

WHY TRUST THE BIBLE?

PART 1 – EVIDENCE FOR THE HISTORICAL EXISTENCE OF JESUS

1. NO DOUBT ON EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

There is universal agreement among historical Jesus scholars that he absolutely existed as a historical figure.

2. GOSPELS ARE WRITTEN AS BIOGRAPHIES

There is overwhelming consensus among scholars that the gospel accounts of Jesus' life are written in the form of ancient biographies, never intended to be taken as mythology or symbolism. The introduction to Luke's gospel makes this abundantly clear by stating that he has 'carefully investigated everything from the beginning' and decided to write 'an orderly account', 'so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught'.

3. NON CHRISTIAN DOCUMENTS REFERRING TO JESUS

The existence of non Christian documents referring to Jesus provide corroboration of the following events detailed in the gospels: The existence of Jesus himself, the existence of his followers, the existence of his brother James, the execution of John the Baptist, Jesus crucifixion under Pontius Pilate, the spread of the early church and further to that, the persecution of Christians and their willingness to die for their beliefs.

4. NEW TESTAMENT IS A COLLECTION OF SOURCES, NOT ONE BIG BOOK

Because of the existence of multiple sources (the criteria of multiple attestation), the reliability of the gospel stories is severely strengthened by the fact we have a number of different voices all offering the same overall picture of Jesus.

5. NEW TESTAMENT ACCOUNTS ARE REMARKABLY EARLY – That the New Testament texts in their ancient context were written down extremely early in comparison to most historical documents of the time. (With Paul's letters starting around 15 years after his death and the latest Gospel in John being dated to 60 years after his death.) When we compare these dates to other historical texts dated hundreds of years after the fact, we can be extremely confident of their accuracy.

6. RECORDS ARE TOO EARLY TO BE THE RESULT OF MYTH OR LEGEND

Written records 20-30 years after the death of Christ is far too short a period of time for any myths or legends to develop. Paul's writings from the 20 year mark (with references to a creed and hymn dated earlier) and Marks gospel at the 30 year mark both offer portraits of Christ that are consistent with all later text and the teaching we see of Jesus in the church now. The fact that thousands of people who were witnesses to his life and deeds would still be living at the time leaves them extremely open to criticism.

7. EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

All four gospels along, with several other New Testament books, were written either by immediate disciples or by those who had direct links with them. This strengthens the case that they are written as history with the direct intention of portraying events as they occurred.

8. SO MANY COPIES SO WELL PRESERVED

The overwhelming number of surviving manuscripts and their consistency in essential doctrine throughout translations gives us an extreme degree of confidence that the original meaning of the text has been preserved.

9. ORAL TRADITION

The ancient practice of oral tradition further strengthens the reliability of the events being transmitted accurately from the start through to their being written down in the letters of Paul and the Gospels. The fact that those who were passing it down were eyewitnesses to the events and committed to sharing the gospel faithfully also makes this more reliable.

10. ARCHEOLOGY

While archeological finds in recent years clearly cannot prove the existence of Christ in themselves, they can endorse the narratives and enhance the credibility of the New Testament. These finds show that the Biblical writings are historical and geographical in character — and thus deserve to be weighed and treated as seriously as other texts from antiquity

CONCLUSION

There are around eight things that most scholars, Christian or skeptical, accept as basic historical fact.

- Jesus was a Galilean Jew.
- His activities were confined to Galilee and Judea.
- He was baptized by John the Baptist.
- He called disciples.
- Over a period of 1-3 years debated Jewish authorities on the subject of God
- He was crucified by the Romans near Jerusalem.
- After his death his disciples continued.
- Some of his disciples were persecuted.

The very existence of disciples, willing to suffer and die for their beliefs and the rapid spread of the early church, attested to by non Christian documents is enough to completely dismiss any theory of his non existence. The notion that this kind of movement can begin from a single person who never actually existed, despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary is extremely wishful thinking. To say he is a mythical figure is to ignore all of the evidence.

All these things viewed on their own cannot prove the case for us. But when taken together, a comprehensive argument starts to emerge. That whether or not you can believe that Jesus is the divine Son of God, these events are undoubtedly historical. And in my view, once you consider the weight of it all, it would take a much greater leap of faith to dismiss him than to believe him.

Thus the Gospels can be taken as historically reliable documents, and the person Jesus Christ who is the subject of these accounts did most likely exist! Did he rise from the dead as claimed? This is the subject of Part 2.

John Dixon - "We have exactly the kind of evidence you would expect if the account of Jesus life as told by the gospels was true. And much more evidence pointing in that direction than if it were made up."