

A Seasoned Author Responds to Peter Jennings and His ABC News Special: *THE SEARCH FOR JESUS*

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(www.buddyscott.com is an answer to prayer for parents, grandparents, and guardians who are praying about the attitudes and behaviors of their children and grandchildren.)

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Article I

How objective, unbiased, and balanced were Peter Jennings and ABC News? Did they disqualify themselves by their lack of objectivity?

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In the ABC News Special, *The Search for Jesus*, Peter Jennings and the panel of scholars he chose to interview disputed the foundational facts of the Christian faith. (See page 2 to read some of the truths they attempted to discount.)

How did Jennings do that? Why did he do that? And what can we learn from that? Was Jennings objective or did he disqualify himself via his lack of objectivity? These are the questions that will be answered in this series of eight newspaper articles. My purpose will be to help my readers recover from any seeds of doubt that may have been planted.

The broadcast was not a news magazine or an opinion piece. It was clearly stated to be a special report by ABC News in which Peter Jennings, the reporter assigned to cover the story, was claiming professional objectivity.

The logo and the theme music of ABC News were presented, and the program was introduced with these words: "This is an ABC News Special." Both the Internet chat line and the discussion board were stated to be under the auspices of ABC News. Therefore, to be valid, their presentation had to be objective. It wasn't.

During the broadcast of *The Search for Jesus*, ABC ran a promo about its news department and Peter Jennings. In the house ad, Jennings said, "If people can come away from a half hour of World News Tonight feeling *I know more and I understand more*, that's a very gratifying feeling." My questions are: Why did ABC News have Jennings saying that during a show where he was offending so many Christians? And: Why did the American Broadcasting Company appreciate what a first-class reporter Jennings is while it depreciated the life and work of Jesus? What's that about? That was strange! According to ABC News, Jennings is most excellent; but Jesus is plagued with fabrications, embellishments, exaggerations, fictions, and lies.

The program began with Peter Jennings reading the story of the birth of Jesus in a very touching and moving manner, accented with beautiful music and attractive graphics. Then it went directly to an archeological excavation that had uncovered a rock where Mary supposedly rested when she was pregnant

with Jesus. Officials there were preparing to designate it as a special place of spiritual significance and turn it into a tourist attraction. The site was presented as obviously a stretch of the imagination. Then the program insinuated the same flawed authenticity could be true for other sacred places commemorating the life of Jesus, including the Church of the Nativity. And then the interviews began. And within a few minutes of having read the Christmas story so meaningfully, Jennings had planted seeds of doubt about its most treasured elements.

Readers please understand that planting seeds of doubt is all that is necessary to greatly injure the reputation of the Christian faith in the hearts of millions of people. If Jesus wasn't born of a virgin, for example, it follows that more than likely other treasured truths in the Bible are wrong. Allowing dissection removes the rudder from our lifeboat and sets us adrift in the sea of pell-mell opinions. We can't risk our souls and those of our family members and friends to opinions.

In *The Search for Jesus*, Jennings and ABC News presented themselves as the sole sorters of truth and authenticity. Jennings said, "We suspected that reliable resources were hard to come by, and sometimes they were." And in another place, "We discovered how difficult it would be for a journalist to get the story right." His statements presume that they are qualified to authenticate resources, uncover the real story, and get it right.

Did Jennings and ABC News find reliable resources that can provide the real story and get it right? A contributor to the discussion board comments on this subject: "I actually laughed out loud when I realized how many times the people being interviewed said, 'I think' or 'Perhaps it was such and such.'" Other phrases used by the "reliable" resources were: "I have a hunch," "my hunch is," "probably," "maybe," "I think," "I don't think," "apparently," "in all likelihood," "plausibility," and "scholars believe that." Did Jennings select scholars who are reliable resources? The words from their own lips contradict Jennings's presumption that they are reliable resources. How could Jennings "get the story right" with uncertain scholars?

N. T. Wright, Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey, clearly admits on the broadcast that conclusions drawn by historians may or may not be valid:

People are looking for mathematical or scientific proof. In history, that doesn't exist. What we are looking for is likelihood, possibility, plausibility, stuff like that. And in history, that is as far as you get, that's as good as it gets...I know as a historian that history is full of things which were improbable at the time, and yet, my goodness, they happened.

In spite of the lack of precision among the scholars, I counted more than 20 times that Jennings and his scholars directly disputed the *New Testament Gospels* during *The Search for Jesus*.

Jennings labeled scholars he didn't include as conventional scholars. He labeled the millions of Christians he knew would disagree with him as literalists. (His literalists label is inaccurate since many nonliteralist Christians believe what Jennings doubted.) Conventional scholars, literalists, and nonliteralists who believe the basic truths of Scripture are the scholars and people Jennings knew were opposite his view. Therefore, the way for Jennings and ABC News to have been professionally objective would have been to include interviews of them about the specific historical and theological facts being considered (and questioned). But they were completely excluded.

Yet Jennings and ABC News skillfully presented the impression that he included them. How did they do that?

They filmed Jennings with a beautiful Pentecostal choir during a casual time. They showed the choir members as they performed in Israel and as they presented a dramatic passion play at their church in the United States. They filmed Jennings interviewing a Baptist archeologist and other conventional scholars and literalists. Except Jennings didn't ask any of those resources anything of substance. They were only used to add inspiration and general information. He did not allow them to have any input on the specific questions that he asked the unconventional scholars. How else could he have reported and let stand, without sufficient refutation, opinions like the following?

- ✘ Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are unreliable and contradictory sources for facts about the history of Jesus. They are blighted with myth, inaccuracies, and embellishments. Jennings said: "Scholars told us early on that they don't take everything they read in the *New Testament* literally because the *New Testament* has four different and sometimes contradictory versions of Jesus' life. The *Gospels* of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—there is no reliable evidence about who the authors actually were. It is pretty much agreed that they were not eyewitnesses. In fact the *Gospels* were probably written 40 to 100 years after Jesus' death." (I can't help but ask a tongue-in-cheek question: Jennings discounted what was written 40 years after Jesus' death in favor of what was assumed 2,000 years later? Note: In senior adults, their long-term memory often improves with age as their short-term memory declines with age, especially for outstanding events. Reader, can you well remember a significant emotional event that occurred in your life 40 years ago? Yes, and with detail. And what if that significant emotional event had been Jesus? Could you remember the magnificent miracles, events, and teaching of His life in detail? Of course. And younger people would be seeking you out to again hear every detail of the wonderful story of Jesus.)
- ✘ The *Gospel* writers of the *New Testament* were scheming and manipulative authors who were low enough to purposefully lace their writings with fiction and fraud. Jennings and his scholars repeatedly said, in essence, that the *Gospels* are fraudulent writings designed to convince the public that Jesus was someone He wasn't: God incarnated into human flesh. Jennings and his scholars said that the *Gospel* writers were familiar with the *Old Testament* requirements that Jesus had to fulfill to be the Messiah, and they misled humankind by writing falsehoods and embellishments into their *Gospels* to qualify Jesus to be the Messiah. According to Jennings and his scholars, the Christian faith was built on the falsehoods and embellishments of authors who were dishonest and untrustworthy. (Their accusations were appalling and bizarre. Yet they were said with such smoothness that many viewers didn't awaken to their off-the-scale seismic significance. A person who did comprehend the significance, said to me, "I wonder how Jennings and those he interviewed will feel when Jesus plays *The Search for Jesus* at their Judgment." This writer wishes them no ill, and I hope they will make restitution before the dead and great stand before God to be judged.)
- ✘ Jesus may not have been born in Bethlehem. Marcus Borg said, "In all likelihood, He was born in Nazareth, and not in Bethlehem...He was known as Jesus of Nazareth." Jennings mused, "But if Jesus wasn't born in Bethlehem, why would the *Gospel* writers say that He was?" He answered his own question by suggesting that it was a fabrication of *New Testament* writers to satisfy *Old Testament* prophecies in order to qualify Jesus to be the Messiah. Jennings said, "*Gospel* writers believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and the *Old Testament* said that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem." After injecting doubt about the honesty of the *Gospel* writers, Jennings interviewed two other scholars who believe Jesus was born in Bethlehem.
- ✘ There was no star in the East. One of Jennings's scholars, Marcus Borg, said, "It was purely legendary and symbolic."
- ✘ No angels announced the birth of Jesus, no wise men came, and no gifts were given. Another of Jennings's scholars, Jerome Murphy O'Conner, said, "I don't think that it was angels (that were seen by the shepherds), and I don't think there were three wise men."

- ✘ Mary was not a virgin. Jesus was probably the illegitimate child of a Roman soldier. Jennings said, “Perhaps a Roman soldier made Mary pregnant...Mary could well have been a teenager, raising a child by herself...Here are the only things we can say with some certainty about the birth of Jesus: He was born Jewish at a time of great political tension.”
- ✘ Jesus was not tempted by the devil in the wilderness. He was merely hallucinating from hunger. Jennings said, “The *Gospel* stories also say that Jesus was tempted by the devil.” Marcus Borg added, “And we also know that fasting brings about alterations in consciousness.” Jennings followed with, “Which is as speculative as historians want to get when discussing the meeting with the devil.” The subject was abruptly dropped.
- ✘ The Holy Spirit did not descend upon Jesus at His baptism and there was no voice from heaven that said, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.” Jennings said, “*The Gospel According to Mark*, which was probably the first one written, makes no mention of others hearing the voice or seeing the Holy Spirit.”
- ✘ Jesus didn’t perform the miracles in which He commanded nature—walking on the water, turning water into wine, and feeding five thousand people with five loaves of bread and two fish. Peter Jennings said, “Most scholars we talked to think these stories were invented by the *Gospel* writers as advertisements for Christianity in its early years. Christianity, after all, was competing for followers with Judaism and with Greek and Roman pagan religions.”
- ✘ Jesus did perform the miracles in which He healed diseases, but some miracles were less impressive since the “diseases” He “healed” were psychosomatic. Jennings said, “But many scholars do believe the *Gospels* when they say that as He moved from village to village preaching, Jesus also healed and drove demons out of people. In the first century, sick people were thought to be possessed by evil spirits.”
- ✘ If Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the palm branches were not brought out for Him. They were a normal part of the festivities. Claiming them for Him was probably another exaggeration of *New Testament* writers. Jesus was probably a minor figure who didn’t command much attention in Jerusalem. Jennings said, “Apparently Jewish travelers always erupted in celebration when they arrived in Jerusalem for Passover. They may have been singing and shouting, but not necessarily for Jesus.”
- ✘ The crucifixion of Jesus may not have been an event that commanded a lot of attention. Jennings reported, “The stark truth is we don’t know if more than a handful of people paid attention to Jesus’ execution. There are scholars who believe that Jesus didn’t generate very much enthusiasm in Jerusalem.”
- ✘ The authenticity of the Last Supper was brought into question. Jennings reported, “Historians differ about what happened at the Last Supper. Some people think the whole speech about His body and blood at that meal was added by the *Gospel* writers.”
- ✘ Jesus was not betrayed by Judas, a man whose name meant *Jew*. That “hoax” was likely added by *New Testament* writers as a scheme stimulate anti-Semitism, according to Robert Funk. He said that the story of Judas betraying Jesus was “probably a fiction because Judas looks to many of us like the representation of Judaism or the Jews as responsible for His death.” Jennings asked him, “Do you believe that this was written into the *Gospels* in order to portray the Jews as having participated in His death?” Funk answered, “Yes.”
- ✘ The Jews did not have a significant role in the accusations and trials of Jesus. Jennings stated, “There is an intense debate whether Jesus was put on trial by Jewish priests as the *Gospels* indicated.”
- ✘ The *Gospel* stories are wrong about why Jesus was condemned. Jennings surmised, “So Jesus was executed not for blasphemy as the *Gospels* indicate, but as a political revolutionary, a threat to the established political and social order.”

X There was no resurrection because Jesus wasn't buried. John Dominic Crossan said, "The function was to leave the body on the cross for the carrion crows and the prowling dogs." Or because the resurrection idea was stolen from pagan religions. Marvin Meyer said, "And one of the things I believe early Christians did is that they took the model of the Mystery religions, they took that story and retold that story as the story of Jesus." Or the resurrection actually did occur. N. T. Wright said, "I simply cannot explain why Christianity began without it."

In anticipation of the ABC News Special, Mary Nabor (© June 2000) wrote the following for *Crosswalk.com Entertainment*:

This Monday (June 26th at 9 PM, ET) will indeed be a sad day for responsible journalism and the reputation of respected news anchorman, Peter Jennings, when ABC airs "Peter Jennings Reports: *The Search for Jesus*." The flagrant dishonesty begins with the two-hour documentary's title. This show is no open, investigative search for truth.

In days gone by, when objectivity was the most sacred of all attributes of reporters, Peter Jennings was my favorite national TV reporter. I was impressed with his pleasant appearance, his smooth presentation, and the way his persona communicated trust.

Consequently, I encourage readers not to think that this series of articles is coming from someone who has never admired and respected the national TV news media. I am someone who has become reluctantly disillusioned with national news personalities and companies over a period of several years.

And to be open with you, after I wrote a couple of articles a few weeks ago about the bias of most TV network newscasters against Christians who are faithful to all of God's Word, I had wished that something would be broadcast that would confirm the articles to anyone who thought I was overstating the problem. And unfortunately, it came to pass with the broadcast of *The Search for Jesus* with Peter Jennings.

To be objective in his ABC News Special, Jennings would have had to interview conventional contemporary scholars in addition to the unconventional contemporary scholars he interviewed, and he would have had to allow them the opportunity to speak to the subjects on which only the unconventional scholars were allowed to speak.

And to be objective, Jennings would have to do similar news specials about Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions; dumb-down the lives of the patriarchs and the lives of Muhammad, Buddha, and other religious leaders; and attempt to discredit the credibility of the Torah, the Koran, the Dharmas of Buddhism and related religions, and other religious writings. Will Peter Jennings do that?

Article II

Why did Peter Jennings and the American Broadcasting Company attempt to dumb down the story of the life and mission of Jesus Christ?

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My 83-year-old aunt in California phoned my mother and told her that Peter Jennings shook her faith. She is hoping my articles will make her feel again secure in her Christian faith. This article, therefore, is dedicated to my wonderful Aunt Polly.

Why did Peter Jennings attempt to dumb down the story of the life and work of Christ in his ABC News Special, *The Search for Jesus*?

Why did he and his scholars say that Christian faith was founded on the embellishments and fabrications of the early followers of Christ?

And why did he and ABC offend millions of people, conservative or not, who don't believe the Bible is compromised by myth and embellishments while ABC's officials are running numerous advertising spots of Jennings to increase his popularity and give them the edge over other national news organizations?

The American Broadcasting Company must have an agenda that is even more important to them than profit. This article contains my explanation.

Millions of Christians who honor the *New Testament* as the whole truth and nothing but the truth believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation and that their Lord has commissioned them to invite everyone in the world to their faith. Although not inappropriate in a country whose citizens are guaranteed freedom of religion, Christ's great commission to His followers is out of step with some tenets of sensitivity training, diversity training, globalization, and the secularists' positions of...

Proselytizing is wrong because it presumes one's set of values is better than another's set of values.

It is wrong and arrogant to judge the values of others as needing improvement.

Anyone who objects to anyone else's legal sexual behavior is bigoted.

Any legal behavior between consenting adults is okay.

Don't judge my values, and I won't judge yours.

I'm okay; you're okay.

Etceteras.

To those who rigidly support such positions, Christian faith (that is based on the truth of Scripture and upon Jesus as the Savior of all humankind) is America's last resistance against their platform, and they perceive that it must be neutralized and downgraded. The method for attempting to rid the country of the strongest and most committed of the Christian faith is to intimidate them with doubt and equip detractors with fresh supplies of "ammunition."

This can be clearly perceivable when readers realize that the ABC News logo and the BeliefNet.com logo were shown side by side on the television screen during *The Search for Jesus*, and BeliefNet.com was persistently promoted by Jennings and his announcers.

BeliefNet.com presents a smorgasbord of religions, traditional and new, placing all religions on the same level, inviting certain participants to build their coven's Web presence through the media of BeliefNet.com. BeliefNet.com is a for-profit venture funded by Highland Capital, Primus, Zero Stage, The Trump Group, and Blue Chip Ventures. Disney owns ABC.

What could be more effective in downgrading the Christian faith than dumbing down the life and work of Christ? How did Jennings do that?

Jennings designed his piece to calm Bible-honoring Christians of all denominations while he quietly attempted to remove their foundation from beneath them.

He opened by saying: “We’ve tried to be respectful of what people believe (although their beliefs are based on fabrications and embellishments) as we have gone in search of what we can note about Jesus the man. We found *a real man*.”

The parenthetical statement is mine, and notice the words I italicized. *A real man*: Jennings and his scholars implied that Jesus was not God incarnated into human flesh. Not the Savior of the world. Not the Christ who was sacrificed for the sins of all humankind. Not the King of the spiritual Kingdom of God.

Their implications were that Jesus was nothing more than an authentic human, although a really impressive and heroic *man* who championed the cause of justice for those who were being treated unjustly. One of Jennings’s scholars placed Jesus in the league of civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King and Gandhi.

What was the point? If Jesus is only a man, then Christian faith is ill-founded and only one of many religious options. It is downgraded. It should not be taken too seriously. And Christian faith’s most faithful defenders should become less assertive.

As the broadcast closed, ABC provided a chat line with Jennings and a message board—very useful tools. ABC officials know that they can defuse much of the anger of viewers who were insightful and offended by allowing those viewers to calm their anger by writing their frustrations and submitting them—getting everything off their chests.

Article III

Who were Peter Jennings’s chosen ones?

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In the ABC News Special, *The Search for Jesus*, Peter Jennings featured seven scholars, and according to Dr. Elizabeth McNamer, Adjunct Instructor of Religion and Philosophy, Rocky Mountain College, interviewed at an archeological excavation on the program, four of the scholars were a part of the *Jesus Seminar*. (Another source reduces the number of *Jesus Seminar* scholars to three.)

She told me, on the phone, that because of the number of scholars included from the *Jesus Seminar* and because only one less-radically liberal scholar was included, Rev. N. T. Wright, the author of *The Challenge of Jesus*, the show was unbalanced and confusing to a lot of people. (Note: Wright wasn’t a conservative scholar as conservatism is generally understood in the United States. He chuckled [if not snickered] when Jennings asked him about the reliability of the four *Gospel* stories of Christ. Then he questioned the authenticity of the *Gospels*. Wright defined a conservative in his responses to the public on the discussion board. You’ll notice that his definition does not necessarily require believing in the authenticity of Scripture. Wright wrote, “A ‘conservative believer’ must be someone who believes that Jesus was truly human as well as truly divine. [Anything else is radically unorthodox.]” Jennings covered this subject in his chat after the broadcast. He wrote something peculiar in light of what his scholars had said on the broadcast: “Many of you have asked why, in your view, we didn’t speak to more ‘conservative’ scholars. It’s hard to answer the question without fully understanding your definition of ‘conservative.’ The majority of people we spoke to are practicing believing Christians. My suspicion is, it’s unfair to categorize them one way or the other based on the brief biographical information which appeared on the screen. All of their credentials can be found at abcnews.com and BeliefNet.com.” After hearing the scholars interviewed, no one has to question whether or not they were conservative or liberal. “By their fruit, ye shall know them,” Jesus said.)

McNamer said that she felt the program's lack of balance was somewhat her fault. She said she told Jennings's producer about one of the *Jesus Seminar* scholars without anticipating that ABC News would include so many of them. One of the scholars Jennings interviewed, she said, "makes no bones about the fact that he is out to destroy Christianity."

She said that there were plenty of reputable scholars who could have been interviewed to bring balance to *The Search for Jesus*. There are hundreds of scholars who have devoted their lives to the study of the historical Jesus and the faith Jesus.

McNamer expressed to me that she likes Jennings and his producer very much, and she hadn't understood the original intention for the special to be to present the most liberal view.

Not a conservative herself (as conservatism is generally understood in the United States), McNamer said that she believes that the *Gospels* are a reliable source of information about Jesus. Her view is not in harmony with the view generally reflected on the program concerning the *Gospel* writings.

I also spoke with John Patrick Whelan, M.D., Ph.D., an instructor at Harvard Medical School. He was interviewed for the program by Jennings's producer in May of 1997. He was in Israel devoting two weeks of his time to excavating the ancient city of Bethsaida. He said that *The Search for Jesus* turned out to be an effort to tear down literal interpretation of the Bible.

This writer finds it a bit difficult to take everything the Bible says literally, but I find the alternative to be about as wise as trying to hang over a cliff from a sky hook: Trusting modern scholars to dissect it since there can be no *standard of dissection*. Truth is lost to people when they do what's right in their own eyes. The Bible specifically warns against the consequences of pell-mell dissection.

The *Jesus Seminar* is a revealing example of what can occur when people dissect Scripture. About 30 self-appointed unconventional scholars, a mutual-admiration society, authorized by no official entity, not balanced by the participation of scholars from other schools of thought, met twice each year to issue their individual opinions on whether or not Jesus said what the Bible says He said. The outcome was predictable.

According to Marcus J. Borg, a participating scholar in the *Jesus Seminar* and author of *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*, Trinity Press International © 1994, page 160:

After analysis and discussion of a saying attributed to Jesus, members of the seminar voted on whether they thought the saying goes back to Jesus himself by casting one of four differently colored beads into a ballot box.

A red vote means, "I think these are the authentic words of Jesus"; pink means, "A close approximation of what Jesus said"; gray means, "Not Jesus' words, though they may reflect his ideas"; and black means, "Inauthentic; definitely not spoken by Jesus."

Borg reports the results of their line-item vetos in his book. Eighty percent of the sayings that are attributed to Jesus received gray or black beads. Twenty percent received red or pink beads.

According to Borg, they black beaded essentially all of the *Gospel of John*, all passages in the *Gospels* which Jesus spoke of Himself with exalted titles such as "Son of God," "Messiah," "all of the

great ‘I am’ sayings,” and the seminar concluded that Jesus didn’t teach the Lord’s Prayer. Remember, these scholars made up half of the scholars that Jennings interviewed on *The Search for Jesus*.

In the *Scholars Version of the Gospels of Christ*, translated by selected scholars from the *Jesus Seminar*, here is an alarming example of how they translated the words of Christ. In place of “Woe to you,” they have Jesus saying, “Damn you!”

If people who honor what the Bible says are wrong, their only consequence is that they have lived quality-controlled lives based on Scripture. But what if the dissectors of the Bible and the detractors therefrom are wrong? What happens to them? What happens to the people they have led astray?

As for me, I literally want to follow Christ. I literally want to stand approved before God at The Judgment. I literally want to go to heaven and be reunited with my family and friends. And I literally want to enjoy one-on-one time with my esteemed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Then the Prince of Peace will explain everything that I literally don’t understand. My delight will be to hear my Lord say to me, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Article IV

Why did Peter Jennings and his chosen ones judge Jesus by comparing Him to the ancient world of mythical pagan gods? And how could they have missed the appropriate point of reference?

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Read the way Peter Jennings described the miracles of Jesus Christ involving nature in his ABC News Special, *The Search for Jesus*:

The *Gospel* stories describe Jesus impressing his followers by performing supernatural feats. Walking on water, turning water into wine, and feeding thousands of people with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. But most scholars we talked to think these stories were invented by the *Gospel* writers as advertisements for Christianity in its early years. Christianity, after all, was competing for followers with Judaism and with Greek and Roman pagan religions.

To support his statements, Jennings interviewed the author of *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, Marvin Meyer. Meyer said:

Moses feeds a multitude in the wilderness just as Jesus feeds a multitude in the wilderness. Jesus walks on the water just as the Greek god Poseidon rides his chariot over the water; that’s his miracle. Jesus changes water into wine just as the Greek god Dionysius, as his chief miracle, changes water into wine. And the message of the *New Testament Gospels* really is that Jesus can do the same kind of good stuff that Poseidon and Dionysius can do. So those stories really are adopted then and adapted to the figure of Jesus.

According to Jennings and Meyer, some of the nature miracles are worse than not true as recorded in Scripture. They are a part of the scheming fabrications of the early Christians who were trying to start a new religion. Another of Jennings's scholars didn't agree.

Read between the lines when Jennings made this open-ended statement to another scholar: "By your definition then, Jesus is not an heroic figure at all until He gets in the hands of all the people who are going to write and embellish about Him afterwards." (Wow! I'm not used to people representing *New Testament* writers as bottom feeders. What's with Jennings and ABC News?)

The scholar answered that Jesus was a heroic character in the sense that He died for the integrity of His vision (social and political, not being the Savior of the world). He was a heroic character simply because He was unwilling to compromise, He didn't look out for Himself, He didn't ask anything for Himself, and He didn't even ask His followers to do anything in particular.

That's it? That's it. Nothing divine? Nothing divine.

I think my readers will be sharp enough to see through that without any help from me. According to the *New Testament* and Jesus' own words, He didn't come to start a new religion. He came to fulfill the Jewish religion, to be the Messiah about whom their prophets had prophesied. When Jews didn't acknowledge Him as their Messiah, the pulsating energy He had set in motion couldn't and wouldn't evaporate like mere tons of steam. A new religion became its expression.

The miracles Jennings refers to as supernatural feats weren't the scheming fabrications of *New Testament* writers and early zealots. Jennings's scholars looked in the wrong place. Rather than comparing Jesus to pagan gods, they should have related Him to His Heavenly Father.

Remember how Jesus told His parents, "I must be about My Father's business." The miracles were the fruit of a beautiful relationship of **LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON**. Since Jesus was the Son of the Creator of the whole universe, why wouldn't Jesus be creative? The miracles were Jesus creating with His Father—commanding nature and creating health, wholeness, peace, and fresh supplies of food and drink.

God and Jesus performed miracles involving nature. Examples...

God the Father spoke the universe into being.
God the Son spoke healing into the universe.

God created water and grapes.
Jesus turned a bit of water into wine.

God created streams, rivers, lakes, and seas.
Jesus walked on the water.

God created winds and the waves.
Jesus commanded them to calm down.

God created the fish of the sea and the wheat of the fields.
Jesus multiplied a few loaves and fish, and He fed thousands of people.

God and Jesus performed miracles involving health. Examples...

God created human bodies.

Jesus restored health to many human bodies.

God created sight.
Jesus restored sight to many who were blind.

God created hands and legs.
Jesus healed maimed hands and legs.

God created life.
Jesus reissued life to the dead.

And God the Father and Son performed miracles involving salvation. Examples...

God created human souls to be sanctuaries for Him.
Jesus drove the demons out of some of His Father's sanctuaries.

God created us to commune with Him.
Jesus died for our sins to clear the way for us to choose communion with God.

In all of the miracles of God and Jesus...

$A + B = C$
Creative Father + Creative Son = Miracles
(That's not difficult to compute.)

Article V

Has the authenticity of Jesus perfectly survived the test of time?

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I was intrigued by Peter Jennings referring to Jesus as "a first-century Jew" in the ABC News Special, *The Search for Jesus*. Readers, ask yourself: Why was Jesus "a first-century Jew"?

Because **JESUS SPLIT TIME!**

We don't have to look far to know that Jesus' divine mission was authentic. Who else has split time?

Flavius Josephus, who was born 37 years after Jesus split time, wrote about Jesus. As a Jewish historian, he had no reason to present Jesus in a positive light. But read what Josephus wrote about Jesus (the parenthetical statements are those of Josephus):

About this time appeared Jesus, a wise man (if indeed it is right to call Him man; for He was a worker of astonishing deeds, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with joy), and He drew to Himself many Jews (many also of Greeks. This was the Christ).

And when Pilate, at the denunciation of those that are foremost among us, had condemned Him to the cross, those who had first loved Him did not abandon Him (for He appeared to them alive again on the third day, the

holy prophets having foretold this and countless other marvels about Him.)
The tribe of Christians named after Him did not cease to this day.

A Roman writer, Tacitus, who was born 54 years after Jesus split time, confirmed the death of Jesus at the hands of Pontius Pilate and wrote about the Christians' willingness to be tortured morbidly for their faith. Tacitus wrote:

Mockery of every sort were added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination, when daylight had expired...for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

As Christians waited to be used as wicks in torches to light Nero's gardens, hearing the cries and screams of their Christian brothers and sisters, I think they would have recanted if their beliefs hadn't been proved to them beyond a reasonable doubt.

As was said by a modern Jewish historian, Paula Fredriksen, Boston University, Jennings's Jewish representation on his panel of scholars in *The Search for Jesus*:

I know in their own terms, what they saw was the raised Jesus. That's what they say, and then all the historic evidence we have afterwards attests to their conviction that that's what they saw. I'm not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn't there. I don't know what they saw. But I do know as an historian, that they must have seen something.

There are 2,000 years between Paula Fredriksen, the modern Jewish historian, and Flavius Josephus, the ancient Jewish historian, but they are close enough to being on the same page to affirm Jesus' power over death and His resurrection.

The above works, but I was intrigued by what Jennings said about modern scholars who issue conclusions about Jesus. He stated:

So this, it turns out, is what all the scholars do. They look at the stories and the other available evidence, they choose what makes the most sense historically, and then they make educated guesses.

Jennings's scholars were educated guessers? Jennings used educated guessing to assert that the Christian faith was founded upon the fabrication, embellishment, and fiction of those who wrote the *New Testament*? Based on educated guessing, he sought to detract from the basic tenets of Christian faith?

I think that's especially tragic in view of the fact that many of the people my clinic has counseled have their faith as the last shrub of hope onto which they are grasping before they fall down the jagged face of a cliff into emotional or addictive oblivion. Why would Peter Jennings intentionally cut off their last shrub of hope?

Article VI

Did Peter Jennings and ABC have a secret agenda?

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Peter Jennings devoted a relatively disproportional amount of time on his ABC News Special, *The Search for Jesus*, to communicating that the Jews were not as involved in the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus as is written in the Bible. Why was that important to him? Answering that question is the subject of this article.

Here is some of the dialogue from the special...

In a conversation with Robert W. Funk, author of *The Acts of Jesus* and a chairman of the *Jesus Seminar*, Jennings said, “All the *Gospels* say that one of His disciples, a man named Judas, led the guards to Jesus. In three of the *Gospels*, Judas identifies Jesus by kissing him.”

Funk responded, “Probably a fiction because Judas looks to many of us like the representation of Judaism or the Jews as responsible for His death. If it is a fiction, it was one of the most cruel fictions that was ever invented.”

Jennings asked, “Do you believe that this was written into the *Gospels* in order to portray the Jews as having participated in His death?”

Funk answered, “Yes.”

Jennings pursued, “This is why you call it such cruel fiction?”

Funk replied, “Yes. It’s because of the untold hostilities that have existed between Christians and Jews throughout the centuries.”

A growing school of thought blames Christian faith more than Adolf Hitler for the Holocaust. Readers, if this is the first time you’ve heard this disturbing information, you may wonder if what I’m relating to you is actually occurring. Yes, it is. This school of thought is being taught in high places. I’ll give you an example before this article concludes.

The ABC News Special continued...

Jennings stated, “In every version of the story (in the *Gospels*), the Jewish leaders take Jesus to the Roman military governor, Pontius Pilate, and have to pressure him before he will pass the sentence. Many historians don’t believe it. The conventional Christian wisdom—I think that’s the way to put it—says that the Jews put Him on trial and forced Pontius Pilate to crucify Him.”

John Dominic Crossan, DePaul University, asserted, “The conventional Christian wisdom usually forgets the situation. Pilate is running the country.”

Paula Fredriksen, a Jewish historian, Boston University, added, “We have evidence other than the *Gospels* for Pilate. Josephus talks about him as a thug. In a string of bad governors, he was one of the worst. Philo of Alexandria, who is Jesus’ contemporary, writes that Pilate was known for his theft, his finality, and his execution of untried prisoners. Jesus fits into that category without effort.”

The conclusion at which Jennings and his scholars arrived was that Jesus was executed for treason, not for blasphemy as the Bible states.

When I visited the Holocaust Museum, in close proximity to the Mall of Washington, D.C., I watched a film in the museum and carefully documented its words. The film clearly blamed Christian anti-Semitism for the Holocaust. Included was this quote:

Enter Adolf Hitler. Austrian born and baptized a Catholic, Hitler viewed world history as a racial struggle for survival of the fittest. He saw Jews as the source of all evil—disease, social injustice, cultural decline, capitalism, and all forms of Marxism, especially communism. Anti-Semitism would be considered the presiding ideology of the Third Reich.

The film cut to Hitler, speaking at a rally amid chants of support:

In defending myself against the Jews, I am acting for the Lord. The difference between the church and me is that I am finishing the job.

At the end of the film, these words silently rolled up the screen:

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE HOLOCAUST, CHRISTIAN CHURCHES ARE REEXAMINING THEIR TEACHINGS ON JEWS AND JUDAISM.

The fact that Hitler was baptized a Catholic can't insinuate that he had remained true to Catholicism or that he lived as a Christian. To the contrary: In his words at the rally, he differentiated between himself and the Catholic Church. Hitler was not a crusading Christian. He was an egomaniac who cunningly pulled from many sources to enable his macabre march through history. And he killed five million people who were not Jews, most of which were Christian. Here is a quote from www.holocaustforgotton.com where links are available to further explore this subject:

Of the 11 million humans killed in the Holocaust, six million were Polish citizens. Three million were Polish Jews and another three million were Polish Christians...Hitler wanted not only to conquer all of Europe, but Hitler also wanted to create a new religion and to replace Jesus Christ as a person to be worshipped. Hitler expected his followers to worship the Nazi ideology. Since Catholic priests and Christian pastors were often influential leaders in their community, they were sought out by the Nazis very early. Thousands of Catholic priests and Christian pastors were forced into concentration camps. A special barracks was set up at Dachau, the camp near Munich, Germany, for clergymen. A few survived; some were executed, but most were allowed to die slowly of starvation or disease...The Nazis decided that it was a waste of time and money to support the handicapped...thousands of people with various handicaps were put to death like cats and dogs...In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler said he would eliminate all the children born of African-German descent because he considered them an "insult" to the German nation.

I appreciated the comment made by Hadassah Lieberman when she spoke at her husband's introduction as the Democratic vice-presidential nominee. She expressed her gratefulness to the United States for what it had done to help her family survive the Holocaust.

And it's appropriate to note that the majority of the American soldiers who carried the near-death Jews in their arms from the death camps were Christians. Christians were among others who nursed them back to health. And Christians have been very supportive of the Holocaust Museum.

After this article appeared in the newspaper, a letter to the editor challenged my content. The writer wrote:

I'm the one to blame: I killed Jesus! I am not real proud of it, but I have to confess it now because I am tired of people like Buddy Scott blaming the Jews for it like he did in Saturday's religion section...In fact it was the promulgation of this tragic deception that caused the wholesale slaughter of Jews during the middle centuries (A.D.) and the extermination of approximately one-third of the Jews that existed on this planet at the time of Hitler's holocaust. It breaks my heart terribly to know that these people, millions of them, all died in the name of Christianity.

The writer's purpose was to criticize my content. In the process, however, he affirmed it. He wrote that Christianity was responsible for the Holocaust. Point made: There is a growing school of thought that blames the Christian faith for the Holocaust and thereby attempts to discredit our faith. The content of *The Search for Jesus* seemed to be of that school of thought.

Here are two issues that I would like to also include in this article:

First: Many Jews do not believe that Christian anti-Semitism caused the Holocaust, and many esteem the gallant success of American soldiers, most of whom were of Christian heritages, for stopping the killing of Jews. They know, in fact, that many American Christians literally gave their lives to save the Jews.

Second: I grew up in a Christian home and faithfully attended church. My parents and church leaders raised me to highly esteem Jewish people. My parents gave me a trip to Israel when I graduated from college. In Old Jerusalem, about 35 years ago, I found the only Jewish bookstore located there. In the store, I met a Jewish author's daughter. I bought his book and had her autograph it for me. I still have the treasured book, even to this day. The only experience that has disturbed my esteem for the Jews was my visit to the Holocaust Museum. I went in admiring Jews. I came out fighting a sudden resentment of Jews. Later, I've realized that the Holocaust Museum cannot be given the prestige of being a monument that establishes all Jewish thought.

Article VII

How respectful of Jesus' healing miracles were Peter Jennings and his chosen ones?

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Peter Jennings planted doubt about so many biblical truths about Jesus in his ABC News Special, *The Search for Jesus*, that I was intrigued that he lightened up a bit when it came to the healing miracles of Jesus. He cast some doubt; but for the most part, he allowed their authenticity to stand.

That's wonderful since with the healing miracles of Jesus I can rebuild what Jennings categorized as fabrication, embellishment, and fiction. But first, this...

To me, the Jewish scholar from Boston University who served on Jennings's panel of scholars, Paula Fredriksen, was the most careful, objective, and balanced of his guests, even above that of the unconventional Christian scholars.

She observed, "People are coming to Him (Jesus) in order to have demons driven away and in order to be cured of illness. And while He's doing this, He says something like, 'You see what's happening? The blind see! The lame walk! This means that the Kingdom of God is occurring, it's about to break in.'"

Jennings asked her, "So did people believe Jesus particularly because of His healings?"

Fredriksen responded, "Oh, imagine yourself in the crowd. If somebody who had suffered from blindness could suddenly see, how would you feel about what He (Jesus) was saying?" (Note: The capitalizations of the pronouns for Jesus were supplied by this writer.)

Jennings introduced the subject of Jesus' healing miracles with, "The reason scholars believe that Jesus was able to heal people in some cases is that doctors believe it." Notice the phrase "in some cases" and notice in the following interview that Jennings tended to detract from the magnitude of the miracles.

Jennings introduced Patrick Whelan, M.D., Harvard Medical School, and included an excerpt from an interview with him. The excerpt seems fine at first glance. Then you realize that Jennings and his producers used it to imply that Jesus was healing psychosomatic illnesses, not actual diseases. Jesus was merely removing the psychological anxieties that caused the illnesses. And as a by-product of clearing up the erroneous thinking, the "diseases" disappeared.

Here is the excerpt he used from Whelan:

In my field, which is rheumatology, aches and pains, a large dimension of dealing with these problems is the psychiatric dimension. Somebody comes into the doctor and oftentimes we can't do anything but reassure them that this will not get worse, this will not threaten your life. And then their suffering is immensely eased by that, by depriving them of the anxiety and the fear component of the pain, and their pain is easier to bear.

You'll remember that I phoned Dr. Whelan and spoke with him about the ABC News Special. He said he felt Jennings had been respectful in the manner in which he had conducted himself on the broadcast.

In addition to what I have already written, I queried him, "I'm sure you had more to say than was used in *The Search for Jesus*. I'd like to know what else you said."

He replied:

The woman who interviewed me on behalf of Jennings in 1997 said that it seems that in the *Gospels* that there are numerous miracles that Jesus performed which deal with health conditions for which we still don't have very good treatments, and she wondered if there are anything doctors today could learn from Jesus, not inspirationally but rather practically. Are there any treatment secrets in the *Gospels* that the doctors have failed to pick up on that we could learn from Jesus since He was clearly so successful in treating many conditions that doctors still don't have a good handle on?

He told me that he answered:

At the very least, there are a couple of very important lessons that Jesus teaches doctors today. The average male doctor in the United States spends four minutes with his patients which is not enough time to deal with the psychosocial elements of the disease...so much of the pain experience is the anxiety that people feel. There's just no doubt about it. And most doctors just don't have the time or take the time to deal with that element of the suffering that people have. So my feeling is that if you can spend that time with people and deal with the anxiety element, then you significantly reduce their pain experience. So I was just drawing on the numerous instances in *Luke's Gospel* where Jesus tells people not to fear. "Fear not."

And the other element that struck me when I had an opportunity to reread all the *Gospels* during that trip (to Israel) was how *touch* was such a universal theme in all the health miracles. Jesus was constantly reaching out and touching people. This is a tremendous flub doctors have today. They are so time limited that oftentimes they don't even examine their patients. And this is a reason why chiropractors are so popular. The essence of the chiropractic visit is the laying on of hands, the touch element.

I can't help but imagine that in that day and age people must have lived in terror day after day that they wouldn't be alive the following week, there was so much disease everywhere, and the fact that these stories are so pervasive in the Scripture suggests that Jesus must have had some extraordinary abilities that no one else had.

I observed, "You are telling me that you believe in the miracles of Jesus as they are written in the *New Testament*."

"I don't have any reason to doubt them," he affirmed.

Article VIII

How can my readers and my Aunt Polly rise above and go beyond Peter Jennings, the American Broadcasting Company, and their chosen ones?

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There were discrepancies and inconsistencies in *The Search for Jesus* that have made my evaluation difficult.

One of Peter Jennings's scholars wrote off Jesus' temptations by Satan in the wilderness as merely the hallucinations of a starving man. No other opinions were allowed, and the subject was abruptly dropped. Yet Jennings's scholars let stand—more than not—the miracles of Jesus casting out demons.

Marvin Meyer, author, *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, said on the broadcast:

This is one of the more interesting of the issues that scholars face, and sometimes scholars who are embarrassed by televangelists and by exorcisms and healings on stage or on television might shy away from these kinds of accounts. And the fact of the matter is that we have lots of stories of healings and exorcisms in the *New Testament* and early Christian literature, and we've got to face those in honest and forthright kinds of fashion.

Jennings's scholars attempted to negate the miracles of Jesus that dealt with nature (walking on the water, turning water into wine, feeding the five thousand). Yet Jennings's scholars let stand—more than not—the miracles of Jesus that dealt with physical healings (healing blinded eyes, etceteras).

You'll remember that I previously quoted Paula Fredriksen's response to Jennings's question: "So did people believe Jesus particularly because of His healings?" She replied, "Oh, imagine yourself in the crowd. If somebody who had suffered from blindness could suddenly see, how would you feel about what He (Jesus) was saying?"

Jennings's scholars attempted to disallow the divinity of Jesus—Jesus as Immanuel (God with us), the Messiah (the anointed One, the supreme political and spiritual liberator for the universe for Whom the Jews are waiting), and Savior of the world (the author and finisher of salvation for all humankind). Yet Jennings's scholars let stand—more than not—the resurrection of Jesus.

About the resurrection, the Jewish historian, Paula Fredriksen, said:

I know in their own terms, what they saw was the raised Jesus. That's what they say, and then all the historic evidence we have afterwards attests to their conviction that that's what they saw. I'm not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn't there. I don't know what they saw. But I do know as an historian, that they must have seen something.

N. T. Wright concluded, "If Jesus had died and stayed dead, they (His followers) would either have given up the movement, or they would have found another Messiah. Something extraordinary happened that convinced them that Jesus was the Messiah."

With the resurrection, we can restore to springtime all that Jennings, ABC News, and their scholars attempted to wilt with doubt...

Since Jesus rose from the dead,
walking on the water was a walk in the park.

Since Jesus resurrected,
feeding five thousand with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish was a piece of cake.

Since Jesus achieved victory over the grave,
turning water into wine was child's play.

Since Jesus has proved that He has the keys to death and the grave,
raising others from the dead was and is the high calling entrusted to Him by our Heavenly Father.

John 3:16 is accurate: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And from that old-time favorite, we can spring to other scriptures with a similar theme: Jesus resurrected, and He is the Savior of all individuals who choose Him. Notice how the resurrection of Jesus is foundational to each of the following scriptural truths:

Jesus proclaimed in Revelation, “***I am he that liveth, and was dead;*** and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:18).

The apostle Paul wrote, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath ***raised*** him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Again, Paul wrote, “For since by man (Adam) came death, by man (Jesus) came also the ***resurrection*** of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:21).

And Jesus said, “And this is the will of him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will ***raise*** him up at the last day” (John 6:40).

The Bible says, “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall ***rise*** first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Another way to approach this is by using the well-known equation of $A + B = C$: Jesus proclaimed He would resurrect from the dead + Jesus resurrected from the dead = Jesus has the position, power, and integrity to speak the truth. Since Jesus can successfully interact with eternity and rise from the dead, surely He can tell the truth and protect the delivery of that truth even until our day.

Since Jesus can be trusted to protect the truth, let’s hear what He has to say in the *Gospel of John*:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:24-29).

Jennings concluded with these words:

And even the most skeptical of scholars and historians agree on this: In His brief life, Jesus of Nazareth probably met and spoke with no more than a few thousand people, He wrote nothing, He commanded no great army, and He spent most of his time with the poor and the outcast. But He had a vision for a just world which was so vivid and moved Him so powerfully that he was willing to die for it. And after His death, His vision somehow transformed the world. Miraculous!

By the way, the majority of the information supplied to *The Search for Jesus* by the unconventional scholars is not new. I heard some of their views when I was in college more than 30 years ago. I wish ABC News would have presented a diversity of views from a diversity of scholars from a wider diversity of races. Then viewers could have made their own decisions based upon an objective presentation. Personally, this writer believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died for the sins of all humankind. There is more than sufficient evidence to support what I believe. As Jennings said:

“The truly faithful find a remarkable power in Him.”