

The Historicity of Jesus Christ

By Adam Taylor

11/22/2011

“They must find it difficult, those who have taken the authority as truth, rather than truth as the authority.” –Gerald Massey

In today’s society, the Christian religion is the most widely believed religion in the world. America alone is approximately 76% Christian, with 25% of America being made up of Catholics.¹ In all walks of life, Christianity is recognized as the world’s leading religion. And it is all thanks to one man; Jesus Christ, the son of God. The Catechism, the official text of the teachings of the Catholic Church, tells us that, “The transmission of the Christian faith consists primarily in proclaiming Jesus Christ in order to lead others to faith in him.”² Indeed, there can be no denying that the faith of Christianity has spread far and wide thanks to the message of Jesus.

However, throughout history there has been heated debate amongst believers and non-believers as to how divine this man Jesus really was. Many have questioned how much of his story is based on factual data, and whether or not he truly was the son of God. But there are also those who have gone even further in questioning Jesus’ history. There are those who have questioned whether or not Jesus actually existed at all as a real historical person. This theory has come to be known as the “Christ-myth” theory. This might at first seem to be a strange suggestion, as it has generally been accepted by most biblical historians that, whether or not he was truly the son of God, there was a man known as Jesus who really existed as a physical being. The Christian scholar F. F. Bruce, for example, has written that:

Some writers may toy with the fancy of a “Christ-myth,” but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased

¹ Cf. Kosmin, Barry A. and Keysar, Ariela, *American Religious Identification Survey*, pg. 3
http://b27.cc.trincoll.edu/weblogs/AmericanReligionSurvey-ARIS/reports/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, pg. 107

historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the “Christ-myth” theories.³

However, this sort of argumentation is mere hand waving, and does nothing to further the discussion. Why should we not be allowed to examine Jesus’ historicity? Why, according to Bruce’s logic, are those who question Jesus’ existence labeled “not historians?” Should we simply accept what the majority of scholars say and take their word for it without independent confirmation? According to Dr. Robert Price, one of the world’s leading New Testament scholars and prominent Christ-myth theory advocate, the answer is no.

[W]e must keep in mind that *consensus is no criterion*. The truth may not rest in the middle. The truth may not rest with the majority. Every theory and individual argument must be evaluated on its own. If we appeal instead to “received opinion” or “the consensus of scholars,” we are merely abdicating our own responsibility, as well as committing the fallacy of *appeal to majority*... It matters not whether a particular hypothesis comports easily with the majority paradigm or with one's own other hypotheses. Since all must be but tentatively and provisionally held anyway, we must follow the evidence wherever it seems to be taking us in this or that particular case.⁴

As we shall see, there is in fact sufficient reason to believe that the figure we know as Jesus Christ may never have existed as a human being. Though this may be difficult for some to cope with, it is essential that we determine the facts about this man. As we’ve seen, 3/4 of Americans identify with the teachings of Christ and are led by his words. And in many cases this has had dire consequences. It was the words of Jesus that inspired the burning of unbelievers during the Inquisition.⁵ It is due to Jesus’ words that over 40% of Americans believe that he will return and

³ Bruce, F. F., *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, pg 123

⁴ Beilby, James K. and Eddy, Paul R., *The Historical Jesus: five views*, pg. 61-62

⁵ Cf. Barker, Dan, *Why Jesus?* <http://www.ffrf.org/publications/nontracts/Why-Jesus/>

decide the fate of man.⁶ Jesus' words have even been placed on the rifles being used in the "War on Terror."⁷

There are many questions we must ask ourselves in pursuing this mystery. For starters, how do we determine whether or not Jesus existed? After all, common sense has told us for years that you can't "prove a negative." Critics of the Christ-myth theory have frequently noted this point, and it is likely one of the reasons so many of them find the theory silly to begin with. We obviously cannot "prove" that Jesus didn't exist in the same way we could prove a positive notion. Nothing short of finding a lost letter from the apostle Paul saying something along the lines of "I made the whole thing up" would definitively show that Jesus didn't exist. However, while we may not be able to show that Jesus' existence is an absolute impossibility, we can determine whether or not it is a virtual *improbability*.

Which leads us to the second question; what can we use as evidence for the non-existence of Jesus? Scholars have for years used an assortment of evidence to show that Jesus did exist, but what constitutes evidence that indicates he doesn't exist? In this regard, there are two main factors to the Christ-myth that provide the strongest evidence for his non-existence: that there appears to be no hard evidence that Jesus existed, and that the story of Jesus appears to predate him by hundreds, if not thousands of years. The latter of these two factors is what we shall discuss first.

The actual story of Jesus is well known amongst believers and non-believers alike. The Gospels provide us with the most detailed account of his life and the many miracles he performed. He is portrayed throughout the New Testament as being the only begotten son of God who was a savior to mankind. Of course, Jesus was not the first figure in history to be portrayed

⁶ Cf. *Life in 2050: Amazing Science, Familiar Threats*, pg. 15 <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/625.pdf>

⁷ Cf. Rhee, Joseph; Bradley, Tahman and Ross, Brian; *U.S. Military Weapons Inscribed With Secret 'Jesus' Bible Codes* <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/us-military-weapons-inscribed-secret-jesus-bible-codes/story?id=9575794>

this way. This is no mystery, as there were obviously numerous religions that existed prior to Christianity and most, if not all of them, involved gods who were said to be the saviors of man. What is not more apparent, however, is that these other saviors seemed to have more in common than just being the offspring of the gods. Throughout history, the numerous savior gods actually possessed many specific characteristics in common; characteristics that most would only think to apply to Jesus. Though not all savior deities have possessed all of these characteristics, and many clearly did possess features that were for the most part entirely original to themselves, the most common characteristics that the savior gods possessed were as follows:

- They were born at the Winter Solstice.
- They were born of virgins and/or they were the offspring of a male god and a mortal woman.
- Their births were announced by stars that appeared in the sky.
- They were adored at their births and presented with gifts.
- As an infant, they were pursued by a tyrant.
- They were baptized.
- They had followers or disciples, sometimes numbering in twelve.
- They performed miracles.
- They were known by names such as the “Truth,” the “Light,” the “King of Kings,” the “Good Sheppard,” etc.
- They were crucified.
- Upon their deaths, they were resurrected, in some cases after three days.
- After being resurrected, they ascended into heaven.

These are all, of course, the most commonly known characteristics of Jesus. Again, most other saviors did not possess all of these characteristics. In some cases, a savior may have had only one or two of these features. But the overall point is that these characteristics did exist in pre-Christian times, meaning that they were not features that were solely original to Jesus. And these features were so well known that they have been found in different religions from different lands from all over the world. There are numerous examples of savior gods who fit Jesus' general mythological construct.

For example, the Indian god Krishna, who dates back to around 900 BCE, possessed many features in common with the one we today identify as Christ. Krishna was said to have been born of the virgin Devaki.⁸ A series of stars were said to have appeared at Krishna's birth, signaling his coming.⁹ At his birth, he was sought after by a tyrant known as King Kamsa.¹⁰ He was said to have performed miracles, and upon his death he was resurrected and ascended into heaven.¹¹

Another classic example of these Jesus parallels is found in the case of the Greek god Dionysus, who dates back to at least 500 BCE. The legends of Dionysus portray him as having been born of the god Zeus and the mortal woman Semele, in some cases with Semele being a virgin.¹² He is said to have been born at the Winter Solstice, on December 25th.¹³ As the god of wine, he was portrayed as performing miracles involving wine, and there are accounts in pre-

⁸ Cf. Sanyal, J. M., *The Srimad-Bhagavatam of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*, volume 4, pg. 16 (In this passage, Devaki is referred to as "chaste," which can be defined as "virgin." See also: Acharya S., *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled*, pg. 199ff.)

⁹ Cf. *The Bhagavata Purana*, 10.3:8

¹⁰ Cf. Wilson, Horace Hayman, *The Vishnu Purana*, volume 4, pg. 504

¹¹ Cf. Ganguli, Kisari Mohan, *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*, Book 16: *Mausala Parva*, Section 4

¹² Cf. Hugh-Jones, Stephen, and Laidlaw, James Alexander, *The Essential Edmund Leach*, volume 1-2, pg. 108

¹³ Cf. Rahner, Hugo, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, pg. 140

Christian times of Dionysus even turning water into wine.¹⁴ Upon his death, Dionysus was said to have been resurrected and ascended into heaven.¹⁵

The parallels become even more obvious with the Perso-Roman god Mithra, dating back to around 1200 BCE. Mithra was said to have been born of a virgin¹⁶ on December 25th.¹⁷ He was said to have had twelve “companions” or “disciples.”¹⁸ He was known by many names such as the “Way,” the “Truth,” the “Light,” the “Life,” etc.¹⁹ And upon his death, Mithra was said to have been resurrected after three days.²⁰

There are many more examples that could be given of savior gods who fit this general mythological motif. However, in one very rare case, we do in fact have evidence for one pre-Christian god who possessed virtually every significant characteristic of Jesus; the Egyptian sun god Horus, dating to around 3000 BCE. From the information gathered by numerous researchers over several centuries, a strong case can be made that the story of Horus may have actually been the primary basis for the story of Jesus Christ. For Horus, like Jesus, was said to have been born on December 25th, or the “Winter Solstice.”²¹ He is the son of the god Osiris, and his mother was the virgin Isis-Mery.²² His birth was announced by a star that appeared in the sky, which three kings followed to locate and adorn him.²³ At the age of 12, Horus became a child teacher, and at the age of 30 he was baptized.²⁴ Horus was baptized by a figure known as “Anup the Baptizer,”

¹⁴ Cf. Cotter, Wendy, *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, pg. 164

¹⁵ Cf. Weigall, Arthur. *The Paganism in Our Christianity*, pg. 220

¹⁶ Cf. Hinnells, John R., *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies*, pg. 418

¹⁷ Cf. Herbermann, Charles G., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, X, pg. 404

¹⁸ Cf. Hinnells, pg. 507ff.

¹⁹ Cf. Berry, Gerald. *Religions of the World*, pg. 57

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cf. Murdock, D. M., *Christ in Egypt: The Horus-Jesus Connection*, pg. 79ff.

²² Ibid. pg. 120ff.

²³ Ibid. pg. 198ff.

²⁴ Ibid. pg. 210ff.

who was later decapitated.²⁵ Horus was said have had twelve “followers,” “companions” or “disciples.”²⁶ Horus performed many miracles such as healing the sick, healing with his spittle, raising the dead, and walking on water.²⁷ Horus was known by many gestural names such as the “Truth,” the “Light,” the “Good Sheppard,” the “Lamb of God,” the “King of Kings,” etc.²⁸ Horus was crucified,²⁹ buried, and after three days was resurrected and ascended into heaven.³⁰

Another aspect of Horus’s story that parallels Christianity is that he seems to possess the element of being one entity out of three in a trinity, much like the case of Jesus. Horus was said to be his father Osiris reborn,³¹ so he and Osiris can be seen as being one and the same, similar to how Jesus is known in the Bible as also being God the father. Also, Horus and Osiris were known to be interchangeable with the god Ra, so we seem to have a comparable trinity where Osiris, Horus and Ra could be seen as parallel to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.³²

The parallels between the Christian story of Jesus and the numerous pre-Christian religions are clearly overwhelming. Whether or not any of these gods possessed many or a few of the characteristics of Jesus, it is evident that the key characteristics of Jesus, namely his virgin birth, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, long predate the Christian tradition by many hundreds, if not thousands of years. However, these issues have been disputed by those who believe that these parallels are either insignificant or are not true at all. Of course, when one examines the arguments proposed by critics, it becomes apparent that it is their claims that are either insignificant or false.

²⁵ Ibid. pg. 233ff.

²⁶ Ibid. pg. 261ff.

²⁷ Ibid. pg. 285ff.

²⁸ Ibid. pg. 309ff.

²⁹ Ibid. pg. 335ff.

³⁰ Ibid. pg. 376ff.

³¹ Ibid. pg. 62

³² Cf. For a detailed explanation of this concept involving Horus, see *Christ in Egypt*, pg. 52ff.

For example, many critics have asserted that the supposed parallels between Jesus and other savior gods are not exact enough to be considered valid. In the case of Krishna, some critics contend that nowhere does it state in the Indian texts that Krishna was “resurrected” upon his death, and therefore no resurrection occurs at all. It is also argued that he could not have been born of a virgin, since Devaki was said have given birth to seven other children before giving birth to Krishna. It has also been asserted that Mithra did not have twelve “disciples,” being that he is only ever portrayed as being surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac. For Horus, it is argued by many that he was not born of a virgin, but that Isis engaged in sexual intercourse with Osiris. Critics argue that he did not have twelve “disciples,” and many also contend that Horus was not “crucified,” since death by crucifixion was not invented until after the legends of Horus were conceived. All of these criticisms, however, are shown to be invalid.

While it is true that the Indian texts do not specifically say that Krishna was “resurrected” upon his death, the portrayal of Krishna involves him being accidentally killed by a hunter, with the hunter’s arrow piercing through Krishna’s foot (similar to the Gospel account of a nail piercing Jesus’ feet). Krishna dies, but then appears to the hunter to comfort him *before* ascending to heaven. The overall point is that Krishna was portrayed as dying, returning to life to some extent, and then ascending up into the heavens. Whether or not the exact terminology was used in the Indian texts and the Gospels is irrelevant.

As for the charge that Krishna was not born of a virgin due to the fact that he had older siblings, it must be kept in mind that in discussing these savior gods, they are obviously all mythical figures, and thus are not real people with real physical bodies. As in the case of several savior god stories, a mother can be said to give birth to numerous children and still be deemed a virgin. A case in point is Jesus’ mother Mary, who was said to be a perpetual virgin, even though

Jesus is said to have had several brothers and sisters.³³ Thus, if one were to doubt the virginal status of Devaki, one would also have to doubt the virginal status of Mary as well.

And the virginal status of Horus's mother is also soundly justifiable. Though the Egyptian texts do speak of Isis engaging in sexual intercourse, they also speak of Isis as the "Great Virgin."³⁴ The reason that the texts can speak of Isis as engaging in sexual intercourse and remaining a virgin is because the most common depictions of Horus's conception show Isis becoming impregnated in the form of a hawk, while her actual body does not have sex with Osiris.³⁵ Isis's body therefore remains pure and thus can still be called a virgin. And it is interesting to note that this general depiction of Horus's conception—a female virgin getting pregnant with a son of a god, by means a spirit in the form of a bird—just happens to strongly resemble the most common depictions of Jesus' conception, whereby Mary was impregnated with him through the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove.

As for Mithra and his twelve "disciples," it is true that he is portrayed as being surrounded by what appears to be the twelve signs of the zodiac and not human beings. However, does this mean we should automatically discount this parallel? There is in fact sufficient reason to hold this parallel as true, as Jesus' twelve disciples themselves may very well be symbolic of the signs of the zodiac. As noted by D. M. Murdock:

As Josephus says (*Antiquities*, 3.8): "And for the twelve stones, whether we understand by them the months, or whether we understand the like number of the signs of that circle which the Greeks call the zodiac, we shall not be mistaken in their meaning." (Josephus/Whiston, 75.) Earlier than Josephus, Philo ("On the Life of Moses," 12) had made the same comments regarding Moses: "Then the twelve stones on the breast, which are not like one another in colour, and which are divided into four rows of three stones in

³³ Cf. Padgett, Chris, *Wholly Mary: Mother of God*, pg. 35. It is contended that these siblings of Jesus were either the children of Joseph or possibly Jesus' cousins. However, there appears to be no strong evidence for this other than the fact that these siblings exist in the first place.

³⁴ Cf. Murdock, *Christ in Egypt*, pg. 151-152

³⁵ Cf. One of these depictions is shown in *Christ in Egypt*, pg. 195.

each, what else can they be emblems of, except of the circle of the zodiac?” (Philo/Duke, 99.)³⁶

The twelve stones Josephus and Philo are referring too are the stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel.³⁷ What is interesting to note here is that the Gospels suggest that Jesus actually selected his disciples based on the twelve tribes.³⁸ However, Philo had written before the time Jesus supposedly started his ministry, but had never heard of Jesus. And yet he had heard of the twelve tribes, which he and Josephus in turn compared to the signs of the zodiac. Therefore, it is clearly justifiable to equate the signs of the zodiac with Jesus’ twelve disciples.

Similarly, critics contend that the “twelve” spoken of in the Egyptian texts were not Horus’s disciples, but rather twelve star gods associated with him. But again, this is simple nit-picking over terminology. The point is not if Horus or Mithra or any of these other gods specifically had twelve *disciples* per se, but if twelve figures played a significant role in their stories. We have already seen that the Gospels found it suitable to equate the twelve tribes of Israel with Jesus’ disciples. Horus’s twelve should be equally comparable, for if twelve people can be compared to twelve tribes, then clearly twelve people can be found comparable to twelve people.

As for Horus’s crucifixion, while it may be true that death by crucifixion did not exist when the story of Horus was first conceived, this aspect applies to Horus in a different, but still significant way. When the word “crucifixion” is uttered, most immediately relate this to the story of Jesus’ death, believing that this concept of crucifying only applies to torture and death.

However, in the myths of Horus this is not the case. As Murdock explains:

The verb “to crucify” comes from the Latin *crucifigere*, which simply means “to fix to a cross” and does not necessarily signify to throw down to the ground and nail a living person to a cross. To be “crucified,” therefore, could refer to *an image of a god or man simply fixed to a cross*, as in a *crucifix*. In discussing “*crucifixion*,” then, the point to keep

³⁶ Ibid. pg. 261-262

³⁷ Cf. *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, Ex. 39:9-14

³⁸ Cf. Mt. 19:28

in mind is the contention that various mythical motifs such as the god with outstretched arms or the sun on the cross were already in existence and revered long prior to the common era, likely utilized in the weaving of the Christ myth.³⁹

Likewise, we find in several Egyptian images the portrayal of Horus and other Egyptian figures in cruciform, with their arms outstretched in a cross shape.⁴⁰ Some may argue that this is still not a valid comparison to Jesus, but when one looks deeper we find that there are even closer connections between these two god-men. Some scholars have identified Horus with a Gnostic counterpart, called “Horos-Stauros,” which is a Greek term meaning “Boundary Cross.”⁴¹ And as it turns out, the latter word *stauros* was the exact term used to describe Jesus’ cross in the New Testament.⁴²

The parallels between Jesus and these other saviors are clearly a close enough of a match to the point where we can reasonably conclude they are not merely coincidences. However, in light of the fact that these similarities are so striking, some critics have used a different strategy to explain away these parallels: that the pagan religions actually borrowed from Christianity, instead of the other way around. This argument is generally based upon the fact that much of the writings that discuss these pagan gods usually date to the time after the Gospels are said to have been written. From this, critics contend that, were there to be any genuine parallels, it is more likely that the pagans copied Jesus’ story rather than the Gospels copying from the other religions. However, this argument suffers from numerous issues.

First off, although many of the writings for these other savior god legends don’t seem to appear until the second century and later, this is in fact the case for the Gospels themselves.

Although the earliest Gospel, Mark, dates to around the year 70 CE, the Gospels themselves do

³⁹ Murdock, *Christ in Egypt*, pg. 336

⁴⁰ Cf. Several of these figures, including Horus, are shown in *Christ in Egypt*, pg. 367-375.

⁴¹ Cf. For more information on this concept of Horos-Stauros, see the chapter “Was Horus ‘Crucified?’” in Murdock’s *Christ in Egypt*.

⁴² Cf. Mt 27:32; Mk 15:30; Jn 19:19

not show up clearly in the literary record until the *second century*.⁴³ So, if the story of Jesus truly was written in the first century but did not clearly appear until the second century, then it is reasonable to assume that this could be the case for the pagan religions as well. Second, the legends of these other gods can be found in non-written forms that predate Christianity. A case in point is Krishna's persecution by King Kamsa, the writings of which date after the Gospels. As Murdock notes:

Extant Indian texts are late; however, the tradition of Kamsa's massacre is considered to be at least 2300 years old, with a relevant depiction on the walls of a temple-cave on the Indian island of Elephanta evidently dating to three centuries prior to the Christian era. That elements of the Krishna tale existed centuries before the Christian era is attested in the writings of the Greek geographer Megasthenes (c. 350-c. 290 BCE).⁴⁴

Similarly, as Tim Callahan notes concerning the Greek myths:

In the case of ancient Greek myths many were not collected until Roman times. However, we have depictions of scenes from the myths on vases dating into pre-Classical times, often with the names of the characters written on the vases.⁴⁵

What these facts demonstrate is that the myths of these religions were, at the very least, recorded through oral tradition in pre-Christian times. Third, even if these myths were conceived after the first century, this does not automatically mean that they could not have had any effect on the writings in the Gospels. After all, much of what is today considered the Christian tradition was not decided on until centuries after the Gospels were written. The doctrine of the Trinity, for example, was not firmly decided on until the fourth century by the Council of Nicaea.⁴⁶

⁴³ Cf. For a detailed examination of the dating of the Gospels, see: Murdock, D. M., *Who Was Jesus? Fingerprints of the Christ*, pg. 59-83

⁴⁴ Ibid. pg. 222

⁴⁵ Callahan, Tim, *Secret Origins of the Bible*, pg. 16

⁴⁶ Cf. Barnett, Don, *History of the Doctrine Concerning the Nature of God in the Early Centuries of Christianity*, part 13 <http://www.altupc.com/altupc/articles/hdng.htm>

Regardless of all this, the best evidence that these pagan god myths predated Christianity may very well come from the early church fathers themselves. Justin Martyr, one of the earliest defenders of the story of Jesus, wrote in his *First Apology*:

And when we say also that the Word, who is the first-birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that He, Jesus Christ, our Teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, **we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of [the god] Jupiter.**⁴⁷

Elsewhere in his *First Apology*, Justin Martyr also wrote:

And if we even affirm that He was born of a virgin, **accept this in common with what you accept of Perseus.**⁴⁸

What these writings reveal to us is that church fathers such as Justin Martyr were well aware of the similarities between Jesus and the pre-Christian pagan gods. However, like many modern day apologists, Justin had explanations for these parallels. Unfortunately, his explanations were not modern day. According to Justin, these parallels were caused by the devil and his minions. As Justin wrote in his *First Apology*:

...For having heard it proclaimed through the prophets that the Christ was to come, and that the ungodly among men were to be punished by fire, [the wicked demons] put forward many to be called sons of Jupiter, under the impression that they would be able to produce in men the idea that the things which were said with regard to Christ were mere marvelous tales, like these things which were said by the poets.⁴⁹

This passage is by far one of the most revealing regarding Justin's acknowledgement of the Jesus parallels. For Justin does not offer any of the excuses modern-day critics have offered, i.e., "no parallels," "late dating," or "pagans copying from Christianity." Had Justin believed any of these kinds of explanations, he would never have resorted to a "the devil did it" type of excuse.

⁴⁷ Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, I, pg, 170 (Emphasis added)

⁴⁸ Ibid. pg. 231 (Emphasis added)

⁴⁹ Ibid. pg. 181

And other Church fathers evidently felt the same way. For example, Church father Tertullian wrote that:

The devil, whose business is to pervert the truth, mimics the exact circumstances of the Divine Sacraments... Thus he celebrates the oblation of bread, and brings in the symbol of the resurrection.⁵⁰

There can be no doubt that the story of Jesus is an entirely unoriginal concept. The idea of a savior, who is born of a virgin, performs miracles, dies and then is resurrected, long predates Christianity. And yet so many are reluctant to accept this glaringly obvious fact, as noted by Dr. Price.

Conservative scholars and Christian apologists have never been at ease even recognizing the existence of the dying-and-rising-god motif in non-Christian Mystery Religions, much less their relevance for Christian origins. As apologists are merely spin doctors for a theological party line, their aloofness to the dying-and-rising-god mytheme is scarcely surprising and one is hard-pressed to take their disdain seriously, anymore than the ancient attempts of Justin Martyr and Firmicus Maternus to discount such parallels as Satanic counterfeits.⁵¹

However, there is much more to the Christ-myth than just these parallels between Jesus and the pagan gods. For even if Jesus' story were unoriginal, this would not be proof in of itself that there could not have been a real person whom the stories were attributed to. The real truth we must recognize next is that there are no reliable sources that demonstrate that any man known as Jesus Christ truly ever walked the earth as a physical human being.

In documenting the sources for Jesus' existence, they can essentially be broken up into two categories: biblical and non-biblical. That is, the sources contained within the Bible and the sources which are outside of the Bible. Taken together, it is contended by many Biblical scholars that there are in fact a great number of sources for Jesus' existence. For example, Drs. Gary

⁵⁰ LaBriolle, Pierre de. *Tertullien: De Praescriptione Haereticorum*. The original Latin is: "A diabolo scilicet, cujus sunt partes intervertendi veritatem, qui ipsas quoque res sacramentorum divinatorum idolorum mysteriis aemulatur...celebrat et panis oblationem, et imaginem resurrectionis inducit, et sub gladio redimit coronam...." pg. 86

⁵¹ Price, Robert M., *Deconstructing Jesus*, pg. 88

Habermas and Mike Licona argue that there are at least 42 sources that mention Jesus within 150 years of his life, which they deem an “impressive” amount.⁵² They also raise a commonly heard argument used by critics of the Christ-myth theory; that there are historical figures in history that have even less sources documenting their existence, but their existence is unquestioned. Before examining this latter argument, let’s examine some of these sources which supposedly mention Jesus.

The first fact that needs to be recognized is that, out of all the sources given for Jesus’ existence, not one of them is a contemporary of him. It is argued by many that at least two of the Gospel writers were contemporaries of Jesus, Matthew and John. The reasoning is that Matthew was Matthew Levi, a tax collector and one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, and that John was the disciple “whom Jesus loved.”⁵³ Although we have no way of knowing who actually wrote any of the Gospels, is it possible that these writers were two figures in the Bible who met Jesus? The facts overwhelmingly suggest no. As Dr. Price points out:

[E]ven Catholics and evangelicals are by and large disposed to accept source criticism, that Matthew and Luke used Mark, etc. But they do not seem to realize... that this admission is doubly fatal. First, it means that at least some of the gospels are not based on eyewitness testimony. Luke and Mark never claim to be. Matthew and John share names with two characters who appear in the gospel story, but that does not even hint that they are supposed to be the disciples Matthew and John. If Matthew the evangelist were Matthew the eyewitness disciple, how is it possible he would base his gospel on the account of Mark, who was not?⁵⁴

Likewise, we find similar problems for the non-Synoptic Gospel of John. For example, John’s Gospel says nothing of Jesus’ transfiguration, even though he was supposedly a witness to it! But the main piece of evidence that shows that the Gospels could not possibly have been written by any contemporaries of Jesus is the simple fact of when the Gospels were written. As

⁵² Cf. Habermas, Gary R. and Licona, Michael R., *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, pg. 127

⁵³ Jn. 20:2

⁵⁴ Murdock, *Who Was Jesus?* pg. vii

we previously noted, the first Gospel, Mark, is said to have been supposedly written around 70 CE, and the other Gospels were written later. By this time, most contemporaries of Jesus would have long been dead, so there seems to be no way that the Gospels could have been written by eyewitnesses or based on the testimonies of eyewitnesses.

It is no mystery that the Gospels are incredibly contradictory with one another. Regardless of how much they are based on each other, the four Gospels of the New Testament contradict each other on some of the simplest facts regarding Jesus' life. From his birth, to his sayings, to his last words, to his death and to his life in general, the Gospels don't seem to agree with one another.⁵⁵ The Gospels are, in of themselves, unreliable sources to prove Jesus' existence, for out of all of them, only Luke ever *claims* to be writing history,⁵⁶ even though, as we have already established, much of his Gospel was based on Mark, who never claimed to be writing history. And the writings of Paul and the Epistles fair no better. Although these writings appear to discuss Jesus in great detail, they also appear to speak of Jesus as if he were a mythical figure, not a real historical person.⁵⁷ Indeed, there is very little in the writings of Paul that indicate he believed Jesus was a real physical human rather than just a spiritual being.

Can we truly accept the writings of the Bible as legitimate historical accounts? Much of what exists in the Gospels, as we have already seen, are clearly mythical events that have their origins in pagan thought. And it seems that at every point in his story where Jesus seems to be locked into history (that is, an event of his life involving other figures we know existed), there appears to be no basis for it. For example, Herod's slaughter of the innocents is a well known element of Jesus' life, but there is no credible reason to believe it actually happened. Only

⁵⁵ Cf. Several of the most contradictory issues regarding the Gospels are given in: Fitzgerald, David, *Nailed: Ten Christian Myths that Show Jesus Never Existed at All*, pg. 137ff.

⁵⁶ Cf. Lk. 1:1-3

⁵⁷ Cf. Doherty, Earl, *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ?*, pg. 16

Matthew mentions this supposed event, and not only do none of the other Gospel writers mention it, but no other historian *at all* mentions it. We also previously saw that this type of event was told in the story of Krishna, and similar stories are also told in other myths, such as the story of Moses.⁵⁸ Another example is Jesus' arrest and execution. The Gospels speak of Jesus being arrested by the Jewish Supreme Council on the Eve of Passover which, as noted by historian Richard Carrier, "was definitely illegal and unnecessary."⁵⁹

The Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament simply don't seem to represent valid historical accounts. What would validate these writings, however, are the accounts of Jesus' life outside of the Bible. This makes sense, as it would obviously be fallacious to attempt to prove the Bible with the Bible. This leaves us with the non-biblical accounts of Jesus' life. As we shall see, they also appear to hold up quite poorly under scrutiny.

In discussing the non-biblical sources that supposedly mention Jesus, it must first be recognized that in many cases, these sources are not actually discussing Jesus Christ in any great detail. Rather, they are mainly discussing *Christians* and their actions at the time. For example, one of the sources trotted out by defenders of the historical Jesus is the Roman historian Pliny the Younger. In the year 110 CE, Pliny wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan asking for his advice on what type of punishments should be inflicted on the "Christians" who were causing trouble and would not renounce "Christ" as their god. In his letter he wrote:

Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ — none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do — these I thought should be discharged.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Cf. Ex. 2:1-10

⁵⁹ Carrier, Richard, *Critical Notes on the Movie The God Who Wasn't There*, pg. 4
<http://www.richardcarrier.info/NotesOnTGWWT.pdf>

⁶⁰ Pliny, *The Letters of Pliny the Younger*: Letter 96
http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?pageno=117&fk_files=2025

This may at first give the impression that there evidently was a person known as “Christ” who was being worshipped by “Christians,” but we must first examine the context of this passage. First, Pliny himself does not appear to be entirely sure what these so-called “Christians” really believed, writing that he contemplated their punishments “whatever the nature of their opinions might be.”⁶¹ Since Pliny does not elaborate what the true beliefs of these Christians are, it is difficult to tell exactly which god they were worshipping. According to the emperor Adrian in a letter written in 134 CE, those who were known at this time as “Christians” were actually considered to be followers of the Greco-Egyptian god Serapis.⁶² Therefore, it is entirely possible that it is this god that these so-called “Christians” were worshipping. But even if these individuals were worshipping Jesus Christ, none of them had likely lived during the time Jesus supposedly lived. All Pliny’s letter tells us is that a group of people known as Christians were worshipping a figure known as “Christ,” which was a title that could have applied to other gods. Pliny gives us no details regarding who this “Christ” actually was and what these “Christians” really believed. This type of source ultimately tells us nothing, as obviously no one doubts that there were *Christians* at this time.

Another source often brought up is the historian Suetonius. Writing in around 121 CE, Suetonius wrote that Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome because they were “making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.”⁶³ Many argue that this is evidence for Jesus’ existence, and that it is also consistent with the passage in the Book of Acts that discusses Claudius exiling the Jews from Rome.⁶⁴ However, the assertion that this passage proves Jesus’ existence is unconvincing for several reasons. First and most obvious is that Claudius’ expulsion

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Cf. Taylor, Robert, *The Diegesis: Being a Discovery of the Origin, Evidences, and Early History of Christianity*, pg. 407

⁶³ Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 223

⁶⁴ Cf. Acts 1:2

of the Jews occurred around 49-50 CE, so Jesus could not have been the one “instigating” in Rome, being that he supposedly died in around 30-33 CE. Also, Suetonius refers to someone known as “Chrestus,” not “Christos,” which is the correct Latin spelling. Although some have argued that Chrestus was merely a misspelling of Christos on Suetonius’s part, this suggestion is highly unlikely, since in Suetonius’s other writings he discusses “Christians,”⁶⁵ not “Chrestians.” This tells us that Suetonius evidently knew how to spell “Christ” and “Christian” just fine. The name “Chrestus” was in fact very common, as noted by David Fitzgerald:

“Chrestus” is the Latin form of the Greek name Chrestos, meaning “Good.” In fact, Chrestus was a very common name in Rome, especially hardworking slaves. Archeologists have found the name more than eighty times in Roman inscriptions.⁶⁶

The fact that Suetonius evidently knew the correct spelling of “Christians” shows he was well aware of them, which also seems to rule out the possibility that he was merely discussing a Christian sect in his writings about Claudius, since in that passage he was discussing Jews, not Christians. There is simply very little chance that Suetonius was discussing the same man described in the Bible. His writings of Christians tells us nothing, for again, no one denies that there were Christians at this time.

These types of sources are on the whole quite useless, as they are inconclusive and do not give us any detail on Jesus’ life that are consistent with the Gospel accounts. In fact, only two historians appear to give any specific details of Jesus within 100 years of his life. The first of these sources is the Roman historian Tacitus. In his *Annals*, Tacitus discusses the persecution of Christians by Nero for their supposed burning of Rome. Writing in 109 CE, Tacitus recorded that:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the

⁶⁵ Cf. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, pg. 98

⁶⁶ Fitzgerald, *Nailed*, pg. 379

populace. 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, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.⁶⁷

This passage would seem to confirm two aspects about Jesus; that he lived as a historical person and that he had been executed by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. Unlike the other sources we've examined, this one does appear to be discussing the Christ described in the Gospels. However, is this passage truly evidence that Jesus was a historical person? The facts once again demonstrate a likely "no." Though Tacitus provides us with specific details of Jesus' life, he does not discuss where he obtained this information from. This has led many to believe that Tacitus may have simply gotten his information from a random Christian off the street, as these beliefs about Jesus were very common at this point. Others have argued against this, noting that Tacitus was one of the greatest historians of his time and would have made sure to get his information from primary sources. Although this is likely what Tacitus *would* have done, we need to examine if he *could* have obtained his information this way in the first place.

It is extremely unlikely that that Tacitus received this information from any primary source from the first century. The Romans did not keep exhaustive records of the many crucifixions they carried out, much less records going back almost a century before. Historian Richard Carrier has noted that it is highly unlikely that Tacitus could possibly have gotten his information from any kind of historical records, one of the main reasons "being that Rome's capitol had burned to the ground more than once in the interim."⁶⁸ Likewise, scholar Acharya S. notes that, "Tacitus was an imperial writer, and no imperial document would ever refer to Jesus as 'Christ.'"⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Tacitus, *The Annals*, Book XV <http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/annals.11.xv.html>

⁶⁸ Fitzgerald, *Nailed*, pg. 376

⁶⁹ Acharya, *Suns of God*, pg. 397

But what about the fact that Tacitus was an incredible historian? Wouldn't he have made sure he got his information from a credible source? Though this is naturally what Tacitus would have done, it wouldn't exactly have been necessary in this case, being that the story of Jesus and his death was not the subject of this passage. Furthermore, Tacitus was actually known to have used unverifiable information at times.⁷⁰ All of these facts point to Tacitus having gotten his information from a non-primary source, such as a random second-century Christian who had already been taught that Jesus had been executed by Pilate.

So that leaves us with the only other source which supposedly provides us with a valid report of Jesus' existence; the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. Out of all the supposed sources for Jesus' existence, Josephus is the only one that comes close to being a near contemporary. This is not to say that his account was written particularly close to Jesus' time; it wasn't. Josephus was born years after Jesus' death, with his account of Jesus supposedly written some sixty years after Jesus' death. Josephus wrote his *Antiquities of the Jews* in either 94 or 95 CE, which contains two disputed passages that many see as historical evidence for Jesus.

The first of these passages in *Antiquities* is referred to as the *Testimonium Flavianum* (XVIII, 33). The passage in question reads:

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 among 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.⁷¹

This passage has been subjected to decades of heated debate. Almost all scholars today accept that this passage is a Christian forgery added into Josephus's writings centuries after he lived.

⁷⁰ Cf. Mellor, Ronald, *Tacitus*, pg. 44

⁷¹ Acharya, *Suns of God*, pg. 382

What scholars do not universally agree upon, however, is how much of it is a forgery. Many argue that this passage is on the whole genuine, with some Christian interpolations added in. Some of the most obvious indications of interpolation are the parts of the passage that sound Christian to begin with. Josephus was an orthodox Jew, and no Jew would ever have referred to Jesus as the “Christ.” The passage also has somewhat of a positive tone in discussing Jesus, something an orthodox Jew would also have never written. But again, it has been argued that this passage is at least somewhat authentic, or at least authentic enough to show that Josephus really did speak of Jesus.

However, there is good reason to think that the entire passage is in fact a forgery. First off, there are other aspects of the passage that seem extremely un-Josephus like, rather than just the Christian sounding parts. For starters, Josephus talks of “divine prophets,” even though he does not indicate who these prophets are, which is very unlike Josephus, who was always very thorough in documenting his sources of information. There is also Josephus’s usage of the word “Gentile.” Josephus, who was writing for a Roman audience, never used the word Gentile to describe non-Jews in any of his other writings.

But by far the two most obvious indications that the entire passage is a forgery are the fact that it breaks the flow of Josephus’s writings and that there is absolutely no mention of it until the fourth century. With regards to the first point, the *Testimonium* ends with a discussion of Jesus’ resurrection, but the very next sentence of the next paragraph in *Antiquities* reads, “About the same time also another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder.” This does not fit the tone of the *Testimonium*. It does, however, fit the tone of the previous paragraph before the *Testimonium*, which discusses Pilate sending his soldiers to massacre a large crowd of Jews in

Jerusalem. That would clearly fall under the category of “sad calamity.” With the *Testimonium* completely omitted, the two paragraphs flow seamlessly into each other.

With regards to the second point, the *Testimonium* is not mentioned by a single person until the fourth century by church father Eusebius. This is extremely odd, as numerous earlier Christian authorities were known to have poured over Josephus’s writings, including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Hippolytus,⁷² yet not one of these people ever mentioned the *Testimonium*. Origen in particular had used Josephus extensively, with his own writings being full of references to Josephus. And yet, when the skeptical Roman Celsus asked what miracles Jesus had performed that made him godly, Origen answered him by saying that Jesus had performed many miraculous actions, “[but] what source could we use other than the gospels?”⁷³ Furthermore, Origen had used Josephus to prove the existence of John the Baptist, and while doing so noted that Josephus “did not believe in Jesus as Christ.”⁷⁴

These facts, when taken together, demonstrate that in all likelihood the *Testimonium Flavianum* is a complete forgery. And it is quite interesting that the first person to make mention of this passage was Eusebius, being that he was known to have forged data in order to defend the Christian faith. Though he has been touted by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches as “the Father of Ecclesiastical History,” Richard Carrier notes that “Eusebius was either a liar or hopelessly credulous, and either way not a very good historian.”⁷⁵

If a passage mentioning Jesus was genuinely written by Josephus, what would it have looked like? It would have most certainly been unflattering, as Josephus was known to have bashed other supposed messiahs that he didn’t believe in. Furthermore, there are parts of Jesus’

⁷² Cf. These and other examples are given in: Acharya, *Suns of God*, pg. 385

⁷³ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 2.33, pg. 94

⁷⁴ Ibid. 1.47, pg. 43

⁷⁵ Fitzgerald, *Nailed*, pg. 98

story that Josephus likely would have mentioned without needing to speak about Jesus at all. An example would be Herod's slaughter of the innocents. We previously established that only the Gospel of Matthew was known to have recorded this event. But Josephus did not write about this event, even though he was known to have written extensively on the atrocities that Herod committed. This only further confirms that this event in Matthew was a mythical story.

So, in the case of the *Testimonium*, we are left with a passage that does not sound like it was written by Josephus, is not mentioned by any Christian authorities until hundreds of years after it was supposedly written, and when it is finally mentioned it is by a church father who was known to have forged information. The probability of this passage being at all genuine would seem to be practically zero. However, there are still those who believe that Josephus did mention Jesus in another of his writings.

The second supposed reference to Jesus found in Josephus's writings is what has come to be known as the "James Passage." This passage in *Antiquities* (XX, IX, 1), reads:

...when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity. Festus was dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled a Sanhedrim of judges and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.⁷⁶

This passage, if it be genuine, would demonstrate that Jesus existed and had a brother named James. But is this passage a forgery as well? Unlike the *Testimonium*, very few scholars believe so, as it appears to be too short to be an interpolation that would have been added in. But is this passage a genuine reference to Jesus of the Gospels? Though it speaks of Jesus and his brother James, the passage in full does not appear to be consistent with the biblical account of James' death. This passage refers to James being stoned amongst a group of people; while all other

⁷⁶ Acharya, *Suns of God*, pg. 391

accounts of the death of “James the Just” discuss him being killed alone by an angry mob.⁷⁷

Furthermore, as noted by D. M. Murdock, “Josephus’s James died some seven years prior to the death of the New Testament’s ‘James the Just.’”⁷⁸

But what about the referral to Jesus as being “called Christ?” Josephus never uses the term “Christ” or “Messiah” anywhere else in his writings, not even to describe his own choice of messiah, Emperor Vespasian. And if the *Testimonium* did not refer to Jesus as “Christ,” this term would have meant nothing to his Roman audience. Though this gives the appearance of speaking of Jesus of the Bible, there may be an alternative explanation. For in the same passage, Josephus later writes about how the Jews were outraged by this execution, and they complained to King Agrippa, who took the high priesthood from Ananus “and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.”

What we first note about this section of the passage is that the Jewish people were for some reason outraged by James’ execution. If this James was truly James, the brother of Jesus, then why would they be upset? Most conservative Jews would have considered a Christian leader to be a hated cult leader, so there would be no reason for them to be outraged by his execution. Secondly, there is the matter of the other Jesus that Josephus mentions in this passage. Who is this Jesus? As it turns out, he may very well be the same Jesus who is James’ brother. This would make perfect sense when one considers the context. Basically, Josephus is telling us that after Ananus has this “brother of Jesus” killed, the Jewish people are angered. So in response, King Agrippa takes the high priesthood from him and makes Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest. If this Jesus, son of Damneus, is the same Jesus mentioned before, then that would explain

⁷⁷ Cf. Fitzgerald, *Nailed*, pg. 101

⁷⁸ Murdock, *Who Was Jesus?* pg. 91

why the punishment was to depose Ananus and install in his place the brother of the man he unlawfully killed.

But what about the title of “Christ” applied to this Jesus though? According to historian Richard Carrier and David Fitzgerald, this was most likely an accidental scribal interpolation of a marginal note. According to their analysis:

It looks exactly like what a scribe would write in the margin to himself to indicate that he thinks this ‘Jesus’ is ‘the one called Christ.’ But it interrupts the sentence, and though it is not bad Greek per se, it is clunky and confusing. Remove that awkward phrase and the sentence reads even more smoothly.⁷⁹

Therefore, the phrase “who was called Christ” is not an interpolation, but rather an accidental marginal note. If this is the case, then taken together with all the information we have discussed, it would seem that the Jesus that Josephus is discussing is not Jesus of the Gospels, but rather Jesus the brother of James, who were both the sons of Damneus.

To summarize, the two passages in Josephus’s *Antiquities* that supposedly mention Jesus apparently do *not* discuss Jesus at all. The first passage is in all likelihood a forgery, and the second passage is genuine, but discusses an entirely different Jesus all together. With this information, we can ultimately conclude that Josephus made absolutely no mention of Jesus of the Gospels at any time in his writings. And unfortunately, this brings the number of non-biblical first century references to Jesus down to zero.

There are of course other sources which are claimed to have discussed Jesus, but they are all just as spurious and problematic as all the other sources we have discussed.⁸⁰ But the two Josephus passages teach us an important lesson in analyzing the historical evidence for Jesus. Before any source can be deemed to be valid, it must first meet at least two criteria; that a) the source can be shown beyond a shadow of a doubt to be authentic and not a forgery (or at least

⁷⁹ Fitzgerald, *Nailed*, pg. 104-105

⁸⁰ Cf. David Fitzgerald analyzes all of the most commonly cited sources for Jesus’ existence in *Nailed*, pg. 358-414

authentic enough) and b) the source is actually talking about the subject in question. It would seem that in the case of the two Josephus passages, they each only meet one criterion. In other words, the *Testimonium Flavianum* clearly meets the second criteria, but not the first. And likewise, the “James Passage” meets the first criteria, but not the second.

The fact that all of the sources for Jesus’ existence are in this much doubt raises a major problem for the other argument raised by Drs. Habermas and Licona; that there are other figures in history who are referenced less than Jesus within 150 years, but their existence is unquestioned. To support this argument, Habermas and Licona offer two examples of less-referenced figures; Julius Caesar and Tiberius Caesar. According to Habermas and Licona, “only five sources report [Julius Caesar’s] military conquests: writings by Caesar himself, Cicero, Livy, the Salona Decree, and Appian.”⁸¹

First off, these are not the only sources which mention actions done by Caesar, such as his crossing of the Rubicon, as noted by Richard Carrier.

[A]lmost every historian of the period reports the Rubicon crossing including the most prominent of the Roman age: Suetonius, Appian, Cassius Dio, and Plutarch. Moreover, these scholars have shown proven reliability, since a great many of their reports on other matters have been confirmed with material evidence and in other sources.⁸²

Second, as Habermas and Licona themselves admit, Caesar himself was one of the sources documenting his existence, which is virtually all we need to determine that he really existed. In contrast, we have absolutely nothing written by Jesus himself. It is clear that their choice of offering Julius Caesar as an example was a very poor choice indeed.

As for their second example, Tiberius Caesar, Licona and Habermas consider him to be a “better example,” since he was a contemporary of Jesus. They note that only 10 sources mention

⁸¹ Habermas and Licona, pg. 128

⁸² Carrier, Richard, *Why I Don't Buy the Resurrection Story*
http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/resurrection/

Tiberius within 150 years of his life, and that this is far poorer than Jesus' supposed 42 sources. But is this true? Let's examine a few of the sources which mention Tiberius. One of these sources is a historian we previously looked at, Tacitus. This may at first seem to actually strengthen their case, since Jesus and Tiberius share a source. However, Tacitus's account of Tiberius could not be more different than his account of Jesus. As we previously saw, Tacitus's account of Jesus is very problematic, since in all likelihood he did not obtain his information from a primary source. His mention of Jesus was also quite small, only a few sentences at best. In contrast, Tacitus devoted the first six books of his *Annals* entirely to the reign of Tiberius. There is obviously a world of difference between writing a few questionable sentences about someone, and devoting six books to someone's actions.

Another source which mentions Tiberius is a Roman historian named Velleius Paterculus. This historian's account of Tiberius is even better than Tacitus's, as Velleius actually served under Tiberius for eight years. Again, this is in stark contrast to Jesus, as we previously established that none of his supposed sources ever actually met him or even lived during his time. Tiberius is yet another poor source chosen by Habermas and Licona. Moreover, there have been artifacts discovered that demonstrate that both of these Caesars existed, such as coins and sculptures depicting them. However, we have no physical evidence for Jesus' existence that dates to the time he supposedly lived.

These facts greatly undermine Habermas and Licona's case, as they appear to have not factored in an important aspect in establishing a person's historicity; that one must not merely examine the *quantity* of sources attested to someone, but the *quality* of said sources should also be examined as well. Regardless of whether or not Jesus has more sources mentioning him than other figures in history, it is clear that the quality of these sources are extremely poor in

comparison to other figures that have less sources. One fact that simply cannot be ignored is that every source for Jesus' existence is *in dispute*. In contrast, the two figures Licona and Habermas present each have at least one source that is *not* in dispute, and that is all one would need.

We must assume that these figures, Julius and Tiberius Caesar, are two of the best examples they could come up with. As we can see, their examples are not impressive. Nor are they fair comparisons to Jesus either. If one were to offer another figure in history to accurately compare to Jesus, then one would need to present a figure who:

- Has no personally written texts.
- Has no writings of him by friends during his lifetime.
- Has no writings of him by enemies during his lifetime.
- Has no sculptures or other artwork of him created during his lifetime.
- Has no artifacts confirming his life.
- Has no artifacts confirming his death.
- Has an unknown date of birth.
- Has an unknown date of death.

Only after another figure in history has been shown to have all of these qualities and whose historicity is not questioned can any fair comparison be made. Otherwise, any other comparison is inaccurate and misleading.

Likewise, the sources which documented these two Caesars' lives were some of the most renowned historians of their time, and had every reason to mention them. However, there were several figures who had every reason to mention Jesus during or near his lifetime, but did not. For example, Seneca the Younger (4 BCE-65 CE) was a Stoic philosopher and writer who would have at least made mention of the miraculous events that supposedly occurred during Jesus'

time. Some of these events were the numerous earthquakes that are said to have occurred after Jesus' death, or the world-wide darkness that was said to have occurred at Jesus' crucifixion. Seneca most certainly would have recorded these events in his book on nature *Quaestiones Naturales* had they occurred, but he makes no mention of them.

A better example would be Seneca's older brother Junius Annaeus Gallio, who actually appears in the Bible.⁸³ According to the Book of Acts, Gallio was the magistrate who heard Paul's case and threw it out of court. If this is true, then it is extremely strange that Gallio would have made no mention of this to his brother. Likewise, there is no indication that Gallio ever heard of Jesus either. How is it possible that if Jesus had actually existed he would have gone unnoticed by these men?

This silence is also found in Judea as well. Nicolaus of Damascus, who was born around 64 BCE and died somewhere in the late first century CE, was advisor and court historian to King Herod the Great. Though Nicolaus was known to have written a huge amount of information on Herod, he makes absolutely no mention of the wise men who came to Herod's court, of Herod's fury when he learned that the wise men had deceived him or of Herod's slaughter of the innocents. These are all events Nicolaus would have been a witness to, yet he never wrote a word about any of them.

There are many more examples of historians and writers who lived during or near the time Jesus supposedly lived that could and likely would have mentioned him, but did not.⁸⁴ This absence is particularly significant due to who Jesus was supposed to be. It cannot be said that no contemporaries of Jesus would have had reason not to notice Jesus, as the Gospels portray him as

⁸³ Cf. Acts 18:12

⁸⁴ Cf. A lengthy list of these other historians and writers are given in Murdock's *Who Was Jesus?* pg. 85

having “great crowds” and “multitudes” of people knowing of his fame.⁸⁵ It is simply astounding that, had Jesus really existed, every contemporary historian would have missed him. Even F. F. Bruce, the Christian scholar who has firmly defended Jesus’ existence, has admitted that:

Apart from the New Testament writings and later writings dependent on these, our sources of information about the life and teaching of Jesus are scanty and problematic.⁸⁶

When it comes to the case of Jesus and those who would confirm his existence, the silence is deafening.

In conclusion, it is apparent that a very strong case can be made that Jesus never existed at all as a human being. The evidence appears to overwhelmingly support this assertion. However, this topic will obviously go on to be debated for decades, if not centuries from now, which should be done. It is important for us as human beings to decide whether or not we should continue to see Jesus as a real or mythical figure. But it’s also important for us to realize that, real or not, original or unoriginal, Jesus’ message stays the same. That message overall is to live a peaceful life and treat others with kindness and respect. Throughout the centuries, people have obviously misused and distorted Jesus’ words, which has caused a great number of terrible incidents to happen. And I for one believe that getting all the facts straight about Jesus, including whether or not he lived at all will help us to avoid more of these incidents in the future.

Perhaps one day we shall discover hard evidence which proves Jesus really did exist. This has been known to happen for other figures, such as Pontius Pilate, the very man who was said to have condemned Jesus to the cross. For years scholars debated whether or not Pilate was a historical person, but the discovery of the Pilate Stone in 1961 put an end to that debate and

⁸⁵ Cf. Examples of these: Mt 4:23-25, 5:1, 8:1, 8:18, 9:8, 9:31, 9:33, 9:36, 11:7, 12:15, 13:2, 14:1, 14:13, 14:22, 15:30, 19:2, 21:9, 26:55; Mk 1:28, 10:1; Lk 4:14, 4:37, 5:15, 14:25 etc.

⁸⁶ Bruce, F. F., *New Testament History*, pg. 155

showed that he really did exist.⁸⁷ And a similar discovery could be made for Jesus as well in the future. The point is that we need to continue to research this topic, whether Catholic, Christian or any other type of believer, and allow the information to guide us, not any religious notions that may cloud our judgment. As noted by Dr. Robert Price, there may have been a real historical Jesus, “but unless someone discovers his diary or his skeleton, we’ll never know.”⁸⁸ In short, only time will tell.

⁸⁷ Cf. Vardaman, Jerry, *A New Inscription Which Mentions Pilate as ‘Prefect,’* Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 81, 1962, pg. 70-71

⁸⁸ Jacoby, Douglas A., *Compelling Evidence for God and the Bible*, pg. 97

Bibliography

Acharya S.- *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled*, Adventures Unlimited Press, 2004

Barker, Dan- *Why Jesus?* <http://www.ffrf.org/publications/nontracts/Why-Jesus/>

Barnett, Don- *History of the Doctrine Concerning the Nature of God in the Early Centuries of Christianity* <http://www.altupc.com/altupc/articles/hdng.htm>

Beilby, James K. and Eddy, Paul R.- *The Historical Jesus: Five Views*, InterVarsity Press, 2009

Berry, Gerald- *Religions of the World*, Barnes & Noble, 1956

The Bhagavata Purana, Motilal Banarsidass, 1976

Bruce, F. F.- *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1981

- *New Testament History*, Oliphants, 1977

Callahan, Tim- *Secret Origins of the Bible*, Millennium Press, 2002

Carrier, Richard- *Critical Notes on the Movie The God Who Wasn't There*

<http://www.richardcarrier.info/NotesOnTGWWT.pdf>

- *Why I Don't Buy the Resurrection Story*

http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/resurrection/

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997

Cotter, Wendy- *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, Psychology Press, 1999

Doherty, Earl- *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ?* Age of Reason Publications, 2005

Fitzgerald, David- *Nailed: Ten Christian Myths that Show Jesus Never Existed at All*, Lulu Enterprises Inc., 2010

Ganguli, Kisari Mohan- *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*, BiblioBazaar, 2009

Habermas, Gary R. and Licona, Michael R.- *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Kregel Publications, 2004

Herbermann, Charles G.- *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert Appleton Company, 1909

Hinnells, John R.- *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies*, Manchester University Press, 1975

The Holy Bible, New King James Version, Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1979

Hugh-Jones, Stephen, and Laidlaw, James Alexander- *The Essential Edmund Leach*, volume 1-2, Yale University Press, 2001

Jacoby, Douglas A.- *Compelling Evidence for God and the Bible*, Harvest House Publishers, 2010

Kosmin, Barry A. and Keysar, Ariela- *American Religious Identification Survey*
http://b27.cc.trincoll.edu/weblogs/AmericanReligionSurvey-ARIS/reports/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf

LaBriolle, Pierre de- *Tertullien: De Praescriptione Haereticorum*, Picard, 1907

Life in 2050: Amazing Science, Familiar Threats- <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/625.pdf>

Mellor, Ronald- *Tacitus*, Psychology Press, 1994

Murdock, D. M.- *Christ in Egypt: The Horus-Jesus Connection*, Stellar House Publishing, 2009
-*Who Was Jesus? Fingerprints of the Christ*, Stellar House Publishing, 2007

Origen- *Contra Celsum*, Cambridge University Press, 1980

Padgett, Chris- *Wholly Mary: Mother of God*, St Anthony Messenger Pr, 2011

Pliny- *The Letters of Pliny the Younger*, Letter 96
http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?pageno=117&fk_files=2025

Price, Robert M.- *Deconstructing Jesus*, Prometheus Books, 2000

Rahner, Hugo- *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, Biblo & Tannen Publishers, 1971

Rhee, Joseph; Bradley, Tahman and Ross, Brian- *U.S. Military Weapons Inscribed With Secret 'Jesus' Bible Codes* <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/us-military-weapons-inscribed-secret-jesus-bible-codes/story?id=9575794>

Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James- *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, I, The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887

Sanyal, J. M.- *The Srimad-Bhagavatam of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*, volume 4, Oriental Pub. Co., 1965

Suetonius- *The Twelve Caesars*, Digireads.com Publishing, 2007

Tacitus- *The Annals*, Book XV <http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/annals.11.xv.html>

Taylor, Robert- *The Diegesis: Being a Discovery of the Origin, Evidences, and Early History of Christianity*, J. P. Mendum, 1829

Vardaman, Jerry- *A New Inscription Which Mentions Pilate as 'Prefect,'* Journal of Biblical Literature, Vol. 81, 1962

Weigall, Arthur- *The Paganism in Our Christianity*, Kessinger Publishing, 2003

Wilson, Horace Hayman- *The Vishnu Purana*, volume 4, J. Murray, 1840