

Was Jesus Just A Man?



What Should This Man Mean to Us?

We finally come to the most important lie of our time and it's important to us because it has the most bearing on our eternal future. Who is this guy known as Jesus? We really need to figure this out if we are ever going to understand what his death means to us personally. Let's face it, if Jesus is just a man, than his life and death hold no more importance than the life and death of any great philosopher. But if Jesus is more than that, then His death has a special meaning for our world.



A Tragic Death or a Joyous Gift?

If Jesus was just a man, then when we read about his death in the records of history, we can't help but grieve over the tragedy and brutality of his murder. It is a ghastly event in time with little to celebrate. But if Jesus is who he claimed to be, and his death is what He claimed it to be, then that single event in time is a point to tremendous joy and tremendous sacrifice. It is God's gift to us. Our world has been split in two over this issue of the identity of Jesus Christ:

Jaroslav Pelikan

"Both Socrates and Jesus were outstanding teachers; both of them urged and practiced great simplicity of life; both were regarded as traitors to the religion of their community. Neither of them wrote anything; both of them were executed; and both have become the subject of traditions that are difficult or impossible to harmonize."

Marquis de Sade

"Lycurgus, Numa, Moses, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, all these great rogues, all these great thought-tyrants, knew how to associate the divinities they fabricated with their own boundless ambition."

Friedrich Nietzsche

"Jesus died too soon. if he had lived to my age he would have repudiated his doctrine."

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh

"Jesus was a crackpot"



Fact or Fiction?

Before we can even begin to counter these absurd comments, we need to establish the fact that Jesus Christ did actually live and walk on the face of the earth. Before we can decide who he is, we need to know if he ever existed, and there are many who would claim that he never existed to begin with.

1 Thallus

Sometimes we fall into the mistaken belief that the life and history of Jesus can only be found on the pages of scripture, and that belief can cause us to doubt that he really existed at all. If Jesus came into this world and made the impact that he did, wouldn't we hear about him from other non-religious sources? Well there is a record of Jesus on the pages of secular history. Thallus is perhaps the earliest secular writer to mention Jesus

and he is so ancient that his writings don't even exist anymore. But Julius Africanus, writing around 221AD does quote Thallus who had previously tried to explain away the darkness that occurred at the point of Jesus' crucifixion: "Thallus in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun..." This record of Thallus, confirms that Jesus lived, and was crucified and that something spectacular and unexplainable happened on that terrible day. If only more of Thallus' record could be found, we would see that every aspect of Jesus' life could be verified with a non-biblical source.

2 Phlegon

Similarly, Africanus also mentions a historian named Phlegon who wrote a chronicle of history around 140AD. In this history, Phlegon also mentions the darkness surrounding the crucifixion in an effort to explain it, but even more interestingly, he mentions Jesus' ability to foresee the future in describing the life of our Savior.

3 Mara Bar-Serapion

Sometime after 70AD, a Syrian philosopher named Mara Bar-Serapion, writing to encourage his son, compares the life and persecution of Jesus with that of other philosophers who were persecuted for their ideas. The fact that Jesus is known to be a real person with this kind of influence is important. As a matter of fact, Mara Bar-Serapion refers to Jesus as the "Wise King".

4 Josephus

In more detail than any other non-biblical historian, Josephus writes about Jesus in his "the Antiquities of the Jews" in 93AD. Josephus was a consultant for Jewish rabbis at age thirteen, was a Galilean military commander by the age of sixteen, and under the rule of roman emperor Vespasian, was allowed to write a history of the Jews. This history includes three passages about Christians, one in which he describes the death of John the Baptist, one in which he mentions the execution of James and describes him as the brother of Jesus the Christ, and a final passage which describes Jesus as a wise man and the messiah, retelling the resurrection story!

5 Cornelius Tacitus

Cornelius Tacitus was known for his analysis and examination of historical documents and is among the most trusted of ancient historians. He was a senator under Emperor Vespasian and was also proconsul of Asia. In his "Annals" of 116AD, he describes Emperor Nero's response to the great fire in Rome and Nero's claim that the Christians were to blame. In the process, he describes the persecution and execution of Jesus under Pontius Pilate and the persecution of early Christians.

6 Pliny the Younger

Early Christians are also described in secular history. Pliny the Younger, in a letter to the Roman emperor Trajan, describes the lifestyles of early Christians. They are said to have unmovable faith in Christ, meeting once a week before the sun rises, sang hymns to Christ, vowed to do good deeds, and ate together in fellowship.

7 Hadrian

In addition to Pliny the Younger, Hadrian and Lucian of Samosata also describe the lives of early Christians in the Roman Empire.

Our faith is not grounded in our imagination or in theory. It is grounded in a historical truth of God's life here on earth.



The Lie

Many skeptics would say that at best, Jesus was just a good man who never claimed to be God. But this is not what Jesus claimed and it is not what logic dictates. Jesus Said He Was God



John 14:1-7

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Clearly, Jesus left little to doubt. In many ways and at many different times, he told us that He was God Himself. The world is lying to you if they are trying to tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God. Jesus told us we should know that he is God, in two different ways. First, His miracles demonstrated his divinity, and second, his authority proved his divinity:



John 14:8-11

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need." Jesus replied: Philip, I have been with you for a long time. Don't you know who I am? If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. How can you ask me to show you the Father? 10 Don't you believe that I am one with the Father and that the Father is one with me? What I say isn't said on my own. The Father who lives in me does these things. Have faith in me when I say that the Father is one with me and that I am one with the Father. Or else have faith in me simply because of the things I do.



John 10:22-30

That winter, Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Temple Festival. One day he was walking in that part of the temple known as Solomon's Porch, and the people gathered all around him. They said, "How long are you going to keep us guessing? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly!" Jesus answered: I have told you, and you refused to believe me. The things I do by my Father's authority show who I am. But since you are not my sheep, you don't believe me. My sheep know my voice, and I know them. They follow me, and I give them eternal life, so that they will never be lost. No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father gave them to me, and he is greater than all others. No one can snatch them from his hands, and I am one with the Father.



LORD, Liar, or Lunatic

Jesus told us who he was. He told us that he was God Himself, that there was NO difference between himself and the LORD. How can he possibly say this? Either it is true or He is a Lunatic or a Liar.



The Miracle of the Resurrection

But one sure way we can judge this and determine if Jesus was crazy or a liar, is simply to examine the one thing that separated him from all other historical figures of his time. We must examine the miracles. While there are many other great spiritualists, philosophers and religious leaders, and many of these were said to have great power, none makes the simple claim that Jesus made. All these other leaders lived a good life, died and are still dead. Only Jesus rose after dying and still lives. Only Jesus lays claim to the greatest miracle of all, the resurrection. This one event in history is the foundation of our faith really. Look at what Paul has to say about it in his letter to the Corinthians:



1 Corinthians 15:12-22

If we preach that Christ was raised from death, how can some of you say that the dead will not be raised to life? If they won't be raised to life, Christ himself wasn't raised to life. And if Christ wasn't raised to life, our message is worthless, and so is your faith. If the dead won't be raised to life, we have told lies about God by saying that he raised Christ to life, when he really did not. So if the dead won't be raised to life, Christ wasn't raised to life. Unless Christ was raised to life, your faith is useless, and you are still living in your sins. And those people who died after putting their faith in him are completely lost. If our hope in Christ is good only for this life, we are worse off than anyone else. But Christ has been raised to life! And he makes us certain that others will also be raised to life. Just as we will die because of Adam, we will be raised to life because of Christ.

The resurrection is the single event that both proves that Jesus is who he said he is, and gives us hope for our future in heaven.



The Claim That Jesus Didn't Die (the Swoon Theory)

But not everyone will agree that Jesus actually did die on a cross and rise from the dead three days later. The doubting world divides into two camps when trying to deny the resurrection. Some say that Jesus did not actually die at all, and others who might admit that he died on the cross, will deny that he later rose from the dead. First, let's take a look at those who say that Jesus never actually died. These folks claim that Jesus was only injured up there on the cross. Later when he was taken down, he was in a swooning state of semi-consciousness, and only appeared to be dead. He came back to his senses later and appeared to the world, not as a man who had come back to life, but as a man who had recovered from his injuries!



Roman Soldiers Would Not Allow It

But this did not happen and it can be demonstrated in a number of ways. First, there was a tremendous penalty to be paid by Roman soldiers if they allowed a capital criminal to either escape or avoid the penalty to which they were sentenced. The soldier himself would have to take the punishment. It would be a death sentence for the soldier to bungle the execution. For this reason, Roman soldiers were brutal and meticulous, executing their orders with precision to make sure that they did not find themselves on the cross. Roman soldiers NEVER bungled executions of this nature, and history verifies this truth.



Didn't Break His Legs

In addition, we can be certain from the Gospel record that Jesus was dead when he was taken off the cross. The soldiers always confirmed that the executions were complete by assuring that each man on the cross was dead before taking them off. If they

were not, the soldier would use a club to break their legs so that their own body weight would suffocate them. Unable to push themselves up with their legs to take a breath, and unable in weakness to continue to pull themselves up with their arms, the victims would simply suffocate under their own weight, unable to breath. The Gospels tell us that the soldiers came to break Jesus' legs, but saw that he was already dead.

3 John Saw Water

Not only that, but the gospels also tell us that one of the soldiers stabbed Jesus in the heart area with a spear and that water and blood rushed from the opening. That's not uncommon for someone who has been dead for a while. The body cavity begins to fill with clear liquid, water drawn from the body itself. Blood in this situation appears watery and this is consistent with someone who is already dead.

4 Where Did He Go?

But if this wasn't enough, we still have the issue of where Jesus went after the recovery. If he didn't rise from the dead and then ascend into heaven, where did he go? There is no historical document that even attempts to account for a recovered Jesus, who lived after the recovery in some far away land.

All things considered, the notion that Jesus did not die is preposterous. It's ridiculous to think that somehow all the disciples of Jesus who took his grotesquely beaten body off the cross, wrapped it in linen, scented it with spices and prepared it for burial would not have noticed that he was still alive. You have to think this through. It makes no sense.



The Claim That Jesus Didn't Rise (the Hallucination Theory)

Once we have examined the issue and recognize that Jesus did, in fact, die on the cross, the next doubt you will encounter is whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead after the crucifixion. Those who deny this fall into three camps, the first of which proposes that the disciples imagined the entire resurrection. This is commonly referred to as the Hallucination theory. The disciples, in their incredible grief and wishful thinking, imagine the entire resurrection as a sort of hallucination.

1 No Group Hallucination

But imagine yourself having a hallucination and then snapping out of it only to discover that your best friend had the exact same hallucination, down to every detail! That's just not going to happen. Hallucinations are personal. There is no such thing as a group hallucination. And that would have to be the case here.

2 Stuck Around Too Long

Not only that, but imagine a hallucination that lasts for days and weeks on end. That's also never happened before and would have been the case here if you are to believe that the resurrection was just a hallucination. Jesus appeared to his followers for 40 days.

3 What About the Corpse?

Are we to believe also that after having experienced this hallucination hat the disciples would not have checked the tomb? Eventually they would have discovered the corpse, and realized that the hallucination was just that. But, of course, the corpse was not there to be found...

The biggest problem with the hallucination theory is that it does not account for the group sightings of Jesus in which everyone, including doubters like Thomas, got the chance to eat with, speak to, touch and be touched by Jesus himself. These experiences move the resurrection from hallucination to reality.



The Claim that the Resurrection is a Lie (the Conspiracy Theory)

The next obstacle we will encounter with people who deny the resurrection is the notion that the disciples made it all up. It's all fiction and the disciples conspired to fool the world. They are consummate liars.

1 Couldn't Have Removed the Body

The biggest problem with this theory is the fact that there would be no way for the disciples to get the body out of the tomb without alerting the guards. They Jews knew that they would have to guard the body in order to prevent its theft. They wanted to hang on to the body to show that Jesus was just a man. And they convinced authorities to place a Roman Attachment at the tomb. They guarded the tomb with the same intensity with which they confirmed Jesus' death.

2 Locals Would Have Known It

But keep in mind that it would also be impossible for the disciples to perpetuate a lie in the relatively small environment in which Jesus was said to have walked and appeared to more than 500 people according to Paul. They would have seen the lie coming and written a lot about the fact that all of it was untrue. Yet nothing exists to expose the resurrection as a lie.

3 They Had No Motive

But most of all, the disciples had no motive and, in fact, they put their very lives in danger by holding to the truth of the resurrection. Today, many of us who believe will risk our lives to defend our faith. That's because we truly believe and we have no evidence that what we believe is untrue. But that was not the case for the first disciples. If the resurrection was untrue, they would have known it was a lie. Would they all have carried the conspiracy to their death, knowing full well that it was all a lie? Wouldn't at least one of them have cracked under the torture and beatings and told the truth? How did this group of misfits become able to endure all this? They were transformed not by a lie but by the truth. And knowing that death was not something to fear, they boldly stood their ground.

Tell me that these men were conspiring to perpetuate the biggest lie ever told in the history of man. It simply does not make any sense. The disciples would ALL have to be crazy to hold to a lie that eventually killed them all.



The Claim That He Never Existed (the Myth Theory)

Finally, those who deny the truth of the resurrection may try to tell you that it was a legend that was developed over time by people other than the disciples, people who heard stories and twisted them or misinterpreted them or invented them in order to create the faith system that we have today. They would argue that all of it is a myth, a legend created over time.

1 *Non Christian Records of Jesus*

But of course the first big problem is the existence of non-Christian historical records of Jesus. These historians had no reason to perpetuate the mythology and attest to the fact that something did in fact happen here on planet earth 2000 years ago.

2 *Not Enough Time*

Aside from that, there is not nearly enough time for this type of legend to develop. This myth theory requires several generations to pass so that there or no remaining eyewitnesses of the real events left to dispute the mythology. But the first Christian documents recording the life of Christ appear on the scene within the first generation of the eyewitnesses. They were able to review the stories and testify to their validity. No one could have started the mythology without their knowing it.

3 *Women Witnesses*

But this small fact is also overlooked when people want to think that the reality of Jesus' resurrection is just a myth. The first witnesses to the resurrection were women. That is recorded clearly in all the Gospels. And remember that women at this time had very low social status. They were not even allowed to testify in court. They were not considered to have status that would make them trustworthy witnesses. Yet these stories are brutally frank in the way that they describe women as the first witnesses. If someone was trying to establish the validity of a legend and give it credence, they would never have chosen women as the first witnesses. As a matter of fact, they would have made the first witness a man of considerable status. But that is simply not how it happened, and the truth was recorded in scripture regardless of the impact that it might have on early readers. This little detail is incredibly important and testifies to the reality of what happened.

For a MUCH more detailed examination of the historicity and divinity of Jesus, check out our Person of Jesus page [HERE](#). Once you have dispelled the arguments for the swoon theory, you are going to have to conclude that Jesus did actually die, and after you dispel the hallucination, conspiracy and myth theories, you are going to have to conclude that Jesus did in fact rise again. Now you are in yet another position of theory and understanding.

You're now in a position that we know as traditional Christianity. Jesus did die on that cross. After three days, Jesus did come back to life. How can that be? It can be true because Jesus is not a lunatic, he is not a liar, he is LORD, God Himself, able to break the laws of nature that He established from the beginning of time.



The Reality

Jesus existed in history and was who he said he was. And from the very beginning He told us and showed us that He was more than a man. There is a consequence for our disbelief:



Matthew 10:32-33

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”

I, for one, don't want to be in this position; disowned by God. Yet many of us are willing to let our rebellion keep us from God when all it would take is a moment of surrender to change it all. What are you waiting for? Do you realize that we are all on the path to somewhere, either to eternal life with God or to eternal condemnation? In which direction are you headed? If you want to know God's plan for your life and his offer of reunion and salvation, travel down the Roman's Road by clicking [HERE](#).



Live Above the Lies

I want you to have confidence in your future, and I want you to know His Plan for your life. So here's the challenge for all of us as we come to grips with the identity of Jesus Christ. Remember that in the end, all the 'reasons' not to believe are simply 'excuses' no to obey. Live with confidence that you are a child of God.