

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?

The Historical Jesus

By

Art Braidic

&

Dennis Fischer

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Blow the Trumpet

Proclaiming a Warning in the Last Days

Dear Friends,

The booklet you are about to read addresses an issue that has recently gained significant traction in the secular world—a world that now stands in defiance of the God of the Bible and His moral authority. So hostile is this defiance that its leading voices brazenly mock Him. They even proclaim that the scriptures leading figure never even existed and is nothing more than a silly fable—a myth perpetrated on the gullible.

It is hard to imagine that anyone would treat the Almighty and His word with such contempt. Even more amazing is the fact that it is they (the defiant) who are spreading fables and it is the truly gullible who fall for their lies. Thankfully, the Great Creator of Heaven and Earth has promised that His word can be proven and that only a fool would deny the evidence.

Respectfully,

Blow the Trumpet

The Historical Jesus

The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God...

Psalm 14:1

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 a 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.

Those who make this assertion (known as the "Christ-myth-theory") contend that the only evidence suggesting the Messiah really lived comes solely from the Bible. They then claim the scriptures cannot be trusted because they were written by men who were more interested in advancing a new religion than in recording factual events.

This now brings us to the question of the day: Did Jesus of Nazareth really live and can the biblical record of His life be trusted? Furthermore, is there real, credible, external evidence that not only proves Jesus Christ was a genuinely authentic figure, 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 Bible—a book that despite his dismissing, is arguably the most popular ever written? Furthermore, is there no mention of Him in Roman history as he claims? And what about Josephus? Is it true that he remained silent concerning the existence of Christianity's leading figure as Mr. Templeton asserts?

Everyone who considers himself a serious believer must face this question: was Jesus real? Did He really live when the Bible writers say? 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 words that follow address these critical questions and when doing so present clear and compelling evidence from both the scriptures and secular history proving the existence of the biblical Jesus. Furthermore, for critics like Mr. Templeton 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. To illustrate this point, consider the following:

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 these inspired works.

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. To illustrate this point 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). Furthermore, 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.

But there is more.

The gospels actually 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, He is shown needing to lay hands on 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 when casting the money changers out of the temple (Mk. 11:15-18), 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 your Savior.

A Scholar Speaks

William James Durant was an American writer, historian, and philosopher. He is best known for *The Story of Civilization*, an 11 volume work written in collaboration with his wife Ariel and published between 1935 and 1975. In it, Durant makes the following observation:

"Despite the prejudices and theological preconceptions of the evangelists, they record many incidents that mere inventors would have concealed—the competition of the apostles for high places in the Kingdom, their flight after Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial, the failure of Christ to work miracles in Galilee, the references to some auditors to his possible insanity, his early uncertainty as to his mission, his confessions of ignorance to the future, his moments of bitterness, his despairing cry on the cross; no one reading these scenes can doubt the reality of the figure behind them. That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels." (The Story of Civilization, part III, p. 557).

A Fallacy in Logic

There is a great logical fallacy among those who claim that when discussing the historical aspects of scripture one should not use the Bible as proof that Jesus existed but rather only use non-biblical sources. But why would anyone attempt to create such an arbitrary standard when the established criteria for objectively measuring the reliability of historical documents already exists? That criteria is:

- 1) the number of available copies of ancient manuscripts in existence,
- 2) their consistency with each other and the original
- 3) The time span between the original version and the date of those copies.

Thus the greater number of copies combined with a shorter interval of time between them and the original, along with their consistency with the original and each other, the more reliable it becomes.

When examined under this standard, the Bible passes with flying colors actually eclipsing writings identifying some the greatest figures in history. To illustrate this point consider the following:

Some of the earliest manuscript fragments of the New Testament are the "John Rylands Fragment," the "Chester Beatty Papyrus" and the "Bodmer Papyrus" which were written between 50-100AD. Furthermore, copies of these papyri were reproduced between 125-200 AD, meaning that the time span between the originals and the copies still in existence today is 25 years to 150 years.

Now some may question the historical reliability of these manuscripts on the grounds that they were produced decades after the death of the Messiah. However, any credible expert on ancient documents would not share their view. Furthermore, it is doubtful that skeptics would apply the same standard when it comes to other great historical figures. For example:

- **Plato** — Plato wrote his works from 427-347 BC. However, the earliest manuscript copy of Plato's writing in existence today was written in 900 AD. That is over 1,200 years after Plato's death! Furthermore, there are only 2 copies of these manuscripts in existence.

- **Julius Caesar** — Caesar is one of the most celebrated and trusted historical figures of all time. He lived from 100-44 BC. However, the earliest manuscript copy of his writings only dates back to 900 AD, putting the best evidence of Caesar's existence at nearly 1,000 years after his death. Furthermore, there are only ten manuscript copies of Caesar's *Gallic Wars*. Therefore, if one wishes to question the reliability of the Bible's assertion that Jesus is REAL, then he or she must be even more skeptical regarding the historical legitimacy of Caesar and Plato.
- **Homer** — Homer, is credited with writing the *Iliad* in ca 900 BC. However, the earliest manuscript copy of the *Iliad* dates to 400 BC. This means that the only proof of Homer or the *Iliad* being legitimate comes from a document that didn't come into existence until 500 years after his death.

However, to Homer's credit there are 643 copies of ancient manuscripts of the *Iliad* written over the centuries that when compared against each other by experts have a 95.3 per cent consistency and accuracy rating, making it one of the most reliable and proven documents of antiquity.

That is of course, until you compare it to the New Testament. The New Testament manuscripts date to less than 100 years after the death of Christ. Additionally there are over 5,600 ancient manuscript copies of the New Testament making it dwarf any other figure of ancient history. Furthermore, when compared to each other these copies have a 99% accuracy rate.

The bottom line is this: the historical record of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is more prolific and accurate than any "proof" offered concerning any figure from the ancient world.

Time-Interval between New Testament Manuscripts and their Autographs

An extant manuscript is considered more reliable the shorter the time period exists between it and its autograph (original writing). A short time period equates to less time for the document to be corrupted through transmission or interpolation (introducing additions into the text).

For most ancient manuscripts there is an average gap of 1,000 years between the original work and the date of the earliest copy. Even in light of these chasms of time, secular works of antiquity are almost universally unchallenged by the literary and scientific communities. Yet, the textual situation of the New Testament in regards to the time-interval is vastly superior.

However, unlike the classical works, a very brief period of time exists between the New Testament autographs and their earliest copies. A few examples follow:

- The John Rylands' papyrus manuscript (so named because it resides in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester, England) was discovered in Egypt is dated between AD 117-138. The distinguished philologist Adolf Deissmann has argued that it should be dated even earlier.
- The Bodmer Papyri collection dates to about AD 200. This collection contains parts of the New Testament, including most of the Gospels of Luke and John.
- The Beatty Papyri collection, which contains almost all of the New Testament, dates to approximately AD 250.
- Codex Sinaiticus, containing the entire New Testament and parts of the Old Testament and residing in the British Museum, dates from about AD 340.
- Codex Vaticanus, which includes almost the entire Bible and which resides in the Vatican Library, dates from AD 325-350.
- Codex Alexandrinus, containing most of the Bible and kept in the British Museum, dates from AD 450.
- Codex Bezae, including parts of the New Testament (most of the four Gospels) and written in Greek and Latin, resides in the Cambridge University Library; it dates within AD 450-550.
- Codex Ephraemi, containing part of the Old Testament and most of the New Testament which is held in the French National Library in Paris, dates from about AD 400.

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, See also: Lk. 1:1-4)

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)

Noted archeologist Sir William Ramsey who initially questioned the legitimacy of the gospel of Luke would later make the following observation.

"Luke is a historian of first rank... This author should be placed along with the very greatest historians... Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness."

Eyewitness Testimony

Clearly, the Bible record was chronicled by men of diverse backgrounds and educational levels. In short, they were very different from each other. However, despite 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 personally knew Jesus and was an eyewitness to His appearing. And 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 some of the stories concerning Peter's association with Jesus were less than flattering. On more than one occasion, Jesus chastised him 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 Testimony of John

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)

Peter and John 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 Him after His resurrection, he was convicted. James would later become the bishop of 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)

Paul

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, he was one of the greatest persecutors of Christians in the Roman world. He literally dragged people into prison for their belief in Christ 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 the Messiah. Prior to that time, these men were often fearful. At one point they were reluctant to go to Bethany because of the potential threat to Jesus' life and even begged Him not to go (Jn. 11:8). Additionally, most of the disciples fled when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane—fearing their own arrest. Furthermore, because of his own fear, Peter actually denied being a follower of Jesus three times during the Messiah's trial at the palace of Caiaphas.

However, after these men personally witnessed the resurrection, their courage soared and their commitment to Christ and the cause of the Kingdom was unshakable. They were even willing to suffer and die, if necessary, in order that the gospel might be preached as a witness (Mt. 24:14). If the story of Jesus was false, why would the disciples and others be willing to make such a great sacrifice? Why would anyone lay down his life to perpetuate a myth?

It is also important to understand that those who followed Jesus were subjected to great public condemnation—even within the religious community where Christians were routinely expelled from the synagogue—a fate which would ostensibly cut them off from their Jewish neighbors. As a result, it would be almost impossible to work and make a living. However, this fear was never a consideration to Jesus' true followers. Even though their loyalties may require them 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. Once again, if Jesus was simply a fabrication, why would they do it?

Conspiracy Defies Reason

As a general rule a person's actions are almost always motivated by the anticipation of potential gain or loss. In other words, the potential for personal gain will inspire certain actions while the potential for harm will discourage them. With that said, the apostles had little to gain and virtually everything to lose by proclaiming Jesus Christ as God in the flesh and the Savior of the world, and that He had risen from the dead. Prior to experiencing Christ, these men were staunch monotheists, committed to worshipping the one, true and living God of Israel (Yahweh).

By holding aberrant theological views, they were assured of costly personal consequences—in every case stigma and ridicule while in many cases torture, imprisonment and even death. Creating and supporting a hoax about Christ would only have brought the apostles meaningless hardship.

It Makes No Sense

Throughout history many have died for a religious cause they sincerely believed in; but if the apostles were purporting a hoax, this would not have been the case with them because they would absolutely know it was a fraud. With that said, it is simply inconceivable that they had, in fact, created a resurrection hoax and then laid down their lives to perpetuate it.

Furthermore, even if the apostles had created such a deception, their conspiracy would have undoubtedly come unraveled under extreme scrutiny. After all, there were plenty of adversaries dedicated to discrediting the Messiah and His followers. However, there is not one example that even hints that Christianity's antagonists ever claimed Jesus didn't exist--NOT ONE.

The bottom line is this. Nowhere in the Scriptures do the apostles appear as charlatans or mythmakers; rather, they are portrayed as simple, honest, and trustworthy men, speaking as eyewitnesses to the greatest event in history.

The only rational position is that they truly believed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and they knew without a doubt that He had risen from the grave.

The Witness of History

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

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)

But is this statement true? Is there no word about Jesus in secular records? Contrary to this view, 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

Tacitus was a Roman statesman and historian. He held several positions in the Roman government, including that of proconsul, or governor, of the provinces in Asia. Tacitus is also regarded as the "greatest historian" of ancient Rome. One of the crowning achievements of his 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. (*Annals* book 15 chapter 44)

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.

"If we apply to the New Testament, as we should, the same sort of criteria as we should apply to other ancient writings containing historical material, we can no more reject Jesus' existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned."

*Michael Grant, Atheist
Cambridge Historian*

Suetonius

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.

The observation made by Suetonius is in total agreement with the writings of the New Testament. Luke records 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. Furthermore, their writings reveal that He was an important part of history.

When noted author and historian H. G. Wells was asked who has left the greatest legacy on history, he replied, "by this test Jesus stands first."

Phlegon

The biblical Jesus is also written about by authors of less prominence. One such author was a man named Phlegon who is best known for his sixteen volume *Olympiads*. Phlegon was born about 80 A.D. and although this work is no longer in existence some parts of it have been preserved by prominent historians such as Eusebius and cited by other very credible sources. For example: Origin, a leading third century theologian and a man regarded as the father of biblical criticism, made reference to it.

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*.

"Now as a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that...the gospels are... not legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing."

~C. S. Lewis

Julius Africanus and Thallus

Julius Africanus (c. 160-c.240) was a Christian historian of the late 2nd and early 3rd century. He is important chiefly because of his influence on Eusebius as well as a plethora of later writers of church history. Africanus quotes the writings of a man named Thallus, a first century non-Christian historian that some scholars believe wrote just twenty years after the crucifixion thus making his writing the earliest reference to the historical Jesus. Africanus cites Thallus when explaining the reason for it being so dark during the day time on the day of Jesus' crucifixion:

An eclipse of the sun'unreasonably, as it seems to me unreasonably of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died." Julius Africanus, Chronography, 18.

The importance of this quote is two fold

- 1) It provides **non-Christian proof of Jesus' existence** and
- 2) It is yet another confirmation of the Bible's account of Jesus' crucifixion. The Bible states in reference to the time Jesus was executed:

"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour" (Mt. 27:45)

The "sixth hour" is noon and the ninth hour is 3:00PM. Thus we see Thallus explaining the odd occurrence of the sky being dark at noon during the crucifixion of Jesus as an eclipse. Africanus also quoted Phlegon when describing this event.

Lucian of Samosate

Lucian was born in Born 115 AD. He was a well-known Greek satirist and traveling lecturer. More than eighty works bear his name. He mocked Christians in his writing, however, when doing so he was providing evidence that Jesus was a real historical figure. Notice the following:

"He was second only to that one whom they still worship today, the man in Palestine who was crucified because he brought this new form of initiation into the world."

"Having convinced themselves that they are immortal and will live forever, the poor wretches despise death and most willingly give themselves to it. Moreover, that first lawgiver of theirs persuaded them that they are all brothers the moment they transgress and deny the Greek gods and begin worshipping that crucified sophist and living by his laws."

"They scorn all possessions without distinction and treat them as community property. They accept such things on faith alone, without any evidence. So if a fraudulent and cunning person who knows how to take advantage of a situation comes among them, he can make himself rich in a short time."

Although Lucian does not mention Jesus by name, there is no doubt he is speaking of Him as evidenced by the fact that he confirms: 1) that he was crucified in "Palestine," 2) had followers who believed in eternal life and 3) that they were all equal in Jesus Christ.

*"The historical evidence for Jesus himself is extraordinarily good.
From time to time people try to suggest that Jesus of Nazareth
never existed, but virtually all historians of whatever background
now agree that he did"*

*~Nicholas Thomas ("Tom") Wright
Prominent New Testament Scholar and author*

Despite protests to the contrary, well known historians such as Suetonius and Tacitus as well as more obscure historians such as Phlegon and Thallus 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.

Ancient Non-Christian Authors who Confirmed the Historicity of the Biblical Jesus

- Tacitus (ca. AD 55-120): Roman historian, *Annals*
- Suetonius (ca. AD 120): Roman historian, *Life of Claudius*
- Josephus (AD 37-97): Jewish historian, *Antiquities*
- Pliny the Younger (AD 112): Roman governor, *Epistles X*
- Jewish *Talmud* (commentary on Jewish law, completed AD 500)
- *Toledoth Jesu* (reflects early Jewish thought, completed fifth century AD)
- Lucian (second century AD): Greek satirist
- Thallus (ca. AD 52): Samaritan-born historian, *Histories*
- Mara Bar-Serapion (ca. AD 73): Letter
- Phlegon (ca. AD 80): historian, *Chronicles* (mentioned by Origen)

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, he became a great historian. Although he lived after the crucifixion of Jesus, 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.

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 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 reader'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, Origen 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 similar testimony regarding Jesus, who was of greater importance than the other two (p. 819).

"Those who have created the true historical record are not necessarily endorsing a Christian belief about Jesus - some are Christians, some are not. They are simply saying that a person recognizable as the Jesus of the gospels truly lived, taught, gained a reputation as a miracle-worker and was executed."

<http://www.is-there-a-god.info/belief/wasjesusreal.shtml>

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.

“Even the most bitter opponents of Christianity never expressed any doubt as to Jesus having really lived.”

*~Shlomo Pines
Israeli Scholar*

Whiston then added that all other historians who wrote for the next several centuries understood that Josephus was not a believer and that his 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

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

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, (61 AD – ca. 112 AD): better known as 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 Trajan to explain how he interrogated those he believed were Christians. Pliny related that if those he interrogated were not Christians they would recite an invocation to the gods and worship a statue of Trajan. This was done to prove their loyalty to Rome and their rejection of the emerging faith.

However, he also identified those who steadfastly held to their new religion and how they refused to yield to any form of coercion ("There is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians, into any of these compliances."). Pliny's then explained that his remedy to this defiance was execution.

"In the meanwhile, the method I have observed towards those who have denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their creed might be, I could at least feel not doubt that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy deserved chastisement."

Furthermore, he reported that in some cases, he would even torture the believer in an effort to gather information about the emerging Christian movement. In one such case, he wrote of two deaconesses who met this fate and 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 whose parents were pagans. However, after a study of the Old and New Testaments, Martyr converted to Christianity. He was ultimately executed during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius because he refused to offer sacrifices to the pagan gods. 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*" no longer exist, it was also referred to by Tertullian—giving it his tacit acknowledgement as an official Roman document.

It is also 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. Furthermore, these documents prove that his followers believed very precise details concerning His life and teachings as well as His crucifixion and resurrection.

... "In recent years, 'no serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus' or at any rate very few, and they have not succeeded in disposing of the much stronger, indeed very abundant, evidence to the contrary."

*~Michael Grant
Eminent historian of the Roman Empire*

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. Perhaps the atheist Michael Grant said it best when he conceded:

"To sum up, modern critical methods fail to support the 'Christ-myth-theory,' It has again and again been answered and annihilated by first rank scholars," (*Jesus An Historian's Review of the Gospels* London: Rigel, 2004, pp 199-200.

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 and prove incontrovertibly that Jesus was real and the beliefs of His Church genuine.

"Biblical scholars and classical historians now regard it [the theory that Jesus didn't exist] as effectively refuted."

*~Robert Van Voorst
Western Theological Seminary*

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

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

The Secular Record and the Messiah

- 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.

An Opportunity Spoiled by Truth

Disproving the resurrection could have been accomplished several ways. The enemies of Jesus could have: produced Jesus' body, produced testimony revealing a plot by Jesus' followers to stage His death, or 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.

Seven Reasons Historians are Confident Jesus Was a Real Historical Figure

From: *Jesus outside the New Testament*,
By Robert Van Voorst

1. The Apostle Paul did not say a lot about Jesus (an argument sometimes used by sceptics, but this is an argument from silence and therefore invalid without positive evidence). But Paul did know about Jesus, and was unlikely to write a lot of historical detail in letters.
2. The gospels are too early for invention (too many people would have remembered the real facts), and their accurate references to Palestinian geography would not have been possible if the stories were invented later.
3. The development of the early christians' understanding of Jesus which can be seen in the gospels (another argument sometimes used) is not sufficient to justify the belief that they were inventions.
4. No early opponents of Christianity, whether pagan or Jew, ever denied that Jesus truly lived, or even questioned it.
5. Scholars are generally agreed that references to Jesus in the Roman historian Tacitus (early second century) and the Jewish historian Josephus (late first century) are both genuine, though some parts of Josephus appear to be later additions.
6. Most arguments that Jesus wasn't a historical figure have come from people opposed to Christianity and thus not unbiased, whereas scholars of all viewpoints from atheists to Christians accept the historicity of Jesus.
7. Proponents of the mythical Jesus view have not been able to offer any credible hypothesis that explains the stories of Jesus and the birth of Christianity.

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 in extraordinary detail centuries before He lived. 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 and every one of them came true. 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 pronouncements 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 His 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 that follows 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
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
<u>Prophesied</u>	<u>His Crucifixion</u>	<u>Fulfilled</u>
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

<u>Prophesied</u>	<u>His Burial and Resurrection</u>	<u>Fulfilled</u>
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? Furthermore, 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. And despite what critics might claim, the proof of His existence is overwhelming.

"I don't think there's any serious historian who doubts the existence of Jesus We have more evidence for Jesus than we have for almost anybody from his time period."

*~Prof Bart Ehrman
University of North Carolina*

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.

"In total about one third of non-Christian sources date from the first century; a majority originate from no later than the mid second century."

*~Gary Habermas
An American historian, New Testament scholar and prolific author*

"These independent accounts prove that in ancient times even the opponents of Christianity never doubted the historicity of Jesus."

Encyclopedia Britannica

Today, those who deny the existence of the biblical Jesus must first reject incontrovertible evidence that 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—a truth that 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. But there is an even more important truth:

He is alive today.