

2 JESUS' FIRST QUESTION

KEY POINTS

- 1. If the testimony of the world's great leaders and scholars about Jesus Christ is correct, He is the most unique person to ever live in this world.*
- 2. If the Holy Bible is a reliable historical source in all that it affirms about Jesus Christ, it is the most powerful witness in the world for the deity of Christ.*

IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL STUDY THESE QUESTIONS:

- Who does the world say that Jesus Christ is?
 - Was Jesus just a legend?
 - Is the Holy Bible a reliable source?
 - Is the bibliographical test reliable?
 - Is the external test reliable?
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One day Jesus asked some of His followers two questions: “Who do people say I am?”⁸ and “Who do you say I am?”⁹ These two questions are our starting point.

WHO DOES THE WORLD SAY THAT JESUS CHRIST IS?

If you have already investigated Jesus Christ, you probably agree with most thinking people that Jesus is the most unique personality the world has ever known. Jesus is not simply a great man among men; He is the greatest man who ever lived. The more you study His life, the more you are impressed. Even atheists and skeptics acknowledge the uniqueness of Jesus. Listen to what the skeptics of the world have said about Jesus and His unparalleled contribution in human history.

Renan, the French thinker and atheist, said, “Whatever may be the unexpected phenomena of the future, Jesus will not be surpassed.”¹⁰

Rousseau, another French thinker, compared Jesus with Socrates, saying, “When Plato describes his imaginary righteous man loaded with all the punishments of guilt, yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he describes exactly the character of Jesus Christ.... The life and death of Jesus were those of a God.”¹¹ He also said, “If Socrates lived and died like a sage, Jesus lived and died like a God.”¹²

Napoleon said, “I know men, and I tell you, Jesus Christ was not a man.”¹³ He went on to say, “Everything about Christ astonishes me. His spirit overwhelms me. There is no comparison between him and another. He stands single and alone.”¹⁴

Lord George Gordon Byron, the English poet, who certainly did not embrace Christian principles and died at the age of twenty-six because he lived his life only for his selfish pleasure, is reported to have said this of Jesus: *If ever a man were God, or God were a man, Jesus was both.*

More recently **James Allen Francis** described the influence of Jesus of Nazareth this way: “I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all of the parliaments that ever have sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that One Solitary Life.”¹⁵

Therefore, Jesus Christ, according to the skeptics and people who knew His life, is considered the most unique person who ever lived. Remember our question: “Who does the world say that Jesus Christ is?” Some people say that Jesus was a legend, meaning He never really existed.

WAS JESUS JUST A LEGEND?

Those who consider Christ to be a legend do not do so on the basis of historical investigation! Even secular historical sources, such as **Cornelius Tacitus**, the Roman historian of the first century, refer to the person of Christ.

Flavius Josephus, the well-known first-century Jewish historian, speaks of the life and death of Jesus and how He went about claiming to be the Messiah and performing great works.¹⁶

Nineteenth century historian and theologian **Philip Schaff** said, “Truly, Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Gospels, the Christ of history, the crucified and risen Christ, the divine-human Christ is the most real, the most certain, the most blessed of all facts.”¹⁷

There is more secular evidence for the historical reliability of the four Gospels than for any other piece of classical literature.

Skeptic **H. G. Wells**, in *The Outline of History*, devotes over twenty pages to Jesus Christ, substantiating His life and death from a historical perspective. He emphasizes the fact that more secular evidence for the reliability of the four Gospels exists than any other piece of classical literature.

Dr. **F. F. Bruce**, professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, said: “If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond doubt.”¹⁸

In the Bible we have four different detailed accounts of the life of Christ. Of course many people question the Bible’s historical authenticity, but once again we must take care with remarks that are not based upon thorough investigation. As a matter of fact, there is more secular evidence for the historical reliability of the four Gospels than for any other piece of classical literature.

IS THE HOLY BIBLE A RELIABLE SOURCE?

In the book, *Skeptics Who Demanded a Verdict*, Professor Josh McDowell says, “When you study history you need to develop a historiography, a proper approach to evaluating historical documents.

There are three basic tests. One is the *bibliographical test*, another is the *internal evidence test*, and then the *external evidence test*.”¹⁹

The *bibliographical test* looks at the number of manuscript copies of the original, the length of time between the writing of the original, and the writing of the existing copies when none of the originals still exist.

The *external test* looks at other historical materials to determine if they confirm or deny statements within the manuscript, that is, archaeological evidence.

The *internal test* looks at internal consistencies and inconsistencies within the manuscript. This test will be considered in lesson three.

IS THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST RELIABLE?

This is how the bibliographical test works.

Caesar wrote his history of the Gallic Wars between 100 and 44 B.C. The earliest copy that we have is one produced 1,000 years after his death, and we have only ten copies of that document.

Plato wrote from about 427 to 347 B.C. The earliest copies of his writings that we have were produced around A.D. 900, nearly 1,200 years after the originals. We have only seven copies.

Aristotle lived and wrote between 384 and 322 B.C. We have only five copies of his manuscripts today, the earliest copy being produced around A.D. 1100, over 1,400 years after the originals.

Tacitus, the Roman historian, wrote in the first century. The only copy that we have of his writings is from around A.D. 1100, over 1,000 years after the original.

Thanks to bibliographical testing, experts confirm the authenticity of documents by Caesar, Plato, Aristotle, and Tacitus and the reliability of the authors. So let us apply the same test to biblical writings and to New Testament documents. The books of the New Testament (Bible) were probably written between A.D. 40 and A.D. 70. The earliest manuscript copies date from about A.D. 130, only 90 years after the originals. More than 24,000 copies of manuscripts, texts and quotes exist in many ancient languages.²⁰ Applying the bibliographical test of veracity to the New Testament, therefore, should make us think twice before we say that biblical literature cannot be trusted. When we apply the external and internal tests, we will see even more clearly why the Bible is a reliable document and definitely inspired by God.

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	No. of Copies
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000 years	10 copies
Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200 years	7 copies
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1,400 years	5 copies
Tacitus	A.D.100	A.D. 1100	1,000 years	1 copy

The New Testament Greek scholar **J. Harold Greenlee** adds: “Since scholars accept as generally trustworthy the writings of the ancient classics even though the earliest manuscripts were written so long after the original writings and the number of exact manuscripts is in many instances so small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the New Testament is likewise assured.”²¹

Why should sixty-six books, written by some forty men over a period of 1,600 years, be put together in one book called the Holy Bible? Because one theme runs through them all. That theme is the salvation of sinful humankind by a loving God.²²

IS THE EXTERNAL TEST RELIABLE?

Remember our question: “Who do people say that Jesus Christ is?” I often find that the intellectual elite of society tend to say that spiritual and religious interests are only to help less educated people. They say it is the ignorant and unlearned people who are interested in how they can know God and are the only ones who need God.

Let me share what some of the leading intellects of our past and present have said about their pursuit to find God through the person of Christ.

Perhaps the most sophisticated of the German literary figures, **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**, the German poet and dramatist, called Jesus The Divine One, the Holy Man, and wrote, “If ever the Divine appeared on earth, it was in the person of Christ.”²³

Nobel Prize winner **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn**, recognized by the world for his great literary achievements, talks openly about his faith in Jesus Christ and how, while he was in the Gulag, a Jewish doctor won him to Christ.

Russian writers, like **Leo Tolstoy** and others, have described the work of God's Spirit in utterly transforming their lives. Tolstoy lived much of his life as an atheist but toward the end of his life he explained that for 35 years of his life he was, in the proper acceptance of the word, a nihilist—not a revolutionary socialist, but a man who believed in nothing. He said that when he believed in the doctrine of Jesus, his whole life underwent a sudden transformation—life and death ceased to be evil. Instead of despair, he tasted joy and happiness that death could not take away.

Probably the greatest literary genius of all times, **William Shakespeare**, before his death reportedly said, "I commit my soul into the hands of God, my Creator, most assuredly believing in Jesus Christ, my Savior."

Professor **Ambrose Fleming**, voted England's most outstanding scientist and professor emeritus of electrical engineering at the University of London talked about his faith in Christ, and expressed his belief that nothing in all the Bible would cause a man of science problems with Jesus Christ.

Karl Barth, one of the leading theological intellects of the 20th century, also known as The Great Swiss Thinker was asked in a personal interview what was the most profound thought he had ever had. His reply was, "Jesus loves me. This I know."

It is reported that Professor **Charles Malek**, 13th President of the United Nations General Assembly, speaking of his faith in Christ said we must eliminate the division between Christ and the universe, between the intellect and faith.

Please consider the weakness of the argument that says Jesus was just a good moral man. Please do not accept a conclusion that He never existed and that He was just a myth. And, please do not think that it is only ignorant and unlearned people who are interested in who Christ is. If you do, you will not be fair to the pursuit of truth.

A QUESTION FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:

"If the Holy Bible is a reliable historical source verified by bibliographical and external testing, does this add credibility to the claim that Jesus Christ is God?"