

Did Jesus Have a Beard?

Commentary of June 21, 2007 — What Was the Custom in New Testament Times?

Question: In your book *101 Secrets of the Bible* you state in Secret number five: **"... and no evidence before the fourth century suggests he [Jesus] even had a beard."**

Not So — I think you are so motivated to be different that it doesn't take much "evidence" for you to come up with another "Zinger" to wow everyone with.

"I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting."

• *Isaiah 50:6 NIV*

Answer: First let me say that Dr. Martin did not indulge in "zinger" information just **"to wow everyone with"** as you say. However, he did try to provide provocative titles to his articles, as do I. This is perfectly acceptable, and I certainly make no apologies for doing so.¹ That is neither wrong nor pandering to the audience.

Second, let us consider this verse in Isaiah:

"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

• *Isaiah 50:6 KJV*

The Hebrew is clear. The words "cheeks" and "hair" are definitely in the Hebrew text. "Cheek" is variously translated in the KJV as "cheek," "jaw," and "jawbone." The Hebrew verb translated "plucked off" means "make smooth, bare, bald; scour, polish" according to the Brown Driver Briggs-GESENIUS *Hebrew-Aramaic and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. The Greek Old Testament (the LXX) of Isaiah 50:6 also has "cheeks."²

However, no New Testament account of the beatings of Christ say anything about pulling out hair from His beard. Most remarkable!

Jesus was beaten and spit on by the guards of the Sanhedrin and the High Priest according to the parallel accounts of Matthew 26:67–68 and Mark 14:65.

Later Jesus was beaten and spit on by the Roman soldiers before Pilate in John 19:3. Matthew 27:30 and Mark 15:19, recording the same incident add that they struck him on the head. There is no mention in any of these accounts of plucking any hair from Jesus' face or from His head. In Luke, however, it indicates that they hit Jesus not just on His head, but they hit Him in the face:

"And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, 'Prophesy, who is it that smote you?'"

• *Luke 22:63–64*

The beating Jesus then received from the scourging by the Romans was extremely severe:

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1. I recently put out an article titled "[Goliath's Head](#)" which purposely had a provocative title.
 2. This same Greek word is used in the parallel verses of Matthew 5:39 and Luke 6:29 where Jesus says that if one person strikes you on the "cheek," turn the other cheek to him.

“As many were astonished [astonished] at you; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more [marred] than the sons of men.”

• *Isaiah 52:14*

In none of the New Testament verses is there any mention of “pulling” or “plucking” of the beard of Jesus. He did not have a beard. There is no evidence that He had a beard, other than perhaps several days normal beard growth.

The situation is this: Isaiah prophesied about practices occurring in his day. One of the forms of torture (particularly done by the Assyrians during the time of Isaiah) was to pull the beard (along with attached chunks of skin) out of the chin and cheeks.

One aspect of humiliation in Old Testament times was to shave the beard, and the head of a captive, and then slap and hit them about the head and face. This was done to King David’s envoys to the nation of Ammon and that action led to war between Israel and the Ammonites:

“Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away.”

• *2 Samuel 10:4*

Shaving the head and beard was also a traditional manner of expressing anguish in the Old Testament. However, by New Testament times the men no longer wore beards and Jesus had no hair to be pulled from His chin. They slapped and beat Him severely around the head, in the face, and on the cheeks.

Beards in the Old Testament

In times of affliction or mourning the hair was altogether cut off as indicated in Isaiah 3:17, 24, 15:2, 22:12; Jeremiah 7:29, 48:37; Amos 8:10; and Josephus, Wars of the Jews 2.313.

We know that Aaron, the first High Priest and brother of Moses, had a beard. Therefore there was no prohibition against priests having beards, just that their hair must be short.³

“It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments.”

• *Psalms 133:2*

Indeed, removing the beard was one of the threatened punishments that God had Isaiah present to Ahaz (Isaiah 7:14) immediately after the Immanuel prophecy:

“In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard.”

• *Isaiah 7:20*

I have the latest edition of *Bibleworks*, which is a remarkable computer program containing the Old Testament in Hebrew and Greek, New Testament in Greek (several versions), and many English translations. It also contains the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha from the intertestamental period, the complete writings of Philo in Greek, Josephus in Greek, and the most important works of the Apostolic fathers in Greek.

This is important: there is no mention in ANY of these works of a “beard” or “beards” or “hair(s) of the face” or shaving the face or the beard by Jews immediately before, during, or soon after the New Testament period. Nor is there any use of the terms “beard,” “shave,” or “cut” in reference to facial hair. One would expect such an occurrence in the literature during and immediately following the New Testament period.

3. See Bible Secret #5 [“The Long-Haired ‘Jesus’ Is a Pagan God”](#) and [“Appendix 2, The Error of the Long-Haired Jesus,”](#) both of which discuss this matter greater detail.

This all indicates that sometime between the close of the Old Testament and the events of the New Testament lengthy facial hair grown into beards ceased to be a custom, as it was in Old Testament times. If Jesus had a beard He would have been unusual for His time. It would have been worthy of comment by someone, whether the New Testament writers, non-biblical Christian writers who admired Jesus, critics of Christianity (the Jews and pagans), or neutral observers like Philo and Josephus. It simply was not the custom for Jews during this period of history. Indeed, as Dr. Martin says, **“no evidence before the fourth century suggests he [Jesus] even had a beard.”**

Non-biblical References to Beards

The Mishnah is a commentary on the Old Testament rituals and laws passed down from generation to generation, starting with Moses. This Oral Law began to be written down about 200 years after the destruction of Jerusalem, and after the New Testament was completed. Largely silent on the issue of beards, the *Mishnah* says this in one of its few references to a beard:

“If a man removed his fingernails by means of his nails or his teeth, and so, too, if [he pulled out] the hair of his head, or his moustache or his beard ... — such a one R. Eliezer declares liable [to a sin-offering].”

• *Shabbath 10:6, Danby translation, [the brackets are Danby’s]*

The reference in Shabbath 10:6 to the beard meant that it was wrong for him to pull out hair from your head, not that it was wrong to be clean shaven.

The early 2nd century church Father Ignatius speaks of the subject of Jesus’ beating, but again there is no mention of a beard or a plucking out of Jesus’ beard:

“... He who was Himself the Judge was judged by the Jews, falsely so called, and by Pilate the governor; was scourged, was smitten on the cheek, was spit upon; He wore a crown of thorns and a purple robe; He was condemned.”

• *Ignatius to the Trallians (long) 10:4*

The non-biblical Epistle of Barnabas says this about the beating, with no mention of a beard:

“And again he says, ‘Behold, I have given my back to scourges, and my cheeks to strokes, and I have set my countenance as a firm rock.’”

• *Epistle of Barnabas 5:14*

In about 45 C.E. Philo wrote about Jews appearing before the Roman general from the province of Syria charged with setting up an idolatrous image of Gaius Caesar in the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem. In the only reference to “beard” or “beards” in all of Philo’s works (outside of Philo writing about pubescent males) Philo tells of the Jews:

“... and that they stood speechless and poured forth a ceaseless abundance of tears as if from a fountain, tearing their beards and the hair of their head, and saying, ...”

• *Embassy to Gaius 1:223*

One must ask, did they literally tear out hair from their head, or did they tear out their beards from their cheeks and chins? Well, no. What they did was to grab their hair and pull on it. They grabbed their cheeks and chins and pull on them, while wailing and pleading with the Roman general.

Josephus does not use the Greek terms “beard” or “shaved” for any Jew or Israelite of his time, although he did talk about beards of Old Testament characters. Josephus wrote his

works between 75 to 95 C.E., after the destruction of Jerusalem and later than the New Testament period.

Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, the *Easton Bible Dictionary*, or the *Fauccett Bible Dictionary* all have articles titled "Beard." Not one of those articles mention any New Testament verses. Is it not strange that the entire New Testament does not have the word "beard," considering Jesus was supposed to have a beard according to Isaiah 50:6?

The *McClintock & Strong's Cyclopedia* has lengthy articles for "beard," "shaving," and "hair." None of those articles mention any New Testament passages regarding the topics of facial hair, beards, or shaving.

The Greek Old Testament (the LXX) has a term for "beard" (*pougon* in Greek) but neither that Greek term, nor any other term, is found in the Greek of the New Testament. To state again, the word "beard" does not occur in the Greek New Testament! This is surprising considering the Christ supposedly had His beard plucked out.

Shaving in the New Testament

In the Greek of the New Testament the word "shaving" only applies to shaving of the head (not a beard) for the vow that the apostle Paul was asked to take in Acts:

"Them take, and purify yourself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning you, are nothing; but that you yourself also walk orderly, and keep the law."

• Acts 21:24

There are two other instances of the Greek word "shaven" which refer to the evils of women shaving their heads in 1 Corinthians 11:5–6. There is no mention of having anyone in the New Testament having beards or shaving beards.

Conclusion

It is clear from the evidence, and the lack of expected evidence, that Jesus did not have a beard. As Dr. Martin shows, Jesus also had short hair.

If anyone has different information than that presented here, I would be pleased to look at that new information and make a correction. Until that time it is clear that Jesus not only had short hair, but He was clean-shaven.

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