

## TRANSCRIPT

An Undeceptions podcast.

Audio:

Here's the breakdown. Over there, we've got your basic beautiful people. Now listen, unless they talk to you first, don't bother.

Audio:

Boy, is that your rule or theirs?

Audio:

Watch. Hey there?

Audio:

Eat me.

Audio:

You see that?

John Dickson:

If you haven't already guessed, we're listening to a clip from the film *10 Things I Hate About You*. It's a late 1990s teen romcom. Producer Kaley says you haven't lived until you've seen it. This scene is typical of many, many teen films of the time. The introduction to American high school cliques, you know them already, they're cheerleaders, the jocks, the IT geeks, the chess club, the glee club.

Audio:

To the left, we have the coffee kids.

Audio:

Very edgy. Don't make any sudden movements surrounding.

Audio:

These delusionals are your white rastas. They're big Marley fans. They think they're Black, semi political, but mostly-

Audio:

Smoke a lot of weed?

Audio:

Yeah. These guys-

Audio:

Wait, wait, let me guess. Cowboys?

Audio:

Yeah, but the closest they've come to a cow is McDonald's.

John Dickson:

Teenagers. They strike fear into the minds of many a young parent. When you've got little ones, you just pretend they won't ever eventually really turn out 13-year-olds or 15-year-olds or 18-year-olds. The rumours are frightening. Now, I should say that my own teenage children have been and are awesome. Mostly. Anyway, in *A Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare puts these words on the lips of a shepherd bemoaning his lost sheep that was scared away by a couple of teenage boys: "I would, there were no age between 16 and three and 20, or that youth would sleep out the rest, for there is nothing in the between." He goes on to say that what happens in the between is chasing girls, disrespecting elders, and lots of fighting. That's the life of a teenage boy, according to Shakespeare. There's not an awful lot of good in them. It's mainly trouble.

John Dickson:

So what about Jesus? He was once a teenage boy, right? Was he a rascal? Who did he hang out with? Was he considered the ancient equivalent of a nerd, a jock, a cool kid, or something else? How on earth did he get through the normal teenage years of angst and still be the perfect incarnation of God?

John Dickson:

There's a little bit of speculation about the teenage Jesus. And I promise to cover all of the evidence for it. I'm John Dickson and this is Undeceptions. Undeceptions is brought to you by Zondervan Academic's new Bible commentary on the Gospel of Mark by Timothy G. Gombis, part of the Story of God series. Every episode at Undeceptions, we explore some aspect of life, faith, history, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they're talking about, we'll be trying to undeceive ourselves and let the truth out.

Kaley:

"After this again, he went through the village and a lad ran and knocked against his shoulder. Jesus was exasperated and said to him, 'You shall not go further on your way.' And the child immediately fell down and died."

John Dickson:

Yeah, that story isn't from the Bible. It's actually from a set of stories written by an unknown Christian author, more than a century after Jesus. It's in what's called the *Infancy Story of Thomas*, not to be confused with the gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, which we've talked about before. They're two entirely

different texts. It's a late second century work that purports to tell "all the works of the childhood of our Lord Jesus Christ and his mighty deeds." In this particular story, which depicts the boy Jesus as a rather bad-tempered superhero, the parents of the child Jesus kills end up complaining to Jesus' father Joseph, and Jesus responds by striking the parents blind. Yikes. So, was teenage Jesus one of the bad boys?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

It's basically stories about Jesus from about age three or four up to about age 12. It's book ended by the birth stories from Luke's Gospel and Jesus going to Jerusalem at the age of 12 in Luke's Gospel. So, straight away, we know it's derivative on material in Luke. It's later than Luke's Gospel.

John Dickson:

That's Dr. Chris Forbes, who, up until he retired recently, was senior lecturer in Ancient History at Macquarie University in Sydney. He specializes in the Greco-Roman history and religion. We spoke to Chris for the very popular episode in season three on the formation of the Bible. That episode was called Cannon Fodder. Go and check it out after this.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

And it has Jesus doing interesting things like bringing little clay birds to life and having them fly away, which is proof that it doesn't matter that he was playing with clay on the Sabbath. It's got him, well, killing people for bumping him in a rush. It's got Jesus cursing a particularly difficult primary school teacher that he had and then bringing him back to life because he doesn't kill anyone permanently, he only kills people temporarily. All of this is great fun and weird, and what you have to ask yourself is what's going on here at all?

John Dickson:

Other childhood miracles in the Infancy Story of Thomas include Jesus raising a friend to life, Jesus separated the water of a brook into little ponds, and he lengthened a piece of wood to help out his carpenter dad. All rather innocent, if fanciful.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

But the significant thing is, none of it seems to be actually located in a time and place which is at all historically plausible. When Jesus is taught the alphabet in school, it's the Greek alphabet, not the Hebrew or the Aramaic alphabet. In other words, this is later fantasy. There's nothing historical in this stuff at all. Oh, by the way, it's also written a full century after any of the Gospels that we normally refer to.

John Dickson:

Okay, so no super boy Jesus raising people from the dead or killing them on a whim. These are pious, or rather impious, fictions, inventions of people who were dissatisfied with the fact that the Gospels are silent, basically, on the childhood of Jesus. Personally, I'm astonished that anyone who claimed to be a follower of Jesus could have produced such stories. A person who relishes the thought of Jesus striking a

child dead for inadvertently bumping into him has lost his moral compass, let alone his Christian compass. The Jesus who features here doesn't at all sound like the one who grew up to insist, "If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also." That's from the Sermon on the Mount, by the way, which you can read in the Gospel of Matthew.

John Dickson:

Jesus' homeland was Galilee. Was it all dusty roads and deserts like we see in the movies?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Deserts, no. And nor is it now, by the way. Galilee was and is quite a nice, lush area. According to Josephus it was agriculturally extremely rich and full of small farming villages.

John Dickson:

Josephus was a Jewish aristocrat and historian. We have come across him loads of times in Undeceptions, and Galilee is the northernmost region of traditional Israel. In Roman times, the region had two main cities, Tiberius, right by the lake, and Sepphoris. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, the town about six or seven kilometers from Sepphoris.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Judea to the south was much rockier and harsher in terms of its environment, much less water. The lake of Galilee actually adds an enormous amount to the economy, as well as to the general amenity of the area.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Dusty roads, well, walking tracks, really, most of the time. Perhaps there were only half a dozen main roads in the whole province where you could risk a chariot. And there were certainly hardly any Roman roads. So walking tracks more than roads. We tend to take roads for granted because we've got them everywhere, but tarred roads were unheard of.

John Dickson:

You say they were farmers. What were some of the things that they were farming?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Wheat, barley, olives, grapes, staples. That was just the agrarian basis of the economy. There was also manufacturing. There was a big fishing industry, and that included an export of fish to the rest of the Mediterranean market. So they were pickling fish from the lake of Galilee and then shipping it out. Magdala, where Mary Magdalene came from, was actually a center of the fish pickling industry.

John Dickson:

People have this idea that it was all just subsistence, hand to mouth, hardly anything left over to sell down the road, but you are painting a different picture.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

I'm saying that there's a process going on, particularly in Jesus' lifetime under Herod Antipas, where what was predominantly a subsistence agriculture economy was developing into more of a market-driven economy, more of a services economy, and more trade was going on, though mainly within Galilee. There wasn't a lot of trade to the wider world, except for the fish.

John Dickson:

Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee in Jesus' lifetime, almost exactly during Jesus' lifetime, really, from 4 BC to AD 39, and of course Jesus lived from about 4 BC to around the year 30. Antipas was the son of Herod the Great, the one who appears in the Christmas story as the man who ordered the infants of Bethlehem to be killed. Anyway, Herod Antipas inherited Galilee when his dad died and had a very long tenure as its ruler, on behalf of Rome, of course. It was Antipas who beheaded John the Baptist, the one who baptized Jesus at the beginning of his ministry. And we have that story of the beheading of the Baptist from both the Gospels and from the non-Christian Josephus.

John Dickson:

How politically stable was Galilee, and I guess Judea as well?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

It went up and down. When Herod the Great died in 4 BC, slightly after the birth of Jesus, there were revolts, and those revolts included Sepphoris itself being destroyed by a Roman army. Sepphoris was, by the way, the capital of the region, and it's almost visible from the ridge above Nazareth. You can just go over the ridge at Nazareth and look down the hills down towards the lake.

John Dickson:

So the Romans come and they destroy Sepphoris. Jesus will have grown up knowing that, right? Everyone in the region knew, "Hey, you don't mess with the Romans," right? Because there's this great big monument or former monument to Roman power.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Yes, Sepphoris had been destroyed and was in the process of being rebuilt during Jesus' teenage years. There were another series of revolts in 6 AD, when Judea into the south was turned into a Roman province and a number of Jewish people clearly objected to that violently because it involved paying taxes directly to the Romans.

John Dickson:

One of them was a Galilean, am I right?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Yes, Judas the Galilean was one of the leaders of what was probably a tax revolt against Roman taxes. But apart from those two nasty spots, we are told that things were basically pretty quiet, partly because

Herod Antipas was a reasonably canny ruler and didn't get on the wrong side of his subjects too badly, and partly because difficulties come and go. Tacitus, the Roman historian, barely mentions the area, and when he does, all he says is, "Under Tiberius, it was all quiet." Which isn't a lot to say, but it's probably significant that he saw it that way. So how stable was it? Up and down, but in Jesus' lifetime, more stable than not.

Dr. Justin Coulson:

As a society, we have got a confusing relationship with the idea of rebels and rebellion.

John Dickson:

That's Dr. Justin Coulson, who spoke at the TEDx Conference in Melbourne in 2017. He was giving advice to parents on how to raise rebel children and why they might really want to.

Dr. Justin Coulson:

So, close to home, if we have a rebel sitting in front of us in our living room, I think it's probably fair to say that we struggle. We find it challenging. And yet, we love stories about rebels. We love their conviction. We love their courage. We love how they're so willing to stand firm and strong and steadfast in the face of so much opposition. The whole world can be against them, their communities can turn against them, their friends can desert them, even families can turn against these rebels, and yet they stand firm, unflinching, unmoving, and they do incredible things.

Dr. Justin Coulson:

I think that we love the idea of rebels so much because sometimes we know the end from the beginning. We know how it turns out and so we know we can love them because of what they did. Going through it might have been different.

John Dickson:

I wonder what it was like for Mary and Joseph to raise Jesus. We certainly know that Jesus was a precocious child. More about that later. And when his parents lost him one day and then found him, he said, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" As a parent, I don't know how I'd respond to that.

John Dickson:

Let's turn to Jesus then. He seems to have had a large family, mom, dad, as well as brothers and sisters. What's the evidence for that?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Well, the evidence is in the Gospels themselves, where we are told on the couple of occasions where Jesus' family come out to find out what on earth he thinks he's doing. On one occasion, we are told, "Your mother and your brothers are here." And Jesus says, "Ah, but who are really my mother and my brothers?" In other words, family isn't the only issue here, you know. The other case is where he goes

back to Nazareth to his hometown and is going to speak in the synagogue. We are told that people basically said, "Who does he think he is? We know who he comes from. We know his brothers," then they give their three names of three of the brothers, "and his sisters live here too."

Dr. Chris Forbes:

This gives people from a Catholic background hiccups because if Mary is to be perpetually a virgin, then it's pretty clear that Jesus can't have brothers and sisters. So you can argue either that it's a loose use of the word that means cousins, or it means half-brothers and half-sisters, Joseph's kids by another wife, which is, I think, the way that the Orthodox tend to take it. But scholarship is pretty well agreed that it actually means brothers and sisters, and if you want to think otherwise, you're pushing it uphill.

John Dickson:

So that's pretty large family. So he had four brothers, at least two sisters, because they're just mentioned as plural, right?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Yes.

John Dickson:

Is that a pretty normal Galilean family, so far as we know?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

We don't know, but in any pre-industrial society, families tend to be large unless the mother dies early, because there's no reliable form of contraception. And you want a large family because you know that quite a few children will die in childhood and you want to have them able to grow up and work in the family business.

John Dickson:

Yeah. And sometimes the parents die. Some people have said Joseph must have died younger because he doesn't feature in the Gospels. Do we know anything about Jesus' father?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Nope. After Luke, chapter 3, when he goes with Jesus to Jerusalem when Jesus is about 12, he simply disappears from historical documents. We know nothing about what happened. He may have been older than Mary. It would've been normal for the man to be older than his wife. But we just don't know.

John Dickson:

One thing we probably do know is that Joseph was a carpenter, and therefore Jesus will have grown up learning some of that craft. Can you tell me about a carpenter? Did they just make nice wooden cabinets or something else?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Skilful ones would make nice wooden cabinets. The term in Greek is [foreign language 00:17:02]. A [foreign language 00:17:04] is a craftsman who mainly works in wood, and when they work in teams, they're run by an [foreign language 00:17:10], which is where we get the word architect from. An architect is somebody who manages a team of wood craftsmen. They do general-purpose woodwork. They do farm implements, like yolks for oxen. They do furniture. They do small-scale building. They're all-purpose chippies.

John Dickson:

So does this make Jesus, I'm being anachronistic here, working class, or is he middle class, or are these categories just useless to us?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

I don't think they're terribly useful. He's not a landowner, so that puts him among the working poor. But he's a skilled craftsman, that gives him opportunities. So, working class, but not desperately poor, certainly not a day laborer. He'd be somebody who would get jobs on a regular basis.

John Dickson:

But what work would there be? Didn't he just hang out in little villages where everyone could build their own door post? Are you saying there were places for him to go and travel and work?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

One of the most fascinating puzzles, which I am going to speculate about, is that in Jesus' childhood, all the accounts place him in Nazareth, which is a tiny little place, probably only a few hundred inhabitants. But by the time he becomes a public figure, he's down by the lake in places like Capernaum. One of the questions that just has to be asked is why did he move? And I think the answer is probably, and now I am speculating, employment opportunities. Because starting when Herod Antipas took over Galilee, he began the rebuilding of Sepphoris, which was a major project. And then about 19 or so AD, when Sepphoris was rebuilt, he started building Tiberias on a headland overlooking the lake. So there was a lot of construction work, a lot of work for [foreign language 00:19:00].

John Dickson:

Yeah. So he would've had good work as a teenager, up into his early 20s, and then more work down in Tiberias, if he indeed wanted to pursue that work, in his early 20s.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Yes. Now, we don't know for sure that he did.

John Dickson:

No.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

But it seems entirely plausible that's why he moved down near Capernaum.

John Dickson:

Yeah. So it may have been for work. Others have speculated, I'll just throw this at you, you give me your opinion, that it was to get a little further away from Herod Antipas, since the border of Antipas' region was only sort of 10 kilometers from Capernaum. Do you give that any stock, that he could tell that there was a growing angst about Antipas?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

I don't know that we know that. The only time that we know that Jesus is concerned about what Herod Antipas thinks is when Herod Antipas is beginning to get really interested in Jesus, during his public career. So I think that's just guesswork, really.

John Dickson:

Although Antipas was responsible for killing Jesus' mentor, if you don't mind me saying, John the Baptist was his mentor.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

That's what he was, yes.

John Dickson:

Yeah. And so already Jesus would've had a interesting view of Antipas, I imagine.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

That would be at the beginning of Jesus' public career rather than earlier.

John Dickson:

Jesus really launched his ministry up in Galilee, the northern region of traditional Israel. And some have argued that this must indicate he was influenced not so much by Jewish culture, which was more a southern phenomenon, they say, but by pagan or Gentile culture. After all, even an Old Testament biblical text calls the region Galilee of the Gentiles.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

I don't give it a lot of credit. The famous passage in Isaiah 9:1 that talks about Galilee of the nations, which we tend to translate the Gentiles, was written about 700 years before Jesus' lifetime. And a lot had happened since then. The Assyrian and Babylonian conquests had largely depopulated Galilee and it was resettled in the first century BC by settlers from Judea. From then on, it was profoundly Jewish.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

The other reason, and it's an equally bad reason, though in a different way, is that in the middle of the 20th century, a number of German scholars tried to argue that Galilee wasn't Jewish and Jesus wasn't Jewish, he was actually Aryan, like any proper religious leader ought to be. But that was simply Nazi ideology gone mad.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

The evidence makes it very clear that Galilee was ethnically and linguistically Jewish. There are hardly any pork bones found. People weren't eating pig. There were lots of ceremonial baths for Jewish purification rituals. They preferred stone vessels, which are more impermeable and therefore less likely to contract Jewish concepts of impurity. There are hardly any Greek inscriptions, even in the big towns and cities. And interestingly, when Herod Antipas starts minting coins, he's very, very careful not to put on human images on them. In other words, he's carefully taking note of Jewish concerns about such things. No, Galilee was Jewish.

John Dickson:

Just as there have been questions about whether Jesus' ideas were really of pagan origin rather than Jewish, so too there have been suggestions that Jesus was perhaps influenced by other religions in his teaching. Did Jesus travel to the other side of the ancient world to learn from Hinduism and Buddhism? Seriously, that's a theory. More after the break.

John Dickson:

Today's Undeceptions is brought to you by Zondervan Academic's new Bible commentary on the Gospel of Mark by Timothy G. Gombis. It's part of the Story of God series. Look, for my sceptical listeners who've been wondering whether they should read any part of the Bible, I'd say the Gospel of Mark is one of the best places to begin, not least because it's the shortest Gospel by far and most scholars reckon it was the first of the Gospels to be written. That makes it a very important source. And I reckon reading a good commentary right alongside a Gospel is a brilliant idea. It can help illuminate what you are reading by offering a sense of its meaning in historical context and in the context of the Bible's grand overarching storyline. If you are looking at a Gospel for the first time or the hundredth time, it's truly eye-opening to learn about how Jesus' words and actions link back to the Old Testament. Without doing that, it's like walking into a conversation halfway through and not really getting what's going on.

John Dickson:

So if you're interested in working out what the life of Jesus meant back then, and therefore what it might mean right now, this is the commentary for you. You can get Zondervan's new Gospel of Mark commentary in the Story of God collection on Amazon right now, we've put a link in the show notes, or you can just go to [zondervan.com](http://zondervan.com) for more info.

John Dickson:

Right now, 2.2 billion people can't access water that is safe to drink. It's an extraordinary figure. And Anglican Aid, the overseas relief agency of the Anglican Church, is working hard to change that. These are

people I deeply trust. Their Waterworks campaign is funding local organizations in 17 countries to provide wells, boreholes, rainwater tanks, micro flush toilets, and hygiene education, all of which decreases waterborne diseases and raises living standards exponentially. And you can help make this happen in more places. Head to [waterworks.org.au](http://waterworks.org.au) to learn more about the Waterworks campaign, and please donate today. You can also find a link in the show notes.

Audio:

India, a land of contrast and mystery, with a spiritual heritage that dates back before the dawn of recorded history. A country where 600 million people are struggling to enter the 20th century. From the delicate beauty of the Taj Mahal to the harsh realities of the streets of Calcutta, India overwhelms the senses. Spiritual teachings of India's numerous religions echo past glories of her golden age, a highly advanced civilization with mankind's older scriptures came into being.

John Dickson:

We're listening to a clip from the 1977 documentary *The Lost Years of Jesus*, directed by Richard Bond.

Audio:

Here in this land of spiritual receptivity, the birthplace of Rama, Krishna, and Buddha, the lives of saints and holy men are revered and preserved in ancient texts and documents. In the archives of an ancient Tibetan monastery, there are said to be records originally written in India in the ancient Pali language and later translated into Tibetan, dealing with the life of an extraordinary saint known to the Buddhist as Issa. The life story of Saint Issa closely resembles the life of Jesus Christ, revealing what may well be the last years of Jesus.

John Dickson:

The story of Jesus' pilgrimage to the East originates with the Russian journalist Nicholas Notovitch, who in 1894 claimed to have found a document in a Buddhist monastery which described how Jesus had journeyed from Galilee all the way to India to learn Hinduism and Buddhism, and then to return to Israel to preach this newfound wisdom.

John Dickson:

There's a popular rumour that he travelled perhaps as far as Nepal, where he learned all those friendly bits of his teaching, to love people and so on, and then came back, and that's how he brought this world-changing message, because he'd learned Buddhism or something like that. Is there anything plausible about that idea? I mean, Nepal is only 5,000 kilometers away, right?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Which isn't far by plane.

John Dickson:

Alexander the Great almost got that far.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Let's say it's not totally impossible. It's just highly unlikely. If Jesus did go that far, he travelled further than any other first-century person we know of. Even the sea route to India was relatively recent in his lifetime. And that was only the sea route across the Persian Gulf and to the coast of India, it doesn't include going to Nepal. So it's not totally impossible, but it just doesn't seem likely.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Jesus doesn't seem like a cosmopolitan person. It doesn't seem likely that he even visited Gentile areas north of Galilee very often. He's parochially Jewish. And we know that Buddhist ideas might have travelled west in a derivative form. There's some evidence that some Greek philosophers had come across one or two Buddhist ideas. But if they did, these ideas weren't well known, and Greek philosophers weren't well known in Galilee anyway.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

What we have to say simply, though, is when you look at Jesus' ideas, they look thoroughly Jewish and particularly Galilean. The coming of the kingdom of God isn't a very Buddhist idea, and yet it's the central idea of Jesus' whole public ministry. So I think the idea that he travelled to Nepal is a joyous piece of fantasy but not to be taken terribly seriously.

John Dickson:

This was a very cool attempt at East-West fusion but the whole thing was a hoax. Shortly after these claims emerged, the head abbot of the very monastery Notovitch had claimed to have visited issued a public statement that no Russian gentleman had ever visited the community in living memory, and no such document ever existed. Despite all this, the story of Jesus' Eastern pilgrimage still makes its way into contemporary works. It's found in a book by actress Shirley MacLaine, that TV documentary titled *The Lost Years of Jesus* that we just heard from, and countless news articles from travel diaries purporting to follow in Jesus' footsteps in India, which you can read in the show notes.

John Dickson:

Let's press pause. I've got a five-minute Jesus for you. There is no evidence and virtually no historical possibility that Jesus travelled to India, Nepal or Tibet. And the idea that he learned Eastern philosophy there, Hinduism or Buddhism, is problematic on other grounds. First, there are the obvious and fundamental contradictions between the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism and what Jesus ended up teaching. Central to Hinduism is the belief that our soul is trapped in a cycle of reincarnations in this world, until we can escape this physical creation and merge with the impersonal life principle of the universe known as Brahman. By contrast, Jesus clearly taught that we have just one existence in this world, in which we're obliged to worship a personal creator God, who at the climax of history will raise the dead bodily and renew the physical cosmos. That ain't Hinduism.

John Dickson:

The differences with Buddhism are equally real. The Buddha taught that there is no continuing self, no soul of any kind. Central to the Buddha's philosophy is the insistence that existence is basically illusory. The goal of life therefore isn't to merge with Brahman or worship God, not even to be reincarnated or resurrected, it is to remove all desire for self. Only then can the Buddhist be liberated from this fleeting, changing existence and enter into Nirvana, the unbinding of all physical, mental, and emotional processes. What Jesus taught about our eternal existence in God's coming kingdom would have been anathema to the Buddha.

John Dickson:

Now, Jesus would have agreed with at least four of the five basic commandments of Buddhism, these are the Pancasila. So the first four are: refrain from taking life, refrain from stealing, refrain from sexual immorality, and refrain from lying. Like most Jews of the day, Jesus would've accepted this. Famously, he didn't accept the fifth Buddhist commandment, to refrain from alcohol. So there are a few ethical similarities, but I can't see any major theoretical agreements between the Buddha and Jesus, not on the topic of God or suffering or the afterlife, or pretty much anything else.

John Dickson:

My point is that if Jesus did travel to the East, he obviously returned to Galilee having rejected pretty much everything he learned there. There's an almost humorous problem with the story of Nicholas Notovitch that Jesus went to Tibet to learn Buddhism. Buddhism didn't reach Tibet until the time of King Songtsän Gampo in the 600s AD. Any earlier than that and it wouldn't have been Buddhism that the intrepid Jesus learned, it would've been the traditions of Bon, the animistic and shamanistic indigenous religion of Tibet. The whole thing is nuts. You can press play now.

John Dickson:

So if Jesus wasn't educated in Nepal, where was he educated? Was he educated at all? Do we have any hints of Jesus' level of education?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

Not a lot. But I think level of education is the right way to think about it, rather than just asking about literacy. Jesus' level of education would depend on three factors, really. It would depend on wealth, it would depend on proximity to somewhere that had books, and it would depend on his personal educational ambitions. Now, Jesus' family wasn't, as far as we can tell, well off in any strong sense, and Nazareth is pretty much too small to have a public library. So wealth and access, not a lot. I mean, we don't really even know whether synagogues in Galilee had multiple copies of scripture or of the whole of the Hebrew Bible. We just don't know.

Dr. Chris Forbes:

But clearly Jesus was keen for an education. He was profoundly interested in Jewish culture and religious ideas. And I think his level of education would've depended on whether dad was willing to let him push that barrel and whether there were local people who could help him. It's possible, of course, to be

illiterate and highly knowledgeable, which we tend to forget. But the ancient culture was far more an oral culture than we are used to thinking about. It seems to me that that's probably where Jesus fits in. He was probably functionally literate, as in could sign his name, could read the details of a government decree, but he was almost certainly not formally educated in any strong sense. This comes up nicely in John's Gospel, where Jesus starts teaching in the temple in Jerusalem and people say, "What's going on here? This man sounds like he's educated, but we know he can't be." So I think Jesus falls in that halfway place where people know he wasn't properly formally educated, but, gee, it sounds like he could have been.

Audio:

What's the matter? Honey?

Audio:

I have a terrible feeling.

Audio:

About what?

Audio:

That we didn't do something.

Audio:

Ah, no, you feel that way because we left in such a hurry. We took care of everything. Believe me, we did.

Audio:

Did I turn off the coffee?

Audio:

No. I did.

Audio:

Did you lock up?

Audio:

Yeah.

Audio:

Did you close the garage?

Audio:

That's it. I forgot to close the garage. That's it.

Audio:

No, that's not it.

Audio:

What else can we be forgetting?

Audio:

Kevin.

John Dickson:

That's a clip from the movie Home Alone, when the parents of eight-year-old Kevin, played by Macaulay Culkin realize they've left their son behind while they've nicked off to an exotic vacation. It brings to mind the one story from Jesus' boyhood that has survived, tucked away in the Gospel of Luke. The passage tells how Jesus' family joined the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the great Passover festival. That's the most holy celebration of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, centuries earlier. As the tour party began to return home up in Galilee, after the week long festivities, Mary and Joseph realize that their 12-year-old is missing. Here's producer Kaley.

Kaley:

"Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they didn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days, they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.' 'Why were you searching for me?' he asked. 'Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart." Luke 2:44-51.

John Dickson:

The passage is striking in both its brevity and understatement. No dazzling superhero up appears here. But it raises lots of questions too. How could Mary and Joseph have started out for Galilee without checking that their eldest son was with them? How could they have travelled a whole day without noticing that he was missing? And where did the boy Jesus sleep during those few nights in Jerusalem? The questions lose some of their force when we try to think in ancient terms rather than modern. A family of nine, yes, Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters, traveling with hundreds of other pilgrim relatives and friends from the same district, could be forgiven for assuming that their eldest was somewhere in their company. David Flusser, the great Jewish professor of History and Religion from the

Hebrew University in Jerusalem, notes that, "in those days, a boy of 12 could be regarded as a grownup." In Flusser's judgment, the story is plausible.

John Dickson:

Given the extraordinary impact of Jesus' later teaching, a story about his insightful questions as a 12-year-old is not at all unbelievable. And, frankly, it's to the Gospel writer's credit that they showed remarkable restraint in treating these missing years of Jesus. They refused to add exotic tales of boyhood powers or travels to distant lands. All we have is a single story about Jesus' early precociousness.

John Dickson:

So why don't the four earlier Gospels tell us anything about Jesus' youth? Is this silence suspicious?

Dr. Chris Forbes:

I don't think so. What the four Gospels are clearly interested in is Jesus' public career and public message, what he was on about, and that's the story they want to tell. They only include material from his childhood where it sets that up. No, I don't find that suspicious at all. In fact, I find the idea that people would want to know about Jesus childhood the bit that makes me suspicious.

John Dickson:

The reality is, like so many other great figures of antiquity whose glory years are pretty much all we know of them, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, just to name two, the Jesus we reliably know about is the adult Jesus. There are missing years, for sure, but there is nothing mysterious about them. Sorry about that.

John Dickson:

Hey, if you like what we're doing here at Undeceptions, can I urge you to visit [undeceptions.com](http://undeceptions.com) and hit the donate button? We've made it pretty large so you can't miss it. And honestly, your support for our project is really appreciated. While you're there, send us a question and we'll try and answer it in a later episode. And if you're interested in other good podcasts, do check out Salt, Conversations with Jenny Salt. This is part of the Eternity Podcast Network.

John Dickson:

Next episode, we are heading west. Our guest is Tom Holland, the author of many bestselling books, including his latest *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind*. He's not a Christian, well sort of, and I try and pin him down about that, but he's written one of the most impressive surveys of Christianity's impact on Western culture that I have ever seen. Honestly, this is perhaps my favourite interview ever. See ya.

John Dickson:

Undeceptions is hosted by me, John Dickson, produced by Kaley Payne, and directed by the precocious Mark Hadley. Special thanks to our series sponsor Zondervan for making this Undeception possible.



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