

JESUS CHRIST: LEGEND, LIAR, LUNATIC or LORD?



**North River Church of Christ
Douglas Jacoby**

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked.
“Who do you say I am?”

—*Matthew 16:13-15*

C. S. Lewis on the options about Jesus

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either he was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool; you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about him being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

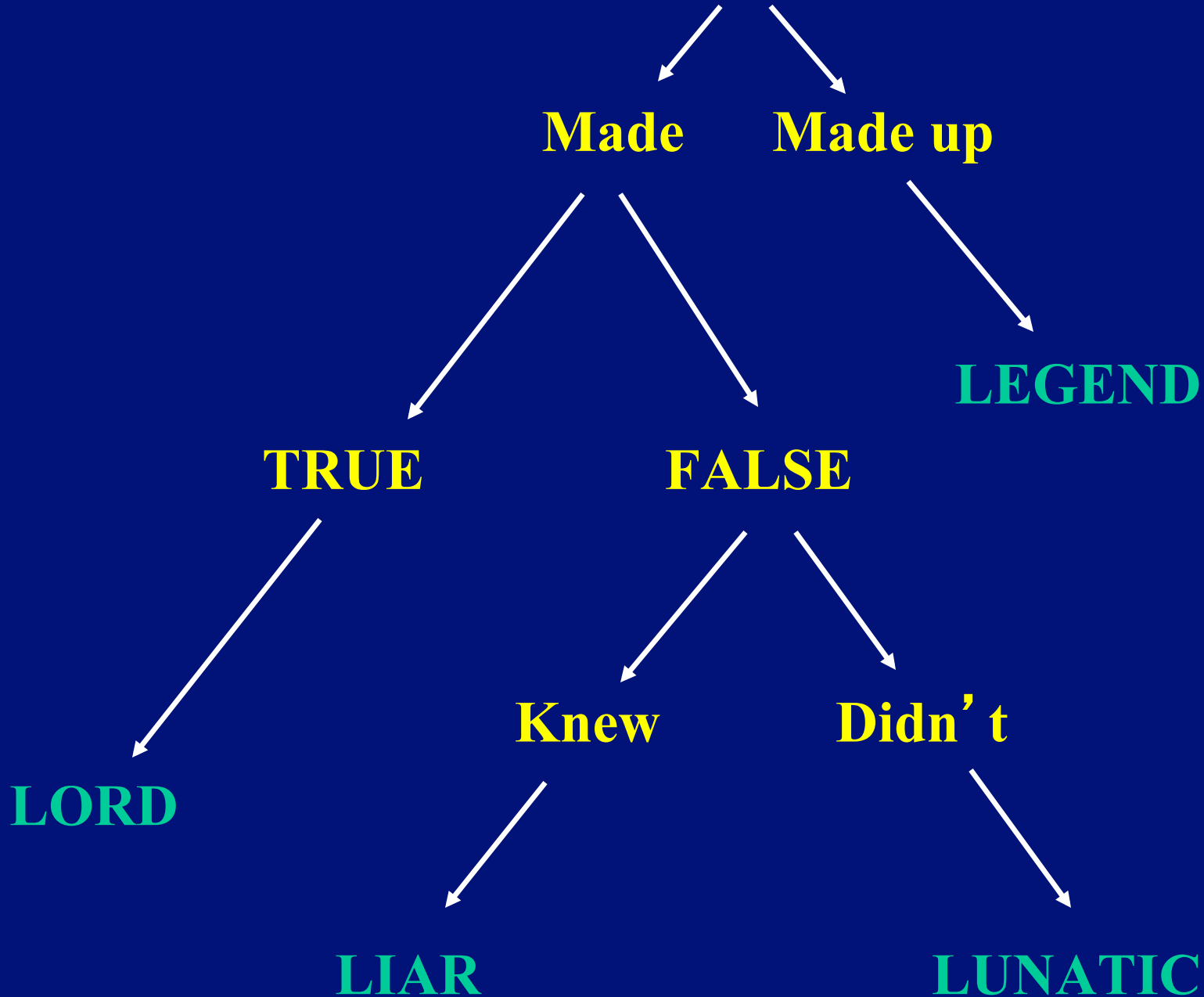
– *Mere Christianity*, II.3.56

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Claims of Jesus



Claims of Jesus

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graph TD; A[Claims of Jesus] --> B[Made]; A --> C[Made up]; B --> D[TRUE]; B --> E[FALSE]; C --> F[LEGEND]; D --> G[LORD]; E --> H[Knew]; E --> I[Didn't]; H --> J[LIAR]; I --> K[LUNATIC];
```

Made

Made up

TRUE

FALSE

LEGEND

LORD

Knew

Didn't

LIAR

LUNATIC

The stunning claims of Jesus

(paraphrased)

I am the light (Jn 8:12).

I've always existed (8:58).

I've never sinned (8:46).

I'm the only way to God (14:6).

I'm coming again to judge the earth (5:22).

The Scriptures are written about me (5:39).

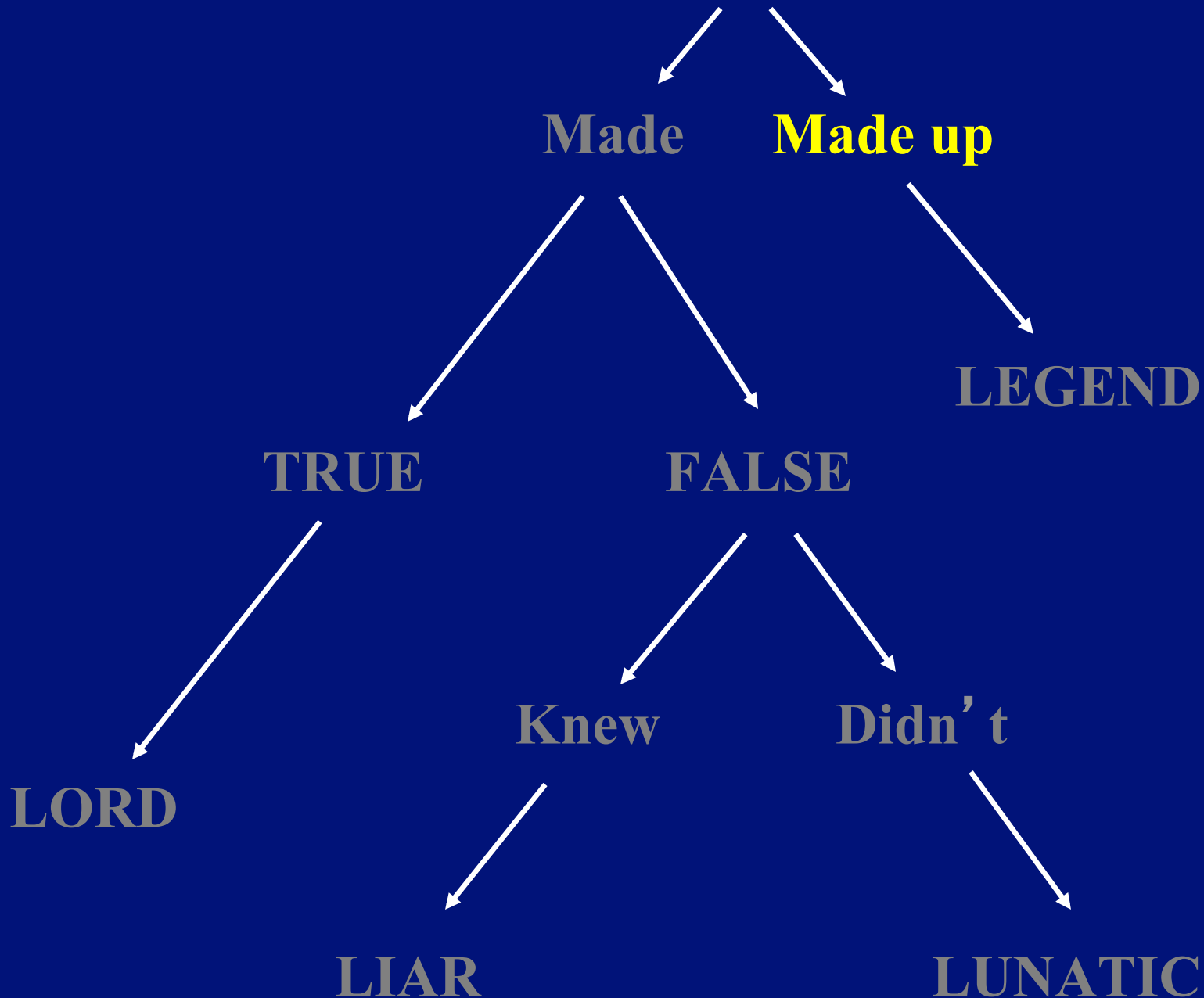
I bring fullness of life to all those who follow me (10:10).

I forgive sins (Mk 2:10).

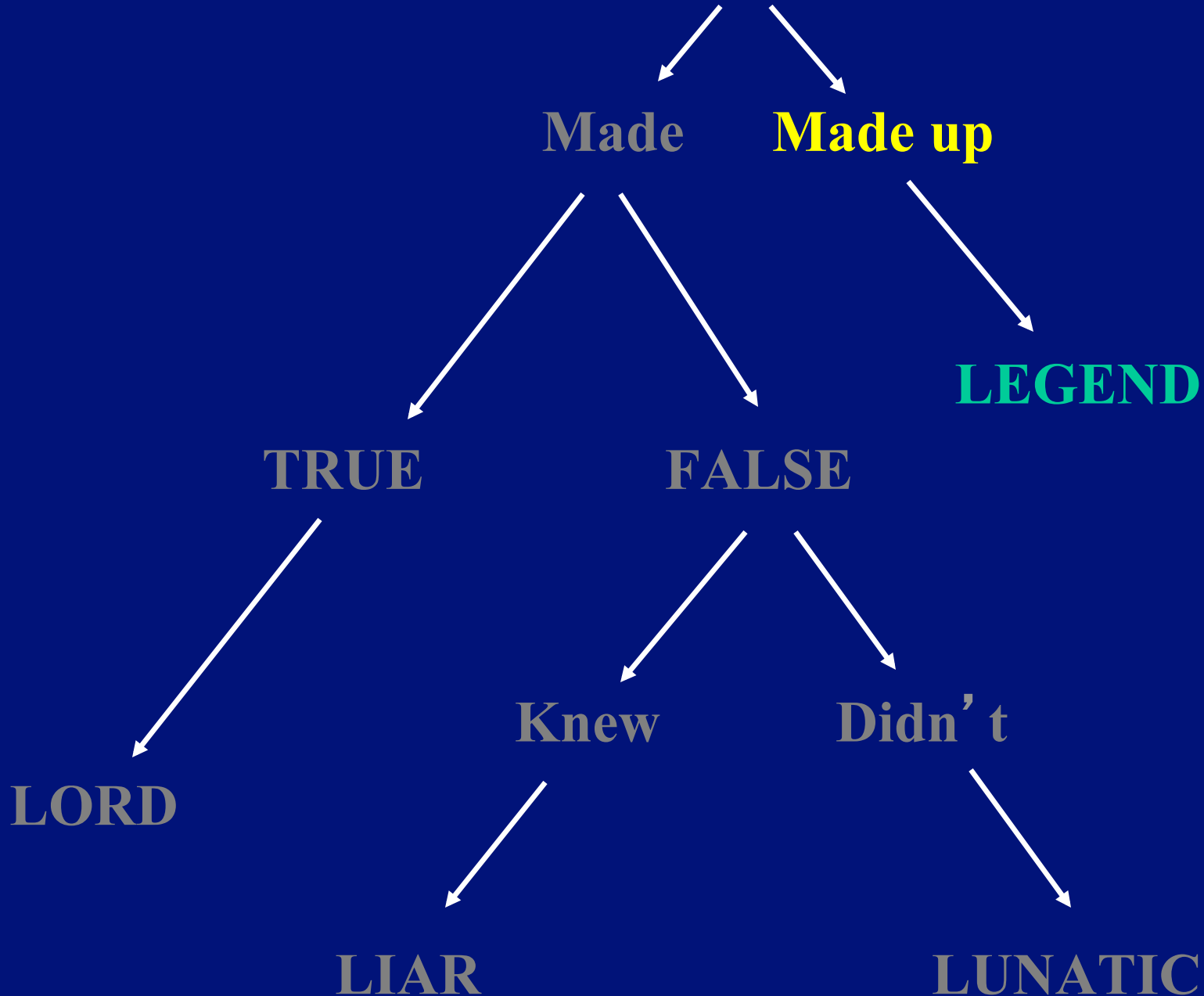
I have all authority (Mt 28:18).

He who rejects me rejects God himself (Lk 10:16).

Claims of Jesus



Claims of Jesus



LEGEND





THE LEGEND

OF ZORRO

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Impact of non- or quasi-historical figures?

Fox in Sox

Robin Hood

King Arthur

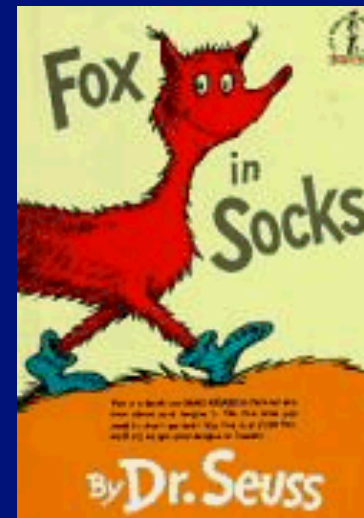
Santa Claus

Tooth Fairy

Winnie the Pooh

Impact of non- or quasi-historical figures?

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Historical figures

Mahatma Gandhi

Albert Einstein

Vincent van Gogh

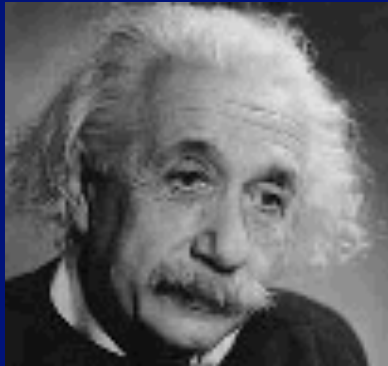
Nelson Mandela

Mother Teresa

Bill Gates

Michael Jordan

Historical figures



Mahatma Gandhi

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Historical figures

Mahatma Gandhi

Albert Einstein

Vincent van Gogh

Nelson Mandela

Mother Teresa

Bill Gates

Michael Jordan



First 150 years after death (37-187 AD / 30-180 AD)

Emperor Tiberius

- **10 sources**
- **9 secular sources + Luke**

Jesus Christ

- **42 sources**
- **9 secular sources**
- **33 Christian references**

Parallellomania *(a la Zeitgeist)*

Virgin Births?
Crucifixions?
Resurrections?

Long after time of Christianity

The stunning claims of Jesus

(paraphrased)

I am the light (Jn 8:12).

I've always existed (8:58).

I've never sinned (8:46).

I'm the only way to God (14:6).

I'm coming again to judge the earth (5:22).

The Scriptures are written about me (5:39).

I forgive sins (Mk 2:10).

I have all authority (Mt 28:18).

He who rejects me rejects God himself (Lk 10:16).

“The stunning claims of Einstein”

The Bible is written about me.

I am the light. (I travel at “ c .”)

I forgive sins. (Don’t cross me!)

I’ve always existed and I always will.

I’ll coming again to judge the earth.

(Whoever can’t explain $E = MC^2$ is doomed.)

I’ve never sinned. (Tthose pictures of me smoking were faked!)

I have all authority on earth and in space—
relatively speaking.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE: HISTORICITY

Peter (64 AD):

We did not follow cleverly
invented stories when we told
you about the power and coming
of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we
were eyewitnesses of his
majesty.

2 Pet 1:16

John (90 AD):

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... We
proclaim to you what we have seen
and heard...

1 John 1:1-3

Paul (56 AD):

And 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... If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

1 Cor 15:14-19

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LEGEND

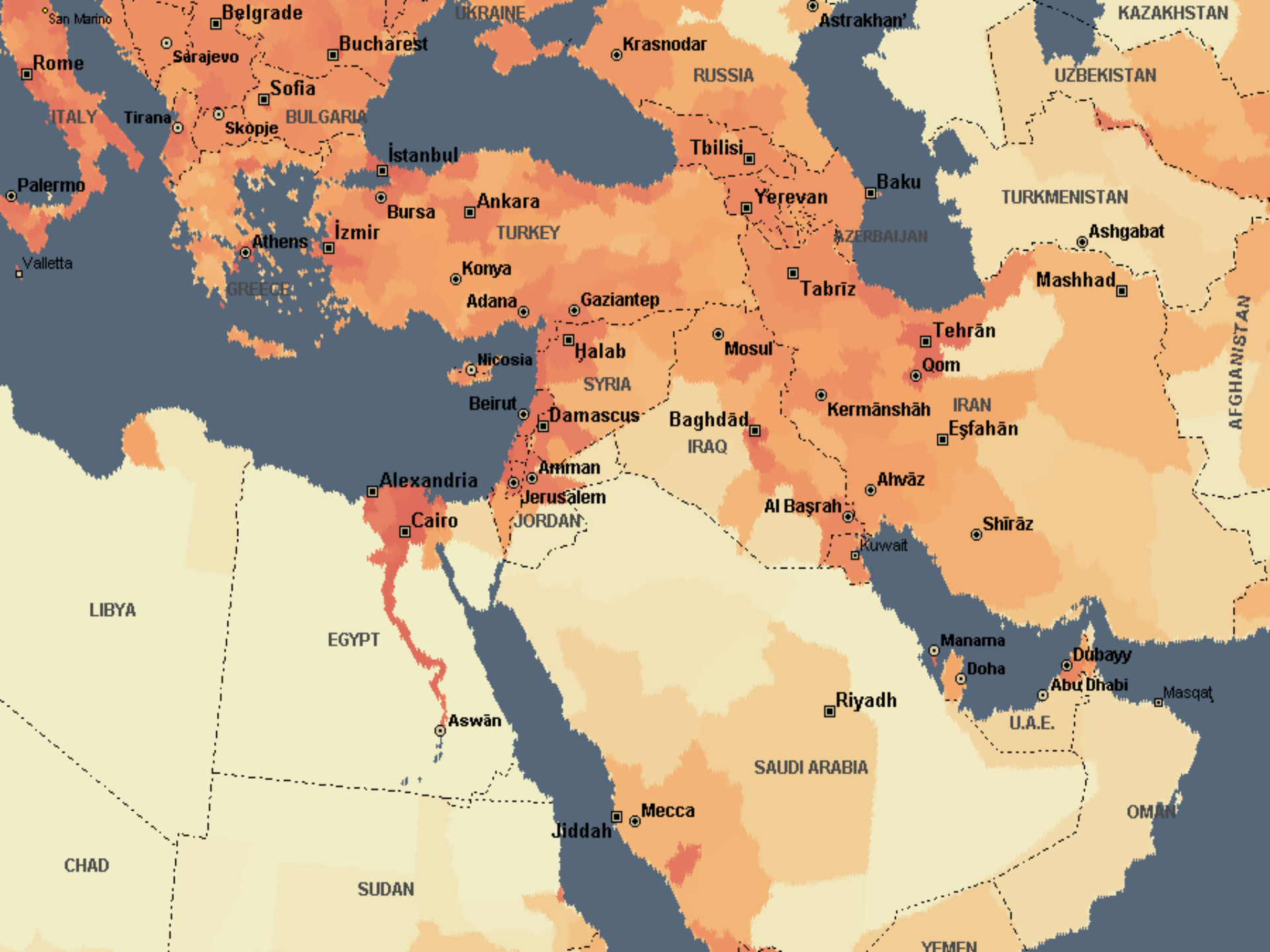
LORD

Knew

Didn't

LIAR

LUNATIC







Pilate inscription, Caesarea Maritima



Caiaphas Ossuary (bone box)



LITERARY EVIDENCE

והאור זה
תלמוד
ירושלמי

דער
גרוס
דאורייתא

מועד ז

The Talmud

(c. 400 AD)

“On the eve of the Passover they hanged **Yeshu** [Jesus]. Let anyone knowing anything in his defense come forward and plead for him. But they found nothing in his defense and hanged him on the eve of the Passover.”

– *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a*

Mara bar Serapion

(73 AD or later)

“What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. 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 executing their wise King?** It was just after that their Kingdom was abolished...”



long and narrow, and the gold and blue of the initial 'A' is a beautiful contrast to the red and white of the text. The initial 'A' is a large, ornate letter, and the text is written in a clear, legible hand. The overall effect is one of elegance and refinement.

[Faint handwritten text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]



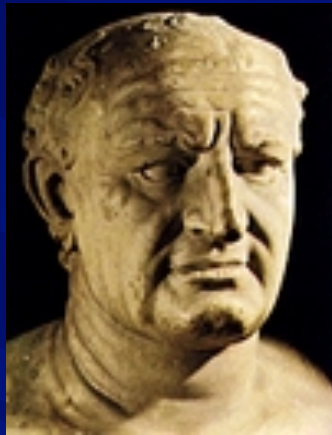
Tacitus

(c. 55-117 AD)

“But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called **Christians** by the populace. **Christus**, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius [14- 37 AD] at the hands of one of our procurators, **Pontius Pilatus**, and a most mischievous superstition thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.”

“Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, **they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserve extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man’s cruelty, that they were being destroyed.”**

—Annals xv. 44



Suetonius (c. 69-140 AD)

“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of **Chrestus, Claudius [41-54 AD] expelled them from Rome.”**

– Claudius 25:14; cf. Acts 18:2

exuberib; caprarum aut ouium pas-
torum manu praecissis. Longa linea
copiosi lactis effluere. Pueri sur-
rexerunt in colomis. Nos ob stupefacti
tanta rei miraculo. Id quod ipsa
cogebat ueritas facebamus. Non
est sub caelo. qui martini possit
imitari.

IIII CONSEQUENTI ITI DEM
TEMPORE ITERCUM EODE
dum dioceses uisitare agebamus
nobis in scio quanta necessitate remo-
rantib; aliquantulum ille pro-
cesserat. Interim peraggerē
publicum plena militanti; uiris
fiscalis raeda ueniebat. Sed ubi
martinum inuenerat hispida in gro-

Sulpicius Severus

(c. 363-425 AD)

“In the meantime, the number of the **Christians** being now very large, it happened that Rome was destroyed by fire... Afterwards, too, their religion was prohibited by laws which were enacted; and by edicts openly set forth it was proclaimed unlawful to be a **Christian**. At that time **Paul and Peter** were condemned to death, the former being beheaded with a sword, while Peter suffered crucifixion.” — Chronicle ii. 29



Flavius Josephus

(c. 37-101 AD)

About this time lived **Jesus**, a man full of wisdom, if indeed one may call him a man. For He was the doer of incredible things, and the teacher of such as gladly received the truth. He thus attracted to himself many Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the **Christ**. On the accusation of the leading men of our people, Pilate condemned Him to death upon the cross; nevertheless those who had previously loved him still remained faithful to Him. For on the third day he again appeared to them living, just as, in addition to a thousand other marvelous things, prophets sent by God had foretold. And to the present day the race of those who call themselves **Christians** after Him has not ceased.

— *Antiquities*, 18.3.3 §63

Early literary references to Christ and Christianity (dates approximate)

- Thallus (Roman, 52 AD)
- Mara bar Serapion (Syriac, 73 AD)
- Josephus (Jewish, 90-100 AD)
- Tacitus (Roman, 109 AD)
- Suetonius (Roman, 110 AD)
- Pliny the Younger (Roman, 112 AD)
- Lucian (Syrian, 165 AD)
- Celsus (180 AD)
- Rabbinic sources (200s+)
- Church fathers (100s-400s)

86,000 N.T. verse quotations in first three centuries

Interval between teaching of founder
and earliest definite recording of
Christian tradition:

Buddha → Buddhism 500 years

Christ → Christianity 20 years

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Claims of Jesus

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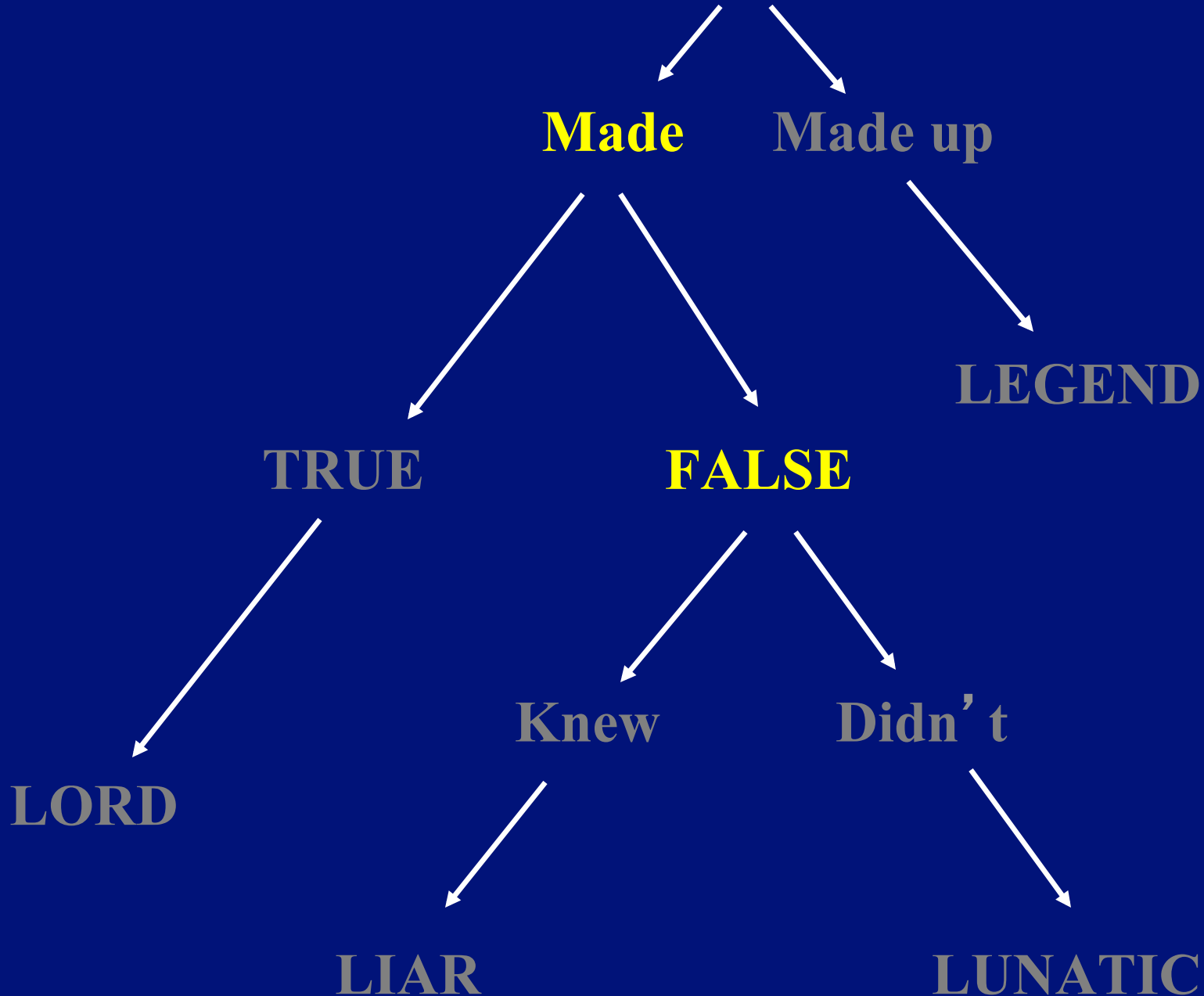
Knew

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Claims of Jesus



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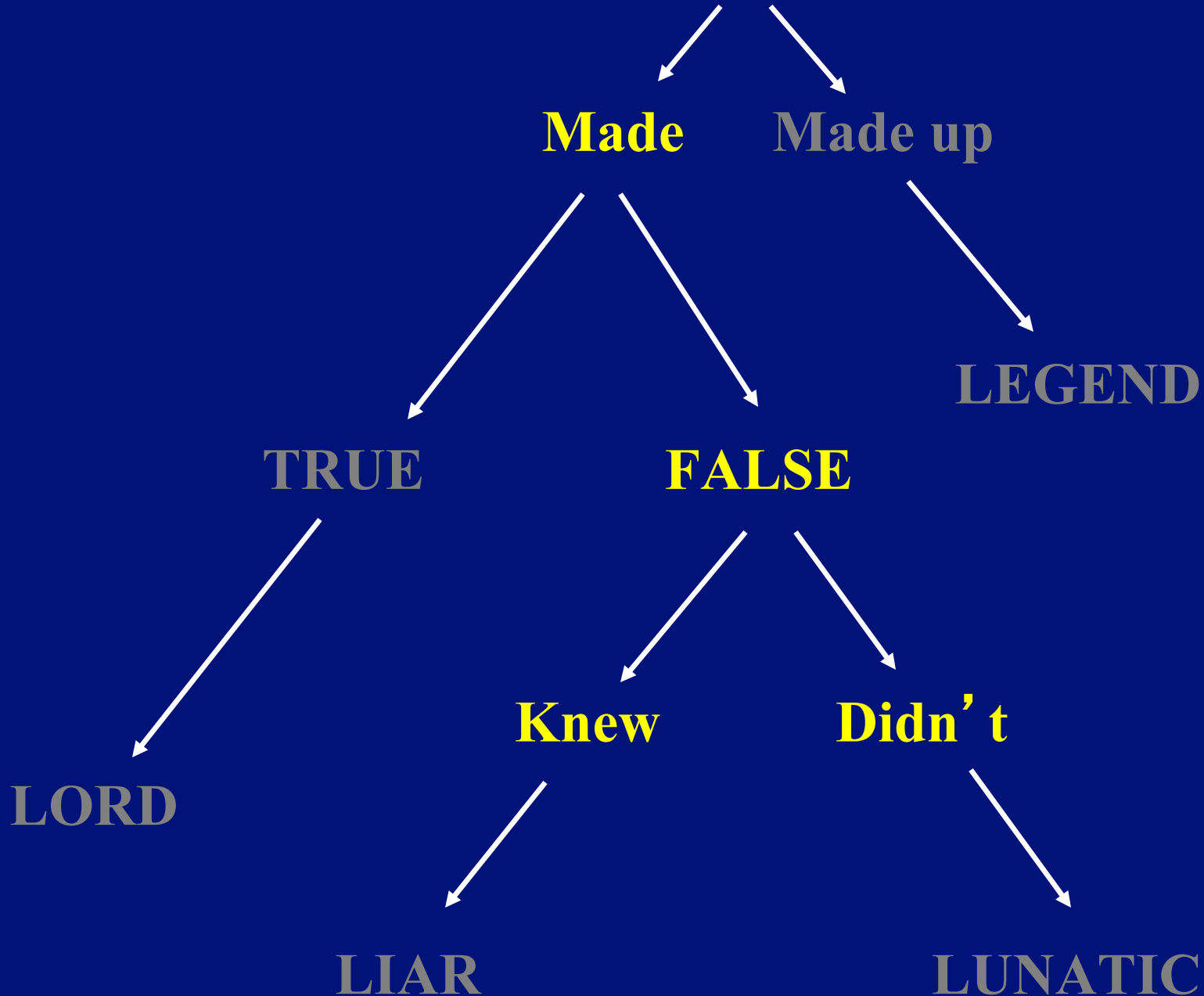
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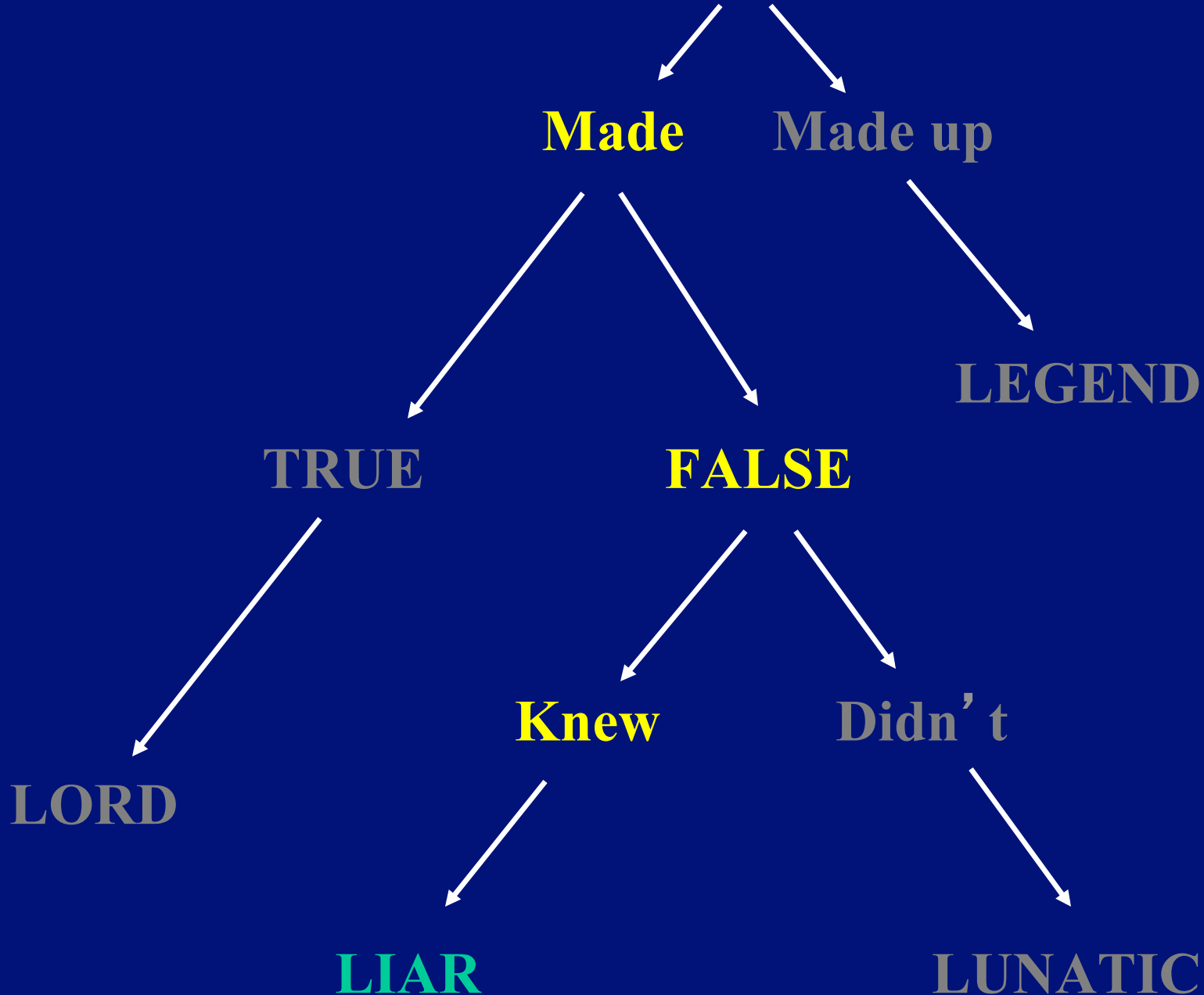
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LIAR





“He deceives the people.”

Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, “He is a good man.” Others replied, “No, he deceives the people.”

— *John 7:12*

“You mean he has deceived you also?” the Pharisees retorted. “Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?” ...

— *John 7:47-48*

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MOTIVE?

- **Power?**
- **Fame?**
- **Revenge?**
- **Riches?**
- **Coercion?**
- **Money?**

GREED

But false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. These false teachers will infiltrate your midst with destructive heresies, even to the point of denying the Master who bought them. As a result, they will bring swift destruction on themselves. And many will follow their debauched lifestyles. Because of these false teachers, the way of truth will be slandered. And **in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words**. Their condemnation pronounced long ago is not sitting idly by; their destruction is not asleep. —2 Peter 2:1-3





“So far as we know, no one could have been less corrupted by power or less prone to sexual temptation... We get no hint of his using his spiritual power to exploit others.”

—Anthony Storr,
Feet of Clay: A Study of Gurus

Liar

Cruel

Fool

Liar



Cruel

Fool



Liar



Cruel

Fool

“The disciples stole the body.”



“When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away...’ ”

– *Matthew 28:13*



?

TRUTH

- “What is **truth**?”

Pilate, Governor of Judea, 26-36 AD

- “Your word is truth.”

Jesus, John 17:17, ministered 27-30 AD

- “I am the way and the truth and the life.”

Jesus, John 14:6

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Made

Made up

LEGEND

TRUE

FALSE

LORD

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LIAR

LUNATIC

LIAR



LIAR



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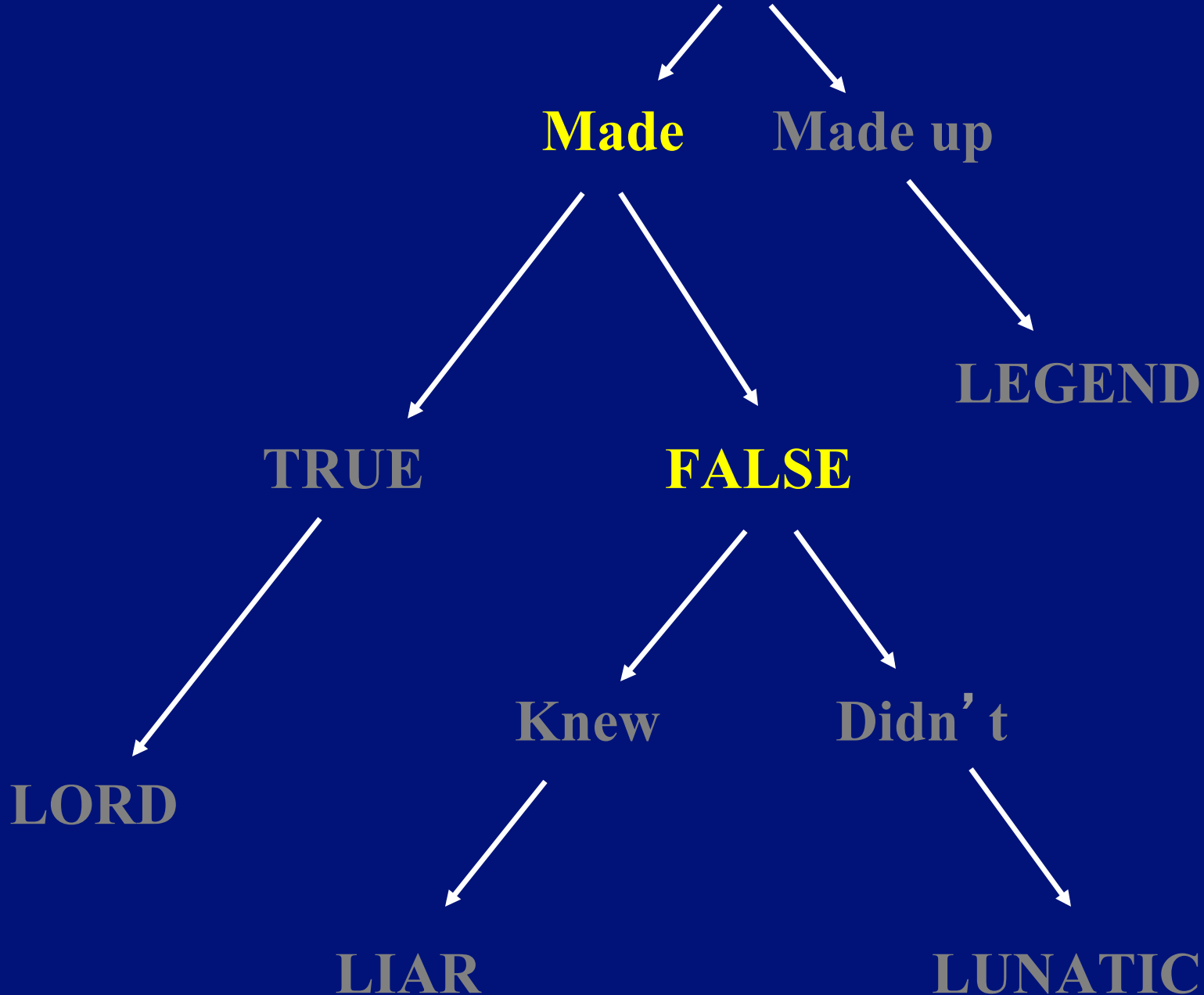
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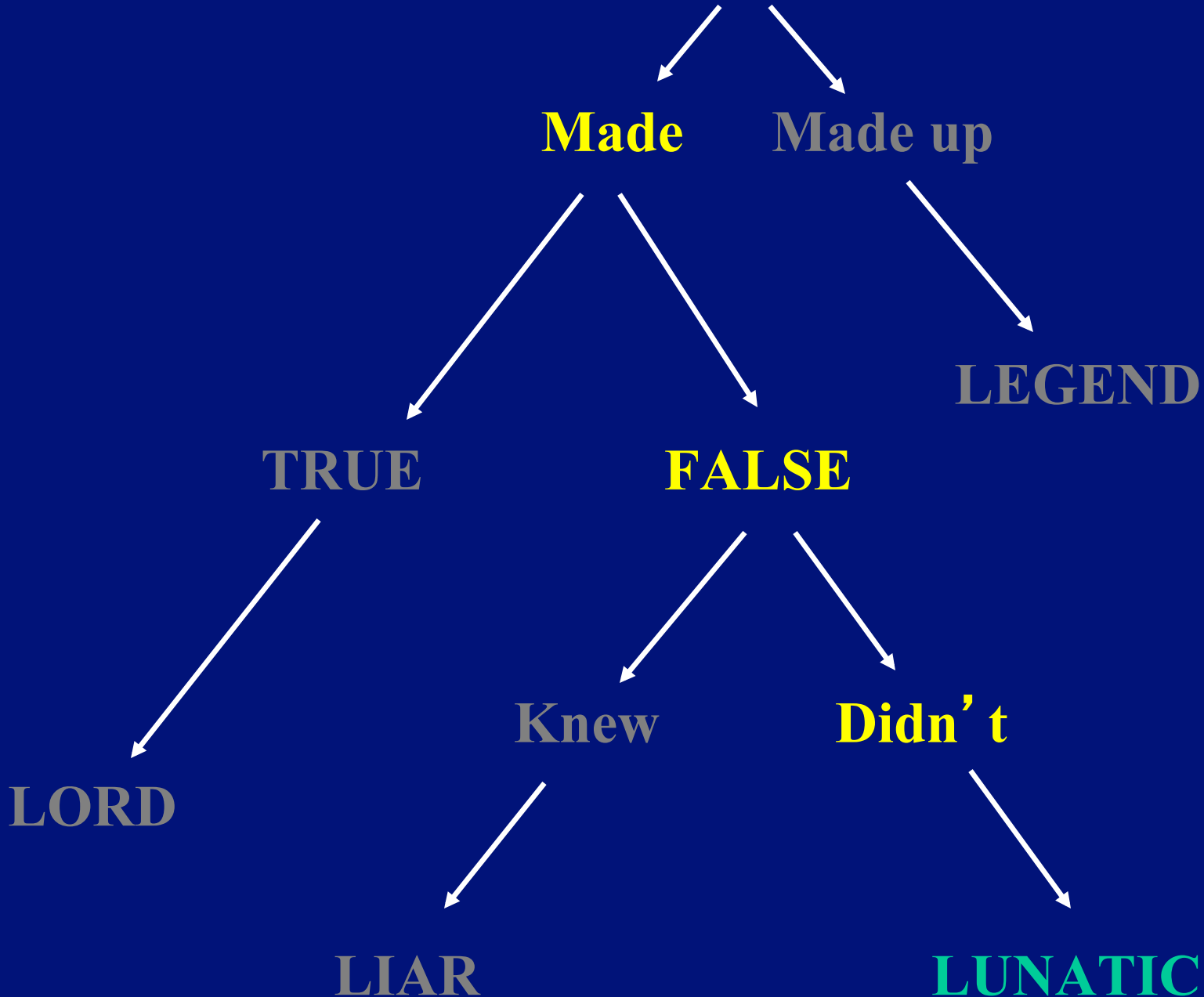
Knew

Didn't

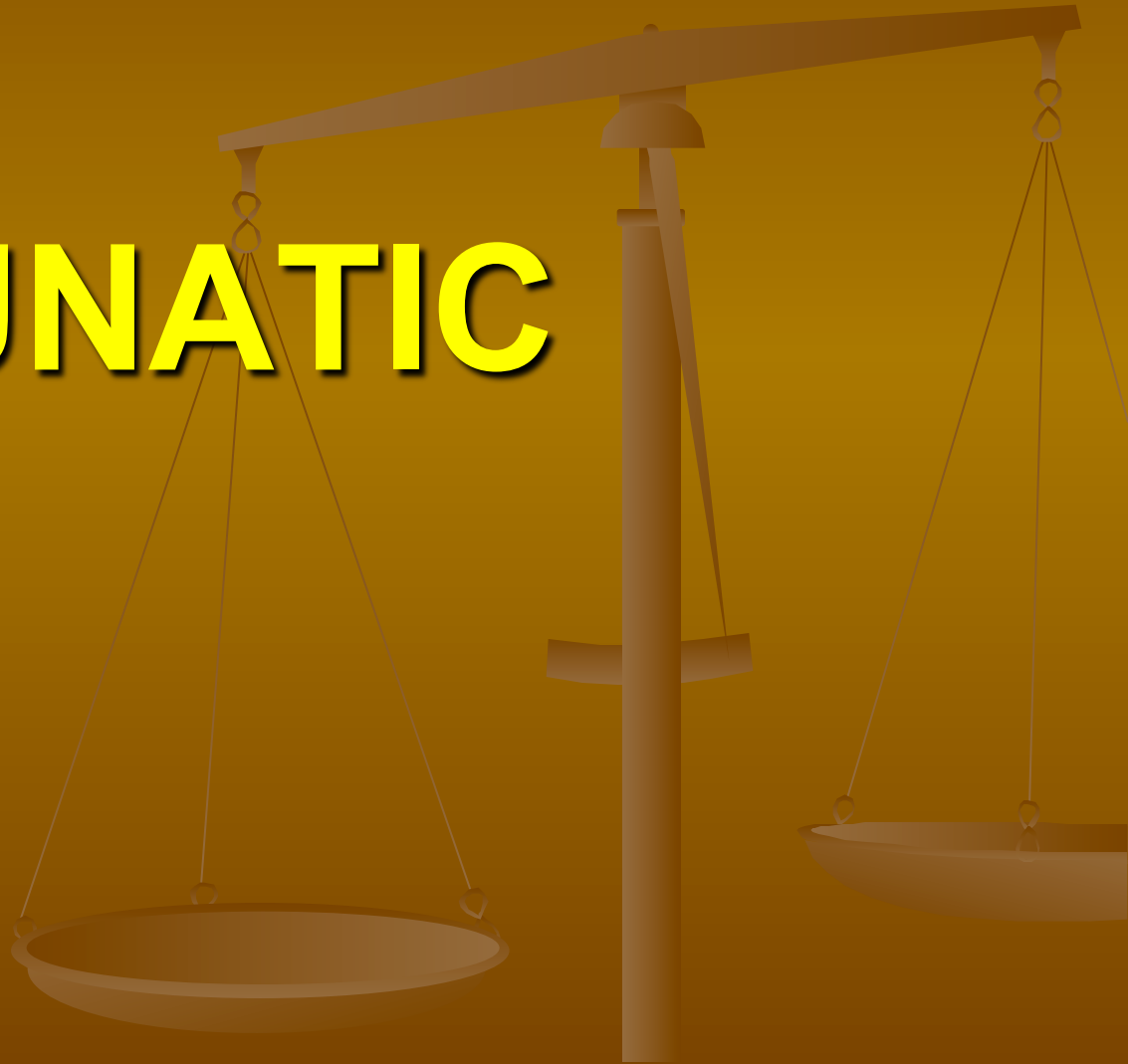
LIAR

LUNATIC

Claims of Jesus



LUNATIC



“You’re mad!”



**“He is demon possessed and raving mad.
Why listen to him?” – *John 10:19***

Signs of instability 1

Neurosis, paranoia

Psychosis or sociopathy

Inconsistencies in his teachings

Mood swings, depression, etc...

Signs of instability 2

Delusional thinking

Theomania

Narcissism

The Sanity of Jesus

Tender and loving, but not sentimental

Zealous and fearless, but wise and cautious

Unworldly, but not antisocial

Confident, but not arrogant

Self-sacrificing, but still joyful

Urgent and responsible, but peaceful and unhurried

Often under attack, never rattled

Strong and uncompromising, but never harsh

A powerful leader, yet a man of prayer and a servant

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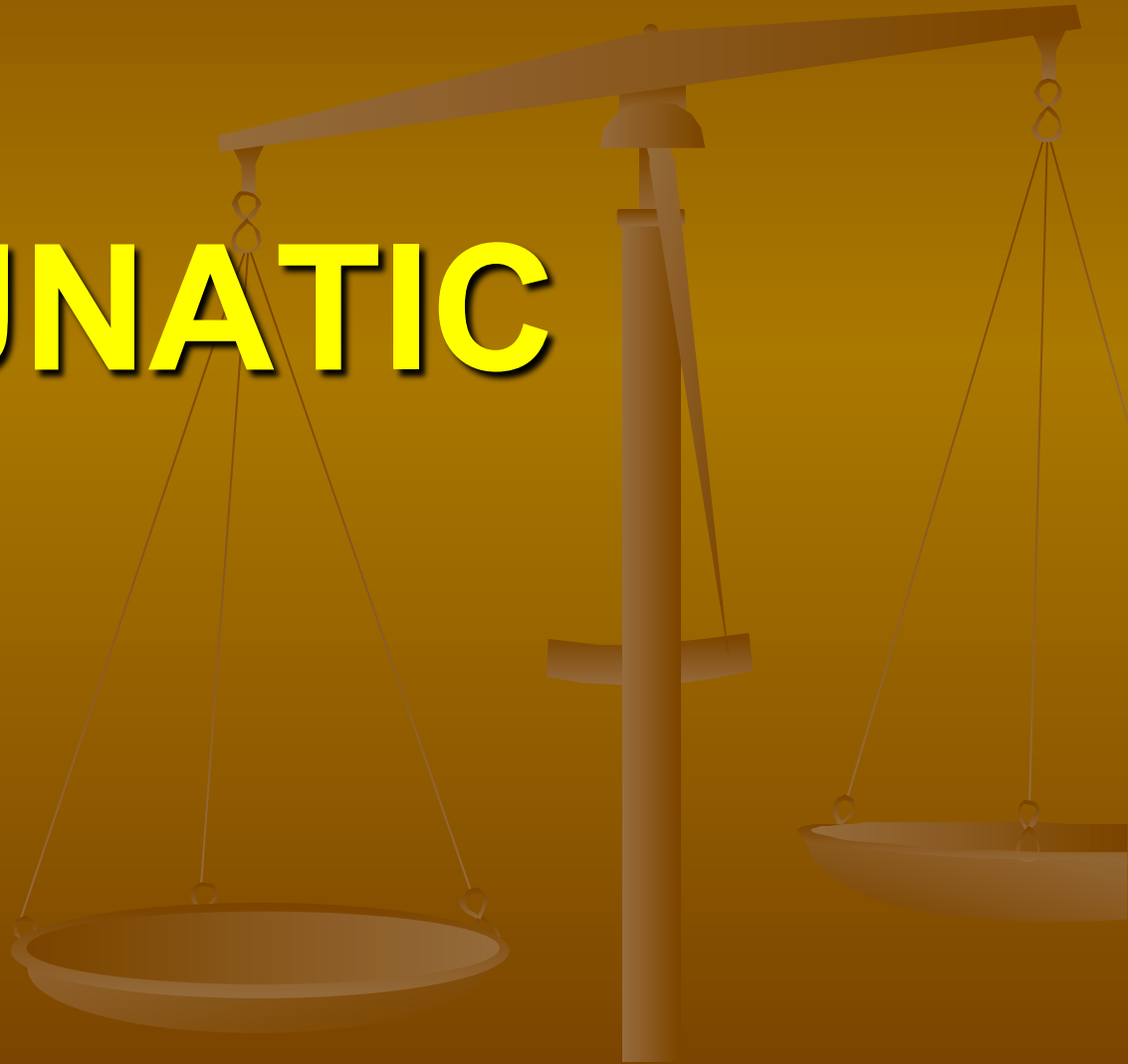
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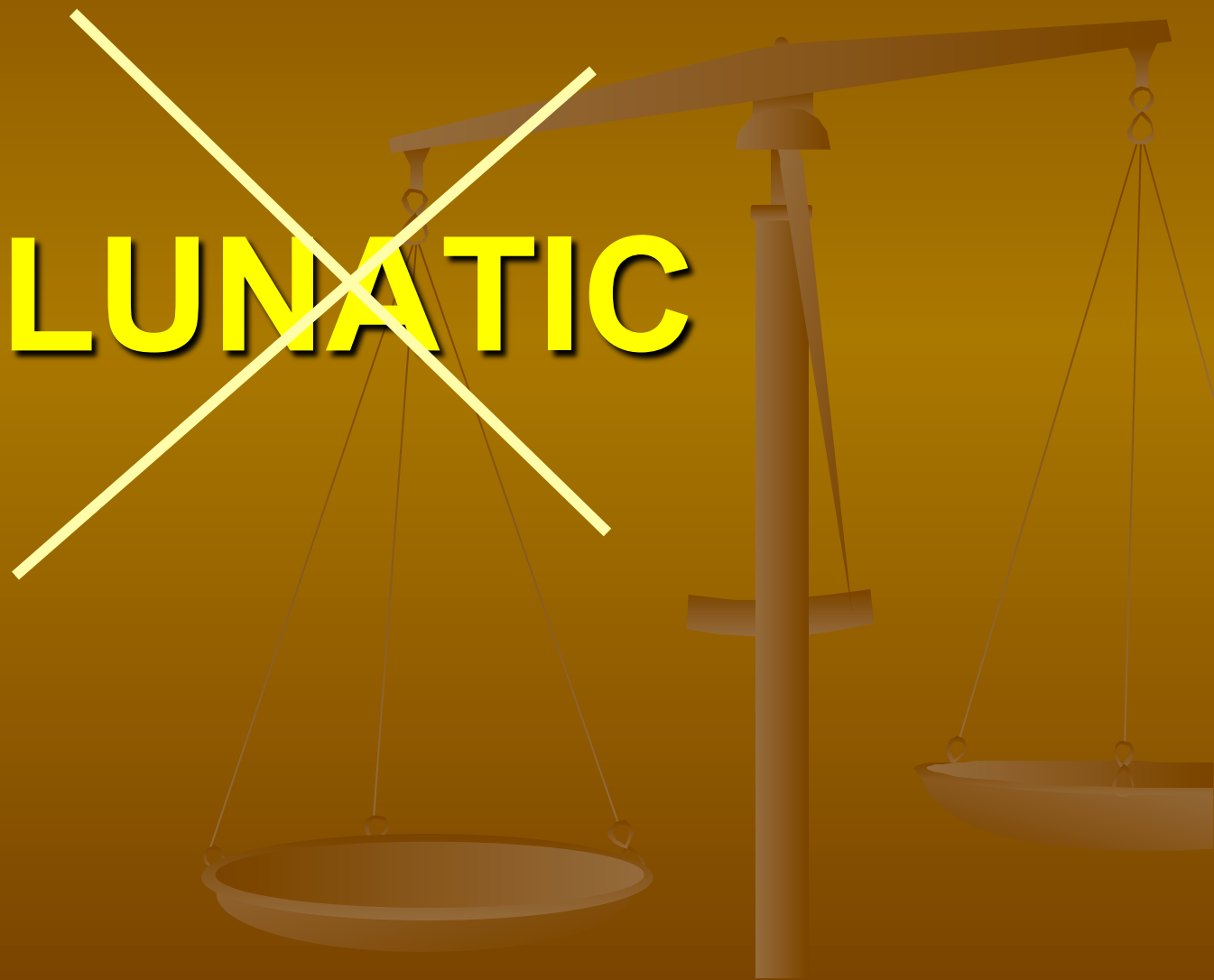
LIAR

LUNATIC

LUNATIC



LUNATIC



Claims of Muhammad



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graph TD; A[Claims of Muhammad] --> B[Made]; A --> C[Made up]; B --> D[TRUE]; B --> E[FALSE]; C --> F[Legendary]; D --> G["The Prophet"]; E --> H[Knew]; E --> I[Didn't]; H --> J[Deceiver/-ed]; I --> K[Unstable];
```

A flowchart on a dark blue background with yellow and teal text. The root node is 'Claims of Muhammad' in yellow. It branches into 'Made' and 'Made up' in yellow. 'Made' branches into 'TRUE' and 'FALSE' in yellow. 'Made up' branches into 'Legendary' in teal. 'TRUE' branches into 'The Prophet' in teal. 'FALSE' branches into 'Knew' and 'Didn't' in yellow. 'Knew' branches into 'Deceiver/-ed' in teal. 'Didn't' branches into 'Unstable' in teal.

Made

Made up

TRUE

FALSE

Legendary

“The Prophet”

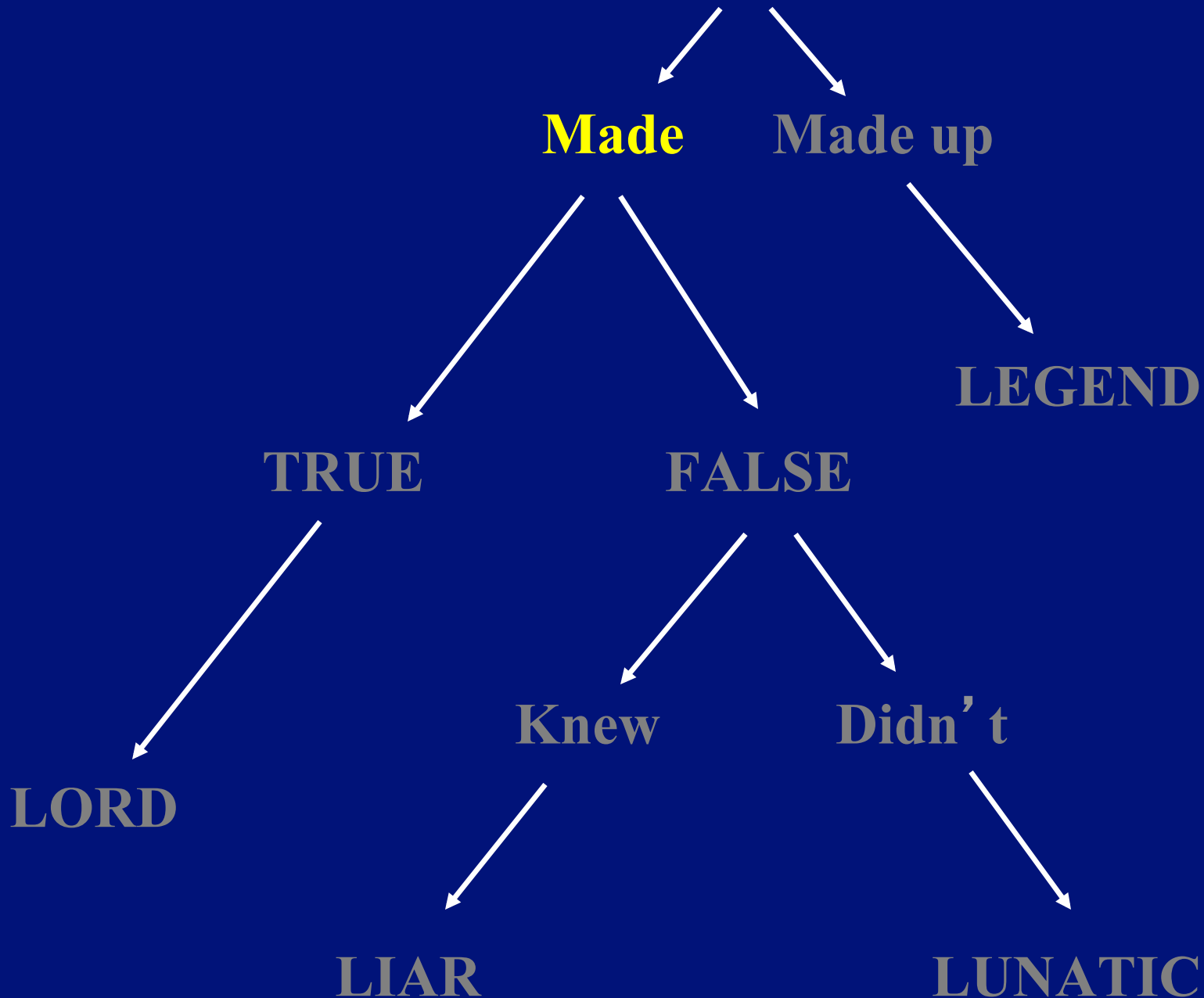
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They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

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“If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”

—*John 7:17*

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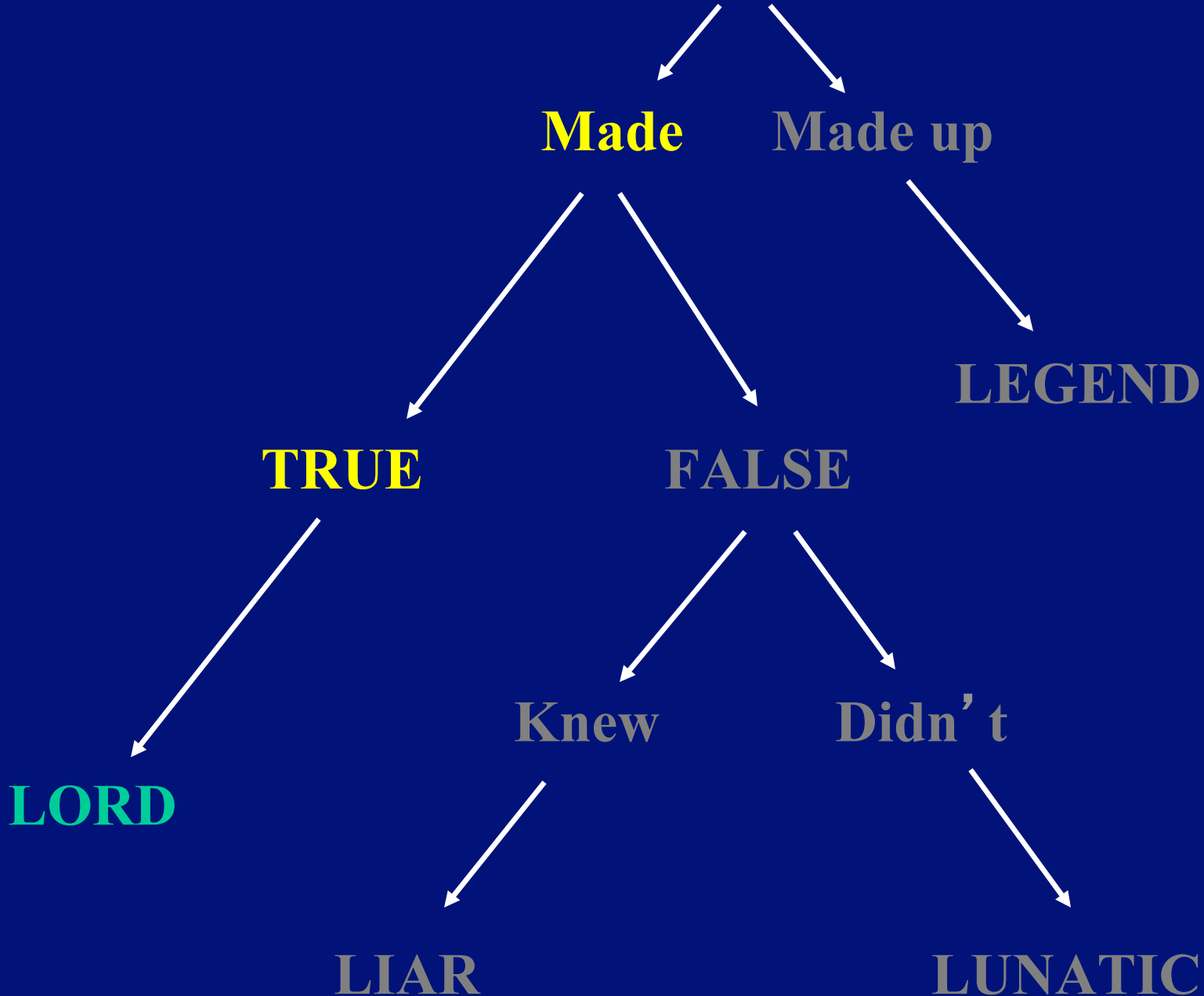
LORD

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LORD



Some evidences that Jesus is Lord:

- * Sinless life**
- * Miracles**
- * Impact on others**
- * Opposition from evil men**
- * Fulfillment of prophecies**

PROPHECIES FULFILLED

(Short list)

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| * Salvation to come through descendant of Eve | Gen 3 |
| * To be a descendant of David | Isa 11 |
| * To be born in Bethlehem | Mic 5 |
| * To be born of a virgin | Isa 7 |
| * Messiah to arise from among the Jews | Deut 18 |
| * To be crucified | Ps 22 |
| * To be God in the flesh | Ps 45 |
| * Though a human being, to be Lord | Ps 110 |
| * God as Good Shepherd | Eze 34 |
| * To be pierced | Zech 12 |
| * Death to be salvific | Isa 53 |
| * To return to heaven | Dan 7 |



The Cross





**Resurrection,
Easter 30_{AD}**



**JESUS
IS
LORD**

Implications

Accept his uniqueness

Implications

Accept his uniqueness

Deal with doubt

Now Thomas... one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

A week later... Jesus came and stood among them... Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe!”

Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

—*John 20:24-28*

Implications

Accept his uniqueness

Deal with doubt

Offer our obedience

**“Why do you call me, ‘Lord,
Lord,’ and do not do what I
say?”**

—*Luke 6:46*

“Jesus is Lord” \Rightarrow I’m not.

- Raw egoism: Everyone should do what is in my interests.
- Comfortable religion: Even if the universe doesn’t revolve around me, I still want a religion that still allows me to think I’m okay as I am.



**As Paul discoursed on
righteousness, self-control and
the judgment to come, Felix
was afraid and said, “That's
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– *Acts 24:25*

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The Gospel of Convenience

Church is a democracy—just like the universe.
God and all people are equals.

It's wrong to demand obedience to the gospel.
Even a strong suggestion is out of place.
Just follow your own heart. In your own
time. When it's convenient, that is.

Churches that make anyone feel uncomfortable
have no right to exist. We're all going to
heaven, even if we aren't living holy lives.

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.”

—*John 3:5*

“Whoever puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for [service in] the kingdom of God.

—*Luke 9:62*



“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

—Matthew 11:28-30

JESUS IS LORD!

