

Some preliminary questions

- *Who is Jesus?*
- *Secular history and all the major religions of the world agree He existed, but they have very different answers as to who He is*
- *If someone asked you “Who is Jesus?”, how would you answer?*
- *Hi, I’m Yvon Prehn and welcome to Bible 805!*
- *In our podcast today we’ll look at the history that verifies His existence and in contrast the beliefs about Him that have no basis in history or the Bible account of Him all to help YOU answer the most important question of time and eternity—Who do you think Jesus is?*
- *Be sure to check out the notes, and links to the video of this podcast at www.Bible805.co*

Who is Jesus, Really? Answers from history, other religions, and the Bible

Our view of Jesus defines us

- *“Show me your Christology and I will tell you who you are.”*
Karl Barth
- *If our view of Jesus defines us, there certainly are many options.*
- *These range from saying he was a myth, to a good man and ethical teacher, to God in human flesh and the only Savior.*
- *In addition, Christianity is not the only religion that acknowledges he existed*
 - *Hindu, Buddhist, all Eastern religions*
 - *Islam and Mormons*
 - *All have a place for Jesus in their religion*

But for the Christian, He is everything

- *A summary from the Bible:*
- *Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God. He existed before God made anything at all, and, in fact, Christ himself is the Creator who made everything in heaven and earth, the things we can see and the things we can’t. . . all were made by Christ for his own use and glory. He was before all else began and it is his power that holds everything together. He is the Head of the body made up of his people—that is, his Church—which he began; and he is the Leader of all those who arise from the dead so that he is first in everything; for God wanted all of himself to be in his Son.*
- *It was through what his Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to him—all things in heaven and on earth—for Christ’s death on the cross has made peace with God for all by his blood. Col. 1:15-20*

From the Nicene Creed

- *Creeds are statements that summarize important beliefs in the church.*
- *This is one of the earliest creeds, coming from the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and though slightly revised over time, it is still a creed affirmed by all parts of the Christian community, Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox.*
- *The council was important because it met to clearly define, who Jesus is.*
- *Was he an eternally existing third person of the Trinity, or a created being—a question still asked today.*

- Their conclusion is important because it defines what Christians believe about Jesus and have believed from the earliest days of the church.
- To help you remember it, I have a little flyer for you on the [www.bible805](http://www.bible805.com) website with the notes for this podcast.

Why do Christians affirm these extraordinary things about Jesus?

- It is not a blind, unthinking faith.
- Thoughtful Christians believe these things about Jesus are true based on what we read in the Bible and how that is verified through history.
- If you haven't taken the time to explore the historical reality of the Christian faith, believer or not, you owe it to yourself to do that.
- That's what we're going to begin to do now.

Why we believe the Bible is a true record of Jesus life

- Please listen to previous podcasts AND checkout the Bible805 YouTube channel where I define truth and go into great detail in several lessons on why we can trust the Bible. Aside from that, here is a brief overview.
- Truth—that which agrees with reality (what really happened)
- History helps us determine reality (what really happened) through
 - Archeology, coins, artifacts, other writings—tangible, touchable evidence
- Part of that reality is the reliability of the history of the texts of the Bible
 - Massive amount of textual support, more manuscripts than any other ancient texts that are universally accepted
 - And the manuscripts agree over time
 - Some say they are, “changed, corrupted” but didn't happen—
 - Dead Sea Scrolls—great evidence to that fact
 - ***NO objective, scholarly basis for “corruption” of texts
 - Again, other podcasts and videos go into detail on these topics at www.Bible805.com

Based on the reliability of the textual documents

- Scholars believe they are credible records of what happened.
- However, the *implications and application* of the historical life of Jesus are up to individual acceptance or rejection, but there is extensive, objective, historical evidence that he lived and did the things recorded in the Christian Bible.
- To believe that doesn't necessarily mean you believe in God or are a Christian, it is perfectly OK to be exploring—you are simply being intellectually honest to acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth existed when the Bible said he did.
- To be a Christian requires more, but not less than agreement with reality and true history.

More on the historical texts about Jesus

- History about him in what we know as the New Testament Gospels was written within the lifetime of those who knew him—by people who were eye-witnesses of the events.
- They are not fanciful stories made up hundreds of years after his death
 - Based on Manuscript dating, we have fragments from 100's
 - And complete and thousands of manuscripts not much later
- *But that's not all! We don't only know about Jesus from what is in the Bible. In a class I was asked if there were other historical figures that mentioned Jesus and what I found I'll share with you in this lesson.*

- Other Historical comments about Him are from historical figures of the first two centuries after his death including, please note, these are all secular sources that are widely accepted as living when they did and writing what they wrote, when they said they did. They include, and we will look at their writings:
 - Pliny the Younger
 - Josephus
 - Tacitus
 - Various Roman leaders
 - Christian writers
 - Critics of Christianity
 - Let's look at some of them now

Josephus, AD 37-101, Roman Historian, who lived during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. He did careful research and wrote for a Roman audience:

- He wrote in his *Antiquities of the Jews*
- *"About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man [if indeed one ought to call him a 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. [He was the Christ.] When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst 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. [On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him.] And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared."*
- Some debate on this passage, but there is no conclusive evidence that confirms Josephus didn't say it as recorded above. The primary doubt is from people who approach the passage with an anti-supernaturalist viewpoint.
- Even if comments on Jesus' as the Christ are disregarded, it is still historical verification of his life and death and the start of the Christian faith.

Tacitus, AD 56 – AD 117, was a senator and a historian of the Roman Empire

- In the *Histories of Tacitus*, reporting on Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in 64 AD, he writes:
- *Nero fastened the guilt . . . 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 . . . Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.*
- Note: Apostle Paul was killed in this persecution, therefore all his books had to be written prior to it, evidence for early writing of the Bible.
- Tacitus did not have a positive view of Christians, but his comment is solid historical evidence of the dating and fact of Jesus' death and the existence of the Christian church in Rome.

3 more Emperors of Rome, in the second century talked about Christians

- As one historian said, "Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius. They all deal with the persecution of Christians. Trajan in replying to Pliny's letter, told him that the Christians were "not to be hunted out" and if the accused Christian would sacrifice to the gods, they were to be acquitted (19).

- Hadrian, around 122-123, was likewise writing about how to handle accusations against Christians (20).
- Marcus Aurelius (161-180) was concerned with philosophical rather than legal issues. He did not believe the Christians laid down their lives nobly and for the right reasons, but out of “sheer opposition” and with “histrionic display” (21). From his perspective, all the Christians had to do was go through the motions of sacrificing and they would escape death. Their deaths must have seemed unnecessary and fanatical.”
- <https://malcolmnicholson.wordpress.com/second-century-pagan-writers-knowledge-of-christianity/>
- Again, though many of these are negative comments, they are a confirmation of basic beliefs and existence of the early Christian faith.

Christians also wrote extensively at this time.

One was Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John, was martyred in 155-167, at 87 years old.

- **Polycarp’s life was a direct link to one of Jesus’ disciples (John).**
- **In his writings he talked about John sitting around and telling them about Jesus.**
- **In his writings he repeated an early agreed core of beliefs when he said:**
- *“I have greatly rejoiced with you in our Lord Jesus Christ, because ye have followed the example of true love [as displayed by God and it] . . . bringeth forth fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, [but] “whom God raised from the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave... . But may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Son of God, and our everlasting High Priest, build you up in faith and truth, and in all meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, forbearance, and purity.*

Polycarp’s **Letter to the Philippians**

More Testimonies of Early Church Writers, as to the deity of Jesus

- ***The Epistle of Ignatius to the Church at Smyrna (where Polycarp was Bishop), written AD 108***
- *“ . . . In very truth, with respect to our Lord Jesus Christ, that He was the Son of God, “the first-born of every creature,” God the Word, the only-begotten Son, and was of the seed of David according to the flesh, by the Virgin Mary; was baptized by John, that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him; that He lived a life of holiness without sin, and was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed [to the cross] for us in His flesh.”*

These early records are Important because

- Some say that the idea that Jesus was God and Savior was a mythology that developed hundreds of years later than Jesus’ life.
- Which is the case in the lives of some historical religious figures such as the Buddha.
- In contrast, Polycarp knew John, one of Jesus disciples and was repeating to Ignatius what he learned.
- This direct testimony was from the earliest days, from the people who lived with Jesus and saw him die. They also saw him come back from the dead and believed he was God.
- That Jesus is God and Savior is not a belief that developed hundreds of years after the historically verified life of Jesus, but it was described by witnesses of it, who passed in on to others.

Not only friendly accounts—an enemy of the faith records early beliefs—Celsus

- <https://malcolmnicholson.wordpress.com/second-century-pagan-writers-knowledge-of-christianity/>
- *“Around 177-180 Celsus wrote The True Word, an attack on Christianity, parts of which were preserved in quotations in Origen’s Contra Celsum written in the mid-third century. As far as know, this was the first time an entire pagan work had been devoted to Christianity, rather than passing references in other works.*
- *Celsus knew more about Christianity than any previous pagan writer. He was the first to refer to the founder of Christianity by his name, Jesus, rather than Christ. He knew many details which Christians believed about the life of Jesus, his virgin birth (39), the visit of the magi (40), the massacre of the innocents (41), his baptism by John (42), his disciples (43), miracles (44), his betrayal (45), crucifixion (46) and resurrection (47).*
- *Celsus reasoned that if Christians worshipped Jesus, they could not be true monotheists (49), and understood that if he could discredit Jesus, he could discredit Christianity (50). He wrote that the virgin birth was made up and Jesus’ real father was a Roman called Panthera (51), that there were no reliable witnesses to the dove descending at Jesus’ baptism (52), and that Jesus’ miracles happened, but were magic (53). He dismissed the resurrection as a hallucination and wishful thinking (54).”*
- Though he didn’t agree with the Christian belief system, his words again show the core of beliefs was based on real events he couldn’t deny and by his very writings show that it was a belief system well-known enough to be worthy of a scholarly attack very early in the history of the church.

Summary of the historical facts about Jesus

- Based on the repeated, early witness about Jesus, both for and against him are unanimous on the core events of his life, his good deeds, his miracles, his death, and resurrection that they did indeed happen.
- Whether you believe the Bible is a divinely inspired document or not, specifically the New Testament, is a credible historical source for the life of a historically verified Jesus of Nazareth.
- Regardless of who you attribute them to (whether to God or other sources), why you think they happened, (magic or sorcery or some other reason) the historical record shows his miracles did take place and his death and resurrection are a historical facts.

Not only the historical record of Jesus’ life

- ALSO verified by history, his followers were so changed by the reality of his resurrected life, the belief He was God and the source of forgiveness of sins and eternal life that they also believed he fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.
- Because of that belief, they completely abandoned their previous Jewish system of sacrifice and way of worshipping God.
- This was an extraordinary happening. Thousands of years of persecution (from Egypt through Babylonian captivity to wars of the Maccabees to their current occupation by Rome) could not destroy their previous Jewish system of worship and yet within a few months of the resurrection of Jesus everything changed.
- Because of Jesus—his followers declared He was the fulfillment of all the religious history that had gone before and that by his resurrection, he

validated all his claims and showed He was the only way to God. To them Jewish religious observations were the fulfilled foundation; the Christian church was born.

A historical acknowledgment Jesus existed is not enough

- Since the reality of a person called Jesus is verified historically, other religions can't and don't try to deny He existed, but they have a vastly different way than Christianity does for how they explain Him.
- YOU must understand these differences because salvation in Jesus is only possible if you know the real Jesus, not simply someone with the same name.
- Throughout the ages, like Celsus, many acknowledge Jesus lived, but they attempt to redefine him and his life.
- Let's now look at how other religions define Jesus.
- Please look at other podcasts and videos where I go into detail on the historical truths of other religions in contrast to Christianity, with the challenge in mind that though faith is always a step beyond facts, it should be based on true history not fantasy. This is a very short overview of hours of additional teaching on the www.Bible805.com site.

Eastern Religions, New Age

- **Hinduism**
 - Jesus Christ is a teacher, a guru, or an avatar (an incarnation of Vishnu). He is a son of God as are others. His death does not atone for sins, and he did not rise from the dead.
- **Buddhism**
 - Jesus Christ is not part of the historic Buddhist worldview. Buddhists in the West today generally view Jesus as an enlightened teacher, while Buddhists in Asia believe Jesus was an avatar or a Bodhisattva, but not God.
- **New Age of various kinds today**
 - Jesus as a good teacher, god in all, he had god in him as we all have god in us.
- All acknowledge no historical basis for any of these beliefs, their own or about Jesus.
- They all believe that individuals determine their own truth.
- Let's look at two others more closely.

Islam—describes him as a prophet

- But not THE Prophet, they believe—
- Jesus (Isa in Arabic) was not God or the Son of God. His virgin birth is likened to Adam's creation. He was sinless, a worker of miracles, and one of the most respected prophets sent by Allah.
- Jesus was not crucified or resurrected. They believe it was a hoax
- Jesus, not Muhammad, will return to play a special role before the future judgment day, perhaps turning Christians to Islam.
- More complete lessons on www.Bible805.com have the exact passages from the Koran that support these beliefs.

Historical Comments on Islam

- **Muhammad, 570 – 632 AD**
- Born into a polytheistic culture—reaction to that of “only one God—to them Allah.”
- Exposed to monotheism and Christianity, but not in depth.

- ***No historical basis for the assertions about Jesus in the Koran. He was illiterate and received his content for the Koran from a visitation by an angel.***
- Very respectfully, we are not talking about the same Jesus.
- To describe Jesus as a prophet equal to other prophets is not enough.
- Christians believe Jesus is the eternally existing son of God who came to earth and took on a body and who was crucified, buried, and rose again.

Mormon church

- Founder Joseph Smith, 1805-1844, some later comments built upon his works, describe God and Jesus in this way:
- *"God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; He was born in the same personal, real and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about this paternity; He was begotten, conceived, and born in the normal and natural course of events. --Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie*
- *"The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the worlds was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the savior of mankind."*
- Mormons also believe that if you are a good Mormon, you too can have your own world like Jesus did. "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."
- Mormons do not deny the person of Jesus, but like other nonChristian religions, they give Biblical facts a totally different meaning;
- Some opinions about Jesus also come from *the Book of Mormon*, a document with absolutely NO historical or factual verification, received by revelation from an angel.
- Their Jesus, humanly conceived, the spirit brother of Lucifer, preacher to the Indians of North America, is not the historical Jesus of the Bible.

Of these views of various religions

- All these completely ignore history—and the historical record of what Jesus said about himself.
- He claimed to be God; he forgave sins, he said he was one with God the Father.
- He stated He and He alone was the only way to God.
- He proved his words were true by his historical death, burial, and resurrection.

Useful summary statement of other religions in contrast to Jesus

Buddha never claimed to be God. Moses never claimed to be Jehovah.

Mohammed never claimed to be Allah. Yet Jesus Christ claimed to be the true and living God. Buddha simply said, "I am a teacher in search of the truth." Jesus said, "I am the Truth." Confucius said, "I never claimed to be holy." Jesus said, "Who convicts me of sin?" Mohammed said, "Unless God throws his cloak of mercy over me, I have no hope." Jesus said, "Unless you believe in me, you will die in your sins." –Unknown, www.tentmaker.org

C.S. Lewis' summary of who Jesus is

- A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of

Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. --C.S. Lewis

Why all these different views?

We have been warned this would happen

- **2 Corinthians 11:3-4** *But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. . . .¹³ For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*
- Warned there will be "false Jesus" preached and so we must be ready.
- Note this warning was written to the Corinthian Church—a church with all sorts of moral challenges.
- The Biblical Jesus can be very demanding and it can be tempting to was to worship one who allows us to live as we want to live, but ignoring the truth or accepting another view, doesn't change what is true—what is in accord with reality about Jesus.

What to do

- ***ALWAYS clarify which Jesus you are talking about, especially with groups such as Mormons and other cults who use his name but are not talking about the Biblical Jesus.
- It isn't what "your opinion" is, you are sharing what the historically accurate documents say about him.
- You do not have to believe the Bible is the Word of God to respect it as a historical document.
- Our duty is to know the truth and to be able to share it with "gentleness and respect."
- For ourselves, be sure you know the REAL JESUS.
- Get to know him in His Word—all the Bible talks about Him and www.Bible805.com has reading plans, commentary, lessons and more that will help you in that.
- Beyond all historical and scholarly truth....

We, personally, individually need to know the REAL JESUS

- And why we believe what we believe for the "dark nights of our souls."
- Every Christian experiences times of doubt, especially when times are hard.
- We need to know not just what we believe, but WHO we believed in.
- For me when circumstances, people, and even church people disappoint, I find comfort in the facts of history.
- I go over them. I remind myself Jesus really did live, die, rose again, and someday I will see Him face to face.

I then remind myself what the Bible says about this historical Jesus

- I remind myself that though history is a comfort, that Jesus is not confined to history, but that at a point in time, the eternal God broke into it as He tells us in—

- *Jn. 1:1-18¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
- And I remind myself why he came—
- *John 3:16-17, TLB, For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that anyone who believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it.*

Regardless of all else, the most important question

- Who do you say that Jesus is?
- Who is Jesus to you?
- If you are not a follower of His, explore further—***The Case for Christ*** is an excellent book, where a sceptic, who also happened to be a crime reporter, searches for the historically, verifiable truth about Jesus and after a 2-year search decided that what the Bible said about Him was true.
- Check out other resources on www.Bible805.com; read the Bible, check out the primary documents about his life for yourself.
- If you are a follower of the true Jesus....
- *Does your life reflect that?*
- Of course, we all have a long way to go, but are we even trying? Or is our life one excuse after another on how we will do this or that for the Lord or try to be more like him when we get older, or more financially stable, or don't have all these other things going on that are going on now?
- No matter where you are in your faith journey, how old or young you are, if you truly believe Jesus is the Son of God who died for your sins and freely gives you a glorious eternity with Him, NOW is the time to live out what you believe about Jesus.

DISCUSSION GUIDE for

Who is Jesus, Really? Answers from history, other religions, and the Bible

Brief Lesson Summary

This lesson examines the question, 'Who is Jesus?' by comparing the historical record, the teachings of other religions, and the testimony of the Bible. It emphasizes that Jesus is one of the best-attested figures of the ancient world, reviews historical sources inside and outside the Bible, contrasts Christianity's understanding of Jesus with other worldviews, and challenges each person to decide who Jesus is and to live consistently with that answer.

Ice-breaker Question

If someone sincerely asked you, 'Who is Jesus?' what would you say in one or two sentences?

Discussion Questions for a Group; Journal Questions for Individual Study

1. Why is our understanding of Jesus the most important belief we can have? How does it influence every other part of our faith?
2. What historical evidence mentioned in this lesson most strengthens your confidence in the reality of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?
3. What are some important differences between the Biblical Jesus and the descriptions of Jesus found in other religions or belief systems?
4. Why is it important to distinguish between respecting Jesus as a historical person and trusting Him as Savior and Lord?
5. How can Christians explain who Jesus is with both confidence and 'gentleness and respect' when talking with others?
6. What practical difference should believing in the real Jesus make in the way we live each day?

Life Application Suggestions, consider and respond

- Read one Gospel this month, asking what it teaches about the identity of Jesus.
- Practice giving a brief, clear answer to the question, 'Who is Jesus?' using both history and the Bible.
- When speaking with people of different beliefs, carefully clarify what each person means by 'Jesus' before discussing faith.
- During times of doubt, remind yourself of the historical foundation of the Christian faith and the promises of Jesus.

Prayer Focus

Thank God for revealing Himself through Jesus Christ. Pray for a deeper understanding of who He is, the courage to speak about Him with love and truth, and the desire to live each day in a way that reflects genuine faith in the real Jesus.

The Reason for the Season



JESUS CHRIST



the only Son of God,
God from God, Light from Light



Through him all things were made.



For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven and was made man.



*For our sake
he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.*

ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN

in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.



*He will come again in glory to judge the living
and the dead.*

AND HIS KINGDOM

will have no end!

