

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

1) How do we know that a person called Jesus ever existed?

- A) We know Jesus existed the same way we know that Alexander the Great existed. There are historical records and documents that testify to his existence.
- B) Most of what we know about Jesus is contained in biographies that were written in the 1st century.
 - (1) These biographies (known as the Gospels) are the testimony of those who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' life and ministry.
 - (2) These biographies were written only a few decades after Jesus' ascension and thus cannot be explained away as legends. "In fact, the fundamental beliefs in Jesus' miracles, resurrection, and deity go back to the very dawning of the Christian movement."¹

2) Is there historical evidence for Jesus' existence outside the Bible?

- A) Around the year 93, a Jewish historian called Josephus mentioned Jesus' name twice in his book, *Antiquities of the Jews*.
 - (1) "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 receive 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" (*Antiquities* 18.63).
 - (2) "Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim 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* 20.197).
- B) About 20 years later, Tacitus, a Roman historian, wrote a book surveying the history of Rome. In it he described how Nero (a Roman emperor) "punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called)." He went on to write that "their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilatus" (*Annals* 15.44).
- C) Suetonius, in his work *The Twelve Caesars*, specifically mentioned Christ and His followers. He wrote, for example: "Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous

¹ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), p. 259. See also Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* and Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels*.

disturbance at the instigation of Chrestus [Jesus], he [Emperor Claudius] expelled them from the city” (*Claudius* 25.4; note that in Acts 18:2, Luke mentioned this expulsion by Claudius).

- D) “We have better historical documentation for Jesus than for the founder of any other ancient religion” (Edwin Yamauchi). One expert documented 39 ancient sources that corroborate more than 100 facts concerning Jesus’ life, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection. Seven secular sources and several early creeds concern the deity of Jesus, a doctrine “definitely present in the earliest church,” according to scholar Gary Habermas.²

3) Can we trust the biographies of Jesus?

- A) The biographies of Jesus stand up under even the most skeptical scrutiny. The writers were honest and willing to include difficult-to-explain material; they didn’t allow bias to unduly color their reporting of the actual events. The harmony among the gospels on essential facts, coupled with divergence on some details, lends historical credibility to the accounts. In short, the gospels pass these eight evidential tests:³

- Intention: did the writers intend to accurately preserve history?
- Ability: were the writers able to record events with accuracy?
- Character: are the writers reliable witnesses?
- Consistency: do the biographies agree with each other?
- Bias: any vested interest by the writers to color their writings?
- Cover-up: do the gospels include embarrassing material?
- Corroboration: can the gospels be independently verified?
- Adverse Witness: were others present who could have corrected the biographies if they had been false?

4) Were Jesus’ biographies reliably preserved over the last 2,000 years?

- A) Compared with other ancient documents, there are an unprecedented number of New Testament manuscripts, and they can be dated very close to the original writings. The modern NT is 99.5% free of textual discrepancies, with no major Christian doctrines in doubt.⁴

5) Does archeology confirm the biblical account of Jesus?

- A) Yes it does—in fact, no archeological discovery has ever disproved a biblical reference. Further, archeology has established that Luke, who wrote about ¼ of the NT, was an especially careful historian. The Gospels truly are an accurate and trustworthy source of information about the life of Jesus.⁵

² Ibid., p. 260.

³ Ibid., pp. 39–51, 259–260.

⁴ Ibid., p. 260.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 260–261.

6) Did Jesus really die?

- A) The biographies of Jesus record that He was crucified on a cross, died, was buried, and rose from the dead. Was Jesus' death a sham? If you analyze the medical and historical data, it is clear that Jesus could not have survived the gruesome rigors of crucifixion, much less the gaping wound that pierced His lung and heart. Roman executioners were grimly efficient, knowing they themselves would face death if any of their victims were to come down from the cross alive.⁶

7) Was Jesus' body really gone from the tomb?

- A) Jesus appeared to His disciples no less than seventeen times after His resurrection. "Five of these occurred during the first Easter Sunday, and six more took place between that time and His ascension. The remaining six happened between Pentecost and the completion of the Bible"⁷ (John 20:11-29; 21:1-23; Mark 16:9-18; Matt 28:9-20; Luke 24:13-53; 1 Cor 15:5-7; Acts 1:3-9; 7:55-56; 9:3-6; Gal 1:12; Rev 1:12-20). At one time He appeared to more than 500 people at once (1 Cor 15:6)! "Taken as a whole, the appearances are of such various character and to so many people under so many different circumstances that the proof of the resurrection of Christ is as solid as any historical fact that could be cited in the first century."⁸

8) What is the significance of Jesus' resurrection?

- A) Jesus' resurrection is the validation of His claims and predictions:
- He is God (John 10:30-33).
 - He is the Son of God (Matt 16:13-20; John 5:17-18).
 - He is the only way to God (John 14:6).
 - He is the source of eternal life (John 17:3).
 - He is the source of truth (John 14:6).
 - He is the Messiah (John 4:25-26).
 - He would be tortured and killed (Matt 16:21; 20:18-19).
 - He would rise from the dead on the 3rd day after His death (Matt 20:18-19).
- B) The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith (1 Cor 15:14-17), a faith that is founded on historical fact.

⁶ Ibid., p. 262.

⁷ H. L. Willmington, *Willmington's Guide to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), p. 628.

⁸ Ibid., p. 629.