

# GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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## Did Jesus actually exist ?

By Jerry Fite

**M**ost of us would answer, “YES!” All you have to do is read the first four books of the New Testament and see for your self that Jesus lived and walked upon the earth in the first century. But what if one does not believe the Bible? Dan Barker, once a preacher but now an atheist, claims “the New Testament Jesus is a myth” (*Losing Faith in Faith*, p. 378). Albert Schweitzer says, “He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in an historical garb” (*The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, p. 398).

How do you deal with such disbelief? How do you answer such charges? Is there documentation outside the New Testament to substantiate that Jesus actually was an historical figure?

Tacitus (A.D. 56-117) was a Roman elitist who in his work, *Annals*, wrote about the Great Fire of Rome that occurred in A.D. 64.

He writes, “Nero fabricated scapegoats-and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called). Their

originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius’ reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilatus. But in spite of this temporary setback the deadly superstition had broken out afresh, not only in Judea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome” (*The Annals and the Histories*, trans. Michael Grant, 15.44).

This documentation is valuable because it is from one who was not a friend of Christianity. He looked upon it as a “deadly superstition” and that Christians, in his view, were “notoriously depraved”. Yet, he records the fact of Jesus’ death in the reign of Tiberius, and during the governorship of Pilate.

The second-century pagan philosopher, Celsus attacked Christianity in his work, *True Discourse* ( A.D. 178). He said Jesus owed his existence to the fornication between Mary and a Roman soldier named Panthera. As Jesus matured, he began to call himself God which caused the Jews to kill him. While Celsus’ account is denigrating, he does recognize that Jesus actually lived and died.

Josephus, twice in his *An-*

*tiquities of the Jews*, referred to the existence of Jesus. His work was printed in A.D. 93-94. In the first account he writes, “And there arose about this time Jesus, a wise man, if indeed we should call him a man, for he was a doer of marvelous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure. He led away many Jews, and also Greeks...” (XVIII, iii, 3). Notice that Josephus saw the work of Jesus as leading many Jews away. While no friend of Christianity, he did recognize that Jesus existed and had a reputation for marvelous deeds.

Josephus also records that Ananus brought before the Sanhedrin, “a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others He accused them of having transgressed the law, and condemned them to be stoned to death.” (XX, ix, 1).

Historical records from both Romans and Jews, who have no agenda to promote Christianity, point to the fact that Jesus actually lived and died. Even his enemies acknowledge his historical existence.