

The Historical Jesus

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The Historical Jesus

Was the Jesus of Nazareth described in your Bible a real historical figure? Is the account of His life as recorded in the gospels true? Or was the entire account of Jesus' life a huge exaggeration, or even worse, a total fabrication?

In the world today, many attempt to deny the validity of the New Testament account regarding the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This denial is based on the belief that there exists no "objective" evidence proving Jesus even existed, let alone preached a powerful gospel, performed great miracles, and was resurrected from the dead.

The critics who deny the existence of a historical Jesus contend that the only evidence suggesting He really lived comes from the Bible. Further, they contend that the Bible cannot be believed because it was written by men who were less interested in recording factual events than in advancing a religion.

What is the truth? Did Jesus of Nazareth really live? Can the biblical record of His life be trusted? Furthermore, is there real, credible, external evidence that not only proves Jesus Christ lived, but that His life had a profound impact on the course of history?

A Critic Speaks

One of the most outspoken critics of the existence of a historical Jesus is Charles Templeton. In his book, Act of God, Mr. Templeton explains his skepticism.

The church bases its claims mostly on the teaching of an obscure young Jew with messianic pretensions who, let's face it, didn't make much of an impression in his lifetime. There isn't a single word about him in secular history. Not a word, no mention of him by the Romans. Not so much as a reference by Josephus. (p. 152)

Is Mr. Templeton correct? Is there no word regarding Jesus except for those found in the scriptures? Is there no mention of Him in Roman history? And what about Josephus? Is it true that Josephus remained silent concerning the existence of Christianity's leading figure?

Everyone who considers himself a serious Christian must face this question: was Jesus real? Did He really live when the Bible writers say He did? Did He really do the things the Bible claims? Was Jesus actually crucified and more importantly, was He raised from the dead on the third day as the scriptures declare?

The plain truth is that there exists clear and compelling evidence from both the scriptures and secular history proving the existence of the biblical Jesus. Further, to characterize the scriptures as untrustworthy because they were written from positions of bias reveals a great misunderstanding about the Bible and its many authors.

The Bible Is Historical Evidence

One of the most common misunderstandings about the Bible is the belief that it is simply one book. This is not true. The New Testament alone consists of twenty-seven books written by at least eight different authors. Furthermore, of those eight, only three (Matthew, Peter, and John) were a part of the original twelve disciples. Of the remaining five, two were originally skeptical concerning Jesus' identity. One was a great persecutor of Christians and even consented to the execution of the first New Testament martyr. One was a gentile, and one was a young boy when Jesus lived and taught.

Additionally, these New Testament authors came from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. One was a tax collector, another a physician. Another was a highly educated Pharisee. At least two were fishermen while two others grew up as the children of a carpenter and most likely learned that trade.

It is also important to understand that the writings of the New Testament span a period of over fifty years with the book of Revelation being written at the very end of the first century. This being the case, it is hard to imagine that there could have been a collaborative effort in creating the books of the New Testament.

The Gospels: An Objective Record

While some try to portray the gospels as the product of an author's bias, this simply is not true. Few biographies portray the flaws of their leading characters with such candor. Consider the following. At one point or another, the gospels portray Jesus' disciples as skeptical, faithless, selfish, argumentative, fearful, and even defiant.

The scriptures even record an event in which Jesus rebuked Peter with the words, "Get thee behind Me, Satan!" (Mt. 16:23). Further, the gospels chronicle events in which the disciples fought among themselves for personal power (Lk. 22:24), fled for their lives in terror (Mt. 26:56), openly forsook Jesus (Mt. 26:73-74), and even considered abandoning the faith altogether (Jn. 21:3). Clearly, the gospel writers were not afraid to expose character flaws in their leading figures.

Additionally, the gospels portray Jesus as a man of limits. At one point, He is shown in a state of such fatigue that He remains sleeping in a boat during a violent storm (Mt. 8:24-26). In another event, Jesus is shown needing to lay hands upon a man a second time in order to heal him (Mk. 8:22-25). Jesus was even portrayed as vulnerable when at the end of His life, He appealed to the Father to remove “the cup” containing the horror of His impending crucifixion (Lk 22:42).

Throughout the scriptures, Jesus is shown displaying a variety of emotions such as love, joy, anger, disappointment, agitation, and reflection. Whether it was His sadness when lamenting the plight of Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37), His rage at the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His day (Mt. 23), or His tenderness when receiving little children (Mk. 10:14-16), Jesus was portrayed as what He truly was – REAL. It is hard to imagine any biographer being more objective in his account of a person’s life than the gospel writers were when recounting the life of Jesus.

The Testimony of Acts

There is an important fact that is ignored by most critics of the New Testament. This fact is that at least one New Testament book was authored by a professional writer who was commissioned to chronicle the history of the early New Testament Church.

The book of Acts is a legitimate and highly credible history of the Church during the first century. It was written by Luke, a Gentile convert. Luke was sponsored to write this history by a man named Theophilus. Although little is known of Theophilus, most authorities believe he was a high ranking Roman official. Luke introduces the book of Acts as well as his gospel with a tribute to this man.

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which He was taken up... (Acts 1:1-2)

With the words “until the day in which He was taken up,” Luke is reporting as historical fact that Jesus had risen from the dead. Although many skeptics today argue the veracity of such a claim, it would have been almost impossible to rebut it during the first century. According to the apostle Paul, the eyewitnesses to Jesus’ resurrection numbered in the hundreds.

After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. (1Cor. 15:6)

Eyewitness Testimony

Clearly, the Bible record was chronicled by men of diverse backgrounds and educational levels. These men were very different from each other. However, despite all these differences, they did have something in common. Virtually every one of them claimed to have known Jesus personally. Therefore, they were speaking as eyewitnesses. Consider the words of Peter, the author of two epistles bearing his name.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2Pet. 1:16)

Here, this leading apostle asserts without ambiguity that he knew Jesus and was an eyewitness to His appearing. Why shouldn’t Peter make this assertion? His own words as well as the testimony of others declare that Peter knew well this man called Jesus. It is also important to understand that the stories concerning Peter’s association with Jesus were less than flattering.

On more than one occasion, Jesus chastised Peter for his lack of faith and at one time, when Peter was asserting the strength of his loyalty, Jesus informed him that Satan could grind him into powder (Lk .22:31) – not very flattering words considering Peter was one of the premier leaders in the New Testament.

However, despite some characterizations that show Peter’s human weaknesses, his words are unshakable. He knew Jesus personally and he declared that fact without apology.

The apostle John is the second most prolific New Testament author. He, too, declared that he had a personal knowledge of Jesus and His message.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen [it], and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship [is] with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1Jn. 1:1-3)

These are just two examples of men who wrote powerfully about a real Jesus. They did so because they knew Him intimately. They were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ teachings, His miracles, His life, His death, and His miraculous resurrection.

The Witness of Converted Skeptics

It is important to understand that some New Testament authors were at first very skeptical concerning Jesus’ messiahship. Consider James, the author of the epistle that bears his name. James was the half brother of Jesus and despite this close physical relationship, he was not persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah. However, when he saw Jesus after His resurrection, he was convicted. James would later become a leader in the Jerusalem Church and would eventually lay down his life for the faith.

The great Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote about the reputation of James.

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananus] assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned. (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 20, Chapter 9)

The apostle Paul was clearly the most prolific New Testament author. His epistles are studied more by Christians today than any other books of the Bible. Paul was persecuted greatly for his faith and spent the end of his life in a Roman prison, waiting to be executed. However, prior to his conversion, Paul was one of the greatest persecutors of Christians in the Roman world.

He dragged people into prison for their belief in the Christian faith and even consented to their death. Paul personally authorized the execution of Stephen, the first New Testament martyr (Acts 7:60-8:1). However, after his conversion (Acts 9:1-9), Paul’s commitment to Christianity and the gospel became legendary.

From Fear to Devotion

A tremendous change can be seen in the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Prior to that time, these men were often fearful. They warned Jesus against going to certain cities because of the threat to His life (Jn. 11:8). Most of the disciples fled when Jesus was arrested and even feared their own arrest. Because of his fear, Peter even denied Jesus three times.

However, after these men personally witnessed the resurrection, their commitment to the cause of the Kingdom was unshakable. They were even willing to suffer and die if necessary in order that the gospel of the Kingdom might be preached as a witness. Consider the apostle Peter. At the end of his life, he was arrested and taken to Rome where he would be condemned and sentenced to death.

History records a tradition concerning the execution of Peter. According to the tradition, Peter refused to be crucified in the same way Jesus was. This was because he did not believe that he deserved such an honor. Therefore, Peter was crucified upside down.

Clearly, there was a willingness in the followers of Jesus to suffer and even die for Him. This attitude speaks volumes about the truth of a historical Jesus. If the story of Jesus was false, why would the disciples and others consent to such great persecution?

It is also important to understand that those who followed Jesus were subjected to great public condemnation even within the religious community. Christians were routinely expelled from the temple. Such an act would ostensibly cut them off from the rest of the Jewish community. As a result, it would be difficult to work or even live within that community. However, this fear was never a consideration to Jesus' true followers after His resurrection. Even though being a follower of Christ's may require one to give up family and friends as well as positions of status and social standing, those among the true community of faith were willing to pay that price. If Jesus was simply a fabrication, why would people pay such a price? Why would anyone lay down his life to perpetuate a myth?

The Witness of History

There are many who reject Jesus as a real historical figure because they think secular history is completely silent concerning His existence. In the words of Charles Templeton,

There isn't a single word about Him in secular history. Not a word, no mention of Him by the Romans. (Acts of God, p. 152)

Is this statement true? Is there no word about Jesus in secular history? The truth is that secular history does mention Jesus of Nazareth and its words corroborate the biblical record.

Consider the chronicle of Cornelius Tacitus (55 to 117 A.D.). Tacitus was a Roman statesman and historian. He held several positions in the Roman government, including that of proconsul, or governor of the Roman provinces in Asia. Tacitus is also regarded as the "greatest historian" of ancient Rome.

One of the crowning achievements of Tacitus' work is Annals, a 16 volume history of the Julian emperors from Tiberius to Nero, written between 115 and 117 A.D. In this work, Tacitus wrote about persistent reports of Jesus' resurrection.

...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 at the hand of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

When using the words "a most mischievous superstition," Tacitus was referring to the belief in Jesus' resurrection. This belief spread throughout the empire. When Roman officials heard of it, they considered it a superstition. However, those who were eyewitnesses called it a miracle.

Tacitus was not the only Roman historian who makes mention of the biblical Jesus. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (c. 69 to 140 A.D.) was a contemporary of Tacitus. Suetonius was a Roman biographer and historian whose writings are one of the primary sources of information about the lives of the first twelve Caesars. His work was so popular that his biographical approach set the pattern for historical writing.

Suetonius once wrote of a wave of riots which broke out in a large Jewish community in Rome in 49 A.D. In his chronicle called Claudius, Suetonius explains that the Jews were banished from the city.

Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from the city.

The name *Chrestus* used by Suetonius is a variant spelling of Christ. It is virtually the same as that used by Tacitus. The point Suetonius was making is that riots broke out because of opposing views about Christ.

This observation made by Suetonius is in total agreement with the writings of the New Testament. Luke records in the book of Acts that at that time, Aquila and his wife Priscilla were forced to leave Rome.

...a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome). (Acts 18:2)

Suetonius wrote about the impact of Jesus' life on more than one occasion. In his work Nero, this famous historian explains that Christians were being punished for their beliefs.

After the great fire at Rome... punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief.

Here, Suetonius continues to chronicle the great persecution inflicted on the early Christian Church. Clearly, some of Rome's leading historians acknowledged in their writings that the biblical Jesus was real. Further, their writings reveal that He was an important part of history.

The biblical Jesus is also written about by authors of less prominence. One such author was a man named Phlegon. Phlegon was born about 80 A.D. and although his works are no longer in existence, they have been quoted by very credible sources. Origin, who was a leading third century theologian and a man regarded as the father of biblical criticism, made reference to the historical works of Phlegon.

Now Phlegon, in the Thirteenth or fourteenth book, I think, of his Chronicles not only ascribed to Jesus a knowledge of future events, but also testified that the result corresponded to His predictions.

Origin continued to quote Phlegon as a source of proof that Jesus was crucified and that the crucifixion was accompanied by an earthquake.

And with regard to the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place, Phlegon too... has written in the Thirteenth or fourteenth book of his Chronicles.

It is important to understand that well known historians such as Suetonius and Tacitus as well as more obscure historians such as Phlegon knew the biblical Jesus was a real person. Although they did not live and write exactly when and from where Jesus lived, they nevertheless had to accept the undeniable impact of His teaching and work.

The Witness of Josephus

Flavius Josephus is regarded as the premier first century Jewish historian. His writings have been quoted by virtually hundreds of authors, including many of the world's most respected scholars.

Josephus came from a priestly family and became a Pharisee at the age of 19. He was appointed Commander of the Jewish army under Roman occupation. After the rebellion by the Jews, Josephus was captured by the Roman general Vespasian. During this time, Josephus became a great historian. Although Josephus lived after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, he was closely associated with the experiences of that generation.

In his book, Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus makes a statement that is contested by those who reject the existence of a historical Jesus. Here, Josephus writes:

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works-- a teacher of such men as received the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day. (Book 18, ch. 3)

This statement by Josephus has been the center of considerable debate and controversy. Those who reject its authenticity contend that these words were not written by Josephus but rather were added by the Christian church in an attempt to strengthen its argument that Jesus was real and that He was the Christ. There is, however, a credible authority which can shed considerable light on this issue.

William Whiston is a scholar who translated the works of Josephus into English. Whiston provides the following observation concerning the authenticity of Josephus' words regarding Jesus.

Since we meet with several important testimonies in Josephus, the Jewish historian, concerning John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus of Nazareth, concerning Jesus of Nazareth himself, and concerning James the Just the brother of Jesus of Nazareth; and since the principal testimony which is concerning Jesus of Nazareth himself has of late been greatly questioned by many, and for me who has ever declared my firm belief that these testimonies were genuine, to set down fairly some of the original evidence and citations I have met with in the first fifteen centuries concerning them; and then to make proper observations upon that evidence, for the readers's more complete satisfaction. (The Works of Flavius Josephus, Appendix p. 815)

Whiston went on to explain that after exhaustive examination of Josephus' writings, he concluded that the texts being questioned were, in fact, genuine. He drew this conclusion because their style was consistent with that found in Josephus' other writings. Whiston also provided a list of highly respected historians who quoted the writings of Josephus and considered them authentic regarding John the Baptist, James, and Jesus Christ. These authors included Tacitus in 110, Justin Martyr in 147, Origin in 230, Eusebius in 324, Ambrose in 360, Hieronym in 400, Isidorus in 410, Cassiodorus in 510, Anastasius in 740, and Johan in 850.

Whiston further pointed out that it would be impossible to have such a volume of honorable and accurate testimony regarding John the Baptist and James, whose lives were predicated on the life of Jesus, and then refuse to accept same testimony regarding Jesus who was of greater importance than the other two. (p. 819)

Josephus' Position Regarding Christianity

Those who contend that Josephus' reference to Jesus is spurious do so because the words appear to convey that Josephus embraced Jesus as the Christ. However, William Whiston explains that such a conclusion is a mistake.

This was Christ, or [the] Christ, does not mean that this Jesus was the Christ of God, or the true Messiah of the Jews; but that this Jesus was distinguished from all others of that name, of which there were not a few, as mentioned by Josephus himself, by the addition of the other name of Christ; or that this person was no other than he whom all the world knew by the name of Jesus Christ, and his followers by the name of Christians. (The Works of the Jews, Appendix 819)

Whiston went on to explain that Josephus was not conveying his belief in Christ but rather that Christians were named from "this Christ." According to Whiston, if Josephus was a true believer, this passage would have required a much fuller explanation.

Additionally, it is important to understand that Josephus wrote for both the Greeks and Romans and that this particular audience would not have understood who he was referring to if he simply used the name "Jesus." Therefore, according to Whiston, Josephus used the term "Christ," not to convince others that Jesus was the Messiah, but only to differentiate Him from other historical figures with the same name.

Whiston then added that all other historians who wrote for the next several centuries understood that Josephus was not a believer. Josephus' approach was similar to that of Pontius Pilate during the time of Jesus' crucifixion. According to the scriptures, Pilate ordered a sign to be posted upon Jesus' cross. The sign bore the words: "This is Jesus, king of the Jews."

The fact that Pilate ordered this sign did not mean he believed Jesus was the king of the Jews. He only placed it there because he was provoked by the Jewish leaders who brought charges against Jesus. These leaders wanted the sign to read that Jesus **claimed** to be king of the Jews. However, because of his exasperation with these Jewish leaders, Pilate refused to have these words changed (Jn. 19:19-22).

An Arabic Translation of Josephus

It is important to understand that there are other manuscripts concerning the works of Josephus. An Arabic manuscript has been found and translated which makes the controversial passages found in Josephus easier to understand. This Arabic translation reads as follows.

At this time, there was a wise man who was called Jesus. 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. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his 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.

Here, the translation adds clarity to the meaning of Josephus' words. Based on this translation, Josephus is simply recounting that Jesus was a good man and his followers taught that He was resurrected.

The Babylonian Talmud

The works of Josephus are not the only Jewish writings that identify Jesus of Nazareth. The Babylonian Talmud includes a section in which Jesus is mentioned by the Jews to have been hanged from a stake on the eve of the Passover.

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and

enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.” But since nothing was brought forward in his favor, he was hanged on the eve of the Passover. (The Babylonian Talmud, vol. III, Sanhedrin, 43a, p. 281)

The Testimony of Other Writers

In addition to Tacitus, Suetonius, Phlegon, and Josephus, other prominent historical figures make mention of the biblical Jesus. Thallus wrote about Mediterranean history during the middle of the first century. Although there are only fragments of his writings today, one such fragment relates what happened at the crucifixion.

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down.

This description of events surrounding the crucifixion is totally consistent with the gospel record. Consider the words of Matthew.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour... And, behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent... (Mt. 27:45, 51)

Pliny the Younger

Pliny the younger was a Roman author who at one time served as governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. He was concerned about the rapid growth of Christianity and its potential for threatening the beliefs of Rome. Because of this, he wrote the emperor to explain how he interrogated those he believed were Christians. Pliny related that if those he interrogated would not worship the emperor, he would have them executed.

In some cases, he would torture them to gather information about the emerging Christian movement. In one such case, he tortured two deaconesses and wrote to the emperor concerning the information he had gathered.

They [the Christians] were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses of a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food - but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. (The Tenth Book of Pliny's Letters)

When Pliny referred to “food of an ordinary and innocent kind,” he was addressing a rumor regarding Christianity. This rumor was that Christians took the symbols (bread and wine) Jesus introduced at the Passover as literal and would secretly meet on certain occasions and actually eat human flesh and drink human blood.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr was a second century philosopher and theologian. His parents were pagans; however, after a study of the Old and New Testaments, Justin Martyr converted to Christianity. He was executed during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius because he refused to offer sacrifices to the pagan gods.

Justin Martyr wrote about 150 A.D. In one of his writings, he explained that the events of Christ's crucifixion could be validated by the report of Pontius Pilate.

And the expression, "they pierced my hands and my feet" was used in reference to the nails of the cross which were fixed in His hands and feet. And after he was crucified, they cast lots upon His vesture, and they that crucified Him parted it among them. And that these things did happen you can ascertain in the "Acts of Pontius Pilate." (First Apology XXXV)

Although the "Acts of Pontius Pilate" referred to by Justin Martyr is no longer in existence, it was also referred to by Tertullian. Both Tertullian and Justin Martyr believed that this was an official Roman document

It is interesting to note that there were two archives kept in ancient Rome. One consisted of the minutes of senatorial meetings; the other consisted of correspondence sent to the emperor from various parts of the empire. Any correspondence from Pontius Pilate to Tiberius would unquestionably belong to this second archive.

The Historical Jesus

In spite of the early secular world's hostility toward Christianity, there exist many historical documents to verify that the biblical Jesus actually lived. Further, these documents prove that his followers believed very exact details concerning His life and teachings as well as His crucifixion and resurrection.

Few ancient historical figures can boast of the amount of material that Jesus of Nazareth had written about Him. In addition to the gospels, there is the book of Acts as well as numerous epistles.

On top of all the Biblical evidence, sits a crown of numerous historical documents. These documents are totally consistent with the writings of the New Testament.

Whether it was the writings of Tacitus, Suetonius, Phlegon, Origin, Thallus, Justin Martyr, Josephus, or even Pontius Pilate, the existence of the biblical Jesus is unimpeachable. Jesus of Nazareth did live and His life had a powerful impact on the course of history.

The Bible: An Accurate Record

The writers of the New Testament were so concerned with accuracy that they did not enhance the reader's view of Jesus or in any way try to make Him seem more acceptable. The disciples and gospel writers simply put down what actually occurred.

Additionally, it is important to understand that first century authorities were the enemies of Jesus and Christianity. They would not publicize Him or His message. Instead, they would tend to minimize Jesus and His teachings.

Like the great Roman church, they would burn documents and literature of those dissidents who held fast to the original faith. Despite this, some documents survived. These documents prove incontrovertibly that Jesus was real and the beliefs of His Church genuine.

Additionally, secular history acknowledges that Jesus was crucified and that many believed He was resurrected from the dead. It is also important to understand that in the first century, Christianity was a faith with powerful enemies. These enemies resorted to lies about true believers as well as acts of violence against them.

It is interesting to note that the one thing enemies of Christianity could have done to completely shut down the Christian movement was never successfully attempted. Understand that the resurrection was the central theme of the Christian church. Therefore, if the resurrection of Jesus Christ could be proven untrue, Christianity would collapse.

The Record of Secular History

Secular history goes into considerable detail when describing Jesus Christ and His effect on history. The following are twelve aspects regarding Jesus Christ and Christianity that are addressed in the secular historical record.

- ▶ Jesus lived and taught in the area of Palestine.
- ▶ He was regarded as a wise, ethical, and virtuous man.
- ▶ His followers believed Him to be the promised Messiah.
- ▶ It was reported that He performed great miracles.
- ▶ He was purported to have spoken prophecies and the prophecies came true.
- ▶ He was crucified by Pontius Pilate.
- ▶ Darkness and earthquakes accompanied the crucifixion.
- ▶ It was reported that He was resurrected on the third day.
- ▶ He was worshiped as God.
- ▶ As a result of His teachings, the Church He founded grew rapidly.
- ▶ Christianity had powerful enemies who attempted to crush it.
- ▶ Despite great persecution, His Church still survived.

Disproving the resurrection could have been accomplished several ways. The enemies of Jesus could have:

- 1) produced Jesus' body,
- 2) produced testimony revealing a plot by Jesus' followers to stage His death, or
- 3) produced credible witnesses claiming Jesus' disciples or others stole His body.

However, history records no legitimate attempt to invalidate the resurrection with credible evidence. This is because there was no credible evidence to prove Jesus was not resurrected as the scriptures claim.

History in Advance

Clearly, the voice of both the secular and New Testament records speak dynamically regarding a real biblical Jesus. His life and teachings are thoroughly documented by eyewitness testimony as well as the historical record of objective and highly credible sources.

However, there is an even more dramatic historical record regarding this man called Jesus. In addition to the 27 books of the New Testament that reflect back on Jesus' life, there are 39 books of the Old Testament which describe Jesus' life virtually centuries before He lived. These books describe in extraordinary detail the biblical Jesus.

Included in their chronicle is a detailed description of His lineage, His birth, His teachings, His miracles, His betrayal, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven. These prophecies span the pages of the Old Testament from the third chapter of Genesis to the third chapter of Malachi. There are virtually hundreds of prophecies regarding Jesus Christ. Consider the words of Sidney Collette

There are no less than 333 prophecies in the Old Testament which center in the person of the Messiah – every one of which, in relation to His earthly life has been fulfilled to the letter. (All About the Bible, p. 84)

The statistical probability of virtually every Old Testament prophecy regarding Jesus being correct are one in several trillion. But the prophecies about Jesus are completely true. These prophecies were declared with pinpoint accuracy and fulfilled with the same precision.

God’s power to shape the course of history is undeniable and is dramatically declared in the scriptures. The great prophet Isaiah wrote of God’s power to govern the destiny of the universe.

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure...” (Isa. 46:9-10)

The prophecies in the Old Testament reveal God’s great plan concerning His creation. That plan will ultimately include the return of Jesus Christ with His Kingdom. However, before that Kingdom could come, God had to provide mankind with a perfect sacrifice. That sacrifice was His Son who died for all humanity.

The table on the following pages identifies a small percentage of the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus Christ as well as their fulfillment. Understand that these items only scratch the surface of what God inspired to be written about the Savior of the world who would come.

Old Testament Prophecies Concerning Jesus Christ		
<u>Prophesied</u>	<u>His Birth and Childhood</u>	<u>Fulfilled</u>
Jer. 23:5-6	He would be a descendent of David.	Lk. 1:32-33
Mal. 3:1	He would be preceded by a forerunner (John the Baptist).	Lk. 1:17
Isa. 7:14	He would be born of a virgin.	Mt. 1:23
Mic. 5:2	He would be born in Bethlehem.	Mt. 2:5-6
Jer. 31:15	Children would be slaughtered.	Mt. 2:18
Hos. 11:1	He would flee to Egypt.	Mt. 2:15
Isa. 9:1-2	He would live in Galilee.	Mt. 4:15
Isa. 11:1	He would live in the city of Nazareth.	Mt. 2:23
<u>Prophesied</u>	<u>His Life and Teachings</u>	<u>Fulfilled</u>
Psa. 69:9	He would cast the moneychangers out of the temple.	Jn. 2:13-17
Isa. 61:1-2	He would preach the gospel.	Lk. 4:18
Psa. 78:2	He would teach by parables.	Mt. 13:35
Isa. 53:4	He would heal people.	Mt. 8:17
Zech. 9:9-10	He would enter Jerusalem on an ass.	Mt. 21:5
Psa. 118:25-26	People would cry out to Him, “Hosanna!”	Mt. 21:9

**Old Testament Prophecies
Concerning Jesus Christ**

Psa. 118:22-24	He would be rejected.	Mt. 21:42
Zech. 11:12	He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver.	Mt. 27:9
Psa. 41:9	He would be betrayed by one with whom He shared a meal.	Jn. 13:26

Prophecies

His Crucifixion

Fulfilled

Psa. 22:16	He would be crucified.	Lk. 23:33
Psa. 34:20	None of His bones would be broken.	Jn. 19:36
Isa. 53:12	He would be crucified with malefactors.	Lk. 23:33
Psa. 22:18	Soldiers would gamble for His garments.	Jn. 19:24
Zech. 12:10	His side would be pierced.	Jn. 19:37
Psa. 22:1	He would cry out, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?"	Mt. 27:46
Psa. 22:2	Darkness would cover the earth.	Mt. 27:45
Psa. 22:16	His hands and feet would be pierced.	Lk. 24:39-40
Psa. 22:6-8	He would be mocked on the cross.	Mt. 27:43
Psa. 69:21	He would be given vinegar and gall.	Mt. 27:34

Prophecies

His Burial and Resurrection

Fulfilled

Isa. 53:9	He would be buried by a rich man.	Mt. 27:57-60
Jonah 1:17	He would be in the grave three days and three nights.	Mt. 12:40
Psa. 16:10	He would be raised from the dead.	Mk. 16:6
Psa. 68:18	He would ascend to His Father in heaven.	Acts 1:9-11
Psa. 110:1	He would sit on the right hand of the Father.	Acts 7:56

A Final Thought

Was Jesus of Nazareth a real historical figure? Did He walk the countryside of Palestine and preach a powerful message about a magnificent Kingdom? Was He crucified and more importantly, was He resurrected from the dead as the scriptures declare? Further, is the impact of Jesus' life thoroughly documented in both the biblical and historical record?

The answer to these questions is categorically yes! Jesus lived and taught just as the biblical record asserts. Despite what critics might claim, the proof of Jesus' existence is overwhelming.

It is interesting to note that there were also critics in Jesus' time who rejected Him and His gospel. This was done despite the mountain of evidence that proved He was in fact the promised Messiah. However, every attempt to discredit Him by these critics met with total failure. Finally, they resorted to perjured testimony to win their case.

Today, those who deny the existence of the biblical Jesus must first reject incontrovertible evidence. That evidence shouts from the pages of secular history as well as from the sacred scrolls of God's word. Then, just like those before them, these critics must manufacture an argument that has no basis in truth. That truth is simple but powerful: Jesus of Nazareth did live. He preached a powerful message of hope. He offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice for mankind. He was crucified and buried, then rose again the third day, just as He said He would. The truth is Jesus did live. But there is an even more important truth:

He is alive today.

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