

The Historical Evidence of the Lord Jesus

1- Objectives

- ❖ Claims that oppose the existence of Jesus in the history that can lead to Atheism.
- ❖ Proofs and evidences of the History of Jesus' existence.

2- Reference

- ❖ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicity_of_Jesus

3- Scriptural Verse

- ❖ "Tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me" (Matthew 11:4-6)

4- Lesson Outlines

Claims against the existence of Jesus

- ❖ No one has physical evidence to support a historical Jesus; no artifacts, dwelling, works of carpentry, or self-written manuscripts.
- ❖ No contemporary Roman record shows Pontius Pilate executing a man named Jesus.
- ❖ All accounts of Jesus came after his death in the NT writings. They are all hearsay.
- ❖ The story of Jesus parallels pagan savior gods.
- ❖ We do not know who wrote the Gospels.
- ❖ None of the Gospels existed during the alleged life of Jesus.
- ❖ None of the original Gospel manuscripts exists.

Evidences of Jesus existence

Tacitus, a Roman historian

- ❖ Reporting on Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in A.D. 64 wrote: "Nero fastened the guilt... 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... Pontius Pilatus".

Pliny the Younger, Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor

- ❖ In one of his letters, dated around A.D. 112, he asks Trajan's advice about the appropriate way to conduct legal proceedings against Christians. "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, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food of an ordinary and innocent kind."

Josephus, a first century Jewish historian

- ❖ On two occasions, in his Jewish Antiquities, he mentions Jesus. One reference describes the condemnation of one “James” by the Jewish Sanhedrin. This James, says Josephus, was “the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ.”
- ❖ The second reference called the “Testimonium Flavianum,” About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he... wrought surprising feats... He was the Christ. When Pilate... condemned him to be crucified, those who had... come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared... restored to life... And the tribe of Christians... has... not disappeared.”

Babylonian Talmud

- ❖ There are only a few clear references to Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings compiled 70-500 AD. Given this time frame, it is supposed that earlier references to Jesus are more likely to be historically reliable than later ones.
- ❖ For the Talmud, the earliest period of compilation was 70-200 AD. Reference to Jesus from this period state that, “On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald... cried, “He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery” (the charge of sorcery is similar to the Pharisees’ accusation that Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons).

Lucian of Samosata, a second century Greek satirist

- ❖ In one of his works, he wrote about the early Christians: “The Christians... worship a man to this day--the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... It was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.”
- ❖ Mara-Serapion, a Stoic philosopher who was imprisoned, wrote a letter to his son, 73 A.D that was found in El-Souryan Monastery in 1843 A.D. He tells of the deaths of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Jesus “What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king? Nor did He die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given.”

Summary of the previous evidences

- ❖ Both Josephus and Lucian indicate that Jesus was regarded as wise.
- ❖ Pliny, the Talmud, and Lucian imply He was a powerful and revered teacher.
- ❖ Both Josephus and the Talmud indicate He performed miraculous feats.
- ❖ Tacitus, Josephus, the Talmud, Lucian, and Mara-Serapion; all mention that He was crucified. Tacitus and Josephus say this occurred under Pontius Pilate. And the Talmud declares it happened on the eve of Passover.
- ❖ There are possible references to the Christian belief in Jesus’ resurrection in both Tacitus and Josephus.
- ❖ Josephus records that Jesus’ followers believed He was the Christ, or Messiah. And finally, both Pliny and Lucian indicate that Christians worshipped Jesus as God.

Physical Description of Jesus

Publius Lentullus, President of Judea

- ❖ The following was taken from a manuscript in the possession of Lord Kelly, and in his library, and was copied from an original letter of Publius Lentullus at Rome. It being the usual custom of Roman Governors to advertise the Senate and people of such material things as happened in their provinces in the days of Tiberius Caesar. He wrote the following epistle to the Senate concerning the Nazarene called Jesus.
- ❖ “There appeared in these days a man, of the Jewish Nation, of great virtue, named Yeshua [Jesus], who is yet living among us, and of the Gentiles is accepted for a Prophet of truth, but His own disciples call Him the Son of God- He raiseth the dead and cureth all manner of diseases. A man of stature somewhat tall, and comely, with very reverent countenance, such as the beholders may both love and fear, his hair of (the color of) the chestnut, full ripe, plain to His ears, whence downwards it is more orient and curling and wavering about His shoulders. In the midst of His head is a seam or partition in His hair, after the manner of the Nazarenes. His forehead plain and very delicate. His face without spot or wrinkle, beautified with a lovely red. His nose and mouth so formed as nothing can be reprehended. His beard thickish, in color like His hair, not very long, but forked; His look innocent and mature. His eyes grey, clear, and quick- In reproving hypocrisy He is terrible; in admonishing, courteous and fair spoken; pleasant in conversation, mixed with gravity. It cannot be remembered that any have seen Him Laugh, but many have seen Him Weep. In proportion of body, most excellent. His hands and arms delicate to behold. In speaking, very temperate, modest, and wise. A man, for His singular beauty, surpassing the children of men.”

Pontius Pilate

- ❖ This is a reprinting of a letter from Pontius Pilate to Tiberius Caesar describing the physical appearance of Jesus. Copies in the Congressional Library in Washington, D.C.
- ❖ To Tiberius Caesar: A young man appeared in Galilee preaching with humble unction, a new law in the Name of the God that had sent Him. At first, I was apprehensive that His design was to stir up the people against the Romans, but my fears were soon dispelled. Jesus of Nazareth spoke rather as a friend of the Romans than of the Jews. One day I observed in the midst of a group of people a young man who was leaning against a tree, calmly addressing the multitude. I was told it was Jesus. This I could easily have suspected so great was the difference between Him and those who were listening to Him. His golden colored hair and beard gave to his appearance a celestial aspect. He appeared to be about 30 years of age. Never have I seen a sweeter or more serene countenance. What a contrast between Him and His bearers with their black beards and tawny complexions! Unwilling to interrupt Him by my presence, I continued my walk but signified to my secretary to join the group and listen. Later, my secretary reported that never had he seen in the works of all the philosophers anything that compared to the teachings of Jesus. He told me that Jesus was neither seditious nor rebellious, so we extended to Him our protection. He was at liberty to act, to speak, to assemble and to address the people. This unlimited freedom provoked the Jews -- not the poor, but the rich and powerful. Later, I wrote to Jesus requesting an interview with Him at the Praetorium. He came. When the Nazarene made His appearance, I was having my

morning walk and as I faced Him my feet seemed fastened with an iron hand to the marble pavement and I trembled in every limb as a guilty culprit, though he was calm. For some time, I stood admiring this extraordinary Man. There was nothing in Him that was repelling, nor in His character, yet I felt awed in His presence. I told Him that there was a magnetic simplicity about Him and His personality that elevated Him far above the philosophers and teachers of His day. Now, Noble Sovereign, these are the facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth and I have taken the time to write you in detail concerning these matters. I say that such a man who could convert water into wine, change death into life, disease into health; calm the stormy seas, is not guilty of any criminal offense and as others have said, we must agree -- truly this is the Son of God.

Your most obedient servant
Pontius Pilate

- ❖ Both Justin Martyr (150 AD) and Tertullian (200 AD) make references to Pilate's letter to Tiberius. According to Tertullian, Tiberius acted upon this letter and presented it to the Roman Senate.
- ❖ "Tiberius accordingly, in whose days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from Palestine of events which had clearly shown the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favor of Christ. The senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all accusers of the Christians."

The Emerald of Caesar

- ❖ This Likeness of Jesus was copied from a portrait carved on an emerald by order of Tiberius Caesar, which emerald the Emperor of the Turks afterwards gave out of the Treasury of Constantinople to Pope Innocent VIII for the redemption of his brother, taken captive by the Christians.

The Archko Volume

- ❖ It contains official court documents from the days of Jesus. This information substantiates that He came from racial lines, which had blue eyes and golden hair. In a chapter entitled "Gamaliel's Interview" it states concerning Jesus (Yeshua) appearance:
- ❖ "I asked him to describe this person to me, so that I might know him if I should meet him. He said: 'If you ever meet him [Yeshua] you will know him. While he is nothing but a man, there is something about him that distinguishes him from every other man. He is the picture of his mother, only he has not her smooth, round face. His hair is a little more golden than hers, though it is as much from sunburn as anything else. He is tall, and his shoulders are a little drooped; his visage is thin and of a swarthy complexion, though this is from exposure. His eyes are large and a soft blue, and rather dull and heavy....' This Jew [Nazarite] is convinced that he is the Messiah of the world. ...this was the same person that was born of the virgin in Bethlehem some twenty-six years before..."

Counterarguments

- ❖ If Jesus had not existed, how could all these descriptions of his physical appearance that were written by different people have been so similar with no contradictions between

them? Even though there are second hand accounts of Jesus that were written after his death, we see that they share many things in common regarding facts around the life of Christ and Christians and are not in conflict with one another.

- ❖ Even if we were to believe that the Gospels are biased or unreliable that argument cannot be used to disprove the existence of Jesus. In general, historians never dismiss sources simply because they are biased.
- ❖ Paul in his letter to the Galatians makes a reference to James as “the Lord’s brother.” If Jesus had not existed it would have been difficult to make such a claim.
- ❖ There is no account of a pagan savior god who dies for the sins of the people.
- ❖ Luke in his Gospel refers to the census that was taking place about the time Jesus was born and that Mary and Joseph were going to Bethlehem to be counted in the census. If Luke was conjuring up a fictitious character, why would he refer to an official document that would have the names of Mary, Joseph and Jesus?

5- Conclusion

- ❖ There is evidence to prove the historical existence of Jesus, whether people choose to believe or argue away evidence is their choice.
- ❖ Whether the evidence with time increases or dwindles, it becomes a matter of faith.
- ❖ We as Christians choose to believe even if there is no evidence because the Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20: 29).

6- Activities / Discussion Points

- ❖ Our Lord Jesus Christ said: “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves” (John 14:11).
- ❖ Look to the history of the church and take many examples of great miracles that had happened and still are happening and do not forget the “Resurrection light”... These are the greatest proof that the Lord Jesus Christ is living until now in His Church.