

Question: What if they say to you that Jesus is a made up person concocted to control the masses?

Answer: Show them that the ancient historical writers, most of whom were hostile to Christianity, would disagree with that statement. (See the evidence below)

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 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 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 confirms 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.”

6. Pliny the Younger / 112 AD: In writing to Emperor Tragan 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 / 2nd century 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 of the second century AD: 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 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.

Summary of Jesus the Real Person of History

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 the name of Jesus and His people. Yet there are those that still say He is not a real person of history that claimed to be the Christ and died on the cross at the hands of Pontius Pilate.

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.*"

Stage Two: Introducing the New Testament as a History Book

Question to Ask the Doubter: Was Jesus a good or a bad person of history?

Their typical answer: "*He was a good man.*"

If this is the case, ask them where they gained this observation? They might say that someone told them, but where did they get their information about Jesus being a good man? Since there is not a plethora of secular writings that state this since the origin was hostile to Christianity, the only place they could have gotten this viewpoint was from the non-hostile source, the New Testament.

Stated Conclusion: Logically their statement that Jesus was a *good man* is an admission that the writings of the New Testament are historically reliable, for that is the only body of early evidence that concludes that to be a true statement.

The New Testament is a History Book:

Taking just one writer of the New Testament, we can see the historical reliability of the New Testament. He did not actually witness Jesus, therefore his account was one of an investigative reporter.

Luke 1:1-4 Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us,² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,³ 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;⁴ 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.

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.² This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.³ 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.

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,² 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 if it was true. Not one single person that Luke mentions in his account has been proven to be fictitious.
- His other confirmed writing was the Book of Acts, 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 Christ and Who He was to those who knew Him.

In the next lesson we are going to use the historical accounts of Luke from the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts to confirm that Jesus was the Son of God. For now we want to conclude that the historicity of Jesus is solid and true. This is confirmed from sources both in and out of the New Testament.

The Investigative Historical Document of Luke Reveals the Following:

According to Luke's historical account, Jesus predicted that he would be killed and resurrected on the third day.

- Luke 9:22 “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.”

Note: It is very important that the prospect stay focused on this particular miracle surrounding Jesus, for it is the thing to be believed concerning the gospel (1 Cor 15:1-4).

One of the following would be true concerning this prediction:

1. Jesus was a liar.
He spoke against lies, dishonesty and deceit. This was the basis of His being.
2. Jesus was crazy.
People who are crazy don't teach with authority that He did and do not stand toe to toe with the greatest minds of His day like He did.
3. Jesus was the Christ.
If He was raised from the dead, then He was Whom He said He was, the Christ.

Jesus was arrested and charged as an historical fact.

- Luke 22:54 Having arrested Him, they led Him *away* and brought Him to the house of the high priest...”
- Luke 22:63 Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody...”
- Luke 23:1-2 Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate. ² And they began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.”

Jesus was questioned by Pilate, a real person of history.

- Luke 23:3 So Pilate asked Him, saying, “Are You the King of the Jews?” And He answered him and said, “*It is as you say.*” ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.”

Jesus was interrogated by King Herod, a real person of history.

- Luke 23:8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. ⁹ And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing.

Jesus was sentenced to a real crucifixion of history.

- Luke 23:23-25 “...they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices *began* to prevail. ²⁴ And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted. ²⁵ And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

Luke provides a real historical account of the crucifixion of Jesus including location, time, position and events.

- Luke 23:33-34 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left.
- Luke 23:44-46 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, ⁴⁵ because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.” Having said this, He breathed His last.

Luke provides historical evidence that Jesus was buried in a tomb.

- Luke 23:50 “...Joseph...went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain.
- Luke 23:55 Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid.

Simple Summary of the Facts: According to Luke’s historical account everybody according to the testimony believed that Jesus was dead. The executioners, the governor, the embalmers, the priests and Jewish leaders and the apostles all believed he was dead.

Luke’s historical account states that the tomb was empty on the first day of the week.

- Luke 24:1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. ² And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Luke’s historical account confirmed that the women reported this to the apostles.

- Luke 24:8-9 “And they...returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven...”

Luke’s historical account confirmed that Peter went to the tomb to see for himself.

- Luke 24:12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.

Luke’s historical account mentions that many saw the Jesus after the resurrection.

- Luke 24:13-15 “...two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus...” and “...Jesus Himself approached and *began* traveling with them.”
- Luke 24:34 “The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon.”
- Luke 24:46 “...He Himself stood in their midst...” (the apostles)

Simple Summary of the Facts: According to the account of Luke, there were many eye witnesses that could confirm the post-resurrection of Jesus. They talked with Him; they ate with Him; they examined the puncture marks in His hands. The historical record makes this very clear.

The Early Responses to the Preaching of the Resurrected Jesus.

Luke's historical account states that Jesus instructed the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until the beginning of their post-resurrection message.

- Luke 24:49 "...you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."
- Acts 1:8 "...and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

Luke's historical account says that Jesus ascended into heaven.

- Luke 24:5 While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

Luke's historical account states that only fifty days following the crucifixion that three thousand people converted in response to Peter's sermon about the resurrected Jesus.

- Acts 2:29-32 "Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ "And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT *one* OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, ³¹ he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. ³² "This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.
- Acts 2:41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.
- Note: They could have easily dismissed that Jesus was resurrected from the dead by investigating this, but they accepted it as a fact.

Luke's historical account states that shortly thereafter the number of converts that responded to the message of a resurrected Jesus grew to be five thousand men.

- Acts 4:2-4 "...they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead...⁴ But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."

Luke's historical account states that there were constant converts to the resurrection of Jesus even though they would be persecuted.

- Acts 5:14 And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to *their number*,
- Acts 5:18 They laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail.
- Acts 5:27-30 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross.

Luke's historical account confirms that the generation of the resurrection was even willing to be put to death for their belief in the resurrection of Jesus.

- Acts 7:59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

- Acts 12:2 And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

Simple Summary of the Facts: The people who were in and around Jerusalem, whom saw Jesus and could remember the death, burial and an empty tomb on the third day, were willing to convert, be persecuted and killed for what they knew.

Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Luke's historical account states that Saul of Tarsus was a persecutor of Christians.

- He orchestrated the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58).
- He laid waste to the church by dragging them to prison (Acts 8:1-3).
- He was slaughtering Christians (Acts 9:1-2).
- He persecuted them to death (Acts 22:4).

Luke's historical account records that Saul had a conversion on the road to Damascus.

- Acts 9:18 “And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized...”
- Acts 22:15-16 ‘For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ ‘Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.’

Luke's historical account records that Saul (Name changed to Paul) was being persecuted for his faith in Christ.

- Acts 9:22-23 “But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ. ²³ When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him...”
- Acts 14:19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.
- Acts 16:23-24 When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; ²⁴ and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Simple Summary of the Facts: What could have made such a change in Saul's life concerning this conversion? There was not a single person that would have been able to reach Saul with the gospel for they were all fleeing for their lives from him. Luke records that the resurrected Jesus reached him for conversion. From a persecutor to the persecuted, Paul's life is truly one of a life changing history, for he was confronted by the resurrected Jesus.

Overall Summary:

- According to the historically reliable writings of Luke, we can see that Jesus claimed that He would be killed, buried, resurrected, appear to the apostles and others following the resurrection.
- The apostles started spreading the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the people who were in and around Jerusalem at the time of the actual event. Within days of the ascension, thousands upon thousands of Jews converted against peer

pressure and even threats of beatings and imprisonments. They must have been convicted of what they knew to be true.

- Saul of Tarsus would have been the hardest person on the earth to convert to Christianity. Luke confirmed that he was a persecutor of the church and a radical hater of Christians. Yet something happened on the Road to Damascus that changed his life and made him a prolific missionary and writer in the name of Christ.
- Luke 24:6 “He is not here, but He has risen.”