

Truth You Can Sing About – Part 3

Probe radio producer Steven Davis provides spiritual truth in five Christmas carols, backed by new music written and performed by his son Jon Clive Davis.

Coventry Carol

Songs about Jesus' birth have been close friends with Christmas for generations, but when's the last time you thought about the great truth found in these Christmas hymns and carols? In this article we're highlighting five Christmas songs, and first up is *Coventry Carol*.



*Herod the King in his raging charged he hath this day,
His men of might in his own sight all children young to slay...*

Following a star, Magi arrive in Jerusalem, and ask Herod where they can find this new born King of the Jews. Herod rouses his biblical scholars to research this, and they find in Micah (5:2):

But as for you, Bethlehem . . . 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.

This King was a much bigger deal than Herod ever would be. Still, Herod chooses to inform the Magi, encouraging them to return and tell him where they found this King, so that he too could "Worship Him (Matthew 2:8)."

But God knowing his heart, warns the Magi to return home another way. When Herod found out he was furious, and

instructed his soldiers to kill all the baby boys two years old and younger. A second prophecy is fulfilled from Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more." (31:15)

It was this event which stirred the writing of the hauntingly beautiful *Coventry Carol*. Even though this is a dark and tragic theme, we need to know and to feel the entire context surrounding the birth of Christ.

One child born, and who knows how many dozens, if not hundreds, were slaughtered.

2000 years later, few would respond to Christ as Herod did; but to even do something as "harmless" as ignore Him, places you at eternal risk. So, how do you respond to the Christ?

In the Bleak Midwinter

*Enough for Him, whom Cherubim worship night and day,
a breastful of milk and a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom Angels fall down before,
the ox and ass and camel which adore.*

The third verse speaks to something we often forget, especially when it comes to applying it. The Christmas narratives from the Gospels, prophecies and subsequent teaching speak plainly and forcefully to the deity and humility of Christ. The Apostle Paul explains it well:

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. (Philippians 2: 6-8 NLT)

Jesus Christ gives us the greatest example of a life of

humility, first by laying aside His “divine privileges,” then humbled Himself further by dying for our sins on the cross. Going from the non-stop worship of the cherubim to mother’s milk and a bed of hay was entirely within His character. As was the stark contrast between angels falling prostrate before Him to simple barnyard beasts adoring Him.

Perhaps God’s greatest goal for your life and for mine is to make us like Jesus. Paul tells us in Romans: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Romans 8:29) So do you think humility would be part of that process for us? Of course.

The author of the song Christina Rossetti wraps up her verses with an application:

Yet what I can I give Him, give my heart.

Humility is what brings us to Christ. Will you give your heart to Him this Christmas?

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

*God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of
comfort and joy.*

Even though this is one of the oldest Christmas Carols still being sung today, it offers a unique blending of historic and contemporary perspectives.

The first and last verses are for us (the contemporary perspective), while the middle verses are about shepherds, angels, the Christ Child, and His mother Mary. Let’s look at the verses which apply to you and me.

The first line tells us how we are to rest merry and are not

to dismay. How can we do that? Because Christ was born to save. The angel said: "Do not be afraid" (Luke 2:10). In other words, don't be dismayed. And, "there has been born for you a Savior" (Luke 2:11), which allows us to rest merry. We learn more from Matthew 1:21, "He will save His people from their sins." So not just saved—but saved from our sins.

The next line talks about how "we were gone astray." Isaiah 53 shows us how far we've gone astray, listing the things Christ has done for us: bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; chastised for our peace, and His wounds healed us. And after all Christ has done for us, it says: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way." Despite this, the Lord "Laid on him the iniquity of us all."

What typically is the last verse, with the contemporary perspective, says: *Now to the Lord sing praises, all you within this place.* That's what you do when the Son of God has come into the world, to save you from your sins.

While Shepherds Watched

While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground,

An angel of the Lord came down, and glory shone around.

"Fear not," said he for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind

"Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind."

Well, there's no doubt from the title it's all about the shepherd's perspective of what happened the night Christ was born.

When you compare the lyrics of the carol with Luke 2, you discover that the shepherd's perspective in this song is extremely Biblical. Examine all the main points from the Gospel narrative, and you find them in the song: the cast, the

location, angelic appearance, fear, angelic announcement, new location, signs, chorus, praise.

Now a word about the cast, and their perspective. *They were shepherds!* But wait, wasn't this the birth of the Son of God? King of kings and Lord of Lords? Why would God make such a stellar announcement to the working class? Two reasons:

The first reason is found in both Luke 2 and the first verse of the song. Here's Luke's account: "And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'" This good news was for ALL the people.

The second reason the shepherds were the recipients of such good news was pride. Had the message been brought to the elite, the royal, the upper class, do you think they would have shared such a great message with those of us less fortunate? Probably not. We wouldn't have access to their social circles. Why would they seek us out to share this good news? Pride would have cut the Good News off from the rest of the world.

God did not want this message to miss anyone. Christ came humbly, and his announcement came humbly. After all, *God so loved the **world**.*

0 Holy Night

*0 holy night! The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.*

Long lay the world in sin and error pining. Although one rarely "pines" anymore, as I read this line, I feel the hopelessness and helplessness pressing in. In the seventh

chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, he said: "And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't . . . I am a slave to sin." Yeah, that's hopeless.

Speaking of slavery, the third verse declares: *Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother; and in His name all oppression shall cease.* In 1847, when the lyrics were written, slavery was rampant, especially in these United States. And a century and a half later, oppression still hasn't ceased. Why?

Well, Paul said it in the previous passage: "I am a slave to sin." We are *all* slaves to sin . . . until Christ breaks those chains.

The result of Christ breaking the chains of oppression is found in the choruses:

Fall on your knees;

and

Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!

Christ humbled Himself to embrace our human weaknesses, and humbled Himself even further, unto death on the cross. And our response is to fall on our knees in humility and praise. I wonder if humility has a place in breaking the chain of oppression. Seems to work for Jesus.

This program's scripts were written by the producer of Probe Radio, Steven Davis. The music was composed and performed by his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis. May your Christmas be filled with praise!

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Christmas Articles



[A Christmas Quiz](#) [Dale Taliaferro]

A quiz concerning the Christmas story from a biblical perspective.

[3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth](#) [Paul Rutherford]

Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth.

[The Star of Bethlehem](#) [Dr. Ray Bohlin]

What was the Star of Bethlehem? Some people suggest it was an astronomical conjunction of planets and stars. But it might have been the Shekinah Glory, a physical manifestation of God's presence on earth.

[Christmas Film Favorites](#) [Todd Kappelman]

Todd Kappelman highlights some favorite films of the Christmas season, encouraging Christians to enjoy the films while separating the sacred from the secular: *A Christmas Carol*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

[Truth You Can Sing About: 5 Christmas Carols](#) [Steven Davis]

Probe Radio producer Steven Davis wrote the scripts providing devotional insights into five Christmas carols, and his son

and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis wrote and performed the music underneath.

[Truth You Can Sing About: Part 2](#) [Steven Davis]

Probe Radio producer Steven Davis wrote five more scripts providing devotional insights into five Christmas carols, and his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis wrote and performed the music underneath.

[Truth You Can Sing About: Part 3](#) [Steven Davis]

For the third year in a row, Steven Davis and his son Jon Clive Davis collaborated on a new look at five Christmas carols, accompanied throughout each day's broadcast by new compositions of each carol.

[The Theology of Christmas Carols](#) [Dr. Robert Pyne]

A look at the theology behind five Christmas carols: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Joy to the World, O Little Town of Bethlehem, and O Holy Night.

[Christmas SHINY!](#) [Sue Bohlin]

The visible presence of God in the Old Testament—the Shekinah glory—shows up again at Christmas. No wonder we like shiny, sparkly things that remind us of the glory of heaven!

[Is Christmas Necessary?](#) [Jerry Solomon]

Christians have had to respond to the customs of the surrounding culture since the beginning of the church. In the end, though, Christmas is necessary only in terms of its historical and theological content.

[Reincarnation: The Christmas Counterfeit](#) [Sue Bohlin]

Sue blogs that Jesus is the only person who had a life before His birth, which we celebrate at Christmas.

[The Christmas Story: Does It Still Matter?](#) [Rusty Wright]

Christmas often means time with family, hectic shopping, parties, cards and gifts. But what about the first Christmas? Why is the original story the baby in a manger, shepherds,

wise men, angels important, if at all? The answer may surprise you.

[The First Christmas Wreath](#) [Jimmy Williams]

The founder of Probe Ministries examines the role of the wreath in Christmas.

[The Great Light](#) [Jimmy Williams]

A short essay on the role of light at Christmas.

[The Stable](#) [Jimmy Williams]

Jimmy Williams examines the symbolic and prophetic role of the stable in Christmas.

[Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?](#) [Rusty Wright]

Have you ever missed a great opportunity because you weren't listening carefully? Twenty centuries ago some clues to impending good news of monumental import eluded most folks. Fascinating prophecies of Jesus' birth and life bring revealing insights into your own life today.

The Scandal of Blood Atonement: “Why All the Blood and Cross-Talk, Christian?”

The story of Jesus' death and resurrection raises accusations that Christianity is obsessed with blood. Many believers struggle with this too. Byron Barlowe explores the biblical reasons for the focus on Christ's blood and why its shedding was necessary.

The Bloody Cross: A Tough Thing to Handle

Easter season is all about the death and resurrection of Christ—which centers on the blood sacrifice He endured. Christianity is called a bloody religion, focusing on the execution of Jesus Christ on a cross. Why is this true and what does it mean when we say His blood atones for our sin?

Millions of Americans—and billions of Christians around the world—celebrated the death and Resurrection of Christ during Passion Week and Easter Sunday. The topic was everywhere from sermons to a CNN docudrama titled *Finding Jesus: Faith, Fact, Forgery*.

You may have questions about all the talk of "the blood of Christ" and songs saying things like "Jesus's blood washed away my sins." This bloody theme does raise understandable concerns that are shared by believers, seekers and skeptics alike.

In fact, more and more skeptics are posting on the Internet things like this book promotion:

"Christians are obsessed with blood! They sing about it, declare they are washed in it and even drink it! In this book you will discover the crazy background to this Christian obsession and the truth about the bloodthirsty God they claim to know and serve. [{1}](#)"

In this article, we'll discuss whether these charges are true and fair and explain the doctrine of blood atonement.

Again, even many Christians—including me—have wondered deeply about all the biblical imagery of shed blood, what some call the Crimson Thread of Scripture. I mean the grotesqueness of Old Testament animal sacrifice and the belief in Jesus's torturous slaying as the core of salvation. Radical stuff for modern ears.

So what is blood atonement and why does it matter? In historic orthodox Christian thought, God's Son is at the very center of history doing these things:

- reconciling man to God,
- ransoming humans from slavery to sin and well-deserved death and
- justly recompensing God for the horrific offense of rebellion and disobedience to Him.

Thankfully, the gospel (or good news) is simple. The Bible claims, "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."[{2}](#)

The bottom line for all people is this: out of Christ's death came the hope of eternal life—and his resurrection proved this. Our sin caused God's Son to suffer and die. By grace, through faith, we can benefit. Otherwise, we suffer eternally for staying with the cosmic rebellion that started in a perfect Garden long ago.

Yet, this blood-centered good news is a scandal to both those who believe and those who deny it. In fact, the Greek root word *skandalon* is used for Christ himself.[{3}](#) You see, Jews denied Christ as the Promised One and Gentiles thought it was all nonsense. Nothing has changed for mankind: the choices are either do-it-yourself religion, being too smart for all that, or believing in this radical hope.

The Reason Someone Had to Die

Why did anybody have to die? God's justice and holiness demands a death penalty for the sinner.

We are all in a serious spiritual and moral pickle. Biblical Christianity declares that each person ever born is stuck

under an irreversible "*sin*drome" for which there is no human answer. History sadly records the habitual and continual effects of sin: oppression, addictions, self-promoting power plays, deceit, war, on and on.

Now for a reality check: no moral order, either in a family, a company, military unit or society survives ambiguity or failure to enforce laws. Just ask the victims of unpunished criminals set loose to perpetrate again. If the Creator were to simply wink at sin or let people off scot-free, where would justice be? What kind of God would He be?

God is holy and He called himself the Truth. There is no way God would be true to Himself and the moral order He created and yet fail to punish sin. Such impunity would mock justice. As one theologian puts it, "Pardon without atonement nullifies justice . . . A law without penalty is morally unserious, even dangerous."

Ok, but penalties have levels of harshness. Why is death necessary? Scripture spells out clearly the decree that sinners must die. In God's original command He stated, "When you eat of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die" (Gen. 2: 17). In Ezekiel the same formula appears slightly reworded: "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20). Paul boiled it down this way: "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

God's justice and holiness demand death for sin. Blood must be shed. Detractors of the cross tend to underestimate sin and know nothing of its offense to a holy God. Everyone wants justice—for others.

Ok, so what does a just and holy God do with impure, treasonous creatures He made to bear his image? God was in a quandary, if you will.

Yet, even in the Garden, he was already hinting at a plan to reconcile this dilemma. "God so loved the world" that he sent

down his own Son as a man to pay the death penalty.{4}

Thomas Oden writes, "God's holiness made a penalty for sin necessary . . . Love was the divine motive; holiness [was] the divine requirement. [Romans 5:8 reads] 'God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us'. [And as Romans 8 teaches,] This love was so great that God 'did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all' (Rom. 8:32)."{5}

Christ's Death and Resurrection Was Unlike Other Religious Stories: It Was All for Love

God's morally just demand for a death-payment is not the same as pagan gods, who maliciously demanded sacrifices. True for one big reason:

Isn't this crucifixion thing simply about a grouchy god acting all bloodthirsty, as some atheists like popular author Richard Dawkins say? Should good people find this repugnant? One unbelieving critic wrote,

"Unfortunately, much of Christian art consists of depicting the sufferings and agony of Jesus on the Cross. This reflects the obsession of Christianity with the Crucifixion . . . "Crosstianity" [in the contemptuous words of one skeptic]. The obsession with 'our sins' having been 'washed away by the Blood of the Lamb' would be regarded as evidence of a serious mental illness . . . but when this is an obsession of millions of people it becomes 'religious faith'."{6}

Wow! Did you know that you, if you are a believer, are part of an insane global crowd? This vividly illustrates the scandal of the cross: "which is to them that are perishing foolishness" as the Apostle Paul described it.{7}

No, biblical sacrifice is not a bloodfest, but the way to deal

with a sad reality. Put it this way: If God said, "Nah, don't worry about rebelling against your Creator," would that be a just and righteous God? Would a deity who fails to punish wrongdoing be worth following? Would His laws mean anything? Yet, we are unable to keep laws, so He steps in to pay that penalty. With His lifeblood. This storyline is utterly unique in the long human history of religions. And the resurrection Christians celebrate shows its truth in actual time and on this dirty earth.

Pagan myths of savior gods who rise from the dead have only a surface resemblance to the biblical resurrection. Such deities are more like impetuous and tyrannical people than the one and only Yahweh. The biblical God's love fostered the unthinkable: set up a sacrificial system for a one-of-a-kind people—the Israelites—that served as a foretelling of His *coup de grace*: dying in man's place as the spotless sacrificial Lamb. What a novel religious idea that only the true God could dream up! Theologian Thomas Oden says it this way: "It was God who was both offering reconciliation and receiving the reconciled." [\[8\]](#)

God's merging of perfect holiness, just retributive punishment and allowance of His Son's execution was actually a beautiful thing. Francis of Assisi wrote that "love and faithfulness meet together [at the cross]; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven." [\[9\]](#)

But Why a Violent, Bloody Death?

I get that death was demanded of someone to pay for sin. So why a bloody suffering and execution? Why the constant shedding of blood?

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* hit movie theaters in 2004 to mixed reviews. It earned its R-rating for gory bloodshed and, ironically, became a cultural scandal itself. Seems that the bloody realism was too much for both soft-core

Christians and high-minded unbelievers. But this vividly poignant portrayal of Christ's blood-stained Passion did raise a good question.

When it came to saving mankind, why the shedding of blood? Could God not have found another way? Church Father Athanasius believed that, if there were a better way to preserve human free will and still reconcile rebellious man to a holy God, He would have used it. Apparently, Christ's suffering and death was the only solution.

The Apostle Paul summarized Christ's entire earthly ministry this way: He "humbled himself and became obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:8). At the cross, "human hate did all the damage it could do to the Only Son of God."[\[10\]](#) God used the realities available to Him, including the masterfully grim method of crucifixion, honed to a fine art by Roman pagans who viewed human life as dispensable.

Again, why is death demanded of God to atone for sin? The grounding for such a claim appears early in the Bible, after the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. In Genesis 9 Yahweh declares, "I will require a reckoning . . . for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."[\[11\]](#) Apparently, God has put the price of a man's life as that of another's life.

The highlight of Christ's death was its substitutionary sense. The Apostle Peter wrote, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."[\[12\]](#) Justice, fairness, reality itself demanded a bloodguilt payment for sin. Christ paid it.

Substitutionary sacrifice was nothing new for the Jews who unwittingly had the Messiah crucified. From the beginning of God's dealings with His people, agreements were blood covenants. What else could carry the weight of such momentous

things? And, as the book of Hebrews teaches, "Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**"[\[13\]](#)

One theologian plainly said, "Through this sacrificial system, the people of Israel were being prepared for the incomparable act of sacrifice that was to come in Jesus Christ."[\[14\]](#)

His suffering, death and resurrection conquered sin and neutered the fear of death. Only blood could clean sin; only God's Son's blood could do it perfectly and forever.

Here's the scandal we spoke of: only a perfect sacrifice would do for washing mankind's sins away and reconciling us back to God.

Beautiful Obsession: God Was Glad to Allow This Brutality for Us!

God said it was His pleasure to pay the death penalty with His own self, in the Person of His son. Christianity's so-called blood-obsession is a beautiful picture of perfect divine love.

Theologian Thomas Oden summarized well our discussion of Christ's blood atonement. He wrote, "Love was the divine motive; holiness the divine requirement. 'God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8)."

Such claims trump the understandable disgust of doubters. But the red blood leads to clean white.

Chick-fil-A restaurant employees are trained to say, "My pleasure" when serving customers. Imagine God saying that to believers regarding the cross of Christ! Paul explains in his letter to the Colossian church that "it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him . . . having made peace *through the blood* of His cross . . . He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death . . ."[\[15\]](#)

God was glad to stand in as the essential scapegoat to restore us to right relations with himself, to buy us back from slavery to sin, fear and death, and to abolish sin and its effects. This doesn't sound like a bloodthirsty tyrannical deity demanding a whipping boy or abusing his own child, as some acidly accuse. "My pleasure" brings in new dimensions of lovingkindness and servant-heartedness.

But wait, there's more! Scripture lists lots of wonderful effects created by the blood of Christ. These include forgiveness, propitiation or satisfaction of God's righteous wrath, justification or being made right, reconciliation with God cleansing, sanctification, freedom from sin, and the conquest of Satan.

Yes, you could say that Christianity is blood-obsessed. As accused, even its hymns often focus on the benefits bought at the highest of prices: the life of the God-Man himself. One famous hymn goes:

*For my pardon, this I see,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my cleansing this my plea,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

This beautiful blood obsession finds its highest hope in Revelation. The following is a prophecy about persecuted believers:

"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have *washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb* . . . For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."[\[16\]](#)

Maybe the revelations here are as crazy as skeptics say. The foolishness of God. We believe they are the most glorious story ever told.

Notes

1. Promotion at Amazon.com for *Obsessed with Blood: The Crazy Things Christians Believe*, Book 1, by Ex-Preacher.
2. 1 Peter 3:18, NASB.
3. Romans 9:33, 1 Corinthians 1:23, 1 Peter 2:8.
4. John 3:16.
5. Oden, Thomas, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 405.
6. Meyer, Peter, "Why I Am Not a Christian". Serendipity blog. Accessed 2-27-17, www.serendipity.li/eden/why_i_am_not_a_christian.htm.
7. 1 Corinthians 1:18.
8. Ibid., 414.
9. Ibid., 405.
10. Ibid., 389.
11. Gen. 9:4-6.
12. 1 Peter 3:18.
13. Hebrews 9:22-23, emphasis mine.
14. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 413-414.
15. Col. 1:19.
16. Rev. 7:14b-17, emphasis mine.

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Loving God Through Xmas Music?

From Thanksgiving to Christmas Day, the sounds of Christmas music are everywhere: stores, TV specials, many radio stations. Every year, the biggest oldies station in Dallas becomes "The Christmas Station," this year starting in mid-

November.

There are two ways to respond to Christmas music, I think. One way is to let it stream unfiltered into our hearts and minds as the background noise of our December lives. The other is to be intentional about categorizing what we hear, letting it all remind us of “the reason for the season.”

I suggest that Christmas music falls into four categories, and we can mentally tag each song with the appropriate category as we listen:

Songs About Weather

What do sleigh rides have to do with Jesus’ birthday? Nothing. But a number of songs we only hear in December are focused on northern-hemisphere weather. Key words are snow, cold, frosty, winter, and jingle bells (because they belong on sleighs, apparently).

Songs About Fantasy

All songs about Santa Claus, the Grinch, elves, and Frosty the Snowman belong in this category. Make-believe characters have nothing to do with the birth of the Savior, but we only hear them at Christmas.

Songs About “Xmas Feelings”

There are lots of songs invoking warm and fuzzy feelings about Christmas, and being together, and good cheer. It’s “the happiest season of all,” right? Other songs highlight what the singer wants for Christmas, ranging from a kid’s two front teeth to the not-T00-greedy “Santa Baby” song: a fur coat, a car, a yacht and a ring. Be sure to hang some mistletoe so you can score a kiss from somebody. (Except that given the current movement to expose sexual harassment and crimes, that might not be the best move right now.) I call these “Xmas Feelings” because although the songs are played at Christmastime, none of them have anything to do with the reason we celebrate Christmas in the first place. It’s a totally secular feel-good

holiday, so we can just X out the Christ of Christmas.

Songs About the Birth of Christ

Aaaah . . . *now* we're talking! Most songs about Jesus' birth are either Christmas carols, long venerated for the very good reason that they proclaim truth. We call them carols, but they're really hymns that celebrate the Incarnation, God leaving heaven to become man. Most carols show deep insight into the glorious mystery of the Incarnation. "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" proclaims, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity." My favorite Christmas carol, "Joy to the World," exhorts us—and the whole world—to embrace the Savior: "Let earth receive her King, Let every heart prepare Him room, And heaven and nature sing. . ."

In addition to Christmas carols, some more modern songs teach biblical doctrine. "Mary Did You Know," written by Mark Lowry and Buddy Greene in 1991, elevates Jesus in a most worshipful way. "Mary did you know . . . when you kiss your little Baby you kiss the face of God? . . . This sleeping Child you're holding is the Great I AM?" Still gives me goosebumps. Every time I hear it.

The continual presence of Christmas music is a good opportunity to practice discernment with every song by asking, "Which category does this song go in?" Using biblical wisdom to think intentionally is one way we can love God with our minds, as Jesus said is part of the greatest commandment (Luke 10:27). But then we can go on to a second step, which is to connect the dots between the songs and the Lord behind "the reason for the season."

When we hear a song about weather: "Lord, I praise You for being the creator of winter—and spring, summer and fall."

When we hear a song about fantasy characters: "Lord, I praise You for being real and true, and not make-believe like Santa or Frosty."

When we hear a song about Xmas feelings: “Lord, the longings of the heart for love and for home and for belonging are all met in You. Thank You for drawing me into relationship with You as the giver of these good things.”

When we hear a song about Jesus’ birth: “Lord, Happy Birthday! Thank You for leaving heaven and coming to earth to reconcile us with the Father. Thank You for this wonderful song that reminds us that You are Lord.”

Bonus points for identifying “category error” songs that mix fantasy and truth. Examples: “Here Comes Santa Claus” mixes the made-up Santa and the True God:

“Peace on earth will come to all, if we just follow the light
So let’s give thanks to the Lord above ‘cause Santa Claus
comes tonight.”

Then there’s “Up on the Rooftop”:

Up on the rooftop
Click, click, click
Down through the chimney with
Good Saint Nick

Santa is not Saint Nicholas, a 4th-century Christ-follower in modern-day Turkey. St. Nicholas didn’t come down chimneys with toys for good little girls and boys! Santa is fantasy; “St. Nick” is real.

Happy singing . . . and thinking!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/loving_god_through_xmas_musi

[C](#)

on December 12, 2017.

3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth

Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth.

Pine scent inside my home, the quick defensive tightening of my skin as I walk outside into the cold brisk air, and then the reflexive opposite – the slow relaxation of my whole body as I stand in front of a fire warming myself.

These experiences during the holidays warm my heart.



As we look toward Christmas and hear the nativity story this season, I want to share with you one conversation starter I use to defend my faith.

Let me share it with you. It's rather simple. It's easy to remember because it comes entirely out of Matthew's second chapter. It's not long and involved either—just three points.

Skeptics ridicule the Bible for its many supposed “errors,” “holes,” and “inconsistencies.” They conclude that it's unreliable. Sharing this quick three-point apologetic can assure them that the Bible is reliable and can be trusted.

If the Bible makes three prophecies and then records the fulfillments of those prophecies, don't you think that makes the book at least a little bit credible? That's what you can

do citing just the Christmas story from Matthew 2.

You might be tempted to dismiss this, saying it doesn't matter. But here's why the reliability of Scripture matters. IF Scripture can be trusted, AND what it is says is true, then some of the recorded teachings of Jesus could radically alter your life.

In Matthew 10:13 Jesus said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Or Luke 14:27, "Whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple."

Does that mean the disciple of Jesus has to lose his life?!! In a sense, yes.

How's that for radical?! If the Bible is reliable, then that means your life is at stake. Literally. That's not exaggeration: your physical life and your spiritual life. Both.

So there's a lot at stake then, if what the Bible says is true. Let's take a look, then, shall we?

Matthew's account of the Christmas story records three distinct fulfillments of prophecy: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth. We'll consider these one at a time.

Jesus Born in Bethlehem

Your life hangs in the balance of the Bible's reliability. That's why this discussion matters—whether or not the Bible is reliable. The Christmas story from Matthew 2 offers strong evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we get into the first of three instances in the Christmas story that point to the miraculous fulfillment of prophecy strictly surrounding Jesus' birth—namely the location

of His birth, Bethlehem.

The gospel writer, Matthew, begins chapter two telling the story of the Magi—the fabled wise men from the East who came to worship the King of the Jews. They arrive in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital city, expecting to find the baby King. They are disappointed, but redirected to Bethlehem by King Herod's chief priests. Why? Because those priests had read the prophet Micah who foretold the Messiah, the coming King, would come out of Bethlehem.

In Matthew 2:6, the writer is quoting the prophet Micah 5:2.

You may have known Jesus was born in Bethlehem. That's a pretty widely known fact, which is also why it's a great place to start this conversation to make a case for the Bible's reliability. It might sound like this.

“You know Jesus was born in Bethlehem, right?” you could begin. “Well, did you know that was prophesied hundreds of years prior?” Don't worry about trying to remember the citation. Just focus on it being fulfilled prophecy. You can always look up the reference later if you want to. If you want extra credit, go for the prophet's name, Micah.

Some skeptics may grant that Jesus indeed fulfilled prophecy, but that he did so intentionally. That is, skeptics basically charge Jesus with reading the Hebrew prophets, and then deliberately fulfilling as many as he possibly could in order to win favor, influence, and gain a following.

However, this is difficult to achieve when you haven't been born yet! How could he possibly have deliberately fulfilled anything when he wasn't deliberating anything at all? He wasn't conscious, and didn't even exist yet in the flesh.

So no, Jesus could not have fulfilled this prophecy by Himself in order to deceive and manipulate. What are the chances Jesus' birthplace would fulfill prophecy? Not likely!

Jesus' Flight to Egypt

The second fulfillment of prophecy recorded in Matthew 2 (the Christmas story), is Jesus' flight to Egypt. Practically overnight Jesus' father, Joseph, moves his family out of the country—out of Israel and into Egypt. Here's the text. Matthew 2:14-15.

“So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

International travel back then was not what it is today. Modern conveniences ease travel today and increase comfort, yet it still remains difficult for us. Joseph and Mary, however, risked their very lives in order to relocate internationally. This effort was not undertaken lightly. Joseph was, after all, under orders from an angel.

Question: what do you think are the chances an ancient near-eastern middle-class laborer would embark upon world travel with only a moment's notice? He risked the life of his fiancée. He risked the life of his (adoptive) child, not to mention his own. This kind of journey was highly unusual. So it seems unlikely this scenario would have played out under other circumstances—that it was mere coincidence to fulfill prophecy.

When compared to non-biblical prophecy, this one seems awfully specific. It names the country out of which he is called—Egypt—not something vague like “foreign country.” No. The prophet Hosea mentions Egypt specifically in chapter 11:1. Further it mentions the gender of the child—a male child, a son.

The specificity of the prophecy and the unlikely nature of the

event occurring on its own both point to divine orchestration. This was no accident. The fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus' birth make the Bible seem a lot more reliable.

Your life is in the balance of the Bible's reliability. The teachings recorded in this book can save your life. The bigger question is, will you believe them? Do you want to be saved? Do you believe Jesus is Lord and accept His sacrifice on the cross to save you from sin? (If so, please email me at paul@probe.org.) I want to hear from you.

Jesus, Genocide Survivor

Three fulfilled prophecies recorded by Matthew chapter two—in the Christmas story—underscore the reliability of this controversial ancient text. The Christmas story is evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we consider the third prophecy Jesus' birth story fulfills: namely, that there would be a genocide killing babies. Here's the text from Matthew 2:16-18.

“Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.’”

The gospel writer, Matthew, is quoting a prophecy of Jeremiah. To decode this passage, first keep in mind that Rachel, Jacob's wife, was mother to Israel's twelve tribes, and here she is a kind of symbolic mother for all of Israel. The second point to note is that Ramah is located in Bethlehem.

With that in mind, the prophecy foretells of Israel's mothers crying in Bethlehem, mourning the loss of their children. The

author draws our attention to the amazing accuracy of this prophecy. Not only does he get right the who and the what—the moms and their weeping because of the lost babies, but he also correctly prophesies the small village! Incredible.

What are the chances Jesus would fulfill this prophecy this specifically? And as we discussed before, if Jesus were no more than a charlatan attempting to self-fulfill these prophecies, how could a man orchestrate something as large-scale as the death of all the baby boys in a village? Plus the Bible records that was Herod's idea. And remember, Herod didn't want Jesus around. Herod was attempting to eliminate potential competition for his throne.

The genocide ordered by the Jewish king, an event that is part of the Christmas story of Jesus' birth, fulfills prophecy. In so doing it shows the Bible is reliable. That's a big deal because the Bible records the story of a very important man—one whom you need to know: Jesus.

Conclusion

We've been discussing how the Christmas story indicates the Bible is true. We've done that by considering three instances recorded in Matthew 2 that fulfill Old Testament prophecy.

First, the prophet Micah prophesied the coming Ruler would come out of Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2:1 records that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Second, the prophet Hosea prophesied that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt. Jesus' father Joseph moved infant Jesus to Egypt to flee the coming baby genocide. When it was safe, Joseph was instructed in a dream to return. So Jesus was called out of Egypt. (Matthew 2:14)

Then thirdly, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied all the mothers in Bethlehem would mourn the loss of their children. Matthew 2:16 records that after King Herod learns the news of Jesus'

birth, he orders all infant boys in Bethlehem killed.

What are the chances of one man fulfilling ALL of those prophecies? Not likely! If you want more, read Josh McDowell's book *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. He records 61 prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. In it he quotes professor Peter Stoner who calculated the probability of Jesus fulfilling just eight prophecies. He illustrates the likelihood this way. Cover the state of Texas in two feet of silver dollars. Mark just one silver dollar. Now choose one silver dollar at random from anywhere in the state. The chances of picking up the marked silver dollar on the first try are the same as Jesus fulfilling just eight Old Testament prophecies. Not happening!

We have good evidence that what the Bible records is accurate. It will stand up to criticism that Jesus attempted to fulfill prophecy on his own, to position himself as a teacher with authority, influence, or to gain a following. But the fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy we discussed cannot be intentionally self-fulfilled. They either occurred before He was born, or were entirely out of His control.

Do you now believe in Jesus because you listened to this? Email me. I'd love to hear from you (paul@probe.org). Are you already His disciple? God has a unique purpose for your life, only you can fulfill. You are his ambassador. Share the good news. Your life is not the only one at stake. Your neighbor's is too. Have you shared with him or her yet? Take your next step of faithfulness today, whatever that is. I am praying you do.

You now have a great conversation starter to help you get there. The Christmas story is tremendous evidence for biblical truth.

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The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? – A Real Historical Event

Dr. Zukeran presents strong evidence discounting the most common theories given against a historical resurrection. The biblical account and other evidence clearly discount these attempts to cast doubt on the resurrection. Any strong apologetic argument is anchored on the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an historical event.

Introduction

The most significant event in history is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the strongest evidence that Jesus is the Son of God. This event gives men and women the sure hope of eternal life a hope that not only gives us joy as we look to the future but also provides us with powerful reasons to live today.

Throughout the centuries, however, there have been scholars who have attempted to deny the account of the Resurrection. Our schools are filled with history books which give alternative explanations for the Resurrection or in some cases, fail even to mention this unique event.

In this essay we will take a look at the evidence for the Resurrection and see if this event is historical fact or fiction. But, first, we must establish the fact that Jesus Christ was a historical figure and not a legend. There are several highly accurate historical documents that attest to Jesus. First, let's look at the four Gospels themselves. The

authors Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John recorded very specific facts of the events surrounding the life of Jesus, and archaeology has verified the accuracy of the New Testament. Hundreds of facts such as the names of officials, geographical sites, financial currencies, and times of events have been confirmed. Sir William Ramsay, one of the greatest geographers of the 19th century, became firmly convinced of the accuracy of the New Testament as a result of the overwhelming evidence he discovered during his research. As a result, he completely reversed his antagonism against Christianity.

The textual evidence decisively shows that the Gospels were written and circulated during the lifetime of those who witnessed the events. Since there are so many specific names and places mentioned, eyewitnesses could have easily discredited the writings. The New Testament would have never survived had the facts been inaccurate. These facts indicate that the Gospels are historically reliable and show Jesus to be a historical figure. For more information on the accuracy of the Bible, see the essay from Probe entitled [Authority of the Bible](#).

Another document that supports the historicity of Jesus is the work of Josephus, a potentially hostile Jewish historian. He recorded Antiquities, a history of the Jews, for the Romans during the lifetime of Jesus. He wrote, "Now there was about that time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man."(1) Josephus goes on to relate other specific details about Jesus' life and death that correspond with the New Testament. Roman historians such as Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger also refer to Jesus as a historically real individual.

Skeptics often challenge Christians to prove the Resurrection scientifically. We must understand, the scientific method is based on showing that something is fact by repeated observations of the object or event. Therefore, the method is limited to repeatable events or observable objects. Historical

events cannot be repeated. For example, can we repeatedly observe the creation of our solar system? The obvious answer is no, but that does not mean the creation of the solar system did not happen.

In proving a historical event like the Resurrection, we must look at the historical evidence. Thus far in our discussion we have shown that belief in the historical Jesus of the New Testament is certainly reasonable and that the scientific method cannot be applied to proving a historical event. For the remainder of this essay, we will examine the historical facts concerning the Resurrection and see what the evidence reveals.

Examining the Evidence

Three facts must be reckoned with when investigating the Resurrection: the empty tomb, the transformation of the Apostles, and the preaching of the Resurrection originating in Jerusalem.

Let us first examine the case of the empty tomb. Jesus was a well-known figure in Israel. His burial site was known by many people. In fact Matthew records the exact location of Jesus' tomb. He states, "And Joseph of Arimathea took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb" (Matt. 27:59). Mark asserts that Joseph was "a prominent member of the Council" (Mark 15:43).

It would have been destructive for the writers to invent a man of such prominence, name him specifically, and designate the tomb site, since eyewitnesses would have easily discredited the author's fallacious claims.

Jewish and Roman sources both testify to an empty tomb. Matthew 28:12-13 specifically states that the chief priests invented the story that the disciples stole the body. There would be no need for this fabrication if the tomb had not been

empty. Opponents of the Resurrection must account for this. If the tomb had not been empty, the preaching of the Apostles would not have lasted one day. All the Jewish authorities needed to do to put an end to Christianity was to produce the body of Jesus.

Along with the empty tomb is the fact that the corpse of Jesus was never found. Not one historical record from the first or second century is written attacking the factuality of the empty tomb or claiming discovery of the corpse. Tom Anderson, former president of the California Trial Lawyers Association states,

Let's assume that the written accounts of His appearances to hundreds of people are false. I want to pose a question. With an event so well publicized, don't you think that it's reasonable that one historian, one eye witness, one antagonist would record for all time that he had seen Christ's body? . . . The silence of history is deafening when it comes to the testimony against the resurrection.(2)

Second, we have the changed lives of the Apostles. It is recorded in the Gospels that while Jesus was on trial, the Apostles deserted Him in fear. Yet 10 out of the 11 Apostles died as martyrs believing Christ rose from the dead. What accounts for their transformation into men willing to die for their message? It must have been a very compelling event to account for this.

Third, the Apostles began preaching the Resurrection in Jerusalem. This is significant since this is the very city in which Jesus was crucified. This was the most hostile city in which to preach. Furthermore, all the evidence was there for everyone to investigate. Legends take root in foreign lands or centuries after the event. Discrediting such legends is difficult since the facts are hard to verify. However, in this case the preaching occurs in the city of the event immediately

after it occurred. Every possible fact could have been investigated thoroughly.

Anyone studying the Resurrection must somehow explain these three facts.

Five Common Explanations

Over the years five explanations have been used to argue against the Resurrection. We will examine these explanations to see whether they are valid.

The Wrong Tomb Theory

Proponents of this first argument state that according to the Gospel accounts, the women visited the grave early in the morning while it was dark. Due to their emotional condition and the darkness, they visited the wrong tomb. Overjoyed to see that it was empty, they rushed back to tell the disciples Jesus had risen. The disciples in turn ran into Jerusalem to proclaim the Resurrection.

There are several major flaws with this explanation. First, it is extremely doubtful that the Apostles would not have corrected the women's error. The Gospel of John gives a very detailed account of them doing just that. Second, the tomb site was known not only by the followers of Christ but also by their opponents. The Gospels make it clear the body was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish council. If the body still remained in the tomb while the Apostles began preaching, the authorities simply would have to go to the right tomb, produce the body, and march it down the streets. This would have ended the Christian faith once and for all. Remember, the preaching of the Resurrection began in Jerusalem, fifteen minutes away from the crucifixion site and the tomb. These factors make this theory extremely weak.

The Hallucination Theory

This second theory holds that the Resurrection of Christ just occurred in the minds' of the disciples. Dr. William McNeil articulates this position in his book, *A World History*. He writes,

The Roman authorities in Jerusalem arrested and crucified Jesus. . . . But soon afterwards the dispirited Apostles gathered in an upstairs room' and suddenly felt again the heartwarming presence of their master. This seemed absolutely convincing evidence that Jesus' death on the cross had not been the end but the beginning. . . . The Apostles bubbled over with excitement and tried to explain to all who would listen all that had happened.(3)

This position is unrealistic for several reasons. In order for hallucinations of this type to occur, psychiatrists agree that several conditions must exist. However, this situation was not conducive for hallucinations. Here are several reasons. Hallucinations generally occur to people who are imaginative and of a nervous make up. However, the appearances of Jesus occurred to a variety of people. Hallucinations are subjective and individual. No two people have the same experience. In this case, over five hundred people (Corinthians 15) have the same account. Hallucinations occur only at particular times and places and are associated with the events. The Resurrection appearances occur in many different environments and at different times. Finally, hallucinations of this nature occur to those who intensely want to believe. However, several such as Thomas and James, the half brother of Jesus were hostile to the news of the Resurrection.

If some continue to argue for this position, they still must account for the empty tomb. If the Apostles dreamed up the Resurrection at their preaching, all the authorities needed to do was produce the body and that would have ended the Apostles' dream. These facts make these two theories extremely unlikely.

The Swoon Theory

A third theory espouses that Jesus never died on the cross but merely passed out and was mistakenly considered dead. After three days He revived, exited the tomb, and appeared to His disciples who believed He had risen from the dead. This theory was developed in the early nineteenth century, but today it has been completely given up for several reasons.

First, it is a physical impossibility that Jesus could have survived the tortures of the crucifixion. Second, the soldiers who crucified Jesus were experts in executing this type of death penalty. Furthermore, they took several precautions to make sure He was actually dead. They thrust a spear in His side. When blood and water come out separately, this indicates the blood cells had begun to separate from the plasma which will only happen when the blood stops circulating. Upon deciding to break the legs of the criminals (in order to speed up the process of dying), they carefully examined the body of Jesus and found that He was already dead.

After being taken down from the cross, Jesus was covered with eighty pounds of spices and embalmed. It is unreasonable to believe that after three days with no food or water, Jesus would revive. Even harder to believe is that Jesus could roll a two-ton stone up an incline, overpower the guards, and then walk several miles to Emmaeus. Even if Jesus had done this, His appearing to the disciples half-dead and desperately in need of medical attention would not have prompted their worship of Him as God.

In the 19th century, David F. Strauss, an opponent of Christianity, put an end to any hope in this theory. Although he did not believe in the Resurrection, he concluded this to be a very outlandish theory. He stated,

It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical

treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening, and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of life, an impression that would lay at the bottom of their future ministry.(4)

The Stolen Body Theory

This fourth argument holds that Jewish and Roman authorities stole the body or moved it for safekeeping. It is inconceivable to think this a possibility. If they had the body, why did they need to accuse the disciples of stealing it? (Matt. 28:11-15). In Acts 4, the Jewish authorities were angered and did everything they could to prevent the spread of Christianity. Why would the disciples deceive their own people into believing in a false Messiah when they knew that this deception would mean the deaths of hundreds of their believing friends? If they really knew where the body was, they could have exposed it and ended the faith that caused them so much trouble and embarrassment. Throughout the preaching of the Apostles, the authorities never attempted to refute the Resurrection by producing a body. This theory has little merit.

The Soldiers Fell Asleep Theory

Thus far we have been studying the evidence for the Resurrection. We examined four theories used in attempts to invalidate this miracle. Careful analysis revealed the theories were inadequate to refute the Resurrection. The fifth and most popular theory has existed since the day of the Resurrection and is still believed by many opponents of Christianity. Matthew 28:12-13 articulates this position.

When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money telling them, "You are to say, his disciples came during the night

and stole him away while we were asleep.'"

Many have wondered why Matthew records this and then does not refute it. Perhaps it is because this explanation was so preposterous, he did not see the need to do so.

This explanation remains an impossibility for several reasons. First, if the soldiers were sleeping, how did they know it was the disciples who stole the body? Second, it seems physically impossible for the disciples to sneak past the soldiers and then move a two-ton stone up an incline in absolute silence. Certainly the guards would have heard something.

Third, the tomb was secured with a Roman seal. Anyone who moved the stone would break the seal, an offense punishable by death. The depression and cowardice of the disciples makes it difficult to believe that they would suddenly become so brave as to face a detachment of soldiers, steal the body, and then lie about the Resurrection when they would ultimately face a life of suffering and death for their contrived message.

Fourth, Roman guards were not likely to fall asleep with such an important duty. There were penalties for doing so. The disciples would have needed to overpower them. A very unlikely scenario.

Finally, in the Gospel of John the grave clothes were found "lying there as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself separate from the linen" (20:6-7). There was not enough time for the disciples to sneak past the guards, roll away the stone, unwrap the body, rewrap it in their wrappings, and fold the head piece neatly next to the linen. In a robbery, the men would have flung the garments down in disorder and fled in fear of detection.

Conclusion: Monumental Implications

These five theories inadequately account for the empty tomb, the transformation of the Apostles, and the birth of Christianity in the city of the crucifixion. The conclusion we must seriously consider is that Jesus rose from the grave. The implications of this are monumental.

First, if Jesus rose from the dead, then what He said about Himself is true. He stated, "I am the Resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies" (John 11:25). He also stated, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man comes to the father , but through me" (John 14:6). Eternal life is found through Jesus Christ alone. Any religious belief that contradicts this must be false. Every religious leader has been buried in a grave. Their tombs have become places of worship. The location of Jesus' tomb is unknown because it was empty; his body is not there. There was no need to enshrine an empty tomb.

Second, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:54, "Death has been swallowed up in victory." Physical death is not the end; eternal life with our Lord awaits all who trust in Him because Jesus has conquered death.

Notes

1. Josephus, *Antiquities* xviii. 33. (Early second Century).
2. Josh McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor* (San Bernadino, Calif.: Here's Life Publishers, 1981), p. 66.
3. William McNeil, *A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 163.
4. David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus for the People* , vol. 1, 2nd edition (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), p. 412.

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Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? – A Clear Christian Perspective

Rusty Wright presents a compelling case for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection. Looking at four outcomes of the resurrection, he presents a brief case supporting a Christian worldview understanding that Jesus actually died and was resurrected from the tomb.

At Easter, some might wonder what all the fuss is about. Who cares? What difference does it make if Jesus rose from the

dead?

It makes all the difference in the world. If Christ did not rise, then thousands of believers have died as martyrs for a hoax.

If he did rise, then he is still alive and can offer peace to troubled, hurting lives.

Countless scholars—among them the apostle Paul, Augustine, Sir Isaac Newton and C.S. Lewis—believed in the resurrection. We need not fear committing intellectual suicide by believing it also. Where do the facts lead?

Paul, a first-century skeptic-turned believer, wrote that “Christ died for our sins...he was buried...he was raised on the third day...he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve (Disciples). After that, he appeared to more than five hundred...at the same time, most of whom are still living.” Consider four pieces of evidence:

1. The explosive growth of the Christian movement. Within a few weeks after Jesus was crucified, a movement arose which, by the later admission of its enemies, “upset the world.” What happened to ignite this movement shortly after its leader had been executed?

2. The Disciples’ changed lives. After Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion, most of the Disciples fled in fear. Peter denied three times that he was a follower of Jesus. (The women were braver and stayed to the end.) Yet ten out of the eleven Disciples (Judas committed suicide) were martyred for their faith. According to traditions, Peter was crucified upside down; Thomas was skewered; John was boiled in oil but survived. What turned these cowards into heroes? Each believed he had seen Jesus alive again.

3. The empty tomb. Jesus’ corpse was removed from the cross, wrapped like a mummy and placed in a solid-rock tomb. A one-

and-a-half to two-ton stone was rolled into a slightly depressed groove to seal the tomb's entrance.

A "Green Beret"-like unit of Roman soldiers guarded the grave. Sunday morning, the stone was found rolled away, the body was gone but the graveclothes were still in place. What happened?

Did Christ's friends steal the body? Perhaps one of the women sweet-talked (karate-chopped?) the guards while the others moved the stone and tiptoed off with the body. Or maybe Peter (remember his bravery) or Thomas (Doubting Thomas) overpowered the guards, stole the body, then fabricated—and died for—a resurrection myth.

These theories hardly seem plausible. The guard was too powerful, the stone too heavy and the disciples too spineless to attempt such a feat.

Did Christ's enemies steal the body? If Romans or Jewish religious leaders had the body, surely they would have exposed it publicly and Christianity would have died out. They didn't, and it didn't.

The "Swoon Theory" supposes that Jesus didn't really die but was only unconscious. The expert Roman executioners merely thought he was dead. After a few days in the tomb without food or medicine, the cool air revived him.

He burst from the 100 pounds of graveclothes, rolled away the stone with his nail-pierced hands, scared the daylights out of the Roman soldiers, walked miles on wounded feet and convinced his Disciples he'd been raised from the dead. This one is harder to believe than the resurrection itself.

4. The appearances of the risen Christ. For 40 days after his death, many different people said they saw Jesus alive. Witnesses included a woman, a shrewd tax collector, several fishermen and over 500 people at once. These claims provide further eyewitness testimony for the resurrection.

As a skeptic, I realized that attempts to explain away the evidences run into a brick wall of facts that point to one conclusion: Christ is risen.

The above does not constitute an exhaustive proof, rather a reasoned examination of the evidence. Each interested person should evaluate the evidence and decide if it makes sense. Of course, the truth or falsity of the resurrection is a matter of historical fact and is not dependent on anyone's belief. If the facts support the claim, one can conclude that he arose. In any case, mere intellectual assent to the facts does little for one's life.

A major evidence comes experientially, in personally receiving Jesus' free gift of forgiveness. He said, "I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him (or her)."

Worth considering?

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The Answer Is the Resurrection

Steve Cable shows us that the resurrection is the key apologetic for those seeking to evangelize. As we share our faith, understanding the evidence for the resurrection helps prepare us to answer questions raised by a seeker after the truth.

Making a Defense for Your Living Hope

A key verse for our ministry at Probe is 1 Peter 3:15 where Peter writes, “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}](#)

I want to encourage you to make this verse a motivator for your own walk as an ambassador for Christ. You might say, “I am not equipped to make a defense. Surely, this verse is talking to pastors and people like the researchers at Probe.” A deeper look at Peter’s letter shows us that this is not the case. Peter makes it clear that these instructions are for all Christians.[{2}](#) In addition, Peter wrote this verse in the imperative tense, meaning that it is a command, not a suggestion.



Okay. I want to be ready to give an account for the hope that is in me, but I need be clear on what that hope is. Fortunately, Peter answers that for us in chapter 1 where he writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”[{3}](#)

So, our hope is a living hope for an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven. If I am to make a defense for this hope of eternal life, I need to be able to explain why I believe that the source of this hope has both the capability and the motivation to follow through on this offer.

How do we get this living hope? Our hope comes “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”! Jesus’ resurrection is the basis for our hope. If Jesus is not

resurrected from the dead, we are of all men most to be pitied.[{4}](#) So, any defense of the hope that is within us begins with explaining why someone should believe in the resurrection. The empty tomb is the cornerstone to answering most other objections raised up against the gospel.

In the remainder of this article, we will look at evidence for the resurrection and how a defense of the resurrection is the foundation for answering many of the objections raised against Christianity.

Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

Giving an account for our belief in Jesus' resurrection is the key to defending the hope within us. Several books have been written on this topic, and you can find a [list](#) of them in the transcript of this radio program on our Web site. The evidence for the resurrection as an historical event is so strong that even Dr. Antony Flew, until recently a noted proponent of atheism, had to admit, "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events."[{5}](#)

One help to remembering the overwhelming evidence is to think of the ten A's attesting to Jesus' resurrection:

1. *Accurate predictions.* Both the Old and New Testaments contain predictions of Jesus' death and resurrection. Numerous times in the Gospels, Jesus told his disciples and the Jewish authorities that He would rise to life after three days in the earth. In John 2, at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus told this to the Jewish leaders. It made such an impression on the disciples, that verse 22 tells us, "So when 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.”

2. *Attesting miracles.* Jesus’ resurrection was not a sudden miraculous cap to an otherwise unremarkable life. Jesus had consistently demonstrated His authority over the material universe from turning water into wine, to walking on the water, to healing the sick, to raising Lazarus from the dead. His resurrection is consistent with the power He demonstrated during His earthly ministry.

3. *Agonizing death.* Jesus had numerous opportunities to avoid a fatal confrontation with the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. No one is going to go through a Roman scourging and crucifixion as a hoax. Jesus submitted to the cross because it was necessary to pay for our sins and He knew that He had the authority to conquer death.

4. *Angry authorities.* After word of Jesus’ resurrection began to spread, the Jewish authorities wanted to put a stop to people believing in Him. Producing the body of Jesus would have been the best way to do this. Even with support from the Roman authorities, they were never able to produce a body.

5. *Absent body.* The chief priests set a guard around Jesus’ tomb to make sure the body was not stolen by his disciples. Those guards knew their lives could be at stake if they failed in their duty, but on the third day Jesus was gone. Once they regained their senses, the guards “reported to the chief priests all that had happened.”[{6}](#) Why did they take this risk? Because they knew that there was no body to recover. No one has ever found any credible evidence that the body of Jesus was anywhere to be found on this earth.

6. *Amazed disciples.* After Jesus’ arrest, most of His disciples fled. It is clear from their reaction that they despised the cross and were not anticipating the resurrection. Two of his disciples did not recognize the risen Jesus even as He was teaching them the Scriptures related to Himself.[{7}](#)

Their skepticism and shock showed that they clearly were not part of some preplanned hoax.

7. *Agreeing eyewitnesses.* After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to over five hundred people. They testified to His resurrection. We do not have a record of anyone disputing their testimony, saying “I was there with them and it was a hoax.”

8. *Apostolic martyrs.* People don't die for something they know to be a hoax. Yet, many of these eyewitnesses accepted death rather than deny the resurrection of Jesus.

9. *Agnostic historians.* Contemporary, non-Christian historians reported that Jesus was reputed to have risen from the dead and that his followers were willing to die rather than recant their belief in Jesus.

10. *Attesting Spirit.* Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit continues to convict unbelievers and assure believers that Jesus is the risen Son of God.

We don't have to believe in the resurrection in *spite* of the facts. Instead, we believe in the resurrection in *light* of the facts. If you can defend your belief in the resurrection, then you are already positioned to respond to other questions people may have about your faith. In fact, you can respond to objections by asking, “Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus?” If the answer is no, then you may want to focus on the evidence for the resurrection as a foundation for addressing their other concerns.

Tearing Down Objections Through the Resurrection

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is the key to making a defense for our living hope. Let's consider some common objections to Christianity, and see how the resurrection can

be the starting point for a reasoned response.

1. Is there a God still active in this universe?

Jesus' resurrection shows there is a power that transcends the physical universe. A transcendent God is the only power that can override decay and death. As the apostle Peter wrote, "[God] raised [Jesus] from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."[{8}](#)

Jesus' resurrection declares God's active involvement in this world. He planned it from the beginning and He performed it at the appointed time.[{9}](#)

2. What difference does God make to my life?

Jesus' resurrection shows that He lives into eternity and that we have the prospect of life beyond this world.[{10}](#) Knowing we have a soul that continues beyond this world impacts our perspective on life. As Paul points out, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."[{11}](#)

But if the dead are raised, then we need to live with eternity in mind. It becomes a top priority to know the one who controls eternity, God.

3. Is the Bible really God's revelation? Every religion has their holy books.

Jesus' resurrection confirms that Jesus is the source of truth. He knows which holy book is actually a revelation from God. Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the Old Testament. He promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles as they shared His teaching through the New Testament. The Gospel of John states, "So when 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."[{12}](#)

If Jesus' resurrection caused His disciples to believe the Bible, it is certainly sufficient to cause me to believe.

4. I am too insignificant for God to love.

Jesus' resurrection shows the depth of God's love for you. Without the crucifixion there would be no resurrection. His crucifixion cries out "God loves you!" Romans tells us that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." [{13}](#)

Being singled out for God's love makes you very significant in His universe.

5. How can anyone know the truth about life and death?

Jesus' resurrection gives Him firsthand knowledge. He has been beyond death and returned. His knowledge transcends this physical universe. Jesus gives us an eyewitness for eternal life. He told Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world. . . . For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth." [{14}](#)

Jesus testifies to the truth regarding eternal life. We can trust His testimony because of the resurrection.

6. Why should I believe that Jesus is God's divine Son?

Jesus' resurrection conquered the grave. No mortal can claim victory over decay and death.

He said that "I and the Father are one." His victory over death confirms His claim, crying out through the ages "He is God!" As Paul proclaims in Romans, "[Jesus] was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." [{15}](#)

7. Aren't there many ways to God? Can Jesus be the only way?

Jesus' resurrection puts Jesus in a class by Himself. His crucifixion and victory over death clearly show that He is the only way to God. If there were multiple ways, Jesus would not have gone to the cross. He allowed himself to be subjected to death because it was necessary for our redemption. In

addition, Jesus clearly stated that no one comes to the Father except through Him.[{16}](#)

8. How can I possibly be forgiven for my sins?

Jesus' resurrection validates His claim to have victory over sin and death. The ultimate result of sin is death, and Jesus conquered death.[{17}](#) In Romans chapter 10 we learn "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."[{18}](#)

Belief in Jesus' resurrection is a central part of saving faith.

9. Why should I believe God is involved in His creation? I don't see God making much difference in this world.

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates God's active involvement in this world. He predicted it, He planned it, He performed it. Peter writes, "[you are redeemed] with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you."[{19}](#)

10. How can a loving God allow all of the evil in this world?

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates a loving God redeeming a world degraded by evil. If there were no evil, Jesus would not have had to conquer death through the cross. If God was not loving, He would not have sent Jesus into the world to redeem us.[{20}](#) Looking at His death and resurrection, we know without a doubt that there is evil in this world, yet we are still loved by a God with power over death. Evil and love coexist because God valued us enough to create us in His image with a genuine capability to choose to turn our backs on Him. Making us unable to choose evil would have made us unable to love removing the greatest attribute of His image.

Once someone accepts the resurrection, many other barriers to accepting Christ are torn down. Whatever the question, the answer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

May what John said of the disciples be true of us as well: "So when He was raised from the dead, . . . they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." [\[21\]](#)

Notes

1. Scripture references are taken from the NASB95.
2. 1 Peter 1:1-2, 3:8.
3. 1 Peter 1:3-4.
4. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19
5. Gary Habermas, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: An Exclusive Interview with Former British Atheist Professor Antony Flew." Available from the Web site of Biola University at www.biola.edu/antonyflew/.
6. Matt 28:11.
7. Luke 24:13-32
8. 1 Peter 1:21.
9. 1 Peter 1:18-21.
10. 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
11. 1 Cor. 15:32.
12. John 2:22.
13. Rom 5:8-11.
14. John 18:37-38.
15. Rom 1:4-5.
16. John 14:7.
17. James 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-57.