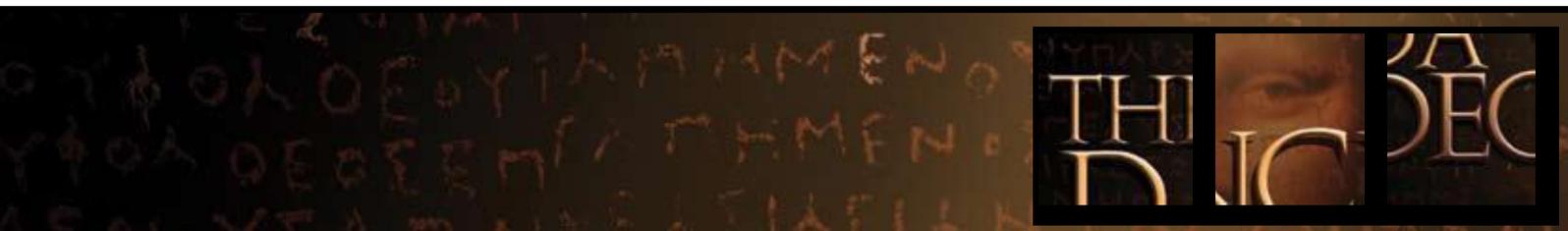


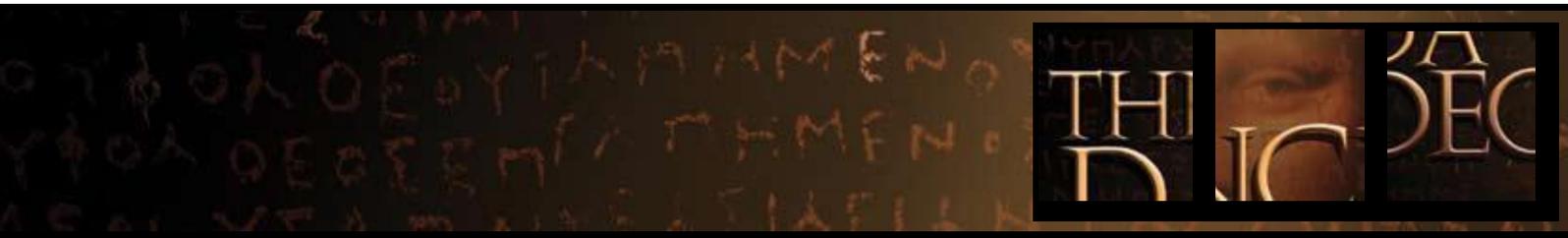
HOPEFM

MYSTERIES UNEARTHED

**The Da Vinci
Decode
episode 2**

Jesus,
Mortal Prophet or son of
God?





Notes...

In The Da Vinci Code, Dan Brown (though the character Sir Leigh Teabing) claims Jesus Christ was just a man, but the church decided to change the story:

'Jesus' establishment as "the Son of God" was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea. [And it was] a relatively close vote at that.'

'...until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal.'

'...almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false.'
(pp.315 318)

Christianity claims Jesus was God in human form. It invites people to investigate historical evidence for this, not just believe by blind faith. Christianity risks all its credibility on one event that can be proved or disproved historically. St Paul wrote:

...if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins [and] we [Christians] are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...

-1 Corinthians 15:14-20 NIV

What evidence exists for this?

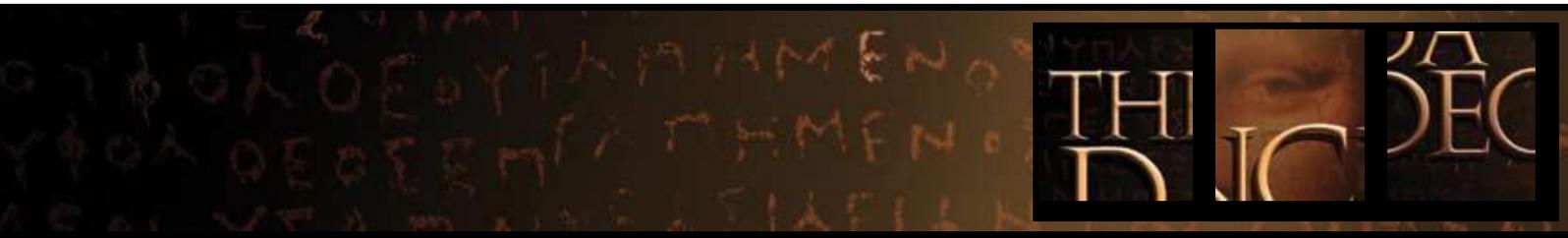
1. Jesus was a real figure in history

a) Roman historians

Cornelius Tacitus (born c.52AD) 'the greatest historian ... who wrote in the Latin language' (Encyclopaedia Britannica), describes Emperor Nero being blamed for starting the fire in Rome:

'Hence to suppress the rumour, falsely charged the guild, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius.' (Annals, XV, 44)

- Matches Gospel story, with same historical figures
- Establishes Christ's death



Notes...

Lucian of Samosata (b.AD120), Greek satirist who targeted Christians:

'The poor wretches have convinced themselves...that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody... Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once, for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.' (The Passing Perigrinus pp. 11,13)

- Crucifixion of Jesus as real historical event
- Jesus worshipped as divine

Flavius Josephus (b.AD37), Jewish historian working for the Roman army, early 2nd century:

'At this time there was a wise man called Jesus, and his conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon their discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.' -Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 18.3.3

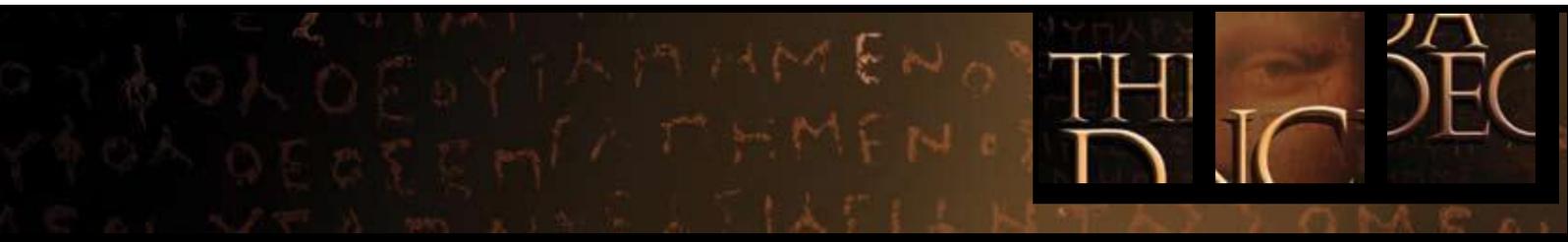
- Executed on cross by Pilate
- Reports that he appeared three days later
- “perhaps the Messiah” predicted by ancient prophecy (see next session)

Mara Bar-Serapion, a Syrian whose manuscript is preserved in the British Museum, wrote sometime after AD73:

'What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them...What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from killing their wise King? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men...'

(F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* p. 114)

- Jesus a real figure of history



Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Younger), governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor in AD112, recorded that Christians “were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang...a hymn to Christ as to a God...” (Epistles X, 26)

Notes...

Tertullian, the legal mind of Carthage, a Christian himself, said in AD197:

‘Tiberius...in those days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from the truth of Christ’s divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favour of Christ. The senate, cause it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all the accusers of the Christians.’ (Apology, V, 2)

b) Jewish historians

The Talmuds:

‘On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (of Nazareth)...in that he hath practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel... and [they] hanged him on the eve of Passover.’ (Babylonian Sanhedrin 43a)

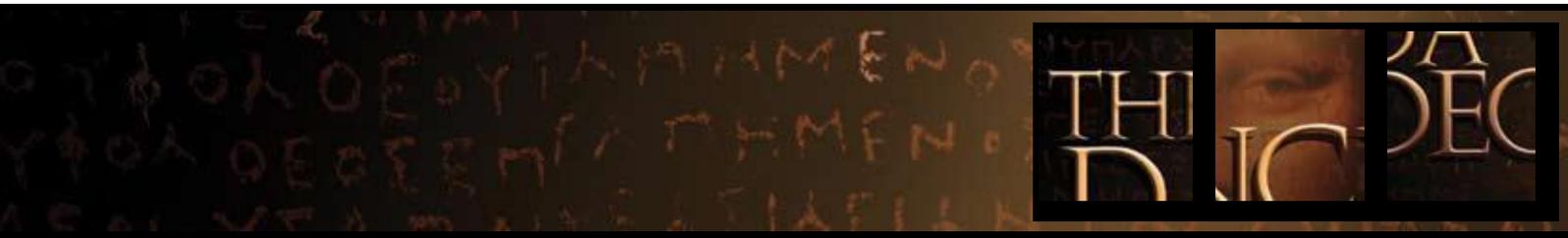
- Yeshua in Hebrew = Jesus in Greek
- Hanged (on a cross) just before Passover feast (as Gospel says)
- Accused of sorcery: miracles? In the gospel story, priests accused him of doing miracles by the power of Satan. (Matthew 9:34)

All mentioned Jesus as a historical figure within 150 years of his life.

2. Major eyewitness sources have nothing to gain when they describe Jesus dying and coming back to life.

- Thomas was speared to death in India as a consequence of sharing his faith.
- The gospel writer John stuck to his claims after being tortured and his friends executed
- John’s motive:

‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make your joy complete.’ 1 John 1:1-4, NIV



3. Evidence for the resurrection of Jesus

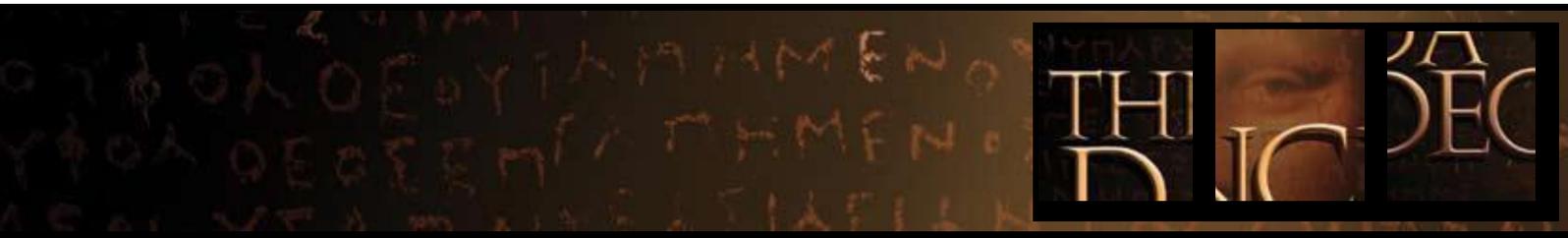
Notes...

a) Basic facts of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection as the Gospels narrate them

- Jesus was put to death by crucifixion on Friday afternoon
- A Roman soldier pierced His side with a spear. Blood and water came out (John 19:34, NIV)
- The body was wrapped in clean linen cloth (Matt 27:59)
- The body was placed in a solid rock tomb (Matt 27:60)
- A Roman guard was stationed to guard the tomb (Matt 27:66)
- A seal was affixed to the stone at the entrance to the tomb (Matt 27:60)
- Early Sunday morning there was a great earthquake (Matt 28:1-2)
- An angel rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb (Matt 28:2)
- The guards shook for fear and “became like dead men” (Matt 28:4)
- The angel told the women to tell the disciples Jesus was risen and would meet them in Galilee (Matt 28:7)
- Some of the guards reported the events to the Chief Priests (Matt 28:11)
- Soldiers were bribed to say that the disciples stole the body while they slept (Matt 28:13-14)
- The soldiers were promised protection if this came to the attention of the governor. (Matt 28:14)

b) Who saw Jesus after his resurrection?

- Sunday morning: Mary Magdalene (Matt 28:9-10)
- Sunday morning: the other women (Matthew 28:9,10)
- Sunday afternoon: Cleopas and friend (Luke 24:13-33)
- Sunday afternoon: Peter (Luke 24:34)
- Sunday evening: Ten apostles (without Thomas or Judas) (John 20:19-24)
- Next Sunday evening: Eleven apostles, including Thomas (John 20:26-29)
- Later: The seven by the Lake of Tiberias (John 21)
- Later: More than 500 believers (1 Cor 15:6)
- Later: The 11 Apostles, who saw him ascend into heaven (Acts 1)
- In vision: Paul (Acts 9:3-6, 1 Cor 15:8)



c) Issues for critics of the Resurrection

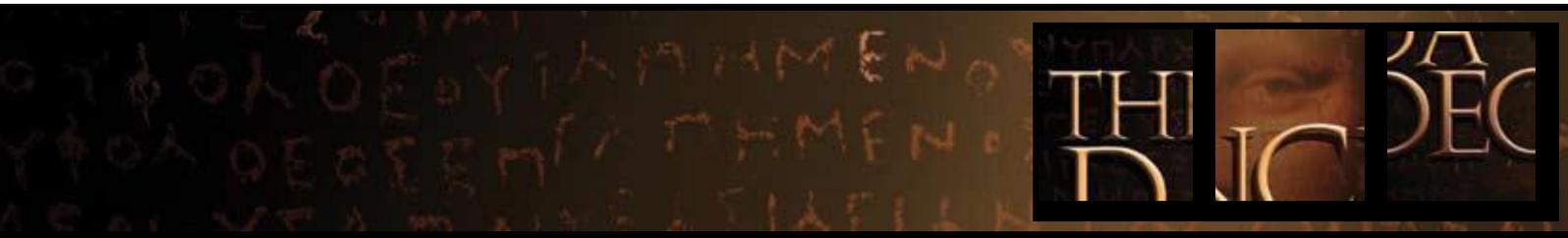
Frank Morison, Who Moved The Stone?

Josh McDowell, More Than A Carpenter

Notes...

Anyone wanting to debunk the resurrection would have to explain the following:

- A Roman seal (a sign of Rome's authority) was broken (Matthew 27:66)
 - A very large stone was moved from the entrance to the tomb while Roman guard stood watch. (Matthew 28:11-15)
 - Highly disciplined Roman guards fled their watch and were bribed by authorities to lie about what happened. (Matthew 28:11-15)
 - The Jewish leaders admitted that the tomb was empty (Matthew 28:11-15)
 - The grave clothes were folded together apart from the body (John 20:6-7)
 - Jesus subsequently appeared to more than 500 witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:6)
 - Women were described as the first witnesses that the tomb was empty. If the story were just clever fiction, the writer would not have selected women as the first witnesses because they were legally unable to give evidence in a Jewish court
 - The disciples displayed cowardly behaviour at the time of the crucifixion. Peter denied Jesus three times and the disciples fled Gethsemane. (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:50; Acts 2:14-32)
 - The disciples did not expect Jesus to rise and were initially sceptical. But later they were willing to die for their belief in the Resurrection (Luke 24:10,11)
 - The resurrection message was central to the New Testament and to the preaching of the early Christian church. And the church grew rapidly despite fierce opposition (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:33; 5:14; 23:6-8)
 - The early Christian church grew rapidly under persecution.
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Notes

Alternative Theories of the Resurrection

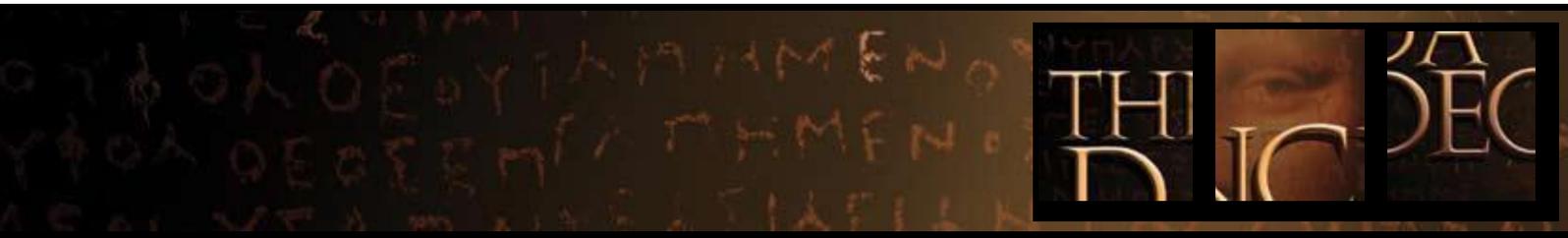
- i. Resuscitation Theory / Swoon Theory claims Jesus did not really die
- ii. Conspiracy Theory claims the disciples deliberately made up a false story
- iii. Hallucination Theory claims that all the witnesses thought that they saw Jesus, when in fact they just imagined it
- iv. Theft Theory claims the disciples stole the body and then lived a lie.

i) Problems with the Resuscitation/ Swoon theory

- Roman soldiers were highly practiced with capital punishment, and took special care when executing rebels. A Roman soldier checked Jesus, ready to break His legs so as to speed up death by asphyxiation, but then did not bother because he was sure that He was dead. (John 19:31-33)
- Jesus had been severely beaten before being crucified. These beatings could easily result in death. Roman soldiers had scourging down to an art form and knew how to stop just short of killing the prisoner, so Jesus was most likely critically injured before He was even crucified.
- John, an eyewitness, wrote that he saw blood and water (a sign of death) come from Jesus' pierced side (John 19:34-35)
- The body was wrapped in linen sheets and placed in a rock tomb (John 19:38-42)
- If Jesus had somehow survived, his condition would have been critical. Yet He was fully alive at his post-resurrection appearances (John 20:19-29)
- The disciples believed He had risen from the dead, not escaped death by the slimmest of margins
- How could someone taken down from a cross (after being pronounced dead) move a heavy stone and overpower a Roman guard?

ii) Problems with the Conspiracy Theory

- There was no motive for a conspiracy
- The lives of the disciples were changed
- The disciples were persecuted for their belief in the resurrection
- None of the disciples changed their story under torture
- Thousands became Christians just weeks later when the story of the resurrection was preached in Jerusalem (Acts 2)
- If the resurrection was a lie, the authorities could have produced the body
- A conspiracy would have been exposed by the disciples' critics, who had the interest and power to expose any lie.



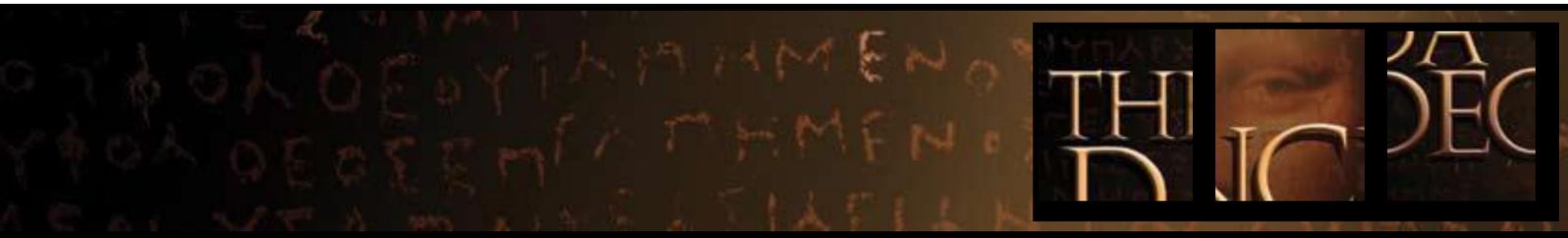
Notes...

Problems with the Hallucination Theory

- It is possible for a skilled practitioner to hypnotise an individual and even a group for a short time, but Jesus appeared to many different people at different times and places including, on one occasion, 500 eyewitnesses (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- Hallucination is different: it is a sense perception with no basis in the external world, often the result of drugs or a psychiatric disorder. What are the chances of so many different people at different times experiencing the same false perception?
- The disciples did not expect the resurrection and did not believe it at first (Luke 24:36-43)
- It is recorded by an eyewitness and a medically-trained investigator that Jesus ate on at least two occasions after his resurrection (Luke 24:42-43; John 21:1-14). Do hallucinations eat?
- The disciples touched him (Matt 28:9) and spoke with Him (Acts 1:3)
- If the story was the result of hallucination, the authorities could have discredited the story by producing the body
- At most, hallucination can only attempt to explain the post-resurrection appearances. It would not explain the empty tomb.

Problems with the Theft Theory

- The authorities placed additional guards to secure the tomb against the theft
- The disciples were in hiding at the time of the resurrection. This does not suggest that they were brave enough to face a detachment of soldiers and steal the body
- If the soldiers were asleep, how could they possibly say the disciples stole the body?
- The noise of moving the large rock would have surely woken the soldiers if they were asleep
- It is most unlikely that the soldiers would have fallen asleep while on watch – to do so would have incurred the death penalty
- The grave clothes that enveloped Jesus were found by themselves in the empty tomb. Why would robbers try to remove them from the body?
- The disciples had no reason for taking the body
- The disciples at first disbelieved the story of the resurrection. They had not expected the resurrection and would not be trying to make it come true
- Their lives were transformed
- They spent their lives proclaiming the message of the resurrection
- Stealing the body would have been totally inconsistent with the moral example of the disciples and the message they were proclaiming.



Rival Theories of the Resurrection

J.N.D. Anderson states:

Notes...

“A number of different theories, each of which might conceivably be applicable to part of the evidence but which do not themselves cohere into an intelligible pattern, can provide no alternative to the one interpretation which fits the whole.”

Lord Darling, former Chief Justice of England, wrote:

“The crux of the problem of whether Jesus was, or was not, what He proclaimed Himself to be, must surely depend on the truth or otherwise of the resurrection. On that greatest point we are not merely asked to have faith. In its favour as a living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.”

Conclusion

It is historically true that Jesus Christ came back to life after being dead.

Jesus as great teacher:

- Christ's words on non-violence inspired Bishop Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.
- His words about the poor inspired the Salvation Army, World Vision, and others.
- His words have passed into more books, proverbs, artworks, talks, songs, films, and internet sites than anyone else's.

If someone claims to be God, he is either:

1. A madman
2. A conman
3. Telling the truth

Option 1: Was Jesus mad?

His biography portrays an amazing personality that inspired others:

- Even-tempered whether loved or hated
- Tolerated hateful attacks
- Answered questions brilliantly
- Could even predict his own death with emotional balance.

