

DEFENDABLE FAITH - ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

Did Jesus Really Live?

Introduction: Was there really such a person as Jesus of Nazareth, and do the gospels offer a historically accurate picture of His life? A careful study of the answer to these questions has led many a soul to come to believe in Jesus, not only as a real, _____ person, but as the Christ, the Son of God. The reason for this is that the evidence concerning the life of Jesus is absolutely overwhelming. We will look at three main areas.

EVIDENCE FROM EYEWITNESSES

- **John** _____, a traveling companion of Peter, wrote the first of the four gospels. Mark was not an eyewitness, but his account (humanly speaking) was based upon the eyewitness account of Peter.
- **Matthew**, also called Levi, a tax collector and disciple of Jesus, wrote a gospel after Mark. Matthew was of course an eyewitness to many of the events recorded in the gospel. Matthew was writing specifically to his own people, the _____, seeking to prove that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah foretold by the Scriptures.
- **Luke** was a physician and traveling companion to Paul. The facts of Jesus' life declared in many of Paul's letters (written in many cases _____ the gospels) were learned from the apostles, who were themselves eyewitnesses. Luke indicates he used other sources as well before he laid out an orderly explanation of the story told in the gospel that bears his name and in its sequel, the Book of Acts.
- **The authorship** of the above three gospels was absolutely _____ in the decades and centuries immediately following their writing. The fact that they agree with such precision in their testimony concerning Jesus is a remarkable occurrence in the recording of history. All three accounts are in perfect _____ even though they are written with different audiences in mind and from the eyewitness perspective of different individuals.
- **The date of the authorship** of the three synoptic gospels is also telling. Almost all scholars date the writing of these three from the late 50's to the 70's. The writing and distribution of these accounts so soon after Jesus' death and resurrection provides stirring evidence of the veracity of its testimony. The fact is that many people who were themselves eyewitnesses to many of the events recorded were still alive. If the events recorded in the gospels were not true, there would have been numerous objections. There were not.

- Finally we add to the list of eyewitness accounts the **Gospel of John**. John lived until near the end of the first century, yet no written contradiction of his testimony in his gospel was made.

EVIDENCE FROM HISTORIANS _____ OF THE GOSPELS

- **Josephus** was a Jewish historian who sided with Rome rather than commit suicide at Masada following the destruction of the temple. He was born in 37 A.D. so he was not an eyewitness of Jesus or His life, but he was contemporary with many people who were eyewitnesses, although they would have been a generation older than him. Josephus was not a Christian, yet he makes two distinct references to Jesus as a fact of Jewish history. In the first reference, Josephus refers to “_____, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ.”

Josephus affirmed that Jesus was the martyred leader of the church at Jerusalem, that He was a wise teacher with a large following, and that He had been crucified by Pilate. Because much of Josephus’ work has been corroborated through archaeological excavations, he is considered a _____ historian by most secular historians today.

- **Tacitus** was a _____ historian of the first century. He wrote of Nero’s blaming of the Christians for the fire in Rome in 64 A.D. In explaining who Christians were, Tacitus wrote of “Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition ... broke out not only in Judea ... but even in Rome” Not only does Tacitus thus record the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, but many believe makes a reference to people’s belief in the _____!
- **Other references** can also be found. Thallus wrote a history of the Mediterranean region in 52 A.D. that mentioned the _____ that encompassed the area on the day of the crucifixion.

Historian Gary Habermas, says that there are thirty-nine _____ sources documenting the life of Christ. In contrast to that, only nine ancient sources mention Tiberius Caesar, a Roman Emperor for twenty-two years!

To update my own understanding of the best answers for tough questions, I read a new book, ***Reflections on the Existence of God*** by **Richard E. Simmons III**, which I heartily recommend. Dr. Simmons said,

So abundant is the testimony pointing to Christ’s historical existence that Dr. F.F. Bruce, professor of Biblical criticism at the University of Manchester in England, says, “The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an _____ historian, as the historicity of Julius Caesar.”

Will Durant, the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian who wrote the most successful work of history, the eleven-volume *The Story of Civilization*, concludes his material on Christ this way: “No one reading these scenes can doubt the _____ of the figure behind them.

Most significantly, listen to the words of the great historian H.G. Wells: “I am a historian, I am not a _____, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.

EVIDENCE FROM ARCHAEOLOGY

- **Understanding what archaeology can and cannot do.**
 - Archaeology cannot _____ theology.
 - Archaeology can cast serious doubt about the veracity of a document or an author, if the things reported by the author can be shown by archaeological findings to be inaccurate.
 - Archaeology can also provide supporting evidence that a document is reliable and _____, if the geography and history it reports can be confirmed with archaeological findings.
- **What does archaeology show us concerning the writings of the New Testament, and in particular, about Jesus?**
 - About the Gospel of Luke
 - Luke is of particular importance because his gospel and Acts comprise about one fourth of the entire New Testament.
 - The consensus of both conservative and liberal scholars concerning Luke is that he is very _____ as a historian.
 - Several instances in which Luke was thought to be in error but proven by archaeology to be correct:
 - **Luke 3:1** “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and **Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,**”
 - ❖ Archaeological evidence had shown Lysanias to have been a ruler of Chalcis 50 years before this time, so Luke must be wrong.
 - ❖ Later archaeologists found an inscription from the time of Tiberius (A.D. 14 - 37) which names Lysanias as tetrarch in Abila near Damascus, just as Luke had said!

- ❖ There had been _____ rulers named Lysanias.
- Acts 17:6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.”
 - ❖ Luke uses the word politarchs to denote the _____ of the city.
 - ❖ Critics objected because they could find no such position listed in Roman documents.
 - ❖ Then an inscription was found on a first century _____, “In the time of the politarchs ...”
 - ❖ Since then more than 35 inscriptions that mention politarchs have been found.
- Luke 2:1-2 And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.
 - ❖ While the authenticity of such a census was well-documented in the Roman world, even the part about returning to one’s hometown to be registered, a question was often raised about whether the census occurred when Quirinius was governor of Syria.
 - ❖ The rest of the account tells us that Herod the Great was King of Judea.
 - ❖ The seeming problem was that records indicated that Herod died in 4 B.C. and Quirinius did not begin to rule Syria until A.D. 6.
 - ❖ The dilemma was solved when a coin was found that showed that Quirinius ruled Syria as proconsul from 11 _____ until after the death of Herod.
 - ❖ It could be that Quirinius ruled twice, or it could be two different men with the same name.
 - ❖ Once again, archaeology showed that Luke was correct after all.
- Many years ago, Sir William Ramsay set out to prove the inaccuracies of Luke’s writing by his own archaeological excavations. To his surprise, every discovery he made _____ rather than vilified the accuracy of Luke.

- John
 - Illustrative of the attacks against Luke's historical reliability is the reference in John 5 to the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem which he described as having _____ porticoes.
 - No such pool had ever been found in all of Jerusalem.
 - But now it has been found, _____ feet deep. It has five porticoes, just as John described!
 - Other discoveries have also verified John's writing:
 - The Pool of Siloam from John 9:7
 - Jacob's Well from John 4:12
 - Stone Pavement near the Jaffa Gate in John 19:13
- All the gospels
 - All four of the gospels speak of Nazareth, the home town of Mary and Joseph, and the town in which Jesus was raised after their return from Egypt.
 - Some critics suggested that Nazareth did not even exist until centuries _____ Jesus lived. They cited as evidence the fact that no ancient historians other than the gospel writers list Nazareth as a town in first century Galilee.
 - Archaeology has shown us the reason. Nazareth was an exceedingly small town, as was Bethlehem. Its population was probably only about _____ people. The site of the town was probably about 60 acres.
 - But now we have found first century records to the tiny city, and we have found the tombs of the ancient town just outside the city limits.
- Universally esteemed archaeologist John McRay, a scholar of impeccable credentials, was asked by Lee Strobel if he had "ever encountered an archaeological finding that blatantly contravened a New Testament reference." He answered, "Archaeology has not produced anything that is unequivocally a contradiction to the Bible. On the contrary, we've seen, there have been many opinions of skeptical scholars that have become codified into fact over the years but that archaeology has shown to be _____."
- Strobel's book, *The Case for Christ*, mentioned above provides additional details concerning archaeology and the New Testament as does Evidence that Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell. Both were used as sources for this study.