

The Case for Jesus



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The Big Question

“...who do you say that I am?”

Jesus to His disciples, Matthew 16:15

Jesus' Claims Found in the Gospels:

- Claimed to be the Messiah (“Christ”)
- Claimed to forgive sin
- Claimed to exist before Abraham
- Claimed to be one with the Father
- Claimed to be the only way to God
- Claimed to be God

If I made these claims...



The men in the white coats would take me away

If Jesus Claimed to Be God...

Three possibilities:

- ♦ He was not God but thought He was
 - ♦ He was not God, and knew he was not God
 - ♦ He was God
-
- ♦ Fourth possibility: He is a legend (never existed, or, if He did exist, His followers embellished His story to make Him God)

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER



HOW JESUS BECAME GOD

The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee



BART D. EHRMAN

A RESPONSE TO BART D. EHRMAN

MICHAEL F. BIRD + CRAIG A. EVANS + SIMON J. GATHERCOLE
CHARLES E. HILL + CHRIS TILLING



HOW GOD BECAME JESUS

THE REAL ORIGINS OF BELIEF IN JESUS' DIVINE NATURE

Could Jesus have been merely a good moral teacher?

“You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” C.S. Lewis

What's the Big Deal?

Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance, the only thing it cannot be is moderately important.

C.S. Lewis, Cambridge Professor,
former atheist

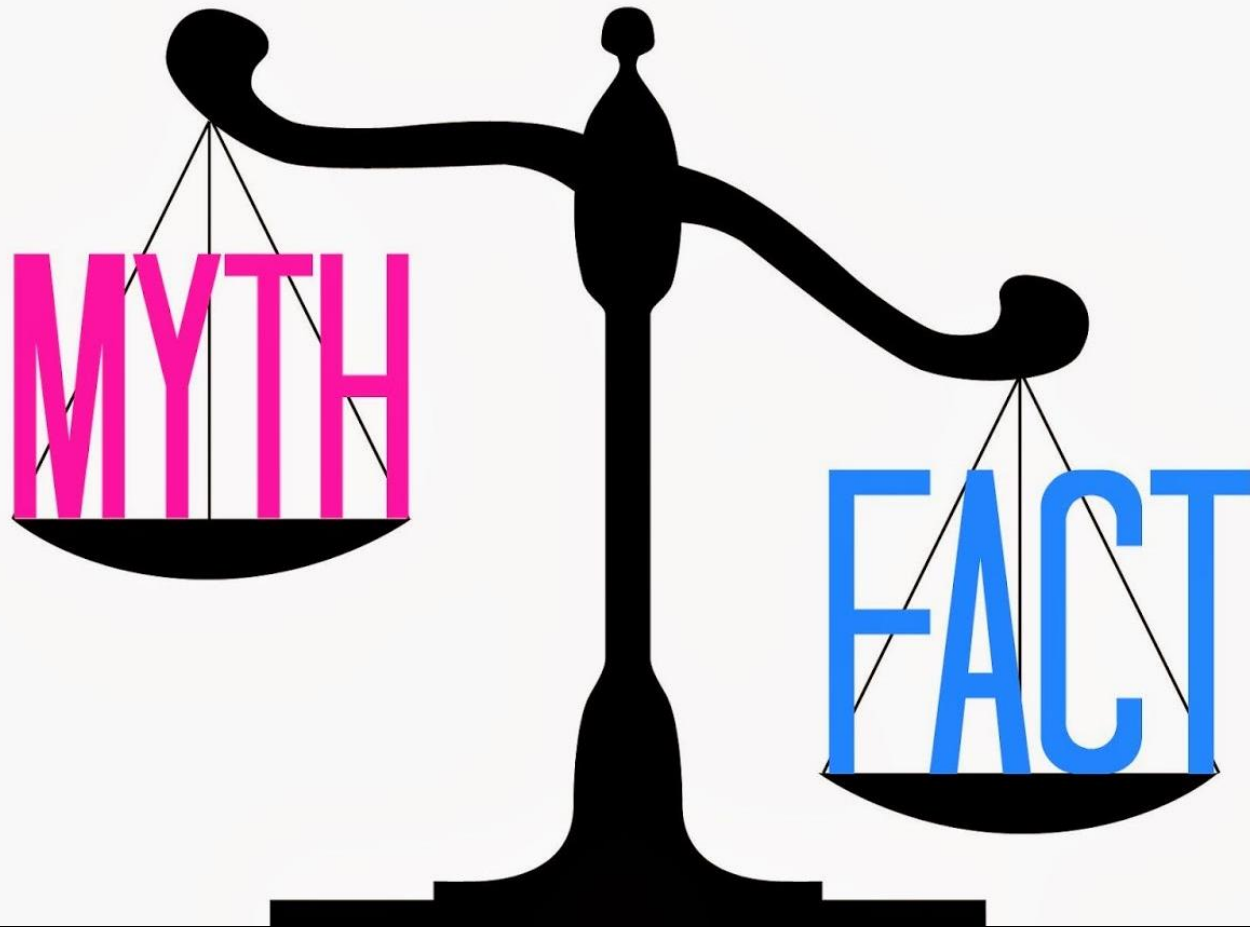
How Can We Know What is True? By Considering the Facts (not Faith)

Weigh the Evidence



- Did Jesus Live?
- Did Jesus Rise from the dead?
- Is Jesus the Son of God and God the Son?

Part One—Did Jesus Exist?



Sources for the Life of Jesus

- ♦ New Testament (27 books)

- Four biographies—the Gospels

- a Church History book—Acts of the Apostles

- 21 Letters to His followers—Epistles

- a Book of Prophecy—Revelation

- ♦ Secular historians and writers

- ♦ Early Christian writers

The “Jesus Myth” Theory

- Remsburg’s List
- What Scholars say about the Jesus Myth theory
"That (Jesus) was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be."

John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1995) p. 145

Do Early Secular Sources Confirm that Jesus Actually Existed?



Secular Writers Who Wrote About 1st Century Events

- ♦ Josephus (wrote near end of 1st c.)
- ♦ Tacitus (wrote at beginning of 2nd c.)
- ♦ Suetonius (wrote at beginning of 2nd c.)
- ♦ Pliny the younger (beginning of 2nd c.)
- ♦ Lucian of Samosata (middle of 2nd c.)
- ♦ Thallus (wrote near middle of 1st c.)

These writers should have made reference to
Jesus--how many did?

ALL OF THEM!

- Josephus--two references to Jesus
- Tacitus--refers to Jesus (“Christus”), Pilate and Christians
- Suetonius--refers to Jesus and Christians
- Pliny--refers to Christ and to Christians
- Mara bar Serapion--refers to Jesus
- Lucian of Samosata--refers to Jesus
- Thallus--refers to the darkness during Jesus’ crucifixion

Josephus

“At this time there appeared Jesus, a wise man []. For he was a doer of amazing deeds, a teacher of persons who receive truth with pleasure. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. [] And when Pilate condemned him to the cross, the leading men among us having accused him, those who loved him from the first did not cease to do so. [] And to the present tribe of Christians, named after this person, has not disappeared.” *Antiquities*

18.63-64

Tacitus, A.D. 110
Annals, Book 15, ch. 34

“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 hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...”

Suetonius, A.D. 115

“As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus he expelled them from Rome.” *Life of Claudius*, 25.4

“Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.” *Life of Nero*, 16.2

Pliny the Younger, A.D. 112

“They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word...” *Epistles*, 10:96

Mara bar Serapion

A Syrian named Mara Bar-Serapion wrote to his son Serapion, sometime after A.D. 73:

“What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? . . . Nor did the wise King die for good; he lived on in the teaching which He had been given.”

Lucian of Samosata

- Lucian of Samosata, b. A.D. 120, satirist
- Refers to Christ as “. . . the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world” and referred to Christians as “Worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.”

The Passing Peregrinus

Thallus

- Roman historian, wrote in A.D. 52 (none of his writings exist today)
- Julius Africanus, a Christian writing in A.D. 221, refers to Thallus as trying to explain away the darkness during Jesus' crucifixion:

“Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun-- unreasonably, as it seems to me.”

Conclusion regarding the Historical Jesus from Secular Sources

“These independent accounts prove that in ancient times even the opponents of Christianity never doubted the historical accuracy of Jesus...”

Encyclopedia Britannica, 15 Ed. 1974, p. 145

Evidence of the Historical Jesus from Early Christian Writers

- ♦ Papius (60-135)
- ♦ Polycarp (69-155)
- ♦ Clement (30-100)
- ♦ Ignatius (35-110)
- ♦ Irenaeus (130?-202)
- ♦ Tertullian (160-225)

Citations of the Gospels by Early Christian Writers

- Clement of Rome cites Mt, John, 1 Cor. A.D. 95-97
- Ignatius cites six of Paul's letters, A.D. 110
- Polycarp cites all four Gospels, Acts and most of Paul's letters between A.D. 110-150
- Origen (ca. 185-254) cites the Gospels 9,231 times in his writings

Summary of Case for Jesus, Part 1— Did Jesus Exist?

- ♦ Sources for his life and works are without equal in antiquity
- ♦ Even skeptics conclude His crucifixion is one of best-established facts of history

Conclusion: Jesus actually lived

Case for Jesus, Part 2

Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?

What is the Consensus of Scholars?

- Secular and Religious scholars who engage in “Jesus Studies” have considered all available historical sources
- These scholars in the field of Jesus Studies have reached a consensus

What Scholars Agree on Concerning the Life of Jesus

- Jesus died by crucifixion
- The disciples were in a state of despair
- Jesus' tomb was empty
- Disciples believe they saw the bodily resurrected Jesus with their own eyes
- The resurrection is the central teaching of the early church
- There was early proclamation of resurrection

Making a Case for the Resurrection Using “Minimal Facts”

- (1) “facts” must be well evidenced
- (2) “facts” must be agreed upon by most scholars studying the subject

Facts Accepted by 99% of Scholars

- (1) Jesus died by crucifixion
- (2) the disciples believed that He rose from the dead and appeared to them
- (3) Paul, a persecutor of the early church was converted when he believed he had seen the risen Christ
- (4) James, the skeptical brother of Jesus was converted when he believed he had seen the risen Christ

The Fact that Jesus Died by Crucifixion

- Stated in all four gospels
- Mentioned by several secular sources--
Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, Mara Bar-Serapion
and the Talmud
- Even skeptic John Dominic Crossan writes,
"That he was crucified is as sure as anything
historical can ever be."

The Fact that the Disciples Believed Jesus Rose from the Dead

- I Corinthians chapter 15 is solid evidence supporting the disciples' belief that Jesus rose from the dead.
- Apostolic preaching focused on Jesus' resurrection as proof He was the Messiah

The Fact that Paul was Converted After Seeing What He Believed was the Resurrected Jesus

- Acts chapters 9 and 22 give Paul's account
- He was a devout Jew and persecutor of the church, not someone easily converted
- His testimony and secular sources support that he was persecuted (and eventually martyred) for his belief in the risen Jesus

The Fact that James was Converted after Seeing what he Believed was the Resurrected Jesus

- James, the half brother of Jesus, was a devout Jew who was skeptical about Jesus' Messiahship, not someone easily converted
- His testimony and secular sources support that he was persecuted (and eventually martyred) for his belief in the risen Jesus

Another Fact Accepted by
75% of Scholars

Jesus' tomb was found empty.

How Close Can We Get to the Event of the Resurrection?

- Gospels were written 10-65 years after Jesus' crucifixion
- Is there a way to get closer to the events?

YES!

(the Creed found in 1st Corinthians 15:3-4)

When Was the Creed Developed that Paul Cites in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4?

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians—AD 55

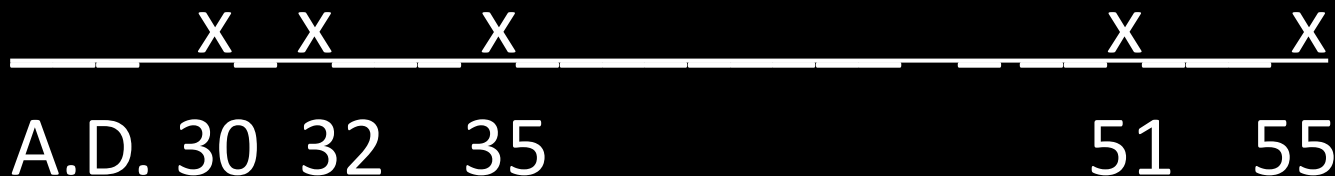
Paul's first visit to the Corinthians—AD 51

Paul in Jerusalem when he rec'd material—AD 35

Paul's conversion—AD 32

Creed developed—AD 30-32

Jesus' crucifixion-AD 30



Conclusion of Scholars

“...that is why I, as an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again leaving an empty tomb behind him.”

British Scholar N.T. Wright

“It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus’ death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ.” Gerd Ludemann

Case for Jesus, Part Three

Jesus' Identity—Son of God and God the Son?

- What did Jesus say about Himself?
- What did His followers say about Him?
- What did His enemies say about Him?
- What did early secular sources say about Him?

What Jesus Said about Himself

- “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30)
- “He that has seen me has seen the Father.” (Jn 14:9)
- “Before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58)
- “I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except by me.” John 14:6
- “Unless you believe that I am, you shall die in your sins.” John 8:24
- “I am the resurrection and the life.” John 11:25

What Did Jesus' Followers Say?

- He is the Creator (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16)
- He is the “only begotten God” (John 1:18)
- He claimed prerogatives of deity (Mark 2:5-7)
- He is Lord and God (John 20:28)

What Did Jesus' Enemies Say?

He made Himself out to be God (John 10:33)

He made Himself equal with God (John 5:18)

“Never did a man speak the way this man speaks.”

John 7:46

“Truly this man was the Son of God.” Mark 15:39

What Did Early Christians Say About Jesus?

- Ignatius (A.D. 30-110): “For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary.” *Letter to the Ephesians, 18:2*
- Irenaeus (A.D. 115-200), “...Christ Jesus, our Lord and God and Savior...” *Against Heresies, X.1*
- Theophilus (A.D. 116-181): “In like manner also the three days which were before the luminaries, are types of the Trinity, of God, and His Word, and His wisdom.” *Epistle to Autolycus, II, xv*

Early Christians on the Identity of Jesus

- Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) “[Jesus] was God, Son of the only, unbegotten, unutterable God.” *Dialogue with Trypho*, 126
- Tatian (A.D. 110-172) “...God was born in the form of man.” *Address to the Greeks*, 21
- Melito (d. 190, Bishop of Sardis): “He rose from the dead as God, being by nature God and man.” *On the Passover*, 8-9

What a Governor and Secular Historian Said About Jesus

Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia, writing to Emperor Trajan, A.D. 113, regarding the problem he was having with Christians:

“They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god....” *Letters, 10.96-97*

Summary of Jesus' Identity

- From Jesus' own words, His followers, His enemies, early Christians and a Roman governor,

Jesus was believed to be the Son of God
and God the Son

Summation

Based upon the evidence presented:

- Jesus is an historical person
- He died on a cross and rose from the dead
- He claimed to be and was believed to be the Son of God and God the Son

The Verdict

- Therefore, I ask anyone who has heard the facts to bring the only Verdict supported by the evidence:

Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:16

The Defense Rests



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