

A (Not So) Brief Defense of Christianity

Faith

Everybody has faith. From the meticulous scientist to the most irrational religious fanatic, everyone believes in something, and everyone acts on that belief somehow. The question is not whether we WILL have faith; it is whether or not the things we believe are true. Unfortunately, many people never evaluate the basis for their beliefs. They go with the flow of society, which today is dominated by the idea of *religious pluralism*. Religious pluralism means that we look at one another's beliefs and in effect say, "I'm OK and you're OK." A remark often heard, especially on campus is, "I don't think it really makes much difference what you believe as long as you're sincere."

Truth

Many of us are hesitant or feel it's wrong to make distinctions between people or their ideas. This is because we feel it is arrogant, exclusionary, undemocratic, or socially inappropriate. We want people to like us, so we try not to be disagreeable. Ironically, this very pluralistic environment creates a hesitancy to express personal convictions for fear of offending another. In reality, this creates an atmosphere where all views held are of equal value and are therefore "true." It also may explain why so many people today regard themselves as atheists or agnostics. Viewing so many "religious" options which profess to be THE truth, they become agnostics or atheists, disclaiming the religious idea of "faith" altogether. Some militant atheists propose philosophical and scientific "proofs" to explain away the existence of God, hoping to convince others logically. Other atheists and agnostics have not come to their beliefs

logically, but rather believe what they do simply because they prefer or are more comfortable with it.

The Need for Apologetics

A committed, thinking Christians desire must be to challenge that complacency. If there is such a thing as truth, and if different worldviews do contradict one another, then we need to make sure that the one we choose is the right one and that we have good reasons for believing it to be so. Further, 1 Peter 3:15 tells us that we are to be ready always to give a “defense” (*apologia*), to give answers, reasons for why we believe as we do. This particular outline is designed to provide some of those answers: thus, the title, “A Brief Defense of Christianity.” There are three primary reasons why such apologetical information is important:

1. The religious pluralism rampant in our culture demands it. Many today are spiritually hungry and looking for truth in a culture of “isms” very similar to what we find in the Graeco-Roman world of the New Testament. It was in this kind of cultural environment that Christianity came, flourished, and ultimately dominated Western Civilization for 15 centuries. It has been said that Christianity prevailed because the first Christians “out-thought” and “out-loved” the ancient world. Many contemporary Christians are so enamored of having a personal “experience” with God in the safety of their various religious enclaves they have little time left to defend the faith and convert the pagans. *Mind Games* is designed to help us better connect with the wider world through solid thinking and loving care.

2. In the light of Peter’s admonition above, Christians are to prepare themselves to share their faith with others and help remove the obstacles to faith which hinder some non-Christians from giving serious consideration to Christ and His claims upon their lives. Apologetics can help remove these obstacles and demonstrate the “reasonableness” of Christianity.

3. Apologetics can also serve to strengthen the faith of young Christians as well as provide them with the discernment necessary to identify and counter non-Christian thinking and worldviews. This enhances personal spiritual growth and better equips the Christian for more effective evangelism. Finally, we noted above that EVERYONE has faith—theist, agnostic, and Christian. The real issue is not to have faith, but rather to have a worthy OBJECT for our faith. As you walk out on a frozen pond, which would you prefer, a LITTLE faith in a sheet of ice two-feet thick, or a LOT of faith in 1/4 inch of ice? Faith is important, but the object of our faith is all-important. The material in this outline is designed to help assure you that to stand upon Christ and the world view which He taught is to rest upon an object most worthy of your faith. To demonstrate this, we are going to ask and then answer some basic questions concerning the truthfulness of the Christian faith.

SECTION I: THEISM

What is the most reasonable worldview?

Metaphysical options

We have stated that the most basic philosophical question is not that NOTHING is here, but rather SOMETHING IS HERE, and it demands explanation. I am a part of some kind of reality. I have consciousness. Something is happening and I am part of it. Where did it come from? Did everything come from nothing? Or has the material universe always been here and things just accidentally got started? Or is there something or someone that transcends the material universe and is responsible for bringing it into being, and us with it? All of these questions relate to the philosophical concept of *metaphysics*. Webster defines it thusly: "That division of philosophy which includes ontology, or the science of being, and cosmology, or the science of the fundamental causes and processes in things."

When we seek to answer these basic questions, then, we are thinking “metaphysically,” thinking about the origin and causes of the present reality. And we really have few options, or possible answers to consider:

1. The idea that “something came from nothing.” (Most reject this view, since the very idea defies rationality).

2. The idea that matter is eternal and capable of producing the present reality through blind chance. This second view has spawned two basic worldviews: *Materialism* (or *Naturalism*) and *Pantheism*. Both hold to the idea that nothing exists beyond matter. Materialism is therefore atheistic by definition. Pantheism is similar with the exception that since God does not exist, nature becomes “god” in all its parts.

3. The idea that Someone both transcends and did create the material universe of which we are a part (*Theism*). THERE ARE NO OTHER LOGICAL EXPLANATIONS. Christians of course would embrace this third view, theism, as the most reasonable explanation for what we believe AND for what we find to be true in ourselves and in reality at large. These ideas will be developed more fully in the section on the arguments for the existence of God.

In order to argue for the truth of Christianity, therefore, we must begin with the existence of God. Christianity is a theistic religion. That is, we believe that there is one God who created all things. This is not simply a statement of blind faith. There are sound and rational reasons for preferring this view above the others. We will begin to explore those, but first, let’s briefly evaluate atheism and agnosticism.

Atheism and Agnosticism

Atheism

Ever since the “Enlightenment” in the eighteenth century,

philosophers have argued that ALL of reality is to be observed only in space and time. Any notion of a God who is transcendent, eternal, and not bound by natural laws has been largely rejected as “unscientific” or “unprovable.” Since we cannot “prove” the existence or the non-existence of God, they reason, there is no real benefit or practical value in considering theism as a metaphysical option. An atheist is a person who makes the bold assertion, “There is no God.” It is bold because it claims in an absolute manner what we have just said was not possible: i.e., the existence or non-existence of God cannot be proven. It is also bold because in order to make such an assertion, the atheist would have to be God himself. He would need to possess the qualities and capabilities to travel the entire universe and examine every nook and cranny of the material world before he would even begin to be qualified to come to such a dogmatic conclusion.

The most brilliant, highly-educated, widely-traveled human on earth today, having maximized his/her brain cells at optimum learning levels for a lifetime could not possibly “know” 1/1000th of all that *could* be known; and knowledge is now *doubling* by the years rather than by decades or centuries! Is it possible that God could still exist outside this very limited, personal/knowledge experience of one highly intelligent human being? By faith, the atheist says, “No.” Another curious thing about the atheist is that before he can identify himself as one, he must first *acknowledge* the very idea, or concept, or possibility of God so he can then *deny* His existence! David saw the fallacy of this long ago when he said, “Only the fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God.’” (Psalm 14:1). (Note: For those who desire additional, more formal material on the existence of God, see the Appendix at the end of this outline, where this subject is addressed in greater detail by such philosophers as Anthony Flew, Ludwig Feuerbach, and David Hume). [Editor’s note: Anthony Flew disavowed his atheism in 2005 after grappling with the impossibility of DNA arising from purely naturalistic, random forces.]

Agnosticism

By definition, agnosticism takes the position that “neither the existence nor the nature of God, nor the ultimate origin of the universe is known or knowable” (Webster). Here again are some bold statements. The agnostic says, “You can’t know.” What he really means is, “I can’t know, you can’t know, and nobody can know.” Leith Samuel in his little book, *Impossibility of Agnosticism*, mentions three kinds of agnostics:

1. *Dogmatic*. “I don’t know, you don’t know, and no one can know.” Here is a person who already has his mind made up. He has the same problem as the atheist above he must know everything in order to say it dogmatically.
2. *Indifferent*. “I don’t know, and I don’t care.” God will never reveal Himself to someone who does not care to know.
3. *Dissatisfied*. “I don’t know, but I’d like to know.” Here is a person who demonstrates an openness to truth and is willing to change his position if he has sufficient reason to do so. He is also demonstrating what should be true about agnosticism, that is, for one who is searching for truth, agnosticism should be temporary, a path on the way to a less skeptical view of life.

Theism

Those who have not found atheism and agnosticism philosophically, scientifically, or personally satisfying may, at some time in their lives consider the third alternative, that of theism. They may come to ask our next question:

“Is it reasonable to believe that God exists?”

Theism is a reasonable idea. Theologians have traditionally used several philosophical proofs in arguing for the existence of God. These arguments are not always persuasive, but that

probably says as much about us as it does about the arguments. People most often reject God for reasons other than logic. These arguments, however, do provide insights that, while not PROVING the existence of God, do provide insights that may be used to show EVIDENCE of His existence.

The Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument is quite similar to one that the Bible uses in Psalm 19, Psalm 8, and Romans 1. The existence of the "cosmos," the creation, strongly suggests the existence of a Creator. Central to this argument is the following proposition: If anything now exists, something must be eternal. Otherwise, something not eternal must have emerged from nothing. If something exists right now, it must have come from something else, come from nothing, or always existed. If it came from something else, then that something else must have come from nothing, always existed, or come from something else itself. Ultimately, either something has always existed, or at some point something came into being from nothing.

Someone may argue that it is possible that nothing now exists. That is both absurd and self-defeating, because someone must personally exist in order to make the statement that nothing exists. Therefore it is undeniable that we ourselves exist.

Therefore, if I exist, then something must be eternal. If something is eternal, it is then either an eternal being or an eternal universe. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that the universe is not eternal, but that it had a beginning. In addition, if the non-personal universe is that which is eternal, one must explain the presence of personal creatures within that universe. How does personal come from non-personal? If something is eternal and personal while the universe is finite and non-personal, then there must be an eternal being. If there is an eternal being, that being must by definition have certain characteristics. He must have always existed, and he must be the ultimate cause of all that

we can see. He must possess infinite knowledge, or else he himself would be limited, not eternal. Similarly, he must possess infinite power and an unchanging nature.

We do not have to go very far with these arguments to realize that we are describing the God of the Bible. One of the questions asked most frequently concerning this cosmological argument is, "Where did God come from?" While it is reasonable to ask this question about the universe, since as stated above, the strongest evidence argues for a universe which had a beginning. Asking that same question of God is irrational, since it implies of Him something found only in the finite universe: time. By definition, something eternal must exist outside both time and space. God has no beginning; He IS (Exod. 3:14).

The Teleological Argument

Another philosophical argument for the existence of God is the teleological argument. This comes from the Greek word *telos*, meaning "end" or "goal." The idea behind this argument is that the observable order in the universe demonstrates that it functions according to an intelligent design. The classic expression of this argument is William Paley's analogy of the watchmaker in his book, *Evidences*. If we were walking on a beach and found a watch in the sand, we would not assume that it washed up on the shore having been formed through the natural processes of the sea. We would assume that it had been lost by its owner and that somewhere there was a watchmaker who had designed it and built it with a specific purpose.

Some evolutionists maintain that the argument from design has been invalidated by the theory of natural selection. Richard Dawkins, a scientist at Oxford, even speaks of evolution as "The Blind Watchmaker," saying that it brings order without purpose. However, the theory of evolution faces major obstacles in scientific circles to this day, and it is grossly inadequate in its explanation of the ordered species of

animals in this world. The best explanation for the order and complexity that we see in nature is that the divine Designer created it with a purpose and maintains all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17).

The Moral Argument

The moral argument recognizes humankind's universal and inherent sense of right and wrong (cf. Rom. 2:14,15) and says this comes from more than societal standards. All cultures recognize honesty as a virtue along with wisdom, courage, and justice. These are thought of as absolutes, but they cannot be absolute standards apart from an absolute authority! The changeless character of God is the only true source of universal moral principles; otherwise all morality would be relative to culture preferences (See ["Rights and Wrongs"](#) outline). Each of these arguments follows the same basic pattern. What we see in the creation must have come from a sufficient cause. This is the argument of Romans 1, and it is the argument used by Paul in Acts 14 and 17. God has provided us with a witness to Himself in the creation, and we are called upon to believe in Him on the basis of what we have seen Him do: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

Pantheism

Pantheism offers a self-defeating alternative. Pantheism is the belief that all is god. Pantheists maintain that there are no real distinctions between persons, creatures, or objects; that all is divine. For many years, the only pantheists most of us would have been exposed to were Buddhists. However, with the rise of the New Age movement, which is extremely pantheistic, pantheism has become a very popular worldview in North America. The hope of pantheism is an irrational one. Evil is regarded as an illusion, however real it may seem, and

the cruel actions of others are attributed to their misunderstanding, or non-enlightenment. Shirley MacLaine, an actress who has been one of the most popular spokespersons for the New Age movement, writes, "There is no such thing as evil or good. There is only enlightened awareness or ignorance."

Since all is one and all is divine, there are no real contradictions. There are no black-and-white distinctions between truth and falsity. Instead, reality consists of that which seems contradictory, but really is not. Buddhists are sometimes encouraged to meditate on "the sound of one hand clapping." There can be no sound with just one hand, and that's the point. For the pantheist, reality is irrational. Since there are not distinctions and all is divine according to pantheists, Shirley MacLaine and others believe themselves to be perfectly justified in declaring, "I am God." This "realization" is thought to be the key to unlocking one's true potential, for to realize you are God is to realize that you have no finite limitations. But that is the precise problem with the claim. If God does not have limited knowledge and abilities, why would we have to grow in knowledge if we are God? Why would we even have to come to the conclusion that we are divine? If we are unlimited, why are we so limited that we do not always realize we are unlimited? If New Age pantheism violates reason, as it obviously and admittedly does, then how can it be defended? We are told that the concepts cannot be adequately comprehended apart from one's personal experience of them, but the fact is that reality is logical. To argue that logic does not apply to reality would be self-defeating, because one cannot make the claim without using logic. Reality IS logical, and there are distinctions in our world. I am not you, and you are not me. Common sense tells us that as we converse. The pantheistic option, then, is both illogical and self-defeating. It is tragic that it has become such a popular viewpoint in our day.

The Possibility of God

Some five hundred years ago the rise of modern science initiated a process we could call the "demythologizing of nature," the material world. Superstition and ignorance had ascribed spirit life to forest, brook, and mountain. Things that were not understood scientifically were routinely designated as the hand of supernatural forces at work.

Theistic Skepticism

Slowly, the mysterious, the spiritual dimension was drained away as scholars and scientists provided natural explanations and theories for how and why things worked quite apart from supernatural forces. Man and earth were now no longer at the center of the universe with the sun, the planets, and the stars revolving around this uniquely important globe. Human significance diminished in the vastness of the cosmos, and only time, not God, was needed to explain the totality of the natural order.

Re-emergence of the Spiritual

Ironically, the same science which took God away then, is bringing the possibility of His existence back today. Physics and quantum mechanics have now brought us to the edge of physicality, to the extent that the sub-atomic particle structure is described by some as characterized more as spirit, ghost-like in quality. Neurophysiologists grapple with enigmatic observations which suggest that the mind transcends the brain. Psychology has developed an entirely new branch of study (parapsychology) which postulates that psycho-spiritual forces (ESP, Biofeedback, etc.) beyond the physical realm actually function. Molecular biologists and geneticists, faced with the highly-ordered and complex structures of DNA, ascribed a word implying "intelligence" to the chaining sequences: "the genetic CODE." Astrophysics has settled on the "Big Bang theory," one which seems to contradict the idea that

matter is eternal, but rather that the universe had a definite beginning. Huge as it is, the universe appears to be finite.

The Reasonability of Theism

It certainly seems more reasonable to believe that God exists than to suggest the alternatives explored above. And this brings us to the next important question.

III. If God does exist, how could we know He is there?

Introduction

Herbert Spencer, an agnostic, once pointed out that no bird ever flew out of the heavens and therefore concluded that man cannot know God." What Spencer is saying is that man in his finiteness, like the bird, can only go so far and no farther. There is a ceiling, a veil which separates us from God, and we are helpless to penetrate it from our side and find Him. Tennessee Williams, in his drama, "Sweet Bird of Youth," was making the same point when his character, the "Heckler," comes on stage and says, "I believe that the long silence of God, the absolute speechlessness of Him is a long, long and awful thing that the world is lost because of, and I think that it is yet to be broken to any man." These statements hit on a crucial point of epistemology (how we know). If God does not exist, then knowing can come to us only through one of two avenues: experience (empiricism) or reason (rationalism).

The Possibility of Revelation

What both of these men are saying is simply that if God does exist, man cannot make contact with Him through any effort of his own. But both have forgotten one other very important possibility. If God exists and so desires, would He be able to penetrate the veil from HIS side and make His presence known? Of course He could. The next question would logically be, "Has

He ever done so?" Christians would answer a resounding, "Yes!" God did so in the Person of Jesus Christ. "The Word Who was with God and was God became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory" (John 1:1,14). Theologically, this event is called the Incarnation. If true, humans have an additional source of knowing truthrevelation.

Who Was Jesus?

There have been many great and outstanding men and women of history. But Christian and non-Christian alike would have to agree that Jesus of Nazareth has had the greatest and most far-reaching impact on earth than any person who ever walked the planet. One anonymous writer said,

*All the armies that ever marched,
all the navies that ever sailed,
all the parliaments that have ever sat, put together,
have not affected life on this planet as much as has that
One Solitary Life.*

What do we really know about this Jesus? Some think Him merely a man, the founder of a religion, like Muhammad or Zoroaster. Others believe He lived, but His followers embellished the story and made a god out of him. Or they postulate that He was either a clever "con man" who purposefully engineered His personal circumstances toward Messianic ends, or a paranoid schizophrenic with "delusions of grandeur." Still others don't even believe He was ever an historical person. For them Jesus is a mythological figure. Before we can examine His Person, His Work, and His extraordinary claim to be the Son of God in human flesh, we must first determine if He every actually lived, and if so, what can the source materials tell us about the kind of man He was and about the things He did or said.

Was Jesus a Historical Person?

Introduction

Let us begin by saying that Christianity is rooted in history. Christ's birth was counted in a Roman census, and his death was no doubt recorded in the Roman Archives. What do we know about Him? We are solely dependent upon the accuracy and the validity of the sources handed down to us. But what do we know about Julius Caesar? Charlemagne? George Washington, or any other person of history? We must rely on those sources which have survived and give information concerning their lives.

Extra-Biblical Sources

Ignoring for the moment the reliability of the biblical documents concerning Jesus, we will examine other sources from antiquity which verify that Jesus actually lived in the first century.

Jewish Sources

Josephus (37-95 A.D.). "And there arose about this time Jesus, a wise man . . . for he was a doer of marvelous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure. He led away many Jews, and also many of the Greeks. . . . And when Pilate had condemned him to the cross on his impeachment by the chief men among us, those who had loved him at first did not cease . . . and even now the tribe of Christians, so named after him, has not yet died out."

Rabbinical Writings. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Jewish religious scholars began to codify the legal and theological traditions of Jewry based on the Old Testament. The Mishnah (legal code) and the Gemara (commentaries on the Mishnah) developed in the early A.D. centuries to form The Talmud which was reduced from an oral tradition to writing about 500 A.D. There are a number of statements or allusions to Jesus and Christianity contained within. F. F. Bruce points

out that while most of these references were hostile, they all refer without question to Jesus as a historical person. He says, "According to the earlier Rabbis whose opinions are recorded in these writings, Jesus of Nazareth was a transgressor in Israel, who practiced magic, scorned the words of the wise, led the people astray, and said he had not come to destroy the law but to add to it. He was hanged on Passover Eve for heresy and misleading the people. His disciples, of whom five are named, healed the sick in his name."

Roman Sources

Cornelius Tacitus (55-117 A.D.). (Regarding Nero and the burning of Rome in 64 A.D.): "Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius. . ." (Annals, XV.44).

Seutonius (). In his work, *Life of Nero*, Seutonius also mentions the Christians in conjunction with the Great Fire of Rome: "Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men addicted to a novel and mischievous superstition."

Another possible reference to Christians may be found in his *Life of Claudius*: "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome."

Pliny the Younger (). In 112 A.D. Pliny Secundus, governor of Bithynia in Asia, wrote to Emperor Trajan requesting advice about how to deal with the "Christian" problem: "they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed, but to abstain from all fraud, theft and adultery, never to break their word, or deny a trust when called upon to honor it;

after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”

Archeology/Artifacts

Ossuaries. Hebrew University professor E. L. Sukenik found in 1945 what he believed to be the earliest record of Christianity: two inscriptions scratched on two ossuaries (containers for human bones) found near Jerusalem. One was a prayer to Jesus for help; the other prayed Jesus would raise from the dead the person whose bones were contained therein.

Name of Pontius Pilate. While Josephus and Tacitus both name Pontius Pilate in their writings, artifacts are stronger evidence. In 1971, Pilate's actual name was found in Caesarea Maritima by archeologists. “Found in a step of the theater, it was originally part of a nearby temple. The Latin reads, ‘Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judea, has dedicated to the people of Caesarea a temple in honor of Tiberius.’”

The Cross. For Paul and the other New Testament writers to speak of the cross as a symbol of faith, would be the equivalent of our doing the same thing today with the electric chair. Yet Tertullian (145-220 A.D.) speaks of its early prominence in the Christian community: “In all travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupies us, we mark our forehead with the sign of the cross.”

Conclusion

Without the aid of the biblical documents, we here find a Christianity and a Jesus with which we are familiar, a perspective that moves from “a good and wise man, a doer of wonderful works” to one who “practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel.” From the annals of history, we know that this man, Yeshua, underwent trial and persecution by the

reigning religious and Roman authorities (including the name of the Procurator (Pilate) who pronounced sentence upon him), was executed by crucifixion, and that his teachings became the foundation for a “cult” of religious worshippers called Christians. These sources corroborate, rather than contradict, the Jesus portrayed in the biblical documents. We now turn to the crucial question of how reliable these documents are.

SECTION II: ARE THE BIBLICAL DOCUMENTS RELIABLE?

Introduction

How do we know that the Bible we have today is even close to the original? Haven't copiers down through the centuries inserted and deleted and embellished the documents so that the original message of the Bible has been obscured? These questions are frequently asked to discredit the sources of information from which the Christian faith has come to us.

Three Errors To Avoid

1. Do not assume inspiration or infallibility of the documents, with the intent of attempting to prove the inspiration or infallibility of the documents. Do not say the bible is inspired or infallible simply because it claims to be. This is circular reasoning.
2. When considering the original documents, forget about the present form of your Bible and regard them as the collection of ancient source documents that they are.
3. Do not start with modern “authorities” and then move to the documents to see if the authorities were right. Begin with the documents themselves.

Procedure for Testing a Document's Validity

In his book, *Introduction in Research in English Literary History*, C. Sanders sets forth three tests of reliability employed in general historiography and literary criticism.^[1] These tests are:

Bibliographical (i.e., the textual tradition from the original document to the copies and manuscripts of that document we possess today)

Internal evidence (what the document claims for itself)

External evidence (how the document squares or aligns itself with facts, dates, persons from its own contemporary world).

It might be noteworthy to mention that Sanders is a professor of military history, not a theologian. He uses these three tests of reliability in his own study of historical military events.

We will look now at the bibliographical, or textual evidence for the Bible's reliability.

The Old Testament

For both Old and New Testaments, the crucial question is: "Not having any original copies or scraps of the Bible, can we reconstruct them well enough from the oldest manuscript evidence we *do* have so they give us a true, undistorted view of actual people, places and events?"

The Scribe

The scribe was considered a professional person in antiquity. No printing presses existed, so people were trained to copy documents. The task was usually undertaken by a devout Jew. The Scribes believed they were dealing with the very Word of

God and were therefore extremely careful in copying. They did not just hastily write things down. The earliest complete copy of the Hebrew Old Testament dates from c. 900 A.D.

The Massoretic Text

During the early part of the tenth century (916 A.D.), there was a group of Jews called the Massoretes. These Jews were meticulous in their copying. The texts they had were all in capital letters, and there was no punctuation or paragraphs. The Massoretes would copy Isaiah, for example, and when they were through, they would total up the number of letters. Then they would find the middle letter of the book. If it was not the same, they made a new copy. All of the present copies of the Hebrew text which come from this period are in remarkable agreement. Comparisons of the Massoretic text with earlier Latin and Greek versions have also revealed careful copying and little deviation during the thousand years from 100 B.C. to 900 A.D. But until this century, there was scant material written in Hebrew from antiquity which could be compared to the Masoretic texts of the tenth century A.D.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947, a young Bedouin goat herdsman found some strange clay jars in caves near the valley of the Dead Sea. Inside the jars were some leather scrolls. The discovery of these "Dead Sea Scrolls" at Qumran has been hailed as the outstanding archeological discovery of the twentieth century. The scrolls have revealed that a commune of monastic farmers flourished in the valley from 150 B.C. to 70 A.D. It is believed that when they saw the Romans invade the land they put their cherished leather scrolls in the jars and hid them in the caves on the cliffs northwest of the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea Scrolls include a complete copy of the Book of Isaiah, a fragmented copy of Isaiah, containing much of Isaiah 38-6, and fragments of almost every book in the Old Testament. The majority of the fragments are from Isaiah and the

Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The books of Samuel, in a tattered copy, were also found and also two complete chapters of the book of Habakkuk. In addition, there were a number of nonbiblical scrolls related to the commune found.

These materials are dated around 100 B.C. The significance of the find, and particularly the copy of Isaiah, was recognized by Merrill F. Unger when he said, "This complete document of Isaiah quite understandably created a sensation since it was the first major Biblical manuscript of great antiquity ever to be recovered. Interest in it was especially keen since it antedates by more than a thousand years the oldest Hebrew texts preserved in the Massoretic tradition."[\[2\]](#)

The supreme value of these Qumran documents lies in the ability of biblical scholars to compare them with the Massoretic Hebrew texts of the tenth century A.D. If, upon examination, there were little or no textual changes in those Massoretic texts where comparisons were possible, an assumption could then be made that the Massoretic Scribes had probably been just as faithful in their copying of the other biblical texts which could not be compared with the Qumran material.

What was learned? A comparison of the Qumran manuscript of Isaiah with the Massoretic text revealed them to be extremely close in accuracy to each other: "A comparison of Isaiah 53 shows that only 17 letters differ from the Massoretic text. Ten of these are mere differences in spelling (like our "honor" and the English "honour") and produce no change in the meaning at all. Four more are very minor differences, such as the presence of a conjunction (and) which are stylistic rather than substantive. The other three letters are the Hebrew word for "light." This word was added to the text by someone after "they shall see" in verse 11. Out of 166 words in this chapter, only this one word is really in question, and it does not at all change the meaning of the passage. We are told by

biblical scholars that this is typical of the whole manuscript of Isaiah.”[{3}](#)

The Septuagint

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, also confirms the accuracy of the copyists who ultimately gave us the Massoretic text. The Septuagint is often referred to as the LXX because it was reputedly done by seventy Jewish scholars in Alexandria around 200 B.C. The LXX appears to be a rather literal translation from the Hebrew, and the manuscripts we have are pretty good copies of the original translation.

Conclusion

In his book, *Can I Trust My Bible*, R. Laird Harris concluded, “We can now be sure that copyists worked with great care and accuracy on the Old Testament, even back to 225 B.C. . . . indeed, it would be rash skepticism that would now deny that we have our Old Testament in a form very close to that used by Ezra when he taught the word of the Lord to those who had returned from the Babylonian captivity.”[{4}](#)

The New Testament

The Greek Manuscript Evidence

There are more than 4,000 different ancient Greek manuscripts containing all or portions of the New Testament that have survived to our time. These are written on different materials.

Papyrus and Parchment

During the early Christian era, the writing material most commonly used was *papyrus*. This highly durable reed from the Nile Valley was glued together much like plywood and then allowed to dry in the sun. In the twentieth century many

remains of documents (both biblical and non-biblical) on papyrus have been discovered, especially in the dry, arid lands of North Africa and the Middle East.

Another material used was *parchment*. This was made from the skin of sheep or goats, and was in wide use until the late Middle Ages when paper began to replace it. It was scarce and more expensive; hence, it was used almost exclusively for important documents.

Examples

1. Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus

These are two excellent parchment copies which date from the 4th century (325-450 A.D.). Sinaiticus contains the entire New Testament, and Vaticanus contains most of it.[{5}](#)

2. Older Papyri

Earlier still, fragments and papyrus copies of portions of the New Testament date from 100 to 200 years (180-225 A.D.) before Vaticanus and Sinaiticus. The outstanding ones are the Chester Beatty Papyri (P45, P46, P47) and the Bodmer Papyri II, XIV, XV (P66, P75).

From these five manuscripts alone, we can construct all of Luke, John, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, and portions of Matthew, Mark, Acts, and Revelation. Only the Pastoral Epistles (Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy) and the General Epistles (James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 1, 2, and 3 John) and Philemon are excluded.[{6}](#)

3. Oldest Fragment

Perhaps the earliest piece of Scripture surviving is a fragment of a papyrus codex containing John 18:31-33 and 37. It is called the Rylands Papyrus (P52) and dates from 130 A.D., having been found in Egypt. The Rylands Papyrus has

forced the critics to place the fourth gospel back into the first century, abandoning their earlier assertion that it could not have been written then by the Apostle John. [\[7\]](#)

4. This manuscript evidence creates a bridge of extant papyrus and parchment fragments and copies of the New Testament stretching back to almost the end of the first century.

Versions (Translations)

In addition to the actual Greek manuscripts, there are more than 1,000 copies and fragments of the New Testament in Syria, Coptic, Armenian, Gothic, and Ethiopic, as well as 8,000 copies of the Latin Vulgate, some of which date back almost to Jerome's original translation in 384 400 A.D.

Church Fathers

A further witness to the New Testament text is sourced in the thousands of quotations found throughout the writings of the Church Fathers (the early Christian clergy [100-450 A.D.] who followed the Apostles and gave leadership to the fledgling church, beginning with Clement of Rome (96 A.D.).

It has been observed that if all of the New Testament manuscripts and Versions mentioned above were to disappear overnight, it would still be possible to reconstruct the entire New Testament with quotes from the Church Fathers, with the exception of fifteen to twenty verses!

A Comparison

The evidence for the early existence of the New Testament writings is clear. The wealth of materials for the New Testament becomes even more significant when we compare it with other ancient documents which have been accepted without question.

Author and Work	Author's Lifespan	Date of Events	Date of Writing*	Earliest Extant MS**	Lapse: Event to Writing	Lapse: Event to MS
Matthew, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 0-70?	4 BC – AD 30	50 – 65/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years
Mark, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 15-90?	27 – 30	65/70	ca. 225	<50 years	<200 years
Luke, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 10-80?	5 BC – AD 30	60/75	ca. 200	<50 years	<200 years
John, <i>Gospel</i>	ca. 10-100	27-30	90-110	ca. 130	<80 years	<100 years
Paul, <i>Letters</i>	ca. 0-65	30	50-65	ca. 200	20-30 years	<200 years
Josephus, <i>War</i>	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 70	ca. 80	ca. 950	10-300 years	900-1200 years
Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	ca. 37-100	200 BC – AD 65	ca. 95	ca. 1050	30-300 years	1000-1300 years
Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>	ca. 56-120	AD 14-68	100-120	ca. 850	30-100 years	800-850 years
Seutonius, <i>Lives</i>	ca. 69-130	50 BC – AD 95	ca. 120	ca. 850	25-170 years	750-900 years
Pliny, <i>Letters</i>	ca. 60-115	97-112	110-112	ca. 850	0-3 years	725-750 years
Plutarch, <i>Lives</i>	ca. 50-120	500 BC – AD 70	ca. 100	ca. 950	30-600 years	850-1500 years
Herodotus, <i>History</i>	ca. 485-425 BC	546-478 BC	430-425 BC	ca. 900	50-125 years	1400-1450 years
Thucydides, <i>History</i>	ca. 460-400 BC	431-411 BC	410-400 BC	ca. 900	0-30 years	1300-1350 years
Xenophon, <i>Anabasis</i>	ca. 430-355 BC	401-399 BC	385-375 BC	ca. 1350	15-25 years	1750 years
Polybius, <i>History</i>	ca. 200-120 BC	220-168 BC	ca. 150 BC	ca. 950	20-70 years	1100-1150 years

*Where a slash occurs, the first date is conservative, and the second is liberal.

**New Testament manuscripts are fragmentary. Earliest complete manuscript is from ca. 350; lapse of event to complete manuscript is about 325 years.

Conclusion

In his book, *The Bible and Archaeology*, Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum, stated about the New Testament, “The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant 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.”[\[8\]](#)

To be skeptical of the twenty-seven documents in the New Testament, and to say they are unreliable is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity, for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as these in the New Testament.

B. F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, the creators of *The New Testament in Original Greek*, also commented: “If comparative trivialities such as changes of order, the insertion or omission of the article with proper names, and the like are set aside, the works in our opinion still subject to doubt can hardly mount to more than a thousandth part of the whole New Testament.”[\[9\]](#) In other words, the small changes and variations in manuscripts change no major doctrine: they do not affect Christianity in the least. The message is the same with or without the variations. We have the Word of God.

The Anvil? God's Word

Last eve I passed beside a blacksmith's door
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime:

Then looking in, I saw upon the floor

Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

"How many anvils have you had," said I,

"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"

"Just one," said he, and then, with twinkling eye,

"The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."

And so, thought I, the anvil of God's word,

For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;

Yet though the noise of falling blows was heard,

The anvil is unharmed . . . the hammer's gone.

Author unknown

Notes

1. C.Sanders, *Introduction in Research in English Literacy* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), 143.
2. Merrill F. Unger, *Famous Archaeological Discoveries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 72.
3. R. Laird Harris, *Can I Trust My Bible?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 124.

4. Ibid., 129-30.

5. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 892.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Sir Fredric Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 288ff.

9. B.F. Westcott, and F.J.A. Hort, eds., *New Testament in Original Greek*, 1881, vol. II, 2.

SECTION III: WHO WAS JESUS?

Jesus Was a Man of History

Having established above the overwhelming historical reliability of the extra-biblical and biblical source documents concerning His life, only dishonest scholarship would lead one to the conclusion that Jesus never lived. From the evidence, there is a high probability that He did, and we can therefore discard the notion that He is only a mythological figure, like Zeus or Santa Claus.

Jesus Is the Unique Man of History

But there seems to be a problem for many with the portrayal of Jesus in the source documents. He does things which defy our rationality. He is born of a virgin. He makes strange statements about Himself and His mission. After years of obscurity, He appears for a brief time in a flurry of public ministry in a small and insignificant province of the Roman Empire. He loves and heals and serves. He is a master teacher,

but all of His teaching points to Himself, to His identity. The following claims which He makes concerning Himself are extraordinary.

The Claims of Christ

1. Able to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-10).
2. A Healer of disease (Mark 5:21).
3. Allows others to worship Him (Matt. 14:33, 28:9; cf. also Acts 10:25,26;14:12-15).
4. Claims to be "other worldly" in origin and destiny (John 6:38).
5. Performs miracles over nature (Luke 9:16,17).
6. Claims He has absolute, moral purity (John 8:46, 2 Cor. 5:21).
7. Claimed to be God, Messiah, and the way to God (Mark 14:61,62; John 10:30; 14:6-9).
8. Claimed to be the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament (John 5:46-7; Luke 24:44).
9. Allowed others to call Him God and Messiah (John 20:29; Matt. 16:15-17).

Responding to the Claims

The wide divergence of opinion about who Jesus really was is not based, as we have seen, on a lack of good and adequate historical evidence; it rather comes from grappling with His unique and audacious claims listed above. There is no intellectually honest way to carve up the documents according to our own liking and philosophical preferences. Many have done this, including a great American patriot and president, Thomas Jefferson. He admired Jesus as a moral man, but would have nothing to do with the supernatural elements found in the

documents. Using scissors and paste, the Sage of Monticello left on the cutting floor anything, he felt, which contravened the laws of nature. Jefferson entitled his creation, *The Life and Morals of Jesus*. Only 82 columns, or little more than one tenth of the 700 columns in the King James Bible remained. The other nine tenths of the gospel record were discarded. His book ended with the words, "There laid they Jesus (John 19:42) . . . and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed (Matt. 28:60)." One way to deal with the claims is to remove the historical material which is offensive to us, such as Jefferson did. The other option is to honestly accept the historical accuracy of the documents and come up with a plausible explanation. Our choices are reduced to one of four: He was either a Liar, a Lunatic, a Legend, or our Lord.

Considering the Options

Liar. Everything that we know about Jesus discourages us from selecting this option. It is incomprehensible that the One who spoke of truth and righteousness was the greatest deceiver of history. He cannot be a great moral teacher and a liar at the same time.

Lunatic. Paranoid schizophrenics do not behave as Jesus did. Their behavior is often bizarre, out of control. They generally do not like other people and are mostly self-absorbed. Nor do they handle pressure well. Jesus exhibits none of these characteristics. He is kind and others-centered, and He faces pressure situations, including the events leading to and including His death, with composure and control.

Legend. The greatest difficulty with this option is the issue of *time*. Legends take time to develop. Yet most of the New Testament, including Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, and all of Paul's Epistles were written by 68 A.D. An equivalent amount of time today would be the interval between President Kennedy's assassination in 1963 to the present. For people to start saying Kennedy claimed to be God, forgave people's sins,

and was raised from the dead would be a difficult task to make credible. There are still too many people around who knew Jack Kennedy . . . and know better.

Lord. In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis said,

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."

Other than the fact that the Liar, Lunatic, and Legend choices are not persuasive as explanations for who Jesus was, we are still faced with the question of why we should accept Him as Lord. During the latter days of His ministry, Jesus was confronted by a hostile crowd which posed this question to Him: "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." Jesus answered, "An 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 great fish, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:38-40). Here we are led to understand that Jesus pointed to His bodily resurrection as THE authenticating sign by which He would confirm His own unique claims. Later on, the Apostle Paul, in speaking of the importance of this event to the faith of a Christian would say, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins (1 Cor. 15:13-17)." We now turn to explore the possibility of such an event occurring.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a Historical Fact

There are really two points that we must prove in order to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. First, the tomb of Jesus Christ was found empty on the third day after His death. Second, the tomb was empty because Jesus was alive.

The tomb of Jesus Christ was found empty on the third day.

Many people have denied that Jesus' tomb was found empty on the third day after His death, but their reasons have generally been theological or philosophical. It's extremely difficult to argue against the empty tomb on the basis of historical evidence. Here are some historical facts that support the idea that Jesus' body was no longer in the grave.

Christians have argued that the tomb was empty on the third day since the beginning.

It usually takes at least two generations for false legends to develop, for the simple reason that it takes about that long for those witnesses who might contradict the tale to die off. By all accounts, however, the followers of Jesus began proclaiming *right away* that he had been raised from the dead. The books of the New Testament were written early enough that eyewitnesses could have still contradicted them, and those books at times reveal oral traditions (in the form of early creeds, songs, or sayings) that show the church's belief in the resurrection to be even older. There does not appear to have been sufficient time for a legendary account to have developed the resurrection was talked about immediately after the death of Christ.

Even the opponents of Christianity believed that the tomb was empty. If Jesus' body had still been in the tomb, it would have been pretty easy for the opponents of Christianity to

discredit the resurrection. They could have simply produced the corpse, paraded it around town, and put an end to any further speculation. Why didn't they do it? Because the body wasn't there. The Gospel of Matthew records one of the arguments that the religious leaders of the day used to explain the fact of the empty tomb. Apparently the story was widely spread among the Jews that the disciples had stolen the body from the tomb while the guards were sleeping (Matt, 28:13-15). They did not deny that the tomb was empty. They simply offered another explanation for the disappearance of the body! Some may suggest that the body of Jesus was never buried in a recognizable tomb, and that the opponents of Christianity simply were unable to locate the corpse when Jesus' disciples began talking about the resurrection. However, the earliest historical accounts maintain that He was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin. There is no reason to question the credibility of this testimony, which is very ancient and contains a number of specific details. As Craig writes,

Even the most skeptical scholars acknowledge that Joseph was probably the genuine, historical individual who buried Jesus, since it is unlikely that early Christian believers would invent an individual, give him a name and nearby town of origin, and place that fictional character on the historical council of the Sanhedrin, whose members were well known.

Jesus was buried in a known tomb, but the tomb was empty the third day. This is a fact that even the opponents of Christianity recognized, and it's one that Christians can appeal to in their arguments for the gospel (Acts 26:26).

If the tomb had not been empty, it probably would have been treated as a shrine. It was common in first-century Judaism to regard the graves of holy men as shrines, but there is absolutely no suggestion that the grave of Jesus was ever treated in that way. His followers did not come back again and

again to the place to worship, nor did they treat it with any special esteem. There was no reason to, because there was nothing inside.

If the tomb was occupied, what would make the disciples of Jesus risk their lives by saying that it was empty? Jesus' followers clearly believed His tomb was empty, for they were persecuted from the very beginning for their testimony to that effect. That doesn't prove that what they said was true, but it does strongly suggest that they believed what they said. People have died for lies, but only because they believed them. What would make the followers of Jesus believe that His tomb was empty? Their own writings state that they believed it because they went to see the tomb and found that His body was no longer there. They did what you and I would do. They checked it out, and it was empty.

The tomb of Jesus was empty because He had been resurrected from the dead.

There is very little question that the tomb of Jesus was found empty on the third day after His death. This is a fact that was widely proclaimed at a time when it would have been easily discredited had it not been true. Even the opponents of Christianity agreed that the tomb was empty, and therein lies the crux of our next problem.

Given that the tomb was empty, what happened to the body of Jesus? There have been several suggestions, only one of which can be true.

Did the disciples steal the body? As noted above, this was one of the earliest skeptical explanations for the empty tomb. It may be early, but it isn't very credible. For the disciples to steal the body, they would have had to overcome guards who were stationed there specifically to prevent its theft. At the same time, they would have had to manifest a tremendous amount of courage, which is some thing they apparently did not have

when they fled the night Jesus was arrested. If the disciples had stolen the body, they obviously would have known that the resurrection had not really taken place. The fact that these men suffered in life and were then killed for their faith in the resurrection strongly suggests that they believed it really happened. They did not give their lives for what they knew was a lie. The disciples did not steal the body of Jesus.

Were the disciples deceived? Some have suggested that the disciples really did believe in the resurrection, but that they were deceived by hallucinations or religious hysteria. This would be possible if only one or two persons were involved, but He was seen alive after His death by groups of people who touched Him, ate with Him, and conversed with Him. Even more to the point, the tomb really was empty! If the disciples didn't steal it, even if they did only imagine that they had seen it, what happened to the body of Jesus?

Did the Jewish leaders take it? If the Jewish leaders had taken the body of Jesus, they would have certainly produced it in order to refute the idea that He had been raised from the dead. They never did that, because they didn't have the body.

Did Jesus really die? When left with no other credible option, some have suggested that Jesus did not really die, that He only appeared to be dead, was revived, and then appeared to the disciples. This makes a mockery out of the sufferings of the cross, suggesting that a beaten and crucified man could force his way out of a guarded tomb. At the same time, it portrays Jesus as the sort of person who would willingly deceive his disciples, carrying off the greatest hoax of all time. That the disciples would believe Him to be resurrected in triumph over death would be even more surprising if He was in fact on the edge of death after a severe beating. Jesus was truly killed, He was actually buried, and yet His grave was empty. Why? It is extremely unlikely that anybody took the body, but Jesus' disciples offered another explanation.

Jesus was raised from the dead. Since the other explanations do not adequately explain the fact of the empty tomb, we have reason to consider more seriously the testimony of those who claimed to be eyewitnesses. The followers of Jesus said that the tomb was empty because Jesus had been raised from the dead, and many people claimed to have seen Him after the resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul identifies a number of individuals who witnessed the resurrected Christ, noting also that Christ had appeared to over five hundred persons at one time (v. 6). He tells his readers that most of those people were still alive, essentially challenging them to check out the story with those who claimed to be eyewitnesses. The presence of such eyewitnesses prevented Paul and others from turning history into legend.

Alternative explanations are inadequate, and eyewitnesses were put to death because they continued to maintain that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Christianity exists because these people truly believed in the resurrection, and their testimony continues to be the most reasonable explanation for the empty tomb of Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection Demonstrates the Truth of Christianity

It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian faith rests on the fact of Jesus' resurrection. Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, said that his entire ministry would be worthless if the resurrection had not taken place. "If Christ has not been raised," he wrote, "then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). On the other hand, if Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, then Paul's message is true, faith has meaning, and we can be freed from our sins.

That's essentially what we have been arguing. It makes good

sense to believe in the teachings of Christianity, because those teachings are based on a simple historical fact the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If Jesus was raised from the dead, then what He said about himself must have been true. When the religious leaders of His day asked for some proof of His authority, Jesus told them that the only proof they would be given would be His resurrection from the dead (John 2:18 19; Matt. 12:38 40). When He was raised from the dead, that proof was provided.

What was proven through Jesus' resurrection? Here are some of the things that Jesus said about Himself, all of which were affirmed by His resurrection from the dead:

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

"I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I AM" [a claim to be God himself] (John 8:58).

"I am the door; if anyone enters through me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9).

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies" (John 11:25).

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me" (John 14:6).

If these statements are true, then anything that contradicts them cannot also be true. In other words, if it is true that Jesus is God, then anyone who says Jesus is *not* God must be wrong. If it is true that Jesus gives eternal life to those

who believe in Him and that He is the only way to the Father, then anyone who says that there are other ways to salvation must be wrong. How do we know that what Jesus said about Himself is true? We know by His resurrection, which He offered as definitive proof for all that He did and said. What this means is that the statements quoted above demonstrate the uniqueness of Jesus, but they also demonstrate the uniqueness of Christianity. If what Jesus said about Himself is true, then Christianity is true, and any contradictory religious belief must be false. That's not a very popular message in today's pluralistic culture, but the fact is that there are genuine differences between worldviews. Only one can really be correct. If Jesus Christ was actually raised from the dead, there's little need for further debate. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus is the Lord of History

The material in this outline forms the foundation for a Christian worldview. It is on these critical truths Christians have stood over the centuries. When someone asks us the REASONS for the hope that is within us that is, why we hold to the Christian faith, these are the reasons. We prefer to believe that the universe and man were created, rather than being the products of blind chance in a closed, material world. We believe that God not only created, but that He communicated, revealed Himself to humankind, through His prophets, apostles, and finally through His Son (Heb. 1:1). We believe that Jesus lived, and that His life and mission, outlined most extensively in the biblical documents but corroborated by extra-biblical documents, are what they have purported to be over the millennia: the seeking and saving of the lost through His sacrificial death. We believe that Christianity cannot be acceptably explained, historically, by leaving a dead Jew hanging on a cross. Only His resurrection from the dead adequately explains the boldness and commitment unto death of His disciples, the forsaking of worship on the

Sabbath in preference to Sunday, and the exponential growth of the church which began immediately, and has continued to this day. Every mighty river on this planet the Mississippi, the Nile, the Volga has its source. Each one begins somewhere. Every Christian church or community in the world also has an historical source. It flows from Palestine, from Jerusalem, from a hill called Golgotha . . . and a nearby empty tomb. We said in the beginning that everyone has faith, but also pointed out that faith must have an object. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the most worthy of all objects to which we could entrust our lives, our purpose, and our destiny.

For Further Reading

Theism

Boa, Kenneth and Larry Moody. *I'm Glad You Asked: In-depth Answers to Difficult Questions about Christianity*. Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1982.

This is a small book, but it is surprisingly thorough. It is exceptionally clear, accurate, and very helpful. A leader's guide is available for those who want to use this book in small group study. Highly recommended.

Brooks, Ron and Norman L. Geisler. *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences*. Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990.

This book addresses a variety of issues in Christian apologetics, from the existence of God to the authority of the Bible and the nature of humanity. It is very readable, and its handbook format makes it easy for the reader to find answers to specific questions without searching through the whole book.

Geisler, Norman L. *Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976.

This is a textbook for courses in Christian apologetics, so it is very detailed and at times rather tedious reading. It presents a complete defense of Christianity from a philosophical viewpoint and can be very helpful.

McGrath, Alister E. *The Sunnier Side of Doubt*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990.

It may seem odd to include a book on doubt here, but it

really is appropriate. Like the Yancey book noted below, this is written to believers who are having doubts about their faith. It is very readable and very encouraging. Highly recommended.

Montgomery, John W., ed. *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*. Richardson, TX: Probe, 1991.

This is a collection of essays by scientists who argue that their various disciplines actually provide more evidence for Christianity. As with any multi-author work, some chapters are better than others, but it is extremely thought-provoking and should be very helpful in a college environment.

Moreland, J. P. and Kai Nielson. *Does God Exist? The Great Debate*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990.

This book consists of an actual debate between a theist (J. P. Moreland) and an atheist (Kai Nielson). It includes responses from two other theists (William Lane Craig and Dallas Willard) and two other atheists (Antony Flew and Keith Parsons). All of these men are philosophers, so the debate can be rather challenging at times, but it is a very helpful work for those who want to explore these issues in some depth.

Watkins, William and Norman L. Geisler. *Perspectives: Understanding and Evaluating Today's Worldviews*. San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life, 1984.

This book examines seven different worldviews and argues for the truth of Christianity. It is very readable and very helpful.

Yancey, Philip. *Disappointment With God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988.

This is a wonderful book that asks some of the hard questions of life. Is God unfair? Is God silent? Is God hidden? For those whose faith in God is being stretched by doubts or trials, this book should be required reading. It is sensitive, biblical, and extremely insightful. Read it!!

The Resurrection of Jesus

Craig, William Lane. *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*. Chicago: Moody, 1981.

This is an excellent book that thoroughly defends the

resurrection of Jesus from a historical perspective. It is well-reasoned and very readable. Highly recommended.

Morison, Frank. *Who Moved the Stone?* London: Faber & Faber, 1930. Reprint. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1958.

This book was written by a man who intended to disprove the resurrection. In his studies he became convinced that it had actually occurred, and this book presents the evidence that changed his mind.

The Authority of the Bible

Bruce, F. F. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1960.

This is a helpful book by a highly respected New Testament scholar. He argues for the historical authenticity and reliability of the New Testament.

Geisler, Norman L. and William E. Nix. *A General Introduction to the Bible.* Chicago: Moody, 1968.

This book is titled appropriately, for it provides a general overview of the nature of the Bible, the meaning of inspiration, and the reliability of the biblical manuscripts. It is very helpful and very readable.

Goodrick, Edward W. *Is My Bible the Inspired Word of God?* Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988.

This book describes the difference between the original autographs of Scripture, currently available manuscripts, and modern translations. It is very clear and encourages the reader to have confidence in the Scriptures.

McDowell, Josh. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith.* San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972.

One of the most helpful apologetics books available, this work discusses the uniqueness of the Bible, demonstrates the strength of its manuscript support, and also examines the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

_____. *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith.* San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975.

This sequel to McDowell's first book focuses on higher criticism and scholarly attempts to undermine the authenticity of the biblical text. Very thorough and very

helpful.

Yamauchi, Edwin. *The Stones and the Scriptures: An Introduction to Biblical Archaeology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972.

Quite thorough for an introduction, this book argues that archaeological discoveries continue to support the truth of the biblical text.

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