

## From Myth to Savior

by Doug Hamilton

### Percent of Americans Believing in the Resurrection Drops To 64% From 77% Last Easter April 1, 2013 -By Dan Joseph

A study released by the Rasmussen Reports polling firm on Good Friday found that 64% of Americans believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

While Americans who believe in the resurrection remain in the majority, that number is down significantly when compared to a Rasmussen Poll that asked the same question, released a year ago.

On April 7th, 2012 Rasmussen released a poll finding that 77% of Americans believed the resurrection of Christ to be historical fact.

The difference between the two polls shows a 13 percentage point drop in the number of Americans who believe that Christ rose from the dead, since last Easter.

Additionally, this year's poll found that 19% of Americans reject the central tenant of the Christian faith and do not believe that Christ was resurrected. That's compared to only 7% who said they didn't believe that Christ rose from the dead a year ago. A staggering 12 percentage point jump.

### Secularizing America

As time goes by, fewer and fewer people in our country believe that Jesus was risen from the dead as a fact of history. This is because our society is being bombarded in the media, the schools and elitist clubs with anti-Christian themes. The result is not only a growing population doubting not only the resurrection of Jesus, but also His very existence as a real person of history. Some are actually teaching that Jesus was only a myth concocted to control ignorant and superstitious populace. Take for example from the website [www.rationalrevolution.net](http://www.rationalrevolution.net):

Like many other religious figures, "Jesus Christ" began as a theological concept, was later used as a character in allegorical stories, and was then historicized as someone whom people believed really existed. The belief in a literal "human" Jesus most likely emerged as Eucharist rituals and theology developed around the concept of the "flesh" and "blood" of Christ and these concepts merged with allegorical narratives about the figure.

### Purpose of the Lesson

The purpose of this lesson is not only bolster the faith of the believer in Christ, but to better equip Christians to take the doubters from the Jesus of mythology to the same being Savior of the world.

### Step One: Proving Jesus was a Real Person of History Using Secular Sources

1. Thallus / 52 AD: His mentioning of Jesus in his writings takes for granted His existence in relation to the darkness that came upon the earth at the time of the crucifixion. It was in the reflection of this writing that Julius Africanus reasoned that Thallus' observation

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was a purely natural phenomenon. If Jesus was not a real person of history, it certainly was not communicated by Thallus who considered it an historical fact.

2. Mara Bar-Serapion / 73 AD: Writing to his son in prison, he encourages him with the fact that it is foolish to persecute wise men of history, specifically Socrates, Pythagoras and Christ. He said concerning the latter “*What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their King?*”... “*the wise King die for good; He lived on in the teaching which He had given.*” He obviously recognized Jesus as a real person of history.
3. Cornelius Tacitus / (Born 52-54 AD): He was considered one the greatest Roman ancient historians, wrote concerning the Nerodian persecutions dating only thirty years after Jesus:

“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...”

He was in a unique position to know the details about Christians, being a former governor of Asia in 112 AD. He could have easily dismissed Jesus as a made up person of history, but did not for he accepted that historical fact.

4. The Babylonian Talmudic Writings / 70 to 200 AD: These were the writings of the Jews following the destruction of Jerusalem. They mention Jesus many times, all in negative light. The writings say that Jesus was a sorcerer that practiced magic, caused trouble against the wise men of the day and was moved to destroy the Law of Moses. They painted him as a rebel who had to be dealt with.

“It has been taught: On the Eve of the Passover, they hanged Yeshu. And an announcer went out in front of him, for forty days saying: 'he is going to be stoned because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray.' Anyone who knows anything in his favor, let him come and plead in his behalf.' But, not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the Eve of the Passover.”

In their ridicule of Him, they actually confirmed that He was a real person of history.

5. Flavius Josephus / (Lived 37 to 100 AD): He is considered one of the greatest historians of the region, having witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman forces. His writings confirm many biblical personalities from the NT, including John the Baptist, Pilate, the Herods, many other religious and political leaders of the day. He also goes into a little detail about another person of history, Jesus Christ.

“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.”

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6. Pliny the Younger / 112 AD: In writing to Emperor Trajan requesting advice on how to deal with the sect of Christians, which according to his words, were troubling his province. He wrote:

“They were in a habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed...after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but a food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”

He accepted that Jesus was their leader and in the context of a real person of history had real followers of history that was causing some real “problems” of history. It was all in historical context.

7. Suetonius / 120 AD: In his writing “The Life of Claudius” he mentions Jesus in historical context saying, “*As the Jews were making constant disturbances as the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.*” This was the same historical event that occurred in Acts 18:1-2.
8. Lucian of Samosata / 125-180 AD -Greek philosopher: In criticizing the early Christians he wrote:

“The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day -- the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account... You see, these misguided creatures started with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.”

In his criticisms he confirmed that to his trained mind Jesus was a real person of history.

9. Celsus, a pagan philosopher. He produced the oldest existing literary attack against Christianity. His *True Discourse* (c. A.D. 178) was a bitter assault upon Christ. Celsus argued that Jesus was born in low circumstances, being the illegitimate son of a soldier named Panthera (see above). As he grew , He announced Himself to be God, deceiving many. Celsus charged that Christ’s own people killed Him, and that His resurrection was a deception. But Celsus never questioned the historicity of Jesus.
10. Porphyry of Tyre / born about A.D. 233. He studied philosophy in Greece, and lived in Sicily where he wrote fifteen books against the Christian faith. In one of his books, “*Life of Pythagoras*”, he contended that magicians of the pagan world exhibited greater powers than Christ. His argument was an inadvertent concession of Jesus’ existence, and power.

As you can see, Jesus was more than confirmed to be a real person of history according to the ancient writers. These ten ancient writers uniformly confirm that He was a man, claimed to be

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the Christ and died at the hands of Pontius Pilate. If he was not a real person or perceived as so, these educated men would have simply dismissed Him as ridiculously false.

### The Contemporary Emperor

In Luke 3:1 it states, “*Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...*” Tiberius was the ruler of the entire Roman Empire, the ruler of the conquered world. Scholars are only aware of ten sources that mention Emperor Tiberius within 150 years of his life, including the gospel writer Luke. Only ten sources! Yet, there is not a respected historian that would ever claim that Tiberius was not a real man of history, for that would be foolish.

Jesus lived the same time that Tiberius was Emperor. Jesus is mentioned by no less than forty writers of history in the same time period with an even greater detail! Within this short time frame, the number of ancient writers who mention Jesus outnumber those who mention the leader of the entire Roman Empire by a ratio of 4:1! Take into consideration that this was during a time of hostilities against Christ, the Christians and their writings. Many of the ancient writings of the church were gathered and burned by Roman authorities and the evidence is still overwhelming. Yet there are those that still say He is not a real person of history.

As a famous Israeli scholar (Professor Shlomo Pines), in discussing the fact of Jesus' historicity, states: “*...the fact is that until modern times this particular hare (i.e. claiming Jesus is a hoax) was never started. Even the most bitter opponents of Christianity never expressed any doubt as to Jesus having really lived.*”

If the believer in "Jesus of Mythology" actually reasons the evidence, they must at minimum admit that Jesus was a real person of history; And if they are willing to admit this based on the external evidence, then it is time to move to the more detailed internal evidence.

### Step Two: Introducing the New Testament as an History Document

Was Jesus a good person? Usually the answer is "Yes". Then ask them where they are basing that answer upon? They might say that someone told them of the goodness of Jesus, but where did those people get the information? Since there is very little information in the ancient secular writings that state this, the only place they could have gained this viewpoint was from the non-hostile source, the New Testament.

Logical Stated Conclusion: Since bulk of the information concerning the goodness of Jesus is from the New Testament, then isn't it logical to assume that the New Testament is considered a reliable ancient document on the historicity of goodness of Jesus? Absolutely.

### The New Testament is a reliable history book attesting to the goodness of Jesus.

Taking just one writer of the New Testament, the same from above, Luke, we can see the historical reliability of the New Testament. Luke did not actually witness the life of Jesus, therefore his account was one of an investigative reporter. This is clear from the opening of Luke's gospel account.

Luke 1:1-4 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us,<sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those

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who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,<sup>3</sup> it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;<sup>4</sup> so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Luke was a physician, and educated man. He is writing to a high-ranking government official named Theophilus about the authenticity of the life account of Jesus Christ. His status is confirmed in the statement "Most Excellent", a term signifying the occupation of high office ("most excellent governor Felix Acts 23:26 and "most excellent Festus" Acts 26:25). Theophilus would have had access to Roman records and could have checked out the facts to see whether they were so.

Luke 2:1-3 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.<sup>2</sup> This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.<sup>3</sup> And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.

Luke mentioned real events of history that are confirmed as true. One could not in all good conscience reject the historical perspective Luke brought to the table. He wrote with the great accuracy concerning people, places and events. He did not deal with "Once upon a time in a land far, far away", but in concrete facts.

Luke 3:1-2 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene,<sup>2</sup> in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.

He wrote about real people of history and placed them in a time/place dimension that calls for readers of all time to CHECK IT OUT and see whether it was true. Not one single person that Luke mentions in his account has been proven to be fictitious. They were real people at real places carrying out real event of history. His other confirmed writing, the Book of Acts, list in great detail the historical record of the beginnings of the church following the resurrection of Jesus. Between the two writings he provided great evidence to the account of personage of Christ and His goodness from the eye witnesses who happened to be present. In particular, Luke taught us of the goodness of Jesus.

Luke's historical record tells us that Jesus reached out to the hurting.

- Luke 10:36-37 36 "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*?"<sup>37</sup> And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."
- Luke 14:13 "But when you give a reception, invite *the* poor, *the* crippled, *the* lame, *the* blind..."
- Luke 18:22 When Jesus heard *this*, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

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Luke's historical record tells us that Jesus encouraged many with His words.

- Luke 9:48 and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great.”
- Luke 11:9-10 “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> “For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.”

Luke's historical record tells us that Jesus taught us to be loving toward everyone.

- Luke 6:27-28 “But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.
- Luke 23:34 Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

Luke's historical record tells us that Jesus had good moral values.

- Luke 12: 15 Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”
- Luke 13: 24 “Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.
- Luke 14:11 “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

From the writings of the ancient historian Luke we can most certainly learn that Jesus was a good man. In the next lesson we are going to use the ancient historical accounts of Luke to confirm the great claim by Jesus that He was the Son of God. For now we want to conclude that the historicity of Jesus is solid and true from ancient secular sources and the New Testament.