

CONTINUATION! Ben Witherington, a conservative evangelical Christian New Testament scholar, has asked me to respond to a number of questions about my book [Did Jesus Exist](#), especially in light of criticism I have received for it (not, for the most part, from committed Christians!). His blog is widely read by conservative evangelicals, and he has agreed to post the questions and my answers without editing, to give his readers a sense of why I wrote the book, what I hoped to accomplish by it, and what I would like them to know about it. He has graciously agreed to allow me to post my responses here on my blog, which, if I'm not mistaken, has a very different readership (although there is undoubtedly some overlap). It's a rather long set of questions and answers - over 10,000 words. So I will post them in bits and pieces so as not to overwhelm anyone. The Q's are obviously his, the A's mine.

Q. Sometimes you make a distinction between literary evidence and other sorts of written evidence (e.g. records of trials or tax records), and you place especial stress on the former as a way of answering the question of whether or not Jesus existed. Can you explain why you do this?

A. Yes, there is a clear distinction to be made between literary and documentary evidence. The only reason I place special evidence on the former, when talking about the historical Jesus, is that there is no documentary evidence for his existence. (For lots and lots of historical issues, documentary evidence is invaluable; but only when it exists for the issue under consideration. If any did exist for Jesus, that would, of course, be highly significant.) We do not have any birth records or land deeds, no reports of his trial (other than in literary sources), and no death warrant related to Jesus - no documents (or inscriptions) of any kind. All we have are later literary references. And so these are the sources that we have to focus on.

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