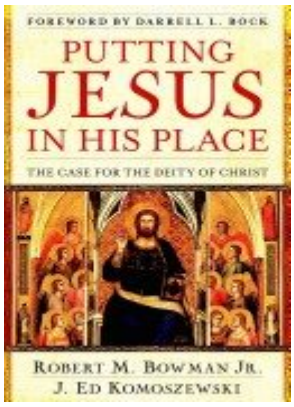
Jesus Is God: 5 Powerful Indicators That Reveal His Divine H.A.N.D.S

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: 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

1. Robert M. Bowman and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus In His Place* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 31.

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Gospel Truth or Fictitious Gossip?

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."{1} 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.{2}

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.{3}

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 differences between the Gospel accounts.{13} He describes this option this way:

> 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 . . . .{14}

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.{15} 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."{16}

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."{17}

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

1. J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: What The Da Vinci Code and Other Novel Speculations Don't Tell You* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2006), 21.

2. Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 4, cited in Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus,* 21.
3. Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 6, cited in Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, Reinventing Jesus, 29.
4. Craig Blomberg, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 33.
5. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, 26.
6. Ibid., 29.
7. Ibid., 30.
8. The following points are taken from Craig L. Blomberg, "Gospels (Historical Reliability)," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 294.
9. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, 33-34.
10. All biblical citations are from the New International Version (NIV).
11. Darrell L. Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?" in *Jesus Under Fire*, eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 73-99.
12. See Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1987).
13. The discussion which follows is largely dependent on the essay by Darrell Bock, "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels," 73-99.
14. Ibid., 77.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 77-78.
17. Ibid., 79.
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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.{2} But Jesus, on the other hand, experienced something unique, declaring Him God above all others.

I speak, of course, of resurrection.{3} 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.{4} 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
4. Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? – A Clear Christian

Perspective;
What Difference Does the Resurrection Make?;
The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?
– A Real Historical Event;
The Answer Is the Resurrection

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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 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 *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 *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."{8}

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."{9} 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

1. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religions of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 176.
2. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert* (New York: Farrar, Strous and Cudahy, 1959), 136.

3. Millar Burrows, *What Mean These Stones?* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 1.
4. Richard Gray, “The wrong kind throne: Toilet discovered 2-800-year-old shrine,” *Daily Mail*, 28 September 2016.
5. Craig A. Evans, “Why Archaeology Matters for Bible Study,” *Bible Study Magazine*, March/April 2019, 18-19.
6. Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 1990).
7. Gordon Govier, “Biblical Archaeology’s Top 10 Discoveries of 2018, *Christianity Today*, December 27, 2018.
8. Amanda Borschel-Dan, “Evidence of Sodom? Meteor blast cause of biblical destruction, say scientists,” *Times of Israel*, 22 November 2018.
9. “ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible,” *Facts and Trends*, March 19, 2018.

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He Is Risen: Evidence for the Resurrection of Christ

Tom Davis presents biblical evidence for why believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is reasonable.

One unique thing about the Christian religion is that it is testable. The most important claim the Christian makes is that Jesus rose physically from the dead. Paul taught, “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14). Paul is telling the church at Corinth that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Christianity is false. When Jesus cleansed the temple, the Jews asked Him what authority He had to chase the people from the Temple. Jesus answered, “Destroy this temple

and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Jesus was saying that the test to authenticate His authority was if He would be raised from the dead. The claim that Jesus was raised from the dead is testable using the same methodology that a historian would use to determine if Alexander the Great invaded India, or if the Roman Senate murdered Julius Caesar.

Early Evidence

To evaluate the truth of historical claims it is important to have accurate historical records. The New Testament contains the historical record of the early church. There are over 5,700 Greek New Testament manuscripts. The earliest manuscript is P52, a papyrus containing part of John chapter 18. This manuscript is dated around A.D. 130. The New Testament was written between the late 40's and the mid 90's. The Gospel of John was written sometime between the late 60's and the mid 90's. This means that there are 40 to 70 years from the time John was written to the time of the first manuscript evidence. The ancient literature with the second most manuscript documentation is the works of Homer. The *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* have 643 manuscripts.{1}

When compared to other historical writings, the New Testament manuscript evidence is very good. Only ten manuscripts attest to Caesar's Gallic Wars; the oldest manuscript is dated 900 years after the original writing. What we know of the works of Tacitus comes from two manuscripts. The oldest is 800 years after the original writing.{2} When comparing the manuscript evidence for the New Testament to the rest of the writings of antiquity, the New Testament has more evidence, and the evidence is closer to the dates of the original writings in question. The manuscripts show that what was written by the original authors of the New Testament has been accurately preserved and faithfully passed down through history. There are a few scribal insertions, but today's Bible copies accurately represent what the apostles originally wrote.

Not all the New Testament is relevant to the resurrection of Jesus. The four canonical gospels are relevant to the life of Jesus. Most New Testament scholars agree that Mark was the first gospel and was written in the late 60s. John was the last gospel. He wrote his gospel between A.D. 80 and A.D. 95. Jesus was crucified in A.D. 30 or 33. The gospels were written between 30 and 65 years after the events they describe.

Virtually all scholars agree that there is earlier evidence that must be considered. Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians in A.D. 55. Paul writes, "For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received—that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also" (1 Corinthians. 15:3-8). Paul is claiming that this is something that he "received." This is an early church confession that was given to Paul sometime after his conversion experience.

In Galatians Paul states that after his conversion he went to Arabia, then returned to Damascus. Paul writes, "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas" (Galatians 1:18). Paul's conversion was a few years after the death of Jesus. Wolfhart Pannenberg claims that "Paul would have been in Jerusalem six to eight years after the events."{3} The confession was formulated before Paul visited Peter. N.T. Wright comments, "It was probably formulated within the first two or three years after Easter itself, since it was already in formulaic form when Paul 'received' it."{4} The confession that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 15 was formulated sometime between two and six years after the death of Jesus. There is no time for legendary embellishment.

The Facts

Several facts can be gleaned from the passage in 1 Corinthians 15:

1. Jesus died.

2. His disciples believed they experienced a resurrected Jesus.

3. Paul had an experience that he thought was the resurrected Jesus.

The gospels and Paul's undisputed letters support these facts.

1. Jesus died

"Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3)

Jesus died by crucifixion during the Passover celebration. This is attested by all four Gospels (Matthew 27:32-54, Mark 15:21-39, Luke 23:26-49, John 19:16-30). The Talmud also states that "Jesus of Nazareth was hanged on Passover Eve."{5} At that time, the term "hanged" referred to crucifixion. Jesus' death is well attested in the ancient literature. Michael Licona sums up the evidence: "Jesus' death and/or crucifixion are also abundantly mentioned in non-canonical literature. Moreover, there is no ancient evidence to the contrary."{6}

2. His disciples believed they experienced a resurrected Jesus

"He appeared to Cephas" (1 Corinthians 15:5)

Jesus' disciples had experiences that they interpreted as seeing the resurrected Jesus. The first person Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 15 is Peter. There is no direct evidence that Jesus appeared to Peter individually. Luke also records an early Christian saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has

appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:23). We know that Paul met with Peter and James (Galatians 1:18-19; Acts 15:1-21). His knowledge of Jesus' appearance to Peter probably came from them.

"then to the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:5)

Jesus appeared to the twelve (minus Judas). Paul was an associate of the apostles; he would have had knowledge of Jesus appearing to these men. Luke and John record Jesus appearing to the apostles (Luke 24:36-49, John 20:19-20). Together, Paul, Luke, and John give three independent attestations of Jesus appearing to the twelve.

"Then he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:6-7)

Jesus appeared to 500 brothers and sisters. There is no other attestation of this appearance. It is unlikely that Paul could have made up this appearance. Paul refers to them as "Most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:6). Paul's statement that most of these people are alive, and that some had died, indicates that he had some knowledge of these individuals. He is saying that these people were available to be questioned about the event.

"Then he appeared to James" (1 Corinthians 15:7)

Jesus' brothers did not believe that He was the Messiah before His death. However, Luke claims that after the ascension, the brothers of Jesus were at the upper room (Acts 1:14). Peter thought that it was important for James to be informed of his escape from prison (Acts 12:17). Later, when Paul visits Jerusalem, Paul gives a report to "James, and all the elders" (Acts 21:18). The book of Acts indicates that James rose to a prominent leadership role in the Jerusalem church. Paul also notes the influence of James. When Paul visited Peter in Jerusalem, he said that he "saw none of the other apostles

except James the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19). James is also referred to as a pillar of the church (Galatians 2:9). The Biblical evidence indicates that James was once an unbeliever who became one of the most influential leaders in the early Jerusalem church. An appearance of the risen Jesus would explain the transition from unbeliever to leader of the church in Jerusalem.

"then to all the apostles." (1 Corinthians 15:7)

Jesus appeared to all the apostles. There are no clues to the nature of this appearance. This may refer to the appearance to the disciples in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20). There is no conclusive way to link that passage to Paul's creedal formula in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8. The reliability of this appearance rests on its early attestation. Paul probably knew the people involved.

3. Jesus appeared to Paul

"Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also." (1 Corinthians 15:8)

Paul rhetorically asks the Corinthians, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9:1). Luke also records Jesus' appearance to Paul (Acts 9, 22, 26). These three passages are consistent in the details of what Paul experienced. However, there are some apparent inconsistencies in the details of what Paul's companions experienced. In Acts 22:9 and 26:13, Paul's companions see the light that blinded Paul. In Acts 9:3-7 there is no mention of them seeing light. Because not mentioning the light does not necessarily contradict the presence of light, it is reasonable to conclude that the men saw the light. There is also a question as to whether Paul's companions heard the voice. The word that Luke uses in Acts 22 is the Greek word *acouo*, which can mean "hearing," "understanding," or "to obey." This means that *acouo* can mean to hear but not understand what a voice is saying. This is why

the passage in chapter 22 is translated, “Now those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice (*acouo*) of the one who was speaking with me” (Acts 22:9). There is also the question of whether the men with Paul were standing (Acts 9:7) or if they were on the ground (Acts 26:14). The Greek word used in Acts 22:9 is *istemi*, which can mean “stopped,” as in not being able to move. When Luke writes, “The men who were traveling with him stood speechless” (Acts 9:7), this could also be understood as saying that the men did not leave Paul.{7} Michael Licona addresses the issue of these translation difficulties:

> “It is one thing to note a contradiction between two authors. However, it is another thing to claim that an author is contradicting himself, within his same writing no less. Unless Luke was being careless, it seems to me that it is better to be charitable in our interpretations of surface contradictions within the same work if they do not require too much strain.”{8}

Licona was specifically addressing the issue of whether the men heard the voice, but this same concept also applies to the interpretation and understanding of whether the men were standing or on the ground.

Evaluating Arguments

What can we conclude so far? There are multiple independent attestations that Jesus’ followers experienced Jesus appearing to them after He was buried. These experiences occurred with individuals and groups of people. William Lane Craig concludes, “The evidence makes it certain that on separate occasions different individuals and groups had experiences of seeing Jesus alive from the dead.”{9}

Marcus Borg (liberal Christian theologian and historian of Jesus and a fellow of the Jesus Seminar) challenges the passage found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 on two points. First,

Borg argues, Paul includes himself in the list of people to whom the risen Christ appeared; implicitly, he regards his own experience as similar to the others.{10} Borg then refers to the record in Acts chapters 9, 22, and 26, claiming that this shows that Paul's experience was a vision. For Borg, this implies that the experience of the other disciples were visions.

There is an important distinction that Borg does not address. The book of Acts begins with Jesus' final appearance to the disciples, which is followed by His ascension into heaven (Acts 1:9). All the appearances to the other disciples took place between the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus occurs well after the ascension of Jesus. This also ignores many details of the appearances recorded in the gospels. Visions do not eat or drink. They cannot be touched. The narratives in the Gospel accounts involve Jesus, in His resurrected body, eating and drinking and being touched. By the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he would have been familiar with at least some of these stories. Because the ascension occurs between the appearances to the disciples and the appearance to Paul, it is reasonable to expect some differences in the nature of these appearances.

Borg's second challenge is concerned with the last half of 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul discusses the nature of the resurrected body. According to Borg, Paul "explicitly denies that it is a physical body; instead, it is a spiritual body."{11} In 1 Corinthians 15:44, Paul writes: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." Borg takes the term "natural body" to refer to a physical body, while he takes "spiritual body" to mean a body that is not physical. The Greek word that is translated as natural is *psuchikon*. Licona searched the Greek literature and found that *psuchikon* never means physical or material.{12} *Psuchikon* always refers

to something natural or unspiritual. *Pnumatikos* is the Greek word translated as spiritual. This word can mean ethereal or refer to something that is not physical. However, *pnumatikos* is not used in the New Testament to refer to a ghost or something ethereal. At the beginning of 1 Corinthians Paul writes, “But I, brothers and sisters, could not address you as spiritual (*pnumatikos*) people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1). Paul is not referring to people who do not have spiritual bodies here. In chapter 15 he is not claiming that a resurrected body is not physical. In this chapter, Paul makes a similar kind of comparison to what he wrote in verse 3:1. The people are “of the flesh,” but when they become spiritual people, they do not lose their physical body. Just as in verses 15:44-49, people do not lose their natural body when they are raised a spiritual body.

A few verses earlier Paul writes, “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or some other grain” (1 Corinthians 15:36-37). Paul is making an analogy between a seed and the plant that it produces, and a body before and after it has been resurrected. A plant is bigger and more beautiful than the seed that it comes from, but there is continuity between the two. A plant is the same organism that was once a seed. A resurrected body is more glorious than the body was before it died, but both bodies bear the same identity of the person. There is continuity between a natural body and a spiritual body.

The appearances are not the only things to be considered. The tomb Jesus was buried in was found empty by a group of His women followers. John designates that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb (John 20:1). Matthew records that “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb” (Matthew 28:1). Mark writes that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went to the tomb. Luke lists Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women as those who went to

the tomb. The genre of the Gospels is ancient biography. The writers of ancient biography were not concerned with explaining all the details. They were not overly concerned with exact details. Ancient authors were more concerned with portraying the nature of events. Matthew, Mark and John do not exclude the possibility that other women were present. At that time, women were not viewed as being capable of reasoning well. In the first century, women could be legal witnesses, but they were not trusted to be reliable and reasonable witnesses. If you were looking for witnesses, you found a man if you could. If the evangelists were to make up a story to convince people that Jesus' tomb was found empty, they would have said that the discovery was made by men. Claiming that the empty tomb was found by women would not have been convincing to any first-century audience—unless it really happened. It is highly plausible that the tomb was found empty by a group of Jesus' women followers.

Robert J. Miller raises an interesting point in the resurrection debate concerning Jesus' empty tomb: "The reports that his grave was empty would hardly persuade many. Even if it was confirmed that the grave where they claim he was buried was empty, what would that prove? Nothing."{13} Miller is right. An empty tomb alone would not cause anyone to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead. An empty tomb was not an unusual occurrence. When explaining the facts surrounding the beginnings of Christianity, the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus to His disciples must be explained. Wright observes, "The empty tomb and the 'meetings' with Jesus, when combined, present us with not only a *sufficient* condition for the rise of early Christian belief, but also, it seems, a *necessary* one."{14} Any explanation of the facts surrounding the death of Jesus and the origins of Christianity must explain both the empty tomb and the appearance of Jesus to His disciples after the resurrection. In current scholarship, there is no natural explanation that can explain both the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus to His apostles.

Eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume raised an objection to the resurrection that is common today. Hume starts by asking that if all the historians and the physicians agreed that Queen Elizabeth died, and was dead for a month, then reappeared and reigned on her throne for three more years, should someone conclude that she was raised from the dead? Hume answers:

> "I should be surprised at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event. I should not doubt of her pretended death and those of other public circumstances that followed it; I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be, real."{15}

Even though all the people who could know agree, and there is no one who disputes the resurrection of the Queen in this hypothetical situation, Hume says that it could not possibly have happened. Hume argues that because all miracle stories are ridiculous, the effect of education on people would "not only . . . make them reject the fact but even reject it without further examination."{16} Hume argued that resurrections do not conform to our knowledge of past experiences. This is a bad argument for two reasons; first, it is a circular argument. Hume claims that resurrections do not happen; therefore, a resurrection did not happen. Second, it is impossible to gain knowledge based on the conformity of past experiences. Many experiences that lead to more knowledge do not conform to past experiences. History is made up of many unique and unrepeatable events. The origin of the universe only happened once. The origin of life only happened once. The life and death of Alexander the Great only happened once. The only reason to reject the resurrection without a careful investigation of the facts is because of a worldview bias against supernatural events.

Conclusion

A careful examination of the evidence surrounding the claim of the resurrection of Jesus reveals four facts. First, Jesus died of crucifixion under the reign of Pontius Pilot. Second, Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of His women followers. Third, Jesus' disciples had experiences which they interpreted as seeing a resurrected Jesus. Fourth, Paul had an experience that he interpreted as an encounter with the risen Jesus. Naturalistic explanations have failed to explain these facts. Hallucination hypothesis fails to explain the empty tomb. Stolen body hypothesis fails to explain the appearances. Combining the hypotheses makes the explanation of the facts complex. When formulating historical hypotheses, the simpler explanation is to be preferred. Hallucinations and grave robbers do not provide any illumination for the origins of Christianity. The resurrection provides a simple explanation of the facts and also explains the beginnings of the Christian religion. There are good reasons to believe that Jesus rose physically from the dead.

Notes

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12. Licona, op. cit., 407.
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14. N.T. Wright, op. cit., 706.
15. David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 138.
Ibid., 139.

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Wes Huff – Billy Carson Debate

A significant corner of the internet recently (October 28, 2024) blew up with a debate between Christian apologist Wes Huff and popular skeptic Billy Carson when their online debate went viral. Kyle Skaggs provides context and understanding.

In recent years, social media platforms that allow monetized live streaming services like Twitch and YouTube have gained significant importance. While live streaming first became popular for gaming content on Twitch, it quickly expanded its scope to more diverse mediums of engagement, the latest of which is the academic world.

The interactive format allows experts and enthusiasts to engage with diverse audiences in real-time, creating a more accessible form of dialogue. Live streaming services are slowly evolving into a hub for philosophical, religious, and ethical debates.

This year started with a debate over the reliability of the Scriptures, and the uniqueness and goodness of the Christian worldview went viral. So, why did it resonate with so many people, what happened during the debate, and what can it teach us about apologetics?

First, the popularity of streaming services on Twitch and YouTube among Millennials and Gen Z cannot be understated. For people my age and younger, these platforms are the most common way to learn different philosophies and worldviews rather than the classroom.

The Billy Carson–Wes Huff debate was initially to be between Carson, a popular Bible conspiracy theorist, and his friend Mark. Mark, believing he was not knowledgeable enough to do the subject matter justice, asked Director of Apologetics Canada, Wes Huff, if he would debate Carson while Mark moderated.

Huff thoroughly dismantled each of Carson's arguments with historical and literary evidence. Shortly afterwards, Carson demanded Mark not to post the debate, a request that was ignored. Carson is now trying to sue Huff. The debate was already popular due to Carson and Mark's substantial audiences, and it further went viral after Huff was invited to speak about it on Joe Rogan's podcast.

Much of the debate's three-hour runtime is padded out by the host, who tends to lead the conversation on tangents, and his statements largely add little to the debate. This, paired with his habit of over-explaining and repeating his questions, causes the debate to drag in places. However, this is offset

by the quality content produced between Carson and Huff.

The topics covered are the inspiration and reliability of the scriptures, and the Christian worldview. The first point of the debate was the crucifixion of Jesus. Carson explained that the Gospel of Barnabas, which predates the KJV, does not mention the crucifixion. Furthermore, the Gospel of Jesus's Wife, while controversial, is believed to be an accurate record that Jesus may have been married. This places the crucifixion in doubt.

Huff counters that the Gospel of Barnabas is a known forgery. We know it is a forgery because it is clear the author has no knowledge of the region, customs, and time of the first century. The author also paraphrased Dante's *Inferno*. Internal evidence heavily suggests a medieval date, not to mention the only two copies of it are in late medieval Spanish and Italian.

Carson claims parts of the Genesis story are copied verbatim from the Enuma Eilish (an ancient Babylonian creation myth), Sumerian cylinder scrolls, and other ancient texts. When Huff asks him to summarize the Enuma Eilish Carson does so, but frames the story in his own interpretation to the point where it is borderline unrecognizable. It would have fit perfectly on a late 2000's history channel at 3:00 am. Wes does not focus on this. Instead, he asks which part of Genesis 1 and 2 is copied.

Huff asks this because having read both the Bible and Enuma Eilish, he does not find any parallels beyond the surface level. He points out that most Ancient Near East scholars see the Genesis account as an apologetic against documents like the Enuma Eilish.

Carson claims that there are certain words that let him know they were copied. As an example, the idea of separating the earth from the water, and the earth being void and formless

tells us that somebody looked at the Enuma Eilish and copied them. Carson attempts to change the subject, saying there was so much more he wanted to cover.

Huff explains the purpose of the Enuma Eilish was to show that the deities come from the created order, which is a fluke. The common man does not matter. Only the kings were made in the image of the divine. On the other hand, the Bible says there is only one God who creates, what He created was good, and man is made in the image of God. Huff argues that rather than plagiarism, the Genesis account is a polemic against works like the Enuma Eilish.

Carson closed his argument by claiming the scriptures are clearly 100% man-made because there are statements in the text that encourage genocide, slavery, and all sorts of horrible things. Wes counters with the ethic found in Judaism and Christianity that is found nowhere else, that we are created in the image of God. People are always going to abuse scripture and religion. The earliest criticism of Christianity is that it’s a religion of slaves and women. The Christian worldview gives agency to the marginalized.

Before going into the debate, Huff looked into the content Carson produces to get a feel for what kind of arguments he’d be facing. So he knew that all he needed to do was let Carson ramble. If Carson had not acted the way he did, and just took the loss, this would not have exploded in popularity.

Huff constantly asks Carson what is his methodology for determining what is an accurate source of information. Carson says his methodology was gathering up as many texts as he could, alongside traveling to learn from their various cultures and the stories they tell. This gave Huff an idea of how much research Carson was doing, but did not answer his question.

Why is methodology so important for Wes? He explains in his

interview with Joe Rogan, “What I was trying to get Billy to get to the bottom of was partly a question of methodology.” Professionals in Wes’s field of study make sure they can explain the criteria they use when looking at one source versus another source to develop a conclusion. They must rely on non-deductive reasoning, which deals in probability. This means we look at the data we have, and make inferences to the best possible conclusion. Historians rarely disagree with the data, but the conclusion can be vastly different.

Carson’s claims disagree with the data. Everything that Billy cited against the crucifixion was either false in the case of the Sinai Bible, or verified forgeries. The evidence against the crucifixion in terms of documentary evidence presented by Billy is not convincing. When Huff points this out, Carson tries to move on to a new subject, showing his inexperience with this kind of conversation. It would have been better if he clarified his criteria for determining the value of a source, or admitted his methodology was flawed. This way, he could keep his credibility as a scholar. By deflecting and changing the subject in the face of defeat he comes across as amateur.

Throughout the debate, we see Huff exemplify what Jesus told His disciples before sending them out among the people of Israel: “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16) We can see from the comment section that Huff’s kind conduct resonated with people. Subscribers to Carson’s channel switched to following Huff! One wrote that their worldview was shattered, and they were picking up the Bible again! Huff later said he did not expect the debate to go viral in the way it did. It is amazing to see the Holy Spirit work through seemingly little things.

“…[I]n your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and

respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander." (1 Peter 3:15)

When we answer with gentleness and respect we show the other person we don't want to dominate them. If they don't become less combative, they at least become more willing to listen. From there, it's all the Holy Spirit's work. This is why I say we need more debates like this, because no matter how we argue, the people we speak to directly may never accept the Gospel, but what about those listening in?

The Professor: Why Are You a Christian? – When Challenged, Can You Defend Your Faith in Christ

Are our adults ready to give a defense of the gospel? When challenged, can they give a reasonable explanation of their faith? Dr. Bohlin presents a sobering view of this question based upon years of experience questioning high school and college-age students on the basis for their belief in Christ. By exposing their lack of cogent answers to questions they may be asked, he challenges them to spend time exploring the questions and developing biblical worldview-based answers.

The Professor

Over the last ten years, I have used a very effective technique to help teens realize their unpreparedness for the step toward college. It seems our young people are heading into public and even Christian colleges thinking they are ready for the challenge to their faith that higher learning can be.

Probe Ministries has sponsored a college prep conference since 1991 that was designed to help young people gain some insights and even some knowledge on how to address the intellectual challenges that college will provide.

If you remember the thousands of college radicals who protested and picketed in the '60s and '70s, they found their push for change was not very effective. Instead, many of them stayed in college, obtained Masters Degrees and PhDs. After all, it was easier than getting a real job! As a result, they are now your children's professors!

The college campus was an anti-Christian breeding ground several decades ago and now it is even worse. Christianity is not so much openly mocked as it is marginalized and deemed a false and mischievous mythology.

If you haven't already heard some of these statistics, you need to hold onto your hat.

In 2007, LifeWay surveyed 23- to 30-year-olds and found that seventy percent had taken at least a one year break from church during their college years.{1} Now, almost two-thirds of these return to some level of church attendance, but mainly to please family or friends who encouraged them to return. That means that most of our churched youth are making many of their life decisions, including marriage and career, apart from a church context. Even many who return carry numerous scars from bad choices during those years.{2}

With this statistical background, it’s plain our young people need some preparation before going on to college or the military. But as most parents of teens know, just telling them they need this is less than likely to be convincing.

Enter the Professor. The technique I mentioned at the beginning is to impersonate an atheistic college professor doing research on the religious beliefs of young people. Sometimes the students know I am playing a role with them, but occasionally I play the professor and the students are none the wiser.

A Simple Question

When I step to the front of the room, I introduce myself as Professor Hymie Schwartz (a name borrowed from my late colleague Jerry Solomon who played this role far better than I do). I tell the group that, since I am conducting research on the religious beliefs of young people, their youth pastor, counselor, principal, teacher—whatever, has allowed me to visit with them.

I begin the conversation something like this: “Since this is a church or Christian school I presume you are all Christians. Is anyone not a Christian?” Of course no one raises their hand. But I am always aware that some may indeed not be believers and may not appreciate my questioning so I am always paying attention.

At this point I simply call on someone, usually someone who isn’t really paying attention or is engrossed in conversation with a neighbor. “You! Are you a Christian?” No one has ever answered no. Upon receiving an affirmative answer, with hands casually stuck in my pockets, I demand, “Why?”

Students are paying attention now. This is for real. Now consider my question for yourself. If Peter warns us to always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks to give a

defense for the hope that we have, this is a pretty basic question. In our highly secular culture, if someone finds out you're a Christian, they may indeed ask you why. Peter says you ought to have an answer.

But this simple question why is usually something our young people, and even their parents, have never really considered. Their Christian faith is certainly something they would claim is central to their lives, but the dumbfounded looks on their faces tells me repeatedly that this question is a new one.

It's usually about this time that any parents sitting in the back are suddenly quite relieved I'm not talking to them!

By asking such questions, I can get them pretty riled up and confused. The point is not to have fun but to help them see that they need to be prepared and think a little about why Christianity is important to them and why they think it's true.

"I Asked Jesus into My Heart!"

Having their Christianity questioned usually comes as a surprise and even shock. Rather than directly answering the question, they try to tell me *how* they became a Christian. It usually takes the form of confidently saying they asked Jesus into their heart.

The professor quickly fires back, "You asked Jesus into your heart?! That sounds pretty gross, really. What's he doing in there with all that blood? Yuck!" That always gets a surprised reaction and a little befuddlement. The student typically tries to recover by saying something like, "No, I mean it's like I trusted Jesus as my Savior."

Again the professor will fire back quickly with a question like, "Why did you do that?" or "Savior? What did you need saving from?" I think you can see where this is going. It

really is not difficult to pick something from what he or she said and challenge it. I either pretend I don't understand what they said, forcing them to better explain themselves (which is rare), or I deliberately ask them why they think that way, or how they know that.

In answer to "How do you know that?" I am often told that "It says so in the Bible!" They usually can't tell me where the Bible says that. I also ask if the Bible is true, and they say it is. But when I ask, "How do you know it's true?" the blank stare reemerges.

Sometimes a student will say, "Because it's the word of God!" Now I can really dig a little deeper. In response to further questioning, they usually can't tell me where the Bible says it's the Word of God nor can they tell me why the Bible is different from The Book of Mormon or the Qur'an. If there is a youth pastor or chaplain present there is usually an embarrassed look on their face or a head buried in their hands.

By this time the class is very tense and full of nervous laughter. When I reach a dead end with a student—for instance when they say, "I don't know" with a very resigned and defeated voice—I look for one of the laughing students and ask, "What about you?" Of course that gets everybody's attention again and off we go.

While I admit I have a little fun playing this role, it never ceases to break my heart at how ill-prepared our young people are to follow Peter's advice to always be prepared with an answer. I have yet to find a student in ten years who is willing and able to go toe-to-toe with the professor.

"You're a Narrow-Minded, Self-Righteous

Bigot!”

Here are three other directions our conversations have frequently taken.

When I have challenged students to tell me why they think or believe Christianity is true, some will turn to their own subjective experience. Technically, there is nothing wrong with this, specifically when speaking to a Christian audience. But someone who doesn’t even believe in God will frequently find ways to truly make fun of this element.

A student may describe that Jesus speaks to them in their prayer time, to which I quickly ask what His voice sounds like or how they know it was Jesus and not indigestion. The blank stares usually resume at this point. We have become so comfortable in our Christian bubble sometimes that we frequently don’t see how unintelligible our language is to those outside the community of faith. It’s tough to share the gospel that way.

Sometimes a student will interject that they believe in Jesus because that’s what their family has taught them or it’s what they learned in church. I usually pounce on that pretty quickly and repeat that this student believes Christianity is true because their parents told them so. The student usually agrees. After commending them for honoring their parents I tell them that’s really pretty stupid. Pausing a second for the shock to register, I go on about the boy raised in India whose parents are Hindu and he respects his parents and believes Hinduism is true, so the boy in India and this student are both headed to heaven because they trusted their parents!

One time a student stammered around and eventually agreed with my statement as his youth pastor put his head in his hands.

Finally in talking about salvation I ask what happens to those

who don’t believe in Jesus. Most will hesitatingly say they go to hell. The professor predictably rants, “Just because I don’t believe the same fairy tale as you, I’m going to hell?” When they predictably shake their head yes, I get down eye to eye and spit out, “You’re a narrow minded, self-righteous bigot!”

Always Be Ready to Give an Answer, with Gentleness and Respect

Students enjoy the interactive nature of this routine even though they are routinely embarrassed by their inability to handle the challenge. When Peter admonished all of us to always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that we have, yet with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15), they fail miserably. Perhaps as a parent, you may be glad that I don’t do this with adult groups.

Often students will try to turn the conversation in their favor by asking the professor a question. I quickly dismiss that idea by simply answering that *I’m* asking the questions. But when we’re done, if time allows I attempt to leave them with hope by quickly summarizing how I, Dr. Ray Bohlin, Vice-President of Probe Ministries, would answer the same question.

Here’s the outline of my response. In a calm voice I quickly assert that I know there is a God. As a scientist I look principally at how marvelously our universe, galaxy, solar system, and planet are designed for complex life here on earth. The number of highly improbable coincidences rules out chance and strongly implies design. This is reinforced by the evidence from biology of the incredible complexity of life, particularly the coded information in DNA. This remarkable molecule with its accompanying system of transcription and translation screams for intelligence.

The fact that all people have some sense of right and wrong, even though we may disagree sometimes, tells us we are comparing our morality to some invisible standard outside ourselves that must come from a supreme Law Giver. I am convinced there is a supernatural God.

If this God exists, then has He spoken to man? I quickly tell about the uniqueness of Scripture, written by forty authors from eight countries over fifteen hundred years in three languages and all with a consistent and unique message of a God of love who ransomed us from our sins. Where we have archaeological evidence it consistently confirms the accuracy of biblical events. I am convinced the Bible is the true and unique Word of God.

The Bible throughout is about Jesus, who repeatedly claimed to be the unique divine Son of God and offered his death and resurrection on behalf of mankind as proof. That Jesus bodily rose from the dead is the only rational conclusion of the evidence of the empty tomb. On top of that, my personal experience of the last thirty-seven years has shown me again and again the unique love and power of God.

So what about you? Why are *you* a Christian?

Notes

1. "LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church," 2007, www.lifeway.com/article/165949/, accessed May 15, 2010.
2. Youth Transition Network has researched this problem over the last ten years and has excellent resources, videos, research, and books and DVDs for purchase. Take a look at www.ytn.org.

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The Answer Is the Resurrection

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

Making a Defense for Your Living Hope

A key verse for our ministry at Probe is 1 Peter 3:15 where Peter writes, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."{1}

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

Okay. I want to be ready to give an account for the hope that is in me, but I need be clear on what that hope is. Fortunately, Peter answers that for us in chapter 1 where he writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus

Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."{3}

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

How do we get this living hope? Our hope comes "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"! Jesus' resurrection is the basis for our hope. If Jesus is not resurrected from the dead, we are of all men most to be pitied.{4} So, any defense of the hope that is within us begins with explaining why someone should believe in the resurrection. The empty tomb is the cornerstone to answering most other objections raised up against the gospel.

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

Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. *Absent body*. The chief priests set a guard around Jesus' tomb to make sure the body was not stolen by his disciples. Those guards knew their lives could be at stake if they failed

in their duty, but on the third day Jesus was gone. Once they regained their senses, the guards "reported to the chief priests all that had happened."{6} Why did they take this risk? Because they knew that there was no body to recover. No one has ever found any credible evidence that the body of Jesus was anywhere to be found on this earth.

6. *Amazed disciples*. After Jesus' arrest, most of His disciples fled. It is clear from their reaction that they despised the cross and were not anticipating the resurrection. Two of his disciples did not recognize the risen Jesus even as He was teaching them the Scriptures related to Himself.{7} Their skepticism and shock showed that they clearly were not part of some preplanned hoax.

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

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

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

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

We don't have to believe in the resurrection in *spite* of the facts. Instead, we believe in the resurrection in *light* of the facts. If you can defend your belief in the resurrection, then you are already positioned to respond to other questions people may have about your faith. In fact, you can respond to

objections by asking, “Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus?” If the answer is no, then you may want to focus on the evidence for the resurrection as a foundation for addressing their other concerns.

Tearing Down Objections Through the Resurrection

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

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

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

Jesus’ resurrection declares God’s active involvement in this world. He planned it from the beginning and He performed it at the appointed time.{9}

2. What difference does God make to my life?

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

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

3. Is the Bible really God’s revelation? Every religion has

their holy books.

Jesus' resurrection confirms that Jesus is the source of truth. He knows which holy book is actually a revelation from God. Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the Old Testament. He promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles as they shared His teaching through the New Testament. The Gospel of John states, "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken."{12}

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

4. I am too insignificant for God to love.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' resurrection conquered the grave. No mortal can claim

victory over decay and death.

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

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

Jesus’ resurrection puts Jesus in a class by Himself. His crucifixion and victory over death clearly show that He is a the only way to God. If there were multiple ways, Jesus would not have gone to the cross. He allowed himself to be subjected to death because it was necessary for our redemption. In addition, Jesus clearly stated that no one comes to the Father except through Him.{16}

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

14. John 18:37-38.
15. Rom 1:4-5.
16. John 14:7.
17. James 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
18. Rom 10:9-10.
19. 1 Peter 1:18-20.
20. John 3:16.
21. John 2:22.

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The Pope Got It Wrong. Breathtakingly Wrong.

Sue Bohlin reacts to Pope Francis's recent statement that all religions are roads to God, providing a biblical answer to this false teaching.

Recently (9/13/2024) Pope Francis told a Singapore audience of youth from different faiths that all religions are equal, all different paths to God.

Through an interpreter, he said,

> *"If we start to fight among yourselves and say my religion is more important than yours, my religion is true and yours is not, where would that lead us. It is okay to discuss, because every religion is a way to arrive at God. Analogously speaking, religion is like different languages to arrive at God. But God is God for all. And if God is God for all, we are all sons and daughters of God. 'But my God is more important than your God.' Is that true? There is only one God, and each of us is a language, so to speak, to arrive at God. Muslim, Hindu, they are different paths. Understood?"*[1]

As the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church's 1.3 billion adherents, the pope is responsible for speaking truth to his flock. Not only is this statement heretical, it is a slap in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ—Whom the pope presumably worships and serves. If all religions lead to God, why did Jesus leave heaven to become a human being? Why did He submit Himself to the excruciating suffering of His passion and crucifixion? Why did the sinless, perfect God-man die? What's the point of His resurrection?

No. Different religious paths do not all lead to God. The pope is wrong wrong wrong. Those who believe what he's saying, trusting in their false religions, will remain enemies of God; their sin will forever separate them from God. This breaks my heart. Even as I type this, I pray for God to open the eyes of those embracing this Satanic lie so that they will turn in faith to the one true God.

Those who believe the "all religions lead to God" deception often invoke the story of the six blind Hindus who encountered an elephant. One felt its side and said, "An elephant is a wall." Another felt its leg and said, "An elephant is a tree trunk." A third felt its tusk and said, "An elephant is a spear." The fourth felt its trunk and said, "An elephant is a hose." The fifth felt its tail and said, "An elephant is a rope." The last one felt its ear and said, "An elephant is a fan."

The point of this allegorical story is that each person's encounter and description of the elephant in radically different ways is like the various world religions. None of them should claim to have the corner on truth because they all have different perspectives.

But this view leaves out the larger picture: an elephant is an elephant—not a wall or tree or spear or hose or rope or fan. And the Creator of the elephant has communicated with us the very nature of the "elephant." He has revealed capital-T Truth about reality, and He has been clear in how mankind is to relate rightly to Himself. This blind Hindu story leaves out the very important aspect of revelation, when Someone outside the limitations of our "blindness" as finite creatures, tells us things we cannot know on our own.

Which leads us to the ultimate reason why the Pope is so very wrong. The "Creator of the elephant," Jesus the Son of God, came to earth as a man and made astonishing truth claims about Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes

to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

If all religions led to God, why would Jesus say He is the ONLY way?

He also claimed to be Yahweh, the covenant God of the Old Testament. “Before Abraham was, I AM.” (John 8:58).

He claimed for Himself attributes that are only true of God Himself:

Eternal “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” (John 17:5)

Omnipresent “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” (Matthew 18:20)

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

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

Accepted worship “And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’ (Matthew 14:33)

Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.” Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:27-28)

Able to Forgive Sins And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5)

“For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.“ Then He said to her, “Your sins have been forgiven.“ Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this man who even forgives

sins?” (Luke 7:48-50)

Judge of All Men “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice…” (John 5:24-28)

Jesus claimed to be God; He claimed to be the only way to the Father. He backed up these claims by fulfilling prophecy about the promised Messiah. And most phenomenal of all, He said He would die and rise from the dead three days later—and He did it.

We can believe Him when He says He is the only way. We *should* believe Him.

The Pope is massively, terrifyingly wrong. All religions do not lead to God. Jesus is the ONLY way.

1. https://ethosinstitute.sg/every-religion-is-a-way-to-god/ Accessed 9/17/2024 ?

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/the-pope-got-it-wrong-breathtakingly-wrong/ on September 17, 2024.

Biblical Reliability

Kerby Anderson provides classic reasons the bible can be believed and trusted as a divine book from God.

Is the Bible historically reliable? That is an important question that deserves an answer since so many people today believe that the Bible is not accurate or reliable. We will look at various tests we can use to evaluate any book and will discover that the Bible is reliable and trustworthy. But before we look at the Bible's reliability, it is worth mentioning its uniqueness.

No doubt you have heard people say they don't read the Bible because it is merely another book. That is not true. Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell spend pages in their book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, listing all the many ways the Bible is unique.

First, it is unique in character. This includes the fact that it is unique in time span, geographical production, authorship, literary genres, and languages. Professor F.F. Bruce, in *The Books and the Parchments*, summarized it this way: "The Bible, at first sight, appears to be a collection of literature—mainly Jewish. If we enquire into the circumstances under which the various Biblical documents were written, we find that they were written at intervals over a space of nearly 1400 years the writers wrote in various lands, from Italy in the west to Mesopotamia and possible Persia in the east."

He goes on to reminds us that "The writers themselves were a heterogeneous number of people, not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles but belonging to the most diverse walks of life . . . The writings themselves belong to a great variety of literary types. They include history, law, religious poetry, didactic treatises,

lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively Biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic."

The Bible is also unique in its theology. There are teachings in the Bible that are not found in any other religious book. And the Bible is certainly unique in its impact (art, literature, history) and circulation (best-selling book of all time).

The Bible is unique, but it is reliable? The Bible makes significant claims about itself, and events recorded in the Bible. These are historical events and can be tested by the same criteria used to evaluate other historical documents.

There are three specific tests scholars, researchers, and archaeologists use to determine the authenticity of historical material. There are three basic principles of historiography: the internal test, the external test, and the bibliographic test. We will apply these three tests to the Bible to determine its reliability as an accurate historical source.

Internal Test

The internal test looks at a document to first see what the document claims for itself, and then to see if there are internal contradictions. What does the Bible claim for itself?

The Bible makes some very significant claims. It claims to be the Word of God. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Just because the Bible claims to be inspired is not enough to accept that claim, but it does serve to remind us about the unique nature of the Bible. Jesus made an even more significant claim: "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (Luke 16:17).

The Bible is unique in another significant way: its

unity. Consider that the Bible was written over a 1400-year period, by over 40 authors, from many walks of life. It was written in three languages, on different continents, under different circumstances. And it addresses numerous controversial topics, and yet we have unity and consistency throughout the Bible. Imagine if you had three people living at the same time, same place, speaking the same language writing on one controversial topic. Would they agree? They would not. The unity of the Bible suggests its inspiration.

But this raises another question. Skeptics often like to- point to contradictions in the Bible. My quick answer often is to merely to point to the number of books written over the last few centuries that provide reasonable answers to apparent contradictions. These many books illustrate that these difficult biblical texts can be resolved.

Professor Gleason Archer has written about Bible difficulties and concludes, “As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied alleged contradictions between the biblical record and evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly certified and strengthened.”

The reliability of the gospels is also supported by what is called undesigned coincidences. Professor Tim McGrew has been on my radio program to talk about these, and his wife Lydia has written a book on the subject. The writer in one gospel provides part of a testimony, while the- writer of another gospel provides another key fact. These are not planned but give a fuller picture of the event. They are like pieces of a puzzle and provide yet another important piece of evidence for the internal test.

External Test

The external test looks at how the document aligns itself with facts, dates, and persons from its world. The facts from

archaeology and history validate the historical accuracy of the Bible. In previous articles, we have provided many examples of archaeological verification of the historical accuracy of the Bible.{1}

Dr. William Albright concluded, “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Bible.” Yale professor and expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Millar Burrows explained, “Archeological 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.”

One of the most famous and most significant archeological finds was the Dead Sea Scrolls. Over 800 fragments were found including a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah. It has provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament.

Another archaeological find occurred in 1993 when a stone monument fragment was discovered near the border of Israel and Syria. It mentions the “House of David” and implies a victory by Ben-Hadad, king of Damascus (1 Kings 15:20).

More recently, archaeologists uncovered a Curse Tablet found in Joshua’s altar on Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30). This ancient Hebrew inscription is centuries older than any known Hebrew inscription from ancient Israel. This is the earliest recorded Divine name in Israel and supports the biblical date of the Exodus.

There are also archaeological finds that validate the New Testament. In 1961, archeological work at Caesarea Maritima discovered a stone with the name “Pontius Pilate.” He was a prefect of the Roman province of Judea and was responsible for ordering the crucifixion of Jesus. More recently, a ring was found at the Herodium (a desert palace outside of Bethlehem)

with the inscription “Pontius Pilate.” The ring was not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate and was likely used for official communications.

Classical scholar and historian Colin Hemer chronicles Luke’s accuracy in the book of Acts. With painstaking detail, he identifies 84 facts in the last 16 chapters of 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.

Bibliographic Test

Now we will look at the bibliographic test. Since we do not have the original documents of any ancient literature, this test is used to evaluate the transmission from the original document to the manuscripts we possess today. The Bible is far superior to any ancient historical book in its- manuscript evidence with respect to time and the number of manuscripts.

Sir Frederic Kenyon observed, “In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament.”

Many of the books on apologetics or biblical reliability provide a chart of the gap between the original manuscript and the earliest copy that we have: Plato (1200 years), Thucydides, *History* (1300 years), and Tacitus, *Annals* (1000 years). That smallest gap is Homer’s *Iliad* (500 years). By contrast, the gap for the New Testament is just a few decades.

Above, we mentioned the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Until their discovery, there was a significant gap between the original and the earliest copy (around AD 900). The discovery allowed us to now see there was an accurate transmission over a 1000-year period.

The number of manuscripts is also important. When we have more

manuscripts, we can compare them and have a better understanding of what was written in the original document. We have seven copies of Plato, eight copies of Thucydides, and twenty copies of Tacitus. There are over six hundred copies of Homer's *Illiad*.

By contrast, the number of manuscripts for the Bible is significant. The total number of Greek and non-Greek New Testament manuscripts is nearly 24,000. The number of Old Testament scrolls is more than 42,000. F.F. Bruce concludes, "There is n-o body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."

The early church fathers also quoted from the New Testament as they wrote to each other. We have more the 36,000 of scripture citations from them as well.

John Warwick Montgomery concluded, "To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity; for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament."

One Last Test: Prophecy

We have discussed three tests that show the reliability of the Bible, especially when compared to other literature of antiquity. The Bible passed the internal test because of its unity and cohesion. The Bible passed the external test because of the history and archaeology that confirms its accuracy. And the Bible passes the bibliographic test because of the number of manuscripts and the short time gap between the original and its copies.

But there is an additional test that only the Bible can meet. More than one-fourth of the Bible's content was prophetic at the time that it was originally written. More than half of

these 1000+ prophecies have been fulfilled down to the minutest detail. No other book (religious or secular) can make this claim.

Fifty years ago, J. Barton Payne compiled the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*. It lists 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament, for a total of 1,817. These encompass 8,352 verses.

In previous articles we have discussed the prophecies of the Messiah. Hundreds of prophecies written down in the Old Testament are literally fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. For example, Zechariah records prophecies about the Messiah that were fulfilled by Jesus during the week He entered Jerusalem and was crucified. He predicted that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). That was fulfilled during what we often call "Palm Sunday" (Matthew 21:5; Luke 19:32-37).

The price of his betrayal would be thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13) and the money would be cast onto the floor of the Temple. That was fulfilled by Judas and the chief priests (Matthew 27:3-10). Also, he predicted that the betrayal money would be used to buy a potter's field- (Zechariah 11:13). We read about its fulfillment in Matthew 27:6-10.

Prophecy is history written before it happens and is another indication of the inspiration of the Bible. It also can give us confidence that prophecies that have not been fulfilled will be fulfilled in the future.

The Bible is historically accurate, and it also shows in many ways that it is also the inspired word of God.

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Notes

1. probe.org/biblical-archaeology/, probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/, probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/

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