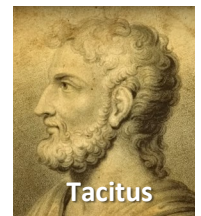


Jesus was a real person, living in a real country, 2000 years ago. Apart from a few cranks, all historians, atheist or believers accept he existed, based on a range of evidence, however in the UK, 40% of the general public doubt he ever lived.

The evidence for a historical Jesus

- The Gospels. **A.** Many of the details recorded in gospels have now been found to be accurate from archaeological evidence, thus giving weight to the idea that the people mentioned are authentic too. **B.** The gospels are authentic, as it shows the failure of the early disciples, e.g. arguing amongst themselves, denying Jesus etc. If the gospel writers were going to make up a Jewish Messiah, you would expect they would make him more, all conquering, and certainly not a having a execution from the Romans, which wouldn't have been quite humiliating to Jews. **C.** It is widely accepted the gospel writers wrote their accounts, after looking at other oral & written sources of the day. The gospels harmonise, for example the feeding of the 5,000. Mark 6:30-44, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-13
- Lack of rebuttal Early Christians were troublesome to both Jewish and Roman authorities. Yet, they never once challenged the reality of Jesus, if there was any doubt at all, they surely would have done.

3 Early historical references. Tacitus the respected Roman historian, wrote in 64AD about Jesus saying he was executed by Pontius Pilate. He was a senator, and had access to the Roman records of the day. Josephus was another historian of the period, records that Jesus was crucified and was reportedly seen alive after the third day. He also wrote about John the Baptist, Herod etc. There are also other documents, from the ancient world that also mention Jesus.



Tacitus

Questions

Have you ever come across someone who didn't even believe Jesus was real?

The Geographical context Israel is at the cross roads between three major continents. It is also, in between the key major empires of the ancient world, Persia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. Jesus was born under the Roman empire. Which meant the early Christians had a highly developed transport network of roads and shipping routes, making it perfect for spreading the gospel Acts 14:24-26. Jesus' family were Jewish, and Galilean, Galilee was separated from other Jews by Samaria. Galilee was considered a bit of a backwater, they even had a 'funny accent' Matthew 26:73. John 1:46 Israel in size, is about the same as Wales in terms of land mass.

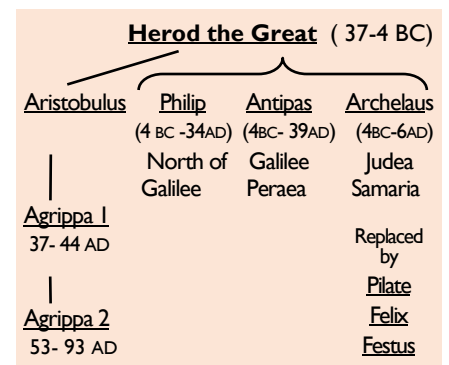


Political context Israel was conquered by the Greeks, in 329 BC but proved to be a difficult land to rule. There were rebellions, as they objected to Hellenism (Greek culture being imposed). Eventually Greek control gave way to the Romans, who also found it difficult to rule. In 37 BC, Mark Anthony appointed a Herod (a tetrach, minor ruler) king of the Jews. Some Jews, were happy to ruled by a Jew, who was endorsed by Rome, they were called Herodians, Others



Herod the Great

hated this compromised state, a Jewish woman called Mary, was forced to marry him, such was the sympathy for her, that Mary became the most popular girls name at the time. He began huge building projects, including the temple John 2:19-20. He was violent and had 45 members of his own household killed, as he was paranoid. The events of Matthew 2:16 are fully in character. Upon Herod's death, the Romans divided his kingdom among his children. Herod Antipas was the ruler at the time of the ministry of Jesus and John the Baptist.



The Religious context to Jesus' ministry

After the Babylonian exile, the idea of synagogues & Rabbi's emerged, and were part of everyday life by the time of Jesus, along side priests. Before the exile, the Jews drifted into idolatry, however after they returned, they stuck to monotheism. The OT books, The Torah, Prophets & Writings (TaNaKh) were settled, and widely used. Luke 24:44. The thirst for a 'Messiah', became more acute after years of foreign occupation. God promised an eternal kingdom, following the line of David. 2 Samuel 7:11-13, Psalm 89:3-4, 20-29. Many theories, and writings about the Messiah were circulating at the time. Some claimed to be the Messiah, Josephus writes that there were over 12, around this period. Acts 5:36. All this influenced the thinking of the disciples. Peter Mark 8:31-33, James and John Mark 10:35-45.

There were two main factions, among the Jewish religion at the time of Jesus.

The Pharisees, were Torah centred, following teachings of Rabbi's. They loved and studied the scriptures keenly, and accepted all of the TaNaKh. They supported a campaign to violently overthrow Roman rule. The Pharisees were common in the Galilee area. A stricter group were the **Essenes**, who lived in communities away from the 'wicked world'. The Dead Sea scrolls were found in a probable Essene site. Some say John the Baptist may have been an Essene.

The Sadducees were Temple centred, and most of the priests belonged to this group. They owned land around the temple, and were wealthier, and more politically accepted by the ruling class. They were liberal in their theology. Acts 28:8. They only accepted the Torah as scripture. They were willing to work with the Roman authorities, and were Jerusalem based. The Roman authorities also had a say in who became High Priest. After the fall of Jerusalem 73AD, the Sadducees died out, leaving the Pharisaic tradition alone to live on.

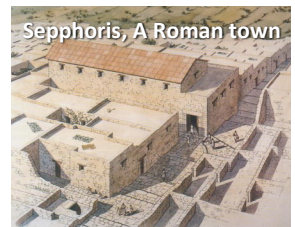
Questions

Can you see any parallels with the Church today?

The everyday life of Jesus.

He was circumcised and named on the eighth day after his birth. Forty days after his birth he was "presented" at the Jerusalem Temple in keeping with the Jewish Law. At the age of 12 he made a Passover pilgrimage to the Temple with his parents Luke 2. He would have attended the synagogue regularly, it was a place of worship on shabbat, but learning for boys for a few hours during the week. Boys were taught professions from their fathers or male relations. Mark 6:3 says Jesus was a carpenter, but the word 'tektōn' could mean stone mason, or general craftsman or woodworker. Daughters were taught to run a home, this included making clothes, cooking, fetching water. Women would get up early and make bread for the day, bread was a staple of their diet, over half a meal for the poorest.

Everyday life in Nazareth would have been busy, noisy and smelly. Most the day was spent outdoors. Three miles down the road from Nazareth was the Roman town, Sepphoris, which was destroyed when the locals revolted after the death of Herod the Great. Herod Antipas rebuilt it, so Jesus might well have worked on that project, which would have needed many skills over years. If so, he would have experienced Roman urban life and culture as well as the rural Jewish one. Josephus records that Galilee had a thriving fishing industry. They sold dried fish and Garum a fish sauce, for export, bringing relative prosperity to the area around the sea, e.g. the town Bethsaida was wealthy, as it was on the key Egypt Damascus trade road.



The taxes which paid for all the Roman administration and building costs, were around 30%+ which really hurt the poorest, and were hated, this was paid in addition to their tythe 10% to God. Mark 2 :15-16 Matthew 18:17. There was no mercy for those struggling to pay. It was common knowledge that collaborating Jews, would charge extra for themselves Luke 19;18. Yet Jesus chose Matthew, a tax collector to be a disciple.

John's Gospel indicates that Jesus made the regular pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem three times a year.



Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish religion and life. The Roman centre was Caesarea, on the coast. However the Roman Governor with many of his troops were always in Jerusalem for festival times. This was when riots and trouble were most likely to start. Normally only 500 soldiers would be stationed in the city, with about 60,000 Jews living in the city. They ruled by fear & intimidation.

Questions

Any questions or comments

Next time - Controversial issues