces of the cross.

So here we have an example of how an individual was crucified in the time of Jesus.

**Dr. Edwin Yamauchi**: Now, if the Resurrection had not happened, then we wouldn't be here speaking. There would have been no Christian movement. He would have been a mistaken Messiah.

**Ankerberg**: So, history tells us that after Jesus died on the cross, He was honorably buried. Three days later, His tomb was found empty. Then His followers began proclaiming this surprising message: "God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact" (Acts 2:32, NIV).

**Dr. William Lane Craig**: The third fundamental fact that any responsible historical hypothesis has to account for in explaining the fate of Jesus of Nazareth is the fact that after His death different individuals and groups of people claimed to have seen Jesus of Nazareth alive from the dead on different occasions and under varying circumstances. Now, this general fact is one that is universally acknowledged today among New Testament critics.

**Ankerberg**: But according to the historical sources, how many people claimed to have seen Jesus?

**Dr. Gary Habermas**: Now, of course, the key list there is in 1 Corinthians 15. In that list you have individuals, leaders of the Church. Paul starts with Peter, ends with himself, in the middle has James, the brother of Jesus—three key individuals who saw the risen Jesus. But you also have groups and that's very important to ascertain some evidence for these appearances. You have the Twelve; you have a group he calls "all the Apostles"; you have more than 500 brethren, most of whom remain alive.

Now, when you go to the Gospels, I think also with good grounds we have, for example, the women. You have several women at the tomb and probably Mary Magdalene alone as she returns. So you've got them sighting Jesus as well as the empty tomb and, again, if you're going to put your best foot forward, you do not use women because they can't go to a law court. You're not going to impress people in first century Palestine. By far the best reason for starting with the women and secondarily with Mary is very simple: they saw the risen Jesus.

Now, the Gospels also tell us about a long walk with two men on the way to Emmaus. I mean, it takes a while to walk and talk for miles with this visitor who turns out to be Jesus.

You have appearances to the groups of disciples. You have in John 20 all the disciples present except, of course, Judas and Thomas. You have a second appearance a week later

with Thomas in the famous incident where Thomas asks for evidence.

So you've got a wide range of activities. You've got men and you've got women. You've got individuals and you've got groups. You've got indoors, outdoors, sitting, standing, fishing, making a shore lunch; walking with them; hanging on by the ankles. Wide variety.

**Ankerberg:** But scholars want to know, "What did these people really see? Did they see Jesus in His physical body, or in some kind of a vision?"

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** Most scholars would certainly say that the disciples believed that they saw Jesus, and many of them would want to just leave it there and say, "Okay, it was subjective phenomenon that happened here." But if you interpret those Gospel documents about the resurrection appearances of the risen Lord, and you interpret the Pauline evidence, the rest of the New Testament evidence, they were claiming far more than that. They were claiming to actually have a physical encounter with Jesus after His death, and that He ate, was tangible, could be touched, that He was still moving in space and time as a real person. So they were claiming more than just having had a vision of Jesus.

**Ankerberg:** Now, scholars have used different words to describe what they think the disciples saw. Some claim the disciples saw an *ordinary* appearance of Jesus, that is, Jesus was literally, physically present with them. He ate with them, and invited them to touch Him.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** If there had been people there with tape recorders and cameras, they would have had photographic and audio images of Jesus appearing in the Upper Room. That would be an ordinary appearance.

**Ankerberg:** Other scholars use the word "vision" to describe what they think the disciples saw. A *vision* is defined as seeing an object in the mind without the use of the five senses. Further, there are two kinds of visions: a truthful vision and a false vision. An example of a true vision, what scholars also call a "veridical" vision, would be a prophet who receives information from God.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** A **veridical vision**, I think, would be an example of what Stephen saw when he was stoned. He looked up and saw the heavens opened and he said, "I see the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God." But the Jewish persecutors about Stephen saw nothing at all. They didn't perceive anything and they rushed upon him and stoned him and killed him. What Stephen saw was a **veridical vision**, a God-induced visionary seeing of the exalted Christ.

**Ankerberg:** But scholars also talk about a false or non-truthful vision. An example of this would be a person who gets drunk and sees a pink elephant. They really do see the pink elephant, but it is a hallucination, purely a projection of the person's own mind and is not really there. This is what scholars usually refer to when they admit the disciples saw **something**, but then imply it was some kind of vision, not a literal physical appearance of Jesus. The question is, did the disciples know the difference between a **real physical** appearance of Jesus and a **vision** of Jesus in their minds?

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** Now, it's interesting that the New Testament draws a clear distinction between *appearances* of Christ and *visions* of Christ. The appearances of the risen Christ were to a limited circle and soon ceased. But visions of the exalted Christ went on in the New Testament Church. Paul saw them when he was praying in the temple in Jerusalem. Stephen saw a vision of Christ at the stoning. In the Book of Revelation you have a vision of the throne room of God that John sees.

So the visions in the Church were something that did not cease, that went on; and yet these

were distinct from a Resurrection appearance.

**Ankerberg:** But what can be said to those who claim Jesus' disciples were only having hallucinations of Jesus?

**Habermas:** What's wrong with hallucination theory? Probably no theory has more problems.

Problem #1: Groups of people, not even two at once, see the same hallucination. An hallucination is something you believe so firmly that you invent the mental picture. Two cannot share an hallucination any more than two can share a dream. So if you've got groups of...if you have examples of group appearances and you have them, for example, three in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff, those are not hallucinations, not as a group.

Secondly, the disciples didn't believe it. It's granted by everybody, both from scripture and from psychology, that you can't have exuberant, expecting disciples after this calamity—best friend, livelihood, everything is destroyed. And they're supposed to be hoping for a Resurrection and making these sorts of images. So second, they're not in the right frame of mind.

Three may be the most devastating one. Too many different people, times, places. You have men; you have women. Indoors, outdoors. Walking, standing. Everything. The problem is, to believe that every one of these people manufactured a private, individual hallucination is beyond credulous. We rarely even see hallucinations today, but they were just supposed to have them on demand. That's too problematic.

Fourth problem: if the disciples were seeing hallucinations, we've got a little problem with the empty tomb. It wouldn't be empty. And so the leaders are saying, "Now, fellows, we've got a problem here." Now critics say, "Now, come on, 50 days later what would the body look like?" Hey look, it doesn't make any difference. This body looks like it's crucified. Here's the nails. This is your man. Blows the theory away. So the empty tomb is a deathblow to hallucination.

**Ankerberg:** In addition, neither visions nor hallucinations explain what the disciples proclaimed, namely, that Jesus literally, physically rose from the dead.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** It's offered as an explanation of the appearances; but in fact, it does not explain why the disciples came to believe Jesus was risen from the dead. For you see, given the typical Jewish mentality about beliefs in the afterlife, they would have believed that Jesus would have gone to Abraham's Bosom, to Paradise, where the souls of the righteous dead would be with God until the Resurrection at the end of the world. And therefore, if they had hallucinated visions of Jesus, they would have projected visions of him as exalted, in Heaven, where God had taken Him up until the Resurrection at the end of the world. But that, at most, would have led them to proclaim the "assumption" of Jesus into Heaven or the "glorification" of Jesus in Heaven, not His literal resurrection from the dead. For the Jew, the Resurrection was an event that took place in space and time, in history, and therefore something more is needed than just hallucinations of the dead man to explain why they came to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus rather than merely His translation into Heaven.

**Ankerberg:** Now, the fourth historical fact accepted by all historical scholars is that the disciples believed Jesus appeared to them and proved He had risen from the dead.

**Dr. N. T. Wright:** The origin of Christianity is actually itself one of the most extraordinary phenomenon in the history of the world. A.D. 20—"there ain't such a thing as a Christian church." By A.D. 120, the emperor in Rome is getting worried letters from one of his proconsuls off in northern Turkey about what to do about these Christians. So in that century, you have this extraordinary thing suddenly appearing out of nowhere. And all the early Christians for whom we have actual evidence would say, "I'll tell you why it's happened. It's because of Jesus of

Nazareth and the fact that He was raised from the dead.”

**Ankerberg:** Now, once we face these four historical facts squarely, namely, the honorable burial of Jesus, the empty tomb, the post-mortem appearances of Jesus, and the disciples’ belief that Jesus was risen from the dead, these four facts call for the conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead.

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** We have framed this argument to take facts which believers and unbelievers hold in common. And what we want the critic to understand here is, these are your facts. They’re in your books. They’re in everybody books. The disciples **believed** they saw the risen Jesus. How do you stop this path from “**thought** they saw” to “**really** saw”? You come up with a naturalistic theory. And I want them to take one of those and run with it. Don’t hide behind “something” happened. Tell me what these facts indicate. I think we’re pushing straight toward the Resurrection of Christ.

**Dr. William Lane Craig:** I believe that when you assess the various alternatives, the various live options, using the ordinary canons of historical assessments, the best explanation for the facts is that God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.

**Ankerberg:** Now, if God did raise Jesus from the dead, what was He trying to tell us?

**Dr. Darrell Bock:** I think the Gospel is the good news that God has provided a way to come into your life forever, not as a ticket, but into a relationship. And He has provided the way to that relationship through the person and work of Jesus Christ, not only the sacrifice for sins but the provision of His very own Spirit coming into your life so that you can relate to God on a healthy level and overcome the sinfulness that is inherent in you. And the good news is that God is committed to that relationship, so committed to that relationship that He sent His only Son to die that it might take place. And the only requirement that exists—it’s a serious requirement—the only requirement is that you believe that He’s done that for you and, in faith, you ask for that relationship through Jesus Christ. It’s that simple, and that demanding, because once God comes into your life, He’s in it to do a marvelous work, a work that grounds you in a relationship with God that will never end.

## Conclusion

**Ankerberg:** And so the search brings us to this point. What have we found?

**Evans:** If a person is going to say Jesus is not going to be important in my life, I’m not going to believe in Him, then they’re going to have to say that for other reasons besides historical....the evidence is there, the sources are there, the picture is clear and coherent, and in my academic opinion, the picture is quite compelling.

**N.T. Wright:** Therefore, the historian, whether that historian be a secularist, a Muslim, a Christian, whatever—the historian has to say, “How do we explain the fact this movement spread like wildfire with Jesus as the Messiah, even though Jesus had been crucified?” The answer has to be, “It can only be because He was raised from the dead.”

**William Lane Craig:** So that the claim of the resurrection of Jesus alone makes Him unique among religious figures of the world. The fact that we have good evidence for it makes it more than unique. It makes it astonishing.

## SCHOLARS PARTICIPATING IN THE JESUS SPECIAL

- Dr. Gabriel Barkay:** Archaeologist and former professor of archaeology at Tel-Aviv University. He is a lecturer at the Jerusalem University College. He was awarded the Israel Prize for archaeology last year and is regarded as the foremost authority on the necropoli of Jerusalem (e.g. he excavated the Ketef Hinnom tombs where the silver amulet—oldest biblical inscription—was found.) He is an expert on tombs and burial practices during the time of Jesus.
- Dr. Craig Blomberg:** Ph.D., Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary; specialized in the parables and the writings of Luke and Acts at Aberdeen University in Scotland. Previously he was senior research fellow at Tyndale House, Cambridge, England. Author of *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, *Interpreting the Parables, Matthew* (in the New American Commentary series), and *Jesus and the Gospels*.
- Dr. Darrell L. Bock:** Research Professor of New Testament Studies and Professor of Spiritual Development and Culture, Center for Christian Leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas. Ph.D. from the University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland. He is author of a two-volume commentary on *Luke* in the Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series and of the *Luke* volume in the NIV Application Commentary series.
- Dr. Magen Broshi:** Former curator of the Shrine of the Book - Museum of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jerusalem. He is a recognized archaeologist and scholar on the Second Temple period, having excavated the most recent discovery of caves at Qumran. He has authored numerous articles in journals on the Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian connections. Excavated first-century level at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and defends it as most reasonable place for crucifixion of Jesus.
- Dr. William Lane Craig:** earned a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Birmingham, England, before taking a doctorate in theology from the Ludwig Maximilians Universität-München, Germany, at which latter institution he was for two years a Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, studying the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. Having spent seven years at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, he is currently a Research Professor at Talbot School of Theology. He is the author of *The Historical Argument for the Resurrection of Jesus* and *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*.
- Dr. Craig Evans:** Ph.D. in New Testament from Claremont Graduate School and is the Director of the Graduate Program in Biblical Studies at Trinity Western University, where he has taught since 1981. He has lectured at Cambridge, Durham, and Oxford. Co-editor of *Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds*, *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* and *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Author of *Jesus and His Contemporaries*.
- Dr. Weston Fields:** Graduate of Grace Theological Seminary and former professor at Western Seminary. Ph.D. from the Hebrew University with dissertation on Sodom & Gomorrah tradition. Present Director of the Dead Sea Scroll Foundation which supports the translation and publication of the scrolls and funds excavations for new scrolls. He has written numerous articles on the Christian connection with the scrolls and is an expert on Jesus and Jewish messianism in the Second Temple period.
- Dr. Hillel Geva:** Archaeologist on staff with the Israel Exploration Society and editor of leading Hebrew journal on Biblical Archaeology - Qadmoniot. Has worked with some of the most important archaeological excavations in Jerusalem since 1967 and was editor of scholarly

book Ancient Jerusalem as well as author of many articles in leading journals. Works also as a guide for the State of Israel with Christian groups and is well-versed in archaeological backgrounds and connections with Christian sites.

**Dr. Gary Habermas:** Distinguished Professor of Apologetics and Philosophy—and chairman of the department of philosophy and theology—at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. He is the author of *The Historical Jesus*, coauthor of *Why Believe? God Exists: Rethinking the Case for God* and coauthor of *In Defense of Miracles*.

**Dr. Amy-Jill Levine (“A.J.”):** E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Nashville, Tennessee. Ph.D. in Religion from Duke University.

**Mrs. Claire Pfann:** Faculty member, Center for the Study of Early Christianity, 1988-present. Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, University of the Holy Land, 1998-present. Contributor, *The Comprehensive Concordance to the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Production Editor, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert XXVII*. Contributor, *The Illustrated Dictionary and Concordance of the Bible*. Contributor, *Hebrew University Bible Project: “The Alignment of the Aramaic and Greek Texts of Ezra and Daniel.”* An expert on Jewish birth practices and culture of Bethlehem during the time of Jesus.

**Dr. Stephen Pfann:** Director of the Jerusalem School for the Study of Early Christianity and of the Nazareth Village. He is well-published in the area of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Dead Sea Scroll concordance, journal of Roland DeVaux, excavator of Qumran settlement) and has been assigned the Daniel fragments from Cave 4 for translation and commentary and also is working on the mysterious Angel Scroll. He is a leading scholar in the area of Jesus and His cultural and social background in the Second Temple period.

**Dr. J. Randall Price:** President of World of the Bible Ministries, Inc.; Ph.D. From the University of Texas at Austin in Middle Eastern Studies with a concentration in Hebrew and Archaeology with graduate work at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.; He has been involved in archaeological excavations in Tel-Yin’am, Jerusalem and is the current director of the Qumran Plateau Excavations Project in Israel.

**Dr. Ben Witherington:** Ph.D. from University of Durham, England; currently Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Asbury Theological Seminary. Author of *The Jesus Quest*, *The Christology of Jesus* and *Jesus the Sage*.

**Dr. N. T. (Thomas) Wright:** Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey and was formerly Dean of Lichfield Cathedral. He taught New Testament studies for twenty years at Cambridge, McGill and Oxford Universities. Wright’s *Jesus and the Victory of God* is regarded as one of the most significant studies in the contemporary “Third Quest” of the historical Jesus.

**Dr. Edwin Yamauchi:** Professor of History at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. One of the leading experts in the United States in Biblical archaeology and the history of the Christian religion. Ph.D. in Mediterranean studies, focusing primarily on the study of ancient languages. While studying in Israel he participated in the excavation in Jerusalem uncovering parts of the marble pavement of the ancient Herodian Temple which was destroyed during the days of Jesus. He is the author of *Persia and the Bible*, *The Stones and the Scriptures* and *The Archaeology of the New Testament Cities in Western Asia Minor*.

**Dr. John F. Ankerberg:** President and Founder of the Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, and host and moderator of the weekly television program *The John Ankerberg Show*, which can be seen in all 50 states as well as selected foreign countries. M.Div. and M.A. in Church History from Trinity International University, Doctor of Ministry from Luther Rice Seminary. Author and coauthor of 59 books.