

Historical Jesus 1: Sources for Jesus' Life

Reasons to Study Jesus:

- 1/3 of earth's population believes in Jesus (2.2 billion)¹
- 71% of Americans are Christians in 2014²
- His life and teachings have massively influenced civilization
- Non-followers even like him
- He offers forgiveness from sin, a way of living full of meaning, and, ultimately, eternal life

My objectives for this class are to help you understand Jesus, teach you to follow Jesus, and inspire you to love Jesus.

Non-Christian Sources about the Life of Jesus:

- AD 93: Flavius Josephus (Jewish Historian)
"Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or some of his companions]; and, when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned" (Antiquities of the Jews 20.9.1)
- AD 93: Flavius Josephus (Jewish Historian)
"About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared." (Antiquities of the Jews 18.3.3)
- AD 111: Pliny the Younger (Governor of Bithynia)
"Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome." (Letters 10.96)
- AD 115: Tacitus (Roman Historian)
"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 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 Judæa, 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. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon

¹ pew research center 2010 report: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

² pew research center 2014 report: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.” (Annals 15.44)

Best Sources Are the Four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)

- Unusual Books
 - o Written in ancient Greek language
 - o Survived thousands of years
 - o A ridiculous number of translations
- Manuscripts
 - o Gap between autograph and extant copies
 - o Number of copies to compare with one another
- Aramaisms
 - o *Talitha cumi* (Mk 5:41), *ephphatha* (Mk 7:34), Golgotha (Mk 15:22), *Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani* (Mk 15:34), Kephias for Peter (Jn 1:42)
- Names Associated with Eye-Witness Testimony³
 - o Mk 15:21 “And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.”
- Lack of Motivation to Make Up Gospels
 - o The Gospels weren’t “best sellers” in the beginning; no one got rich or gained power
 - o In fact, the Gospels caused persecution: first from the Jews then the Romans
- Unflattering Honesty
 - o Jesus’ family thought he was crazy (Mk 3:21; Jn 7:5)
 - o Jesus couldn’t perform many miracles in Nazareth (Mk 6:5)
 - o The disciples often don’t understand or believe (Mk 8:32-33; 10:35-37; 14:37-40, 50)
 - o Peter rebuked Jesus and got called Satan (Mk 8:32-33)
 - o Peter denied Jesus (Mk 14:67-72)
 - o The Romans crucified Jesus (Mk 15:24)
- Lack of Later Controversies Injected into Gospels
 - o Nothing about working Gentiles and Jews into a single congregation
 - o Nothing about speaking in tongues, proper communion, role of women, etc.
- Archeological Corroboration
 - o Places: Jerusalem, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Samaria, Galilee, etc.
 - o Coins: denarius, shekel, half-shekel, lepton
 - o 1941 Ossuary found in Kidron area of Jerusalem “Alexander the Cyrene, son of Simon” (Mk 15:21)
 - o 1961 Pilate stone: in Caesarea Maritima found dedication stone to Tiberius by Pontius Pilate Prefect of Judea
 - o 1968 Yehohanan: crucified man, broken legs, buried in tomb not mass grave, with spike still in his heel (must’ve hit a knot)
 - o 1986 Galilean fishing boat: discovered at north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee (27ft by 7.5 ft) appeared during a drought; it could fit 13 men
 - o 1990 Caiaphas ossuary: found Joseph bar Caiaphas, high priest who orchestrated Jesus’ crucifixion (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.4.3 makes reference to “Joseph, who was also called Caiaphas, of the high priesthood”

³ For a full treatment on this, see Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

- 2002 James ossuary: inscribed with the words “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.” After a 7 year trial, Israeli courts failed to prove the inscription was a forgery
- 2004 Pool of Siloam: discovered two ancient steps while repairing broken sewage pipe. After excavation, they found the steps lead to a massive pool.
- Internal Evidence
 - Luke 1:1-4

1 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.⁴
 - 2 Peter 1:16-21

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," 18 we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, 20 knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.⁵
 - John 19:34-35

34 But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. 35 He who saw it has borne witness-- his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth-- that you also may believe.
 - John 21:21-24

21 When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" 22 Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" 23 So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" 24 This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.
- Changed Lives
 - Countless people have testified to how God irreversibly saved them from destructiveness as a result of encountering the Jesus of the Gospels
- Faith
 - Ultimately, you have to decide if you will put your trust in the Gospels

⁴ See also Luke's precision in Luke 3:1-2: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness."

⁵ According to Papias, writing in AD 130, Mark was Peter's interpreter who wrote down Peter's Gospel. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39

Historical Jesus 2: Birth of the Messiah

“Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander the Great, Caesar, Mohamed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, he shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of school, he spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, he set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.” — Philip Schaff

We have four primary sources

1. Mark: action focused, quick overview, very few teachings
2. Matthew: focused on convincing practicing Jews that Jesus is Messiah
3. Luke: focused on explaining Christianity to Gentiles
4. John: focused on Jesus’ self-understanding as God’s sent Son

God made promises to Abraham and David that will help you understand the birth of Christ much better.

Genesis 17:4-8: God’s Promises to Abraham

4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. 8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

Promises to Abraham

1. You will be father of a multitude of nations
2. Kings will come from you
3. I will be God to you and your offspring
4. I will give you and your offspring the land of Canaan

2 Samuel 7:12-16: God’s Promises to David

12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

Promises to David

1. God will establish kingdom of David’s son forever
2. David’s son will build a house for God’s name
3. I will be a father to him; he will be a son to me

4. When he goes wrong, I will discipline him, but not take my steadfast love from him

Matthew 1:1

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham

This is a bold statement:

1. Christ = Messiah = Anointed King
2. Son of David = the one God promised to establish his throne forever
3. Son of Abraham = the descendant to restore land to Israel

What follows in the first chapter of Matthew is a genealogy or list of ancestors, proving that Jesus is a qualified king going back to David and Abraham.

Luke 1:31-33

31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

The name "Jesus" means "Yahweh Is Salvation." It was very common in the first century (like Joshua is for us today). To distinguish Jesus from other Jesuses, people commonly called him "Jesus of Nazareth" or "Jesus the Nazarene."⁶ Where this prophecy gets interesting is when he is called "the son of the Most High" and the angel says God will give him David's throne. This is not just another Jesus or even another Davidic king. This is the one destined to rule over the kingdom of Israel forever!

Luke 1:34-35

34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy-- the Son of God.

With Jesus, we encounter something totally new. Jesus will not have a human father. God will be his "biological" father. This fulfills God's promise to David that he will be a father to David's son.

Luke 1:38

38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

To her credit, Mary had faith. Regardless of the circumstances, she committed to the prophecy, throwing herself headlong into the care of God.

Matthew 1:18-19

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

⁶ Though when he is in Nazareth they called him Jesus "the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon" or "the carpenter's son" or "Joseph's son."

Joseph decided to divorce her

- Parents typically arranged marriages
- Engagement was as binding as marriage itself
- Couldn't just return the ring and call it off

Matthew 1:20-25

20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God [is] with us). 24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Mary is a great woman of courageous faith

Joseph is a great man of courageous faith

- This level of trust is what God wants from you
- Will you be a Mary or a Joseph in your generation?
- Following Christ is not about playing it safe

At this point, ask yourself

- Who will this baby grow up to be?
- What will he do?
- How will he ascend to the throne of David?
- How will he restore the land back to Abraham's descendants?
- How will he save his people from their sins?

Next time, we'll see how the powers that be reacted to this baby Messiah.