

Magdalen Manuscript: Legend Killer



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Three fragments (front side) of a copy of the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 26, from the collection of Magdalen College, Oxford.

A criticism sometimes leveled against the New Testament is that it is “just a bunch of legends” written down as a result of oral tradition, long after the events it purports to describe. As Jesus Seminar member Burton Mack writes, “The narrative Gospels have no claim as historical accounts. The Gospels are imaginative creations.” In other words, the argument goes, sayings and events are “written in” later and have no basis in fact.

The critic who holds this position and wishes to speak factually, however, should first consider the evidence of archaeology and history.

One notable example is the existence of the Magdalen manuscripts (referred to by scholars as P64). These ancient papyri are fragments of a copy of the Gospel

of Matthew, and part of an ancient codex (a hand-written manuscript in book form, inscribed on both sides of the page). They are in the collection of the Magdalen College Library in Oxford. Other pieces believed to be from the same document are held at the Fundación San Lucas Evangelist, in Barcelona, Spain.

These fragments are significant at several levels, notably for the date they were written. German historian and noted papyrologist Dr. Carsten Peter Thiede, Director of the Institute for Basic Epistemological Research in Paderborn, Germany, has examined the Magdalen papyri, and dates them around A.D. 60-70. Although not all scholars agree with this date, if correct it means that Matthew’s Gospel, of which P64 is a copy, was written and circulating within 30-40 years of the crucifixion of Jesus.

Dr. Don Bierle, author of *Surprised by Faith*, said concerning these early manuscripts, “Since Jesus lived at least until A.D. 30, these copies were made by people who were able to know Him personally or talk with those who did.”

The evidence of history also supports the conclusion of early Gospel authorship. The earliest church fathers like Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp (students of the eyewitness apostles), writing between A.D. 95-110, refer to 24 of the 27 New

Testament books—including all four Gospels. Obviously, the originals must have already been written earlier in order to be quoted by the end of the first century!

Therefore, early manuscripts and quotes clearly demonstrate that the Gospels, contrary to their critics, **did not go through a long period of oral transmission during which they took on legendary traditions.** As Dr. Bierle said, “No other ancient writing has manuscript copies in every century including the generation of the eyewitnesses and its original authors!”

Portions of these verses from Matthew 26 (NASB) are on the Magdalen papyri (P64, recto), according to Dr. Carsten Peter Thiede. (The other side, verso, includes portions of verses 7-8, 10 and 14-15.)

- 22 Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, “Surely not I, Lord?”
- 23 And He answered, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me.”...
- 31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, ‘I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.’
- 32 “But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.”
- 33 But Peter said to Him, “Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.”

The significance of this is illuminated by Dr. Sherwin-White, Oxford historian of Roman times, who states that no legend is known to have developed and become generally accepted within the same generation as the events and persons themselves.

As ideas go, the “Legend Theory” of the New Testament certainly should be considered dead.

God at Work

July 2002–March 2003

Here’s a snapshot of some of what God has been doing in our ministry during the current fiscal year.

FaithSearch	
- Events	96
- Attendance	15,410
- Response forms	1,693
- Faith commitments	780
Supplementary events	
- Events	175
- Attendance	116,384
- Response forms	2,869
- Faith commitments	11,310

* Includes all events where FaithSearch, in whole or in part, is presented. Numbers include many events where no response cards were used, including India, where local workers estimate conservatively that 10% of all attendees will make a faith commitment.

Surprised by Faith

Second Edition On the Way!

The old saying goes, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

After a fruitful decade of impact in the lives of individuals, *Surprised by Faith*, the widely-read book by Dr. Don Bierle, has been revised and updated. No, it wasn’t “broke.” And it didn’t need “fixin’.” Recent discoveries and insights into the integrity of God’s Word, the Bible, and further evidence from archaeology, provide an excellent opportunity to improve this time-tested text.

From the very beginning, this book has been well received. Dr. Billy Graham said the

book “will strengthen your own faith in God, in the reliability of the Bible, and in the truth of Jesus Christ.” And now, it will be even stronger.

Writing and editing have been completed to include the latest scholarship, and to enhance readability. There is a brand new layout, too, including an exciting cover design, making the book even more appealing to the eye. Plus, photos have been added to illustrate the evidence from archaeology and history. **The first printing will be available at the end of May.**

(cont’d on page 3)

FAITH STUDIES INTERNATIONAL

Faith Studies International is an inter-denominational, not-for-profit organization dedicated to presenting evidences for the Christian faith through the **FaithSearch** seminar and its derivatives—including outreach and training seminars, media resources, and discipleship programs. Faith Studies International is not publicly or denominationally supported.

For information call:

(952) 401-4501/toll-free 1-800-964-1447

Address:

105 Peavey Rd., Suite 200
Chaska, MN 55318

Visit our Web site at www.faithstudies.org

Email: FSMN@FaithStudies.org

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CLASSIFIEDS

Wanted: Classroom tables.

If you (or someone you know) have several matching classroom tables that could be donated, give us a call. The ministry is seeking someone willing to donate several tables to be used for classroom training. These are narrower than regular folding tables; 2' x 6' would be ideal. Call (952) 401-4501.

Welcome Denny McKeever

Faith Studies is pleased to re-introduce our "newest" team member, Denny McKeever, who returned to staff full time on April 8. He is an evangelist, and will serve as Director of International Ministry. He reported to work Tuesday morning after an absence of four years, during which time he pastored a church on the Iron Range, and served as the Associate Pastor of Missions, Grace Church of Edina. In his previous role at Faith Studies, Denny was Teacher/Evangelist, Director of Spiritual Care, and Director of Operations.

Upon renewing his tenure with us, he stopped by long enough to greet everyone, then immediately got on a plane bound for India, where he participated in our pastor-training conferences, along with Toby Travis.

He paused long enough before leaving to say, "It's like coming home in a sense. I've been gone for a while, but I have always remained active in and aware of what Faith Studies has been doing.

"And I'm excited and thrilled that God has opened up the opportunity for me to work with Don and the staff again," he continued. "I'm looking forward to many years of fruitful ministry here." So are we, Denny. Welcome "home."

Denny and his wife Joanie have two grown children, and will make their home in the Twin Cities.



To All Peoples Everywhere

Expanding International Emphasis

In our second year of "Extending the Vision," we are focusing on increasing our international impact. In lock step with the Great Commission, we are seeking to go "to all peoples everywhere..." (Matthew 29:19, GNV).

There are a number of exciting developments taking place on this front, including the arrival of Denny McKeever, our new Evangelist and Director of International Ministry. "I'm so excited about the opportunity to be working with internationals and with international leadership to expand our ministry, and, literally, to take **FaithSearch** to the world," he said just before heading for his first assignment in India. "As a missionary with a missionary's heart, I am eager to be involved in this effort here at Faith Studies."

The work in India continues our ongoing partnership with South Asia Campus Crusade for Christ. From April 12-22, they hosted a series of events to train pastors and lay leaders how to use Faith Studies resources in their local ministries. This includes the **FaithSearch** video series, as well as the **Surprised by Faith** and **FaithSearch Guide** publications, produced in India last year.

Here are some additional areas of global growth:

—**Surprised by Faith** and **The FaithSearch Guide** were translated into Tamil and Hindi at the request of pastors in India, greatly expanding their usefulness throughout the country

—The **FaithSearch** video series was also dubbed into Tamil and Hindi

—Businessmen's meetings were added to the India itinerary, increasing the exposure and impact of **FaithSearch**

—Work toward a Spanish translation of **Surprised by Faith** has begun

—Publishing arrangements for the Russian translation of **Surprised by Faith**, completed last year, are being finalized

Dr. Bierle said, "With Denny's international experience and passion, we anticipate renewed effectiveness as we seek to respond to the opportunities that God provides."

"One of the great fits for me at this time," Denny explained, "is helping to develop our international partnerships.



Dr. Bierle welcomed long-time friend and co-laborer Denny McKeever back to Faith Studies.

We will continue our rapid expansion in the English-speaking world, as well as to other geographic areas, people groups and ethnic groups — in fact, wherever else the Spirit of God leads us."

He continued, "We are absolutely convinced that we are in position right now to have a powerful impact in the world for the Kingdom of God. Yet we will also need to develop our budget in this area. It will take the response of individuals and churches to help us accomplish this vision." Please ask God how He would have you be involved in this important and timely work.



What People Are Saying

FAITHSEARCH

"I never really built a logical reasonings (sic) in my mind. I thought it would be wrong to do so. [**FaithSearch**] changed my wrong thinking. This event was terrific! I appreciate that you, Dr. Don, took this time to do this. Also, the way you shared both logical proofs and historical evidences and supernatural way of God's work was just awesome. Thank you." —S.M.

"I'm a very 'logical,' scientific thinker. This presentation and the way it was presented just clicked completely and convinced me for the first time to accept Jesus with all of my heart. I am very excited God led me to this event." —E.G. (senior high school student)

OTHER

"This event (Knowing God) made me start to think. I really am terrified of God, therefore I try not to think about Him. I was surprised to hear about the loving God. For the first time, I prayed to trust and follow Jesus Christ." —J.M.

FaithSearch Field Reports

Our evangelists share their impressions from recent events.

Dr. Don Bierle

Many of you who have been our friends and supporters for several years will recall praying for Vernee's health. There was a period of years when she had to stay home most of the time when I traveled for ministry. **I praise the Lord that for the last three years she has been doing so much better that she can often accompany me.** Thank you for your prayers! I look forward to ministry trips much more when she can be with me. Furthermore, she helps me be more effective as she relates to people at the resource table and assists with many details.

Recently we were together for some great ministry in Florida. I spoke eleven times in a little over a week—Rotary and Kiwanis, Edison Community College, three morning worship services, youth group and of course, the main event, *FaithSearch*. This was our fifth year at Sanibel, and we have come to know many whose lives God has changed through our ministry.

Later in March we initiated a discipleship and outreach ministry in Sioux Falls, SD. There was a lot of enthusiasm generated and the church expressed their desire to use our resources and events for future ministry. In early April we spent a weekend together in Mankato. About 120 attended *FaithSearch*, with many individuals recording a new or renewed commitment to Jesus Christ. **It is so fulfilling that during our "empty-nest" years, we can serve together proclaiming the best news in the world—forgiveness and salvation in Jesus!**

Hasnah Burdge

The second week of April took me through Texas, Louisiana, and locations in Minnesota. As I travel to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those seeking to know the truth, **I am blessed with the privilege of seeing lives being transformed by Christ.**

While I know that the purpose of my travel is to deliver the gift of Good News, I was reminded afresh in Texas that in doing so, I receive much more than I give. At almost all of my speaking venues, people approach me, asking to pray for me. I remember many times—in hallways, closets, lobbies, bathrooms and homes—bending in prayer with godly men and women interceding on my behalf. **Those prayers allow me to walk to the stage with confidence, knowing that God will use my words as I speak.**

Many have taken Paul's admonition to heart: "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, ... pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel" (Ephesians 6:18-19).

In recent weeks, I have again been privileged to be prayed over by dear friends. Thank you, Michael, Jean Ann, Tina, Chris, Ana, Jennifer, Erica, and Leslie for your petitions and prayers. **You all truly are partners in ministry with me!**



Toby Travis

As this issue goes to press, I am again privileged to be serving God in India. I'm thrilled to help train pastors and lay leaders in the use of Faith Studies resources. Denny McKeever and I are conducting a series of presentations in at least five cities. I will also be leading sessions for Campus Crusade staff at their Great Commission Training Center.

I recently conducted events at a college chapel in New York, including one of the largest audiences the college has had for a chapel program. I was encouraged by interacting with a number of students. It was very well received, and there were a number of requests for a longer return visit with multiple sessions. The college chaplain has a real passion for the students, and I am absolutely confident that the follow-up will be intentional and complete.

The *FaithSearch* we held in St. Cloud, MN, was the first outreach event we have done with this church. It had moderate success. Even though there did not appear to be a significant amount of actual outreach this time, many participants from the church indicated they would like another opportunity to invite a friend. Praise God! **I pray that churches everywhere will catch this heart and passion for reaching out to the lost.**

Adrian Van Vector

[Note: This is Adrian's final *FaithSearch* Report, as he moves into ministry outside of Faith Studies International. Please uphold him in prayer, that God will continue to use and bless him in all his service "for King and Kingdom."]

At the end of April I will formally leave the Faith Studies staff. **I have been truly blessed by this time of work and ministry.** As I embark on the next phase of my career, I covet your prayers for my future plans; for the completion of my education; for my upcoming marriage; for the international ministry trips being developed for Russia, England, Germany, Brazil and South Asia.

This will be a time of transition and change for Tiffanie and me. I will miss working with Don and the staff at Faith Studies, and will always treasure our labors together for God. I am thankful for the support and confidence expressed to me. At the same time, **I eagerly anticipate the discovery of all the things God is doing and has yet to do in my life.** May God truly bless you all.



Surprised by Faith

(cont. from page 1)

This effort comes even as the ministry of Faith Studies International is expanding nationally, culturally and globally, "Extending the Vision To All Peoples Everywhere." The nature of the publishing industry is such that this new edition will support our expansion, and work in concert with other promotional efforts.

Please pray for the continued, effective use of this book for God's glory. We trust you will use the book in your church and personal ministry, as well. As we look forward to God using the revised edition, we offer the following review of some of the original book's history and accomplishments.

First published: 1992
Copies in print: 263,600
Estimated readership: 1,000,000
Sales revenue: \$281,200

Languages:

English, Chinese (underway), Russian (completed, pending publishing), Tamil and Hindi (in circulation in India). Coming next: Spanish

Special promotions:

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association:

168,000

2000 World's Fair, Hanover, Germany:

1,000

Lowell Lundstrom Ministries: 800

Coral Ridge Ministries radio & TV: 540



The wraps come off the new, revised edition of *Surprised by Faith* at the end of May.

Surprised by Faith Changes Lives

Although there is no way to fully record its impact (this side of eternity), the book has touched thousands of lives, such as these who wrote to us.

"Dr. Don Bierle has written a powerfully practical book that will strengthen your personal faith in God. This is the most outstanding book I've ever read for evidence of our faith in Jesus Christ." —Lowell Lundstrom, president, Lowell Lundstrom Ministries

"I have not only read Surprised by Faith, but stolen some stuff from it to help my sermons....What a great book!" —D.M.

"I've been an atheist for many years but this book has come closer than anything I've ever read to convincing me of the validity of Christianity." —J.B.

"An 87-year-old gentleman accepted Christ after talking with the pastor and reading the book Surprised by Faith. This is the second person of my acquaintance who has responded to the Lord through this book." —K.H.

“Open Wide!”

Some years ago, I remember going to the dentist because of a pain in my mouth that just couldn't be ignored anymore. After a brief examination, the dentist expressed a triumphant “Ah-ha!” He had made a discovery that led to the repair and ultimately the end of that irritating pain.

Likewise, our global society has been “opening wide” to reveal a festering abscess of corporate and political corruption, moral confusion, broken marriages and homes, and personal loneliness and emptiness. No wonder that many of the thousands of people who come to *FaithSearch* suddenly exclaim “Ah-ha!” We help them to discover the reality of an absolute God whose message of love, forgiveness and assurance offers a new quality of life, both now and forever. It is a repair deep within each person—in the heart—that heals the pain. The Holy Spirit takes up residence within them and, like yeast, begins the process of transforming them and using them to make a substantial positive difference all around them, in corporations, governments, marriages and homes.

The *FaithSearch* message is healing and is revolutionary. Here is what some actual participants have said:

“FaithSearch relates to many, many things I am facing in my life, and I want to make a change. Work isn't making sense, life and family need direction. I believe this will help.” —J.S.

“As a life-long skeptic, I needed this approach to dispel my doubts. For the first time in my life I prayed to trust and follow Jesus Christ.” —N.S.

“I've been asking myself many questions about my faith—and they were all answered. You've helped me to trust in Jesus.” —N.P. (Sr. High)

“FaithSearch helped me overcome the blocks to understanding the historical background of Jesus and Christianity. I am now committed to following Jesus Christ.” —K.J.

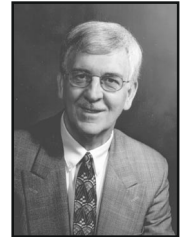
“Fascinating. Completely different than other seminars I have heard. Fills a large void of most ministries.” —M.A.

“I feel like I have been given the key to a huge secret and I must share that secret with all my loved ones, if not the world.” —N.S.

“Amazing information! Everyone needs to know it. I'm glad I do.” —J.C., (Sr. High)

These participants are right. *FaithSearch* does fill a void, is indeed the key, and presents truly amazing information, which is so desperately needed and desired by many. But they need to hear and experience it. Together we must endeavor to extend this message to all peoples everywhere—so they too can discover the “Ah-ha!” of life.

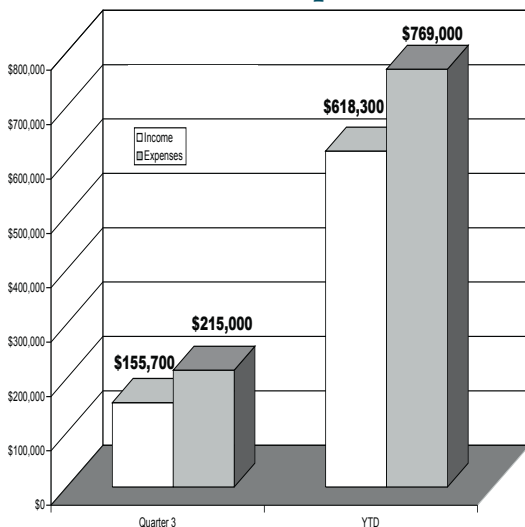
Will you pray about your own participation in making *FaithSearch* known? Please ask God if you should “open wide” in yet another sense—the sense of sharing some of the time, talent and treasure that He has entrusted to you. Your sacrificial financial gift can make a very real difference in the world—one life at a time! Help us to help them discover the “Ah-ha!” of life and to “open wide” for the healing that comes through faith in our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.



Dr. Don Bierle
President

Don

Fiscal 2003 Income-vs-Expenses



Praise

Rejoice with us!

1. **8,564** have heard the Gospel at our events so far in calendar 2003!
2. **656** recorded commitments at our events so far in 2003!
3. **Many FaithSearch** events scheduled now through December 2003!
4. Praise that the new version of *Surprised by Faith* is complete and ready for printing!
5. Praise God for returning **Denny & Joanie McKeever** to Faith Studies!
6. For God's faithfulness to sustain the ministry in these lean financial times!



Prayer

Things to pray about:

1. For the encouragement and spiritual care of those who have **committed their life to Jesus Christ** at our recent events.
2. For an **increase in financial gifts** for operations and for the “Extending the Vision” 2003-2006 campaign.
3. For **wisdom** for us and the Envoy Group (marketing agency) as we plan together for the future growth of Faith Studies.
4. For more **opportunities** in the evangelists' schedules to proclaim the *FaithSearch* message that calls people to new life in Christ.
5. Pray for **scheduled events**. For the host church and the lost they are inviting, for coordinating teams, for the presence of God, for the conviction of the Holy Spirit, for the nurturing of new believers.
6. For the provision of matching **classroom training tables**.