

Why Christianity Won't Go Away

***Author's Note:** Below is an excerpt from my book Identity Theft. It is a historical novel about a Jewish man seeking the truth, whatever it may be. He encounters an angel who takes him back in time to explain the message of Yeshua in its original Jewish context. Ariel, the angel, gives David a glimpse into the book of Acts.*

"However, David, if you really want to know whether **Yeshua** was the Jewish Messiah, you don't even need the testimony of Shaul (Paul), Kefa (Peter), or the prophets. In truth, all you have to do is look to the Jewish leaders of Yeshua's day—the Sanhedrin."

"I don't understand. It was members of the Sanhedrin who handed Yeshua over to the Romans. How could they and why would they prove that Yeshua is the **Messiah**?"

"Well, they didn't do it on purpose! Watch."

As the tablet flickered and came to life, a scene began to play before me.

I could see a gathering where the high priest, his entourage and all the Sanhedrin were present. These were the elders of Israel. Then a stunned jailer ran in, shouting, "They're gone! They're gone! Those rebel-rousers have escaped! The jail door was locked and the guards were there, but when we opened it up, they were all gone!"

A buzz traveled throughout the room as the high priest and the captain of the temple guard tried to figure out what was happening. They were visibly shaken.

Then someone else ran into the room and announced, "The men

you put in jail are back in the temple courts teaching the people!”

Several of the temple guards went immediately with the captain to investigate. Sure enough, there were Kefa, John and the others, boldly proclaiming that **Yeshua** was the Messiah. The captain appeared worried. He could see that the people loved the **apostles** and what they had to say. If he arrested them by force, the people might revolt. But Kefa and the others simply turned to him and said, “Relax. Force won’t be necessary. We will come with you.”

Once again they were brought before the Sanhedrin. The high priest stood and began to question them in an angry, smug and intimidating tone. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name ... yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood” (Acts 5:28).

Kefa spoke for the other apostles as he boldly proclaimed, “We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised [Yeshua] from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a **cross**” (Acts 5:29-30, NLT).

I was reminded again that while the Jewish masses—who came from all over the country to hear Yeshua—loved Him, it was the religious leaders, out of jealousy, who had asked the **Romans** to execute Him.

“Then God elevated Him to the place of honor at His right hand, as Prince and **Savior**,” Kefa continued with holy boldness. “He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the **Holy Spirit**, who is given by God to those who obey Him” (see Acts 5:31-32).

The high priest and the others were so incensed, they could barely restrain themselves. They wanted to kill the apostles. They were frustrated and jealous that these uneducated Jews

from Galilee had the whole city listening to their message. It was clear that they were determined to stop them at any cost, lest they lose their power over the people.

Then one of them, clearly a respected member, stood up. He asked that the apostles be sent outside so they could discuss the issue at hand. Then he raised his voice and said:

“Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.

“So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!” (Acts 5:35-39).

Fortunately, his reasoning swayed the majority. The **disciples** would not be stoned to death ... at least, not yet. They were brought in, and these arrogant, self-serving demagogues had each of them lashed with a whip and again ordered not to speak in the name of Yeshua. But the apostles, in stark contrast to what you would expect of prisoners who had just been beaten, left rejoicing, and as they did, the tablet screen switched off.

“Wow! What a story. Why does Hollywood waste its time on vampires and Harry Potter? This is far more compelling!”

Ariel asked me, “Do you know the name of the man who stood up and convinced the Sanhedrin not to kill the apostles?”

“No,” I answered.

"His name is Gamaliel, remember? I told you earlier that Shaul studied under him. I am sure you have heard of Hillel."

"Of course. He was one of the greatest Jewish scholars ever. Without him, there would be no Mishna or Talmud. Every major university has a Hillel House, a place for Jewish students to maintain their Jewish culture and identity while away from home. I would occasionally eat Shabbat meals there when I was in college."

"Gamaliel was Hillel's grandson and also a very respected Jewish voice of his time. He was a senior member of the Sanhedrin. There is no doubt that it was his lineage and respected position that kept the other elders from executing the apostles that day. And what was his argument?"

Like Neo learning martial arts in the *Matrix*, I could recall everything with vivid detail. "He told them that if Yeshua was not from God, they had nothing to worry about—He would soon be forgotten. That other would-be messiahs had arisen, yet they had come to nothing and no one remembered them. However, he warned, if **Yeshua** was the Messiah, then they would not be able to stop His message from spreading and could find themselves in the uncomfortable position of fighting against the very One they claimed to represent."

"Very good, David. Let me ask you something. Did Yeshua's message spread abroad? Do people still follow Him? Do they still talk about Him? Or, like those others, Theudas and Judas, to whom Gamaliel referred, has He been forgotten?"

I didn't even have to answer the question. Instead I said, "So, according to the wisdom of one of the greatest Jewish leaders of the first century, Yeshua must have been sent from God. Amazing! I remember reading, while growing up, that John Lennon once said that The Beatles were more popular than Jesus and that Christianity would eventually vanish."

"Oh, they were popular ... " Ariel broke in on my train of

thought. *"For a minute,"* he said with a hint of angelic sarcasm. *"But Yeshua has had staying power for over two millennia. I think it is safe to say that John Lennon had a tendency to imagine."*

My funny **angel**.

For more information on Identity Theft, visit .

Ron Cantor is the director of Messiah's Mandate International in Israel, a Messianic ministry dedicated to taking the message of Jesus from Israel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Cantor also travels internationally teaching on the Jewish roots of the New Testament. He serves on the pastoral team of Tiferet Yeshua, a Hebrew-speaking congregation in Tel Aviv. His newest book, *Identity Theft*, was released April 16. Follow him at @RonSCantor on Twitter.