In His H.A.N.D.S.: How We Can Know That Jesus is God

Don Closson explains the five lines of evidence that Jesus is God from the book Putting Jesus in His Place.

Jesus Shares the Honor Given to God

Defending the deity of Christ can be a source of anxiety for some believers. Perhaps it is because our defense often consists only of a couple of proof texts which are quickly challenged by Jehovah’s Witnesses and others. Even worse, some Christians themselves are troubled by passages that seem to teach that Jesus is something less than God, that He is inferior to the Father in some significant way. They are fine with Jesus being the suffering servant, the Messiah who died for our sins, but less sure of His role in creation or as a member of the triune everlasting “I Am” of the Old Testament.

A recent book by Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski titled Putting Jesus in His Place is a great confidence builder for those wrestling with this key doctrine. The book offers five lines of evidence with deep roots in the biblical material. The book is organized around the acronym H.A.N.D.S. It argues that the New Testament teaches that Jesus deserves the honors only due to God, He shares the attributes that only God possesses, He is given names that can only be given to God, He performs deeds that only God can perform, and finally, He possesses a seat on the throne of God.

Let’s look at the first line of evidence for the deity of Christ, that Jesus deserves the honor that should only be given to God. To honor someone is to acknowledge “their place in the scheme of things—to speak about them and to behave toward them in a manner appropriate to their status and position.”{1} As creator of the universe God deserves the highest level of honor and glory, since nothing can claim a higher degree of status or position. As a result, the Old Testament teaches that only God deserves the honor and glory that is part of human worship and He will not share this honor with anything else. In Isaiah 42 God declares that “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols” (Isaiah 42:8).

So how does Jesus fit into this picture? In John 5 Jesus declares that the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son so that “all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” He adds that “He
who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father” (John 5:22, 23). Referring to his pre-existence with the Father before creation, Jesus says, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (John 17:5). In these passages, Jesus is claiming the right to receive the same honor and glory due to the Father; in effect, He is claiming to be God in the same way that the Father is God.

**Jesus Shares the Attributes of God**

If Jesus is honored in the New Testament in a manner reserved only for God, it follows that one who is given the honor and glory reserved for God is also worthy of worship. So it’s not surprising that the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is to be worshipped by the angels or that in Matthew’s Gospel the apostles worshipped him when he came to them walking on water (Hebrews 1:6; Matthew 14:33). Perhaps the most stirring image of Jesus being worshipped is in Revelation where every creature in heaven and on earth sing praises to the Father and to the Lamb, giving them both honor and glory and reporting that the four living creatures and the elders fell down and worshipped Him (Revelation 5:13-14).

The New Testament also teaches that Jesus shares divine attributes that only God possesses. When this claim is made, Muslims, Jehovah’s Witnesses and others protest by pointing out that Jesus exhibited the very human attributes of hunger, fatigue, and pain. This valid observation does not conflict with the traditional Christian teaching that Jesus possessed two essential natures—one divine and one human. There is no reason to assume that one set of attributes cancels out the other. It should be added that although Jesus shares a divine nature with the Father, He does not share the same properties within the Godhead or trinity. The Father sent Jesus into the world; Jesus died on the cross and assumed the role of our permanent high priest.

Jesus clearly states in John 14 that to see him is to see the Father; both are equally God (John 14:10). In Colossians, Paul goes to great lengths to argue that all of God’s divine attributes are present in Christ. He writes that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” and that “...God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Colossians 1:15, 19). He summarizes the same idea by adding that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). The writer of Hebrews concurs in the opening paragraph of that book, saying that “the Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus shares the Father’s attribute of pre-existing the created universe and His own physical incarnation. John’s Gospel tells us that Jesus was with the Father in the beginning when the universe was created, and Paul adds that Jesus is before all things (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-18). In other words, Jesus has always existed and is unchanging. He has been given all authority on heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). He deserves the honor, praise, glory, and worship of all creation.

**Jesus Shares the Names Given to God**

Those who question the deity of Christ complain that the New Testament just doesn’t teach it, that it doesn’t come right out and say that Jesus is God. Is this really the case?

The New Testament uses two key words for God: *theos*, the general Greek word for deity, and *kurios*, usually translated as “lord.” *Theos* is the word most often used to designate God the Father and is also used a number of times in direct reference to Jesus, especially in the Gospel of John. John begins his book with the familiar proclamation that Jesus, the Word, was with God (*theos*) in the beginning, and that the Word (Jesus) was God (*theos*). Later in the chapter, John adds that “No one has ever seen God, but God (*theos*) the One and Only, who at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:18). Jesus, the Word, is described by John as being with God in verse one, and at the
Father’s side in verse eighteen, and in both cases is given the title *theos* or God.

The Gospel John also contains the confession by Thomas that Jesus is his Lord (*kurios*), and God (*theos*). John makes sure that we understand that Thomas was talking about Jesus by writing “Thomas said to Him,” that is, to Jesus, “‘My Lord and my God.’”

Paul uses *theos* in reference to Jesus a number of times. In Romans 9:5 he describes Jesus as “Christ, who is God (*theos*) over all.” And in Titus he writes that we are waiting for our “blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God (*theos*) and Savior, Jesus Christ (2:13).” Peter portrays himself as a servant of Christ who is writing to those through whom “the righteousness of our God (*theos*) and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours (2 Peter1:1).”

All four gospels begin with John the Baptist’s ministry of “preparing the way of the Lord” as fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 40:3. The prophet wrote, “In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.” The Hebrew word translated LORD in this verse is the unspoken special word for God used by the Jews consisting of four consonants called the *tetragrammaton*. The New Testament Gospels are applying the word Lord to Jesus in the same way that the Old Testament referred to Yahweh as LORD.

**Jesus Does the Deeds that Only God Can Do**

It was universally recognized by the Jews of Jesus’ day that “God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1; cf. Isaiah 37:16).” So it might be surprising to some that the New Testament also gives Jesus credit for creation. Paul teaches in Colossians that Jesus created “all things.” To make sure that no one misunderstands his point, he adds that “all things” includes “things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17). Paul wanted to be clear: Jesus is the creator God of the universe.

While Jesus’ role in creation is enough to establish his divine nature, He also exhibited supernatural divine power during His ministry on earth. Unlike the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, Jesus did not have to petition a higher power to heal or cast out demons. He had inherent divine power to accomplish his will. Other than giving thanks, Jesus did not pray before performing miracles. In fact, the apostles reported that some demons obeyed them only when they invoked Jesus’ name. There were a number of occasions when Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him even without His intention to heal (Luke 6:19; Mark 5:30; Luke 8:46).

Jesus not only healed and cast out demons, but also had direct power over nature. When the disciples were frightened on a boat, He “rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm” (Matthew 8:26). When thousands were following him without food, He fed them miraculously (Matthew 14:20-21).

The New Testament teaching that salvation is possible through Jesus Christ alone would also have serious implications for Jewish readers. The Old Testament teaches that God is the only source of salvation. For instance, Psalm 62 teaches that “My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation.” How then does one explain the numerous references claiming Jesus to be the source of salvation? Matthew points out that Mary will call her son Jesus because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Jesus declares of himself that “God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him (Jn. 3:17).” There are also instances where Jesus directly forgives the sins of individuals, thus attracting hostile attention from the Jews (Luke 7:47-49; Mark 2:5-7).
The Psalmist writes that it is the Lord God “who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities” and that “Salvation belongs to the Lord.” John summarizes nicely when he writes, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

**Jesus Has a Seat on God’s Throne**

Our last line of argument for the deity of Jesus Christ refers to his claim to have a place on the very throne of God. From this throne, Jesus rules over creation and will judge all of humanity. He literally possesses all authority to rule.

Jesus made this claim clear during His questioning by the high priest Caiaphas the night of his capture. Caiaphas asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” (Mark 14:61) If Jesus wasn’t God, this would have been a great opportunity for Him to clear up any misconceptions. But instead of denying His divinity, Jesus says “I am,” admitting to being God’s unique Son, and goes on to say, “you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). The high priest’s response was dramatic; he tore his clothes and declared that those present had heard blasphemy from the lips of Jesus. They understood that Jesus was making a direct claim to being God, for only God could sit on the throne of the mighty one.

In His response to the high priest, Jesus draws from a number of Old Testament passages. The book of Daniel describes this “Son of Man” as having an everlasting dominion that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14). The passage adds that the Son of Man has been given authority to rule over all people and nations, and that men of every language will worship him. He is also described as coming with the clouds of heaven, imagery that is used a number of times in the Old Testament to indicate divine presence. Exodus describes a pillar of cloud that designated God’s proximity to the Jews, while the book of Psalms and the prophet Isaiah both picture God riding on clouds in the heavens (Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1). The point here is that Jesus is connecting Himself to this “Son of Man” who will sit at the right hand of the Father, have everlasting dominion and authority, and will be worshipped by all men. This kind of language can only be used to describe God.

The New Testament makes it clear that there is nothing not under the authority and power of Jesus. John writes that the Father put all things under His power (John 13:3). Paul adds that the Father seated Jesus at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named (Ephesians 1:20-21). Jesus sits on the judgment seat, He sent the Holy Spirit, He forgives sinners, and is our perfect eternal high priest (2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 2:33; 7:59-60; Hebrews 7-10).

The New Testament provides multiple lines of evidence to make the case that Jesus is God. The only question remaining is whether or not we will worship him as a full member of the triune Godhead, the only eternal, self-existing, creator God of the universe.

**Note**


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Making a Defense

*Rick Wade explores the meaning of the word “defense” in 1 Peter 3:15, suggesting that all Christians can do what Peter is urging us to do in defending our faith.*

**Introduction**

Apologetics has grown into a very involved discipline over the last two millennia. From the beginning, Christians have sought to answer challenges to their claims about Jesus and complaints and questions about how they lived. Those challenges have changed over the years, and apologetics has become a much more sophisticated endeavor than it was in the first century.

The Scripture passage most often used to justify apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15: “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” This verse is probably used so often because it sounds like marching orders. Other Scriptures show us defense in action; this one tells us to do it.

The word translated “defense” here is *apologia* which is a term taken from the legal world to refer to the defense a person gave in court. It is one of several words used in Scripture that carry legal connotations. Some others are *witness*, *testify* and *testimony*, *evidence*, *persuade*, and *accuse*.

Something that scholars have noticed about Scripture is the presence of a kind of trial motif in both Old and New Testaments, what one New Testament scholar calls the “cosmic trial motif.”{1} There is a trial of sorts with God on one side and the fallen world on the other. The use of legal terminology isn’t merely coincidental.

Think about the arguments you’ve heard presented by apologists that are philosophical or scientific or historical. The core issue of apologetics is generally thought as being truth.{2} While all this fits with what Peter had in mind, I believe there was something deeper and wider behind his exhortation.

In short, I think Peter was concerned with two things: faithfulness and speaking up for Christ. He wanted Christians to acknowledge and not deny Christ. And, as we’ll see later, Jesus said demands for a defense were to be seen as opportunities to bear witness. Defense in the New Testament doesn’t function separately from proclaiming the gospel.

**The Old Testament Background**

As I noted earlier, there is a kind of cosmic trial motif running through Scripture, or what we might call a “forensic theme,” which provides a background for understanding Peter’s exhortation. One thing that will help us think about defense and witness in the New Testament is to look at the trial motif in the Old Testament.

Bible scholar A. A. Trites notes the frequency with which one encounters lawsuits or controversy
addressed in a legal manner in the Old Testament such as in the book of Job and in the prophets. On occasions of legal controversy, witnesses were the primary way of proving one’s case. They were not expected to be “merely objective informants,” as we might expect today.\(^3\) The parties involved “serve both as witnesses and as advocates,” Trites says. “It is the task of the witnesses not only to attest the facts but also to convince the opposite side of the truth of them (Isaiah 41:21-4, 26; 43:9; 51:22; cf. Gen. 38:24-6).”\(^4\)

Especially notable in the Old Testament is the controversy between Yahweh and the pagan gods, represented by the other nations, recorded in Isaiah chapters 40-55. “The debate is over the claims of Yahweh as Creator, the only true God and the Lord of history (40:25-31; 44:6-8; 45:8-11, 21),” says Trites.\(^5\) Yahweh brings charges and calls the nations to present their witnesses, and then calls Israel to be His witness. A representative passage, which I’ll leave you to look up for yourself, is Isa. 43:9-12.

Since the other nations have nothing to support their case on behalf of their gods, they lose by default. By contrast, Israel has witnessed the work and character of Yahweh.


As I continue to set the context for understanding 1 Peter 3:15, I turn now to look at defense in the New Testament.

The apostles had a special role to fulfill in the proclamation of the gospel because they were eyewitneses to the events of Jesus’ life. Trites says that they “were to be Christ’s advocates, serving in much the same way that the witnesses for the defendant served in the Old Testament legal assembly.”\(^6\) Beyond giving the facts, they announced that Jesus is Lord of all and God’s appointed judge, and they called people to believe (see Acts 10:36; cf. 2:36-40; 20:21).\(^7\)

I spoke above about the controversy recorded in Isaiah 40-55 between Yahweh and the nations and their gods. This “lawsuit” continues in the Gospels in the conflict between Jesus and the Jews. New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham writes, “It is this lawsuit that the Gospel of John sees taking place in the history of Jesus, as the one true God demonstrates His deity in controversy with the claims of the world.”\(^8\) Multiple witnesses are brought forth in John’s Gospel. In chapter 5 alone Jesus names His own works, John the Baptist, God the Father, and the Old Testament. And there are others, for example the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, and the crowd who witnessed the raising of Lazarus in chapter 12.

This witness extends beyond simply stating the facts. As in the Old Testament, testimony is intended to convince listeners to believe. The purpose of John’s Gospel was to lead people to belief in Christ (20:30-31).

The concept of witness is important for Luke as well; obviously so in the book of Acts, but also in his Gospel. In Luke 24 we read where Jesus told His disciples, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (24:45-49). Here we have a set of events, a group of witnesses, and the empowerment of the Spirit.
It was a dangerous thing to be a Christian in the first century, just as it is in some parts of the world today. Jesus warned His disciples, “they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons.” Listen to what He says next: “This will be your opportunity to bear witness. Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer” (Lk. 21:12-14). “How to answer” is the word *apologia*, the one Peter uses for “make a defense” in 1 Peter 3:15.

It’s important to keep the central point of this passage in Luke in view. What Jesus desired first of all were faithful witnesses. The apostles would face hostility as He did, and when challenged to explain themselves they were not to fear men but God, to confess Christ and not deny Him. This warning is echoed in 1 Peter 3:14-15. Jesus’ disciples would be called upon to defend their actions or their teachings, but their main purpose was to speak on behalf of Christ. Furthermore, they shouldn’t be anxious about what they would say, for the Spirit would give them the words (Lk. 12:12; 21:15). This isn’t to say they shouldn’t *learn* anything; Jesus spent a lot of time teaching His followers. It simply means that the Spirit would take such opportunities to deliver the message He wanted to deliver.

Witness and defense were the theme of Paul’s ministry. He said that Jesus appointed him to be a witness for Christ (Acts 22:15; 26:16; see also 23:11). As he traveled about, preaching the gospel, he was called upon to defend himself before the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 22 and 23), before the governor, Felix, in Caesarea (chap. 24), and before King Agrippa (chap. 26).

Toward the end of his life when he was imprisoned in Rome, Paul told the church in Philippi, “I am put here for the defense of the gospel (1:16; cf. v.7). That claim is in the middle of a paragraph about preaching Christ (Phil. 1:15-18).

In obedience to Jesus, Paul was faithful to confess and not deny. Although he was called upon to defend *himself* or his actions, he almost always turned the opportunity into a defense and proclamation of the gospel.

1 Peter

Finally I come to 1 Peter 3:15. What is the significance of what I’ve said about the trial motif in Scripture for this verse?

A key theme in 1 Peter is a proper response to persecution. Christians were starting to suffer for their faith (3:8-4:2). Peter encouraged them to stand firm as our Savior did who himself “suffered in the flesh,” as Peter wrote (4:1).

After exhorting his readers to “turn away from evil and do good” (1 Pet. 3:11), Peter says,

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame (3:13-16).

The main point of this passage is faithfulness: faithfulness in righteous living, and faithfulness in
honoring Christ and speaking up when challenged.

So how does the idea of witness fit in here? I submit that Peter would have remembered Jesus’ instructions to turn demands for a defense into opportunities to bear witness. Remember Luke 21:13? Peter did this himself. When he and John were called before Caiaphas, as we read in Acts 4 and 5, rather than deny Jesus as he did when Jesus was on trial (Mk. 14:66-72), Peter faithfully proclaimed Christ not once but twice. The second time he said, “We must obey God rather than men,” and then he laid out the gospel message (Acts 5:27-32; see also 4:5-22).

Sometimes I hear apologists talking about how to put apologetics and evangelism together. While there may be a conceptual distinction between the two, they are both aspects of the one big task of bearing witness for Jesus. The trajectory of our engagement with unbelief ought always to be the proclamation of the gospel even if we can’t always get there. As Paul said in 1 Cor. 2:5, our faith rests properly in Christ and the message of the cross, not in the strength of an argument.

Defense and witness are the responsibility of all of us. If that seems rather scary, remember that we’re promised, in Luke 12:12, the enabling of the Spirit to give us the words we need.

Notes


4. Ibid., 46.

5. Ibid., 45.

6. Ibid., 139.

7. Ibid., 133.


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The Bible: Intentionally Misunderstood (Radio Transcript)

Steve Cable examines the faulty reasoning and interpretation of the Bible in Kurt Eichenwald’s Newsweek article “The Bible: So Misunderstood It’s a Sin.”
Recently, New Testament scholar, Dr. Daniel Wallace, addressing our strong confidence in our modern translations, mentioned others presenting a false view of this situation. One example, *The Bible: So Misunderstood It’s a Sin* by Kurt Eichenwald{1}, appeared in *Newsweek*. This article presents arguments intended to undermine the New Testament. Let’s evaluate some of these arguments to be better equipped in sharing the truth.{2}

Eichenwald begins by parroting negative stereotypes about American evangelicals. Adding rigor to his rant, he states, “A Pew Research poll in 2010{2} found that evangelicals ranked only a smidgen higher than atheists in familiarity with the New Testament and Jesus’s teachings.”{4}

He referred to a table showing the average number of questions out of twelve answered correctly. However, only **two of the twelve related to the New Testament** and **none to Jesus’s teachings**.{5} Two questions are not enough to evaluate someone’s knowledge of the New Testament, But, for the record, the two questions were “Name the four gospels” and “Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born?” 53% of those professing to be born again answered these correctly versus 20% of atheists. Apparently to Eichenwald, a “smidgen higher” must mean almost three times as many.

Eichenwald spends two pages bemoaning the translation problems in the New Testament. But as pointed out by Dr. Wallace and others, his critique really serves to highlight the excellence of today’s translations. The areas he points out as having questionable additions in the text are clearly marked in all of today’s popular translations{6} and if removed make no difference in the overall message of the New Testament (i.e. the woman caught in adultery in John and snake handling in Mark).

He also lists three short passages, claiming they did not appear in earlier Greek copies. Upon examination, we find that one of those passages does not appear in modern translations. The other two do appear in the translations. Why? Because they appear in numerous early Greek manuscripts.{7} Once again his scholarship is found wanting.

All scholars agree there are variations between ancient manuscripts from different areas but they do not change the message. As Wallace points out, “We are getting closer and closer to the text of the original. . . . The New Testament has more manuscripts that are within a century or two of the original than anything else from the Greco-Roman world. If we have to be skeptical . . . , that skepticism . . . should be multiplied one thousand times for other Greco-Roman literature.”{8}

**Supposed Biblical Contradictions**

Eichenwald continues attacking the Bible with nine different topics he claims reveal contradictions in the biblical record. Let’s examine three of them to see if his arguments have substance.

**First**, he claims there are three different creation models, stating that “careful readers have long known that the two stories of Genesis 1 and 2 contradict each other.”{9}
However, a clear-headed examination sees chapter 1 describing the overall creation while chapter 2 talks about the creation of Adam and Eve. As commentators explain, “what follows Genesis 2:4 is not another account of creation but a tracing of events from creation through the fall and judgment.”{10}

In his third creation model “the world is created in the aftermath of a great battle between God and . . . a dragon . . . called Rahab.”{11}

Reading the relevant verses shows no creation story but rather the creature Rahab representing Egypt. Job 9:13 says “under (God) the helpers of Rahab lie crushed.” Some speculate this could relate to the Babylonian Creation Epic. Even if this speculation were true, rather than a third creation story one would say this reference tells us God destroys all idols raised up by others.

Eichenwald’s claim of three different creation models is an illusion.

**His second claim** states the Gospel of John was written “when gentiles in Rome were gaining dramatically more influence over Christianity; that explains why the Romans are largely absolved from responsibility for Jesus’s death and blame instead is pointed toward the Jews,”{12} implying the other gospels put much of the blame on the Romans.

Examining his claim, in Luke we read, “The chief priests . . . were trying to find some way to execute Jesus.” While the Roman governor did not find Jesus guilty of anything worthy of death.{13} In Acts, Peter squarely places the responsibility onto the Jewish leaders and nation.{14} We find similar verses in Matthew{15} and Mark{16}. All the gospels place the blame on the Jewish nation. There is no shift in perspective in John.

**In a third** supposed contradiction Eichenwald writes, “As told in Matthew, the disciples go to Galilee after the Crucifixion and see Jesus ascend to heaven; in Acts, written by Luke, the disciples stay in Jerusalem and see Jesus ascend from there.”{17}

The gospel of Matthew ends saying **nothing** about Jesus ascending to heaven. In Acts, Luke says the Lord was with His disciples over a forty-day period and could have easily traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee and back.

Not surprisingly, his other six so-called “contradictions” all fail to hold up when one examines the Scriptures.

**Faulty Interpretation Part 1**

Eichenwald wants to show that what we think the Bible teaches about homosexuality is not what God intended. He begins by pointing out “the word homosexual didn’t even exist until . . . 1,800 years after the New Testament was written . . . these modern Bibles just made it up.”{18}

But this could be said of many English words used today. A respected dictionary of New Testament words{19} defines the Greek word he questions as “a male engaging in same-gender sexual activity, a sodomite. . .”

He then tells us not to trust 1 Timothy when it lists homosexuality as a sin because “Most biblical scholars agree that Paul did not write 1 Timothy.”{20}

The early church fathers from the second century on and many contemporary scholars{21} do not
agree it is a forgery. Regardless, the same prohibition appears in other epistles and not just in Timothy.

Eichenwald points out Romans, Corinthians and Timothy discuss other sins in more detail than homosexual behavior. He writes, “So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality . . . and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government.”

Most people understand that explaining our relationship to the government is more complex than forbidding homosexuality which is clearly understood.

He claims people are not banished for other sins such as adultery, greed, and lying.

But if you proclaimed you practice those actions regularly and teach them as truth, your church is going to remove you from any leadership position. They should still encourage you to attend worship services out of a desire to see God change your heart. Mr. Eichenwald would be surprised to learn that most evangelical churches handle issues with homosexuality in the same way.

Then he declares, “plenty of fundamentalist Christians who have no idea where references to homosexuality are in the New Testament . . . always fall back on Leviticus.”

Personally, I have never run into another church member who was unfamiliar with the New Testament, but knew the details of Leviticus.

In summary, Eichenwald believes we should declare homosexuality is not a sin and those who practice it should be honored as leaders within the church. He does not suggest that we treat any other sins that way. He does not present a cogent argument that the New Testament agrees with his position. He is saying that we should ignore biblical teaching. But, we really do love those struggling with homosexual behavior and we want to help them gain freedom from those lusts just as much as someone struggling with opposite sex issues.

Faulty Interpretation Part 2

To strengthen his position on homosexuality, Eichenwald calls out “a fundamental conflict in the New Testament – arguably the most important one in the Bible.” As Christians, are we to obey the Mosaic Law or ignore it?

He claims, “The author of Matthew made it clear that Christians must keep Mosaic Law like the most religious Jews, . . . to achieve salvation.” He says this is contrary to Paul’s message of salvation through grace not works.

What a mistaken understanding. In Matthew, Jesus explains that to enter God’s kingdom “our righteousness must surpass that of (the most religious Jews).” We must not get angry, call people names, or lust even once. In fact, “You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Jesus clearly taught we cannot be good enough. Only through His sacrifice can we be made righteous.

In Acts 15, some believers with Pharisaical backgrounds brought the Mosaic Law up to the apostles. Peter told them, “Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? . . . we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as (the Gentiles) also are.” The apostles and the whole church
agreed to send the Gentiles word that they were not required to follow the Law.

Eichenwald is right: we are not required to follow the Law. The New Testament is very careful to identify actions and attitudes which are sin so may try to avoid them. This truth is why sexual sins are specifically mentioned in the New Testament. Even in Acts 15, the apostles tell Gentile Christians to abstain from fornication, a term covering all sexual activity outside of marriage.

Eichenwald also castigates us for disobeying the biblical teaching about government. He says Romans has “eight verses condemning those who criticize the government.” Pat Robertson sinned by stating, “We need . . . to pray to be delivered from this president.”

Actually, Romans says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities . . . the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God.” We are not required to say good things about the government, but rather to obey the law. Our Bill of Rights states that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.” So, if we do not voice our opinions about our government, we are not availing ourselves of the law established by our governing authorities.

**Faulty Interpretation Part 3**

As we examine popular arguments against the Bible, we will conclude by looking at prayer. In his Newsweek article, Kurt Eichenwald castigates a Houston prayer rally saying, “(Rick) Perry . . . boomed out a long prayer asking God to make America a better place . . . babbling on . . . about faith and country and the blessings of America.” He claimed Perry “heaped up empty phrases as the Gentiles do.”

In reality, Perry prayed succinctly for about two minutes with no empty phrases.

Eichenwald explains, Perry is just an example of our error. Most Christians are disobeying by praying in front of people. Jesus told us, “Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray . . . so that they may be seen by others.”

But someone can speak a prayer before others without being a hypocrite. Jesus does tell us to make our prayers a personal conversation with our God. But Jesus prayed often before synagogue attenders, in front of His disciples, and before over 5,000 people. Those times, although numerous, were less than the time He spent praying alone as should be true for us.

Eichenwald states we should repeat the Lord’s prayer verbatim.

But in Matthew, Jesus gave an example of how to pray, not a set of words to repeat meaninglessly. The New Testament contains many prayers offered by the apostles and none repeat the words from the Lord’s prayer. If Eichenwald were there to instruct them, the apostles would not have sinned so grievously.

Eichenwald claims the only reason anyone could pray in front of a large crowd, or on television, is “to be seen.” This claim does not make sense; the people he is judging can build themselves up without having to resort to prayer.

In this article we have seen that critics use an incomplete, shallow examination of Scripture to claim it is not accurate and our application is faulty. In every case, we have seen that these claims leak like a sieve.
Dan Wallace concludes, “But his numerous factual errors and misleading statements, his lack of concern for any semblance of objectivity, his apparent disdain for . . . genuine evangelical scholarship, and his uber-confidence about more than a few suspect viewpoints, make me wonder. . . . Eichenwald’s . . . grasp of genuine biblical scholarship (is), at best, subpar.”

If Eichenwald’s article represents the best arguments discrediting the Bible, one rejoices in our firm foundation. However, realizing many readers of such pieces don’t know their flimsy nature, one is saddened by the potential impact on a society inclined to ignore the Bible.

Notes

2. There are numerous web postings placed after release of Eichenwald’s article. Two you may find interesting that deal with areas of the article not addressed herein are as follows: Daniel B. Wallace, “Predictable Christmas fare: Newsweek’s Tirade against the Bible,” blogpost December 2014; and Darrell Bock, “Darrell Bock Responds to Kurt Eichenwald’s Newsweek Article on the Bible,” blogpost December 2014.
5. The 12 questions are as follows:
   1. What is the first book of the Bible? (Open-ended)
   2. What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels?
   3. Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born? Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?
   4. Which of these is NOT in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others . . . , no adultery, no stealing, keep Sabbath?
   5. Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Job, Elijah, Moses or Abraham?
   6. Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Moses, Job, Elijah or Abraham?
   7. Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Abraham, Job, Moses or Elijah?
   8. What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become body and blood, or are symbols?
   9. Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
  10. Was Mother Teresa Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Mormon?
  11. What is the name of the person whose writings and actions inspired the Reformation? Luther, Aquinas or Wesley?
  12. Who was a preacher during the First Great Awakening? Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Billy Graham?

6. Check your footnotes and the italics applied to the story of the woman caught in adultery and the last few verses of the Gospel of Mark.
8. Wallace.
9. Ibid, paragraph .
11. Ibid, paragraph 66.
Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides good reasons to believe that the stories about Jesus were reliably preserved by his followers before being recorded in the Gospels.

Forgetting What Lies Behind?

It was late at night and the university library was about to close. I was feverishly working to complete a project for one of my classes. A bell sounded, indicating it was time to shut down and
leave the building. As I and a few other students began shutting down our computers to go home for the night, a security guard suddenly began yelling at us to leave the building immediately! Apparently we weren’t moving quickly enough, and the guard, probably tired from a long day at work, was quite irritated. We told her we would leave as soon as we could, but it would take us a few minutes to pack up. Annoyed, she wrote down our names and threatened to report us to the administration. We, in turn, returned the favor, taking down her name and saying that we would report how rudely we were treated.

When I got back to my apartment, I immediately wrote down what had happened. I wanted to be sure that if I was contacted by the administration, I would have an accurate report of the evening’s events. Knowing how fallible human memory can be, I wanted to write everything down while it was still fresh in my mind. Most people would say this was a wise thing to do.

But it raises an interesting question about the New Testament Gospels. Although liberal and conservative scholars differ a bit over when these documents were written, most would agree that the earliest Gospel (probably Mark) was written anywhere from twenty to forty years after Jesus’ death. And the latest, the Gospel of John, probably dates to around sixty years after Jesus’ death.

But why did they wait so long to write their accounts? Some scholars say this was plenty of time for Jesus’ followers to distort and embellish their Master’s original words and deeds. Consequently, they insist, by the time the ministry of Jesus was recorded in the Gospels, it had already reached a form that was partly fictional. In short, the oral tradition which lies behind the Gospels is alleged to have been corrupted before the Gospel writers ever “put pen to papyrus.”

In the words of the Jesus Seminar:

The Jesus of the gospels is an imaginative theological construct, into which has been woven traces of that enigmatic sage from Nazareth—traces that cry out for . . . liberation from . . . those whose faith overpowered their memories. The search for the authentic Jesus is a search for the forgotten Jesus.

Is this true? Did the faith of Jesus’ earliest followers really overpower their memories of what Jesus said and did? Is our faith in the Gospels well-placed—or misplaced? In the remainder of this article we’ll see that there are good reasons to believe that the Gospel writers told us the “Gospel truth” about Jesus!

**Why the Wait?**

Do the New Testament Gospels accurately preserve for us the things which Jesus said and did? Many liberal scholars don’t think so. They maintain that the oral tradition upon which the Gospels are based became quickly corrupted by the early church. If they’re right, then some of what we read about Jesus in the Gospels never really happened. As some of the fellows of the Jesus Seminar put it:

Scholars of the gospels are faced with a . . . problem: Much of the lore recorded in the gospels and elsewhere in the Bible is folklore, which means that it is wrapped in memories that have been edited, deleted, augmented, and combined many times over many years.
This raises some important questions for us to consider. How carefully was the oral tradition about the words and deeds of Jesus transmitted in the early church? Does the evidence indicate whether or not it was corrupted before the Gospels were written? And why on earth did the Gospel writers wait so long to write their accounts?

Let's begin with that last question. Why did the Gospel writers wait so long to record the ministry of Jesus? Let me offer two responses to this question. First, compared with other ancient biographies that are generally considered reliable, the Gospels were written relatively soon after the events they narrate. The Gospels were written anywhere from twenty to sixty years after the death of Jesus. Although this may initially seem like a long time, it's still well within the lifetime of eyewitnesses who could either confirm or contradict these accounts of Jesus' public ministry. By contrast, “The two earliest biographies of Alexander the Great were written . . . more than four hundred years after Alexander’s death . . . yet historians consider them to be generally trustworthy.”{4} Comparatively speaking, then, the Gospel writers really didn’t wait long at all to write their accounts.

Secondly, however, we may not even be looking at this issue correctly. As the authors of the recent book, Reinventing Jesus, point out:

> It might be better to ask, Why were the Gospels written at all? If we think in categories of delay, then this presupposes that the writing of the Gospels was in the minds of these authors from the beginning. However, this is almost certainly not the case. What was paramount in the apostles’ earliest motives was oral proclamation of the gospel.{5}

In the early years of the church the story of Jesus was being told and retold by eyewitnesses of these events. But still, some might ask, might these “events” have become gradually embellished with the story’s retelling, so that what’s recorded in the Gospels is no longer trustworthy?

**To Tell the Old, Old Story**

How accurately was the oral tradition about Jesus’ life and ministry preserved before being written down? Was it corrupted by his earliest followers prior to being recorded in the Gospels? Many liberal scholars think so. But there are good reasons to think otherwise.

In the first place, we must remember that “the interval between Jesus and the written Gospels was not dormant.”{6} In fact, this period was filled with a tremendous amount of activity. The earliest followers of Jesus told and retold his story wherever they went. This is important, for as a recent book on Jesus observes:

> If the earliest proclamation about Jesus was altered in later years, then surely first-generation Christians would know about the changes and would object to them. It would not even take outsiders to object to the “new and improved Christianity,” since those who were already believers would have serious problems with the differences in the content of their belief.{7}

Not only this, but New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg lists many other reasons for believing that this oral tradition was accurately transmitted by Jesus’ earliest followers.{8} First, Jesus’ followers believed that He “proclaimed God’s Word in a way which demanded careful retelling.” Second, over ninety percent of his teachings contained “poetic elements which would have made them easy to memorize.” Third, “the almost universal method of education in antiquity, and especially in Israel, was rote memorization, which enabled people accurately to recount quantities of material far greater than all of the Gospels put together.” And fourth, “written notes and a kind of shorthand were often privately kept by rabbis and their disciples.” Although we can’t be sure that any of Jesus’
disciples kept written notes of His teachings, it’s at least possible that they did.

Finally, we must bear in mind that the Gospels are not the product of merely one person’s memories of the events of Jesus’ life. Instead, the oral tradition which lies behind the Gospels is based on numerous eyewitness reports. This is extremely important, for as the authors of Reinventing Jesus remind us, the disciples’ “recollections were not individual memories but collective ones—confirmed by other eyewitnesses and burned into their minds by the constant retelling of the story. . . . Memory in community is a deathblow to the view that the disciples simply forgot the real Jesus.”{9}

What About the Differences?

Thus, there are excellent reasons for believing that the first Christians accurately preserved and transmitted the stories about Jesus before they were recorded in the New Testament Gospels. But if this is so, then how do we explain the fact that the sayings of Jesus and his disciples are sometimes worded differently in different Gospels?

To cite just one example, consider the different ways in which the Gospel writers record the dialogue between Jesus and his disciples on the occasion of Peter’s famous confession at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus begins by asking his disciples a question, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke each word the question differently. Matthew records Jesus asking, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matt. 16:13).{10} But in Mark the question reads a bit differently, “Who do people say I am?” (Mark 8:27). And in Luke it’s a bit different still, “Who do the crowds say I am?” (Luke 9:18).

Not only is the precise wording of Jesus’ question different in each of these Gospels, but the wording of Peter’s response is as well. In Matthew, Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16). But in Mark he simply says, “You are the Christ” (8:29), and in Luke, “The Christ of God” (9:20).

Now clearly these are not major differences. In each case the gist of what’s said is the same. But we must also acknowledge that in each case the details are different. What’s going on here? If the stories about Jesus were accurately preserved before being recorded in the Gospels, then why are there these subtle, yet real, differences in the words attributed to Jesus and Peter in each of these three accounts? Or to put this question in the words of Darrell Bock, how are we to understand such sayings in the Gospels—are they live, jive, or memorex?{11}

On the one hand, the view which says such sayings are merely unhistorical “jive” just doesn’t do justice to the evidence we’ve already considered regarding how carefully the oral tradition about the life of Jesus was transmitted by his earliest followers. Nor does this view adequately account for both the internal and external evidence for the historical reliability of the Gospels.{12}

On the other hand, the “memorex” view, which holds that the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ spoken words represent the exact words He spoke on the occasions reported, doesn’t seem to square with the actual evidence of the Gospels themselves. The Gospel writers do, as we saw above, report the words of Jesus and his disciples differently, and this is so even in cases where we can be quite confident that the incident occurred only once.

This leaves us with only one more option to consider.

A “Live” Option

Dr. Darrell Bock has persuasively argued for what he calls a “live” option in explaining the
Each Evangelist retells the . . . words of Jesus in a fresh way . . . while . . . accurately presenting the “gist” of what Jesus said. . . . [T]his approach . . . recognizes the Jesus tradition as “live” in its dynamic and quality. We clearly hear Jesus . . . but . . . there is summary and emphasis in the complementary portraits that each Evangelist gives . . . .

In other words, the Gospel writers are not always giving us Jesus’ exact words, but they are always giving us his genuine voice. This distinction is absolutely necessary. For one thing, it helps explain the observed differences among Jesus’ sayings in the Gospels. It also sits well with the fact that most of these sayings had already been translated by the time they were first recorded. You see, most of Jesus’ original teaching would have been done in Aramaic, the dominant language of first-century Palestine. The Gospels, however, were written in Greek. Since “most of Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels is already a translation,” we’re not reading his exact words even when we’re reading the Gospels in Greek. Finally, Jesus’ longest speeches can be read in a matter of minutes. Yet “we know that Jesus kept his audiences for hours at a time (e.g., Mark 6:34-36).” It seems evident, then, “that the writers gave us a . . . summarized presentation of what Jesus said and did.”

But if the “live” option is correct, and the Gospels don’t always give us Jesus’ exact words, does this mean that their reports of Jesus’ teaching are untrustworthy? Not at all. The way in which the Gospel writers recorded the words and deeds of Jesus was totally consistent with the way in which responsible histories were written in the ancient world. As Dr. Bock observes, “the Greek standard of reporting speeches required a concern for accuracy in reporting the gist of what had been said, even if the exact words were not . . . recorded.”

This is exactly what a careful study of the Gospels reveals about the way in which their authors reported the words of Jesus. Although these writers lived before the invention of audio recorders, they nonetheless strove to honestly and reliably record the gist of Jesus’ teachings. We can therefore read these documents with confidence that they are telling us the “Gospel truth” about Jesus in a fresh and dynamic way.

Notes

6. Ibid., 29.
7. Ibid., 30.
10. All biblical citations are from the New International Version (NIV).
Is Jesus the Only Way? - Part 2

Paul Rutherford explains how reason, Christ’s resurrection, and the Bible all testify that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

I can’t drive around town seven days straight without passing at least one car with a bumper sticker that reads, “Coexist” on the back. You know the one. It spells the word using symbols associated with the world’s faiths, ancient and modern.

The popularly held mantra is that “all religions are equally valid ways to heaven.” This is what’s called pluralism. So is there room in this brave new world for the words of an ancient and historically respected faith?

Jesus once said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) That sounds offensive and inflammatory today. I will remind you that Jesus said it, not me.

Even more important is the truth question. It is perhaps even more offensive! Are Jesus’ words true?

I fully acknowledge even the question itself may strike you as antiquated, out of date. Perhaps I sound to you like an eccentric, soured-up, fuddy-duddy. I may be. But if the words of Jesus are true, then far more than your offended sense of style is at stake here. Far, far more.

So listen up. And take note because this crazy sounding first-century Jewish rabbi made some crazy-big statements about the nature of man, the nature of reality, and how to live the good life, here, now, and forever. Does that at least sound appealing to you? If even just for the sake of a little controversy?
Explore with me the words of this rabbi. In this article we’ll think through three reasons you should agree with him. And maybe you’ll even find eternal life in the process. If you’re a long-time listener to Probe radio, or a regular listener, this may sound familiar. I have another program exploring the position that Jesus is the only way to God. This one is part two. In this one I give you three reasons Jesus is in fact the only way to heaven. In the previous program, I defended Jesus’ statement against three lines of criticism. So in the next sections I’ll explain how reason, the resurrection, and the Word all testify that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

**Jesus the Only Way Because of Reason**

Western culture today is more pluralistic and secular than ever before. This means at least in one small part, that people believe multiple religions lead to heaven. Western culture has been moving this way for some decades. Now it has reached mainstream. Pop culture increasingly accepts this. It is therefore so much more important to consider this exclusive claim Jesus made. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me.” (John 14:6)

This is an increasingly unpopular teaching. Before I defend it, allow me to clarify. It was made by the Lord Jesus himself. I didn’t make it up. I am merely defending it.

So today I want to talk about how it is reasonable to believe this statement—why it is that you should yourself believe Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Today’s reason is logic itself. I will base this conclusion on two points: first, that the belief in one God is more logically defensible than believing in multiple creator gods; and second, that the belief in Jesus Christ as God is more reasonable than claims to deity made by others.

The first point is that believing in one creator God is more reasonable than believing in multiple. The god Aristotle believed in (the unmoved mover) was eternally simple. That is, at the root of all things is ultimately one thing—one cause, one source, one origin to which all other things owe their existence. \(^{1}\) This position beautifully avoids the difficulty of what philosophers call *reductio ad absurdum*—or the problem of infinite regression—or the problem of which came first, the chicken or the egg? The search for the first, original, or ultimate source, does not continue on and on forever. It cannot.

The second point is that Jesus is the most reasonable candidate for divinity. I respect the Buddha. But he never claimed to be God. Neither did Mohammad. Jesus was very clear. He claimed to be God.

Consider His teachings. They have not been surpassed in excellence in the two millennia that have passed since He walked the earth. Consider His actions. History’s best biographies about the man Jesus, record Him loving His enemies, healing the sick, and showing compassion to outcasts. Jesus’ life exemplified extraordinary moral rectitude.

I conclude, therefore, that it is more reasonable to believe Jesus is the only way to God given that it is more reasonable to believe in only one creator God, and given that Jesus has the best case for divinity among man’s founders of faith.

**Jesus the Only Way Because of the Resurrection**

We have a saying in American culture that nothing is certain but death and taxes. So if the taxman doesn’t come to call, the grim reaper will eventually. Death finds each of us, so we must face our own mortality.
By the best historical accounts Jesus also died and was buried, just like so many of His human brothers before Him. But Jesus, on the other hand, experienced something unique, declaring Him God above all others.

I speak, of course, of resurrection. Jesus Christ is the only person ever to have raised up Himself from the dead of his own volition, and by His own power.

This one point may be the most compelling of the three I offer this week. It is perhaps the most intuitive case for Jesus being the only way to Heaven. If Jesus really died and raised Himself from the dead, then His power exceeds those of any other man before Him, or after, for that matter. Surely He must be God.

No other religious figure can make that claim. In a class by Himself, Jesus reigns over all the founders of world religions. Muhammad’s burial site is a common tourist destination in Saudi Arabia for contemporary pilgrims. Buddha’s cremation site is in northern India. No such site exists today in contemporary Israel for Jesus. His body has no confirmed remains.

The tomb is empty. That much is clear. Records indicate He definitely died and was buried. The empty tomb demands an explanation. Resurrection makes the most sense. Jesus is the only way because He is the only one who has died and raised himself up to new life.

We have several excellent articles at our website devoted to just this topic. Go check them out for more detail. Jesus is who He said He is, “The way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) So the question is, do you want some? Believe in Jesus today by faith.

Jesus the Only Way Because the Word Declares It

Western culture today increasingly accepts the belief that multiple religions are equally valid and they are all ways to eternal life. I propose to you today another reason to believe something diametrically opposed to this—namely that the Jesus Christ revealed in the Bible, is the only way to eternal life. As the gospel writer John quoted Him, He is, the way, the truth, and the life (14:6). No one comes to the Father except through Him.

This third and final line of reasoning that Jesus is the only way to eternal life, springs from the Bible—from the very word of God itself.

You may not accept the Bible as God’s word. That’s ok. Just hear me out. Let me explain how this line of reasoning at least makes sense. Then after you’ve heard it, you can judge for yourself if it’s true or not.

So first, the Bible claims to be God’s word (2 Timothy 3:16). If we therefore assume the very commonly held conception that God is good and perfect, then that includes the words He speaks as well. So if He speaks good words, then those words must be true. They must accurately describe reality.

The Bible also makes this claim. Jesus in a famous prayer to the Father asks him to sanctify His disciples with the truth before stating, “Your word is truth.” (John 17:17) It’s a profound statement. So if God’s word is true, and God says in His word that Jesus is, in fact, the only way to God—that none can come to Him except by Jesus, then that means it’s true. See how simple that is?

But this statement is also made in another part of the Bible, Acts 4:12. Peter and John have been arrested and are being examined by the Jewish leaders. Peter declares Jesus to them and explains,
“There is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved.”

I fully admit this line of reasoning rests on you acknowledging the authority of the Bible—in which case you may not have needed to be convinced in the first place. But if you had not already been convinced of the truth of God’s word, I am very sincerely relying on the power of the Spirit at work in you to believe this truth. (Isaiah 55:11)

**Conclusion**

In this article we considered the truth of a controversial claim. It might be one of the most hotly contested claims in religion today—that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.

This is not popular these days in America, Europe, anywhere in the English speaking West, or the non-English speaking West. To hear responses to criticisms against the claim, check out part one of this two part series.

Jesus was Himself no stranger to controversy. He died a criminal’s death at the hands of His enemies. He was killed and buried. The Jewish and Roman leaders were smugly satisfied they’d dispatched this unquiet voice.

But when Jesus’ enemies attempt to end his earthly ministry, they unknowingly ushered in a spiritually unending ministry of atonement and reconciliation. By his death Jesus paid the price of sin—death—satisfying the just wrath of God. Jesus made peace with God on your behalf. Believe in Him by faith today and you can have peace with God. Would you like to have peace with him? Tell Him right now. Use your voice or pray silently. But tell Him. Go ahead.

The only thing required of you to receive eternal life is to believe Jesus is Lord. One of Jesus’ most famous sayings is, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Confess this belief with your mouth that Jesus Christ is God and believe in your heart that God has raised up his Son from the dead. And you can be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Jesus is the only way to God because there is no other way to get to God but by Jesus. Mankind is imperfect. You are dead in your transgressions and sins. The only way to satisfy God’s holy wrath is to give Him what is due: death. Jesus died that death for you. He’s the only one who could ever have paid your debt. And He did.

Human reason leads us to this beautiful conclusion that Jesus is the only way. God has declared it himself clearly in his divinely inspired book—the Bible. His resurrection seals it.

If you believed this for the first time today you are now heir to an eternal throne. Pick up a Bible and read Jesus’ life story in the book of John. Tell a friend who’s a Christian. Make plans to join them at their church Sunday. Keep praying and reading the Bible. You can discover the wonderful adventure of life in Jesus Christ, the only way to God.

**Notes**

1. Metaphysics, Lambda.
2. Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19
3. Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20
Biblical Archaeology

*Kerby Anderson provides an update on recent archaeological finds that corroborate the historicity of the Bible.*

One of the most important proofs for the historical accuracy of the Bible can be found in archaeology. Ancient history and archaeology should confirm the accuracy of this record. That is what we find when comparing these finds with the written record of Scripture.

My focus will be to summarize a few of the past archaeological finds that confirm the Bible and then provide an update on some of the newest archaeological discoveries made in just the last few years that are very significant. On the Probe website, we have an excellent summary done twenty years ago of archaeology and the Old Testament (probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/) and archaeology and the New Testament (probe.org/archaeology-and-the-new-testament/).

Archaeology not only has confirmed the historical record found in the Bible, but it also provides additional details not found in the original writings of the biblical authors. Archaeology also helps explain Bible passages by providing context of the surrounding culture as well as the social and political circumstances.

We must also admit the limitations of archaeology. Although these archaeological finds can establish the historical accuracy of the record, they cannot prove the divine inspiration of the Bible. Also, we must admit that even when we have an archaeological find, it still must be interpreted. Those interpretations are obviously affected by the worldview perspective and even bias of the historians and archaeologists.

Even granting the skeptical bias that can be found in this field, it is still amazing that many archaeologists acknowledge the biblical confirmation that has come from significant archaeological finds.

Dr. William Albright observed, “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition.”{1}

Archaeologist Nelson Glueck and president of Hebrew Union College concluded, “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail...
historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical description has often led to amazing discoveries."{2}

Millar Burrows, Professor of Archaeology at Yale University, remarked that “On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine.”{3}

**Old Testament Archaeology**

There are so many significant archaeological finds that confirm the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. Perhaps the most famous and most significant find is the Dead Sea scrolls. A young shepherd boy found the first of them in a cave in 1947. Eventually over 800 fragments were found. This includes a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah.

Many of these scrolls are from before the time of Jesus Christ. That is important because it provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament. The earliest copies of the Old Testament that we had before this discovery were a thousand years later. When we compare the Dead Sea scrolls to these later manuscripts, we can see that there were very few variations (mostly due to changes in spelling or grammar). The transmission through the scribe was very accurate.

Another significant find was archaeological documentation of King David. Archaeologists working at one site uncovered an inscription that means “house of David” that dates to the ninth century BC.

Another important archaeological find was the Hittite nation. The Hittites are mentioned nearly 50 times in the Old Testament, but there was no solid archaeological evidence they existed until the 20th century. Some argued that the Bible must be wrong since it mentions this nation but archaeological evidence was lacking.

The Hittites were a major force against the Jews. Israel needed to conquer them in order to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 11:3-4). King David had Uriah the Hittite killed because of his adultery with his wife, Bathsheba (2 Kings 11:3-21). Fortunately, archaeologists did uncover abundant evidence of the Hittites in Turkey. They found a temple, sculptures, a storeroom with 10,000 clay tablets. Later they even uncovered the Hittite capital city of Hattusha.

Archaeologists with the Israel Antiquities Authority digging at Tel Lachish found an ancient toilet that confirms Old Testament history. To understand its significance, we need to look at the record of King Hezekiah. We read in 2 Kings that he removed the Asherah poles from the high places and smashed the sacred stones that were used in the Canaanite cultic worship.

Archaeologists discovered large rooms that appear to be a shrine where four-horned altars were destroyed. They also found a seat carved in stone with the hole in it that was used as a toilet. It was mostly likely placed there as a form of desecration for the whole room.{4} This correlates with the biblical description in 2 Kings 10:27 that Jehu and his followers “demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day.”

**New Testament Archaeology**

Jesus spent much of his time in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. It is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of the fishing industry there (anchors,
fishhooks), which would have been used by many of the disciples. The houses were one-story buildings, with roofs of wooden beams or branches. This explains how men carried a man to the roof and let him down in front of Jesus (Mark 2:1-4). Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-22, Luke 4:31-36). The remains of a synagogue built in the 4th century sits atop the black basalt foundations of this the synagogue that existed at the time of Jesus.

In Jerusalem are many archaeological discoveries from the time of Jesus. That includes the remains of the temple as well as the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15) and the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-7).

Archaeology (as well as history) verifies the existence of many political leaders mentioned in the New Testament. A Denarius coin shows a portrait of Tiberius Caesar. This is also significant because Jesus asked the people whose likeness was on the coin (Mark 12:17). The name Pontius Pilate was found in an inscription at Caesarea Maritima.

Sometimes archaeology can shed light on what seems like a sharp disagreement in the Bible. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he recounts what he said to Peter who stopped eating meals with gentile Christians. He argued that Peter lived like a Gentile even though he was a Jew.

The answer lies in the fact that Paul was a devout Pharisee, who took kosher food laws and purity very seriously. Peter, though Jewish, was not a Pharisee and grew up in Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeological excavations uncovered some non-kosher evidence. Some were eating wild boar and catfish, which were considered unclean and not to be eaten by Jew following the Torah.\(^5\)

Archaeological finds at Corinth include the city’s \textit{bema} seat, where Paul stood trial (Acts 18:12-17) and an inscription with the name Erastus, a city administrator who was an associate of Paul (Acts 19:22; 2 Timothy 4:20; Romans 16:23).

Critics have challenged the historical record of Luke because of alleged inaccuracies. Classical scholar Colin Hemer documents that Luke is a very accurate historian.\(^6\) He identifies 84 facts in the Book of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This includes nautical details, names of gods, designation of magistrates, and proper names and titles.

These are just a few of the archaeological discoveries in the past that have confirmed the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the next section we will look at some of the most recent archaeological discoveries.

**Recent Archaeological Discoveries**

Within the last few years, there have been major archaeological discoveries that further confirm biblical history. An article in \textit{Christianity Today} provides a list of the top ten archaeological discoveries.\(^7\) Here are just a few of these important discoveries.

The Israel Antiquities Authority announced the discovery of a limestone column on which the world “Jerusalem” was spelled out in Aramaic. This is the oldest inscription of this nature found so far. You might expect that there would be lots of such inscriptions, but that turn out to be very rare.

The inscription was found in an ancient potter’s village that must have served pilgrims making their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. A potter’s field calls to mind the one bought by the priests (Matthew 27:7) with the money Judas returned.

The Jewish tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were located for a time in Shiloh. Excavation
there produced a clay pomegranate. In the Bible, the pomegranate was a common temple decoration (1 Kings 7:18; 2 Kings 25:17). Small pomegranates embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet yarns hung from the hems of the priestly robes (Exodus 28:33). This discovery affirms the sacredness of Shiloh.

Scientists and archaeologists believe they made have found the site of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. They found evidence that a “high-heat” explosive event north of the Dead Sea wiped out all civilization in the affected area. It killed all the people within a 25-kilometer circular area. The fertile soil would have been stripped of nutrients by the high heat. Waves of briny salt would have washed over the surrounding area and spread through hot winds.

The scientists suggest that a cosmic airburst event from a meteor was the reason for the disappearance from the site. It apparently took 600 years for the region to recover before it could once again be inhabited. This fits with the description in Genesis 19, which says that burning sulfur rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah and killed all the people and all the vegetation of the land.

Archaeologist Dr. Stephen Collins says that there was a violent conflagration that ended occupation at the site. There is “melted pottery, scorched foundation stones, and several feet of ash and destruction debris churned into a dark gray matrix as if in a Cuisinart.” He and another author in a joint paper conclude that all of this provides “signs of a highly destructive and thermal event that one might expect from what is described in Genesis 19.”

Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Above we looked at a few of the most recent archaeological discoveries that confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible. Most of them were found in an article in Christianity Today. Here are a few more significant discoveries.

An inscribed piece of limestone discovered in a tomb along the west bank of the Nile was revealed to be a Semitic abecedary (alphabet in ABC order). It dates back to the time of Moses and fits with the statement that “Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said” (Exodus 24:4). It turns out he wasn’t the only one writing in a Semitic script in Egypt at that time.

When ISIS terrorists captured Mosul, they blew up the tomb of the prophet Jonah. This uncovered the remains of a palace of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon. Previous archaeological teams stopped digging in certain sites in Iraq for fear of destroying them. That was a case of the traditional tomb of Jonah, until ISIS started digging beneath it to find artifacts to sell. As one article put it, “ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible.” The tunnels they dug revealed a previously untouched Assyrian palace in the ancient city of Ninevah. Inscriptions found in the old city of Nineveh give an order of Assyrian kings that matches perfectly with the biblical order.

Extra careful processing of dirt from an archaeological dig in the southwest corner of the Temple Mount provided a beka weight. This was used (Exodus 38:6) to measure the silver in the half-shekel temple tax that was collected from each member of the Jewish community.

Another seal impression seems to be (a letter is missing) the name “Isaiah the prophet.” It was found near the Temple Mount near another seal impression that says “King Hezekiah of Judah” that was uncovered two years earlier. Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah are mentioned in the same verse 17 times. This clay seal gives the impression that Isaiah had access to the king’s palace as his adviser.
A ring with the name “Pontius Pilate” on it was excavated decades ago but only could be read recently due to advanced photographic techniques. Of course, this is not the first time that his name has surfaced in archaeology, but it is still a significant find. The ring is not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate. It was probably worn by someone authorized to act on his authority and would use it to seal official communications.

This is an exciting time for archaeological investigation. New finds provide even more evidence of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Archaeology has provided abundant confirmation of the Bible.

Notes


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**God Questions From Little Kids**

Recently I asked some of the mamas of littles in our church, “What God questions are your kids asking?” While not definitive, here are some answers I trust you’ll find helpful.
Who made God?

God has always existed. No one made God. Everything that has been made, has been made by someone or something else. Eventually, when we go back far enough, there has to be a Someone or a Something that is eternal—that was not created. Smart thinkers called philosophers call this an “uncaused cause.”

How do we know this? Because there are some things we can’t figure out on our own, so God tells us in His word. Especially where Jesus is talking to His Father:

“So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” (John 17:5, 24).

How do we know the Bible is true?

The biggest way we can know is fulfilled prophecy. (Prophecies are a special kind of promise.) That means that God gave prophets information about the future that only He could know because He knows everything, and then the prophecies came true in even the smallest detail. This means that the Bible is a supernatural book because it is from God, who had human helpers to write down what He wanted written down.

We also have evidence supporting our belief that the Bible is a supernatural book:

Unity: The Bible’s books were written over 1500 years, by 40 different authors, on three different continents. But there is one consistent, big message from beginning to end: God loves us and has a big plan and purpose for His creation.

Bibliographical Evidence: The reason we have a Bible at all is that the original texts were copied many times over. There are 25,000+ handwritten copies of New Testament documents, with many variations. These variations allow us to see where errors and changes (such as spelling which does not change the meaning of a word) crept into the copying. There are no variations that question essential Christian beliefs.

Concerning the Old Testament: the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered between 1949 and 1956—thousands of fragments from every book of the Old Testament except Esther, including a complete copy of Isaiah. These fragments had been stored since 300-100 B.C. The book of Isaiah had not been changed in that entire time except for a few spelling changes. The scribes were exceedingly careful in copying God’s word.

Archeological Evidence: Archeology, which is the study of old buried stuff, also supports details in the Bible. Not everything in the Bible has archeological support, but no archaeological findings have ever contradicted biblical details.

The evidence for both the Old and New Testaments shows that what we hold in our hands today is the same as what was written by the original authors.

How can Jesus be God but also God’s Son? (In other words, how does this Trinity thing work?)

First of all, it’s a hard idea that nobody fully understands because our minds are just too puny and small. It’s okay not to get it. This truth is called a mystery, and nobody will understand it until
heaven.

Here are three very important truths about God:

1. There is one God.
2. God is three distinct Persons.
3. Each Person is fully God.

The three equal Persons are the Father; the Son, Jesus; and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son or the Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father or the Son. But all three Persons are still one God. Yes, it’s confusing! Here’s a hint: often when people refer to God they mean the Father. For example, when considering the question, “How can Jesus be God but also God’s Son,” we can say that Jesus is divine, meaning He is God, but He is the Father’s Son. He’s not the same as the Father.

So when we’re talking about God it is helpful to refer to either the Father, and Son or the Spirit.

We can see all three Persons of the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus. (Matthew 3:13-17)

**Why can’t we see God?**

We can’t see God the Father because He is spirit. That’s like invisible energy, like sunlight. Or wind. And the Holy Spirit is, well, spirit. Jesus became a human being just like us when He left heaven to live on earth, but we can’t see Him because He’s back in heaven now. God is still on earth because God is everywhere, but He’s invisible.

I know you’d like to see God, and you know what? So would I! Jesus knew we’d feel that way, which is why He said, “Blessed are those who believe without seeing Me.” (John 20:29). But if you trust in Jesus, one day you will see Him very plainly in heaven.

**Where is heaven?**

Heaven is a spirit place. It’s not like our house or our church or the park where we go, that you can find on a map or by walking there. I can tell you that when Jesus left the earth and went back to heaven, He went UP, and the Bible talks about Him coming back DOWN to earth. But it’s not in the sky like the moon. When astronauts went up into space they didn’t find heaven because heaven’s not a place we can touch or see.

**Why can’t I hear God’s voice? When I say, “Hello, God,” why doesn’t He talk back?**

God doesn’t speak to us the same way people do. That’s because He is spirit. But Jesus taught us, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (John 10:27) So hearing His voice is different from hearing Mommy or Daddy’s voice. You hear His voice with your heart. (Matthew 13)

We recognize God’s voice from reading and hearing His word in the Bible. Everything God says lines up with what He tells us in His word, so we can learn to tell the difference between His true voice and our imagination. We have to practice listening. It’s not easy, and we have to know what He says in His word in order to know what His voice sounds like.

**If everything God makes is good, why did He make Satan?**

Satan did not start out as an evil creature. God made him a beautiful, powerful, good angel. The good angel decided to become a bad angel by trying to become like God instead of being content
with how God made him as a good angel.

Some people have asked why God made angels and people who could choose to disobey. That’s because God wanted angels to CHOOSE to obey Him, and He wanted people to CHOOSE to love Him. Without the ability to choose, it wouldn’t be real obedience or real love.

**How will I know how to get to heaven when I die?**

Getting to heaven from earth is like stepping from one room into a hallway or another room. Very simple, right? And you will probably have angels with you as well. Jesus will make sure to bring you to Himself, so you don’t need to worry about it.

**Before I was in your tummy was I in heaven with God?**

No, you didn’t exist before you were in my tummy. God knew you in His mind and in His heart, but He didn’t create you until just the right time to form you inside my body. The only person who was in heaven with God the Father before He became a tiny baby was Jesus.

This blog post originally appeared at https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/god_questions_from_little_kids on October 15, 2019.

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**The Apologetics of Jesus: A Defense of His Deity**

*Dr. Zukeran shows us that the greatest defense of the deity of Jesus was made by Jesus Himself. Claiming to be God in the flesh, His words and His actions had to be an apologetic for His claim. People could see He was a man; He had to prove to them that He was also deity, God in the flesh.*

Jesus was one of the greatest leaders, teachers, and remarkable individuals that ever lived, but few realize that Jesus was also the greatest apologist. Apologetics is the rational defense of Christianity. Christian apologists use reason and evidence to present a convincing case for Christianity, challenge unbelief, expose errors, and defend the message of the gospel. Apologetics was an essential part of Jesus’ ministry. If it was important in His ministry, it certainly should be in all ministries looking to impact the unbelieving world for Christ.

The Bible commands us in 1 Peter 3:15, “But set apart Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer [apologia] to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have.” We are commanded to provide a well-reasoned answer for our faith in Christ to an unbelieving world. Jesus commanded us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Mt. 22:37). Apologetics involves knowing why you believe and
complies with Christ’s command of loving God with your mind.

There exists some misunderstanding among Christians as to whether apologetics is necessary. Some believe that our belief in Christ is based on “faith” and thus does not require solid reasons or evidence to support it. Therefore, in witnessing to unbelievers, some mistakenly suppose that apologetics is ineffective in leading anyone to faith. The call of the Christian is to simply present the gospel, and the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures will do the rest. However, this was not the example of Christ.

Christ made extraordinary claims to be the divine Son of God. He made such claims as being the source of life, forgiver of sins, the embodiment of truth, and authority over the Old Testament Law. Such claims were met with skepticism, doubt, and hostility. Jesus knew He was making remarkable claims, and He did not expect people to simply believe His message without good reasons. He was not seeking or wanting people to exercise “blind faith.” Jesus understood that we are rational and moral beings, for we are created in the image of God who is a rational and morally perfect being. For this reason, we exercise our rational capacity and investigate the evidence before making decisions.

Christ knew He would have to make a convincing case to uphold His claims and He did. Throughout His ministry, Christ presented compelling reasons and evidence to uphold His claim to be the divine Son of God. Jesus’ apologetics included the testimony of witnesses, miracles, the resurrection, prophecy, reason, the use of parables and more. The apologetic methods of Jesus serve as a model for every believer who desires to engage and impact an unbelieving world for Christ.

The Testimony of Witnesses

A man ill for thirty-eight years lay beside the Pool of Bethesda along with a multitude of crippled individuals. Suddenly an unknown stranger walks up and asks him a strange question. “Do you want to get well?” As the lame man begins to explain his situation, the stranger orders the man to “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!” Immediately, strength enters his legs and he rises and walks, carrying his mat as the stranger orders. Soon afterwards the Pharisees arrive and an examination ensues.

What should have been a moment of rejoicing turns into a serious interrogation. The Jewish leaders in John 5 confront Jesus seeking an opportunity and reason to kill Him. Instead of praising God in the healing of the lame man, the focus of the Jewish leaders is on the apparent violation of their Jewish tradition by Jesus.

Jesus responded saying, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” (Jn. 5:17). The following verse states, “For this reason, the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.” (Jn. 5:18). In this chapter Jesus performed some remarkable feats and made some extraordinary claims. When questioned, Jesus gave an answer or an apologia, a defense of His work and character. In His answer, we see that He was the greatest apologist and that apologetics was a key component in the ministry of Jesus.

In the passage that follows, Jesus presents one of the clearest and strongest cases regarding His nature as the divine Son of God. New Testament scholar Leon Morris states, “Nowhere in the Gospels do we find our Lord making such a formal, systematic, orderly, regular statement of His own unity with the Father, His divine commission and authority, and the proofs of His Messiahship, as we find in this discourse.”{1}

What was the apologetic method Jesus used in this instance? Jesus’ apologetic involved the
testimony of witnesses. According to Jewish law, a testimony is valid only if there were at least two witnesses who could testify to the truth of an individual’s claims (Deut. 19:15). Jesus knew these men needed solid testimony to confirm His claims but also testimony that would convict them of their error regarding their understanding of His identity.

Jesus brings forth five witnesses that testify on His behalf; John the Baptist (5:32-35), His works (5:36), the Father (5:37), the Old Testament Scriptures (5:39-40), and Moses (5:41-46). There were no more authoritative witnesses than these. In a brilliant presentation, Jesus makes His case. The testimony of witnesses was part of the apologetics of Jesus.

**Apologetics in the Parables**

It is a well-known fact that Jesus was a great storyteller. His stories captivated the audience and taught a valuable lesson. The term “good Samaritan” and “the prodigal Son,” are recognized all over the world because of the unforgettable stories told by Jesus. One of the best ways to communicate truth is to illustrate it through stories which are also an effective way to penetrate into hardened hearts that would not be receptive to a direct gospel presentation. The parables of Christ are some of the most remarkable lessons ever taught. However, did you know that the parables of Christ were also powerful apologetic presentations of our Lord?

Through the use of these stories, Jesus makes a declaration and a defense of His ministry and claims. The images He selects are used in the Old Testament and later Jewish literature in reference to God. Jesus uses these images and applies them often to Himself. Philip Payne states, “Out of the fifty-two recorded narrative parables, twenty depict Him in imagery which in the Old Testament typically referred to God. The frequency with which this occurs indicates that Jesus regularly depicted Himself in images which were particularly appropriate for depicting God.”

By applying these images to Himself Jesus indicates his self-understanding as the divine Son of God and was communicating this truth to His audience. Payne identifies ten prominent images used in the parables in which images used in reference to God in the Old Testament Jesus applies to Himself. Jesus’ repeated use of such images indicates He wanted His audience to recognize His divinity and that He was carrying out the very will of God in His ministry on earth.

Here are a few examples where Christ declares His divinity in the gospels. The image of the rock is used to describe God, especially in the Psalms (Ps. 19:14, 28:1, 42:9, 61:2, 62:2, 71:3, 78:35). In the parables of Jesus, He states that those who build their lives upon His teachings have built their lives upon “a rock” (Matt. 7:24-26 and Lk. 6:46-49). In Psalm 23 and Ezekiel 34, God is portrayed as a shepherd. In John 10 Jesus identifies Himself as the good shepherd. In another parable, Jesus uses the example of a bridegroom. In Isaiah 49, 54, Jeremiah 2, and Hosea, God is pictured as a bridegroom. In Mk. 2:19, Matt. 9:15, and Lk. 5:34-35, Jesus identifies Himself as the bridegroom. The parables were powerful stories Jesus used to communicate truth but they were also part of the apologetics of Jesus.

**The Use of Reason**

Jesus commanded us to “Love the Lord your God with all your . . . mind” (Mt. 22:37). Jesus exemplified what it meant to love God with “all your mind.” He was the greatest thinker who ever set foot upon the earth. Philosopher Dallas Willard states,

> We need to understand that Jesus is a thinker, that this is not a dirty word but an essential work, and that his other attributes do not preclude thought, but only insure that he is certainly the
greatest thinker of the human race: ‘the most intelligent person who ever lived on earth.’ He
constantly uses the power of logical insight to enable people to come to the truth about
themselves and about God from the inside of their own heart and mind.\(^4\)

Jesus understood that we are created in the image of God. Our creator is a reasonable and rational
being. We are thus endowed with the capacity for reason and rationality. In Isaiah 1:18, God invited
Israel saying, “Come now let us reason together.” God wanted the people of Israel to use their ability
to reason and consider the consequences of their behavior.

Jesus showed Himself to be a brilliant apologist who used the laws of logic to reveal truth, demolish
arguments, and point out error. The communication of truth and discerning error requires the use of
reason. Since our faith is a reasonable faith, reason was part of the apologetics of Jesus.

An example of the use of reason is found in Matthew 12:22-28. Here the Pharisees accuse Jesus of
casting out demons by the power of the Devil. Through the use of reason, Jesus showed their
accusation to be false. The argument He used is the argument known as *reductio ad absurdum*
[Latin for “reduction to the absurd”]. This is an argument that demonstrates if the primary premise
is supposed to be true, then it leads to a contradiction that is absurd. One would then inevitably have
to conclude that the original premise is false.

Jesus responded stating that “Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined and every city or
household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against
himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your
people drive them out?” Jesus points to the illogical nature of their accusation and further points to
the testimony of His miracles that confirm His authority being from God.

**Apologetics of Miracles**

Something had gone terribly wrong. The Messiah had arrived but the Kingdom, which would be
characterized by liberty, freedom, and the just rule of God, had not arrived. Instead, John the Baptist
found himself in prison awaiting execution. Confused and discouraged, John sent his disciples to
Jesus to ask Him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Lk. 7:20).
Jesus responds by pointing to the testimony of His miracles: “Go back and report to John what you
hear and see. The lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised,
and the good news is preached to the poor.” (Lk. 7:22-23). When asked by John if He was indeed the
Messiah, Jesus defends His claim by pointing to the testimony of His miracles. Miracles represent
another component in the apologetics of Jesus.

A miracle is a special act of God that interrupts the normal course of events. Natural laws describe
what occurs regularly by natural causes, but miracles describe what happens rarely, by supernatural
causes. A miracle is an act of God designed to confirm the word of God through a messenger of
God.\(^5\)

Throughout the Old Testament, God used miracles to confirm His message and His messenger.
Christ’s miracles demonstrated that what He claimed about Himself was true and that God’s
confirming hand was on the message He preached. Jesus performed a vast array of miraculous signs
that demonstrated His divine authority over every realm of creation.

When friendly as well as hostile audiences questioned Jesus, He defended His claims with the
testimony of miracles (Mk. 2:1-12, Jn. 2, and 10:22-42). Many who witnessed Christ’s miracles made
the connection. Nathaniel, witnessing the omniscience of Christ, responded exclaiming, “Rabbi, you
are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” (Jn. 1:49). Nicodemus in his evening visit meets Jesus saying, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” (Jn. 3:2).

When Christ establishes His kingdom, all creation will be subject to Him. Sin, sickness, death, and disease will be overcome and the subjects of the kingdom will never be in want. The miracles of Christ reflect His divine character and demonstrate the King of the Kingdom has arrived.

Apologetics was an essential component of Christ’s ministry and should be an important part of any ministry looking to engage this lost world for Christ. The Bible commands us to defend our faith, and Christ set the supreme example for us to follow.

To learn more about the apologetics of Jesus and gain valuable practical lessons from His examples, check out the online store at Probe.org and purchase a copy of the in depth book, The Apologetics of Jesus written by Norman Geisler and myself.

Notes

3. Ibid., 313-17.

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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 reminder 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 Arimathaea 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 the 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**


**For Further Reading**


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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