



Did Jesus Really Exist?

Did the historical Jesus really exist? It's a ridiculous question but one that inevitably comes up every year during the season celebrating His birth. The [Washington Post](#) ran a case in point last week with an article entitled, "Did historical Jesus really exist? The evidence just doesn't add up." It was written by Raphael Lataster, a University of Sydney religious studies lecturer, who questions Jesus' existence because the only historical accounts available today reference the "clearly fictional Christ of Faith." This self-proclaimed atheist opines, "Filled with mythical and non-historical information, and heavily edited over time, the Gospels certainly should not convince critics to trust even the more mundane claims made therein." Yet he provides no examples of "mythical and non-historical information" to prove his point.



Lataster bases his entire theory on the tired argument that unqualified Biblical authors had an evangelistic ulterior motive, and that otherwise there are "no existing eyewitness or contemporary accounts of Jesus." By rejecting the Gospels as reliable historical texts, and ignoring 2,000 years of scholarship to the contrary, Lataster conveniently removes the paramount written record of Jesus, and illogically concludes that He must not have lived since no other eyewitness reports survive to the present day.

Hypocritically, Lataster accepts *de facto* the existence of the Apostle Paul, quoting his Epistles to substantiate the claim that Jesus was a mythical character. Yet we have no more account of St. Paul's life than we do of Jesus Christ's. Dr. James Tabor, Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, writes on his [blog](#) that "outside our New Testament records we have very little additional historical information about Paul."

Should this dearth of empirical evidence shake the foundations of Christendom? Shouldn't Jesus be as well documented as other important individuals in the past? Do we not have ample confirmation that other historical persons existed?

No, we don't. Two thousand years is a long time, and there are not very many tablets or papyri still lying around. Take the example of Pontius Pilate, the fifth Roman prefect of Judea under the Emperor Tiberius ... or so they say. Until 1961 we had absolutely no concrete proof outside of the biblical account that he was real. That summer, archaeologists discovered a piece of limestone among Caesarean ruins bearing the inscription: *Dis Augustis Tiberieum Pontius Pilatus Praefectus Iudaeae Fecit Dedicavit* (To the Divine Augustus [this] Tiberieum, Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea, has dedicated [this building]). The stone is now housed in the [Israel Museum](#) in Jerusalem and remains the single



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known artifact of his in the world.

Our belief in many non-biblical personages who died long ago is based purely on blind faith in the veracity of historical accounts written by fallible authors. It makes just as much sense to ask whether Socrates, Cleopatra, or Attila the Hun ever breathed air. Lataster does not question the existence of these individuals, nor does he question the existence of religious leaders like Mohammed and the Buddha. Only Jesus is confined to the realm of Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy.

Why the notable exception? Perhaps it is because Christianity, according to [Pew Research](#), is the largest religious demographic in the world. Or maybe Christianity makes an easy target for its “turn the other cheek” philosophy ([Matt. v:39](#)).

Whatever his reasons, Lataster refuses to debate the point with Christians. In a blatant and cowardly *ad hominem* attack, he states that, “Believers, who uphold the implausible and more easily-dismissed ‘Christ of Faith’ (the divine Jesus who walked on water), ought not to get involved” in his discussion. Why the aversion? Obviously Lataster objects to faith, but it seems to take a lot more blind faith to believe that a fictional Jesus, 2,000 years after his fictional death, could still dupe 2.2 billion believers worldwide. Christians have been successfully fielding attacks against their faith during that entire time period, while the modern “historical quest for Jesus” began, according to Tabor, fewer than 200 years ago with the publication in 1835 of David Strauss’ *Life of Jesus*.

Christians, however, view faith, not as a character flaw, but as a gift from a loving heavenly Father to be appreciated rather than questioned. And they pray it will be a gift everyone receives during this Christmas season.



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