

The Historical Jesus

Disciple copy — Pleasant Springs Church, Discipleship School

Name: _____ Date: _____

The full six-week series: ps-church.com/discipleship/historical-jesus

The question under the question

Somebody you love has probably said it: *"You know none of that actually happened, right?"*

Today we argue like a _____, not like a preacher. No appeals to "the Bible says so" — the same tools you would use on Julius Caesar.

The rule we keep: we claim only what the evidence carries. Where a point is disputed or thin, **we say so out loud.**

1 • Did he exist at all?

The claim that Jesus never lived is not a position skeptical scholars hold. It is one they _____.

Rudolf Bultmann — about as skeptical as New Testament scholarship gets — wrote:

"By no means are we at the mercy of those who _____ or _____ that Jesus ever lived."

Luke 1:1–4 (ESV) — "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were **eyewitnesses** and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an **orderly account** for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have **certainty** concerning the things you have been taught."

Four words that are not the vocabulary of myth:

_____ . _____ . _____ . _____

2 • The evidence is older than the books

The Gospels are not our earliest evidence. Before any Gospel was written, Christians were reciting short, memorized summaries. You can still see them inside Paul's letters.

1 Corinthians 15:3–6 (ESV) — "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also **received**: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than **five hundred** brothers at one time, **most of whom are still alive**, though some have fallen asleep."

"Most of whom are still alive" is an invitation to go and _____ .

► **The creed dates to within a few years of the crucifixion — about AD _____ to _____ .**

Why that matters: legends need _____ and _____. This has neither. It is in Jerusalem, naming men you could walk up to.

3 • What even skeptics grant

A short list of facts accepted by **virtually everyone who studies this**, whatever they believe about God:

1. Jesus died by _____ .
2. His disciples were driven to _____ .
3. They had experiences they believed were _____ of the risen Jesus.
4. They were transformed — and preached it in _____ , the one city where it was easiest to disprove.
5. _____ , the brother of Jesus — a skeptic — was converted.
6. _____ , the persecutor, was converted.

(The empty tomb is held by many scholars but less universally, so we list it separately rather than smuggle it in.)

John 7:5 (ESV) — "For not even his brothers believed in him."

Historian **Reginald Fuller** on James: even if no appearance to him had been recorded, "*we should have to _____ one*" to explain what happened to him.

4 • The witnesses who had nothing to gain

Evidence is strongest from a witness who _____ by giving it.

Tacitus, Rome's greatest historian, c. AD 115:

"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**."

He calls the faith a " _____ superstition." **No Christian invented that sentence.**

Pliny the Younger, a governor writing to Emperor Trajan, **AD 112**, asking how to prosecute them:

"They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to **Christ, as to a god**."

A Roman official, no friend of the church, records that within a single _____ of the crucifixion they were worshipping Jesus as _____.

Also outside the New Testament: **Josephus** · **Suetonius** · the **Talmud** · **Lucian**

⚠ **Said honestly:** one of the Josephus passages shows signs of later Christian _____. Scholars debate how much. We do not pretend that is settled — and we do not need it to be.

5 • The stones and the cross

June 1968, north of Jerusalem's Old Damascus Gate: the bones of a crucified man named **Yohanan**, with a _____-inch iron nail still driven through his _____ bone. His forearm was worn smooth from pulling himself up to breathe.

The swoon theory — that Jesus survived the cross — was demolished by **David Strauss**, who _____ believe in the resurrection. A half-dead man needs a physician; he does not get worshipped as the Lord of life.

6 • The tomb, and the explanations that fail

Matthew 28:13 (ESV) — "...and said, 'Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and **stole him away** while we were asleep.'""

► **To argue the body was stolen is to admit the body was _____ .**

Why the natural explanations fail:

Explanation	What it cannot account for
Hallucination	a group of _____ hundred, and an empty grave
Fraud	men _____ for something they knew they had faked
Legend	a creed dated within _____ years, in the city where it happened

1 Corinthians 15:17 (ESV) — "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."

Paul hands you a way to _____ his own religion. That is not what a con man writes.

7 • So what?

The New Testament is the best-attested book of antiquity — over _____ thousand Greek manuscripts and portions, where most classical works survive in fewer than _____ .

History cannot make you a Christian. It brings you to an empty tomb, a creed too early to be legend, hostile witnesses, and people who were changed in a way nobody has explained away.

► **It can bring you to the line. It cannot _____ you across it. That step is**

► _____ — **and it is a step toward a person.**

Romans 10:9 (ESV) — "...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) — "...always being prepared to make a **defense** to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with **gentleness and respect**."

"Gentleness and respect" is in the _____ verse as "make a defense." It is not optional.

Three things to remember

1. The evidence is _____ than the books.
2. The _____ witnesses help — the first counter-story conceded the tomb was empty.
3. History brings you to the line; _____ crosses it. Claim no more, and no less.

Closing prayer

Father, thank you that you did not ask us to believe in a fog. You acted in a real place, at a datable time, in front of witnesses who could be questioned. For honest doubters, give patience. For those of us who have been embarrassed into silence, give courage and gentleness both. And where the evidence has brought us as far as it can, give us faith to take the step it cannot take for us. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Take it further — the full series

Week	What it covers
1 Did Jesus Even Live?	The myth theory, the quest, and why no serious historian doubts it
2 The Earliest Witnesses	Creeds older than the Gospels, the 1 Corinthians 15 tradition
3 Jesus Outside the Bible	Tacitus, Josephus, Pliny, the Talmud — a life from outsiders
4 Stones, Bones, and the Cross	The census, Yohanan's heel bone, and the swoon theory
5 The Empty Tomb and the Appearances	Why every natural explanation has failed
6 So What? The Case Assembled	The miracle objection, and the response

ps-church.com/discipleship/historical-jesus — every week has the sources quoted in full, the Greek and the ESV side by side, and a downloadable PDF.

Someone to talk to about this

My notes

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