

Chapter 2

Jesus: The Historical Person



The birth, the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus – are they historical facts?

Are there secular evidences to prove that Jesus is a historical figure?

There are people who argue that Jesus did not live in this world. There are also people who believe in Jesus, the historical person. In the creed, we profess the birth, passion, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Isn't it our responsibility to get convinced of the historicity of Jesus? This chapter presents historical evidences about Jesus and will also answer various questions you may confront.

Reasons to Know the Historicity of Jesus

1. To confirm our faith in Jesus
2. To clear the doubts of others about Jesus

The historical evidence of Jesus can be divided into four parts

The Gospels	Early Christian Community	Historical Documents	Places and Monuments
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I. The Gospels

The Gospels are also historical books. Many references in the Gospels are accepted in the secular historical documents as well. Let us examine some of the historical facts about the Gospels and facts about Jesus in the Gospels.

- References in the Gospels make it clear that the four evangelists witnessed Jesus in person.
- All the Gospels were written between 65 and 95 AD after the death of Jesus. **“Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us by those who from the**



The son conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.



What is the importance of knowing that Jesus is a historical person?



Make posters based on the introductory notes of the Gospels

beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed" (Lk 1: 1-4).

- Manuscripts of the Gospels recorded from the second century AD are available.



P 90 (P. Oxy. 3523) comes from an ancient codex of the Gospel of John and dates to the second century. Photo Credit: Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society (London) and the Oxyrhynchus Imaging Project (Oxford), Wiki media Commons / Public Domain.

- Augustus Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod etc. mentioned in the Gospels are historical persons.
- There is historical evidence for events mentioned in the Gospels such as the census ordered by Augustus Caesar.

II. Early Church Communities

The early Christian communities were established by disciples of Jesus and those who knew him in person. "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life" (1 Jn 1:1). There are abundant documental and archeological evidences about the establishment of early Churches and other specific events.

- Archaeological excavations prove that the Christian Churches existed from the beginning of the 3rd century AD. The oldest Christian Church ever found is the 'House Church' of Dura-Europas. (The Church of Dura-Europas was built in the 3rd century AD).
- All the early Churches were established through the preachings about Jesus. Those who accepted the faith then, were the ones who lived at the time of Jesus and were aware of the historicity of these events.



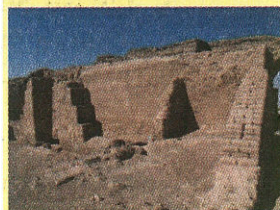
How can we prove the authenticity of the historical information in the Gospels?

Oral & Written Traditions

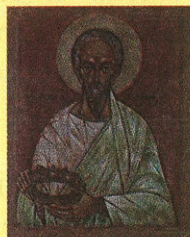
Most ancient texts were written years or centuries after they were orally transmitted.



Who are the prominent persons mentioned in the Gospels?
What are the references?



Dura-Europos House Church

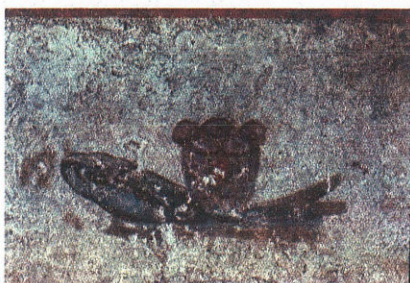


St. Justin, the Martyr
(A.D. 103-167)

- Starting with St. Stephen, numerous martyrs who embraced martyrdom for Christ lived during his time (Acts 7). No one will sacrifice their life for someone whom they do not know.
- Fathers of the Church St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Justin, the Martyr who lived in the second century clearly record Jesus as a historical person.
- In the early Christian centers of worship and Catacombs, numerous artistic representations of Jesus can be found.



St. Ignatius of Antioch (AD +107)



An iconography of the multiplication of the loaves as depicted in the catacombs.

III. HISTORICAL WRITINGS

The historical person Jesus is known as 'Jesus the Nazarene' as he hailed from Nazareth. Pilate wrote on the tablet on the cross of Jesus, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (Jn 19:19). References to Jesus can be found in many historical documents. Let's take a look at some of them.

1. Jewish Scriptures, 2. Flavius Josephus, 3. Roman Authors, 4. Apocryphal Books

1. The Jewish Scriptures

Jesus of Nazareth has his roots in the Jewish race. The Talmud written in the 1st Century is the Jewish code of law and its interpretation. The Midrashim is its contemporary document. It says thus about Jesus: Jesus of Nazareth (Nazarene) was born of a woman named Mary... Jesus was tried and sentenced to death.

2. Flavius Josephus

The references in the writings of the historian Flavius Josephus provide clear evidence about the life of Jesus. In his book the "Jewish Antiquity", written in AD 94, he explains



Referring to the Acts of the Apostles, organize a seminar on how early speeches were conducted on Jesus and how they were accepted.



Which were the early Church communities? How do they prove the historicity of Jesus?

Catacombs

Catacombs were the worship centers and underground burial places of the early Christians. It is a network of cellars and passages carved out of rocks and soils. During the period of persecution, they were used as hiding places and secret worship centers. Catacombs have both historical and archeological significance.

the history and political background of Jews. He describes Jesus and Christians in three instances. First, he writes very respectfully about John the Baptist and his death. Second is of the tragic death of the Apostle James. The epithet 'Jacob, the brother of Jesus, who is called Christ' is found in it (Jewish Antiquity XX). A very detailed description can be seen in the next section, which is as follows:

"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 amongst 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" (Jewish Antiquity XVIII: 63-64).

3. Roman Authors

Many renowned Roman authors mentioned Jesus in their writings. A letter written in AD 112 by Pliny the Younger, who was the governor of Asia Minor, to Emperor Trajan is an example of this. Pliny writes that there were many Christians in Bithynia, a territory of his kingdom. He adds that, "they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a God" (Epistola X: 96).

Tacitus is one of the important Roman historians. He writes about Jesus in his historical book "Annals" as follows: "Certain Christ who was killed during the reign of Tiberius the emperor and while Pontius Pilate was the governor was worshipped by the so-called Christians" (Annales XV, 44).

4. Apocryphal Books

Apocryphal books are not officially included by the Church among the books of the Holy Bible. These are historical documents written about Jesus but not included in the



"Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." In the corresponding Greek phrase, when the first letters of the words are combined, the word ΙΧΘΥΣ is obtained.
I-Iesous-Jesus
X-Christos-Christ
Θ-Theou-of God
Υ-Huios-Son
Σ - Soter - Savior
This Greek word, pronounced as "IKH'THYS" means "fish". During the period of religious persecution, Christians used this term to secretly identify each other. Thus, the fish became a symbol of Jesus during that time.



Create a digital gallery on the theme - 'Jesus commemorated in the Catacombs'.



Discuss the reference on Jesus in Midrashim.

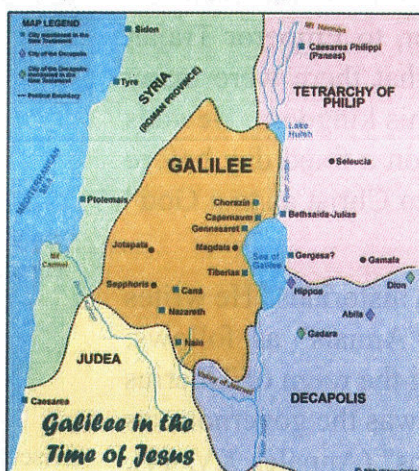


Church's canonical texts. These books contain numerous references to Jesus and the events during his time. Examples include 'Acts of Thomas', 'Gospel of the Hebrews'/'Gospel of the Nazarenes', 'Gospel of Peter' and 'Protoevangelium of James'.

IV. Places and Monuments

All the places and monuments mentioned in the Bible related to Jesus have been established on the basis of archaeological and historical evidences.

- All the places mentioned in the Gospels in connection with the birth, life and death of Jesus have been Christian pilgrimage centers since ancient times. These include the Church of the Nativity, which marks the place where Jesus was born, Jordan where he was baptized, Galilee, the Jerusalem Temple, Mount Tabor where the Transfiguration took place, the Garden of Gethsemane, Golgotha, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher where the tomb exists.
- All the journeys of Jesus documented in the Gospels correspond exactly to the realities of that region. A historical map created using details from the Gospel aligns with the present-day map of that area.



- The words and teachings of Jesus accurately reflect the material, social and political system of that time.

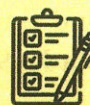


Pliny the younger

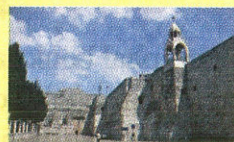
Since Jesus lived as a commoner outside of Galilee, and due to his execution by the Romans, majority of the people did not recognize his importance or document much about him. However, the presence of writings about Jesus during an era when only kings and nobles were typically documented, provide strong evidence of his historicity.



Lk 2:1-5



What are the common features found in the narratives about Jesus in contemporary writings?



Church of Nativity at Bethlehem

Anyone who approaches history with honesty cannot deny the historicity of Jesus. Secular literature and archeology confirm that everything documented in the Gospels about Jesus is historical. Moreover, thousands of people who have directly seen and heard Jesus, underline that truth with their own life testimony. Places and monuments related to the life of Jesus are pilgrim centers for the entire world. Their historicity is also undeniable.

The historical person Jesus, is the Son of God, our Lord and Savior of the universe. The life and teachings of Jesus continue to inspire and instill hope to the world even today. Who is this historical figure Jesus? Jesus rooted in history, is the divine Son of God and the only saviour of mankind.

My Convictions



1. Jesus is a historical person.
2. Jesus is fully God and fully man.
3. Jesus, the historical person and Son of God, is the only saviour of the world.



Let Us Read the Word of God

The Gospel According to
Matthew Chapters 8-14



Let Us Illumine Our Hearts

“And if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” (1 Cor 15:14).



My Resolution

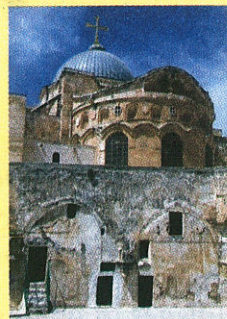
As a young person I will follow the example of Jesus in my life.



Divide into groups and present sections of the 'Acts of Thomas' using power point presentation.



Which are the places connected to the life of Jesus? What is their current state?



Church of the Holy Sepulcher



Trace the route of Jesus' journeys in the map of Galilee and compare with the present-day map.

...
Interview persons who have visited the Holy Land.