

Jesus: Myth or Messiah?

Who was Jesus?
(Apologetics, Week 4)

Introduction: Who do people say Jesus is today?

Common answers

- A great moral teacher
- A prophet or revolutionary
- A myth
- A wise rabbi
- God in the flesh

Today's goal:

To show that Jesus is a real, historical person and the divine Messiah.

Historical Evidence: How many sources?

- New Testament manuscripts: 25,000+
 - Earliest copies within decades
 - 99.5% textual certainty
 - Far exceeds other ancient works

Work	Approx. Date Written	Approx. # manuscripts	NT has more by	NT has ~X times as many
New Testament (Greek)	AD 50-100	5,800		
Homer - Iliad	750 BC	1,800	4,000	3x
Plato - Dialogues	400 BC	250	5,550	23x
Julius Caesar - Gallic Wars	50 BC	240	5,560	24x
Tacitus - Annals	AD 100	2	5,798	2,900

Historical Evidence: How early?

Work	Approx. Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approx. Time Gap
New Testament (Greek)	AD 50-100	AD 125-150	25-50 years
Homer's Iliad	750 BC	250 BC	500 years
Plato - Dialogues	400 AD	900 AD	1,300 years
Caesar's Gallic Wars	50 BC	900 AD	950 years
Tacitus - Annals	100 AD	AD 900-1100	800 - 1,000 years

Non-Christian Sources

- Tacitus - Roman historian
- Josephus - Jewish historian
- Pliny the Younger - Roman governor
- Suetonius - Roman biographer
- Lucian - Greek satirist

Even hostile sources confirm key facts of Christianity

Historical Evidence: Historical Figures

Figure	Earliest Sources After Death	Number of Sources	Hostile Sources?	Historical Consensus
Jesus of Nazareth	20-60 years (Paul, Gospels); 60-90 years (Tacitus, Josephus, Pliny)	Many (Christian + non-Christian)	Yes (Tacitus, Pliny, Josephus)	Virtually unanimous
Alexander the Great	300-400 years later (Arrian, Plutarch)	Few	No	Unquestioned
Socrates	40-70 years later (Plato, Xenophon)	Very few	No	Unquestioned
Hannibal	50-70 years later (Polybius)	Few	Mixed	Unquestioned
Julius Caesar	Contemporary + later	Many	Some	Unquestioned
Tiberius Caesar	Decades later	Few	Some	Unquestioned

Jesus in the Gospels

- Jesus claimed divine authority
 - “Before Abraham was born, I AM” (John 8:58)
 - “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30)
 - “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6)
 - Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)
- He demonstrated authority over:
 - Nature (Mark 4:39)
 - Sin (Mark 2:5-12)
 - Demons (Mark 5:6-13)
 - Death (John 11:43-44)
- He taught with authority

Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?

Which is Jesus?

C.S. Lewis' trilemma

- **Liar**: knowingly false → no moral authority
- **Lunatic** - sincerely mistaken → no moral authority
- **Lord** - his claims are true → legitimate authority

Moral teachers say 'here is a good way to live.'
Jesus says 'Follow me.'

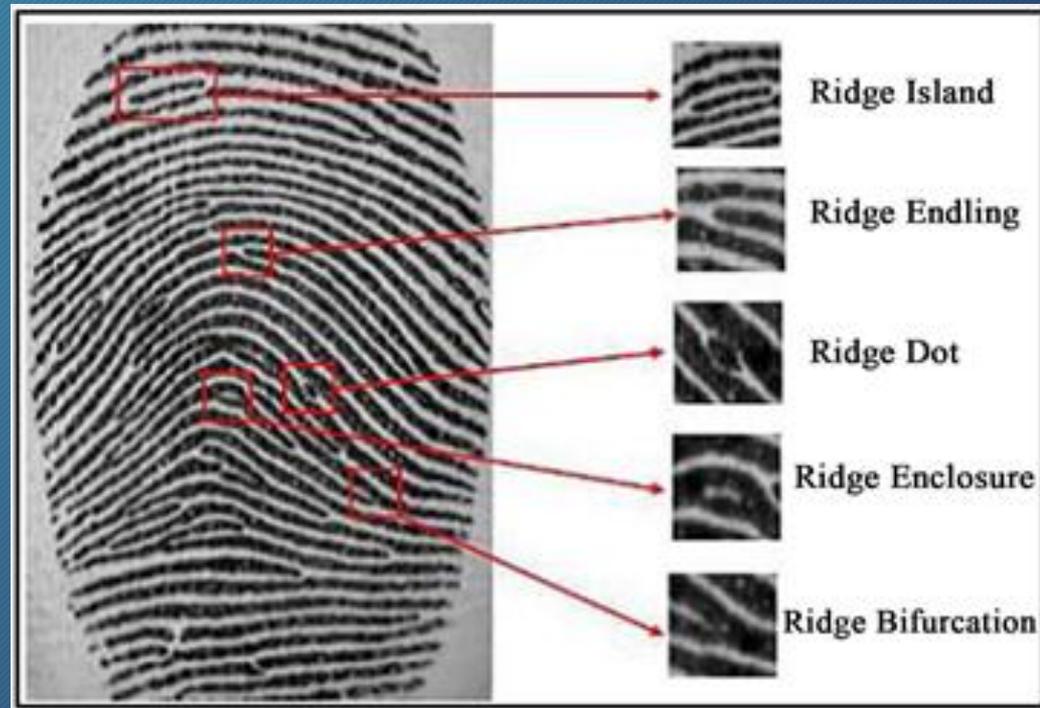
Messianic Prophecy

- Micah 5:2 (700 BC)
 - Messiah born in Bethlehem → Matthew 2
- Isaiah 53 (700 BC)
 - Suffering Servant → Crucifixion
- Psalm 22 (1000 BC)
 - Crucifixion imagery before crucifixion existed

And even more...
between 50-300 more!

Messianic Prophecy and Probability

- Chances of fulfilling 1 prophecy?
- Chances of fulfilling 8 prophecies?
- Chances of fulfilling 48 prophecies?



Is Jesus a Myth?

- Characteristics of a myth:
 - No specific time/place
 - Evolves over centuries
 - Sometimes supernatural
- Compare to Jesus:
 - Jesus is rooted in real time, in real places, with real people
 - Eyewitness testimony
 - Verified death
 - Early creeds stating resurrection

Responding to Doubts

- “We can’t trust the Gospels”
 - Early dating
 - Multiple eyewitnesses
 - Manuscript evidence
- “Jesus never claimed to be God”
 - His words (John 5:18, 10:30)
 - His actions

Application & Encouragement

- Christianity is grounded in real events, not fables (2 Peter 1:16).
- Lewis: “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance.”
- Reflection: “If Jesus really is who He claimed to be, what response makes sense?”

Assignment: Read John 11

Next week...

The Resurrection: Evidence and Power

Discussion

- Why do people prefer to see Jesus as a myth or moral teacher?
- What evidence strengthens your confidence in Jesus' identity?
- How would you respond to someone who says Jesus was just a good teacher?