

# Three Big Questions

Thames Valley churches of Christ, May 2019

**“AND IN HIM YOU TOO ARE BEING BUILT TOGETHER TO BECOME A DWELLING IN WHICH GOD LIVES BY HIS SPIRIT.” (EPHESIANS 2:22 NIV11)**

## Class One: “Did Jesus Exist?”

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*“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” (1 Peter 3:15–16 NIV11)*

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### 1. Procedure

- a. Ask what they think of Jesus
  - b. Ask what kind of evidence they would need
  - c. Ask if they would be open to revising their opinion
  - d. Clearly, something happened or we would not have 2,000 years of Christendom
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### 2. Tacitus - 55/56-c.118 CE

- a. Annals: 116-117
    - “Neither human effort nor the emperor's generosity nor the placating of the gods ended the scandalous belief that the fire had been ordered by Nero. Therefore, to put down the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits and punished in the most unusual ways those hated for their shameful acts ... whom the crowd called “Chrestians.” The founder of this name, Christ [Christus in Latin], had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius pilate ... Suppressed for a time, the deadly superstition erupted again not only in Judea, the origin of this evil, but also in the city [Rome], where all things horrible and shameful from everywhere come together and become popular.”
    - QUESTION: WHAT DO WE NOW KNOW ABOUT JESUS?
  - b. Summary
    - i. ....existed
    - ii. ....founded the movement
    - iii. Christus gave his ..... to the movement
    - iv. .... by ..... of Judea
    - v. During ..... of P.....
    - vi. During reign of.....
    - vii. .... spread to R.....
    - viii. ....began in J.....
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### 3. Josephus: 37-38-Early 2ndC CE

- a. Jewish antiquities - Book 20
  - “Being therefore this kind of person [i.e. a heartless Sadducee], Ananus, thinking that he had a favourable opportunity because Festus had died and Albinus was still on his way, called a meeting [literally, “Sanhedrin”] of judges and brought into it the brother of Jesus-who-is-called-Messiah...James by name, and some others. He made the accusation that they had transgressed the law, and he handed them over to be stoned.”

- b. Book 18 quote:
- “Around this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, *if indeed one ought to call him a man*. For he was one who did surprising deeds, and a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. *He was the Messiah*. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who in the first place came to love him did not give up their affection for him, *for on the third day, he appeared to them restored to life*. *The prophets of God had prophesied this and countless other marvellous things about him*. And the tribe of Christians, so-called after him, have still to this day not died out.”
  - QUESTION: WHAT DO WE NOW KNOW ABOUT JESUS from these two quotes?
- c. Summary.
- Jesus existed as a .....
  - He was called .....
  - He was known as someone who did .....
  - He was known as a .....
  - His ministry was effective with ..... people and G.....
  - He was accused by ruling ..... authorities.
  - Pilate s..... him to .....
  - His followers continued their .....
  - His followers were called .....
  - He was known as .....
  - He founded a new .....
  - It was still ..... at the time of writing.

#### 4. Others

- Lucian of Samosata: c. 125 – after 180 AD - “The Passing of Peregrinus”
- Celsus: 2nd-century Greek philosopher and opponent of early Christianity.
- Pliny the Younger: (61 – c. 113), lawyer, author, and magistrate.
- Suetonius: c. 69 – after 122 AD), a Roman historian
- Mara bar Serapion: 1stC Stoic philosopher from the Roman province of Syria.

#### Conclusion

- Early writers; Romans; Rabbinic Judaism

Suggested questions for your friend...

- How does this evidence effect your view of Jesus?
- How does this evidence effect your view of Christianity?
- Would you like to know more?

“Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” John 7.17

#### Resources

- <https://preparetoanswer.wordpress.com/2018/02/01/why-should-i-believe-in-jesus/>
- <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/did-jesus-exist/>
- <https://www.douglasjacoby.com/>
- The Evidence for Jesus (Hodder Christian Essentials), R.T France
- More than a carpenter, Josh McDowell
- The Case for Christ, Lee Strobel
- [https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/pliny\\_letter\\_to\\_trajan\\_about\\_christians.htm](https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/pliny_letter_to_trajan_about_christians.htm)

#### Next week

- “Did Jesus come back from the dead?”