

The Case for Christianity

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Introduction To The Case For Christianity

Can an intelligent person embrace the Christian faith? Is it possible for someone to use their intellect and be a Christian at the same time? This course is designed to answer these, as well as other questions, with respect to the truthfulness of the claims of Jesus Christ.

We have titled our course *The Case For Christianity*. In our study we will examine the evidence for the Christian faith to see if it stands up to close scrutiny.

Importance Of The Issue

The importance of the issue cannot be overstated. If Christianity is true, then all other religious systems are mere pretenders. They are a hindrance to the truth of God and should be ignored. Jesus made this clear:

I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly (John 10:9,10).

Later He said:

I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6).

Two Simple Choices

Since Jesus claimed that He is the only way for a person to reach the Living God, the choices are simple: Either the Christian faith is a monumental fraud and should be rejected, or it is the revelation of the one true God who exists. There is no middle ground.

Christianity Deserves A Fair Hearing

Because of the importance of the issue, and the clear choices we face, the case for Christianity should be given a fair hearing - the evidence should have a chance to speak for itself. This study lays out some of that evidence.

Intelligent Faith

The Christian faith does not claim to be able to prove everything that it believes but there is enough evidence to demonstrate that faith in Jesus Christ is reasonable. Becoming a believer *does* mean that a person exercises faith, but it is not blind faith. It is, rather, reasonable and intelligent faith based upon compelling evidence. It is our belief that when one honestly considers the facts about Jesus Christ and Christianity it will become obvious that a person does not have to assassinate their brain to be a Christian. With these thoughts in mind let us now consider *The Case For Christianity*. . .

Apologetics: The Defense Of The Christian Faith

I. The Central Issue: Humans Have Many Belief Options

As we begin our examination of the claims of the Christian faith we must first look at the need to make such an inquiry. Why should anyone investigate the evidence to see whether or not Christianity is true? The answer to this question can be simply stated: There are a variety of choices that we, as human beings, have with respect to the existence or non-existence of God or gods. Christianity is only one of these many options. In addition, the Christian faith makes some unique claims about itself. For these reasons, it must be carefully examined along with the other belief options of humanity.

A. The Choices

Humanity has the following choices when it comes to believing in the existence or non-existence of God or gods:

1. Agnosticism

Agnosticism says, "I do not know if God or gods exist." Some agnostics believe that it is not possible to know if a divine "being" or "beings" exist. Their view is that one cannot know anything about these matters. On the other hand, there are those agnostics who think that knowledge about God is possible, yet they are not convinced that there is enough evidence to prove the case. Whatever the exact position may be, an agnostic claims *no knowledge*, one way or the other, about the existence of God.

2. Atheism or Theism

Contrary to agnosticism, which says it does *not* know, are theism and atheism. Both of these groups claim to have knowledge about the existence of a supernatural being or beings. The atheist claims to know that God or gods do not exist. The theist claims to know that God or gods do exist.

3. Polytheism Or Monotheism (One God Or Many?)

Those who believe in the existence of God must decide whether they believe in polytheism or in monotheism. Polytheism believes in the existence of many gods, though a polytheist may choose to worship only one of these gods (this is known as henotheism). A monotheist believes only one God exists - no other so-called gods have any real substance.

4. Pantheism Or A Personal Being

If only one God exists, then it must be determined whether that one God is a personal or impersonal being. Pantheism (God is creation) believes that the one God who exists is impersonal - he has no personal existence apart from creation. Creation and God are one-in-the-same. Those who believe in a personal God make a distinction between God and His creation - God exists separately and independently from that which He created.

5. Deism Or A Personally Involved God

If only one God exists, and that one God is a personal God, then our next question considers His involvement in our world. Is the one God intimately involved in the affairs of humanity? Deism says that God is not involved with humanity. God started everything in the beginning and then backed off from His creation. He is no more than an onlooker. This is opposed to a God who is personally involved in the lives of the beings He created (such as the God revealed in the Bible).

6. Unitarianism versus Trinitarianism

We now come to our final option. If there is one personal God who exists, and He is intimately involved in the affairs of humanity, is this God a unity or a Trinity? Is there only one person, or is there a plurality of persons within the nature of the one God?

These are the various belief options that humans have. Each human being will fit into one of these categories with respect to his or her belief about the existence or non-existence of God or gods.

With so many belief options that are possible, certain questions naturally arise for the Christian: Why believe in Jesus? What makes Christianity different than these other possibilities? It is, therefore, the responsibility of the Christian to respond to these types of questions.

B. The Christian Response

The job of defending the Christian faith, and answering questions such as these, is known as *apologetics*. One person has defined apologetics as "proving what you never doubted by arguments you don't understand." This, however, is certainly not the case!

Our English word "apologetics" comes from two Greek words - the noun *apologia* and the verb *apologeomai*. In the New Testament era, these words meant "to give a defense or reply." They are found some eighteen times in the New Testament.

The Noun "Defend"

The noun *apologia* is used eight times in the New Testament.

1. Brothers and fathers, hear my **defense** which I now offer to you (Acts 22:1).

The Apostle Paul is offering a defense to certain things he was wrongly accused of.

2. And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man

before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his **defense** against the charges (Acts 25:16).

Here the word is used in the technical sense of making a defense against accusers.

3. My **defense** to those who examine me is this (1 Corinthians 9:3).

Paul again is using the term in the legal sense.

4. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what **vindication** of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter (2 Corinthians 7:11).

Here the word has the idea of vindication.

5. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the **defense** and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me (Philippians 1:7).

The scope of Paul's ministry concerns both the defense and confirmation of the good news. This implies that his response or apology was closely linked with the gospel.

6. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the **defense** of the gospel (Philippians 1:16).

This clearly points out his purpose - he is set for the defense of the gospel.

7. At my first defense no one **defended** me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them (2 Timothy 4:16).

This could mean defend or support in front of hostile witnesses.

8. but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a **defense** to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3:15).

This is a key verse with respect to the defense of the Christian faith. Here it is in the context of persecution. When asked, we are commanded to have an answer as to what we believe and why we believe.

The Verb "To Defend"

The verb *apologeomai* is used ten times in the New Testament.

1. And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not become anxious about how or what you should speak in your **defense**, or what you should say (Luke 12:11).

Jesus uses "defense" here with the idea of our defending the faith before institutions and authorities.

2. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to **defend** yourselves (Luke 21:14).

This could be a formal defense before those who were making a legal charge.

3. And some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him

forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a **defense** to the assembly (Acts 19:33).

Alexander was attempting to respond to the charges made against him.

4. And when the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my **defense** (Acts 24:10).

Again, we have Paul's defense to charges that were brought against him. In this case it is before the governor.

5. while Paul said in his own **defense**, "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar" (Acts 25:8).

Paul is responding to the specific charges that he has committed offenses either against the Jews, their religion, or Rome.

6. And Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his **defense** (Acts 26:1).

He begins his legal defense before King Agrippa.

7. In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my **defense** before you today (Acts 26:2).

Again, we have another use of the term in a sense of a legal defense. Paul makes his defense before Agrippa, verse 22 is the key to understand of what his defense consisted.

And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place (Acts 26:22).

Paul argues that he is teaching nothing different than what is found in Moses (the Law) and the Old Testament prophets.

8. And while Paul was saying this in his **defense**, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad (Acts 26:24).

Here Paul is interrupted by Festus as he is making his defense.

9. in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else **defending** them (Romans 2:15).

The thoughts of humans can either bring an accusation or a defense.

10. All this time you have been thinking that we are **defending** ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved (2 Corinthians 12:19).

This refers to specific attacks against Paul from certain people in Corinth.

From these verses we learn that an apologist is one who gives a defense or reply to questions about the Christian faith. This is true whether it is answering a simple question or responding to some type of accusation.

Other Verses

There are other verses in Scripture that speak of defending the faith.

The Faith Once-And-For-All Delivered

Jude wrote about the need for defending the faith:

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

The same idea is here. The faith that has been once-and-for-all delivered needs defending. Jude emphasizes that we should earnestly contend for the faith. Elsewhere he wrote:

And have mercy on some, who are doubting (Jude 22).

We are to be merciful, not judgmental, to those who have honest doubts about the faith.

Church Leaders

In Paul's letter to Titus he lists the traits of a church leader:

holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain (Titus 1:9-11).

The qualifications of those who lead the church include teaching sound doctrine and refuting those who disagree.

Defense To Be Done In Love

Paul stresses the personal qualities that Christians are to have as they defend the faith:

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

This is so important to realize. Any defense of the faith must be done in love.

C. The Job of the Apologist

The apologist's job is to remove roadblocks that keep people from believing in Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, people grow up with certain misconceptions about Christianity and Christ. These

may include: Jesus never existed; the Bible is unreliable; the records about Jesus have been changed throughout history; miracles have been disproven, etc. These accusations must first be answered before these people can hear the gospel. Apologetics, therefore, is not the gospel but rather consists of answering questions and objections so that people are then able to hear the good news of Christ.

1. The Goal - Bringing People To Christ

The ultimate goal in answering doubter's questions is to bring that person to faith in Christ. We want the unbeliever to see themselves as lost sinners needing a Savior. This is what the apologist is trying to accomplish. It is not attempting to win arguments or to establish us as smart.

2. Defending The Central Beliefs Of Christianity

The defense of the faith also consists of the clarification of the gospel message and the belief system of Christians. There is a core belief system that needs to be defended. These beliefs include: salvation by grace through faith; Christ is the only way to know God; and the Bible is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice. The apologist proclaims these beliefs and defends them against attack.

3. The Attacks Are Ever-Changing And Growing

In addition, each generation of believers must respond to the attacks of their own particular generation. The attacks change from generation to generation, yet the doubts continue to surface in the form of the same question, "Has God really said?" This question, originally asked by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, is still being asked today in one form or another.

D. Why Give Reasons At All?

But why not just proclaim the gospel? Why bother with arguing with people and presenting evidence? Many would say that giving reasons for the faith is a waste of time. The best option is to just preach the gospel and pray for that person to respond to the simple message. However, this is not the biblical approach.

1. God Gave Us Our Minds

The Bible says that God created humans with the ability to think and reason. If we devalue the use of the mind then we are devaluing one of the gifts that God has given humanity.

2. The Gospel Message Itself

The message of Christ is addressed to the minds of its listeners. We must use our minds to weigh and evaluate the evidence concerning Christ. God does not bring anyone into His kingdom by bypassing the mind.

3. New Testament Carefully Written

We also find that each New Testament book has been carefully written and thought out. The arguments for Jesus being the Christ are not emotional but rather are reasonable and logical. The expectation is that the reader will be able to follow the line of argumentation and then respond in belief.

4. Experience Is Based Upon Truth

While emotions do play an important part in Christian experience they are always linked to a sound mind and sound preaching. Nowhere do we find the writers appealing to experience alone as the test of truth (2 Timothy 1:7).

5. Commanded To Honestly Investigate

In fact, the Bible encourages honest investigation of the message of Christ. When people have legitimate questions concerning the Christian faith, they deserve to be given honest answers. We should not tell them, "Just believe," or "You have to take it by blind faith." The Bible never encourages this type of response. Paul wrote:

Test all things, hold fast to that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Another New Testament writer put it this way:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God (1 John 4:1).

The Apostle Paul encouraged the church at Corinth to judge, as wise men, the things that he said.

I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say (1 Corinthians 10:15).

An important verse with respect to defending the faith is 1 Peter 3:15:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

This verse commands Christians to know what they believe about God, why they believe it, and then be able to give an answer to those who ask questions about what and why they believe.

6. The Pattern Of The New Testament

Furthermore, we find those in the New Testament giving intelligent answers to the questions asked about Jesus Christ and the Christian faith.

And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and

rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ" (Acts 17:2,3).

This passage tells us that Paul reasoned from the Scriptures with the unbelievers. He took the time to listen to their questions and then give them answers.

Answering The Skeptics

When Paul was in Athens, he went to Mars Hill. At that place he gave answers to the honest questions of the skeptics (Acts 17:16-34). Nowhere do we find him encouraging people to embrace the Christian message with blind faith or merely upon some religious experience.

In another example, when Paul brought the good news to Ephesus, he hired a lecture hall. Then for two years he taught the people daily, proclaiming the message of Christ and answering the people's objections and questions.

In the Book of Acts we read the following about the Bereans.

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so (Acts 17:11).

This type of behavior - the searching of the Scriptures to find out the truth - is applauded by the biblical writers.

Summary

An apologist clarifies and defends biblical Christianity. On the positive side, it is the setting forth of evidences for the Christian faith, on the defensive side apologetics defends the gospel against the attacks of unbelievers.

II. Setting the Record Straight

Before we examine the case for Christianity there are a few more introductory matters that need to be covered.

A. All Religions Are Not Ultimately Saying the Same Thing

Though humans have many different belief options do these choices really matter? Is it possible that all these different belief systems (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc.) are ultimately saying the same thing? If this is the case, then why make such a big deal out of Christianity?

Often we hear it asked in this manner, "Why make such a big issue about Jesus Christ and Christianity? All religions ultimately teach the same thing. Was not Jesus basically saying the same thing as Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, and the other founders of great religions? They

all teach that God is love, we are to love our fellow man, and that we should give of ourselves for others, do they not? If this is the case, then why single out Christianity for special attention?"

Contradictory

The answer is simple: the Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and other religious groups cannot all be experiencing the same God because the way they define God is contradictory. For example, Buddhism believes in an impersonal God - they do not separate God from creation, they are one-in-the same. However Christianity believes and teaches that God is personal - He is not the same essence as His creation but has a separate and independent existence from it. There are many such examples of major differences between the various religions.

Since the various religions teach different and contradictory things about the nature of God, and how a person can get to know Him, they cannot all be true at the same time. They can all be wrong, but they cannot all be true. It is impossible for God to be personal and impersonal at the same time and in the same way. Hence, to say that all religions are ultimately the same shows a lack of understanding of these religions and what they are teaching.

Remember: The main question that needs to be addressed concerning the various religions is not, "Do they contain some truth?" The real issue is, "Can they save?"

B. Christianity Is Unique Among the World's Religions

Next, we must consider the unique claims of Jesus. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). He claimed to be the exclusive way in which a person can know the only God who exists. Therefore, according to the Christian faith, any religion which teaches another way to know God is, at that point, incorrect. This claim of Jesus does not make it true in-and-of itself, however it does rule out the possibility of Christianity being compatible with any other religion.

C. Jesus Is in a Different Class than the Other Founders of Other World Religions

Throughout history many religious leaders have come on the scene and attracted large followings--the Buddha, with his teachings on how to cope with life's suffering, gained millions of adherents, Confucius, with his precepts on how members of society should get along with each other, likewise numbers his followers in the millions. The same can be said for Mohammed and the religion of Islam. Yet, Jesus has demonstrated that He is in a different class from these, as well as all the other founders of world religions.

1. He Is the Issue

Several things make Jesus different. First, He made *Himself* the issue while other leaders made *their teachings* the prime concern. Central to religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, Confucianism, etc. are the teachings. What is stressed are the things these founders taught, not so much who they were. The teachers, therefore, are secondary to the teachings.

However, in Christianity, the opposite is true. The all-important issue is not so much what Jesus taught, but who He claimed to be. The religious leaders of His day became infuriated when He claimed authority over everything. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, contrary to their tradition, they became incensed:

Therefore some of the Pharisees said, 'This Man is not from God because He does not keep the Sabbath.' Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' And there was division among them (John 9:16).

Jesus answered this charge by declaring, "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8).

The Difference Jesus Makes

This is one of the major differences between Jesus and the founders of other religions--He made Himself the issue. We find Jesus asking His disciples the following question:

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15).

He asked this question to secure a commitment, either for Him or against Him. We do not find the founders of the other world religions doing such a thing.

When the Jewish religious leaders brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate their accusation against Him was as follows:

We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God (John 19:7).

Therefore, contrary to the founders of all the other major religions, it is the identity of Jesus Christ, not His teachings, that is the major issue.

2. Jesus Demonstrated His Authority

Another aspect that separates Jesus from other religious leaders is that He demonstrated He had authority to make such monumental claims. While other religious leaders have made great claims, they have given no legitimate evidence to substantiate them. Jesus, on the other hand, backed up His claims with objective proof.

The Difference

The account of Jesus healing the paralyzed man illustrates this point. When this man was brought before Him, Jesus said:

Son, your sins are forgiven you (Mark 2:5).

This claim to forgive sins upset the religious rulers:

But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' (Mark 2:6,7).

Only God Can Forgive

They were absolutely right in their assertion that only God could forgive sins. The prophet Isaiah records God as saying:

"I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins (Isaiah 43:25).

But making the claim to forgive sins is something that cannot be publicly verified. How could anyone have known that Jesus had this authority? Knowing this to be the case, Jesus responded:

Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"-- He said to the paralytic, "I say to you arise, take up your bed and, and go your way to your house." And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all (Mark 2:8-12).

We note how Jesus dealt with the situation. He asked, "Which is easier to *say*, "Your sins are forgiven or rise up and walk?" It is much easier to say, your sins are forgiven because no one can tell, at that moment, whether or not they have been forgiven. The forgiveness of sin is not accompanied by some observable sign.

Everyone Will Know

But, if someone says to a paralyzed man, "Rise up and walk," immediately it will become apparent to everyone whether or not the person has the ability to supernaturally heal. When Jesus instantly healed the paralytic, He showed the religious rulers He had God's authority - since this miracle occurred where everyone could see it with their own eyes. Jesus, therefore, demonstrated His authority in the realm we can see. It illustrated the fact that He also had supernatural authority to forgive sins in the realm we cannot see.

Therefore, Jesus did not merely make claims about Himself, He backed up those claims with observable miracles which testified to His power and authority.

3. Fulfilled Prophecy

Another thing that separates Jesus from other founders of religions is that He fulfilled predictions about Himself that were written hundreds of years before He came. No one else can claim anything like this. Since the evidence is so vast, we will devote an entire chapter in our text (as well as an entire book in our series) to showing the remarkable fulfillment of prophecy in the life of Jesus.

4. Conquered Death

A final fact which separates Jesus from all others is that He conquered the ultimate enemy that everyone faces - death. By coming back from the dead, He provided a solid answer to the question, "What will happen to us when we die?" No other religious figure has returned from the dead to verify his claims except Jesus of Nazareth. As we shall later see, the evidence that Jesus came back from the dead is sufficient to convince even the most skeptical.

Can Be Tested

In addition, the bodily resurrection of Jesus can be *tested* by the most rigorous historical methods. While many other religious traditions have an idea of spirit resurrections (an untestable hypothesis), only the New Testament proclaims a bodily resurrection that passes all tests of historical reliability. This provides the believer with a genuine hope of life beyond the grave.

Thus the resurrection of Jesus Christ separates Him from all other religious figures, past or present, for He conquered one of the greatest enemies we all face - death.

Therefore, Jesus is different from the founders of other religions in at least four ways:

He made Himself the issue instead of His teachings.

He backed up His claims with observable miracles.

He fulfilled predictions made about His life and ministry. These predictions were made hundreds of years before He was born.

He conquered death to verify that He was the unique Son of God.

D. According to Scripture, Truth Is Absolute

We now move on to our next question, "So what if Jesus is unique? Does it really make a difference?" A popular response to this question is, "I'm glad Jesus has helped you, you need help! But don't tell me I have to believe in Him. What is true for you may not be true for me. It's enough that a person believes in something but ultimately it does not matter what you believe."

Object Of Faith

The Bible refutes this kind of thinking. It *is* important what we believe. In the New Testament, it is always the object of faith - Jesus Christ - and not faith itself, that is stressed. As far as the Bible is concerned, correct belief is crucial. The New Testament teaches that right belief consists of several things.

1. Faith In The God Of Scripture

First, faith must be in God, but not just any god. Faith must be placed only in the God of the Bible.

2. Faith In His Son

Second, faith must be placed in God's Son, Jesus Christ. It is impossible to have a relationship with the true God apart from the person of Jesus. The Bible says:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).

In another place it states:

Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also (1 John 2:23).

According to the Bible, anyone who claims to know God, and yet does not believe in Jesus, does not know God. You have to have *both* the Father and the Son.

3. More Than Mental Assent

Furthermore, faith in Jesus is more than merely acknowledging intellectually that He existed or that He is the Lord. James wrote about this type of ineffective faith. He compared it to the belief of demons.

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble (James 2:19).

The demons know who Jesus is - God the Son, the Savior of the world. But merely knowing these and other facts about Jesus does not do them any good - they have no relationship with Him. Biblical faith consists of trusting Jesus as Savior - not simply acknowledging Him with the intellect.

Therefore it does matter what a person believes. Faith must be placed in God's Son - Jesus Christ - or else there is no forgiveness.

E. The Bible Encourages People to Use Their Minds When Considering These Issues

Though the Bible encourages people to put their faith in Jesus, it is neither blind nor irrational faith. No one is asked to sacrifice his intellect when they put their faith in the God of the Bible.

What God Has Done In History

This is because the Christian faith is based upon the firm foundation of what God has done in the past. He has revealed Himself to humanity and that revelation is recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Bible tells us what God requires of us and that we are to respond to Him by faith. In doing so, we are never expected to stop thinking or to act irrationally. Isaiah the prophet records God as saying:

Come let us reason together (Isaiah 1:18).

Jesus emphasized that coming to God involves the mind as well as the heart and soul:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37).

When Jesus had a conversation with one of the scribes, He equated intelligence with knowing God:

So when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God' (Mark 12:34).

An intelligent response from the scribe caused Jesus to remark that this man was close to the kingdom of God. This is another indication that the Bible encourages people to use their minds when examining the evidence for the Christian faith.

They Knew Events To Be True

The writers of the New Testament knew the events they preached and wrote about actually occurred - because they were eyewitnesses to them. Simon Peter showed that the New Testament authors were aware of the difference between mythology and fact:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty (2 Peter 1:16-17).

They knew what myths were, and they knew what they had experienced. They testified that the things they had experienced were not myths but reality. Consequently they welcomed an honest investigation of the facts. Blind faith was never encouraged.

Summary of Christian Position

Therefore, the Christian position can be summed up as follows: If the God of the Bible is the true God, then every subject explored will only confirm, not contradict, His written revelation. The Christian is not afraid of any issue that may come up.

F. Evidence Is Sufficient to Believe in Christ

Finally, as we examine the case for Christianity we will discover the evidence is more than sufficient to believe. When all the evidence is in, it will be clear that the Christian faith is true-- Jesus is the one whom He claimed to be. Therefore each individual must ultimately make a decision concerning Him.

The rest of this book will lay out some of the evidence for the case for Christianity.

Chapter Summary

We can summarize the points of this chapter as follows:

1. First, we have discovered that humans have different belief options about God.

Agnosticism - I do not know if God or gods exist.

Atheism - I do know, God or gods do not exist.

Theism - I do know, God or gods do exist.

Polytheism - Many gods exist.

Henotheism - The henotheist worships only one of the many gods who exist.

Monotheism - Only one God exists.

Pantheism - All things that exist are part of God. Therefore God is impersonal.

Deism - The one God who exists is personal, yet He is not involved with humanity.

Personal Theism - The one personal God is intimately involved with humanity.

Unitarianism - God is only one person.

Trinitarianism - The one God who exists, is, by nature, a Trinity - three distinct persons within the nature of the one God.

2. The Christian response in defending the faith is known as "apologetics." It has an offensive and defensive aspect to it.

3. Apologetics has the idea of defending the faith that has been once-and-for-all delivered to the saints. There is a body of truth that needs to be proclaimed and defended.

4. Apologetics is not the gospel, but defends and clarifies the biblical gospel.

5. Christians must not merely preach the gospel without offering a reasonable defense when the faith is attacked or questioned.

6. Honest questions deserve honest answers.

We also discovered that:

7. All religions are not ultimately saying the same thing.

8. Christianity is unique among the world's religions.

9. Jesus demonstrated Himself to be different from any other religious figure.

10. Scripture teaches that truth is absolute, it does matter what you believe.

11. The Bible encourages people to think about these matters - to use their mind.

12. When all the facts are in, the evidence is sufficient to believe in Christ. Therefore, the Christian is not afraid of answering any question the doubter may ask.

Now that we have an understanding of the basic issues that are before us, let us move on to our case for Christianity.

Introducing the Case for Christianity

We now begin our examination of the case for the Christian faith. Our approach is simple: We are going to presume that the individual we are talking to has never heard about the Bible, Jesus Christ, or Christianity. Therefore we will take absolutely nothing for granted. Our case for Christianity will be built without assuming any facts to be true. It is our belief that when all the evidence is in, the facts will speak loud and clear with respect to the truthfulness of the faith. Our plan is as follows:

I. Establish The Reliability Of The New Testament

Our first point is to make the determination that the New Testament is a reliable historical document--it can be trusted. The reliability will be demonstrated in two ways - its text and its history.

A. Text

We will discover that the text of the New Testament has been transmitted accurately throughout history. In other words, the New Testament says the same thing today as when it was originally written. Therefore we can trust that the message has been handed down to us correctly.

B. History

Next, we will look at the history that the New Testament records. We will see that the historical references reported in the New Testament match up to known history.

Therefore, the New Testament will be proven trustworthy in both its text and history. If this is the case, the claims it makes deserve to be heard because everything about it tells us it is a reliable document.

II. Understand The Claims Made About Christ

Next, we move on to our second point - the claims of the New Testament. First, we determine what kind of book the Bible is and what it says about itself.

A. Jesus - The Only Way

We will discover that the main character of Scripture is Jesus Christ - the entire Bible is about Him. Astounding claims are made about Jesus - He is the Savior of the world, the Son of God, the way, the truth, and the life, the only hope for salvation. According to Scripture, there is no other way to get to the only God who exists except through Jesus.

B. Jesus Is God Almighty

Furthermore, the Scripture teaches that Jesus was more than a mere man, He is God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. In this section, we will look at the biblical evidence for the Deity of Christ.

III. Examining The Claims About Christ

We then examine the claims of the New Testament. Since these claims are recorded in a document that we have already demonstrated to be reliable, they must be taken seriously. There are three possible ways to understand the claims made about Jesus that are recorded in the New Testament:

A. He Never Made The Claims - Legend

This view holds that Jesus never made the astounding claims that are recorded in the New Testament. The claims are those of His disciples who later exaggerated His words. Therefore the accounts about His miracles and the claims that He is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and the only hope of humanity, are merely legendary.

B. He Made The Claims But The Claims Were Not True

The second possibility is that He actually made the claims that are recorded in the New Testament but His claims were not true. We have two possibilities if this is the case.

1. Liar

This perspective believes that Jesus was not the Son of God and that He knew He was not the Son of God, yet He lied about His true identity when He made the claims recorded in the New Testament.

2. Lunatic

The other possibility holds that Jesus was not the Son of God but that He actually thought that He was. In this case, Jesus would have been deluded when He claimed to be the ultimate authority on every issue.

C. He Made The Claims And They Were True

The last possibility holds that Jesus actually made the claims recorded in the New Testament and these claims are true. This would make Him Lord.

After examining the three possible ways in which to assess Jesus' claims, we will find that the only one that makes sense is that He is Lord.

IV. Evidence For Jesus' Claims

The fourth section will deal with the evidence concerning the claims of Christ. If Jesus is the Lord, then there should be some evidence to back up His claims. The New Testament basically provides us with three different lines of evidence: miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and His resurrection from the dead.

A. Miracles

We will see that Jesus performed miracles as objective signs that He was indeed the promised Messiah. The number of miracles recorded, the different types of miracles, as well as the various areas of authority they covered, show that Jesus is the One whom He claimed to be--the Son of God.

B. Fulfilled Prophecy

Our second line of evidence will be predictive prophecy. Only God knows the future and in Scripture we have the evidence of the future having been predicted in advance. Fulfilled prophecy shows not only that God exists, but that also He is in control of history.

C. The Resurrection Of Christ

The final evidence is the most important of all - the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Without the resurrection there is no Christian faith.

V. The Bible Is God's Word--Jesus Says So!

We now come to our final point - the nature of the Bible. We believe it is the Word of God because Jesus says so. His understanding of Scripture will be our understanding since He has demonstrated Himself to be God's Son.

A. Jesus' View Of The Old Testament

First, we will examine Jesus' view of the Old Testament. He believed it was God's Word. His attitude toward the Old Testament was one of total trust.

1. Jesus' View Of His Own Teachings

Next we examine how Jesus viewed His own teachings. We will find that He considered them authoritative. When He spoke there was no court of appeal - He was the final Word!

2. Jesus' View Of The New Testament

Finally we have Jesus' predictions to His disciples with respect to the New Testament. We will find that He pre-authenticated it ahead of time - promising His followers that all things He taught them would be supernaturally brought back to their remembrance and the Holy Spirit would guide them into *all truth*.

This is the outline for our course of study.

We will now proceed to our first point - establishing the reliability of the New Testament.

The Reliability of The New Testament

Our first order of business concerns the text of the New Testament. Is there evidence that what we read today in our modern translations is an accurate representation of what was originally written, or has the text been changed so much that we cannot trust it at all? Can we be assured that we are reading the actual words that these writers first penned, or have their writings been altered - either accidentally or on purpose? This issue is primary. Unless we can be satisfied that the text has come down to us in an accurate manner, no reasonable case for Christianity can be established.

I. The Study Of Textual Criticism

In the first century, Greek was the international language. The books of the New Testament were originally written in the common Greek of the day called *koine*. Today, we do not possess the autographs (originals) of the various New Testament books but are dependent upon copies, and copies of copies to reconstruct the text. The practice of reconstructing the text of a document is known as textual criticism.

Textual criticism is not limited to the New Testament. No originals exist of any classical writer, any of the writings of the early Christians, or even the works of William Shakespeare.

II. The Necessity Of New Testament Textual Criticism

Textual criticism of the New Testament is necessary for three reasons.

1. We do not possess any of the original writings of the New Testament. We are dependent upon copies to reconstruct the text.
2. Until five hundred years ago all documents were copied by hand. Books produced in this way are called manuscripts. The copies of the biblical manuscripts we now possess differ in some respects from each other because of scribal mistakes that have crept into the text.
3. In the case of the New Testament there is an abundance of material to evaluate.

Furthermore, before any type of biblical interpretation can begin, we must first determine what the text originally said. Therefore textual criticism is an absolute necessity.

III. The Practice Of Textual Criticism

The goal of textual criticism is to establish the original reading of the text. To accomplish this goal the textual critic sifts through the manuscripts and carefully compares them with one another. This is to ascertain, as much as it is possible, how the variations occurred.

Abundance of Evidence to Consider

The problem with almost all ancient writings is the lack of existing manuscripts to reconstruct the text. Most ancient writings have the slimmest manuscript evidence by which scholars attempt to establish the original. In the case of the New Testament, however, there is no such problem. We are not lacking manuscripts to reconstruct the text. On the contrary, we have such an abundance of manuscripts that it makes the establishment of the text virtually certain.

IV. Three Lines Of Evidence

In the case of the New Testament there are three lines of evidence available to reconstruct the original:

1. The Greek Manuscripts
2. The Versions (Translations)
3. The Writings Of The Church Fathers

1. Greek Manuscripts

The oldest and most important evidence to reconstruct the New Testament text are the Greek manuscripts. These manuscripts are categorized according to writing material (papyri), the style of the letters (uncial and minuscule manuscripts) and the format of the document (lectionaries).

Papyri

The first group of manuscripts, the papyri, is named after the material they were written upon. Papyrus is the surface upon which the originals (autographs) of the New Testament were composed. Strips of the papyrus reeds were pressed together to make this writing material-- which is extremely perishable, surviving only in warm, dry climates.

The papyrus fragments that have survived, contain some of the earliest witnesses to the New Testament text. In fact, the forty-five earliest New Testament fragments we possess were written on papyri (all dating before A.D. 300). At the turn of the twentieth century there were only nine known papyrus fragments that contained parts of the New Testament. There are now some ninety-eight. These papyrus manuscripts are designated by the letter "p" followed by a superscript Arabic number (e.g. p⁷⁵).

Uncials

The second line of evidence to reconstruct the text of the New Testament are the uncial (inch high) manuscripts. The name is derived from the inch high size of the letters. There are approximately three hundred uncial manuscripts of the New Testament - all written on parchment (animal skins). It has been estimated that it would have taken the hides of about 360 sheep and goats to produce Codex Sinaiticus (an uncial manuscript that contained the entire Greek Old Testament and New Testament).

No Punctuation, No Space Between Words

Uncial writing consists of upper-case letters that are deliberately and carefully written. There was no punctuation in the sentence and no space between the words. The uncial manuscripts were basically written between the fourth and tenth centuries - there are five fragmentary uncials that date from the third century.

Minuscules

In the ninth century A.D., uncial writing began to be replaced by a faster method known as minuscule writing. Minuscule writing was a script of smaller letters not as carefully executed as uncials. By using minuscule writing, books could be turned out much faster. Minuscule writing was in use from the ninth to the sixteenth century.

Lectionaries

The fourth witness to the New Testament text are Scripture portions known as lectionaries. The church followed the custom of the synagogue which had a fixed portion of the Law and the Prophets read each Sabbath. In the same manner, Christians developed a practice where they would read a fixed portion of the gospels and the New Testament letters every Sunday as well as upon Holy Days. These fixed portions are the lectionaries. Fragments of lectionaries come from as early as the sixth century A.D., while complete manuscripts are found as early as the eighth century.

The surviving Greek manuscripts can be catalogued as follows:

<u>Type of Manuscript</u>	<u>Number Surviving</u>
Uncial	299
Minuscule	2,812
Lectionaries	2,281
Papyri	98
Total	5,490

Not Necessarily Complete Manuscripts

When we speak of manuscripts, we are not necessarily speaking of complete manuscripts. For example, of 5,500 Greek manuscripts that have been catalogued, most are fragmentary. Only three of the uncials are complete. There are fifty-six minuscule manuscripts that contain the entire New Testament. Two other uncial manuscripts, and another one hundred forty-seven minuscules contain the entire New Testament except for the Book of Revelation.

Material from the gospels is found in 2,328 manuscripts, Acts and the universal letters in another 655 manuscripts, Paul's writings in 779 manuscripts, and the Book of Revelation in 287. No

other ancient book has anywhere near the amount of manuscript testimony as the New Testament.

As far as the dates of these manuscripts are concerned, 125 of them are from the first five centuries (two and one half per cent of the total) while 65% of the manuscripts are from the 11th through 14th centuries.

2. Versions (Translations)

Though the total number of surviving Greek manuscripts is larger than all other ancient works, they are not the only means available for reconstructing the original text. A second line of evidence by which the New Testament text can be established comes from the versions. Versions are translations of the different New Testament books into languages other than Greek. Ancient literature was rarely translated into another language with the New Testament being an important exception. From the very beginning, Christian missionaries, in an attempt to spread their faith, translated the New Testament into the various languages of the people they encountered. These translations, some made as early as the middle of the second century, give us an important witness to the text of that time.

When the copies of the manuscripts of the versions are catalogued, again we are faced with an overwhelming number as the following chart reveals:

<u>Versions</u>	<u>Number of Manuscripts</u>
LatinVulgate	10,000+ (maybe as high as 25,000)
Ethiopic	2,000+
Slavic	4,101+
Armenian	2,587+
SyriacPeshitta	350+
Bohairic	100+
Total	19,000+

Because the versions are translations from the original Greek, they are not as valuable as the Greek manuscripts in reconstructing the text. However, they are an important witness to the text's reliability.

Comparisons To Other Ancient Works

When the total manuscript evidence for the New Testament text (Greek manuscripts and early translations) is compared to other ancient writings the difference is striking.

<u>Work</u>	<u>Date Written</u>	<u>Earliest Copy</u>	<u>Time Span (Years)</u>	<u>Number of Copies</u>
Euripides	450 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1500	9
Sophocles	450 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1400	193
Catullus	54 B.C.	A.D. 1550	1600	3
Homer	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500	643
N.T.	A.D. 40-80	A.D. 125	50	24,000

Two Questions To Consider

When reconstructing the text of an ancient work, two key questions need to be considered. The first question deals with the time span between the date the work was completed and the earliest existing copy available to reconstruct the text. Usually, the shorter the time span the more dependable is the copy. The longer the time between the original and the copy, the more errors are apt to creep in as the text is copied and recopied.

As the above chart reveals, the time span between the composition of the New Testament and the earliest existing copy is much shorter than for these other ancient works. Using this standard of comparison, the New Testament is far superior in this regard.

Number Of Copies

The second question that needs to be addressed concerns the number of copies, "How many copies are available to reconstruct the text?" The more copies available, the better off we are--since there is more evidence to help one decide what the original text said.

For example, if an ancient work were to come down to us in only one copy, there would be nothing with which to compare that copy. There is no way of knowing if the scribe was incompetent since it could not be checked against another copy.

As we have seen, the New Testament dwarfs all other ancient works with respect to the total number of manuscripts that still exist. With such a wealth of manuscript evidence, we have every right to assume that nothing has been lost from the original New Testament text. Yet, the Greek manuscripts and the versions do not exhaust the lines of evidence for reconstructing how the text read.

3. The Church Fathers

A third line of evidence, used in establishing the New Testament text, are quotations from the writings of the early Christians known as the "church fathers." In their writings, they often quoted from the New Testament text. Every time we find a biblical quotation we have a further witness to the text.

Early Testimony

For example, seven letters have survived which were written by a man named Ignatius (A.D. 70-110). In those letters he quoted from eighteen different books of the New Testament. Every time he cites Scripture, we can observe the Greek text he was using.

Consequently, the early church fathers provide us with an excellent early witness to the text. We must be careful, however, in relying too heavily on the fathers because sometimes their quotations were paraphrases (not word for word citations) of the biblical text. In addition, the manuscripts of their writings have gone through a period of copying, during which time mistakes have slipped into the text. Nevertheless, their writings remain an important witness to the New Testament.

Overwhelming Testimony

The number of quotations of the church fathers is so overwhelming that, if every other source for the New Testament (Greek manuscripts, versions) were destroyed, the text could be reconstructed merely on the writings of the church fathers alone! In his book, *Our Bible - How We Got It*, Charles Leach relates the story of Sir David Dalrymple:

Sir David Dalrymple was wondering about the preponderance of Scripture in early writings when someone asked him. 'Suppose that the New Testament had been destroyed, and every copy of it lost by the end of the third century, could it have been collected again from the writings of the Fathers of the second and third centuries?' After a great deal of investigation Dalrymple concluded . . . 'You remember the question about the New Testament and the Fathers? That question roused my curiosity and as I possessed all the existing works of the Fathers of the second and third centuries, I commenced to search and up to this time I have found the entire New Testament, except eleven verses' (Charles Leach, *Our Bible - How We Got It*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1898, pp. 35, 36).

Leo Vaganay remarked on the thorough research of scholar John Burgon:

Of the considerable volumes of unpublished material that Dean Burgon left when he died, of special note is his index of New Testament citations by the church Fathers of antiquity. It contains sixteen thick volumes to be found in the British Museum, and contains 86,489 quotations (Leo Vaganay, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, trans. by B.V. Miller, London: Sands and Co., 1937, p. 48).

Confidently, we can say that when the evidence from the Greek manuscripts, the versions (translations), and the church fathers is considered, any impartial person cannot help but be impressed with their abundant testimony.

Comparison To Shakespeare

We can go a step further and compare the New Testament to the works of William Shakespeare. He wrote thirty-seven plays in the seventeenth century, all after the invention of printing. The originals of Shakespeare's plays have not survived. Therefore we are dependent upon copies to

reconstruct the text. In every one of his plays there are gaps in the printed text where we do not know what was originally written. Textual scholars attempt to fill in the gaps in the printed copies by making an educated guess as to what it originally said. The New Testament, written some sixteen centuries earlier than Shakespeare, with three quarters of its history copied by hand, is in much better textual shape, needing *no* educated guesses to fill in the blanks.

No Guesswork Needed

Since we do possess so many manuscripts, we can be assured the original text has been preserved. Consequently, we never have to revert to guessing to determine what the text originally said. The great scholar Samuel Tregelles wrote:

We possess so many mss, [manuscripts] and we are aided by so many versions, that we are never left to the need to conjecture as the means of removing errata (Samuel Tregelles, *Greek New Testament, Prolegomena*).

Modern day textual scholar Michael Holmes concurs:

The sheer volume of the information available to the New Testament textual critic makes it practically certain that the original text has been preserved somewhere among the surviving witnesses (Michael Holmes, *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, Editors David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, Zondervan, 1991, p. 106).

The well-known textual authority, Sir Frederic Kenyon, wrote,

The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other book in the world (Sir Frederic Kenyon, *Our Bible and Ancient Manuscripts*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941, p. 55).

Watched By Different Groups

Another important point to remember is that there were different groups interested in the proper copying of the text. Legal authority Simon Greenleaf writes:

These copies of the Holy Scriptures having thus been in familiar use in the churches, from the time when the text was committed to writing; having been watched with vigilance by so many sects, opposed to one another in doctrine, yet all appealing to these Scriptures for the correctness of their faith; and having in all ages, down to this day, been respected as the authoritative source of all ecclesiastical power and government and submitted to . . . it is quite erroneous to suppose that the Christian is bound to offer any further proof of their genuineness or authenticity. It is for the objector therefore to show them spurious; for on him, by the plainest rules of law, lies the burden of proof (Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*, Kregel Classics, 1995, p. 19).

WHAT ABOUT VARIANT READINGS?

Next, we deal with the often-asked question about variant readings. When two manuscripts differ on a particular word or phrase in the text, the result is known as a variant reading. The difference may be of spelling, word order, or different words used. Because the New Testament has been copied innumerable times in the last two thousand years, scribal errors have crept into the text. They arose early in the history of the New Testament because the text was copied so many times.

Unintentional Variations

The scribes who did copy the text introduced changes. These scribal changes can be broken down into two basic types: unintentional and intentional. The greatest number of variants in the New Testament manuscripts are unintentional. They could creep into the text through faulty sight, hearing, writing, memory or judgment on the part of the scribe.

Intentional Variation

Some of the variations came about intentionally as New Testament scholar J. Harold Greenlee notes:

These comprise a significant, although a much less numerous, group of errors than the unintentional changes. They derive for the most part from attempts by scribes to improve the text in various ways. Few indeed are the evidences that heretical or destructive variants have been deliberately introduced into the mss [manuscripts] (J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction To New Testament Textual Criticism*, Eerdmans, 1964, p. 66).

Bruce Metzger expands upon the intentional variations:

Other divergence's in wording arose from deliberate attempts to smooth out grammatical or stylistic harshness, or to eliminate real or imagined obscurities of meaning in the text. Sometimes a copyist would add what seemed to him to be a more appropriate word or form, perhaps derived from a parallel passage (Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, German Bible Society, Second Edition, 1994, p. 3,4).

The charge is often made that the text was radically changed by copyists. Again, the facts speak otherwise as Michael Holmes explains:

Occasionally the text was altered for doctrinal reasons. Orthodox and heretics alike leveled this charge against their opponents, though the surviving evidence suggests the charge was more frequent than the reality (Michael Holmes, *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, Editors David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, Zondervan, p. 103).

Summary

With respect to the variations found in the New Testament manuscripts, most were unintentional. The few that were intentional consisted mostly of grammatical improvements. There is no evidence of any widespread altering of the text for doctrinal reasons.

Small Percentage Of Variation

Furthermore, the variant readings, whether intentional or unintentional, exist only in a very limited portion of the New Testament. The practice of textual criticism, therefore, deals with this small percentage of the biblical text. Two of the greatest textual scholars who ever lived, Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, had this to say concerning the amount of variation in the New Testament manuscripts.

If comparative trivialities, such as changes of order, the insertion or omission of an article with proper names, and the like, are set aside, the words in our opinion still subject to doubt can hardly amount to more than a thousandth part of the whole New Testament (B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, *The New Testament in Greek*, New York: MacMillan, 1957, p. 565).

Scholar B.B. Warfield said that the New Testament:

has been transmitted to us with no, or next to no, variation; and even in the most corrupt form in which it has ever appeared, to use the oft-quoted words of Richard Bentley, 'The real text of the sacred writers is competently exact' (Benjamin B. Warfield, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, seventh edition. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907, p. 14).

Maurice A. Robinson and William Pierpoint note:

For over four-fifths of the New Testament, the Greek text is considered 100% certain, regardless of which texttype might be favored by any critic. This undisputed bulk of the text reflects a common pre-existing archetype (the autograph), which has universal critical acceptance.

Note . . . that most of the variant readings found in manuscripts of other texttypes are trivial or untranslatable. Only about 400-600 variant readings seriously affect the translational sense of any passage in the entire New Testament (Maurice A. Robinson, William Pierpoint, *The New Testament In The Original Greek According To The Byzantine/Majority TextForm*, Atlanta, The Original Word Publishers, 1991, p. xvi. and xvii).

Therefore, when all the variants of the New Testament are considered we are only dealing with four hundred to six hundred places that have any affect on the translation of the text.

Only Fifty Are Important

Church historian Phillip Schaff estimated that of the four hundred variants that have affected the sense of the passages in the New Testament, only fifty of these were actually important (Phillip Schaff, *Companion to the Greek New Testament and the English Version*, 1877, p. 177).

Facts like this led textual scholars Kurt and Barbara Aland to make the following observation:

On the whole it must be admitted that statements about the text of the New Testament whether by amateurs or by specialists, have far too rarely reflected an overall perspective. All too frequently the focus has been on variants found in particular manuscripts or editions. This is true for even the most fundamental aspects of textual criticism; when identifying the text type of a manuscript it is all too easy to overlook the fact that the Byzantine Imperial text and the Alexandrian Egyptian text, to take two examples that in theory are diametrically opposed to each other, actually exhibit a remarkable degree of agreement, perhaps as much as 80 percent! Textual critics themselves, and New Testament specialists even more so, not to mention laypersons, tend to be fascinated by differences and to forget how many of them are due to chance or normal scribal tendencies, and how rarely significant variants occur - yielding to the common danger of failing to see the forest for the trees (Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 1987, p. 28).

Michael Holmes concurs:

Indeed, in view of the attention that is rightly focused on the places where the evidence differs, it is worth noting just how much of the New Testament is well established. A survey by the Alands reveals that out of the 7,947 verses in the Greek New Testament, seven major editions are in complete agreement regarding 4,999, or 62.9% (Aland, text, p. 28-29). If one were to leave aside certain idiosyncrasies and minor differences between these editions, it may be estimated where there is substantial agreement approaches 90% of the total. To be sure, the remaining differences can be substantial and important, and fully merit the attention given to them over the centuries by the textual critics. One should not neglect, however, to keep them in perspective, especially as people unacquainted with textual matters are sometimes shocked to encounter statements to the effect that "there are over 30,000 errors in the New Testament." The statements are uninformed and inaccurate. If one defines "error" broadly enough, to include, e.g., spelling mistakes or differences, then it is true that there are tens of thousands of "errors" among the 5000 + manuscripts of the New Testament. But this hardly affects the reliability of the New Testament itself, since wherever some MSS are in error, other have accurately preserved the original text (Michael Holmes, *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, Editors David Alan Black and David S. Dockery, Zondervan, 1991, pp. 127,128, note 21).

Does Not Affect Christian Doctrine

Since the variants do not materially affect the meaning of the text, Christian doctrine is not affected by textual variations. The introduction to the *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible declares:

It will be obvious to the careful reader that still in 1946 as in 1881 and 1901, no doctrine of the Christian faith has been affected by the revision, for the simple reason that, out of the thousands of variant readings in the manuscripts, none has turned up thus far that requires a revision of Christian doctrine (F.C. Grant, "An Introduction to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament," *The New Testament, Revised Standard*

Version, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1946, p. 42).

New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce concurs:

The variant readings about which any doubt remains . . . affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice (F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954, p. 178).

We can rightly conclude that the variations in the different manuscripts have no affect whatsoever on the reliability of the text or upon Christian theology.

Disputed Passages

We mentioned there were only about fifty passages where variants really affect the meaning. We will now consider some of these disputed passages.

Two Categories

The passages where the readings are disputed can be broken down into two different categories. First, there are passages that are questionable as to whether they belong in the New Testament. Second, there are verses that everyone agrees belong, but there is a question as to exactly how the verse should be worded.

Omitted Or Added?

First, there are passages that are questionable as to whether they belong in Scripture: They include:

Matthew 6:13 For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

This is the famous doxology at the end of the Lord's prayer.

Mark 16:8-20 So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either. Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; "they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He

was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

The last twelve verses of Mark contain an account of the appearances of Jesus after His death.

John 5:3,4 waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.

In this passage there is a parenthetical explanation of why people were waiting at the pool to be healed.

John 7:53-8:11 And everyone went to his own house. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. "Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

This is the famous story of the woman who was discovered in the act of adultery and then brought before Jesus.

Acts 8:37 Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

This verse contains the answer of Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch after the Eunuch asked if he could be baptized.

1 John 5:7 For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

This passage is a clear statement of the Trinity. However the doctrine of the Trinity -there is one God who is manifest in three distinct persons - is not based upon this verse.

These passages are not found in some important manuscripts of the New Testament. Whether or not they belong, no Christian doctrine stands or falls on any of these passages.

DISPUTED READINGS

There is a second group of passages where it is certain that the verse belongs, yet the particular reading of that verse is in doubt. The following are examples of this type of variant.

John 1:18

The question here is, "Does the Greek text read *Son* or *God*?"

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (KJV)

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (NIV)

No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him (NASB)

John 7:8

Did Jesus say "I am *not* going up" or "I am *not yet* going up."

Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come (NASB)

You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come (NIV)

You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come (NKJV)

1 Timothy 3:16

The question in this passage concerns the reading of one word. Is it *God* or *He*?

God was manifest in the flesh (KJV)

He who was revealed in the flesh (NASB)

He appeared in a body (NIV)

Summary

Therefore we can summarize the evidence of the variant readings in the following manner: 80-85% of the text reads exactly the same, no matter what manuscript tradition is followed. Of the 15-20% that has any variations, 99% of these are meaningless and do not affect the translation of the text. Thus, there are only about 400-600 places in the entire New Testament where translation is affected by a variant reading. Of these only about fifty have any real importance. Finally, no Christian doctrine is affected, one way or the other, in these fifty variants. Thus the variants have no real affect on the meaning of the text.

V. Summary and Conclusion

After looking at the evidence for the reliability of the New Testament text, we can summarize as follows:

1. The time span between the date of composition of the books of the New Testament and the earliest surviving manuscripts is relatively short. Most other ancient works have a much longer gap between the time when they were written and the earliest available manuscript. There is in existence a complete New Testament manuscript (Codex Vaticanus) which was copied within 250 years of the time of the writing of the New Testament. In addition, we have over fifty fragments of the New Testament that go back even earlier. The classical writings (Plato, Aristotle, etc.) are viewed as having been transmitted in a reliable manner, yet, the time span, between the original and their earliest copy, is over a thousand years. The New Testament documents, if evaluated on the same basis, also must be viewed as trustworthy.
2. Not only is the interval shorter between the writings of the New Testament and the earliest existing manuscripts, the number of manuscripts (over 5,000 in Greek) is far superior to any other ancient work. Given the axiom, "The more manuscripts, the better chance to reconstruct the original," we again see that the New Testament is in much better shape than other ancient works.
3. The Greek New Testament was translated into other languages at an early date. Those versions provide further evidence in establishing the true text. The number of manuscript copies of the different versions is around 20,000. Most other ancient writings were never translated into another language.
4. A further line of evidence is found in the writings of the church fathers, where verses, passages and entire books are cited. If the other sources for the New Testament were non-existent (Greek manuscripts and versions) the text still could be reconstructed through the writings of the church fathers alone. There is nothing like this for any other ancient work.
5. It should be remembered that there were different groups who carefully watched the transmission of the New Testament text. These groups were opposed to one another in various beliefs and practices. They would certainly be watching each other to make sure the text was not altered in any way.
6. The variant readings that do exist do not affect the reliability of the text. The number of places where there are variants is relatively small and they do not affect any Christian doctrine. In fact,

there are only about fifty places in the entire New Testament where they are of any consequence whatsoever.

7. Therefore, three important facts demonstrate the New Testament can be trusted:

- (1) the short time span between the original and the manuscript copies
- (2) the great number of manuscripts, and
- (3) the lack of any substantial variation between the manuscripts.

Given the above facts, we conclude that the New Testament has been accurately transmitted throughout history. Any contrary conclusion is based either on a willful desire not to accept the evidence as it stands, or ignorance of the facts.

Sir Frederic Kenyon, former keeper of ancient manuscripts and director of the British Museum, was an authority second to none on manuscript evidence. After a lifetime of study of ancient documents he came to the following conclusions:

The interval between the dates of the original composition [of the New Testament] and the earliest extant [existing] evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established (Sir Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology*, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1940, p. 288).

The reliable transmission of the New Testament is absolutely necessary for establishing the case for Christianity. However, the fact that the New Testament has been reliably brought down to us does not mean that it is the Word of God, it doesn't even mean that what it says is true. It is possible for someone to accurately record the ravings of a madman.

However, to be true, and to be the Word of God it must be accurately transmitted for us and we have established that this is the case.

Therefore, since the New Testament has showed itself to be transmitted reliably, we now move to our next issue - the history that it records.

The Historical Accuracy of the New Testament

Now that we know the New Testament has been accurately transmitted throughout history, we come to our next issue - do the events, names, places, etc., that the New Testament records, match up with known history? Can we be confident that the historical references within the New Testament are accurate? This chapter will deal with the question of the historical accuracy of the New Testament.

I. Importance Of Historical Accuracy

The historical accuracy of the Bible is of the utmost importance because the revelation of God to mankind was accomplished through His mighty words and deeds in history. The Bible is a testimony of the mighty works of God.

A. The Old Testament

The Lord constantly reminded Israel of His mighty power. The Old Testament called attention to the past deeds of God.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Exodus 20:2).

The nation was continually urged to remember what He had done for them.

But the Lord, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm . . . Him you shall worship (2 Kings 17:36).

O My people, remember now . . . that you may know the righteousness of the Lord (Micah 6:5).

Consequently, the acts of God in history are stressed by the Old Testament writers. They are assumed to have literally occurred.

B. God Came To Our World

The same is true with the New Testament. Jesus Christ, God the Son, came into our world.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

We find the writers of Scripture appealing time and time again to actual historical events to testify to both the existence and power of God.

Specific Historical References

The entire biblical revelation centers on what God has done in history. For example, one chapter in Scripture, Genesis 10, has five times more specific geographical references of importance than the entire Koran, the holy book of Islam! In addition, there are over 300 references in the Book of Acts alone to names, places, and events. With so much attention to detail, the historical reliability of the Scriptures is of vital importance. If the Bible is the Word of God, then it must be able to withstand the most thorough historical investigation.

Investigate The Same Way As Other Documents

The New Testament was written in the same way as other documents in the ancient world. Consequently, it should be examined the same way as these other documents. Contrary to the claims of other religions and cults, there is no record of documents written on golden plates or discovered in some cave. Neither are the writings of the New Testament brought down from heaven by angels. They are the straightforward accounts of the people who walked and talked with Jesus and were observers of the things that He both said and did. The men who wrote these books made them public at the time they were written. There is no idea of hiding them so as to be discovered by some later generation. Every aspect of the composition of the New Testament is the same as other historical writings of that period. Therefore we need to investigate their claims as we would any other historical record.

II. The New Testament Books: First-hand Testimony

As we investigate the New Testament text we observe that the writers of the books claimed to be either eyewitnesses to the events recorded, or those who gathered eyewitness testimony. The Apostle John wrote:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us (1 John 1:1,2).

Simon Peter testified:

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased" - and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain (2 Peter 1:16-18).

The fact that the New Testament writers claimed such objective, complete, and firsthand evidence concerning Jesus Christ is of the utmost importance. Their evidence is not hearsay or imaginary - it is direct and reliable.

III. Written Short Time Afterward

The time of the composition of the New Testament text is extremely important, because if the documents were written and circulated at an early date, the eyewitnesses would still be living. They could either verify or deny the events recorded. The evidence shows that the four Gospels were written in a relatively short time after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This can first be seen by examining the internal evidence of the New Testament itself.

City Of Jerusalem And Temple Still Standing

The first three Gospels, and possibly also the fourth, were apparently written while the city of Jerusalem was still standing. Each of the first three Gospels contain predictions by Jesus concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), but none records the fulfillment. We know that the city and Temple were destroyed by Titus the Roman in A.D. 70. Hence, the composition of the first three Gospels must have occurred sometime before this event, otherwise their destruction would have been recorded.

The Book Of Acts

The Book of Acts also provides us with a clue as to when the gospels were written. Acts records the highlights in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. The book concludes with Paul at Rome awaiting trial before Caesar. The inference is that Acts was written while Paul was still alive, seeing his death is not recorded. Since there is good evidence that Paul died in the Neronian persecution about A.D. 67, the Book of Acts can be dated approximately A.D. 62.

Luke

If Acts were written about A.D. 62, then this helps us date the gospels, since the Book of Acts is the second half of a treatise written by Luke to a man named Theophilus. Since we know that the gospel of Luke was written before the Book of Acts, we can then date the Gospel of Luke sometime around A.D. 60 or before.

The Brother Who Was Well-Known

There may be further evidence for an early date for Luke's gospel. Paul wrote of a brother who was well-known among the churches for the gospel.

And we have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the gospel has spread through all the churches (2 Corinthians 8:18).

There is ancient testimony that this refers to Luke and his written gospel. If this is speaking of Luke and the gospel he composed, then we have it well-known in the mid-fifties of the first century.

Mark As A Source

There may be a reference in the writings of Luke that he used Mark as a written source. John Mark is called a "minister" by Luke in Acts 13:5 (the Greek word *huparetas*). In 1:2, Luke says he derived the information for his gospel from those who were "eyewitnesses" and "ministers" of the word. The term translated "minister" is the same Greek word *huparetas*. It is possible that this could be a reference to Mark as one of his written sources.

Mark Possibly Written Before Luke

Furthermore, modern scholarship has generally assumed that the Gospel of Mark was written before Luke. If this is the case, then we are somewhere in the fifties of the first century when this book was composed. Since Jesus' death and resurrection occurred approximately in the year A.D. 30, these two gospels were written during the time when eyewitnesses, both friendly and unfriendly, were still alive. These eyewitnesses could either verify or falsify the information contained in the gospels.

Matthew

We now go a step further by considering Matthew's gospel. According to the unanimous testimony of the early church Matthew was the first gospel written. The church father Eusebius places the date of Matthew's gospel in A.D. 41. If this is true, then we have a third independent source about the life of Christ written during the eyewitness period.

John

The Gospel of John is usually assumed to have been the last of the four gospels composed. John testified that he was an eyewitness to the events that he recorded.

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name John (20:30:31).

This is the disciple who bears witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true. (John 21:24).

Internal Evidence

There is also internal evidence that John himself wrote before A.D. 70.

Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes (John 5:2).

John describes the sheep gate as still standing at the time he wrote. The sheep gate was destroyed in the year A.D. 70, along with the rest of the city of Jerusalem. This could very well be an

indication that John wrote his gospel while the city of Jerusalem was still standing. Greek scholar Daniel Wallace writes the following concerning this verse.

The present tense should be used as indicating present time from the viewpoint of the speaker. The implication seems to be that this gospel was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Although many may object to a pre-70 date for John's gospel, they must, in support of their view, reckon with this text (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond The Basics*, Zondervan, 1997, p. 531).

The late John A.T. Robinson, a liberal scholar, in his book *Redating The New Testament*, concluded there is sufficient evidence for believing that *every* New Testament book was composed before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Early Date

When all the historical and textual evidence is amassed, it becomes clear that the New Testament was composed at a very early date either by eyewitnesses or those who recorded eyewitness testimony. The eminent archaeologist William F. Albright concluded,

In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century A.D. (very probably sometime between A.D. 50 and 75) (Interview with *Christianity Today*, January 18, 1963).

Albright also stated:

Thanks to the Qumran discoveries, the New Testament proves to be what it was formerly believed to be: the teaching of Christ and his immediate followers between cir. 24 and cir. 80 A.D. (W.F. Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963, p. 29).

John Wenham writes the following concerning the available evidence we have to date the New Testament:

1. Luke knew Mark's Gospel.
2. The dates should be reckoned working back from Acts, the natural date of which is A.D. 62.
3. Luke's gospel was apparently well known in the mid-50's.
4. According to tradition, Mark's gospel gives Peter's teaching in Rome.
5. Peter's first visit to Rome was probably 42-44 and Mark's gospel was probably written about 45.
6. The universal tradition of the early church puts Matthew first, which means a date around 40.

(John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, And Luke*, Downers Grove, Illinois; IVP, 1992, p. 243).

Legal expert Simon Greenleaf makes a sensible conclusion concerning the dating of the gospels:

The earlier date, however, is argued with greater force, for the improbability that the Christians would be left for several years without a general and authentic history of our Savior's ministry (Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*, Kregel, 1995, p. 19).

Testimony Of Unbelievers

We add to this the testimony of unbelievers. Unwittingly, they have given testimony to the early composition of the New Testament. Speaking of Celsus, a man living in the second century who hated Christianity, Bishop Fallows writes:

This unbeliever, although he caused great annoyance to the believers in Christ living in his day, and seemed to be disturbing the foundations of the Christian faith, rendered more real service to Christianity than any father of undisputed orthodoxy in the Church. He admits all the grand facts and doctrines of the gospel, as they were preached by the Apostles, and contained in the acknowledged writings, for the sake of opposing. He makes in his attacks eighty quotations from the New Testament, and appeals to it as containing the sacred writings of Christians, universally received by them as credible and Divine.

He is, therefore, the very best witness we can summon to prove that the New Testament was not written hundreds of years after the Apostles were dust; but in less than a century and a half had been received by the Christian Church all over the world. He expressly quotes both the synoptic Gospels, as they were termed (the first three Gospels), and the Gospel of St. John (Bishop Fallows, *Mistakes of Ingersoll and His Answers*, pp. 91,92).

Internal Evidence From The New Testament

There is internal evidence from the New Testament itself that parts of it were already considered as Scripture. Peter had the following to say about Paul's writings.

And regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Peter puts Paul's writings on the same level as the rest of the Scripture.

Paul and Luke

In addition, Paul quotes Luke's gospel and calls it Scripture.

For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Timothy 5:18).

This quotation is from Luke 10:7. When Paul wrote First Timothy it seems Luke's gospel had already been accepted as Scripture.

Recognized Early

The completed New Testament was recognized early in the history of the church. Tertullian, writing in the first two decades of the third century, was the first known person to call the Christian Scriptures the "New Testament." The title had appeared earlier (190) in a composition against Montanism by an unknown author.

Consequently, when all the evidence is in, it shows that not only the New Testament documents were written soon after the events they recorded, they were also recognized at an early date to be authoritative by those who read them.

IV. The Authors of The Four Gospels Can Be Identified

The life of Christ has been recorded for us by four separate works known as gospels. The traditional authorship is credited to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There are three basic reasons why we believe the four gospels were written by the men bearing their names.

A. Unanimous Tradition

The four gospels are unanimously attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John--there are no other candidates. Scholar Craig Keener convincingly makes the point that the authorship of these works would not have been forgotten.

Authorship would be the *last* thing forgotten. That this Gospel [Matthew] originally circulated without oral reports of authorship is unlikely; as an anonymous work it would not have quickly commanded the wide acceptance it received, and authors of biographies of this length normally were named (Craig Keener, *Matthew*, Downers Grove, Illinois, IVP, 1997, p. 32).

B. Unlikely Authors

The authors of our four gospels would not have been the obvious choices to write the accounts of the life of Christ. Only one of these four men (John) was a prominent character in the New Testament. Why attribute a book to the others if they were not the authors? The unanimous attestation of these unlikely authors is another strong reason for accepting the traditional view that they penned their respective gospels.

C. The Identification of The Document

The early preservation of the name of the author is another consideration. It was a common literary practice during the time of Christ to preserve the name of the author of a written work. Scrolls with written text on both sides had tags glued to them (called a *sittybos* in Greek) which insured the preservation of the author's name. They were attached in such a way that a person could see who authored the scroll without unrolling it. This is similar to the function of the spine on our modern books - one does not have to open the book to find out who wrote it.

With four different written gospels circulating, there needed to be a way to distinguish them from each other. The term "gospel" would not be enough, seeing that there was more than one circulating. Therefore the church had to preserve the name of each gospel writer at an early date. The tag on the outside of the scroll would accomplish that purpose. It would read in Greek, "Gospel of Matthew" or "Gospel of Mark."

No Variations in the Title

The fact that this happened is clear in that there are *no* variations in the titles of the gospels. Every source is unanimous that Matthew wrote Matthew, Mark wrote Mark, Luke penned his gospel, and John wrote his.

These three reasons - the unanimous testimony of the church, the unlikely authorship of these men, and the early identification of the document, all present a strong case for the traditional authorship of the gospels.

D. Excellent Credentials

The four gospel writers also had excellent credentials to be in a position to know the facts about Jesus' ministry and to record them correctly.

Matthew

The writer of the first gospel originally bore the name Levi but was also named, or possibly renamed, Matthew (gift of God). We know that he was the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:24. Luke 5:27). His job was that of a tax collector. This position would have made him an ideal candidate for writing this gospel for the following reasons:

1. A tax collector would be fluent in Greek.
2. He would also be literate.
3. He would be used to keeping records.
4. He most likely would be able to write in short-hand. Therefore he could have been a note-taker at Jesus teachings.
5. If Levi was a tribal name he would have known about scribal tradition and be familiar with temple practices.

6. He would have been a well educated scribe in the secular sense.

There is something else about the tax collector position that would make Matthew a particularly good candidate to be a writer of one of the accounts of the life of Jesus. Simon Greenleaf makes this brilliant observation:

And if the men of that day were, as in truth they appear to have been, as much disposed as those of the present time, to evade the payment of public taxes and duties, and to elude, by all possible means, the vigilance of the revenue officers, Matthew must have been familiar with a great variety of forms of fraud, imposture, cunning, and deception, and must have become habitually distrustful, scrutinizing, and cautious; and, of course, much less likely to have been deceived in regard to many of the facts in our Lord's ministry, extraordinary as they were, which fell under his observation. This circumstance shows both the sincerity and the wisdom of Jesus in selecting him for an eye-witness of his conduct, and adds great weight to the value of the testimony of this evangelist (Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony Of The Evangelists*, Kregel, 1995, p. 21).

Mark

Mark was also in a unique position to write about Jesus. His gospel contained the preaching of Simon Peter - one of the Jesus' twelve disciples. Therefore we have Mark relating to us the things Simon Peter said about the life and ministry of Jesus. There is hardly any incident related in Mark's gospel where Simon Peter was not present and the recording of minute detail shows that we have the testimony of an eyewitness.

Luke

Luke, the writer of the third gospel, stated the purpose of his account in the preface:

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which are most surely believed among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:1-4).

This statement of Luke tells us, at least, the following:

1. Luke may not have been an eyewitness to the events he recorded.
2. But he, like those before him, made careful use of the eyewitness accounts.
3. Luke had access to other narratives, possibly written documents like his own.
4. Luke felt the need for a further account.
5. His account is orderly.

6. He had full knowledge of the events he recorded.
7. His ultimate aim is truth.

Simon Greenleaf, the legal expert, declared that Luke's use of firsthand sources would make them admissible in a court of law.

It would possess every legal attribute of an inquisition, and, as such, would be legally admissible in evidence, in a court of justice (Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of The Evangelists*, Kregel, 1995, p. 25).

John

The author of the fourth gospel, John, was one of the twelve - an eyewitness to the events in the life of Christ. At the end of the Gospel of John we find these words.

This is the disciple who bears witness of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true (John 21:24).

As an eyewitness he would certainly be in a position to correctly state the facts about the life and ministry of Jesus.

E. CONCLUSION

The evidence shows that each of the four gospel writers were in an excellent position to write an accurate account of the life of Christ. Two of the writers (Matthew and John) were among Jesus' inner circle while another (Mark) recorded the teachings of Peter--the most prominent disciple. Luke put his account together through eyewitness testimony.

V. The Writers Could Be Cross-Examined

Another important point to consider is that the disciples were able to be cross-examined by their contemporaries. For example, they preached the message that Jesus had risen in the very city in which He was crucified and buried. If their testimony were not true, the unbelieving enemies of Christ could easily have refuted their contention. It is crucial to appreciate the fact that the disciples of Jesus did not go off to Athens or Rome to proclaim the truth of the gospel, but rather preached it in the city of Jerusalem - where the events transpired.

The Book Of Acts

The Book of Acts records some of the major events in the early church - including miracles performed by the apostles. These events took place in Jerusalem, in front of the same people who put Jesus to death. We note what was said about one of the miracles they were confronted with:

What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it (Acts 4:16).

The fact of this miracle was of such a nature that even the enemies of Christ could not deny them.

VI. The Testimony Of Paul

Though the gospels were written a relatively short time after the death and resurrection of Christ what about the letters of the Apostle Paul? When were they composed? How do they help with the reliability of the New Testament?

Possibly Earlier

Some of the letters of the Apostle Paul may actually have been written earlier than the gospels. For example, First Thessalonians was written approximately A.D. 51, while the first letter to the Corinthians was penned about A.D. 56. Obviously, all of his letters were written before A.D. 67, when he died.

Confirmed the Gospels

The testimony of the Apostle Paul confirms the evidence presented in the gospel accounts concerning Jesus Christ.

A. Creator of the Universe

John tells us that Jesus was the Creator of the universe.

All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being (John 1:3).

Paul also testified that Jesus was the Creator of the universe:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16).

B. Obeyed the Jewish Law

Jesus was always obedient to the law of God. He asked if anyone had ever seen Him sin.

Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? (John 8:46).

No one could give an example - because He did not sin. In the same way, Paul emphasized that Jesus was obedient to the Old Testament law:

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Galatians 4:4).

C. Betrayed

All four gospels record the fact that Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot. Paul also spoke of Jesus' betrayal by Judas:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you; that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread (1 Corinthians 11:23).

D. Crucified

All four gospels are consistent that Jesus died by means of crucifixion. Paul mentions Jesus' death by crucifixion as the cornerstone of his message: "But we preach Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23).

E. Rose From the Dead

Again, all four gospels testify that Jesus rose from the dead. Paul also confirmed that Christ rose from the dead:

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

VII. Important Points

Three points must be emphasized concerning the testimony of Paul.

A. Contemporary of the Disciples

The Apostle Paul, though not an eyewitness to the events of the life of Christ, was living at the same time as the disciples who were eyewitnesses. Therefore he was their contemporary.

B. He Wrote Within Thirty Years Of The Events

Paul's letters were composed within thirty years of the events of the life and ministry of Jesus. This is far too short a time for him to have radically changed the message of Jesus without receiving criticism from both believing and non-believing eyewitnesses of the events.

For example, First Thessalonians is probably the earliest letter that Paul wrote. It can be dated around the year A.D. 51 - about twenty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

C. Challenged His Readers To Investigate The Evidence

Paul challenged his readers to investigate for themselves the evidence concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He was seen by over five hundred brothers at once, of whom the greater part remain to

the present (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Many eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection were still alive when Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. Anyone doubting the fact of the resurrection could check out their testimony.

Conclusion

We conclude that the testimony of the Apostle Paul adds further evidence to the trustworthiness of the gospel's picture of Jesus.

VIII. The Books Were Read Aloud In Churches and Circulated

We know that many of the New Testament books were read aloud in the churches. We have examples from the gospels, Paul's letters, and the Book of Revelation. In Paul's earliest letter he wrote:

I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers (1 Thessalonians 5:27).

The Gospel of Matthew also assumes someone will be reading it aloud.

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) (Matthew 24:15).

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he ordered his letter to be read publicly.

And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea (Colossians 4:16).

Public Reading Commanded

A very important passage is found in First Timothy. Here Paul commanded the public reading of the Scriptures.

Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching (1 Timothy 4:13).

The Scripture would include all of the New Testament that had been written until that time.

Special Blessing

Finally, John promised a special blessing to the person who read the book out loud as well as those who heard it read. They would receive a blessing if they obeyed the things written in the book.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near (Revelation 1:3).

Therefore the message of Jesus went out publicly, before both believers and unbelievers. It was open for all to freely investigate.

IX. The Testimony of Law-The Ancient Documents Rule

The nature of much of the evidence supports the biblical claim that the New Testament writers wrote during the first century and were either eyewitnesses of the events they described or had carefully checked the facts and evidence with eyewitnesses. As far as we are able to tell, the New Testament writers were historically accurate.

What Does the Law Say?

Given the above evidence for the historical reliability of the New Testament, we now look to the testimony of law on this matter. The 19th century legal authority, Simon Greenleaf, explains what is known as the "ancient documents" rule.

Every document, apparently ancient, coming from the proper repository or custody, and bearing on its face no evident marks of forgery, the law presumes to be genuine, and devolves on the opposing party the burden proving it to be otherwise (Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of The Evangelists*, Kregel, 1995, p. 16).

Therefore, the "ancient documents rule" states that:

(1) If an document is discovered that claims to be ancient (2) and it comes from where we would expect to find it (3) and there is no evidence of forgery (4) and the text shows no sign that it has been changed (5) and it does not contain obvious contradictions or demonstrable errors; then we are to assume it to be true until evidence can be brought forward to the contrary.

Benefit of Doubt

The benefit of the doubt, therefore, is to be given to the document, not to the critic. Consequently, the burden of proof is on those who deny what the work says. Applied to the New Testament, any criticism of its contents must be based in reality, not in supposition or theory. Since the New Testament has proven itself, over and over again, to be a trustworthy guide to past events, *it* should be given the benefit of the doubt when covering things that have no independent corroboration. Therefore the Christian should not feel obligated to have every minute detail verified before they can believe what the New Testament says.

Sufficient Evidence to Trust the Gospels

After examining what leading lawyers had to say about the evidence for the trustworthiness of the four Gospels, Australian lawyer/theologian Ross Clifford made the following conclusion.

We have seen how lawyers affirm that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are trustworthy historical documents. They reach their findings applying general legal principles that obtain to documents and the testimony of witnesses. These show that the gospels are a solid foundation on which to build one's faith. We could rest our case here (Ross Clifford, *The Case For The Empty Tomb*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, New South Wales, Australia, 1991, p. 136).

X. Summary and Conclusion

After looking at the question of the New Testament's historical accuracy we can arrive at the following conclusions:

1. The question of the Bible's historical accuracy is of utmost importance because God has revealed Himself by means of historical events. This is especially true in the New Testament when God became a man.
2. Those who wrote about Jesus were either eyewitnesses to the events in His life or recorded eyewitness testimony.
3. The New Testament was written soon after the death and resurrection of Christ. There was not enough time for the message to be altered.
4. The traditional view of the authorship of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) is supported by the facts.
5. Each of the authors were in an excellent position to give us credible evidence as to the life and ministry of Jesus.
6. The disciples were able to be cross-examined by their contemporaries about the events they proclaimed. They preached their message in the very city where many of the events took place.
7. Paul's letters were written during the eyewitness period. They confirmed many of the main facts of the gospel.
8. We know that many of the New Testament books were read aloud in the churches. The message was open for all to hear and evaluate.
9. The evidence concerning the events, places, and names mentioned in the New Testament conclusively affirms the basic historical reliability of the text. Therefore, the testimony of law comes into play. Since the document has come down to us where we would expect to find it, without any tampering and that it contains no obvious errors or contradictions, it should be given the benefit of the doubt in matters where there is no independent evidence to confirm or deny its teachings. Therefore, we should rightly assume that the New Testament is a reliable historical document.

We now move to the content of the New Testament. Who is the main character of the story? What is the book trying to tell us? These and other related questions will be addressed in our next chapter.

The Claims about Christ

Our next section will deal with the specific claims that the New Testament makes about Jesus. Since the New Testament has been transmitted accurately, and its history matches up with known events, then we must take seriously the claims that it makes. This section examines those specific claims of Scripture.

What Is the Authors' Intention?

Whenever we read any book our goal should be to discover the intention or purpose of the author. As far as the New Testament is concerned, the main character is Jesus Christ and the New Testament was written to create belief in Him. This is the claim it makes for itself:

Many other signs Jesus performed in the presence of His disciples that are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you might have life in His name (John 20:30,31).

These verses are highly instructive. John's purpose in writing was to create in his readers, belief in Jesus. He tells us that he was selective in the signs that he recorded about the life and ministry of Jesus, but that the signs that were given were meant to cause the reader to believe. This is his stated purpose. The remainder of the New Testament echoes that same purpose.

I. All About Him

Actually, the entire Bible is all about the Lord Jesus. Jesus Himself made this clear:

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me . . . For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote of Me (John 5:39,46).

Old Testament - The Preparation For The Christ

The Old Testament was preparing the way for the Messiah. Isaiah wrote:

A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God (Isaiah 40:3).

The Old Testament was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. Everything was pointing toward Him.

The Gospels - The Manifestation of the Christ

The Gospels record the manifestation of the long-awaited Messiah.

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29).

Jesus, the Messiah, arrived as predicted.

Acts - The Propagation of the Message of the Christ

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, His message was to go out to the entire world. The Book of Acts records the propagation of the message of Christ. The key verse of Acts records the following words of Jesus.

but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

New Testament Letters - The Explanation Of The Two Comings Of Christ

The two comings of Christ are explained in the New Testament letters.

to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

Christ's first coming was a "mystery" or "sacred secret" that was not explained to the Old Testament reader. The New Testament letters provide us with the explanation.

Revelation - The Consummation of All Things in Christ

Finally, all things will be consummated at the Second Coming of Christ.

Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen (Revelation 1:7).

Summary

Therefore, we can sum up the evidence as follows:

1. The Old Testament records the preparation for the Christ.
2. The Gospels record the manifestation of the Christ.
3. The Book of Acts gives us the propagation of the message of the Christ.
4. The New Testament letters provide the explanation of the two comings of Christ.
5. The Book of Revelation documents the consummation of all things in Christ.

Therefore the entire Bible is truly about Him.

II. The Claims of Jesus

Now that we understand Jesus is the main character of Scripture and that the New Testament was written to cause belief in Him, we now come to our next point--the specific claims that are made about Jesus.

One God, One Way

When Jesus came to earth, He made a variety of claims about Himself. One thing that Jesus claimed was that He Himself was the only possible way that a person could have a relationship with God. There are many that do not like this assertion because it seems so narrow-minded. Others try to deny that Jesus said or meant this. But the record is clear, and whether a person likes it or not, Jesus made the colossal claim that nobody could know the living God except by means of Him. Jesus told the people of His day:

For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins (John 8:24).

To His disciples in the upper room He said:

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6).

At another time He said:

Most assuredly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live (John 5:24,25).

Elsewhere Jesus declared:

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36).

Not Invented By the Church

The idea that Jesus is the only way to get to God was not invented by the church but was central to His message. Therefore, according to the New Testament, there is no other way to reach God except through Jesus.

Whether a person believes it or not, the record is clear - Jesus Himself believed and taught that only through Him could a person have their sins forgiven and come to know the living God.

The Claims of the Book of Acts

The Book of Acts also makes the claim that Jesus is the only way to reach God. The Apostle Peter said:

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Note well his claim. There is no salvation outside of the person of Jesus Christ. He is the *only* way by which a person can be saved.

The Claims of Paul

The Apostle Paul echoes this thought. He also stated that Jesus was the only way to get to God:

For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

One God, and one go-between, Jesus Christ. There is no other way!

III. Conclusion

Our look at what the New Testament claims about Jesus reveals the following:

1. The stated purpose of the New Testament is to create belief in the reader that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Those who believe this message have life through His name.
2. In addition, the message of the entire Bible is about Jesus. The Old Testament looked forward to His coming, the Gospels record His appearance, the Book of Acts relates the propagation of His message, the New Testament letters explain His two comings, and finally the Book of Revelation reveals all things consummated in Christ.
3. The specific claim of the New Testament is there is only God and only one way to get to the one God - through Jesus Christ. All others are pretenders. There is no salvation outside of the person of Jesus Christ. This is their claim, not something the church later invented.

However, the Scripture goes even further. They tell us that Jesus is actually God Himself who became a man so that we could know what God is like. Our next section will concentrate on this issue - the Deity of Christ.

The Deity Of Christ

We have seen that the Scriptures unanimously teach that Jesus is the only way to get to God. Yet the Scripture goes further than this. The reason why Jesus is the only way in which a human being can know God is because of His identity - He is God in human flesh. This testimony is found throughout the New Testament. We find this to be true in both direct and indirect statements about Him.

I. Direct Statements Of Christ's Deity

In examining the direct statements found in the New Testament concerning the question of the Deity of Christ, the following translations will be used: The King James Version (**KJV**), The New King James Version (**NKJV**), The New American Standard Bible (**NASB**), The New Revised Standard Version (**NRSV**), and the New International Version (**NIV**).

Some More Clear Than Others

Some of the translations are clearer than others, yet each of these verses that we will consider, teach that Jesus Christ is God.

John 1:1

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **KJV**

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **NKJV**

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **NASB**

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **NRSV**

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **NIV**

John 1:18

John 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the

bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. **KJV**

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. **NKJV**

John 1:18 No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. **NASB**

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. **NRSV**

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. **NIV**

John 5:18

John 5:18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. **KJV**

John 5:18 Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. **NKJV**

John 5:18 For this cause therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. **NASB**

John 5:18 For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God. **NRSV**

John 5:18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. **NIV**

John 20:28

John 20:28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. **KJV**

John 20:28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" **NKJV**

John 20:28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" **NASB**

John 20:28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" **NRSV**

John 20:28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" **NIV**

Acts 20:28

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. **KJV**

Acts 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. **NKJV**

Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. **NASB**

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. **NRSV**

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. **NIV**

Romans 9:5

Romans 9:5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. **KJV**

Romans 9:5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. **NKJV**

Romans 9:5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. **NASB**

Romans 9:5 to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. **NRSV**

Romans 9:5 Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. **NIV**

Romans 10:9

Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. **KJV**

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. **NKJV**

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; **NASB**

Romans 10:9 because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **NRSV**

Romans 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **NIV**

Philippians 2:5,6

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Philippians 2:6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: **KJV**

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

Philippians 2:6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, **NKJV**

Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

Philippians 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, **NASB**

Philippians 2:5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

Philippians 2:6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, **NRSV**

Philippians 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Philippians 2:6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **NIV**

Colossians 1:15-17

Colossians 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

Colossians 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

Colossians 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. **KJV**

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

Colossians 1:17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. **NKJV**

Colossians 1:15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation.

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things have been created by Him and for Him.

Colossians 1:17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. **NASB**

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;

Colossians 1:16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers -- all things have been created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **NRSV**

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Colossians 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Colossians 1:17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **NIV**

Colossians 2:9

Colossians 2:9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. **KJV**

Colossians 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; **NKJV**

Colossians 2:9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, **NASB**

Colossians 2:9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, **NRSV**

Colossians 2:9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, **NIV**

1 Timothy 3:16

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. **KJV**

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory. **NKJV**

1 Timothy 3:16 And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory. **NASB**

1 Timothy 3:16 Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory. **NRSV**

1 Timothy 3:16 Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory. **NIV**

Titus 2:13

Titus 2:13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; **KJV**

Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, **NKJV**

Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; **NASB**

Titus 2:13 while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. **NRSV**

Titus 2:13 while we wait for the blessed hope -- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, **NIV**

Hebrews 1:8

Hebrews 1:8 But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. **KJV**

Hebrews 1:8 But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. **NKJV**

Hebrews 1:8 But of the Son He says, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. **NASB**

Hebrews 1:8 But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of your kingdom. **NRSV**

Hebrews 1:8 But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. **NIV**

2 Peter 1:1

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: **KJV**

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: **NKJV**

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior,

Jesus Christ: **NASB**

2 Peter 1:1 Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith as precious as ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: **NRSV**

2 Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: **NIV**

1 John 5:20

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. **KJV**

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. **NKJV**

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. **NASB**

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. **NRSV**

1 John 5:20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true -- even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. **NIV**

From these fifteen passages, the direct evidence shows the New Testament writers considered Jesus to be God.

II. Indirect Testimony of Jesus' Deity

The New Testament also provides indirect evidence that Jesus Christ is God. There are many indirect references that could be cited. Some of these include:

A. Jesus Possesses Attributes of Deity

According to Scripture, Jesus possessed certain attributes that belonged to God alone.

All the Fullness Of Deity

All the fulness of Deity was in the person of Jesus:

For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form (Colossians 2:9).

All-Knowing

Jesus is said to have been all-knowing:

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep (John 21:17).

And they prayed, and said, "You, Lord, who knows the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen (Acts 1:24).

Everywhere Present

After His resurrection, Jesus is everywhere present:

He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things (Ephesians 4:10).

Unchangeable

The character of Jesus does not change:

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

B. Jesus Has Existed For All Eternity

The Bible says that Jesus existed prior to the creation:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God (John 1:1).

Jesus Himself prayed:

And now, glorify Me together with Yourself, Father, with the glory which I had with You before the world was (John 17:5).

The writer to the Hebrews said:

in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things,

through whom also He made the world (Hebrews 1:2).

Isaiah saw Jesus' glory:

These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him (John 12:41).

The reference to Isaiah seeing the glory of Jesus is found in Isaiah 6:1-3.

In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory" (Isaiah 6:1-3).

C. Jesus Is Equal To God In His Names

Jesus is also spoken of as an equal with God. They both possess the same names:

LORD

God is called the LORD in Exodus 6:2. Jesus is addressed as LORD in Acts 2:36 and 1 Corinthians 12:3.

LORD OF LORDS

God is called LORD OF LORDS in Deuteronomy 10:17. Jesus is the LORD OF LORDS in Revelation 17:14.

Shepherd

God is the shepherd in Psalm 23:1, while Jesus is the shepherd in John 10:11-16.

Alpha And Omega

God is the Alpha and Omega in Revelation 1:8 while Jesus is the Alpha and Omega in Revelation 22:13.

D. Jesus Allowed Himself To Be Worshiped

The God who reveals Himself in the Bible has made it clear that He is the only One deserving worship. In the Ten Commandments He said:

You shall have no other gods before Me (Exodus 20:3).

When Satan wanted Jesus to worship him, Jesus refused by saying:

Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him

only shall you serve' (Matthew 4:10).

Worship Jesus

Jesus testified that worship is something that is reserved for God alone. Yet, Jesus allowed Himself to be worshiped.

And as they went to tell His disciples, behold Jesus met them, saying, 'Rejoice!' And they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him (Matthew 28:9).

On another occasion, Scripture records someone saying to Jesus:

'Lord, I believe!' And he worshiped Him (John 9:38).

Jesus allowed Himself to be worshipped on this occasion. If only God is to be worshiped, as the Bible testifies, and Jesus allowed Himself to be worshiped, then the natural conclusion is that Jesus believed Himself to be God.

The Angels Were Commanded to Worship Jesus

The first chapter of Hebrews tells us that God commanded the angels to worship Jesus.

For to which of the angels did He ever say, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"? And again, "I will be a Father to Him And He shall be a Son to Me"? And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him" (Hebrews 1:5,6).

E. Jesus Was Addressed In Prayer

Jesus was also addressed in prayer:

Stephen, the first recorded martyr of the church, prayed to Jesus as he was being killed.

And they went on stoning Stephen as he called upon the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" And having said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59,60).

F. Jesus Forgave Sins

Another indirect testimony to Jesus being God is His forgiving sins. In the presence of the religious leaders, Jesus told a sinful woman:

Your sins are forgiven (Luke 7:48).

On another occasion he said to a paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven you" (Mark 2:5).

The religious rulers on both occasions were indignant. They demanded an explanation asking the question, "Why does this man speak blasphemies like this?" (Mark 2:7).

No doubt the rulers were remembering when God said:

I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake (Isaiah 43:25).

If only God has the ability to forgive sins, and Jesus claimed the ability to forgive sins, then Jesus is claiming to be God.

G. Jesus will Judge The World

Judgment of the world is something that only God can do:

Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord. For He is coming . . . to judge the earth. He shall judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples with His truth (Psalm 96:12,13).

Jesus claimed that He would judge the world.

For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22).

Only God has the right to judge the world, and Jesus claimed that He would be that judge. This is more indirect evidence that Jesus is God.

H. Jesus is the Creator

Among the many deeds attributed to Jesus is the creation of the universe. The Scripture expressly states that Jesus was involved as Creator. The Gospel of John, in speaking of Jesus, said:

All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:3).

Here we have the statement that everything was created by Jesus. Not one thing has been created apart from Him. The Apostle Paul also testified to Jesus being the Creator:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16).

This statement makes it abundantly clear that Jesus created all things in the universe.

Not Recognized

Though Jesus was the Creator of all things, this world did not recognize Him as such. One of the saddest verses in the Bible testifies to that fact:

He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world did not know Him (John 1:10).

Jesus created the world but when He visited His creation the people did not receive Him for whom He truly was.

I. Sustains All Things

Not only did Jesus create everything in the beginning, He also sustains His creation. The Apostle Paul, after testifying to the creative work of Jesus, wrote:

And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17).

Jesus is the one who holds the universe together - the person who keeps it running in an orderly fashion.

By His Spoken Word

The Book of Hebrews takes this a step further. It teaches that Christ is "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). The idea is that Jesus is keeping all things together by His spoken word. Thus, it is the spoken word of Jesus that now upholds the universe.

J. Ruler Of All Things

The Apostle Paul testified that Christ is "the head over all rule and authority" (Colossians 2:10). The universe, and all that is in it, is ruled by Jesus - the One who created the universe.

Summary

From the description of Jesus as recorded in Scripture, we find that He is the eternal God. The direct evidence makes that clear - fifteen separate passages testify directly to the Deity of Christ. We also have indirect testimony that Jesus is God.

1. Jesus possess attributes of Deity.
2. Jesus has existed from all eternity.
3. Jesus is equal to God in certain names.
4. He also allowed Himself to be worshiped.
5. Jesus was addressed in prayer.

6. Jesus is the One who would forgive sins.
7. Jesus claimed to be the judge of the world.
8. The Bible also says that He is the Creator of the universe.
9. He sustains the universe by His spoken word.
10. Jesus also presently rules the universe.

All of these abilities belong only to God. Therefore, from both indirect and direct testimony, we conclude that Jesus is God.

III. Why Did Jesus, As God, Become A Man?

The great truth revealed in the New Testament is that the eternal God became one of us; He became a human being.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

The Apostle Paul echoes John's thoughts:

Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6,7).

In becoming a man Jesus laid aside His heavenly glory to live among us. The question is, why did He do it?

A. To Reveal God To Humanity

The Scriptures give us several reasons Jesus came to earth. The first and foremost reason was to reveal God to mankind. If you wish to know what God is like you need go no further than to look at Jesus.

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known (John 1:18).

This verse teaches that Jesus explained God to humanity. We need no longer wonder what God is like; Jesus shows us.

B. To Die for the Sins of the World

Another reason for Christ's coming was to die on the cross for the sins of the world.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

His death on the cross paid the penalty for our sins. He died in our place so that we do not have to suffer eternally for our misdeeds.

The Bible says:

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation . . . God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, that we may be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:19,21).

C. To Destroy the Works of the Devil

His coming also was to destroy the works of the devil and the hold he has had over mankind.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

Jesus' death on the cross frees us from the power of sin. The devil no longer has any right to control us because Christ has given us the freedom to choose not to sin.

D. An Example

Jesus also came to provide an example for the believer on how to live one's life. When a person puts his faith in Christ he has an example to follow. Jesus lived the perfect life as the perfect man with faith in His Father. Hence we are told "to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

It is for these reasons that Jesus left heaven's glory to live as one of us.

Summary

Scripture teaches that Jesus is mankind's only hope the only way to reach God. It also teaches us that He was more than a mere man - Jesus was God in human flesh.

Therefore, the united testimony of Scripture is that Jesus is almighty God who became a man. The reasons He became a man are as follows:

1. Jesus came to reveal God to mankind.
2. He came to die for the sins of the world.
3. Jesus' coming was also to destroy the works of the devil.
4. Finally, His coming was to provide an example to believers.

Since these are the clear claims that the New Testament makes about Jesus we now are in a position to examine these claims and discover whether or not they are true.

The Claims of Christ Considered

The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus Christ claimed to be the only way in which a person can know God. In addition, it says He was God in human flesh who came to earth to show us what God is like, and to die for the sins of the world. Those claims must be dealt with.

As we have seen, the New Testament has been transmitted to us in an accurate manner and the historical events contained in it match up with known reality. Consequently, the New Testament should be considered trustworthy until evidence to the contrary is brought forward. Therefore when we consider the claims of the New Testament with respect to Christ's identity, we have three possible ways in which we can interpret these claims. They are as follows:

(1) Jesus never personally made the claims about Himself that are recorded in the New Testament. His own disciples, who wrote the New Testament long after His death, exaggerated His words. This would make the claims of Christ legendary.

(2) Jesus did make the claims recorded in the New Testament but His claims were not true. There are two possible options for those who hold this view:

A. He knew the claims were not true, yet He made them anyway. This would make Him a liar.

B. He made the claims truly believing He was God. This would make Him a lunatic.

(3) Jesus actually did make the claims about Himself that are recorded in the New Testament, and He was whom He claimed to be: the Lord of the universe.

We shall now consider each of these possibilities:

I. Legend - He Never Made the Claims

For modern man, the favorite way of dealing with the claims of the New Testament regarding Jesus Christ is simply to believe that He never made them. It is asserted that the claims were made by His followers after many years of their teaching and preaching about Him. Jesus, they argue, was a simple man who had a tremendous impact on His followers. After His death, stories about Him were told and retold. By the time these stories had been committed to writing, Jesus was transformed from a simple Galilean teacher into a miracle worker, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world. Those who believe Jesus never claimed any of these things assert that His well-meaning disciples got caught up in all the excitement around His character and exaggerated His claims and deeds.

A. Not Enough Time

However, the accusation that Jesus never made the claims about Himself that are recorded in the New Testament, does not square with the facts. We are not dealing with generations but rather with a short period of time between the actual occurrence of the events and their recording.

There is strong evidence that three of the four gospels were written within twenty years of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In addition, the earliest letter of the Apostle Paul, First Thessalonians, was also written within twenty years of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. This is far too short of a time for the claims about Jesus to have been exaggerated to the point where they did not accurately reflect what He actually said and did.

Understood Importance

The importance of eyewitness testimony was not lost on the New Testament writers who repeatedly appealed to first-hand evidence to substantiate their assertions. For example, one of Jesus' disciples, John, wrote:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us (1 John 1:1-2).

They testified to what they knew was true - because they were there!

Unfriendly Eyewitnesses

It must be emphasized that not all of the eyewitnesses to the events in the life of Christ were believers. If the disciples tended to distort the facts, the unbelieving eyewitnesses would have immediately objected to their distortion. Yet we find no such objections.

B. The Number of Eyewitnesses

Not only do we have eyewitnesses, the number of eyewitnesses to the events in the life of Christ also argues for their truthfulness. The Apostle Paul said that the resurrection of Christ was witnessed by over five hundred people at one time:

After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Multitudes of people witnesses the miracles of Jesus as well as heard His teachings. They were not isolated events seen only by a select few.

C. Memory Culture

In addition, the people in the first century relied more upon memory than we do today. Lawyer/theologian John Warwick Montgomery makes an appropriate comment:

We know from the Mishna that it was Jewish custom to memorize a Rabbi's teaching, for a good pupil was like 'a plastered cistern that loses not a drop' [Mishna Aboth II.8]. And we can be sure that the early Church, impressed as it was with Jesus governed itself by this ideal (John Warwick Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1964, pp. 37,38).

The memorization of Jesus' teachings, as well as His mighty deeds, would be expected from His audience. They were used to committing to memory the important sayings and deeds of famous teachers.

D. Jesus Made A Lasting Impression

The extraordinary events of the life of Christ would have made a lasting impression on all of the people who witnessed them. Miracles were not something they were used to seeing. After Jesus healed a paralyzed man, the Bible records the reaction of the people:

Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw *anything* like this!" (Mark 2:12).

We note that they had never seen anything like this event. This miracle of Jesus astounded them. Such a deed would not be soon forgotten.

No Exaggeration

These reasons refute the idea that the disciples exaggerated Jesus' claims. The New Testament was composed in such a short time after the events occurred that it would be folly to assume that the writers' memories were so faulty that neither they, nor the unbelievers, could remember the actual events of the life of Christ - especially because of the miraculous nature of the deeds.

E. The Writers Had A Biographical Interest in Christ's Life

It is also evident that the early church had a biographical interest in the life of Christ. The gospel accounts are filled with specific historical details or allusions to events in Jesus' ministry. Matthew, for example, records Jesus' genealogy (chapter 1), the visit of the Magi to Herod and the slaughter of the innocents (chapter 2). He also gives the events associated with the trial and death of Jesus (chapters 26-27).

In the writings of Luke we also find many historical references. He wrote:

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness (Luke 3:1,2).

In this passage seven different people, and their governmental positions, are listed in order to indicate the time that God's Word came to John the Baptist. This testifies that the gospel writers were interested in the biographical and historical details of the life of Jesus.

F. Consistent Testimony

Furthermore, the testimony of the various gospel writers is consistent. They do not disagree among themselves on the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. Their testimony

remained consistent throughout their lives. Theologian John Gerstner makes an appropriate observation:

We note, in the first place, that they had the best possible jury to test their competency - their own contemporaries among whom the events related were said to have taken place. If the writers had been palpably contradicted by the facts, the people to whom they related the facts would have been the very ones to expose them. If they had been misguided zealots the nonzealots to whom they spoke could have spotted in a moment and repudiated it as quickly. If they had garbled the actual events, eyewitnesses in quantity could have testified to the contrary . . . As a matter of fact, their record went unchallenged. No man called them liars; none controverted their story. Those who did not believe in Jesus did not dispute the claims to his supernatural power. The apostles were imprisoned for speaking about the resurrection of Christ, not, however, on the ground of what they said was untrue, but that it was unsettling the people. They were accused of being heretical, deluded, illegal, un-Jewish, but they were not accused of being inaccurate. And that would have been by far the easiest to prove if it had been thought to be true (John Gerstner, *Reasons For Faith*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953, p. 98).

If their testimony could have been challenged, it would have been. However, they were never accused of lying concerning what they said about Jesus.

G. Martyred

The final evidence of the truthfulness of the disciples testimony is that they were martyred for their beliefs. The disciples signed their testimony in their own blood. Certainly, a person might lie for someone else, but will not die for a person or a cause if he believes it to be false. They obviously believed Jesus' story to be true.

The Gospels Can Be Trusted

These reasons are sufficient to trust the gospel portrait of Jesus as given by the New Testament writers. Because of the early dates of composition and circulation of the New Testament books, and the evidential and substantiated nature of those books, it is impossible that Jesus never made the unique claims for which Christianity stands: His sacrifice on the cross, His forgiveness of sin, His resurrection from the dead, and His Second Coming.

Thus, if we assume that Jesus truly made the claims attributed to Him in the New Testament, then we are left with two choices - His claims were not true or they were true.

II. He Made the Claims But They Were Not True

It is possible that Jesus actually made the claims attributed to Him in the New Testament yet His claims were not true. If this is the case then there are two possibilities. The first is that He knew He was not the Son of God yet He lied about His identity. The second option is that Jesus thought He was the Son of God but was deluded.

A. He Knew They Were Not True - Liar

This first option identifies Jesus as a liar. As we have seen, Jesus made some fantastic claims about who He was. He made Himself out to be the eternal God, the Creator of the universe and mankind's only Savior. He consistently made these claims during His time here on earth. The question arises, "Is there any evidence that He lied about who He was?"

1. No Evidence

While it is theoretically possible that Jesus lied about who He was, there is certainly no evidence to suggest it. Everything we know about the character of Jesus testifies that He always told the truth. He underscored the fact that His words were truthful:

The Pharisees therefore said to Him, 'You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.' . . . [Jesus said] 'Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going . . . I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me' (John 8:13,14,18).

Jesus Himself clearly said, 'I am the way, *the truth*, and the life" (John 14:6).

The centurion who presided over His crucifixion testified to Jesus' character.

Now when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He had cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God' (Mark 15:39).

2. Consistent

If He were a liar, then He was a consistent liar up until the end. He confessed to being the Messiah before His accusers. When Jesus made His confession, He did it while He was under oath.

And the high priest answered and said to Him, 'I adjure You by the living God that You tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus said to Him, 'It is as you said' (Matthew 26:63,64).

This statement caused the Jews to bring Jesus to Pilate to be crucified.

The Jews answered him [Pilate], 'We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God' (John 19:7).

Even when Jesus went to His death, He never changed His testimony as to His identity.

3. No Motivation

Furthermore, if one contends that Jesus lied about who He was, a motive needs to be found for His lying. People lie to gain some advantage but one becomes hard-pressed to see any advantage

in Jesus' lying. What advantage was there to being pressured night and day by the multitudes to perform acts of healing and forgive sin? What advantage was there to being a traveling preacher who had no place to call home?

What advantage was there to being put to death for claiming to be the Son of God, if He knew His claims were not true? He could have been released if He had only denied being the Christ. Why not simply admit that He was not?

Conclusion

Thus the evidence indicates that Jesus Christ did not deliberately lie about who He was or why He came.

B. He Thought His Claims Were True - Lunatic

It is clear that Jesus made outstanding claims about Himself. It is also clear that the evidence leads us to believe that *He* believed His claims were true. There are some who contend that Jesus made the claims and believed them to be true because He was mentally unbalanced.

Response

We respond to this accusation as follows:

1. Did Not Act Insane

From someone deluded or insane, we would expect them to act consistent with insanity. That is, someone insane would do and say insane things. When we look at the life and teachings of Jesus we see anything but insanity. After Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount the crowd was awed by His teachings:

And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teachings for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes (Matthew 7:28,29).

On one occasion the Pharisees sent some of their men to apprehend Jesus:

Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, 'Why have you not brought Him?' The officers answered, 'No man ever spoke like this Man!' (John 7:45,46).

The words of Jesus rang clear and true.

2. Always In Control

Moreover, Jesus handled Himself as one always in control. When He was betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He demonstrated self-control and mastery over the situation. He said:

'Do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?' In that hour Jesus said to the multitudes, 'Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? I sat daily with you, teaching in the temple, and you did not seize Me. But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled' (Matthew 26:53-56).

3. Teachings Not That of a Lunatic

As we search the Scriptures, we find there is nothing in the character of Jesus to cause us to believe Him to be insane. On the contrary, the depth of His teaching and His masterful character testify that He was indeed the Son of God. Secular psychiatrist J. T. Fisher explains it this way:

If you were to take the sum total of all authoritative articles ever written by the most qualified of psychologists and psychiatrists on the subject of mental hygiene--if you were to combine them and refine them and cleave out all the excess verbiage . . . and if you were to have these unadulterated bits of pure scientific knowledge concisely expressed by the most capable of living poets, you would have an awkward and incomplete summation of the Sermon on the Mount. And it would suffer immeasurably through comparison. For nearly two thousand years the Christian world has been holding in its hands the complete answer to its restless and fruitless yearnings. Here . . . rests the blueprint for successful human life with optimism, mental health, and contentment (J. T. Fisher and L. S. Hawley, *A Few Buttons Missing*, Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1951, p. 273).

The same Jesus, whom some claim was insane when He talked about His identity, is also lauded the world over for His practical teaching concerning mental and spiritual health. Thus this accusation does not make sense. The well-respected church historian Philip Schaff, remarked,

Is such an intellect - clear as the sky, bracing as the mountain air, sharp and penetrating as a sword, thoroughly healthy and vigorous, always ready and always self-possessed - liable to a radical and most serious delusion concerning His own character and mission? Preposterous imagination! (Philip Schaff, *The Person of Christ*, New York, NY: American Tract Society, 1913, p. 97, 98).

C. Great Prophet?

If Jesus actually made the claims attributed to Him in Scripture, then what are we to make of them? There are those who attempt to sidestep the issue of Jesus' claims. They contend that He was not God, but neither was He lying or deranged. They usually place Him in the category of a great teacher, perhaps the greatest teacher who ever lived. Some go as far as calling Him a prophet. But they deny He was anything more. They deny He is God.

Not Possible

The possibility that Jesus was only a great teacher does not exist. He very clearly claimed to be more than that. Jesus said to the religious leaders:

'Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?' The Jews answered Him saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God' (John 10:32,33).

At the grave of a friend Jesus said:

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die (John 11:25,26).

If He were the one whom He claimed to be, then He should be worshiped as God and His teaching diligently followed.

The Choices

C.S. Lewis pointed out the choices that Jesus has given us.

I am trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him. 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' This is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1962, pp. 40,41).

He clearly claimed to be God and Savior. If He was not whom He claimed to be then He was either a liar or a madman.

III. His Claims Were True - He is Lord

There is one final possibility - Jesus made these claims about Himself and His claims were true - He is, therefore, God Almighty. If this is the case, then each human being, created in His image, must judge and decide either:

- (1) to accept Him as Savior and Lord, or
- (2) to reject Jesus and His gift of eternal life and peace with God.

The issue is clear: Jesus is not merely another religious figure who gave the world some memorable teachings - He is much more than that.

IV. Conclusion

When the claims of Jesus are considered we are left with three possibilities.

1. He Never Made the Claims-Legend

This view does not take into account all the facts surrounding the life and ministry of Jesus. There was too short a period of time for legends about Jesus to arise to the place where all the New Testament writers believed them.

2. He Made The Claims And They Were Not True - Liar Or Lunatic

This option has Jesus actually making the claims attributed to Him, yet, His claims were not true.

A. He could have been a liar.

While this is theoretically possible, as we have seen, there is no evidence to support it.

B. He may have been a lunatic.

Again, this is possible in theory, but the facts speak otherwise.

3. He Made the Claims and They Are True - Lord

Of the three options this is the only one that makes sense.

Jesus Christ is either Lord of all or not Lord at all! If He is Lord of all then we should expect to find evidence to back up these claims. Our next section begins to examine some of that evidence.

The First Line of Evidence - Miracles

The first line of evidence that we will examine, to determine if Jesus is the One whom He claimed to be, is His miraculous deeds. Jesus Himself appealed to miracles as a testimony to His Divine character. When John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus to ask if He were the Christ, Jesus replied as follows:

Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Matthew 11:2-5).

This would remind them of various Old Testament passages including Isaiah 35:5,6:

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.
Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.

Jesus, therefore, appealed to His miracles to back up His claims. On another occasion He also told His disciples:

Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake (John 14:11).

Therefore miracles are an important part of the case for Christianity seeing that it is Jesus' specific claim to substantiate His identity - not our claim.

I. TYPES OF MIRACLES

A. Miracles Of Timing

What is a miracle? The word *miracle* is used in two different ways in Scripture. In the first instance, it is used to describe an unusual or natural event that occurs at a precise time. This is usually in answer to prayer. The miracle is in the timing - not in the event itself. There are examples of this type of miracle in the gospels.

Miraculous Catch of Fish

On two separate occasions, the gospels record Jesus involved in a miraculous catch of fish. Luke records one of these incidents.

And when He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but at Your bidding I will let down the nets." And when

they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish; and their nets began to break; and they signaled to their partners in the other boat, for them to come and help them. And they came, and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink (Luke 5:4-7).

After Jesus' resurrection, John reports an incident between Jesus and several of His disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, 'Children, have you any food?' They answered Him, 'No.' and He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish (John 21:4-6).

There is nothing miraculous about throwing a net into the water and having it filled with fish. This event, however, was a miracle because they had been fishing all night and had not caught a thing. But when Jesus told where to put their net, it immediately became full.

Coin in the Mouth of the Fish

Another natural event, that is a miracle of timing, is the episode of the coin found in the mouth of the fish to pay the temple tax. Jesus told Peter:

But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stater. Take that and give it to them for you and Me (Matthew 17:27).

Again, the miracle is not the event itself, but rather in the timing of the event.

Pigs Running Into the Sea

The account of the pigs running into the sea could also be considered a natural event. Matthew records it this way:

And He [Jesus] said to them, "Begone!" And they came out, and went into the swine, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters (Matthew 8:32).

It is possible for a herd of pigs to rush into the sea and drown because of natural causes. However, this herd did so immediately after the command of Jesus.

Servant Healed By Jesus

John's gospel tells us of Jesus healing a man's son at a distance.

Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he started off. And as he was now going down, his slaves met him,

saying that his son was living. So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. They said therefore to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed, and his whole household (John 4:50-53).

We have another example of a miracle of timing. The fact that the fever broke was not miraculous in-and-of-itself. The miracle is that it broke at the *exact* time Jesus told the man that his son was healed.

Earthquake at Jesus' Death

The Bible says an earthquake occurred at Jesus' death.

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit, And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, (Matthew 27:50-51).

The miracle is that the timing of the earthquake coincided with Jesus' death.

Events like these are not contrary to the laws of science, nonetheless, they are miracles of timing and place. Other New Testament events that could fall into this category include the cessation of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and the withering of the fig tree.

Old Testament

These type of miraculous events occurred in the Old Testament as well. Some of them include: Elijah being fed by the ravens, the storm stopping the moment Jonah hit the water, and the rivers of the Jordan rolling back when the children of Israel entered the Promised Land.

B. Events Beyond Natural Law

The Bible speaks of a second type of miracle performed by God. This kind of miracle cannot be explained in terms of normal cause and effect.

Walking On Water

Jesus walking on the water is an example of this type of totally supernatural miracle:

Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea (Matthew 14:25).

This miracle cannot be explained by the normal laws of science because it is physically impossible for people to walk on water.

Feeding Of Five Thousand

Another example of this kind of miracle is Jesus feeding the five thousand. When a multitude of people who had followed Jesus became hungry, Jesus took the food that was available - five loaves and two fish - and miraculously turned it into enough food to feed the great crowd. The Bible says:

So when they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of fragments that remained. Now those who had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children (Matthew 14:20,21).

Not only did everyone eat, they all were satisfied. The disciples gathered twelve baskets full of leftovers from the miracle. This event cannot be explained by the normal laws of cause and effect.

Lazarus

Another example of a miracle that is purely supernatural is the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus had been dead four days when Jesus brought him back to life.

Jesus therefore again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You heard Me. "And I knew that You hear Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that You did send Me." And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go" (John 11:39-44).

In the life of Jesus we see both of these types of miracles performed. The miracles were either unusual events that occurred at God's precise timing, or events beyond the normal laws of nature and science. In either case, the miracles are convincing evidence of God's great power and His control over the laws He established when He created the universe.

II. THE PURPOSE OF JESUS' MIRACLES

What was the purpose of Jesus' miracles? The word translated *miracle* can also mean "sign." The Apostle John testified why he recorded Jesus' miracles.

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30,31).

The miracles were done as a testimony to the identity of Jesus which would create belief in Him. These signs that Jesus performed convinced many that He was the Messiah.

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did (John 2:23).

Some Doubted

Yet even with all these miraculous signs, there were some who doubted.

When Jesus was speaking to the multitude, He said:

'Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came from heaven saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.' Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to Him' (John 12:28,29).

Though it was the voice of the Father who spoke, many believed they only heard thunder.

After Jesus' resurrection there were still some who did not believe.

And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted (Matthew 28:17).

Therefore, the miracles of the New Testament were performed as signs to testify to Jesus' identity. And although the signs convinced many, there were still some who doubted.

III. WHY BELIEVE THE MIRACLES OF JESUS?

Since the time of Christ, there have been many people who have denied His miracles. For whatever reason, they have not believed the New Testament's account of His supernatural works. The people in Jesus' day, however, had a chance to witness firsthand whether or not He performed miraculous deeds. They had a lot to say on the matter.

A. Sufficient Number

First, the number of miracles Jesus performed was sufficient for honest inquirers to believe in them. The four gospels record Jesus performing about thirty-five separate miracles (or thirty-eight depending upon how you number them). Most of the miracles that Jesus performed are recorded in more than one gospel. Two of His miracles, the feeding of the five thousand and the resurrection, are found in all four gospels.

Many More Than Recorded In Gospels

In addition, each gospel writer says that Jesus performed many more miracles than they recorded:

And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people (Matthew 4:23).

And wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and entreating Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured (Mark 6:56).

And all the multitude were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all (Luke 6:19).

Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book (John 20:30).

The vast number of miracles in which Jesus performed demonstrates that they were a regular part of His ministry.

B. Sufficient Variety

The miracles of Jesus were also of a sufficient variety to show that He had miraculous power. Of the specific miracles recorded in the four gospels we find: seventeen were bodily cures, six were healing of demonic possession, nine were miracles of nature, and there were three occasions where He raised someone from the dead.

Of the seventeen specific healing miracles that are recorded there is a variety of different illnesses that Jesus healed. These include: leprosy, paralysis, fever, shriveled limbs, an amputated ear, blindness, deafness, muteness, and blood hemorrhaging.

He Has Ultimate Authority

Jesus also had the authority over life and death. The Bible records three specific cases of Jesus resurrecting someone from the dead: Jairus' daughter who had just died (Matthew 9:18-26), the widow of Nain's son who was in the coffin (Luke 7:11-15), and Lazarus who had been in the tomb for four days (John 11). Thus Jesus showed His control over three stages of death - those who had just died, those who were going to be buried, and those who were already in the tomb.

C. Covered All Areas Of Authority

As the Son of God, Jesus exercised authority over all realms. The Gospel of Matthew, in the eight and ninth chapter, relates many different areas over which Jesus demonstrated His authority. The point of recording these various miracles is to show that Jesus is Lord of every realm imaginable - He is Lord of all!

1. Incurable Disease

After delivering the Sermon on the Mount Jesus came down from the mountain and reached out to the most repulsive of people - a man with leprosy. At this time there was no known cure for the disease. Therefore, a leper was considered one of the living dead. Jesus had compassion on this particular man and healed him instantaneously.

And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' Then Jesus put out His hand and touched Him saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' And immediately his leprosy was cleansed (Matthew 8:2,3).

Here Jesus demonstrated authority over the realm of incurable disease.

2. Healing from a Distance

Jesus also had the ability to heal someone without being physically present. A centurion approached Jesus on behalf of his paralyzed servant. The centurion's faith was such that he believed the servant would be healed if Jesus just gave the word - there was no need for His actual presence. Jesus marveled at the man's faith.

When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!' . . . Then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.' And his servant was healed that same hour (Matthew 8:10,13).

Jesus exhibited power to heal when He was not present, not even near the afflicted person. This demonstrates that He is Lord of space and time.

3. Lord Of Nature

Jesus is not only the Lord over disease, He is also the Lord over nature. A great storm arose on the Sea of Galilee covering their boat with waves.

Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' But He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?' Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea. And there was a great calm. And the men marveled, saying, 'Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?' (Matthew 8:25-27).

When He calmed the storm, Jesus displayed authority over nature - the realm of the visible world.

4. Supernatural Realm

Jesus also had authority over the supernatural realm. Jesus met two demon-possessed men who were terrorizing the countryside. When Jesus approached they cried out:

What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time? (Matthew 8:29).

Jesus cast out demons into a herd of swine and the two men returned to normal. By doing this Jesus showed authority in the area of the supernatural - the invisible realm. In one short boat trip on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus showed His authority over both the visible and invisible realm.

5. Over Sins

This account is found in Matthew 9:1-8. In the episode of healing a paralyzed man at Capernaum, Jesus showed that His authority extended to the forgiveness of sins.

6. Life And Death

Furthermore, Jesus demonstrated His authority was over life and death.

While He spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, 'My daughter has just died, but come and lay Your hand on her and she will live.' . . . And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, He said to them, 'Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping.' And they laughed Him to scorn. But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose (Matthew 9:18,23-25).

Even death was subject to His authority.

7. Both Natural and Supernatural at the Same Time

The last miracle consists of a man who had problems in both the natural and supernatural realm.

And as they were going out, behold, a mute man, demon-possessed, was brought to Him. And after the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the multitudes marveled, saying, "Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel." But the Pharisees were saying, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 9:32-34).

This man was demon-possessed and mute at the same time. Jesus had no problem dealing with both realms simultaneously.

Therefore Jesus' miracles consisted of:

1. Authority over incurable disease.
2. Being able to heal without being physically present.
3. Authority over nature.
4. Authority over the supernatural realm.
5. Authority over sins.

6. Authority over life and death.
7. Authority over the natural and supernatural realm at the same time.

These varied miracles proves that Jesus is Lord of all!

D. Done Publicly

Another important fact concerning the miracles of Jesus is that they were done publicly. The Apostle Paul said:

I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner (Acts 26:25,26).

The facts concerning the miracles of Christ were obviously well-known. If not, Paul could not make such a statement.

Everyone Knew

When Jesus rose on Easter Sunday He walked, unrecognized, with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. When Jesus asked them what they were talking about, He received the following response:

And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" (Luke 24:18).

Cleopas could not believe that this stranger would even ask the question. There is only one subject that everyone was talking about - Jesus.

E Done In A Strategic Location

Furthermore, the land of Israel was a strategic place in the Roman empire, in the middle of great crossroads. A large amount of travel occurred through the Holy Land. This is the spot where Jesus performed His miraculous deeds, not on some barren fringe of the empire where no one could observe them. He performed His miracles where the maximum number of people could see for themselves if they were genuine.

F. Done Before Large Crowds

When Jesus performed His miracles, it was often done in the presence of the crowds. Some passages emphasize that multitudes and entire cities saw the miracles of Jesus (Matthew 15:30,31; 19:1,2; Mark 1:32-34; 6:53-56; Luke 6:17-19).

G. Not One Special Place

The ability of Jesus to perform miracles went with Him wherever He went. Whether it be on the Sea of Galilee, the city of Jerusalem, or the town of Jericho, the miracle power went with Him. There was no staging area where Jesus brought those who needed healing. Consequently there was no way in which His followers could control the event or the outcome.

H. No Special Time

His miraculous deeds were performed at all times of the day - morning, noon, and night and all seasons of the year - fall, winter, spring, and summer. There was nothing hindering the miracle power of Jesus. We find Jesus walking on the water in the early morning, healing the servant's ear in the Garden of Gethsemane at night, and healing the infirmed in the temple during the day.

I. Performed Before Gentiles

The miracles of Jesus were not limited to His countrymen the Jews, we also find Jesus doing miracles for Gentiles as well (Mark 7:24-30; John 4:46-53).

J. Done Without Props

Jesus' miracles were performed without any props. There were no devices that helped Him when He performed His miraculous deeds as other religious figures have used.

K. Done With Restraint

Whenever Jesus performed a miracle, it was always done for a specific purpose. The miracles were performed for two basic reasons - as signs to testify of God's existence and power, or to meet a specific need. They were never performed as a sideshow or to merely attract attention. For example, when Jesus was being tempted by the devil, He refused to use His miraculous powers to show off. The devil wanted Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and let the angels miraculously save Him, but Jesus would not stoop to this type of supernatural sideshow.

L. Only Beneficial Miracles

With only two exceptions, the cursing of the fig tree and the demons sent into swine, the miracles of Jesus were curative in nature. They were done to help people, not to curse His enemies. When two of Jesus' disciples wanted Him to destroy a Samaritan village by fire, they were rebuked.

And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of (Luke 9:54,55).

The miraculous power of Jesus was never done vindictively or in reaction to what someone said or did.

M. Not For His Own Advantage

In addition, Jesus' miracles were not done in His own interest but in the interest of others. He would not turn stones into bread for Himself to eat, but He multiplied the fish and bread for the five thousand.

When Peter tried to stop Jesus' arrest in Gethsemane, Jesus corrected His well-intentioned sword play. He also told Peter that it was well within His capability to perform a miracle if necessary.

Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:52,53).

N. Real Needs

Jesus performed miracles to meet real human needs, not to draw a crowd. For example, when people were in a desert place and needed food, Jesus miraculously provided the food. The miracle met the particular need of the people at that time.

O. Contrast to Miracles in Apocryphal Gospels

After the New Testament was completed, a number of accounts about the life of Jesus were composed. Some of these filled in the gaps of Jesus' missing years. When they are read in comparison to the four gospels, the differences become immediately obvious. One of these stories has Jesus making birds out of clay and then making them fly. Another account of the boyhood of Jesus has Him turning the shell of a snail on the Sea of Galilee into the size of Mt. Tabor! Then suddenly the snail went back to its original form. Some of these later stories paint

Jesus as vindictive - one who uses His miraculous power to turn His friends into stones or animals.

In contrast, the four gospels never contain any of this type of nonsensical material. Thus we never find the type of miracles that are grotesque or childish. Nothing in the miracles of Jesus leads us to think of the absurd or the bizarre.

P. Done With Great Ease

The miracles of Jesus were performed without ceremony or ostentatious behavior - they were done with great ease. There was no strain on Jesus' behalf to bring forth the miracle. He simply spoke and it was done. In almost all of the cases, the miracles occurred immediately after His simple word or gesture. They were so much a part of His ministry that He could easily move into the area of the miraculous without going through any outward display.

Q. Recorded By Eyewitnesses

We will emphasize again that the accounts given to us in the four Gospels were from eyewitnesses. The writers Matthew and John were observers of the miracles and reported what they saw occur. Mark and Luke recorded the eyewitness testimony that was reported to them. Therefore, the miracles of Jesus are well substantiated by people who were there. John the evangelist wrote:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life (1 John 1:1).

R. Reaction to Miracles

Our next point is extremely important! The reaction to Jesus' miracles from those who observed them is exactly what we would expect if they occurred. Those who witnessed the miracles of Jesus were not gullible people expecting miraculous deeds. It must be recognized that the people living at the time of Jesus were as skeptical of the miraculous as modern man. One need only look at the responses by the people to the miracles of Jesus to see that this is the case.

First Unbelievers

For example, the disciples were the first unbelievers of Jesus' resurrection. When certain women returned from the tomb and told them Jesus had risen, His disciples responded as follows:

And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them (Luke 24:11).

When Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth, the response was amazement. The crowd said:

Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of the blind (John 9:32).

They were not used to seeing something like this. The deed was something extraordinary to them.

Never Had Seen This Before

On another occasion, Jesus healed a man who had been lame. When He performed this miracle the people reacted as we would expect anyone to act who witnessed a similar thing.

And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this' (Mark 2:12).

On the Sea of Galilee Jesus performed another miracle like no one had ever seen:

And a wind storm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him and awoke Him saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. And they ceased, and there was a calm. But He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' And they were afraid, and marveled, saying one to another, 'Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey Him!' (Luke 8:23-25).

These accounts illustrate that first-century man was just as amazed and puzzled as modern man would be when it comes to viewing the miraculous first hand.

S. Never Denied

But we see that these same people, even though they were not used to seeing miracles, could not deny these deeds. The religious rulers, who were enemies of Jesus, sought to discredit Him. Instead of denying His miracles, they attributed them to the power of the devil.

Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind, and mute; and He healed them, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?' But when the Pharisees heard it they said, 'This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons' (Matthew 12:22-24).

The religious leaders, by arguing that Christ's miracles were a work of Satan, were acknowledging the fact that Jesus was a miracle worker. If they could have denied them, they

would have, but the lack of denial on their part shows, from an unfriendly source, that the miracles attributed to Jesus did indeed occur.

You Yourselves Know

On the Day of Pentecost, after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Simon Peter, in testifying to Christ's resurrection, appealed to the knowledge of His hearers.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

He stated to that large audience that the miracles of Jesus were something that they themselves knew about. The fact that Peter was not immediately shouted down demonstrates that the people knew he was telling the truth. Multitudes had seen Jesus perform many miracles. The certainty that Jesus performed miracles was never in question. The question was, "How did He do it?"

All Reports Agree

Another important point is this: for the first five centuries of the Christian era, every account of Jesus, whether coming from a believer or a non-believer, has Jesus performing miracles. No friend or foe, in the early centuries, ever denied His miraculous power.

T. The Testimony Is Sufficient

The testimony of Christ's miracles comes from several different groups of witnesses. They include:

1. Those Who Benefited From The Miracles

The first group that gives testimony are those who directly benefited from Jesus' deeds. They give first-hand testimony with respect to what Jesus did for them.

2. Those Who Observed The Miracles

Next, we have those who were not direct beneficiaries of the miracles but who saw them occur. This would include Jesus' disciples.

3. Those Who Were Unbelievers And Skeptics

Not only were the miracles of Jesus done publicly with the multitudes present, they were also performed in front of unbelievers. Among those who watched Jesus perform healings were the unbelieving religious leaders (Matthew 12). They were there to find fault, not to believe. Jesus, therefore, was not just preaching to the converted.

U. An Essential Part Of His Ministry

Miracles were not something that was an afterthought in the ministry of Jesus. They are interlocked with everything that He said or did. Certain teachings of Jesus would be meaningless without the miracle connected to it. For example, the discourse in John's gospel about Jesus being the bread of life makes no sense whatsoever without the miracle that explains it. Apart from the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, this discourse is unexplainable (John 5,6).

V. Circumstantial Evidence

Apart from the four gospels, we also have circumstantial evidence for the miracles of Jesus that is found elsewhere in the New Testament.

The Book of Acts

The Book of Acts testifies to His miraculous deeds.

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know (Acts 2:22).

Paul

The Apostle Paul emphasized that the miracle of the resurrection proved Jesus was whom He claimed to be.

who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:4).

Miracles of the Apostles

In addition, His miracle power was also given to His apostles. The Book of Acts records some of their miracles done through the authority of Jesus. When Peter saw a lame man at the temple he said:

I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene - walk! And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God (Acts 3:6-8).

After Peter healed this man, the religious leaders made the following admission:

saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it

(Acts 4:16).

Even the miracles of the apostles were undeniable.

Summary

To sum up we can say the following about Jesus miracles.

1. There were a sufficient number of them.
2. They were of a sufficient variety.
3. They covered all possible areas of authority.
4. They were done publicly.
5. They were done in a strategic location.
6. They were performed before large crowds.
7. There was no special place in which the miracles occurred.
8. There was no special time when they were performed.
9. They were performed in front of Gentiles as well as Jews.
10. They were done without props.
11. They were done with restraint.
12. The miracles were beneficial to humanity.
13. They were not done for Jesus' own advantage.
14. They met real needs.
15. They are in contrast to the miracles in the apocryphal gospels.
16. They were done with great ease.
17. They were recorded by eyewitnesses.
18. Those who observed them had same reaction as we would have.
19. The miracles of Jesus were never denied by His contemporaries.
20. There was sufficient testimony to them.

21. His miracles were an essential part of His ministry.
22. There is also circumstantial evidence that Jesus performed miracles.

IV. OBJECTIONS TO MIRACLES

Historically there have been many objections to Jesus' miracles. They include the following:

A. Miracles, By Definition Are Not Possible

One of the popular ways to deny miracles is simply to define them out the realm of possibility. Many people state as a fact that the idea of a miracle is an impossibility. End of discussion.

Of course, the problem with that position is that only God could know whether miracles are possible or not. Therefore the denial of the possibility of miracles is something beyond the ability of humans.

The Example of the Platypus

When explorers first came to eastern Australia they came across a creature that should not have existed. It was a furry, semi-aquatic, egg-laying mammal with a ducks bill and webbed feet. It was named the platypus. The characteristics of this little rabbit-sized creature were so strange that some people in England considered it a hoax when the skin of a dead platypus was first brought to London.

The reason the existence of the platypus was doubted had nothing to do with the evidence. For the evidence, strange as it was, pointed to the existence of this egg-laying mammal. The rejection came because it did not fit the scientists particular view of the world of nature. Since no mammal was known to have laid eggs, zoologists were certain this creature could not exist. Eventually scientists came around to believe the platypus did exist with all its bizarre characteristics.

Same Misconception

Since no one had ever seen a creature like this before, people assumed that it could not exist This is the same misconception of many of those who reject miracles - because they have never seen a miracle they assume it cannot happen. No amount of evidence would convince them to change their mind. Yet the platypus does exist and miracles did happen - this is what the evidence testifies.

B. The Miracles Happened During A Pre-Scientific Age

It is alleged that since the miracles recorded in Scripture occurred from two thousand to four thousand years ago they should not be believed. Supposedly they took place before the age of modern science when people were ignorant about the way the universe functioned. Granted the miracles were recorded before modern times, yet the testimony to their truthfulness remains. The

eyewitnesses were just as skeptical as modern man and their reaction to the miraculous was the same as ours would have been if we saw the same events.

C. Self Induced?

There are those who argue that the healing miracles recorded in the New Testament could have been self-induced. In the first century, before the advent of modern medicine, there was much ignorance regarding disease. Could not one easily argue that the healings of Jesus were self-induced because the illnesses were psychological rather than physical?

Beyond Natural Explanation

A study of the Gospel accounts will put that question to rest. The healing miracles of Jesus were of such a nature as to be beyond any natural explanation. For example, Jesus healed a man who was paralyzed (Mark 2:3-12) and another who was blind from birth (John 9:1-7). Lazarus was dead four days when Jesus brought him back to life (John 11). A young girl who was dead was brought back to life by Jesus (Luke 8:51-56). He healed ten lepers at once (Luke 17:11-19) and healed a man who was a deaf mute (Mark 7:31-37).

It stretches beyond the bounds of imagination to think all these people, including the ones who had been dead, could only be ill in their minds and not in their bodies. Furthermore, we are never told of Jesus ever refusing to heal a person. Unless one would want to argue that no legitimate disease was present in the first century, it seems clear that His healings were often and varied enough to prove valid.

D. Why Aren't They Happening Today?

Another objection, which is similar to an earlier one, is that if miracles occurred long ago, we should expect them to occur today, if indeed they really did occur. First, it ignores the fact that miracles are found in clusters in Scripture, not on every page. But even if they were, "So what?" The issue is, "Did they happen as the eyewitnesses testify?"

E. The Possibility of Misinterpreting the Event

This objection deals with the frailty of us as humans. We all know that it is possible to watch an event and describe it in such a way as to misinterpret what actually happened. Since humans sometimes poorly report what they have seen, why should we believe the biblical account of miracles?

If we took this objection to its logical fulfillment, then there could be no accurate reporting of any event. All reports would be suspect and nothing could be believed. Yet experience tells us that humans can accurately report on events they witness. The evidence has to be weighed and evaluated for each incident.

F. Contradictions Between The Accounts

Often it is alleged that the biblical accounts of the miraculous are so hopelessly contradictory that they should not be believed. Yet this is not the case. The fact that there are minor differences in detail only shows that the accounts are independent of one another. There is agreement between them on the major points.

G. Miracle Reports In Other Religions

What about the miracles in other religions? Since there are other religions who also report miraculous deeds occurring among them, why should they be rejected and the biblical miracles believed? Three things should be considered when answering this question.

1. There Were Not That Many

First, there are not as many miracles in the world religions as some people assume. Miracles are very rare in the accounts of the major religions of the world. The exception, of course, is the biblical account, where miracles are an important part of the message.

2. They Were Not Done Publicly

The public demonstration of Jesus with respect to His miracles is in contrast to other so-called miracle workers who did their work in private. For example, almost all the miracles that are attributed to Mohammed in the Koran occurred in private - where there was no way either to prove or disprove the testimony.

3. There Is No Real Purpose For Them

The miracles attributed to other religions are not backed up by eyewitness testimony. Furthermore, they are all too often performed as a sideshow with no direct purpose in mind. The so-called miracles of other religions do not touch humanity at its basic needs as do the miracles recorded in the Bible. This, and the lack of corroborative testimony to their actually occurring, causes them to be rejected.

H. Recorded Long After The Fact

Often it is objected that the miracles of the New Testament were written long after the events transpired. Supposedly this makes them untrue. Again, as we have seen, the miracles in Scripture were recorded by those who were there - eyewitnesses to the events. Their accounts did not grow larger and larger with time.

Summary

All the evidence points to the fact that Jesus Christ did indeed work miracles. This fact was testified to by both believers and unbelievers. No one doubted His ability to perform supernatural deeds. The question asked Jesus was not *if* He performed miracles but rather *how* did He do these supernatural works. The truth of His miracle working ability was beyond all doubt.

This being the case, we now move to our second line of direct evidence to prove that Jesus is whom He claimed to be - fulfilled prophecy.

Predictive Prophecy

The second line of evidence for the truthfulness of Jesus' claims is one of the strongest anyone can imagine - predictive prophecy.

I. Overview

A. What Is a Prophet?

The word translated "prophet" occurs over three hundred times in the Old Testament and over one hundred times in the New Testament. It comes from two Greek words - *pro* meaning "before," or "in place of" and *pheme* meaning "to speak." A prophet, therefore, is someone who speaks in the place of someone else. The Bible says Aaron was a prophet to Moses.

So the Lord said to Moses . . . Aaron your brother shall be your prophet (Exodus 7:1).

Moses told God that his lack of eloquence prevented him from being His spokesman. God then told Moses that his brother Aaron could accompany him and be his spokesman, or prophet, to the people.

B. Spokesman for God

In the Bible a prophet is a spokesman for God. God sent and commissioned the prophet so that the words of the prophet are the words of God. As the priest represented the people to God, the prophet was God's representative to the people. The Bible is clear that the words of the prophet were not the product of his own spirit, but came from a higher source - the One True God.

C. Proclamation of God's Word

The prophet's message was the proclamation of the Word of God to the people. He was essentially a preacher and a teacher - a person who relays a message from God to humanity. The prophet Jeremiah recorded his prophetic calling:

But the Lord said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all whom I will send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak . . . Therefore prepare yourself and arise, and speak to them all that I commanded you. Do not be dismayed before their faces, lest I dismay you before them (Jeremiah 1:7,17).

Jeremiah the prophet was commissioned to speak the truth - no matter what the response of the people.

D. Predictive

There is also the predictive element in Bible prophecy. If the message of the prophet was not received by the people, then the prophet would predict future events. This would often involve judgment upon the nation Israel for their refusal to listen to the Lord.

Things to Come

Jesus said one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit was to show believers "things to come."

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come (John 16:13).

Bible prophecy, therefore, has both a local and future application. A biblical prophet was both a forthteller of local issues and foreteller of the future.

E. The Purpose of Prophecy

Bible prophecy teaches us that there is a God who exists, and who is in control of history. The purpose of prophecy is given to us in Scripture.

Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; "I declared the former things long ago and they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass (Isaiah 46:9,10).

In another passage the Lord said:

Therefore I declared them to you long ago, before they took place I proclaimed them to you, lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my graven image and my molten image have commanded them' (Isaiah 48:3,5).

From these passages we learn the following about Bible prophecy:

1. There is only one God who exists.
2. No creature anywhere in the universe is like God.
3. The one God tells us what will happen before it occurs.
4. Prophecy is given to fulfill His will.

5. Thus we can know that God exists, and is in control of history, when His predictions come to pass.

F. Evidence Of Authenticity

A practical question arises, "How would the people know if a prophet was sent by God? Could not anyone claim to be a spokesman for God?" God provided a simple method so that the people would know if this person was actually speaking for the Lord - the prophecies he gave must come to pass.

'I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 'And it shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him. 'But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' "And you may say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:18-22).

Speak In Name of Lord

From this passage we see that a prophet of God must speak in the name of the Lord. He shall not encourage the people to follow after false gods. No matter how correct a prophet may seem to be, if he does not encourage people to follow the Lord then he cannot be considered a prophet of God. Merely getting some future events correct is not enough to be considered a prophet of God.

100% Right

This is the biblical test for a true prophet. The person must be 100% right 100% of the time. A prophet of God could not even make one mistake. But what if someone predicted events that would only happen in the distant future? Everyone would be dead before it was known whether or not that person was a true prophet. How could the people immediately know if that person who claimed to be a prophet was, in actuality, sent from God?

In His Own Lifetime

God gave a simple test: his authenticity as a genuine prophet would be demonstrated by predicting something to happen in his own lifetime. Before he could be received as God's prophet, he had to give clear evidence of his supernatural calling.

Isaiah Was A Prophet

For example, Isaiah the prophet spoke to King Hezekiah about the possible attack of the Assyrian army.

Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria: 'He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it' (Isaiah 37:33).

The prophecy was clear. Although the city of Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian army, there would be no destruction whatsoever. Furthermore, there would not even be one arrow shot into the city by the enemy. This prophecy was literally fulfilled:

Then the angel of the Lord went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians, one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses - all dead (Isaiah 37:36).

Therefore, we have an immediate fulfillment in the lifetime of the prophet Isaiah that demonstrates he was speaking for God.

Jeremiah

We also have an example from the life of Jeremiah. During his lifetime there was a false prophet named Hananiah. Jeremiah pronounce judgment upon him:

Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, 'Hear now, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, but you make this people trust in a lie. 'Therefore thus says the Lord: 'Before, I will cast you from the face of the earth. This year you shall die, because you have taught rebellion against the Lord.' So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month (Jeremiah 28:15-17).

Again, we have a prediction fulfilled in the lifetime of the prophet Jeremiah. The same test held true for other biblical prophets.

Summary

We can summarize Bible prophecy in the following manner.

1. A biblical prophet is a person who spoke for God to the people.
2. The main idea behind Bible prophecy is proclamation of His Word.
3. There is a difference between prophecy and predictive prophecy.
4. If the people did not receive the message of the prophet, then judgment was often predicted upon them.
5. Prophecy testifies that God not only exists, He is also in control of history.
6. A prophet must give evidence in his own lifetime that he is a genuine prophet.

II. Prophecies Fulfilled At The First Coming Of Christ

One of the major themes of the Old Testament is that God would send a Deliverer or Messiah (the Christ) to come into the world. He would eventually rule as king over Israel as well as rule over all the nations of the earth. A practical question arises, "How would the people know the identify of this promised Messiah when He arrived?" Theoretically, anyone could claim to be God's anointed one.

This, however, was not the case. God narrowed it down in such a way that whoever claimed to be the Messiah would have to fulfill some very specific predictions. We will look at three specific areas that had to be fulfilled by anyone claiming to be the promised Messiah.

A. The Family Line Predicted

The first set of predictions has to do with the Messiah's genealogy, or family line. God narrowed down the family line of the Messiah in such a way that eliminated most people who have ever been born.

Prediction: He Will Come From The Family Of Shem

He [Noah] also said, "Blessed be the LORD, The God of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant. "May God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant" (Genesis 9:26,27).

Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. God eliminated two thirds of humanity when He said the Messiah would come through the line of Shem.

Fulfillment

The son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech (Luke 3:36).

Luke lists the genealogy of Jesus in which he records Jesus was a descendant of Shem.

Prediction: The Christ Will Be A Descendant of Abraham

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Now God eliminates all the families of the earth but one - the family of Abraham. Whoever claims to be the Messiah has to be a descendant of Abraham for God told Abraham that one of his descendants will bless all the earth.

Fulfillment

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

The Testimony of Paul

The Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, emphasized that God specified one from Abraham's line would be the Christ.

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to the seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ' (Galatians 3:16).

The Apostle Paul says that God uses the singular rather than the plural to emphasize it will be one particular descendant of Abraham who will bless the world.

Prediction: He Will Be A Descendant of Isaac

Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. God promised Isaac that the Messiah would be through his family line.

Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. And I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 26:3,4).

Fulfillment

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ . . . Abraham begot Isaac (Matthew 1:1,2).

Jesus was from Isaac's line.

Prediction: The Messiah Will Come from the Family of Jacob

God also said to him [Jacob], "I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, And kings shall come forth from you. And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, And I will give the land to your descendants after you" (Genesis 35:11,12).

Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Scripture says that the chosen line was through Jacob. This continues to narrow the possible candidates for the Messiah.

Fulfillment

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ . . . Isaac begot Jacob (Matthew 1:1,2).

Jesus was also from the line of Jacob.

Prediction: He Will Come from Tribe of Judah

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples (Genesis 49:10).

Jacob had twelve sons. God eliminated 11/12 of the line of Jacob by saying the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah.

Fulfillment

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ . . . Jacob begot Judah and his brothers . . . and to Judah were born Perez and Zerah by Tamar; and to Perez (Matthew 1:1-3).

Jesus descended from the line of Judah.

Prediction: The Messiah Will Be From Family Line of Jesse

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1)

There were many family lines in the tribe of Judah, but only through the family line of Jesse could the Messiah come. He is the Branch that will bear fruit.

Fulfillment

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ . . . Obed begot Jesse (Matthew 1:1,5).

Prediction: He Will Descend from The House Of David

God told David the Messiah would be from His line:

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12).

Jesse had at least eight sons. God eliminated 7/8 of the sons of Jesse when He said the Messiah would be through the line of David. Again, the list of potential candidates gets narrower and narrower.

Fulfillment

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

The very first verse of the New Testament records the fulfillment of this prophecy.

When the angel appeared to Mary announcing Jesus' birth he confirmed that Mary's child would be a descendant of David.

You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David (Luke 1:31,32).

Summary

Consequently whoever the promised Messiah would be, He would have to be a physical descendant of David the king. All other individuals would not qualify. Therefore, from the predictions with respect to the genealogy of the Messiah, the great majority of the people who have ever been born are eliminated from contention. Jesus, however, fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the family line of the Messiah being a descendant of David.

B. The Place OF His Coming Predicted

In addition, the exact place of His birth was predicted.

Prediction: He Will Born in Bethlehem

God predicted, through the prophet Micah, the exact city where the Messiah would be born:

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity (Micah 5:2).

Every city in the world was eliminated but one - Bethlehem. Thus if someone was a descendant of King David, yet was born in any other city than Bethlehem, he would not qualify as the promised Messiah.

Fulfillment

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem (Matthew 2:1).

Jesus was not only born in the right family, He was also born at the right place.

C. The Time Of His Coming

Finally, we have the prediction with respect to the time in history of the Messiah's coming.

Prediction: He Will Be Killed Before the Temple and City Are Destroyed.

The Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary (Daniel 9:26).

We learn three things from this verse:

1. The Messiah will come on the scene of history.
2. He will be killed.
3. After His death, the city of Jerusalem and temple will be destroyed.

Fulfillment

When Jesus came to the earth, the city of Jerusalem, and the temple, had not yet been destroyed. Teaching at the temple was an important part of Jesus' ministry. The temple was destroyed in the year A.D. 70, along with the city of Jerusalem. This was forty years after His death and resurrection.

D. Summary

Therefore, Jesus fulfilled certain prophecies about the coming Messiah.

1. He was born in the right family line - David's.
2. He was born at the right place - Bethlehem.
3. He was born at the right time in history - before the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.

Two Important Points

These three areas of prophecy we have looked at reveal two startling things:

First, the prophecies were fulfilled literally - exactly as they were written. Jesus was literally a descendant of King David, He was literally born in the city of Bethlehem, and He literally came upon the scene of history and was killed before the city of Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. In other words, the prophecies were fulfilled exactly as they were written.

No Human Manipulation

Second, these three lines of prophecy were all fulfilled without any human manipulation or fulfillment. There is no way Jesus could have deliberately fulfilled them, seeing they were all fulfilled by His birth. Before He gave any sermons, before He did anything miraculous, Jesus supernaturally fulfilled these prophecies. He was born in the right family, at the right place, and

at the right time in history. Humanly speaking, there is no way Jesus could control these factors. Therefore, we find in the birth of Jesus Christ, miraculous fulfillment of Bible prophecy.

III. Prophecies of Jesus That Have Come To Pass

Jesus not only fulfilled prophecy in His own life, He Himself predicted events that were to come to pass some time in the future. One of the ministries of Jesus was that of a prophet. As has been true with prophecies fulfilled in His own life, His prophetic words have been literally and marvelously fulfilled.

We are going to look at ten specific predictions that Jesus made as well as their fulfillment.

PREDICTION 1. His Words Would Be Everlasting

Jesus made the astounding prediction that "heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35). He predicted that His words would be everlasting.

Amazing Prophecy

We need to appreciate the amazing nature of this prophecy. Here was a man who lived in the first century A.D. with only a small group of followers, and His country was subject to the bondage of Rome. There were no modern means of mass communication or storage of a person's words, yet Jesus made the statement that His words were eternal - they will never pass away. Although it seemed improbable at the time, it has occurred exactly as He predicted. The words of Jesus are still with us today, read and believed by untold millions. It has happened just as He said.

PREDICTION 2. The Story of Mary Of Bethany

Mary of Bethany poured oil on the body of Jesus in anticipation of His coming death. The disciples rebuked her for wasting the oil, but Jesus said she had done a good thing.

Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. "For the poor you have with you always; but you do not always have Me." For when she poured this perfume upon My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her (Matthew 26:11-13).

Jesus predicted that her story would be told wherever the gospel was preached. As He predicted, the story of Mary of Bethany, and her anointing of Jesus before His death, is still told today wherever the gospel is preached. The fact that you are reading about it right now continues to fulfill Jesus' prophecy.

PREDICTION 3. His Own Betrayal and Death

Jesus predicted the circumstances surrounding His death.

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed (Matthew 16:21).

Jesus also predicted His death would occur during the Passover celebration, and it would be by means of crucifixion.

You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified (Matthew 26:2).

He also predicted that He would be betrayed by one of His own disciples.

and as they were eating, he said, Truly I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began to say unto him every one, Is it I, Lord? (Matthew 26:21, 22).

This occurred as predicted. Jesus was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, He suffered at the hands of the religious rulers and was crucified during the Passover. All these events occurred just as He had said.

The following points were literally fulfilled with respect to these predictions by Jesus.

- 1. He suffered as a result of the religious rulers.**
- 2. He was betrayed by one of His own disciples.**
- 3. He died in Jerusalem.**
- 4. He died during the Passover celebration.**
- 5. He died by means of crucifixion.**

PREDICTION 4. His Resurrection from the Dead

Jesus also predicted His resurrection from the dead. He said it would happen exactly three days after His death.

On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that

deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise' (Matthew 27:62,63).

The chief priests and the scribes were the ones who arrested Jesus and brought Him to Pilate for execution. Yet three days after His crucifixion, Jesus was alive again. The angel at His tomb on that first Easter made it clear to those who arrived:

He is not here; for He is risen, as He said (Matthew 28:6).

Jesus was crucified on good Friday and came back from the dead on Easter Sunday morning--three days by Jewish reckoning. Again, His predictions were literally fulfilled.

PREDICTION 5. The Destruction of Jerusalem

After Jesus was rejected by His people, He pronounced judgment upon them. Jesus predicted that the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed. Forty years before it occurred, Jesus gave specifics to its destruction:

For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground (Luke 19:43,44).

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near (Luke 21:20).

In A.D. 70, as Jesus had predicted, the city of Jerusalem was surrounded and destroyed by Titus the Roman. The reason Jesus gave for the fall of the city was the peoples' rejection of Him as Messiah, "because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:44).

PREDICTION 6. The Temple Would Be Destroyed

Another prediction of Jesus that was literally fulfilled concerns the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus specified the manner of its destruction.

Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, 'Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down' (Matthew 24:1,2).

This happened exactly as predicted. When Titus the Roman destroyed the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, he also destroyed the temple.

PREDICTION 7. The People Will Be Scattered

When Jesus predicted the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple, He made clear the fate that awaited the Jewish people. The people will be scattered from their land and taken captive by other nations.

And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24).

This occurred just as He had predicted. When the city and temple were destroyed, the people were scattered to the ends of the earth. Those who were not killed when the city was captured, were sold into slavery.

PREDICTION 8. The Holy Land To Be Ruled By Gentiles

Jesus also predicted the nation Israel would be dominated for a long period of time by the Gentile (non-Jewish) peoples.

And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24).

The land remained under Gentile domination for two thousand years. Except for a few short years in the second century the Jews had no rule over Jerusalem until 1967. The prediction that the nation would be subject to Gentile rule has been literally fulfilled.

PREDICTION 9. The Jewish People Would Be Persecuted

The people would not only be scattered, Jesus also predicted that the Jewish race would be persecuted.

'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, "Blessed are the barren, the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" (Luke 23:28-30).

History records that the Jewish people have gone through terrible persecution as Jesus predicted. From the ghettos of the Middle Ages, to the Holocaust of World War II, the Jews have been a persecuted race, like no other people in history.

PREDICTION 10. Though Persecuted, The Nation Will Survive

Though scattered and persecuted, Jesus also predicted the Jewish people would not perish. Though the nation was to suffer terribly, Jesus made it clear they will still survive.

And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24).

They would be persecuted *until* the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled. Once this period of Gentile rule was over, the Jews would again have self-rule.

Summary

From the examples given, it is clear that Jesus had the ability to predict what was going to occur in the future. The historical evidence establishes that Jesus was a reliable prophet. The predictions of Jesus that have been fulfilled include the following.

1. His word's would be everlasting.
2. The story of Mary of Bethany would be told worldwide.
3. He would be betrayed by one of His disciples, suffer at the hands of the religious rulers, and die on the cross during the Passover.
4. He would come back from the dead exactly three days later.
5. The city of Jerusalem would be destroyed because they did not receive Him as their Messiah.
6. The temple would also be destroyed because the people refused to accept Him as their Savior.
7. The Jewish people would be scattered from their land.
8. The holy land would be dominated by Gentile nations.
9. The Jews would suffer terrible persecution.
10. Though persecuted, the nation would survive.

These are merely *some* of the predictions that Jesus has made that have been fulfilled and continue to be fulfilled - there are many more than we have listed.

Thus we have Jesus fulfilling prophecies in His own life as well as predicting things in the future that have come to pass.

So far we have seen two impressive line of evidence for the claims of Jesus - miracles and fulfilled prophecy. We now move to our third line of evidence - the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The big question, that sooner or later every human being has to face, was asked long ago by a man named Job.

If a person dies, will they live again? (Job 14:14).

This same question remains to this day, "Is this life all that there is? Or is there life beyond the grave? Is it possible for anyone to know the answer to this question?"

Our third line of evidence is the Christian's answer to Job's question - the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

I. Introduction

A. The Importance of The Resurrection

The message of the early Christians, and the focal point of the New Testament, was stated in this simple truth by the Apostle Paul:

Jesus Christ, risen from the dead (2 Timothy 2:8).

This is the central truth of the Christian faith. The importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be overemphasized. Without the resurrection there is no Christianity.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

Notice how clearly Paul stated the matter--no resurrection, no Christianity. According to Paul, if Christ has not been raised then:

- A. Christian preaching is empty and so in anyone's faith because the object of the faith, Christ, is not whom He said He was.
- B. The apostles are liars for testifying to a resurrection that did not occur.
- C. No forgiveness has been granted for anybody's sin.
- D. Those who have died believing in Christ have no hope.
- E. If hope in Christ is limited to this life, Christians are to be pitied above all people.

No Meaning for Humanity

Without the resurrection, Christianity has no meaning for humanity--its founder would have been a liar and a failure, and its followers men and women who have no hope. Thus the importance of the resurrection to Christian faith cannot be overestimated.

There are those who say that even without the resurrection, Christianity has significance. They hold that Christ's teachings provide ethical guidelines for humanity. The New Testament, however, testifies that this is not the case. Without the resurrection there is no meaningful Christianity.

Other Areas of Importance

We add further areas of importance of Christ's resurrection:

Important To His Identity

If Christ did not rise then He was a liar, for He predicted He would come back from the dead (Matthew 20:19). The resurrection authenticates Him as a true prophet. Without His resurrection everything that Jesus said would be subject to doubt.

Important To His Ministry

If Jesus did not rise, then His ministry would have ended in defeat. Believers would not have a High Priest to intercede for them to God the Father. There would be no one to head the church and no one to indwell believers and give them power to live godly lives.

Important To His Message

According to the Apostle Paul, the resurrection of Jesus is one of the four pillars of the gospel message.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures and that He appeared to . . . (1 Corinthians 15:3-5).

These four pillars are:

1. Christ died.
2. Christ was buried
3. Christ was raised.
4. Christ appeared.

Without the resurrection there is no gospel message. Its importance to the Christian faith cannot be overestimated.

B. The Resurrection Was Unique

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is unique to the Christian faith--no other religious figure has ever predicted his own resurrection, then accomplished it. All other world religions are based on a founder who lived in the past and whose religion is his only legacy. Mohammed died at age 61 on June 8, A.D. 632 in Medina. He is still dead. Confucius died and Buddha also died. They also remain dead--Jesus Christ is alive.

C. God's Eternal Plan

The death and resurrection of Christ is part of the eternal plan of God. Fifty days after Jesus' death, the Apostle Peter declared on the day of Pentecost:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know--Him, *being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God*, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it (Acts 2:22-24).

In the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John tells us that Jesus was the lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain (Revelation 13:8).

The death and resurrection of Christ was in the predetermined program of God--planned before the foundation of the world. It is a crucial element in God's eternal plan to save humanity from their sins. It was not an isolated event.

D. Not Beyond God's Power

The resurrection of Jesus is not greater than any other miracle recorded in Scripture. Once a person grants the possibility of God performing miracles, then the testimony for the resurrection has to be evaluated like any other miracle that is recorded. The first verse of the Bible declares.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1).

This verse is the basis of all miracles. If a person can believe the truth of this verse--that God spoke and the universe came into existence from nothing--then what is too hard for Him to do? That is why the Apostle Paul declared:

Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? (Acts 26:8).

Other passages testify to God's miraculous power.

Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me? (Jeremiah 32:27).

Therefore, the idea that the God of the Bible has the ability to raise the dead is certainly consistent with what Scripture teaches about His mighty power.

E. The Resurrection Was Foretold By Jesus

The resurrection was not only in the eternal plan of God, it was also predicted beforehand by Jesus. The fact that He would rise from the dead was central to Jesus' ministry and message. As we have said, the resurrection must not be seen as an isolated event in the life of Christ.

Many Predictions

As one reads the four gospels, they are struck by the fact that Jesus predicted, over and over again, His betrayal, death, and resurrection. Three years before He was raised from the dead, the following exchange between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders occurred:

So the Jews answered and said to Him, 'What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken (John 2:18-22).

The Sign

The resurrection was to be *the* sign that demonstrated Jesus as the one whom He claimed to be. When asked for a specific sign from the religious leaders Jesus said:

An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39-40).

Especially during the last six months of His earthly life, Jesus emphasized the importance and necessity of His upcoming crucifixion as well as the triumph of His resurrection.

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day (Matthew 16:21).

The Ability to Raise Himself

Jesus also made the amazing claim that He had the authority to accomplish the resurrection Himself:

Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again (John 10:17, 18).

Common Knowledge

The predictions by Jesus of His resurrection were of such common knowledge that it led the religious rulers to ask Pontius Pilate to secure the tomb:

On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate saying, 'Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, "After three days I will rise." Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, "He has risen from the dead." So the last deception will be worse than the first' (Matthew 27:62-64).

From these predictions, it can be readily seen that the resurrection was a central part of the message and ministry of Jesus.

Setting the Scene

As we examine the events leading up to Easter Sunday, we discover that certain precautions taken by Jesus' enemies actually give circumstantial evidence to His resurrection.

Precautions: Stone, Seal, And Guard

The precautions taken at the tomb consisted of three things--the large stone, the Roman seal, and the guard.

1. The Stone

The Bible says that a large stone was rolled in front of the tomb of Jesus. This stone, not only sealed the tomb, it also would have made it difficult for someone to come right in and steal the body.

2. The Roman Seal

The Roman seal was a sign of authentication that the tomb was occupied and the power and authority of Rome stood behind the seal. Anyone breaking the Roman seal would suffer the punishment of an unpleasant death.

3. The Guard

Jesus' tomb was watched by a guard--either the Roman guard or the Jewish temple police. There is a question as to which one of the two groups was watching over it. The context seems to favor the Roman guard. The Roman guard was a sixteen-man unit that was governed by very strict rules. Each member was responsible for six square feet of space. The guard members could not sit down or lean against anything while they were on duty. If a guard member fell asleep, he was beaten and burned with his own clothes. But he was not the only one executed, the entire sixteen man guard unit was executed if only one of the members fell asleep while on duty.

The Religious Leaders Felt Secure

These precautions made the religious rulers feel secure that the excitement around Jesus would soon go away. Jesus lay dead in the tomb, and His frightened disciples had scattered and gone into hiding. They thought that they had won.

The Event That Changed the World

But the story was not over. The Bible says that early Sunday morning certain women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. The stone had been removed, the seal had been broken, and the body was gone. An angel at the tomb asked:

Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen (Luke 24:5,6).

They went back to tell the other disciples, who at first did not believe their report.

And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them (Luke 24:11).

However, they were persuaded to look for themselves, and they also found the tomb empty. This caused them confusion. The confusion vanished as the resurrected Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene, then to some other women, and finally to the disciples. After being with the disciples for forty days, Jesus ascended into heaven. Ten days later, the disciples publicly proclaimed to all Jerusalem, and to the world, the fact that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

II. Presenting the Case - Undisputed Facts

As we begin to look at the case for the resurrection we will start by examining certain undisputed facts that both believers and unbelievers can agree upon.

A. Jesus Existed

Jesus was a historical figure who lived two thousand years ago. The primary source for His life and ministry is the New Testament which, as we have already seen, was written by eyewitnesses or people who recorded eyewitness testimony.

B. He Was Purported To Have Worked Miracles

Another historical fact about Jesus is that He was a miracle worker. Both friend and foe testify to this fact. In the first five centuries of the Christian era, every report that has come down to us about Jesus, whether from friend or foe, has Him working miracles. There is no doubt that miracles were a central part of His ministry.

C. There Was No Dying And Rising Messiah In First Century Judaism

Another fact beyond dispute is that the disciples of Jesus were not prepared for His death. First-century Judaism had no concept of the Messiah dying and then coming back from the dead. The disciples were not expecting the resurrection of Jesus because they were not expecting Him to die.

D. Jesus Died On a Cross in Jerusalem

Another fact that is beyond dispute is the manner of death of Jesus--He died on a cross. All four gospels make it clear that Christ was crucified in Jerusalem. The testimony of the Book of Acts concurs, as do the writings of Paul. Jesus was executed by means of crucifixion in the city of Jerusalem.

E. Jesus Was Buried

The New Testament also states that Jesus was buried after His death. All four gospels testify to this fact as well as Paul's statement (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

F. The Tomb Was Empty On Easter Sunday

A further fact is that the tomb of Jesus was empty on Easter Sunday morning. Had the body of Jesus remained in the tomb it would have been a simple thing for the authorities to remove the stone and produce it.

The Sanhedrin itself testifies that the tomb was empty. They concocted a story in which they commanded the soldiers to repeat thereafter to explain how the tomb became empty--the body was stolen by the disciples.

G. Jesus Was Reported To Have Risen

The New Testament is unanimous in the fact that Jesus' disciples saw Him after His death. This was the message they brought to the world--Jesus Christ has risen from the dead!

H. The Message Was Preached in the City Where the Events Took Place

When the account of the resurrection was first proclaimed, it occurred in Jerusalem--the same city where Jesus was buried. The disciples did not go away to some distant place where it would have been hard to check out the facts. They began in the very city where all the events took place. If their testimony were not true, then their enemies would have promptly corrected them.

I. The New Testament Writers Believed That Jesus Had Risen From The Dead

When the New Testament was committed to writing, it was from the perspective that Jesus had risen from the dead. All of the New Testament writers believed the resurrection occurred. Obviously something led them to that belief. The question, of course, is, "What made them believe?"

Facts Beyond Dispute

These facts are not in dispute. Jesus existed; during His earthly ministry He reportedly worked miracles; His disciples were not prepared for His death and were not looking for a resurrection; Jesus was dead and buried; yet the tomb was empty on Easter morning; the disciples testified they saw Him alive after His death and they proclaimed the resurrection message in Jerusalem. Finally, all the New Testament writers believed the resurrection was a reality.

III. The Case for the Resurrection - Evidence

We will now weigh the evidence for Christ's resurrection and see if it meets a legal standard of proof. This means we will be looking at the facts and determining what is the most likely thing that happened. Therefore we should let the evidence speak for itself.

A. JESUS APPEARED

The main reason the disciples believed in the resurrection of Jesus is that they saw Him alive after He was dead. Thus we see them testifying, time and time again, to the fact they were eyewitnesses of His resurrection. This firsthand evidence of the disciples is a powerful argument for the resurrection of Christ. The disciples knew that He had risen because they saw Him with their own eyes.

The Various Appearances

After the resurrection Jesus was seen by many different people. Some of the appearances include:

Mary Magdalene

The first appearance of Jesus was to Mary Magdalene.

Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, 'Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him, 'Rabboni!' (which is to say, Teacher) (John 20:14-16).

This appearance was totally unexpected.

Mary the Mother of James, Salome, and Joanna

Jesus also appeared to these three women. This happened after the appearance to Mary Magdalene. After an angel told them Jesus had risen, they were on their way to tell Jesus' disciples when they met the risen Christ (Matthew 28:9). Again, we have another unexpected appearance. As was true with Mary Magdalene, these women touched the body of Jesus.

Peter

Peter is the first person mentioned in Paul's list of witnesses, and is the first of the apostles to see the risen Christ. This was a private appearance to reassure him, since he had just denied his Lord. The gospels are completely silent as to the details of this meeting. Luke merely wrote:

The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon! (Luke 24:34).

Two Disciples in the Emmaus Road

Later on Easter Sunday, Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were conversing with each other about

all these things which had taken place. And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him (Luke 24:13-16).

As was true with the women, these two disciples were not expecting Jesus to rise. In fact, they were leaving Jerusalem because they had lost hope in Him.

The Disciples--Thomas Absent

This is the last of the five appearances of Jesus on Easter Sunday. It took place in the evening, probably in the upper room in which Jesus had instituted the Lord's supper. It is recorded in both Luke's and John's gospel, giving us two independent accounts as to what happened. John wrote:

When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord. . . But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came (John 20:19,20,24).

All the Disciples

Eight days later He appeared again--this time with Thomas present.

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and My God!' (John 20:26-28).

Sea Of Galilee

Another appearance was to seven disciples on the Sea of Galilee.

After these things Jesus manifested Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and He manifested Himself in this way. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples (John 20:1,2).

A Mountain in Galilee

There is also the account of Jesus appearing before His eleven disciples in Galilee.

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful (Matthew 28:16,17).

Over Five Hundred People

On another occasion, Jesus appeared to over five hundred people at one time.

After that He was seen by over five hundred people at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Saul

After Jesus' ascension He appeared again--this time to Saul of Tarsus.

And as he [Saul] traveled he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting' (Acts 9:3-5).

These are some the appearances of Jesus that the New Testament records. They caused His disciples to believe that He had risen from the dead.

1. Observations about the Appearances of Christ

As we examine the New Testament account of the appearances of Christ after His death, we can make the following observations:

a. The Appearances Were Convincing

The different appearances of Jesus convinced His disciples that He had truly risen from the dead. The first chapter of Acts makes this statement about Jesus' appearances.

To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

When describing Jesus' appearances, Luke uses a Greek word translated as "convincing proof." This term refers to the strongest type of legal proof imaginable. The case for Jesus' resurrection would stand up in a court of law.

b. He Appeared To Many Different People

We note that Jesus appeared to a number of different people after His death. The multiple appearances that are recorded in the New Testament range in size from one individual (Peter) to over five hundred people (1 Corinthians 15). These various appearances to different numbers of people testify to the fact that He did indeed come back from the dead.

c. He Appeared at Different Times and Places

There was no specific time or place when the resurrected Jesus appeared. His appearances include: in a locked room, on the road to Emmaus, on a mountain in Galilee, on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, and at the empty tomb. Jesus was able to appear wherever He wished, He was not limited to one geographical area.

Jesus' appearances consisted of brief encounters with people (the women returning from the tomb) to long periods of time (the two disciples on the road to Emmaus).

He also appeared at different times of day--morning (to Mary Magdalene at the tomb), afternoon (the two disciples on the road to Emmaus), and night (the disciples in the locked upper room).

d. The People Were Not Expecting Him to Appear

Jesus' followers were surprised by the events that occurred in those few short days. Beginning with His betrayal by one of their own--Judas Iscariot--to the arrest, trial and crucifixion, these rapidly occurring events shocked the disciples. They were not expecting any of this to happen. However, the one thing that surprised them most was seeing Christ alive after His death.

The women who arrived at the tomb were not expecting Jesus to rise. Their intention was to embalm His body. They went to the tomb expecting to find someone there. This shows they did not expect a resurrection.

When the disciples were first told of the empty tomb, and the reports that Jesus was alive, they did not believe them. They thought the women making these reports were mad.

When Thomas first heard that Jesus had risen, he did not believe it. Until he saw Jesus for himself, and touched the scars of His wounds, he would not believe.

All of these facts testify to the state of mind of the disciples--they were not looking for Him to appear.

e. His Appearances Suddenly Stopped After He Ascended into Heaven

The New Testament says it was for only forty days that Jesus showed Himself after His resurrection before ascending into heaven. After His ascension, Jesus did not appear any longer to His disciples--except for one episode on the isle of Patmos to John. In that instance He appeared as the glorified Christ.

2. The Character of the Witnesses

We also need to consider the character of the witnesses who testified that Christ had risen. The following observations need to be made concerning them.

a. They Were In a Position to Testify

The ones who saw Jesus after His death were in a position to give testimony to whether or not Jesus had risen from the dead. First, they would have been able to testify if He had died. We are told that John and certain others were there at the cross when Jesus died--they observed His death. Others saw where He was buried. Finally, the same Jesus they had seen dead and buried, appeared to them alive. They saw the scars that were on His body from the cross. They knew Jesus intimately and they would not have been fooled by some impostor. Therefore those who testified that Jesus had risen could certainly certify that Jesus had been dead, and that they saw Him alive again.

b. There Was a Sufficient Number of Them

The number of witnesses to the resurrection was sufficient for us to believe their account. We are dealing with the twelve disciples of Jesus (minus Judas), other disciples apart from the twelve, and certain women who knew Him well. One appearance was before over five hundred people at one time. The different number of people who saw the risen Christ is sufficient to cause belief.

c. They Exhibited an Honest Character

Next, we consider the honesty of the witnesses. We are told they were not expecting Him to rise, they were all surprised by His appearance and, in the case of Jesus' disciples, they were the first unbelievers of the resurrection story. There is no effort to make the disciples into some type of super believers. Their faults are listed--Peter denying knowing Jesus on the night of His betrayal as well as the other disciples fleeing the scene.

d. They Had No Motivation for Lying

When all the facts are considered, we find no motivation for them to lie about what happened. There was no financial gain or greed that motivated the witnesses to tell the story that Jesus had risen. To the contrary, they suffered mightily from their fellow countrymen by proclaiming the resurrection. Their status in society was certainly not elevated for believing in Jesus--they were considered members of a sect or cult. When everything is considered, lying about Jesus' resurrection caused them no direct benefit but rather only grief.

e. Their Story Was Consistent

The story that Jesus had risen from the dead was consistently told by the ones who had seen Him alive. As we read through the sermons in the book of Acts, we find them always telling the *same* account. Their story was consistently told as long as they lived.

f. They Did Not Embellish the Story with Excessive Details

The account surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection is told in a straightforward manner without excessive details. Many things we would like to know are not told us. The account is sober and restrained--something we would not expect from a made up story. There are no elements in the account that are mythical. For example, if the account of the resurrection were legendary, we would expect some explanation of what occurred the moment Jesus rose from the

dead, yet the New Testament gives us no such explanation of what happened the moment He left the tomb.

Summary

The character of those who saw the resurrected Christ is sufficient for us to believe their testimony. There is nothing that would cause us to be suspicious of their account. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to accept their report that Jesus had risen.

3. A Bodily Resurrection

It is very important to understand the form that the resurrected Jesus took upon Himself, for the New Testament teaches that when we are resurrected, we shall have a form similar to His:

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

Not A Spirit

There are some that believe that Jesus did not have a resurrected body, but was only a spirit. However, the Scripture is very clear on the issue--the resurrection of Jesus was in bodily form. Early in His ministry, Jesus predicted that He would come back from the dead in a body:

'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them (John 2:19-22).

Linked With Non-Resurrected Body

The idea that Jesus was some disembodied spirit was refuted by Him when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His death. The Scripture shows that Christ's resurrection body had links to His non-resurrected body.

a. Similarities

First, we look at the similarities between Christ's earthly body and His resurrected body.

i. People Recognized Him

Jesus was recognizable after His resurrection.

And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord (John 20:20).

It was the same Jesus who had been crucified on the cross.

ii. Jesus Talked With People

Jesus talked to people after His resurrection.

Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to you.' But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?' (Luke 24:36-43).

iii. Invited People to Touch Him

The disciples were frightened with Jesus' appearance, since they assumed they had seen a spirit. Therefore He invited them to touch His body to see if it were real.

Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and feet (Luke 24:39,40).

iv. Showed His Scars

When Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room Thomas was not among them. Thomas told the other disciples that He would not believe in the resurrection until he could see Jesus with his own eyes and touch His wounds. The Gospel of John records what happened after that:

Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in their midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.' And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and My God!' (John 20:26-28).

On this occasion Thomas was challenged by Jesus to see if He were indeed real. The doubter immediately realized that Jesus had come back from the dead in a resurrected body.

v. Jesus Ate Food with His Resurrected Body

He had the capacity, though not the need, to eat.

But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, 'Have you any food here?' So they gave Him a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate it in their presence (Luke 24:41-43).

Simon Peter later told a group of Gentiles.

And we are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. "God raised Him

up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible, not to all the people, but to witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God, that is, to us, who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead (Acts 10:39-41)

He ate food in their presence, showing that His resurrection was indeed bodily.

vi. He Was Able to Breathe Out

Scripture also records that Jesus breathed out.

And when He had said this, He breathed out, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:23).

All of these above facts show that it was the same Jesus who was placed in the tomb that came back from the dead.

b. Differences

Though it was the same Jesus who was placed in the tomb on Good Friday, and rose on Easter Sunday, His resurrection body was also different in some respects.

i. Enter Closed Rooms

He could enter closed rooms without opening the doors.

When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19).

ii. He Was Able To Disappear

He was also able to disappear:

And it came about that when He had reclined at the table with them, He took the bread and blessed it, and breaking it, He began giving it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight (Luke 24:30-31).

iii. Never Needed Rest

As far as we are able to tell, Jesus' resurrected body did not need any rest or food. Every account of Jesus after His resurrection has Him busy with ministry.

To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

iv. Ascended Into Heaven

Jesus' resurrected body was able to ascend into heaven.

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them; and they also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven (Acts 1:9-11).

The Glorified Christ

The most detailed description of the risen and ascended Christ is found in Revelation 1:12-16. Here John records the vision of the glorified Christ. He was like the Son of Man, which links Him to His former earthly appearance, but He also radiated glory from His eyes, feet, voice, and face. This is the way believers will someday see Him.

Summary

From these accounts we can see that Jesus' resurrection was bodily:

1. His own testimony. He made it clear that He was not a disembodied spirit.
2. He did things only a person having a body can do: He walked, He showed them the prints of the crucifixion on His body, He breathed (John 20:22), and ate (Luke 24:41-43).

All of these acts were possible because Jesus had a body. The body He possessed, however, though like His pre-resurrection body was, in some aspects, different. His new body was no longer subject to the laws of nature. He could suddenly appear and disappear. His new body had abilities the previous one either did not have, or did not demonstrate.

c. What It Is Not

Now that we understand what did happen with Jesus' resurrection body, we can refute some inadequate concepts of the resurrection.

i. Not a Soul Released from Prison

The Greeks thought the soul was in prison until the body died, the soul was then released from bondage and went into heaven. This idea is foreign to the biblical concept of resurrection.

ii. Not Reincarnation

Reincarnation means a human comes back in the next life as another human being. Resurrection, however, means eternal life for that individual, not reincarnation.

iii. Not Resuscitation

The biblical idea of resurrection is the raising to a new body that will never die again. Paul wrote to the church at Rome:

knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him (Romans 6:9).

It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44).

In the New Testament there are a number of examples of resuscitations or reanimations. They include: the son of the widow at Nain, Dorcas, Eutychus, Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus. Though they were brought back to life, they all died again. This is not the same as what happened to Jesus. He was raised immortal in a new body - never to die again.

Conclusion

We conclude that Jesus was raised in a genuine body - not a spirit resurrection. The bodies that believers will someday possess will be like His.

B. Circumstantial Testimony

Apart from the direct evidence, there is also circumstantial testimony that Jesus has risen:

1. The Changed Lives of the Disciples

The changed lives of the disciples give indirect testimony to Christ's resurrection. Something changed the disciples of Jesus from cowards to martyrs, from frightened individuals to bold proclaimers of the resurrection. It had to be something more powerful than a delusion or lie. They said their lives were changed because they had seen the risen Christ.

The Order of Events

We find the New Testament chronicling the events that led to the changed lives of Jesus' disciples. When Jesus was betrayed, the Bible says His disciples scattered.

Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:56).

Simon Peter, who had promised to die for Jesus, denied that he ever knew Him.

Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, 'You were also with Jesus of Galilee.' But he denied it before them all saying, 'I do not know what you are saying.' . . . And after a while those who stood by came to him and said to Peter, 'Surely you also are one of them, because your speech betrays you.' Then he began to

curse and swear saying, 'I do not know the Man!' (Matthew 26:69-74).

At Jesus' crucifixion, His disciples were nowhere to be found.

But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things (Luke 23:39).

The picture we get of the disciples at the time of Jesus' trial and death is of a frightened band of individuals who denied their Lord and went into hiding.

Pentecost

Some fifty days later, however, we find these same disciples standing up bravely proclaiming, in the city of Jerusalem, that Christ has risen from the dead (Acts 2). Something changed these cowards into bold preachers of Christ's resurrection.

Arrested For Jesus

Soon thereafter the boldness of the disciples caused the religious leaders to arrest them.

Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day (Acts 4:1-3).

The religious leaders then resorted to threats. They said to one another:

But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.' And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.' So when they had furthered threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them (Acts 4:17-21).

The former cowards were now fearlessly proclaiming the resurrection of Christ. Obviously, something happened to change the lives of these men. The disciples attributed their bravery to seeing Christ risen. If Christ had not risen, then some other explanation for their changed lives must be in order.

2. The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

A second line of indirect evidence that can be offered for the resurrection of Christ is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the Apostle Paul. Saul of Tarsus, the greatest antagonist of the Christian faith, was converted and became the Apostle Paul - the greatest proclaimer of the faith. According to his own testimony, Saul persecuted the believers in Christ.

Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities (Acts 26:9-11).

Saul had believers jailed and consented to their death sentence. In doing all this, he believed he was serving God. However, something happened to Saul to change his way of thinking.

As I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the ground I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' . . . So I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which I will yet reveal to you' (Acts 26:12-16).

Saul obeyed the heavenly vision and became the Apostle Paul - the mighty defender of the faith. Twelve of the books of the New Testament were written by him. The greatest antagonist to the faith became its greatest champion. What was it that changed this man's life? He said it was meeting the risen Christ.

From Unbeliever to Believer

Here we have an example of a man who was not a believer during Jesus' earthly life, who became a believer after Christ had risen. This is in contrast to Jesus' disciples - who believed in Him during His earthly ministry. Saul's testimony is another in the line of circumstantial evidence that Christ rose from the dead.

Eighteenth century author George Lyttleton wrote the following concerning the conversion of Saul of Tarsus;

I thought the conversion and the Apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity as a Divine Revelation (George Lord Lyttleton, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul in a letter to Gilbert West*, London, 1814).

3. The Rise of the Christian Church

The New Testament church came into existence as a result of the resurrection faith of the believers. In every sermon, the substance of the preaching of the apostles was that Christ had risen from the dead. Multitudes soon believed their message (Acts 2:41, Acts 6:7). It is a historical fact that Christianity spread faster than any other religion or philosophy in the ancient

world. By the early part of the fourth century, the Roman Empire became "Christianized." Something had to account for this unprecedented growth- something at least as compelling as a resurrected Christ.

The fact of Christianity's rapid expansion gives a further witness to the truth of its resurrection message. People embraced Christianity because they were convinced that Jesus Christ has conquered death and could offer them eternal life.

4. Change in the Day of Worship

A further line of circumstantial evidence for the resurrection concerns the changing of the day of worship. The Jewish worship was on the Sabbath (from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown). However the early Christians observed Sunday as their day of worship to commemorate Jesus' resurrection. This was no small thing to the first believers who were Jews. The day of worship, the Sabbath, was something that no Jew would dare break or change. Yet Jesus' disciples preferred to worship on the first day of the week- the day He came back from the dead (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1,2; Revelation 1:10). Something monumental had to happen to make them change the day of worship-something like a resurrection. The Letter of Barnabas, an early Christian document, stated:

Therefore we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead.

5. Women Testifying First

According to the New Testament, the first person who saw the resurrected Christ was Mary Magdalene. She thought Jesus was the gardener. Jesus then appeared to another group of women. If one were to make up the story of Christ's resurrection, they certainly would not have Him first appearing to women. In that culture, at the time of Christ, the witness of a woman was not as readily accepted as a man's. Their testimony would not have been admissible as legal proof except in a few specific situations.

If the story had been made up, then Jesus would have first appeared to a man- either one of His disciples or perhaps one of His enemies such as Herod, Pilate, or Caiaphas the High Priest. Yet the New Testament says that Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and then to other women. This is not what one would expect in a made up story. The special privilege of seeing the risen Christ would not have been given to women. Again, this is another indication the story is reliable.

6. The Christians Buried Their Dead

Another indirect line of evidence concerns Christians burying their dead. Unbelievers cremated their dead. However, from the beginning, the Christians buried theirs in underground cemeteries and catacombs. Six hundred miles of catacombs stretch around Rome. In these catacombs about

four million Christians from the first three centuries are buried. Each one of these buried believers testifies to their faith in the resurrection of Jesus and faith in their own ultimate resurrection.

7. Events on the Day of Pentecost

On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit supernaturally fell upon the disciples of Jesus. They were able to speak in languages they had not previously learned causing amazement to those who heard.

And they were amazed and marveled, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? (Acts 2:7,8).

What caused the supernatural ability of Jesus' disciples to speak in languages they had not previously learned? Peter stood up and told them the reason for this miracle- the resurrection of Christ. Three thousand people converted to Christ on that day. The reason for their conversion, according to the Scripture, was the truth of the resurrection.

8. The Miracles in the Book Of Acts

The miracles in the Book of Acts gives further circumstantial testimony to Jesus' resurrection. The fact that the disciples of Jesus were able to perform similar miracles as He performed demonstrated that Jesus' power was still working after His death, resurrection and ascension.

Acts 3

Peter and John performed a miracle - healing a lame man at the temple. They testified that the ability to perform this miracle was granted to them by the risen Christ. They emphasized again that they were eyewitnesses of His resurrection.

But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses (Acts 3:14,15).

Acts 4

When Peter spoke before the council he testified that it was the power of the risen Christ which healed this sick man.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead - by this name this man stands here before you in good health (Acts 4:8-10).

The enemies could not deny this healing.

saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it (Acts 4:16).

Summary

The miracles of the apostles, as recorded in the Book of Acts, were all based on the power of the resurrection. The message of the early church was that Christ had risen from the dead and His disciples were witnesses to that event. This testimony was evidenced by these miracles.

9. The Grave Clothes Were Undisturbed

Another bit of circumstantial evidence is the undisturbed and folded grave clothes. If the body of Jesus had been taken from the tomb by Jesus' disciples, they would not have taken the time to remove and unwind the grave clothes and then fold them again (John 20:6,7). Thus the position of the grave clothes at Jesus' tomb is another circumstantial indication of His resurrection.

10. The Nazareth Decree

In 1930, a Frenchman named Franz Cumont published an inscription of a text from the city of Nazareth. Though the inscription is in Greek, it is probably a translation of a Latin original. The inscription records the decree of the Emperor Claudius, who ruled from A.D. 41 to 54. This decree ordered the death penalty for anyone disturbing tombs. The inscription reads as follows:

It is my pleasure that sepulchers and tombs, which have been erected as solemn memorial of ancestors or children or relatives, shall remain undisturbed in perpetuity. If it be shown that anyone has either destroyed them or otherwise thrown out bodies which have been buried there or removed them with malicious intent to another place, thus committing a crime against those buried there, or removed the headstones or other stones, I command that against such person the same sentence be passed in respect to solemn memorials of men as is laid down in respect of the gods. Much rather one must pay respect to those who are buried. Let no one disturb them on any account. Otherwise it is my will that capital sentence be passed upon such person for the crime of tomb-spoilation.

Obviously something led to this decree. Why would the Roman Emperor give his attention to body snatching in this remote part of the Roman empire? Why did Claudius institute the death penalty for robbing tombs only in this one particular geographic area - the area where Jesus came from? The decree of Claudius seems to support the early Jewish contention that the body of Jesus was stolen - which is an admission that the tomb was empty.

11. Jesus Can Still Change Lives

The final testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that He is still in the business of changing lives. Millions of people throughout history, as well as millions today, personally testify to a changed life. This power to live a new life is based on the belief in the resurrected Christ.

SUMMARY ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

Apart from the direct testimony of the eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection, we also have much circumstantial evidence that it actually occurred. We have listed eleven different lines of circumstantial evidence. They are as follows:

1. The changed lives of the disciples can only be explained by a risen Christ.
2. The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to the Apostle Paul makes no sense without the resurrection.
3. Some power had to have given rise to the Christian church.
4. Women were the first to see the risen Jesus. This is not to be expected in a made up story.
5. The change of the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday had to have been occasioned by some great event.
6. The Christians buried their dead expecting them to eventually rise.
7. The miraculous events on the Day of Pentecost have to have some explanation.
8. The miracles in the Book of Acts testify to the resurrection power of Jesus.
9. The grave clothes were undisturbed in Jesus' tomb.
10. The Nazareth Decree testifies that the first century Jews were concerned about empty tombs.
11. Jesus Christ has changed lives and can still change lives today.

The evidence, both direct and circumstantial testifies to the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead three days after He was crucified on Calvary's cross.

IV. Objections to the Resurrection

If Jesus did not come back from the dead, as the New Testament plainly says He did, then some alternative explanation must be offered to explain what happened. The problem is that other explanations take as much faith to believe as the New Testament's account. These alternative theories leave more questions unanswered than they explain.

How to Falsify

First, we want to make it clear that it is theoretically possible to falsify the resurrection account. It can be done in one of two ways. Either:

- (1) produce the body; or
- (2) have a reasonable theory that explains all the evidence.

Since the body has not been produced, we will examine the major theories that attempt to explain away the New Testament account. These include:

- 1. THE REAL STORY WAS SUPPRESSED.**
- 2. THE STORY ABOUT JESUS BECAME EMBELLISHED.**
- 3. THE BODY WAS STOLEN.**
- 4. JESUS DID NOT ACTUALLY DIE ON THE CROSS.**
- 5. THE WOMEN WENT TO THE WRONG TOMB ON EASTER SUNDAY.**
- 6. THE DISCIPLES MERELY HAD HALLUCINATIONS ABOUT SEEING THE RISEN JESUS.**
- 7. JESUS APPEARED TO BELIEVERS ONLY - THOSE EXPECTING A RESURRECTION**
- 8. REPORTS ABOUT HIS RESURRECTION ARE HOPELESSLY CONTRADICTIONARY.**
- 9. IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT HAPPENED.**

We will now take a look at each of these objections and evaluate them in light of all the evidence.

OBJECTION 1. The Real Story Was Suppressed

There are many people who question the accuracy of the New Testament account of the resurrection. They contend that the true story was never told because the facts had been suppressed by those later in power. Any evidence to the contrary would have been burned or destroyed. The answer to this view is simple - there *were* unbelievers who gave alternative theories to the resurrection, their writings were not suppressed. We have writings from unbelievers who all argue that the body was stolen - they all admit the body was gone the third day.

No Better Explanation

However, they had no better explanation than it was stolen by Jesus' disciples. This popular theory by the unbelievers was certainly not suppressed by the Christians. To the contrary, Matthew records this theory in his gospel.

OBJECTION 2. The Story Became Embellished

One of the most popular explanations has been to say the stories about Jesus have been embellished. The problem with this theory is that there is not enough time for this to happen. Paul's earliest letter, First Thessalonians, refutes that. The fact that Christ was killed is stated in First Thessalonians 2:15 and 4:14. The fact that He was raised is stated in First Thessalonians 4:14. This was written about A.D. 51, some twenty short years after the resurrection.

OBJECTION 3. The Stolen Body Theory

Many argue the body of Jesus was removed from the tomb before Easter Sunday morning. Since the evidence proves the tomb was empty the question is, "What caused it to be empty?" The empty tomb means two possibilities: the body of Jesus was removed by either: (1) human hands or (2) supernatural power.

Human Hands?

If the body of Jesus was removed by human hands, then we have four basic possibilities as to who did it. The suspects include:

1. The Jews
2. The Romans
3. Joseph of Arimathea
4. Jesus' disciples.

Two questions immediately arise about the stolen body theory. First, concerning His enemies and Joseph of Arimathea, "*Would* they have stolen the body?" Next, His disciples, "*Could* they have stolen the body?"

The Jews

The Jews could have had the body of Jesus removed from the tomb, yet they had no motivation for such an act. Some have argued they may have removed the body to keep the site from becoming a place of pilgrimage for Jesus' disciples. Yet this would have caused the sort of problem they were trying to avoid - rumors that Jesus had risen.

The Jews are the ones who asked for the guard because they were afraid His disciples would come and steal the body. If they had taken the body, then certainly they would have produced it fifty days later when Peter, in the same city of Jerusalem, proclaimed that Jesus had risen.

The Romans

A second possible group, that could have removed Jesus' body, was the Romans. Since they were in charge of keeping law and order, it is possible that they could have taken the body from the tomb. The problem with them is also lack of motivation. Why would they do such a thing? They wanted to keep the peace. Stealing the body of an executed religious leader would only add to the rumors about Him. It would stir up greater conflict. Consequently, there is no motivation for them to steal the body. Furthermore, when the Christian faith began to grow, they could have easily stopped it by producing the body. But they did not do this.

Joseph of Arimathea

He obviously had access to Christ's body since He is the one who requested it from Pilate. It is argued that he may have had second thoughts about placing the body of Jesus in his family tomb. Thus he could have removed Jesus' body after the initial burial and placed it elsewhere - possibly in an unmarked grave.

Again, we have no motivation for him to do such a thing - especially since he and Nicodemus took the time and expense to prepare Jesus for burial. If he remove the body, then why didn't he tell anyone? Furthermore, it was not the empty tomb that caused the other disciples to believe in Jesus - it was seeing the risen Christ.

The Disciples

The oldest alternative explanation to the resurrection is that the body of Jesus was stolen by His disciples while the guard was sleeping. Matthew tells us this was the story the bribed Roman guard was to tell, even though they knew it was false:

Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, 'Tell them, His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept. And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure.' So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Matthew 28:11-15).

The idea that the disciples stole the body is inadequate for the following reasons:

1. Could They Get Past the Guards?

To begin with, the disciples would have had to get by the guards at the tomb. This theory has the guard members conveniently asleep. The disciples would have had to move the large stone away

from the tomb without waking any of them. While this is not impossible, it certainly is inconsistent with the facts as we know them.

2. Why Leave Behind Grave Clothes?

If the Roman guard was asleep you need to move fast. The position of the grave clothes shows the impossibility of the theft of the body. Why take the time to remove the grave clothes and leave them behind? It would have been much easier to remove the body, grave clothes and all, especially if time were a factor. The explanation that the Roman guard was asleep does not help solve this problem.

3. How Could the Guard Testify?

Furthermore, the guard story doesn't stand up to cross-examination. What does anyone know when they are asleep? If the guard were sleeping, how did they know the disciples stole the body? How can you determine anything that's going on while you are asleep? Couldn't Jesus, just as easily, have risen from the dead while they were asleep without the guards knowing it?

4. The Disciples Would Have Been Liars

The stolen body theory would make the disciples deliberate liars. These are the same disciples who gave us the New Testament, the same New Testament where they reported Jesus was sinless. They testified He never lied - rather He always told the truth. Yet this theory wants people to believe that His disciples, while spreading the message of the truth-telling Jesus, lied and continued to lie about the most important event in His life! On the one hand, they proclaimed to the world the story of the most perfect man who ever lived, on the other hand, according to the stolen body theory, they pulled off this gigantic deception. Their character testifies against this idea. Scholar J. N. D. Anderson remarked:

The most drastic way of dismissing the evidence would be to say that these stories were mere fabrications, that they were pure lies. But, so far as I know, not a single critic today would take such an attitude. In fact, it would really be an impossible position. Think of the number of witnesses, over 500. Think of the character of the witnesses, men and women who gave the world the highest ethical teaching it has ever known, and who even on the testimony of their enemies lived it out in their lives. Think of the psychological absurdity of picturing a little band of defeated cowards cowering in an upper room one day and a few days later transformed into a company that no persecution could silence - and then attempting to attribute this dramatic change to nothing more convincing than a miserable fabrication they were trying to foist upon the world. That simply wouldn't make any sense (J. N. D. Anderson, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ" in *Christianity Today*, March 29, 1968, pp. 5,6).

Even if they could have gotten past the Roman guard to get to the body, they would have had to live with that lie for the rest of their lives, proclaiming it, suffering for it, and dying for it. They would have been preaching the resurrection in direct contradiction to their own knowledge of the truth.

5. No Motivation

Assuming the disciples could have stolen the body, another set of questions arise, "What motivated them to do it?" By proclaiming Christ had risen, they subjected themselves to beatings and jail. They eventually died for their testimony. If they had stolen the body, they would have been liars as well as thieves. They would not only have lied for the cause, they would have died for their lie. What advantage would there have been for doing this? Their Lord's body received a proper burial. They had nothing to gain and everything to lose by stealing His body. Thus we can find no motivation for the disciples stealing the body. Their leader was buried with loving hands in a tomb of a rich man. Since they were not expecting Him to rise from the dead, this would have been the best end to Jesus' life - all things considered.

6. No Time

There is also the problem of time. Jesus was betrayed on Thursday night and brought to trial Friday morning. His crucifixion took place from approximately 9:00 to 3:00 on Friday. At sundown on Friday the Sabbath began and the disciples, as observant Jews, would rest. The end of the Sabbath was on Saturday night. The first visit to the tomb realistically would have been on Sunday morning. By then Jesus had risen. There was simply no time to steal the body.

7. The Mental State of The Disciples

The mental state of the disciples also needs to be considered. They were now leaderless for the first time in three years. All the disciples left Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane. Later Peter denied Jesus and John was looking after Jesus' mother. Being afraid and leaderless, did they suddenly become brave? After the surprise betrayal and crucifixion, is it really possible to think they concocted a plan late Friday afternoon to have the body removed by Sunday morning?

8. The Transformed Lives of The Disciples

The mere removal of Jesus' body from the tomb could not have transformed their sadness into gladness. In less than thirty-six hours, they went from the depths of despair to the heights of joy. They had lost hope when Christ died, but they immediately went from hopelessness to certainty, from cowards to eventual martyrs. Something gave them the power to sustain their preaching during persecution and martyrdom. A stolen body would not have changed their lives in this manner.

9. Liars Are Usually Caught

There is another important point - liars are usually caught in their lies. This is especially true when a number of different people are lying. Cover-ups have a way of becoming public, yet none of the disciples ever denied the resurrection. If Jesus had not risen, one would have expected the eventual confession of at least some of them. But they all went to their deaths proclaiming Christ had risen. Why?

10. Why Weren't the Disciples Prosecuted?

According to Roman law, the body of a condemned criminal belonged to the state. That is why Joseph of Arimathea had to ask for Jesus' body. To steal a body was a serious offense and it is odd that neither the Romans nor Jews did anything to substantiate the charges if the body had been stolen. The disciples were never prosecuted for this alleged crime. Why?

11. Jesus Also A Liar

If Jesus did not rise, that would make Him a liar because He predicted His resurrection. As we have seen, lying is totally contrary to everything we know about His character.

12. Why No Veneration of His Burial Place?

The Jews venerated the graves of their religious leaders. If Christ were not buried in Joseph's tomb, then He must have been buried elsewhere, yet there is no trace of any burial place in Jerusalem for the body of Jesus. No tradition exists anywhere that Jesus remained buried.

13. Why Did They Die?

Finally, there is the ultimate question, "Why did they die?" If they had stolen the body, they would have died for a lie knowing it was a lie. The disciples who would have "died for a lie" included Peter (crucified); Andrew (crucified); James, son of Alphaeus (crucified); Philip (crucified); Simon (crucified); Thaddaeus (killed with arrows); Thomas (died by a spear thrust); Bartholomew (crucified); and James, the son of Zebedee (killed with the sword). Jesus' disciples were transformed from cowards to martyrs. Why?

It is one thing to lie; it is quite another thing to die for a lie if you know that it is a lie. The disciples sealed their testimony in their own blood. To save their own life they would only have had to confess to lying, yet they never recanted their testimony.

Died Separately

Furthermore, they died separately. It is one thing to die as a member of a group - strength could be gained from each other as you are awaiting death. However, each of the disciples died separately, apart from one another, apart from any type of moral support. Again, we ask the question, "Why?"

Theory Inadequate

These different factors make the popular stolen body theory inadequate at best. The disciples were no longer capable of raiding the tomb and the other possible culprits had no motivation for stealing Jesus' body.

OBJECTION 4. Jesus Did Not Die On The Cross

A favorite objection is that Jesus did not die on the cross, but rather He fainted from exhaustion. When He appeared to His disciples, it was not as the resurrected Lord but rather as one who had been resuscitated. Therefore, what we have is a resuscitation, not a resurrection. Like the other objections to the resurrection, there are many problems with this theory.

1. The Romans Did Their Job Well

Crucifixion was common in Jesus' time and the Roman soldiers had become experts at it. They had reduced it to a science with a set of rules to be followed. There is no possible way Jesus could have survived the crucifixion, scourging, and lance thrust.

Since the governor had personally condemned Jesus to death, it is highly unlikely the soldiers would make a mistake and not finish the job. Furthermore, we have Pilate cross-examining the centurion to make certain that Jesus had died:

And when evening had already come, because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea came, a prominent member of the Council, who himself was waiting for the kingdom of God; and he gathered up courage and went in before Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. And Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead. And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph (Mark 15:42-45).

2. The Breaking of Jesus' Legs Was Not Necessary

Crucifixion was a slow, painful way to die, with the person usually dying of asphyxiation. The victim had to push his body up in order to breathe. Therefore, breaking of the legs would hasten the death of victim. The legs of the two robbers that were crucified next to Jesus were broken because the Passover was drawing near. Passover began at sunset, and according to Jewish law, bodies could not be left on the cross on that Holy Day. Jesus' legs were not broken because He was obviously dead. In addition, Pilate would not have given permission for Joseph to take Jesus' body for burial if He were not already dead.

3. Blood and Water Came Out From His Side

We are told that at Jesus' death, blood and water came out from His side when it was pierced with a spear.

but one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out blood and water (John 19:34).

The purpose of the spear thrust was to ensure that Jesus was dead. This is eyewitness detail - which shows that death did indeed occur. The blood and water coming out is an outward sign that someone has died.

4. How Did Jesus Get Out of the Tomb?

Another question that needs to be addressed is, "How did Jesus get out of the tomb in the first place?" He had been wrapped in grave clothes and the spices would have hardened around Him in a few hours. This would make His escape difficult, if not impossible - assuming He was still alive. There was also a large stone rolled in front of the tomb that is virtually impossible to move from the inside. In addition, the guards had to have been conveniently asleep for Jesus to get by them.

5. Jesus Perpetrating A Deliberate Hoax

If this theory is correct, then Jesus would have been guilty of perpetrating a deliberate hoax by passing Himself off as one who had risen from the dead. He did not tell His disciples that He narrowly escaped death, He told them He had risen. This would make Jesus a liar - contrary to everything we know about Him and His character.

6. Would This Convince the Disciples?

If Jesus had survived His crucifixion, He would have been in an extremely weak condition. It is not possible to believe that a man who was half-dead, crawling around weak and needing immediate medical treatment, could have given His disciples the impression that He had just conquered death. This type of appearance of Jesus would not have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, and caused them to worship Him as risen from the dead.

7. When Did He Die?

If it were a mere resuscitation we are faced with the question of when did He die? Where, if anywhere, was He buried? Why wasn't His other tomb venerated?

Summary

The evidence is clear - Jesus died on Calvary's cross. Therefore, any theory that attempts to explain away the resurrection must take this fact into account.

OBJECTION 5. The Women Went To The Wrong Tomb

Kirsopp Lake, the great textual scholar, came up with this ridiculous theory. Simply stated: the women were not sure where Jesus was buried and hence they went in the semi-darkness to an empty tomb, thinking it was the tomb where Jesus was actually buried. When they found the tomb empty they assumed He had risen.

Supposedly the young man they saw that dark morning confirmed they were at the wrong tomb.

Mark 16:6 says, "Do not be alarmed, you are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him."

Professor Lake omits the words "he has risen" from the text. Therefore the young man is saying to the women, "He is not here, He is over there. Come see where they have placed Him."

Let's consider the problems with this theory:

1. The Body Was Still In Tomb

There are so many problems with this theory - not the least of which is that the body would still have been in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. When Peter preached the resurrection on the Day of Pentecost, it would have been a simple thing to go to the correct tomb and produce the body.

2. Too Dark for the Gardener

In addition, if it were too dark for the women to find the right tomb, it would have been too dark for a gardener or caretaker to be working.

3. No Reason to Omit the Words

Furthermore, to argue for this theory, you have to omit from the text the words, "He has risen." There is no justification for this omission for *every* manuscript has these crucial words.

4. Empty Tomb Did Not Cause Belief

Finally, it was not the empty tomb that convinced the disciples that Jesus had risen, it was the fact they saw Him after His death. No one really takes this theory seriously.

OBJECTION 6. The Disciples Experienced Hallucinations

Another objection to the resurrection is the contention that His disciples experienced hallucinations. This does not make them liars as much as fools. The disciples only *thought* they saw Jesus, for He had not really risen. Hallucinations often occur when someone wishes for something so much. This theory holds the disciples saw exactly what they wanted to see.

We respond to this as follows:

1. The Body Still In Tomb

The hallucination theory does not explain how the tomb became empty, or why the authorities failed to produce a body. Since they did not produce a body, it leaves open the question what happened to Jesus. The authorities could have produced the body, ending any testimony that Jesus had risen. The hallucination theory does not explain the missing body.

2. They Are Not Collective

Furthermore, hallucinations are not collective, they are experienced by individuals. Five hundred people at one time do not have the same hallucination!

3. Do Not Just Come and Go

Hallucinations tend to increase in intensity and occur on a regular basis over a long period. They become worse not better. According to Scripture, it was after forty days that the appearances of Jesus stopped and He did not appear again. This is inconsistent with the nature of hallucinations.

4. Who Gave Them Power To Work Miracles?

If the disciples were only hallucinating about seeing the risen Christ, then how were they able to perform miracles? Who gave the disciples the power to heal the sick and raise the dead?

5. Who Appeared To Paul

Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul, was converted as an unbeliever. Are we to assume that he had the same hallucination?

6. They Did Not Expect Jesus To Rise

According to the New Testament, the disciples did not expect Jesus to rise because they had not expected Him to die. When Jesus appeared to them it was unexpected, they were not ready for it. The disciples did not convince themselves that Jesus was alive, it was Jesus Himself who convinced them. This was the exact opposite of what they were expecting.

Not Who They Thought

For example, Mary Magdalene did not see a gardener near the empty tomb and think it was Jesus, she saw Jesus and thought it was a gardener. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus did not talk with a stranger and then assume they were conversing with Jesus. They talked with Jesus and thought they were conversing with a stranger. Finally, in the upper room, the disciples of Jesus did not see a ghost and believe it was Jesus, they saw Jesus and thought they had seen a ghost.

7. Only Certain Types of People Suffer Hallucinations

Usually it is highly imaginative people who suffer hallucinations. The appearances of Jesus were to a diverse group of people of different psychological makeup. This included: fishermen, a tax collector, and a Rabbi.

8. Different Times and Places

The appearances of Christ occurred at different times and places: early in the morning, late afternoon, in the evening, at the garden tomb, in a crowded room, at the Sea of Galilee, on top of a mountain, and on the Emmaus road. This is not consistent with hallucinations.

Summary

Again, we have a theory that just does not fit all the facts. Jesus' disciples saw more than mere hallucinations.

OBJECTION 7. Jesus Appeared Only TO BELIEVERS

One of the objections is that Jesus appeared only to believers - people who already had a desire to believe the marvelous stories about Him. Again, the facts say otherwise.

1. Disciples First Unbelievers

We are told that the first unbelievers of the resurrection story were none other than the disciples themselves.

And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them (Luke 24:11).

2. Doubting Thomas

Thomas did not believe - even when the other disciples told him they had seen the risen Christ.

The other disciples therefore were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe" (John 20:25).

3. Others Doubted

We are even told that when Jesus met His disciples in Galilee, there were some who doubted.

And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful (Matthew 28:17).

4. Paul

Paul was not a believer when the resurrected Christ appeared to Him. He had to be convinced from his position of unbelief.

OBJECTION 8. Reports Contradictory

Often it is charged that the accounts of the resurrection, as contained in the four gospels, are so contradictory that they cannot be reconciled. However, a reasonable reconciliation of the resurrection accounts is as follows:

1. After the resurrection, but before dawn on Easter Sunday, an earthquake occurred, an angel rolled away the stone from the entrance to the tomb and then sat upon it (Matthew 28:2-4).
2. As Sunday morning was beginning to dawn, three women approached the tomb (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome). Their intent was to anoint the body of Jesus with perfumed oil. The oil was to be brought by a second group of women who set out later to the tomb (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-4; John 20:1). They were amazed to find the stone rolled away when they arrived.

3. At least one of the women entered into the tomb and announced that the body of Jesus was not there. This is an inference from John 20:2.
4. Mary Magdalene immediately returned to inform Peter and John that someone had removed Jesus' body (John 20:2).
5. Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, along with Salome saw an angel inside the tomb. The angel had the appearance of a young man. The angel announced that Jesus was risen and that they should go tell Jesus' disciples that He would meet them in the Galilee (Matthew 28:5-7; Mark 16:5-7).
6. These two women returned to the city without greeting anyone along the way. They were left speechless by the events which transpired (Matthew 28:8; Mark 16:8).
7. Another group of women from the Galilee, along with Joanna (see Luke 8:3), arrived at the tomb carrying perfumed oil to anoint the body of Jesus. They met the angel, along with another angel (Luke 24:4,23). They then returned to report the angel's message of the resurrection to the eleven as well as to other disciples that had gathered together (Matthew 26:56; Luke 24:1-9; 22:23).
8. Having been informed by Mary Magdalene that the body was gone, Peter and John (and possibly others Luke 24:24) ran to the tomb without encountering Mary and Salome. They saw the grave clothes and then went back home (John 20:3-10; Luke 24:12). The grave clothes caused John to believe that something had happened.
9. Mary Magdalene followed Peter and John to the tomb. She saw two angels inside, and then met Jesus after supposing Him to be the gardener (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-17).
10. Mary Magdalene then returned to inform the disciples that Jesus had risen (Mark 16:10,11; John 20:18).
11. Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, along with Salome meet Jesus on their way back from the tomb. Jesus commands them to tell His disciples that He will meet them in Galilee.
12. The disciples, who had reports of the empty tomb and resurrection from three sources--Mary Magdalene, Joanna and the women from Galilee, and Mary and Salome, still refused to believe these witnesses (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:11).
13. During that same afternoon, Jesus appeared to two disciples on the way to Emmaus. They returned to Jerusalem to report the appearance to the eleven and the other disciples (Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35).
14. Jesus appeared to Peter sometime before these two disciples returned to speak to the eleven.
15. That evening Jesus appeared to ten disciples - Judas was dead and Thomas was absent (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:33; 36-43; John 20:19-23; 1 Corinthians 15:5).
16. Eight days later, Jesus appeared to the eleven with Thomas being present (John 20:26-29).

17. Sometime later, seven disciples encountered Jesus on the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-22).
18. Still later, the eleven met Jesus on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18).
19. Jesus appeared to more than five hundred people at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6).
20. Jesus appeared to James (1 Corinthians 15:7).
21. Before His ascension, He appeared to the eleven near Bethany (Mark 16:9-20; Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:6-11; 1 Corinthians 15:7).
22. Finally, Jesus appeared to the Apostle Paul on the Damascus road (Acts 9, 22, 26).

This is a reasonable scenario of the events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus. The fact that we are not exactly certain of their order only goes to prove there was no collusion between the various authors. If the story would have been made up, the different writers would have made certain that their stories matched detail for detail. However, when four different people tell any story, they will all give the same basic account, but there will always be slight differences in the details. The differences only point to the independence of each author.

OBJECTION 9. We Will Never Know and It Does Not Matter

Finally, there is the argument that we will never know what happened to the body of Jesus. It is a mystery that does not have an explanation. Furthermore, it does not really matter what happened.

This argument ignores the facts. It does matter what happened and we can know, *if* we are willing to look at the evidence.

CONCLUSION

In the last two thousand years many theories have been presented that attempted to give an alternative explanation to the one given in Scripture – Christ rose from the dead. As we have seen, none of them are adequate, for they do not fully explain all the different lines of evidence.

The theory that best fits all the facts is that Jesus Christ was alive three days after His death and that He is Lord of all!

V. The Significance of the Resurrection

If we concur that the resurrection did take place, then so what? What does it mean?

A. It Validates Jesus' Claims

First, the resurrection demonstrates that Jesus is the One whom He claimed to be. Paul wrote to the Romans:

And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4).

The resurrection validates Jesus' claims to be a prophet (Matthew 26:8), Lord, and Messiah (Acts 2:36). Everything He claimed to be has been validated by the resurrection.

B. Demonstrates The Truth Of The Christian Faith

The resurrection also proves the truth of the Christian faith. At the beginning of this course we looked at the various options that humans have about believing if God or gods existed. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead settles the matter as to which of these beliefs is true. It is the Christian faith! Therefore, there is only one God who exists, and only one way to reach the one God, through Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates this to be true.

C. Gives Purpose For Life

Therefore, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, gives humanity the answers to the three basic questions about life, "Who am I? Why am I alive? What will happen to me when I die?"

Identity

The resurrection of Jesus solves our identity problem. We, as humans, need no longer wonder who we are. We now realize that we are created in the image of God. This means we have the ability to think, love and communicate. We have the chance to know the one true God because He has given us these abilities. We now know that human beings are special.

Purpose

Along with identity comes a genuine purpose for living. Instead of living life without any real purpose, we can now know the reason we have been created-to love God and enjoy Him forever. Jesus Christ, and His resurrection from the dead, has provided the answer as to what our purpose is here upon the earth. We not only know who we are, we know *why* we are here.

Destiny

Finally, the truth of the resurrection of Jesus provides us with an answer about our future destiny. We now know that this life is not all there is. We are beings made for eternity, and belief in Jesus allows us to spend eternity in the presence of God. Thus, the grave has no ultimate terror for us because we know there is a better existence beyond this life. Belief in Jesus gives us a destiny to which we can look forward.

D. Provides Everlasting Life For The Believer

The resurrection of Jesus is the factual basis for everlasting life for those who believe in Him. If a person believes in Jesus Christ, then one of the provisions is eternal life. Jesus said,

Because I live, you will live also (John 14:19).

This everlasting life is based upon His resurrection. Jesus said:

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live (John 11:25).

He Is the First of Many

Christ's resurrection is the first in a long line of resurrections of those who believe upon Him.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

His resurrection also serves as a prototype of the resurrection of believers. Twice Christ is referred to as the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). This means that He was the first to have an eternal resurrected body. Our resurrection bodies, like His, will be different from our earthly bodies. Paul says our resurrection bodies will be related to our former ones (1 Corinthians 15:35-41).

In eternity we will be like Him:

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2).

E. Comfort

The realization that Christ has risen provides comfort to the believer. After writing to the church at Thessalonica on the matter of the resurrection of Christ and the eventual resurrection of the believer, the Apostle Paul exhorted the church to "comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The knowledge that this life is not all that there is brings comfort to the believer.

Because of this, we do not fear death in the same way as unbelievers do. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

F. Hope

Because Christ has risen from the dead and granted eternal life to those who put their trust in Him, there is hope for the future.

One of the simplest prayers and earliest creeds of the church was the Aramaic word *Maranatha* "our Lord come" (1 Corinthians 16:22). The hope of the church is the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

We All Need Hope

It has been said that a human being can live eight minutes without air, three days without water, and about thirty days without food, but a person cannot live one second without hope. We all need to hope for something better than what this life offers. The resurrection of Christ provides the basis for that hope.

G. A Satisfying Life

Another benefit of the resurrection is that it provides the believer with the basis to live a satisfying life. Paul wrote that believers could now experience:

what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:19,20).

Abundant life is available right now because Christ has risen. The power of the resurrected Christ is experienced in the life of the believer.

More Than A Simple Historical Event

Therefore, the resurrection of Christ is more than a historical event.

1. It validates Jesus' claims.
2. The resurrection proves the truth of the Christian faith.
3. It gives humanity a purpose for living.
4. It provides the basis for eternal life.
5. It gives the believer comfort.
6. The resurrection offers a genuine hope for the future.
7. All these things result in a satisfying life right now.

The Evidence Is Loud and Clear

The evidence testifies that Jesus Christ has risen! The only rational explanation for these historical facts is that God raised Jesus in bodily form, forever triumphant over sin and death. Lord Darling, the former chief law officer in England has said it well.

We as Christians, are asked to take a very great deal on trust; the teachings, for example, and the miracles of Jesus. If we had to take all on trust, I, for one, should be skeptical. The crux of the problem of whether Jesus was, or was not, what he proclaimed himself to be, must surely depend upon the truth or otherwise of the resurrection. On that greatest point we are not merely asked to have faith. In its favour as a living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world can fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true (Lord Darling cited by Michael Green, *The Day Death Died*, Intervarsity Press, 1982, p. 15).

As we examine the totality of the evidence we render the following verdict:

Jesus Christ Is Risen Indeed!

Since these three lines of evidence, miracles, fulfilled prophecy and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, demonstrate the truthfulness of the Christian faith we now move to what all this means with respect to the inspiration and trustworthiness of Scripture.

Jesus' View of the Old Testament

Now that we have seen that the evidence is sufficient for believing that Jesus is the One whom He claimed to be, we now come to the question of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. This chapter will deal with the Old Testament. Did the stories recorded in the Old Testament actually occur? In what sense does it speak authoritative to us?

What Does Jesus Say?

To find the answer we examine the view of Jesus Christ, since He has already demonstrated that He speaks with ultimate authority. Paul wrote the following to the church at Rome about Christ:

who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:4).

Therefore, we go to Jesus to find the answers to the question about the Old Testament's reliability. For the believer, Christ's view of the Old Testament should be our view.

I. Total Trust

In examining the four gospels we have a great amount of information to work with concerning Jesus' view of the Old Testament. His view can be simply stated in two words, "total trust." Jesus accepted the Old Testament Scriptures as being divinely inspired - He never cast doubt on any of the accounts. Jesus assumed the people were actual people and the events literally occurred. We never find Him giving the slightest hint of anything but the complete acceptance of the Old Testament as the Word of God.

II. The People Were Actual People

The first thing we find Jesus confirming about the Old Testament is that the people mentioned in its pages truly did exist. They were not mythical characters.

A. Abraham

Jesus confirmed the existence of Abraham. He said:

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad (John 8:56).

B. Isaac and Jacob

The patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob, were real people according to Jesus.

And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with

Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 8:11).

C. The Queen Of Sheba

The Queen of Sheba actually came to visit Solomon.

The Queen of the South shall rise up against this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:42).

D. Solomon

Solomon himself, the great king, was a historical person.

yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these (Matthew 6:29).

E. Elijah

Elijah was a genuine prophet. When asked about Elijah returning to this earth, Jesus clearly said that he was returning.

And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things" (Matthew 17:11).

F. Elisha

The story about Elisha the prophet and Naaman the leper was also confirmed by Jesus.

And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:27).

G. Zechariah

Zechariah the prophet was also acknowledged by Jesus.

from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation (Luke 11:51).

H. Sodom and Gomorrah

Jesus believed that Sodom and Gomorrah were actual cities that were judged by God.

Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city (Matthew 10:15).

I. Tyre and Sidon

The account of Tyre and Sidon, the cities that were judged in the Old Testament, was confirmed by Jesus.

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. "Nevertheless I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than for you (Matthew 11:21,22).

III. The Stories Were Factual

As we look at the way Jesus treated the Old Testament, we discover that He assumed the various stories to be factual.

A. Moses Given Circumcision

Jesus stated that it was God who gave the people the rite of circumcision through Moses.

On this account Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man (John 7:22).

B. The Manna In The Wilderness

The provision of the manna, given to the children of Israel while they were in the wilderness, was confirmed by the Lord Jesus.

Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat' (John 6:31).

C. David Eating the Bread of Presentation

The story of David and his men eating the bread of presentation was acknowledged by Jesus.

But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?" (Matthew 12:3,4).

D. David The Writer Of Certain Psalms

Jesus taught that David was the writer of certain of the Psalms.

He said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying" (Matthew 22:43).

E. Moses Wrote the Law

According to Jesus, the Law was indeed given by Moses.

And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest, and present the offering that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them (Matthew 8:4).

F. The Suffering of The Prophets

The fact that the prophets suffered was used by Jesus as an example of how His disciples will suffer.

Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:12).

G. Episode With Lot's Wife

The story of Lot's wife, turning into a pillar of salt, was used by Jesus as an example of not looking back.

Remember Lot's wife (Luke 17:32).

IV. Confirmed Some of The Most Controversial Stories

In addition, Jesus confirmed some of the most ridiculed stories in the Old Testament. It is almost as though He went out of His way to put His stamp of approval on them.

A. Adam and Eve

Jesus believed in the Genesis account of creation - which includes the direct creation of Adam and Eve.

And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh (Matthew 19:4-5).

He used Adam and Eve as an example of God's purpose in marriage.

B. Cain and Abel

The account of Cain killing Abel is rejected today in many circles, but Jesus believed it occurred.

from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation (Luke 11:51).

C. The Flood In Noah's Day

Was there really a Flood, in the days of Noah, that God sent to destroy the earth? Jesus assumed there was.

For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24:37-39).

Jesus compared the circumstances surrounding Noah's Flood as similar to those at His Second Coming.

D. Jonah and the Great Sea Creature

Jesus also believed the story of Jonah and the great sea creature literally occurred. In fact, He used it as a sign of His resurrection:

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall stand up against this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here (Matthew 12:39-41).

E. Daniel

Though the authorship of Daniel is often rejected today, Jesus believed that he was a true prophet.

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) (Matthew 24:15).

All of these disputed and ridiculed accounts of the Old Testament were confirmed by Jesus as actually occurring. Furthermore, He used certain of them as illustrating some of the most important events in His own ministry - including His resurrection and Second Coming. Since He demonstrated Himself to be God's Son, His testimony settles the matter--these stories did occur.

V. Spoke Of Prophecy Being Fulfilled

Jesus said that certain predictions, recorded in the Old Testament, were fulfilled in His life and ministry.

And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You' (Matthew 11:10).

And He said to them, "Elijah does first come and restore all things. And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that He should suffer many things and be treated with contempt? "But I say to you, that Elijah has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him" (Mark 9:12,13).

because these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled (Luke 21:22).

Jesus considered the predictions of the Old Testament as being authoritative - He assumed they needed to be fulfilled.

Conclusion

As we examine the attitude of the Lord Jesus toward the Old Testament we find Him viewing it as totally trustworthy. Jesus believed the people actually existed and the stories literally occurred. This includes some of the most controversial accounts such as Adam and Eve, Noah, and Jonah.

He never cast doubt on any of parts of the Old Testament, on the contrary He believed all of it was equally authoritative. Consequently, Christians, to be consistent, should have the same view as Jesus.

Next we will look at Jesus' view concerning His own teachings. How did He view them?

Jesus' View Of His Own Teachings

We have seen that Jesus viewed the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God. Now we consider how He looked at His own teaching.

I. Authoritative

Jesus also considered *His* words as binding. When He spoke, He spoke as *the* voice of authority. Jesus claimed complete truth for all His teaching.

A. His Words Would Never Pass Away

Jesus said that His words would remain eternally:

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away (Matthew 24:35).

B. The "I" Statements of Jesus

Jesus made certain statements where He contrasted His words with those previously written and spoken by others. He put His own words on an entirely new level. We find many such statements - like the following in the Sermon on the Mount.

You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that . . . (Matthew 5:21, 22).

C. Statements Prefaced By "Truly, Truly"

Jesus made solemn statements prefaced by the phrase "truly, truly."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

D. Wise Men Listened To His Words

Jesus compared those who obeyed His words to wise men. He said those who did not pay attention to His teachings were to be compared to foolish men.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. "And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand (Matthew 7:24-26).

E. He Will Be Ashamed Of Those Ashamed Of Him

Jesus words were of such high value that those who were ashamed of them, He Himself would be ashamed of these people.

For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

F. Those Who Understand Jesus' Teaching Bear Fruit

In the parable of the sower, those who are fruit bearers are the ones who understand Jesus' teaching.

And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty (Matthew 13:23).

G. They Were Blessed To See and Hear Jesus

Jesus told His disciples that their eyes were blessed to see Him and their ears were blessed to hear His words.

But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it (Matthew 13:16,17).

According to Jesus, many prophets, kings, and righteous men had desired to hear the things His own disciples heard. Yet they had not heard them because Jesus did not appear at their time in history.

H. His Words Are True

Jesus considered His words were true.

At that time Jesus answered and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You did hide these things from the wise and intelligent and did reveal them to babes. "Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Your sight. "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him (Matthew 11:25-27).

His true words are revealed to the humble, not the arrogant.

I. All Authority Has Been Given Unto Him

The last thing that Matthew records Jesus commanding His disciples is that they should go and preach *His* message. Jesus claimed that all authority had been given over to Him.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19).

J. Eternal Life Dependent Upon Believing His Words

Jesus also made the monumental statement that eternal life depended upon believing His words.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live (John 5:24,25).

K. His Teaching Had Its Origination From Above

According to Jesus, His teaching originated from heaven.

The Jews therefore were marveling, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" Jesus therefore answered them, and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. "If any one is willing to do His will, they shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself (John 7:15-17).

II. Conclusion

From the biblical evidence we discover that Jesus considered His teaching to be authoritative on whatever subject He dealt with. When He spoke, He expected people to listen and obey - because His words were the words of God. We learn the following about Jesus' view of His own words.

1. His words would never pass away.
2. He made certain authoritative statements where He contrasted His words with those of others.
3. Jesus made solemn statements prefaced by, "Truly, truly."
4. Wise men listened to His words, foolish men did not.
5. Jesus will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of Him.
6. The ones who understand the teachings of Jesus bear fruit.

7. The eyes of Jesus' disciples were blessed to see Him and their ears were blessed to hear His words.
8. Jesus believed His words were true.
9. He claimed that all authority had been given to Him.
10. Finally, He said eternal life depended upon how one responded to His words.

The next section looks at what Christ had to say with respect to the New Testament.

Jesus' View of the New Testament

Thus far we have seen that Jesus taught that the Old Testament was inspired of God, and that His own teachings were absolutely authoritative. We now come to Christ's view with respect to the New Testament. We will discover that He pre-authenticated it ahead of time so that we can be assured that it too, is the Word of God.

Hand-Picked Disciples

Jesus selected and trained certain disciples that would be the authorized teachers of His New Covenant. He chose well the men who would be His disciples and who would pass on His teachings to us - particularly the men whom He chose to record the account of His life.

Old Testament Precedent

There was already the precedent of written Scripture (the Old Testament) that would have been available to the disciples. Since God had given a written account of His words and deeds before the time of Jesus, it makes perfect sense that He would continue with a written account of the One to whom the Old Testament looked forward.

His Words

As we have also seen, since Jesus' words were considered by Him to be absolutely authoritative on whatever issue He spoke, there would have been the need to eventually see them in some permanent form.

Special Promises

Jesus made some special promises to His disciples which deal directly with this issue of the inspiration and authority of the New Testament. John records Jesus saying:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you (John 14:26).

Jesus promised that after He left this world, the Holy Spirit would come in His place and teach His disciples. We note specifically the promise of Jesus with respect to what the Holy Spirit will do. He will teach them *all things* and bring back to their remembrance *all things* that Jesus said and did. What we have is a promise from Jesus, to His disciples, of a supernatural gift of total recall. Everything that Jesus said and did would be brought back to them in a miraculous way. Therefore, we can be assured that the final outcome of their teaching and eventual writing (the New Testament) would be correct in all that it said.

Bear Witness of Jesus

The Bible also says that the Holy Spirit and the disciples of Jesus, will bear witness of the Lord.

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning (John 15:26,27).

Those who have been with Jesus from the beginning will bear witness of Him.

All Truth

There is another promise from Jesus that was given to His disciples.

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come (John 16:13).

This has to do with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It will be into "all truth" that He will "guide" Jesus' disciples.

What He Promised

When we consider these verses, we have the following promises from Jesus:

1. Jesus is going to leave His disciples.
2. Yet, He will not leave them without a Teacher or Helper. He will give them the Holy Spirit.
3. The Holy Spirit will be sent by God the Father to remind them of *all things* that Jesus both said and did.
4. This contains a promise of total recall of all the words and deeds of Jesus which they personally experienced.
5. Both the Holy Spirit, and the disciples, will testify about Jesus.
6. These specific disciples will testify about Jesus because they had been with Him from the beginning of His ministry.
7. In addition, the Holy Spirit will guide these disciples into "all truth" when they preach the message about Jesus.
8. This will continue when their preaching and teaching is recorded in a more permanent form (the New Testament).

In a sense, Jesus authenticated the New Testament ahead of time by the various promises that He gave His disciples. Therefore, we can have confidence in what the New Testament says. Our confidence is based upon the promises of Jesus.

We now move to our last chapter - a summary of the things we have studied so far in this course.

The Case For Christianity

Summary and Conclusion

We began our study by assuming nothing about the truth of the Christian faith - rather we built our argument from only the facts that could be demonstrated. Our examination of the case for Christianity has now led us to the following conclusions:

I. The New Testament Is Reliable

The first thing we discovered is that the New Testament has come down to us in a reliable manner in both its text and history. When we apply the same tests to the New Testament as we would to any other document, we find it to be trustworthy. The text has been transmitted in an accurate way so that we can have confidence that the message has not been changed.

We also found the events recorded in the New Testament match up to known historical events. According to the "ancient documents rule," the New Testament should be accepted as true until some evidence is brought to the contrary.

II. Jesus Claimed He Is The Only Way To Get To The One True God - Furthermore He Is God

We then looked at the New Testament to discover its message. We found that it claimed that there is only one God and only one way to approach the one God - through the person of Jesus Christ. It is the unanimous testimony of the New Testament that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We find this from His own teaching, and the teachings of His disciples. Their claim is that salvation comes no other way.

Moreover, Jesus is able to make these claims because He is God in human flesh, the Second Person of the Trinity. Therefore, Jesus was Almighty God, who became a man, to show us, among other things, what God is like and what He expected from us.

III. The Claims of Christ Considered

Because the claims of the New Testament have been recorded in a document that is historically reliable, they must be dealt with. There are three possible ways in which we could understand them.

1. He Never Made the Claims--Legend

This view holds that the claims of the New Testament did not come from Jesus but rather from His disciples who exaggerated the things He said and did. We found many problems with this view - not the least of which is there is not enough time for this to happen.

2. He Made the Claims and They Were Not True

Since it is clear that He made the claims recorded in the New Testament, they must be either true or false. If His claims were false, then He either knew them to be false or He did not know them to be false.

A. Liar

This view holds that Jesus knew His claims were false, but He made them anyway. As we observed, this is totally contrary to everything we know about His character. There is no evidence whatsoever that Jesus lied about anything.

B. Lunatic

If Jesus really believed Himself to be the Son of God, and He was not whom He believed Himself to be, then He would have been a lunatic. Again, we find this is totally contrary to everything we know about His character and teachings. There is nothing in Jesus' behavior that remotely suggests that He was deluded.

3. He Made The Claims And They Were True - Lord

The only possibility that makes sense is that Jesus is Lord. Yet if this is the case, then there needs to be some evidence to substantiate this claim.

IV. The Evidence For His Claims

The New Testament not only makes claims about Jesus, it provides evidence to substantiate these claims. Three different lines of proof are offered by the New Testament.

1. Miracles

The miracles of Jesus provide the first line of evidence. We saw that they were an essential part of His ministry. There was a sufficient number of miracles to cause us to believe that they occurred. Furthermore, the miracles of Jesus were never denied by His contemporaries. The evidence is clear that Jesus did indeed perform miracles.

2. Fulfilled Prophecies

The prophecies fulfilled in the life of Jesus provide further convincing evidence that the Christian faith is true. There were prophecies fulfilled by Jesus Himself when He came to earth, as well as prophecies He gave that have been fulfilled. These were supernaturally fulfilled

without any human manipulation. The only rational way to explain these prophecies is that there is an all-knowing God who has told us what will happen in the future.

3. Resurrection from the Dead

The final line of evidence is Christ's resurrection from the dead. Three days after His death on Calvary's cross, the New Testament says that Jesus was alive again. The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is overwhelming for all of those who are willing to take the time and consider it.

V. The Bible Is God's Word- Jesus Said So

We can now make some conclusions with respect to the Bible. Because Jesus demonstrated Himself to be the Son of God, the way, the truth, and the life, and the only hope of humanity for salvation, we go to Him to discover exactly what kind of book the Bible is.

1. Jesus' View of The Old Testament

Jesus believed the entire Old Testament was God's Word. He confirmed some of the most controversial stories such as Adam and Eve, Noah, and Jonah. He totally trusted everything that it said. Therefore we also should trust the Old Testament as being the Word of God since He trusted it as being authoritative and true.

2. Jesus' View of His Own Teachings

Jesus' own teachings show that He believed that He was the Son of God--the way, the truth, and the life. He claimed absolute authority on any subject in which He spoke about. When He spoke, He expected people to listen and obey.

3. Jesus' View of The New Testament

Finally, as we look at Jesus' view of the New Testament, we find that He pre-authenticated it ahead of time. Jesus promised His disciples they would be guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit and that all things which He said would supernaturally be brought back to their remembrance. This includes everything His disciples would teach and later write. This gives the New Testament a pre-approval before it was written.

Conclusion

The evidence is clear and convincing. The Christian faith is not a blind faith but rather an intelligent faith based upon the facts of history. The truth of Jesus' claims can be proven beyond a reasonable doubt or to a moral certainty to all those who are willing to honestly consider the evidence.

A Final Issue: Have You Trusted Him?

As we have seen, God has given us sufficient evidence to believe. But there is more. Australian Attorney/theologian Ross Clifford states the matter well.

The fact that the Creator in his grace has preserved such an abundance of evidence shows that he wants no-one to avoid the issue of who Jesus is. The evidence would impress a court of law, but ultimately it amounts to little unless it results in a commitment to Christ and the changed life the risen Lord through the Holy Spirit produces (Ross Clifford, *The Case For The Empty Tomb*, Albatross Books, Sutherland, New South Wales, Australia, 1991, p. 142).

If you have not made a decision for Jesus Christ there is no better time than right now. If you would like to become a Christian, pray a simple prayer like this:

Lord Jesus, I know that I'm a sinner. Thank you for dying for me. Right this moment, in the best way that I know how, I trust You as my own Savior and Lord. Thank you Lord, for saving me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

If you just prayed this prayer, congratulations! You have decided for Jesus Christ and for eternal life.