

The Historicity of Jesus

The argument from the origin of Christianity

One of the ways that the historicity of Jesus can be proven is through the origin of Christianity. From the very beginning of Christianity the religion has been focused on the person of Jesus Christ, and we can know this through its several documented writings about Him:

- The writings of St. Paul say that he existed
- The writings of St. Peter say that he existed
- The other early disciples and their writings say that he existed
- The Gospels say that he existed

What this shows us is that there was an early community arising immediately after the existence of this claimed man, and they claimed that he existed. It is impossible to explain the widespread acceptance of that claim if the claimed man never actually existed at all. Why would its proponents center their claims around a historical person whose ministry and life and death could be verified or falsified by asking the public if they had ever seen him, unless that person really existed? The claim would be so easily falsifiable, if false, that it would be detrimental to the project of gaining converts. In fact it would be virtually impossible for Christianity to get off the ground, if the central figure did not exist, because a potential convert could be so easily led to disbelief (and to spread that disbelief) simply by investigating whether the claimed person had existed at all. If only a few potential converts had asked around, and discovered that no one in Jerusalem knew of his death or crucifixion ever happening, the sham would be revealed, and no one would be persuaded to believe it after that revelation.

Therefore, such a widespread belief in the existence of Jesus so soon after His claimed existence proves that He did exist, because that claim would have been so easily falsifiable, if false, that it would have quickly been discredited.

The argument from the witness of the martyrs

Dozens of the early Christians and self-proclaimed eyewitnesses of Jesus died for the sake of affirming His existence and divinity. Now the fact that they died for this claim indicates that they believed it. But again, if it was absolutely false, virtually no one would have believed it, because its central claims, if false, could be so quickly and easily disproved. If several people make up a claim that has no basis in fact, and try to convince others that it is true, the sham will be quickly revealed if they start getting martyred for believing in it. Line up twelve of them and aim a gun at their heads, and demand that they deny their claim, and they will start doing so *at least* by the time the first or second person dies, unless they believe it is true and love it as a truth more sacred than their very lives.

The Apostles not only continued their proclamation when their executors demanded that they recant, but even more compellingly, they went to Rome, where martyrdom was all but assured, and they went there willingly, because they believed that they needed to proclaim their Gospel to every nation without exception. It is already unlikely that they would persist in a lie in the face of their executors. It is even unlikelier that they would *go to* the city of those executors to proclaim their false message, knowing that they would almost certainly die there for proclaiming it. The fact that they did go there, proclaiming themselves to be eyewitnesses of a miraculous incarnate God, knowing their almost certain martyrdom, indicates that they believed their claim, and if it had not been true, they of all people would not have believed it.

The argument from the admission of opponents

No one among Christianity's early opponents claimed that Jesus did not exist. That would have been an easy disproof of the religion, but there was no one who made that claim. It took almost 1800 years for someone to propose the non-existence of Jesus. If His very existence was a sham, some of Christianity's opponents should have proclaimed it at the start. The fact that our opponents had no objections to the claim that He existed indicates that no objections were plausible.

Our early opponents were not stupid. They knew that the easiest way to disprove a religion is to reveal the falsehood of its foundations. They attacked the Resurrection of Jesus, they denied the Virgin Birth, they rejected the miracles of Jesus, and they did all this on the basis that miracles are irrational—but they didn't deny His existence. What could have induced our opponents to concede the most fundamental point if it was such an easily falsifiable one? Why didn't the non-Christians in Jerusalem, who were the first to reject our faith, simply deny that the crucified one had existed? They doubted His resurrection, which they did not believe could happen, but they accepted His execution, which they *knew* didn't happen, if in fact He never existed. We claimed there were eyewitnesses among themselves, that a great crowd had seen Him enter Jerusalem and had seen Him crucified, we claimed that the execution was recorded in the public records, we claimed that the governor and the curator knew it had happened—if it was all false, why didn't they simply ask them, and show that no one knew anything about it?

The fact that our opponents conceded His existence, and the belief in it spread so fast, and the Apostles thought that proclaiming it was more important than their very lives, when of all people they would have known if it was false, and it could all have been so easily falsified if none of it had happened—all this comes together to show that Christ's existence has an airtight historical foundation, and the focus has to be whether His teachings are true, not whether He existed.