christian advance archives

# Of first importance – 4/26/22 - Did Jesus Really Exist?

**Of First Importance**

While watching a podcast the other day I noticed the comment thread take a disturbing line of thought. One particular troll seemed convinced that Jesus never existed and refused to entertain any information to the contrary. This pulled my mind to a familiar verse in Hebrews 11:6:

***And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.[[1]](#footnote-1)***

Faith was obviously impossible for this person, which according to the words above, salvation had eluded them. They refused to believe Jesus ever lived.

Just an elementary look at facts will clear this up. Believing Jesus was a real historical figure is of first importance for anyone investigating Jesus. They may grapple with this understanding depending on how much they have listened to the secular world.

As with all investigation, it is far more beneficial to get a bird’s eye view than a worm’s eye view. While flying into Washington D.C. one can get a lay of the land. Flying high overhead, you get to view the famous monuments and buildings and their relationship with one another. It gives a more complete understanding and a clearer picture than had we entered the nation’s capital by railway. History gives you a bird’s eye view and history will play a large role in this argument addressing our topic, because Jesus is a real historical figure.

**Jesus Really Did Exist!**

Orthodox Christian theology holds that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He actually was born into the world, just as any other human being, with a real, historical mother. He actually did walk this earth, teach, preach and heal. Jesus did die on a cross for the sins of the whole world. Jesus really was buried in a tomb. Factually, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. His disciples visually watched Him rise to heaven and currently, He really does have the position of authority in Heaven and intercedes for His followers.[[2]](#footnote-2) You can say these claims are false but it is on you to prove their fabrication. These claims have historical weight. Our journey here will give some of the proof necessary for a reasonable position that Jesus really did exist. A logical intellectual stand.

Of first importance is to take the Word of God at face value. Is there any reason why we should not believe what it tells us about the life of Jesus? Has the Bible proven to be a faulty document that cannot be believed? Let’s take a look at some circumstantial evidence, some objective facts and finish with a personal encounter. That is, if the reader is honestly seeking what is true and what is false. This does not give weight to what one feels to be true or what one desires to be true. All we will look into is what *is* true.

**Subjective & Circumstantial Facts**

The Biblical testimony about Jesus lists His personality, character and the events in time and space in which they happened. This includes all the “I say” and “I am” statements in the four Gospels. He is a real person acting within human history. In fact, there is not one statement in canonical scripture that alludes to Jesus not being a real historical figure.

Jesus’ statements did astonish, amaze and even illicit fear from the recorded crowds, groups and individuals who heard Him. This reaction is completely unnecessary if the record is of a non-existent mythical figure. He speaks with sincerity, transparency and holds nothing back from His listeners. This is a disclosure which is unnecessary if the person speaking actually does not exist. From His disclosures, the reader can discern that Jesus doesn’t have any one particular character trait which outshines another. This is not true for any other ancient historical figure, especially one of legend or ancient god-like status. If Jesus was a fabled figure, we would expect Him to be described in the same way as all the others of ancient times. We don’t!

No human being had accomplished perfect living up to the time of Jesus. Jesus then lived a perfect life, in the eyes of God, which is recorded in all four Gospels. He lived out a sinless, serving and surrendered life to the Father. A perfect life could not be dreamed of, only modeled by a perfect person and then recorded by fallen people, as they observe it. The record of Jesus’ life transcends human experience in many ways. All the authors can do is draw upon it. Not invent it.

Testimony from the Gospels can either be believed or not believed. However, the fact is that we have a written record of someone named Jesus and numerous details about his life. Within an historical account, we read Jesus visited the Temple with His parents around the time He was twelve years old. He grew up to be a carpenter or wood worker. As Jesus is described to the reader it becomes clear that Jesus observes the world around Him. Those observations are expressed in teachings called parables. Jesus studied nature as well as studied Scripture. The details in which He knows both of these indicate He knows God and the principles of God’s kingdom.

This is not some freakish being who suddenly shows up upon the scene, much like the unclean spirits do. No, Luke describes a progression of natural development as a fully functional human being. Jesus grew physically, socially, mentally and even spiritually as he naturally aged.[[3]](#footnote-3) In fact, there is a big deal made about His birth into the world.[[4]](#footnote-4) They express supernatural circumstances but a natural delivery from a human mother.

A brief view of His ministry has another historical figure, John the Baptizer attested to by multiple ancient historical voices.[[5]](#footnote-5) The story has John pointing out Jesus to a crowd of onlookers and participants in a historical baptism.[[6]](#footnote-6) There is no reason to conclude otherwise. Only if you choose to. And if you choose to, what are you basing that understanding on? Feelings? Anger? Frustration with organized religion? Certainly not upon the recorded facts.

This Jesus from the town of Nazareth, chose twelve other historical figures.[[7]](#footnote-7) Those twelve walked with Him for three years. By all accounts, they were an amazing three years of being discipled by the incarnate God.[[8]](#footnote-8) After Jesus’ death, these disciples fan out around the known world and testify about their relationship with a real historical figure who redeemed the world.[[9]](#footnote-9) Many others went on to testify as well. A wedded couple could testify to a miracle done at their wedding by a living, breathing guest.[[10]](#footnote-10) People at odds with Jesus could testify of His actions driving them out of the revered Temple.[[11]](#footnote-11) A Pharisee named Nicodemus could share of his personal theological discussion with this Jewish Messiah.[[12]](#footnote-12) An outcast woman in a backwater town could witness to the fact that this Rabbi told her everything she ever did.[[13]](#footnote-13) She had just met Him but He knew everything about her. Face to face He spoke to her.

The towns of Galilee were full of convinced and unconvinced crowds. Many in Nazareth rejected Him.[[14]](#footnote-14) People of Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida knew Him well.[[15]](#footnote-15) He had personally chosen many of His disciples from these fishing towns. A myth developed over time? Absolutely not! Those whom He healed from demonic spirits, blindness and leprosy could all tell you exactly who He is. Those who were miraculously fed on a hillside knew a full stomach, the mute could talk, the deaf could hear and the lame could walk again, after an historical encounter with this Jewish man in his thirties.

Looking into His ministry one can see He encountered friend and foe. A large section of the religious and political leadership of the Jewish people opposed Him and His ministry.[[16]](#footnote-16) These would be typical voices which claim that this person never lived or was a made-up mythical character. There is no record in history that this was the case. Not one ever said Jesus never existed. Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Priests and the High Priest all take action against a living human being walking the earth in order to malign and destroy His ministry and Him personally. As I will discuss later, they accomplished the later, but only for three days.[[17]](#footnote-17)

There are written elements that speak to the historicity of Jesus the Messiah. In one statement, another historical figure states over five-hundred people witnessed a resurrected Jesus. The author even encourages the readers to go ask them, and hear for themselves if what he is telling them isn’t true.[[18]](#footnote-18) Likewise, after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension into Heaven, a watershed moment in history happens. The Holy Spirit enters into Jesus’ followers at a historical event, in real time and space, with world changing consequences.[[19]](#footnote-19) Not only do the four Gospels record His life but the Book of Acts, written as an accurate historical record, records the immediate results of His life.

These accounts were not taken lightly. Luke even tells his readers he has put in the work and done the research.[[20]](#footnote-20) Reader, there is no reason not to believe what you are being told. The testimony of the early church and two-thousand years after, speak to billions of people having encountered this Jewish carpenter, itinerant preacher and Savior. Just think of the chain of disciples throughout the ages. Jesus, a real person, disciples John, a real person, who disciples Polycarp, a real person, who then teaches Irenaeus, a real person, then Hippolytus and so on.[[21]](#footnote-21) There is zero evidence that these people dedicated their lives to an imaginary figure.

Jesus came for a purpose. That purpose was to redeem fallen humankind through being a perfect sacrifice and a risen Savior. Jesus was physically put to death and all the details of His crucifixion point to this as being fact.[[22]](#footnote-22) Jesus then had to bodily rise from the grave. All the details of His resurrection point to this as being a fact.[[23]](#footnote-23) There is no body or bones, not because He was a myth but because He really did rise and ascend.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Ordinances of the Church have included the repetitive “remembering” of Jesus at the Eucharist.[[25]](#footnote-25) Do you remember something that never happened? Jesus even calls His disciples to remember the events they have joined Him in to bolster their faith.[[26]](#footnote-26) Remembrance is historical by nature. It really did happen in the past and it is something to be remembered. A real-life Jesus fed thousands of people in a miraculous way. Included in the words of remembrance are other terms like “I am.” A historical governor named Pilate, asked a historical figure named Jesus, if He is a king, in a historical trial, in the historical city of Jerusalem.[[27]](#footnote-27) Is the reader to come to the conclusion that it is all a fable? Would any reasonable person read the account and come to the conclusion it is legend?

Think of the people who lived at this time. The Gospels record family, friends, acquaintances, followers and enemies. The argument against a historical figure breaks down if literally hundreds of people have to successfully keep a lie and continue to tell it. Chuck Colson rightly observes,

***“I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified, they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren’t true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world – and they couldn’t keep a lie for three weeks. You’re telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”[[28]](#footnote-28)***

One has to believe Jesus’ family members had an imaginary brother. Riots broke out over an imaginary radical. Life change was brought on by psychosis? The historical events of Apostles healing and raising the dead with a new supernatural power finds their origin in a lie? Preposterous!

Jesus’ knowledge speaks of His reality. Again, the Bible describes a wise man, but more than that, a teacher with knowledge not of this world. His teachings ran contrary to the teachings of the world, our own fallen nature and the legalism of His culture. Knowing you could be killed for such things, why would the authors write them down at all? Because they really were spoken.

People followed Him out of genuine love but also from alternative motives. Not only did those who followed receive miracles, wonders and signs, which could easily be discredited, but many also received supernatural gifts not of this world. Gifts from the Spirit.[[29]](#footnote-29) Fruit from the Spirit.[[30]](#footnote-30) On the other hand, people actually stopped following Him due to the hardness of His statements and the demands of a disciple.[[31]](#footnote-31) Why did hundreds stop following Him? Because He was a real person, who said real things that drove real people away.

**Objective Reality**

Mathematically the chances are zero that Jesus was not the Messiah.[[32]](#footnote-32) That is a bold claim and I will just give you a few reasons here, but there is much more proof which can be gathered. If Jesus was a lie, it has ramifications over thousands of years. One can find this information is easily accessible through numerous sources.

The Old and New Testament is written by over forty authors. The authors involved lived on at least three continents and wrote in at least three languages. God’s involvement spans far longer, but the authors involved wrote over a one-thousand five-hundred-year time span. This is a fact. The main focus of all sixty-six books of canonical scripture is God redeeming mankind. This means that the lie would have needed to be spun for over a millennium and a half with no flaw in the story.[[33]](#footnote-33) This is not plausible!

Those who planned the lie, knowing what they were promoting wasn’t true, would have to have been willing to be executed for the lie. This is so outlandish it is impossible to hold as a reasonable theory. People do not die for what they know to be false. They are martyrs for what they believe to be real. Fox’s Book of Martyrs can attest to this.[[34]](#footnote-34) Jesus was the real Messiah, who really was prophesied by real prophets, who really walked the earth and fulfilled the prophecies foretelling His coming. This is attested to by the New Testament authors.

It is a fact that human history has been divided into two main categories of history. The first category can be known as B.C.E. or “before the common era.” It had been known as B.C. for almost all of the past two-thousand-years being referred to as “before Christ.” The second main category of time in history is referred to as C.E. or “the common era.” Again, for almost two-thousand-years it was referred to as “Anno Domini” or “the year of our Lord.” Thus, the historical character of Jesus Christ and His birth was accepted as the dividing point in human history. This is fact. It is hard to believe an imaginary figure dreamed up in history would be so impressive as to divide history for all time.

Are there any voices in history outside of the Bible who testify to Jesus’ real existence around the time of the first century? Yes, there is. Here are some undeniable facts. If you care to delve further Earl E. Cairns is a good source.[[35]](#footnote-35) Which highlights another support for Jesus’ existence, that modern historians hold Jesus as a real historical figure, not an imaginary legend.

History, as mentioned above, gives testimony to Jesus being a real person. Our calendar is one testimony but another observable testimony is the life transformation of believers. They really exist and credit a risen Savior for their transformation out of alcoholism, pornography, abuse, crime, drugs, anger, hatred, prejudice and many other sinful lifestyles. If Jesus was a fairytale no results would occur in having a relationship with Him. History also testifies to this historical figure by means of doctrines, theology, creeds and observances. In fact, think of the very existence of the global Church, more numerous than any other religion. Was Christianity brought forth by lore? Impossible.

**The Testimony of Josephus**

Josephus’ historical account of Jewish life has proved true. He simply states what he has investigated and come to know as true. ***“James, the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ”.*** Also, describing this historical Jesus as ***“a wise man”*** who was condemned to be crucified by Pilate. Historians by their definition tell you what happened in history. In time and space. Real people and real events. Josephus was also present at the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.[[36]](#footnote-36) He writes descriptively of the event. Christians believe passages like Mark 13 include Jesus foretelling the destruction. Historically, it appears the disciples followed Jesus’ advice for those who are in Judea to flee. Why follow the advice of one who never really was? Similarly, Jesus gave the commission to go make disciples.[[37]](#footnote-37) Why leave your life, plans and dreams to carry out the call of a pretend preacher? Factually, they did flee. Factually, they did go make disciples. This is because a real Jesus walked the earth two-thousand years ago. The behavior of the disciples matched the teaching of an actual person.

**The Testimony of Tacitus**

Take Tacitus’ word for it. He clearly writes in his annuls, ***“Christus who in the reign of Tiberius suffered death by a sentence of the Procurator, Pontius Pilate.”[[38]](#footnote-38)***

**The Testimony of Suetonius**

Suetonius, no friend of Christians or Jews, claims Jews were ejected from the city of Rome because of civil unrest over a person named Chrestos (Christ). There is no indication Suetonius believes Christ to be a fictional character. A general reading is to the contrary. The following of a real person brought about real turmoil to a real city.[[39]](#footnote-39)

**The Testimony of Pliny**

The pronouncement of Pliny writing to Emperor Trajan around 112 A.D. asking advice on how to deal with a sect called Christians. Christians is a term meaning little Christs. Furthermore, think of all the actual art in the catacombs depicting Jesus in historical settings, drawn by little Christs.[[40]](#footnote-40)

**The Testimony of Lucian**

Lucian’s description of Jesus describes a man, ***“who was crucified in Palestine”*** for the reason of starting, ***“this new cult.”*** This is a description of human endeavor, not a felonious phantom of lore. Lucian even goes on to point out Christians are the group of followers, ***“worshipping that crucified sophist.”*** [[41]](#footnote-41) Lucian is no friend of Jesus but obviously establishing the fact of Jesus.

You can loathe Christianity and its founder but you cannot reasonably or logically, deny the existence of the founder. There is too much evidence establishing Jesus’ birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and growth of His followers.

In addition, there is Apocryphal writings that have historical value. The catacombs are full of the symbols of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Father. There are images of the Dove, Ichthus or the Fish symbol, an Anchor and other symbols that really exist giving testimony to a historic Jesus and the impact of His life.

**Personal Encounter**

According to a recent release of World Christian Database under global religions it lists 2,559,875,000 Christians around the globe.[[42]](#footnote-42) Does their testimony matter? I say, “Yes!” Why? Because Christianity is a historical religion. It is anchored in actual human history. That history has been so overwhelmingly powerful that the largest religion in the world is Christianity. It could have easily been disproven by alternate historical facts. It wasn’t.

If you would take only ten percent of this number as died-in-the-wool true believers, that would mean roughly 256 million people would claim encountering a risen Jesus through a spiritual encounter of some kind. I’ll ask again. Does their testimony matter? Is their testimony not real? Is it not historical?

**Testimony of a Changed Life**

One historical account goes like this. A middle-class young man grew up in the turmoil and cultural clash of the nineteen-sixties and seventies. A dysfunctional family dynamic. We might call this person a juvenile delinquent or a troubled youth. He was an athlete. Poor student. But financially well off.

An alleged football scout took this young man under his wing. He excelled and began taking trips farther away from home to work on his athletic skills. During these trips he was groomed and molested by this football scout. With no moral compass and in his early teens, he kept these actions quiet. One day during an attempted rape he heard a voice that motivated him to act. The voice spoke one word, “Stop!” He could discern that this was not his voice, the one attempting the rape did not hear the voice, and his testimony states the tone of the voice was, “As if it, the voice, was being hurt in some way by what was taking place. I didn’t know who it was.”

This secular boy had heard God speaking to him in a time of crisis, which emboldened him to physically reject, fight off and leave that evil, incendiary relationship forever. He only came to know it was the voice of God as he later processed God’s providence in his life.

A few years of guilt and shame weighed upon this young man. It seemed too painful to bear and unable to be expressed. At his home, walking down the hallway to his parent’s room, his father’s 410 was located in the bedroom closet. Taking it back to his bedroom, he sat down on his bed, loaded it, put the barrel in his mouth and reached down to trip the trigger. The same voice he had heard a couple of years ago spoke to him again, “Don’t.” This time it was a quiet, peaceful whisper. He said, “This time there was a discernable loving tone to it.”

It was a life changing, life extending moment. Returning to school an Art Teacher took notice that this was a troubled youth. The teacher showed interest, encouragement and guidance in addition to his Christian faith. One day the teacher invited the student to his home to finish a silk-screening project. This would give the teacher a chance to learn more about what was going on in this young man’s head and heart.

The student opened up, shared his life and desire to no longer go on if his life was irreparably damaged. The teacher introduced him to Jesus, told of forgiveness and the removal of guilt and shame. The teacher expressed a personal relationship that they had with Jesus and the relationship this young man could have with Jesus. That evening, this young man encountered a risen Jesus. He received forgiveness of his past sins and surrendered to Jesus’ lordship over his life. This was a real-life historical event in identifiable time and location. This person was not looking for Jesus. Jesus came to him.

A life-long relationship over the past 43 years have been a consistent daily interaction with this Jesus of Nazareth that the ancient historians spoke of. His testimony gives no reason to doubt, unless I bring a bias to the review of his life. There are hundreds of millions of testimonies like this one from people all over the world claiming they too have encountered a risen Jesus Christ. God enters time and space to allow us to have a relationship with Him. He provided the way, through a Nazarene carpenter, traveling preacher, healer of diseases and teacher extraordinaire. Jesus actually lived. Actually died. Actually, rose from the dead and ascended to Heaven. Today, He is genuinely involved in people’s lives.

It is unreasonable and illogical to make the claim that Jesus never existed. There is too much hard evidence to the contrary. This is but a fraction of the evidence, but it is factual. Opponents may come to the conclusion that they do not believe Jesus was who He said He was. But these opponents cannot honestly form an argument that Jesus never existed. Those who make this claim, that Jesus is a mythical figure-head for a religion, and do not research the evidence with integrity, have no firm foundation to their claim. Their assertion collapses under the weight of reality.

1. Holy Bible, *New Revised Standard Version*, Oxford University Press: New York, 1989*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Apostle’s Creed. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gospel of Luke 2:52. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. Chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “John the Baptist”, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\_the\_Baptist. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gospel of Mark 1:1-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Gospel of Matthew 2:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. 3:13-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Book of Acts. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Gospel of John 2:1-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Gospel of Mark 11:15-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Gospel of John 3:1-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Gospel of John 4:1-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Gospel of Mark 6:1-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Gospel of Matthew 11:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. 26:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid. 27:63. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. 1 Corinthians 15:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Book of Acts 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Gospel of Luke 1:1-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. J. Warner & Jimmy Wallace, “Testing the Gospels from John to Hippolytus,” Cold Case Christianity, June 13, 2018, https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/testing-the-gospels-from-john-to-hippolytus/. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Gospel of John 18, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Gospel of Luke 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Gospel of Matthew 28:6. Epistle to the Hebrews 4:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Gospel of Luke 22:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Gospel of Mark 8:14-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Gospel of John 18:33-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Charles Colson, “Quotable Quote”, Good Reads, https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/555921-i-know-the-resurrection-is-a-fact-and-watergate-proved. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Galatians 5:22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Gospel of John 6 and note 6:66. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Josh McDowell, “Did Jesus Fulfill Old Testament Prophesy?”, Josh McDowell A CRU Ministry, March 28, 2018, https://www.josh.org/jesus-fulfill-prophecy/. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Jason Carlson and Ron Carlson, “Is the Bible the Inspired Word of God?”, Christian Ministries International, https://www.christianministriesintl.org/is-the-bible-the-inspired-word-of-god/. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Fox’s Book of Martyrs, William Byron Forbush ed., Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1967. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Earl E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, Zondervan, 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Translated by A. M. William Whiston. 1 vol., Hendrickson, 1987. (See The Wars of The Jews, Book 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Gospel of Matthew 28:16-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Tacitus, *Annuls*, 15.44. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars: Vita Claudius*, 25:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Pliny, *Epistles*, 10.96.7; 10.967.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Lucian, *The Passing of Pregrinus*, 1, 11, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, “World Christian Database: Status of Global Christianity, 2022, in the Context of 1900-2050”*,* Leiden/Boston: Brill, January 2022, https://worldchristiandatabase.org/. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)