

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. The explosive growth of the Christian movement. Within a few weeks after Jesus was crucified, a movement arose which, by the later admission of its enemies, “upset the world.” What

happened to ignite this movement shortly after its leader had been executed?

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

3. The empty tomb. Jesus' corpse was removed from the cross, wrapped like a mummy and placed in a solid-rock tomb. A one-and-a-half to two-ton stone was rolled into a slightly depressed groove to seal the tomb's entrance.

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

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

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

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

The "Swoon Theory" supposes that Jesus didn't really die but

was only unconscious. The expert Roman executioners merely thought he was dead. After a few days in the tomb without food or medicine, the cool air revived him.

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

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

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

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

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

Worth considering?

©1997 Rusty Wright. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Authority of the Bible – A Strong Argument for Christianity

Dr. Pat Zukeran examines some of the compelling evidence for the reliability and the authority of the Bible. The uniqueness and astounding accuracy of this ancient text is an important apologetic for Christianity.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

There are many books today that claim to be the Word of God. The Koran, the *Bhagavad Gita*, The Book of Mormon, and other religious works all claim to be divinely inspired. The Bible claims to be the only book that is divinely inspired and that all other claims of inspiration from other works should be ruled out. Does the Bible confirm its exclusive claim to be the Word of God? The totality of evidences presents a strong case for the divine inspiration of the Bible.

The strongest argument for the divine inspiration of the Bible is the testimony of Jesus. Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God and confirmed His claims through His sinless, miraculous life and resurrection. The events of His life have been recorded in the four Gospels, which have proven to be historically accurate and written by first century eyewitnesses.[\[1\]](#) Since Jesus is God incarnate, whatever He taught is true, and anything opposed to His teaching is false.



Jesus directly affirmed the authority of the Old Testament and indirectly affirmed the New Testament. In Luke 11:51, Jesus identified the prophets and the canon of the Old Testament. He

names Abel as the first prophet from Genesis, and Zechariah the last prophet mentioned in 2 Chronicles, the last book in the Jewish Old Testament (which contains the same books we have today although placed in a different order). In Mark 7:8-9, Jesus refers to the Old Testament as the commands of God. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus states that the Law and the Prophets referring to the Old Testament is authoritative and imperishable. Throughout His ministry, Jesus made clear His teachings, corrections, and actions were consistent with the Old Testament. He also judged others teachings and traditions by the Old Testament. He thus demonstrated His affirmation of the Old Testament to be the Word of God.

Jesus even specifically affirmed as historical several disputed stories of the Old Testament. He affirms as true the accounts of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4-5), Noah and the flood (Matthew 24:39), Jonah and the whale (Matthew 12:40), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 10:15), and more.

Jesus confirmed the Old Testament and promised that the Holy Spirit would inspire the apostles in the continuation of His teaching and in the writing of what would become the New Testament (John 14:25-26 and John 16:12-13). The apostles demonstrated that they came with the authority of God through the miracles they performed as Jesus and the Prophets did before them. The book of Acts, which records the miracles of the apostles, has also proven to be a historically accurate record written by a first century eyewitness.

Prophecy

Many religious books claim to be divinely inspired, but only the Bible has evidence of supernatural confirmation. We have seen that Jesus, being God incarnate, affirms the inspiration of the Bible. Another evidence of supernatural confirmation is the testimony of prophecy. The biblical authors made hundreds of specific prophecies of future events that have come to pass in the manner they were predicted. No book in history can

compare to the Bible when it comes to the fulfillment of prophecy.

Here are some examples. Ezekiel 26, which was written in 587 B.C., predicted the destruction of Tyre, a city made up of two parts: a mainland port city, and an island city half a mile off shore. Ezekiel prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would destroy the city, many nations would fight against her, the debris of the city would be thrown into the ocean, the city would never be found again, and fishermen would come there to lay their nets.

In 573 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the mainland city of Tyre. Many of the refugees of the city sailed to the island, and the island city of Tyre remained a powerful city. In 333 B.C., however, Alexander the Great laid siege to Tyre. Using the rubble of mainland Tyre, he built a causeway to the island city of Tyre. He then captured and completely destroyed the city.

Today, Tyre is a small fishing town where fishing boats come to rest and fishermen spread their nets. The great ancient city of Tyre to this day lies buried in ruins exactly as prophesied. If we were to calculate the odds of this event happening by chance, the figures would be astronomical. No, it was not by coincidence.[\[2\]](#)

Here's another example. There are nearly one hundred prophecies made about Jesus in the Old Testament, prophecies such as His place of birth, how he would die, His rejection by the nation of Israel, and so on. All these prophecies were made hundreds of years before Jesus ever came to earth. Because of the accuracy of the prophecies, many skeptics have believed that they must have been written after A.D. 70—after the birth and death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem. They have thereby tried to deny that they are even prophecies.

However, in 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. These

scrolls contained the book of Isaiah and other prophetic books. When dated, they were found to be written from 120 to 100 B.C., {3} well before Jesus was born. It would have been an incredible accomplishment for Jesus to have fulfilled the numerous prophecies. Some say these prophecies were fulfilled by chance, but the odds against this would be exceptionally large. It would take more a greater leap of faith to believe in that chance happening than in the fact that Jesus is God and these prophecies are divinely inspired.

The record of prophecy is thus evidence for the unique and supernatural origin of the Bible.

Unity

The Bible is the only book with supernatural confirmation to support its claim of divine inspiration. The testimony of Christ and the legacy of prophecy are two proofs for inspiration. A third line of evidence is the unity of the Bible.

The Bible covers hundreds of topics, yet it does not contradict itself. It remains united in its theme. Well, what's so amazing about that? you may ask. Consider these facts. First, the Bible was written over a span of fifteen hundred years. Second, it was written by more than forty men from every walk of life. For example, Moses was educated in Egypt, Peter was a fisherman, Solomon was a king, Luke was a doctor, Amos was a shepherd, and Matthew was a tax collector. All the writers were of vastly different occupations and backgrounds.

Third, it was written in many different places. The Bible was written on three different continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. Moses wrote in the desert of Sinai, Paul wrote in a prison in Rome, Daniel wrote in exile in Babylon, and Ezra wrote in the ruined city of Jerusalem.

Fourth, it was written under many different circumstances. David wrote during a time of war, Jeremiah wrote at the sorrowful time of Israel's downfall, Peter wrote while Israel was under Roman domination, and Joshua wrote while invading the land of Canaan.

Fifth, the writers had different purposes for writing. Isaiah wrote to warn Israel of God's coming judgment on their sin; Matthew wrote to prove to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah; Zechariah wrote to encourage a disheartened Israel who had returned from Babylonian exile; and Paul wrote addressing problems in different Asian and European churches.

If we put all these factors together—the Bible was written over fifteen hundred years by forty different authors at different places, under various circumstances, and addressing a multitude of issues—how amazing that with such diversity, the Bible proclaims a unified message! That unity is organized around one theme: God's redemption of man and all of creation. The writers address numerous controversial subjects yet contradictions never appear. The Bible is an incredible document.

Let me offer you a good illustration. Suppose ten medical students graduating in the same year from medical school wrote position papers on four controversial subjects. Would they all agree on each point? No, we would have disagreements from one author to another. Now look at the authorship of the Bible. All these authors, from a span of fifteen hundred years, wrote on many controversial subjects, yet they do not contradict one another.

It seems one author guided these writers through the whole process: the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:21 states, "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." The unity of the Bible is just one more amazing proof of the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible.

Archaeology

We've studied the testimony of Jesus, prophecy, and the unity of the Bible as providing supernatural confirmation of the divine inspiration of the Bible. Another line of evidence is archaeology. Archaeology does not directly prove the Bible's inspiration, but it does prove its historical reliability.

Middle Eastern archaeological investigations have proven the Bible to be true and unerringly accurate in its historical descriptions. Nelson Glueck, a renowned Jewish archaeologist, states, No archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.^{4} Dr. William Albright, who was probably the foremost authority in Middle East archaeology in his time, said this about the Bible: There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament.^{5} At this time, the number of archaeological discoveries that relate to the Bible number in the hundreds of thousands.^{6}

Archaeology has verified numerous ancient sites, civilizations, and biblical characters whose existence was questioned by the academic world and often dismissed as myths. Biblical archaeology has silenced many critics as new discoveries supported the facts of the Bible.

Here are a few examples of the historical accuracy of the Bible. The Bible records that the Hittites were a powerful force in the Middle East from 1750 B.C. until 1200 B.C. (Genesis 15:20, 2 Samuel 11, and 1 Kings 10:29). Prior to the late nineteenth century, nothing was known of the Hittites outside the Bible, and many critics alleged that they were an invention of the biblical authors.

However, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, archaeologists in Turkey discovered a city which proved to be the capital of the Hittite empire. In the city they discovered a massive library of thousands of tablets. These tablets

showed that the Hittite language was an early relative of the Indo-European languages.

Another example is the story of Jericho recorded in the book of Joshua. For years, skeptics thought the story of the falling walls of Jericho was a myth. However, recent archaeological discoveries have led several prominent scholars to conclude that the biblical description of the fall of Jericho is consistent with the discoveries they have made. One of the leading archaeologists on Jericho presently is Dr. Bryant Wood. His research has shown that the archaeological evidence matches perfectly with the biblical record.[{7}](#)

Archaeology has also demonstrated the accuracy of the New Testament. One of the most well attested to New Testament authors is Luke. Scholars have found him to be a very accurate historian, even in many of his details. In the Gospel of Luke and Acts, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands without error.[{8}](#) A. N. Sherwin-White states, For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.[{9}](#)

There is no other ancient book that has so much archaeological evidence to support its accounts. Since God is a God of truth, we should expect His revelation to present what is historically true. Archaeology presents tangible proof of the historical accuracy of the Bible.

The Bible Alone Is God's Word

We have given several proofs for the divine inspiration of the Bible. These include the testimony of Jesus the divine Son of God, prophecy, unity, and archaeology. Accepting the divine inspiration of the Bible leads to the conclusion that all other works cannot be divinely inspired. This does not mean other works do not contain truth. All people are created in the image of God and can articulate principles that are true.

However, only the Bible proves to be divinely inspired by God and therefore, other claims of divine inspiration should be ruled out for several reasons.

The Bible is the only book that gives supernatural confirmation to support its claim of divine inspiration. Other scriptures which contradict it cannot, therefore, be true.

The law of non-contradiction states that two contradictory statements cannot be true at the same time. If one proposition is known to be true, its opposite must be false. If it is true that I am presently alive, it cannot also be true to say that I am presently not alive. This is a universal law which is practiced daily in every part of the world. Even if you claim, the law of non-contradiction is false, you are asserting this statement is true and its opposite is false. In other words you end up appealing to the law you are trying to deny thus making a self-defeating argument.

Since we have good reason to believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, any teaching that contradicts the Bible must be false. The Bible makes exclusive claims regarding God, truth and salvation that would exclude other scriptures. The Bible teaches that any deity other than the God of the Bible is a false deity (Exodus 20). Jesus declared that he is the divine Son of God, the source of truth, and the only way to eternal life (John 1 & 14:6).

A look at a few works from other religions illustrates this point. The Hindu scriptures include the Vedas and the Upanishads. These books present views of God that are contrary to the Bible. The Vedas are polytheistic, and the Upanishads present a pantheistic worldview of an impersonal divine essence called Brahma, not a personal God.

The Koran, the holy book of Islam, denies the deity of Christ, the triune nature of God, and the atoning work of Christ on the cross (Sura 4:116, 168). These are foundational truths

taught in the Bible. The Pali Canon, the holy scriptures of Southern Buddhism, teach a naturalistic worldview (or pantheistic, as some schools interpret it). It also teaches salvation by works and the doctrine of reincarnation. The worldview of the Pali Canon and its view of salvation contradict biblical teachings. Since these works contradict biblical teaching, we reject their claim to divine inspiration.

The Bible alone proves to be divinely inspired and its exclusive claims rule out the claims of other books.

Notes

1. For more information refer to the articles "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels" (probe.org/historical-reliability-of-the-gospels/) and "The Uniqueness of Jesus" (www.probe.org/uniqueness-of-jesus).
2. Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 869.
3. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1986), 364-367.
4. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1959), 31.
5. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1953), 176.
6. Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 25.
7. Ibid., 152-53.
8. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), s.v., Archaeology, New Testament.
9. Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, 1999), 66.

Ancient Evidence for Jesus from Non-Christian Sources

Dr. Michael Gleghorn examines evidence from ancient non-Christian sources for the life of Jesus, demonstrating that such sources help confirm the historical reliability of the Gospels.

Evidence from Tacitus

Although there is overwhelming evidence that the New Testament is an accurate and trustworthy historical document, many people are still reluctant to believe what it says unless there is also some independent, non-biblical testimony that corroborates its statements. In the introduction to one of his books, F.F. Bruce tells about a Christian correspondent who was told by an agnostic friend that “apart from obscure references in Josephus and the like,” there was no historical evidence for the life of Jesus outside the Bible.^{1} This, he wrote to Bruce, had caused him “great concern and some little upset in [his] spiritual life.”^{2} He concludes his letter by asking, “Is such collateral proof available, and if not, are there reasons for the lack of it?”^{3} The answer to this question is, “Yes, such collateral proof is available,” and we will be looking at some of it in this article.

Let’s begin our inquiry with a passage that historian Edwin Yamauchi calls “probably the most important reference to Jesus outside the New Testament.”^{4} Reporting on Emperor Nero’s decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in A.D. 64, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote:

Nero fastened the guilt . . . on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus,

from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of . . . Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome. . . .[\[5\]](#)

What all can we learn from this ancient (and rather unsympathetic) reference to Jesus and the early Christians? Notice, first, that Tacitus reports Christians derived their name from a historical person called Christus (from the Latin), or Christ. He is said to have “suffered the extreme penalty,” obviously alluding to the Roman method of execution known as crucifixion. This is said to have occurred during the reign of Tiberius and by the sentence of Pontius Pilatus. This confirms much of what the Gospels tell us about the death of Jesus.

But what are we to make of Tacitus’ rather enigmatic statement that Christ’s death briefly checked “a most mischievous superstition,” which subsequently arose not only in Judaea, but also in Rome? One historian suggests that Tacitus is here “bearing indirect . . . testimony to the conviction of the early church that the Christ who had been crucified had risen from the grave.”[\[6\]](#) While this interpretation is admittedly speculative, it does help explain the otherwise bizarre occurrence of a rapidly growing religion based on the worship of a man who had been crucified as a criminal.[\[7\]](#) How else might one explain *that*?

Evidence from Pliny the Younger

Another important source of evidence about Jesus and early Christianity can be found in the letters of Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan. Pliny was the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. In one of his letters, dated around A.D. 112, he asks Trajan’s advice about the appropriate way to conduct legal proceedings against those accused of being Christians.[\[8\]](#) Pliny says that he needed to consult the

emperor about this issue because a great multitude of every age, class, and sex stood accused of Christianity.{9}

At one point in his letter, Pliny relates some of the information he has learned about these Christians:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.{10}

This passage provides us with a number of interesting insights into the beliefs and practices of early Christians. First, we see that Christians regularly met on a certain fixed day for worship. Second, their worship was directed to Christ, demonstrating that they firmly believed in His divinity. Furthermore, one scholar interprets Pliny's statement that hymns were sung to Christ, *as to a god*, as a reference to the rather distinctive fact that, "unlike other gods who were worshipped, Christ was a person who had lived on earth." {11} If this interpretation is correct, Pliny understood that Christians were worshipping an actual historical person as God! Of course, this agrees perfectly with the New Testament doctrine that Jesus was both God and man.

Not only does Pliny's letter help us understand what early Christians believed about Jesus' *person*, it also reveals the high esteem to which they held His *teachings*. For instance, Pliny notes that Christians *bound themselves by a solemn oath* not to violate various moral standards, which find their source in the ethical teachings of Jesus. In addition, Pliny's reference to the Christian custom of sharing a common meal likely alludes to their observance of communion and the "love

feast.”{12} This interpretation helps explain the Christian claim that the meal was merely *food of an ordinary and innocent kind*. They were attempting to counter the charge, sometimes made by non-Christians, of practicing “ritual cannibalism.”{13} The Christians of that day humbly repudiated such slanderous attacks on Jesus’ teachings. We must sometimes do the same today.

Evidence from Josephus

Perhaps the most remarkable reference to Jesus outside the Bible can be found in the writings of Josephus, a first century Jewish historian. On two occasions, in his *Jewish Antiquities*, he mentions Jesus. The second, less revealing, reference describes the condemnation of one “James” by the Jewish Sanhedrin. This James, says Josephus, was “the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ.”{14} F.F. Bruce points out how this agrees with Paul’s description of James in Galatians 1:19 as “the Lord’s brother.”{15} And Edwin Yamauchi informs us that “few scholars have questioned” that Josephus actually penned this passage.{16}

As interesting as this brief reference is, there is an earlier one, which is truly astonishing. Called the “Testimonium Flavianum,” the relevant portion declares:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he . . . wrought surprising feats. . . . He was the Christ. When Pilate . . .condemned him to be crucified, those who had . . . come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared . . . restored to life. . . . And the tribe of Christians . . . has . . . not disappeared.{17}

Did Josephus really write this? Most scholars think the core of the passage originated with Josephus, but that it was later altered by a Christian editor, possibly between the third and fourth century A.D.{18} But why do they think it was altered?

Josephus was not a Christian, and it is difficult to believe that anyone but a Christian would have made some of these statements.[{19}](#)

For instance, the claim that Jesus was a wise man seems authentic, but the qualifying phrase, *“if indeed one ought to call him a man,”* is suspect. It implies that Jesus was more than human, and it is quite unlikely that Josephus would have said *that*! It is also difficult to believe he would have flatly asserted that Jesus was the Christ, especially when he later refers to Jesus as “the so-called” Christ. Finally, the claim that on the third day Jesus appeared to His disciples restored to life, inasmuch as it affirms Jesus’ resurrection, is quite unlikely to come from a non-Christian!

But even if we disregard the questionable parts of this passage, we are still left with a good deal of corroborating information about the biblical Jesus. We read that he was a wise man who performed surprising feats. And although He was crucified under Pilate, His followers continued their discipleship and became known as Christians. When we combine these statements with Josephus’ later reference to Jesus as “the so-called Christ,” a rather detailed picture emerges which harmonizes quite well with the biblical record. It increasingly appears that the “biblical Jesus” and the “historical Jesus” are one and the same!

Evidence from the Babylonian Talmud

There are only a few clear references to Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings compiled between approximately A.D. 70-500. Given this time frame, it is naturally supposed that earlier references to Jesus are more likely to be historically reliable than later ones. In the case of the Talmud, the earliest period of compilation occurred between A.D. 70-200.[{20}](#) The most significant reference to Jesus from this period states:

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald . . . cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy."[{21}](#)

Let's examine this passage. You may have noticed that it refers to someone named "Yeshu." So why do we think this is Jesus? Actually, "Yeshu" (or "Yeshua") is how Jesus' name is pronounced in Hebrew. But what does the passage mean by saying that Jesus "was hanged"? Doesn't the New Testament say he was crucified? Indeed it does. But the term "hanged" can function as a synonym for "crucified." For instance, Galatians 3:13 declares that Christ was "hanged", and Luke 23:39 applies this term to the criminals who were crucified with Jesus.[{22}](#) So the Talmud declares that Jesus was crucified on the eve of Passover. But what of the cry of the herald that Jesus was to be stoned? This may simply indicate what the Jewish leaders were *planning* to do.[{23}](#) If so, Roman involvement changed their plans![{24}](#)

The passage also tells us *why* Jesus was crucified. It claims He practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy! Since this accusation comes from a rather hostile source, we should not be too surprised if Jesus is described somewhat differently than in the New Testament. But if we make allowances for this, what might such charges *imply* about Jesus?

Interestingly, both accusations have close parallels in the canonical gospels. For instance, the charge of sorcery is similar to the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus cast out demons "by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons."[{25}](#) But notice this: such a charge actually tends to confirm the New Testament claim that Jesus performed miraculous feats. Apparently Jesus' miracles were too well attested to deny. The only alternative was to ascribe them to sorcery! Likewise, the charge of enticing Israel to apostasy parallels Luke's account of the Jewish leaders who accused Jesus of misleading the

nation with his teaching.[{26}](#) Such a charge tends to corroborate the New Testament record of Jesus' powerful teaching ministry. Thus, if read carefully, this passage from the Talmud confirms much of our knowledge about Jesus from the New Testament.

Evidence from Lucian

Lucian of Samosata was a second century Greek satirist. In one of his works, he wrote of the early Christians as follows:

The Christians . . . worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. . . . [It] was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.[{27}](#)

Although Lucian is jesting here at the early Christians, he does make some significant comments about their founder. For instance, he says the Christians worshipped a *man*, “who introduced their novel rites.” And though this *man's* followers clearly thought quite highly of Him, He so angered many of His contemporaries with His teaching that He “was crucified on that account.”

Although Lucian does not mention his name, he is clearly referring to Jesus. But what did Jesus teach to arouse such wrath? According to Lucian, he taught that all men are brothers from the moment of their conversion. That's harmless enough. But what did this conversion involve? It involved denying the Greek gods, worshipping Jesus, and living according to His teachings. It's not too difficult to imagine someone being killed for teaching *that*. Though Lucian doesn't say so explicitly, the Christian denial of other gods combined with their worship of Jesus implies the belief that Jesus was more than human. Since they denied other gods in order to

worship Him, they apparently thought Jesus a greater God than any that Greece had to offer!

Let's summarize what we've learned about Jesus from this examination of ancient non-Christian sources. First, both Josephus and Lucian indicate that Jesus was regarded as wise. Second, Pliny, the Talmud, and Lucian imply He was a powerful and revered teacher. Third, both Josephus and the Talmud indicate He performed miraculous feats. Fourth, Tacitus, Josephus, the Talmud, and Lucian all mention that He was crucified. Tacitus and Josephus say this occurred under Pontius Pilate. And the Talmud declares it happened on the eve of Passover. Fifth, there are possible references to the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection in both Tacitus and Josephus. Sixth, Josephus records that Jesus' followers believed He was the Christ, or Messiah. And finally, both Pliny and Lucian indicate that Christians worshipped Jesus as God!

I hope you see how this small selection of ancient *non-Christian* sources helps corroborate our knowledge of Jesus from the gospels. Of course, there are many ancient *Christian* sources of information about Jesus as well. But since the historical reliability of the canonical gospels is so well established, I invite you to read *those* for an authoritative "life of Jesus!"

Notes

1. F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 13.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Edwin Yamauchi, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998),

82.

5. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44, cited in Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 82.

6. N.D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History* (London: Tyndale, 1969), 19, cited in Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 189-190.

7. Edwin Yamauchi, cited in Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 82.

8. Pliny, *Epistles* x. 96, cited in Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 25; Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 198.

9. *Ibid.*, 27.

10. Pliny, *Letters*, transl. by William Melmoth, rev. by W.M.L. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), vol. II, X:96, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.

11. M. Harris, "References to Jesus in Early Classical Authors," in *Gospel Perspectives V*, 354-55, cited in E. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?", in *Jesus Under Fire*, ed. by Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 227, note 66.

12. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.

13. Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 28.

14. Josephus, *Antiquities* xx. 200, cited in Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 36.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament", 212.

17. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.63-64, cited in Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament", 212.

18. Ibid.

19. Although time would not permit me to mention it on the radio, another version of Josephus' "Testimonium Flavianum" survives in a tenth-century Arabic version (Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 41). In 1971, Professor Schlomo Pines published a study on this passage. The passage is interesting because it lacks most of the questionable elements that many scholars believe to be Christian interpolations. Indeed, "as Schlomo Pines and David Flusser...stated, it is quite plausible that none of the arguments against Josephus writing the original words even applies to the Arabic text, especially since the latter would have had less chance of being censored by the church" (Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 194). The passage reads as follows: "At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders." (Quoted in James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 95, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 194).

20. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 202-03.

21. *The Babylonian Talmud*, transl. by I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935), vol. III, Sanhedrin 43a, 281, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 203.

22. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 203.

23. See John 8:58-59 and 10:31-33.

24. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 204. See also John 18:31-32.

25. Matt. 12:24. I gleaned this observation from Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 56.

26. Luke 23:2, 5.

27. Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13, in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, transl. by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), vol. 4., cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 206.

©2001 Probe Ministries

Theology vs. Science or Theology plus Science?

Appendix A: Theology vs. Science or Theology plus Science?

Note: This is one of two appendices for Steve Cable's article [Are We Significant in This Vast Universe?](#)

Are science and religion mortal enemies, or collaborating partners, or denizens of different realms with no common ground? Is the ultimate objective of science to unmask the fictitious myths behind all religions freeing mankind to pursue a rational utopia as espoused by Daniel Dennett^{1} and other atheist academics? Or should we subscribe to the prevailing Western view of a clear secular vs. sacred split, segregating out thoughts so that science and theology are not allowed to deal with any topics which intersect?^{2} Or will unbiased scientific inquiry lead us to a deeper appreciation and understanding of our Creator as espoused by early

formulators of the modern scientific method, such as Isaac Newton, as well as many respected researchers, such as leading nanotechnologist, Dr. James Tour, who stated, "I stand in awe of God because of what he has done through his creation. Only a rookie who knows nothing about science would say science takes away from faith. If you really study science, it will bring you closer to God."[\[3\]](#)

The current view promoted as dogma by many in academia is that acceptable, genuine science is based on a theological presupposition, namely, that any possibility of intervention by a transcendent Creator or other non-physical entity must be excluded from consideration in evaluating possible explanations for any phenomena observed in the physical world. It is ironic that Carl Sagan, one of the popular promoters of this dogma, would take fundamental issue with his own dogma when he wrote,

A central lesson of science is that to understand complex issues (or even simple ones), we must try to free our minds of dogma and to guarantee the freedom to publish, to contradict, and to experiment. Arguments from authority are unacceptable.[\[4\]](#)

In a similar fashion, a common viewpoint promoted in some theological circles is that theology trumps science in any areas in which they have an intersecting interest, i.e. a viewpoint that looks only at the Bible without allowing its interpretation of Scripture to be informed by the findings of science. From this viewpoint, science is at best a limited field of study looking at only a small part of reality, and at worst is spending large amounts of resources studying an illusion masquerading as reality. It is assumed that science cannot provide insights to help deepen our understanding of theology.

I propose that both of these viewpoints share a common shortcoming of prejudging the result before examining the

evidence. Both scientist and theologians should be free to follow the evidence where it leads, whether the evidence comes from observation of the physical aspects of our universe, or from philosophy and logic, or from divine revelation.

One area where this clash of viewpoints is reaching a fever pitch is in the field of Intelligent Design science. Researchers in this emerging field say, let us follow the evidence where it leads. If the makeup of the physical realm includes evidence of an intelligent designer, let's admit it and pass the information on to the theologians. If the physical makeup is more indicative of the handiwork of random variations and natural processes, let's cite it and pass that information along as well. As demonstrated in the 2008 documentary, *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, these researchers are facing stiff opposition and even persecution from the defenders of the scientific establishment. Ironically, but not unexpectedly, the more we learn about the fine tuning required to support life, the history of our planet, and the complexity of living organisms, the more the evidence aligns with the presence of an intelligent designer rather than the results of random, undirected processes. As one scientist observed,

[0]n whatever volume scale researchers make their observations – the universe, galaxy cluster, galaxy, planetary system, planet, planetary surface, cell, atom, fundamental particle, or string – the evidence for extreme fine-tuning for life's sake, and in particular for humanity's benefit, persists.[\[5\]](#)

As Christians, we need not fear science. If the Bible is revelation from our actual Creator, it will not crumble in the presence of scientific studies into the nature of our universe. We do need to be concerned about agenda-driven science which is focused on manipulating scientific results and the popular public perception of those results to prove a predetermined theological point, whether it is atheism or a

particular interpretation of the Bible.

If God is the Creator of the universe and the Bible is revelation directly from God, then accurate observation of the universe will ultimately prove to be consistent with His revelation. By combining the general revelation of science with the special revelation of the Bible, we should be rewarded with a greater understanding of the nature of our Creator and His intentions for mankind.

Notes

1. Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking Press, 2006).
2. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).
3. Candace Adams, "Leading Nanoscientist Builds Big Faith," *Baptist Standard*, March 15, 2000.
4. Carl Sagan, *Billions and Billions: Thoughts on Life and Death at the Brink of the Millennium* (New York, Random House, 1997).
5. Hugh Ross, *Why The Universe Is The Way It Is* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 124.

© 2009 Probe Ministries

Jesus in the Qur'an – Muslims Receive a False View

Dr. Zukeran clearly lays out the differences between a biblical view of Jesus and the view brought forth in the Qura'n. He makes a strong case that the biblical reports are supported by historical fact while the Muslim writings were

created to strengthen their case. Looking at the birth, the life and the death of Christ he highlights the distinct differences and the case for a Christian view over an Islamic view.

The Debate

Islam and Christianity both recognize Jesus as a significant historical figure. However, they teach contrary doctrines regarding the nature and person of Jesus Christ. Christians have taught from the beginning that Jesus is the divine Son of God. This was not a doctrine invented centuries after the life of Christ as some allege, but was taught from the beginning by Christ Himself and the church. There is strong evidence that the New Testament was written in the first century, and there are numerous verses proclaiming the deity of Christ (Matt. 1:23; Mark 2:1-12; John 1:1). Old Testament prophecies regarding the nature of the Messiah proclaimed that He would be human as well as divine (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6). Even non-Christian Roman historical works, such as the writings of Pliny the Younger (AD 112) and Celsus (AD 177), acknowledge that the Christians worshipped Christ as God.

✖ Muslims reject the biblical teaching that Christ is the divine Son of God. Islam builds upon the teachings of the Qur'an, which is considered perfect and without error. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was a significant prophet but not the divine Son of God. Muslims reject the doctrine of the Trinity, and, therefore, worshipping Jesus as God is considered *shirk*, or blasphemy (Sura 5:72).

Islam teaches that Jesus Himself never claimed to be the Son of God. Sura 9:30 states, "The Jews call Ezra a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be upon them: how they are deluded away from the truth!" The assertion that God

stands against those who believe in the deity of Christ is in contradiction with the Bible. Sura 5:116-117 states:

And behold! God will say [i.e. on the Day of Judgment]: "Oh Jesus, the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?" He will say: "Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Yours. For You know in full all that is hidden. Never did I say to them anything except what You commanded me to say: 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.' And I was a witness over them while I lived among them. When You took me up, You were the Watcher over them, and You are a witness to all things."

Chapter five of the Qur'an asserts that Christianity taught the worship of Mary as a god. From this passage and others, many Muslims have incorrectly concluded that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the Father, the Son, and Mary. In fact, the New Testament never taught the worship of Mary. Instead it clearly taught that one must worship the Lord God alone (Matt. 4:10). The biblical doctrine of the Trinity never included Mary. The chapter further states that Jesus Himself clearly denied claiming to be the Son of God and would not accept the worship of others. In contrast, the Bible teaches that Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God and received worship (Jn. 8; Matt. 14:33; 28:17). Sura 5:75 states:

Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than a messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. See how God makes His signs clear to them; yet see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth!

The Qur'an emphatically teaches that Jesus was a prophet and not the divine Son of God. Those who believe Jesus is divine

are “deluded.”

The Apostle John, writing in AD 90, states in chapter one of his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Apostle Paul, writing his letter to the Colossians in AD 60, states in chapter 2:9, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”

It is apparent that Christianity and Islam teach contrary views of Christ and, therefore, cannot both be true at the same time. In this article I will investigate what the Qur'an teaches regarding the life of Christ and compare it with the Gospels. Since they teach contrary views, I will examine to see whether the Bible or the Qur'an has the greater weight of evidence to support its teachings on the nature of Christ.

Infancy Narratives of Christ in the Qur'an

What does the Qur'an teach regarding the childhood years of Christ? Not only do the Bible and the Qur'an teach contrary views regarding the nature of Christ, they also record contrary accounts of His early life. The Bible teaches that Jesus was born in Bethlehem during the time of Caesar Augustus and the reign of King Herod over Bethlehem. Jesus was born in a stable because there were no rooms available for Mary and Joseph. On the eve of His birth, shepherds, who were told of his birth by angels, visited him. Later, wise men from the East came and worshipped the child. Herod, threatened by the announcement of a newborn king, sought to kill the child. Joseph fled from Herod, traveled to Egypt, and, after Herod's death, returned to Nazareth where Jesus grew up. The Gospels rely on eyewitness accounts for their source of information.

The Qur'an includes stories regarding the birth and childhood of Christ, but it relies on very questionable sources that are not eyewitness accounts. First, the Qur'an teaches that Jesus

was born in the desert under a palm tree. Sura 19 teaches that Mary, feeling the pangs of childbirth, seized the trunk of a palm tree and desired at that moment to die. However, the baby Jesus speaks to her from beneath saying, "Grieve not; for your Lord has provided a rivulet beneath you. And shake towards yourself the trunk of the palm tree: it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon you. So eat drink and cool [your] eye" (Sura 19: 24-25).

This story parallels an account from the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*, which is dated to the early seventh century AD (between AD 600 and 625).^{1} New Testament scholar Dan Wallace dates this Gospel even later to the eighth to ninth century AD.^{2} Wallace's date would push back the date of the Qur'an to several generations after Muhammad. In chapter 20 of this apocryphal work, Joseph and Mary are fleeing to Egypt and come to rest under a tall palm tree. Mary longs to eat the fruit of a palm tree and Joseph states their need for water. It is then the infant Jesus speaks to the palm tree:

Then the child Jesus, with a joyful countenance, reposing in the bosom of His mother, said to the palm: "O tree, bend thy branches, and refresh my mother with thy fruit." And immediately at these words the palm bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary; and they gathered from it fruit, with which they were all refreshed. And after they had gathered all its fruit, it remained bent down, waiting the order to rise from Him who had commanded it to stoop. Then Jesus said to it: "Raise thyself, O palm tree, and be strong, and be the companion of my trees, which are in the paradise of my Father; and open from thy roots a vein of water which has been hid in the earth, and let the waters flow, so that we may be satisfied from thee." And it rose up immediately, and at its root there began to come forth a spring of water exceedingly clear and cool and sparkling. And when they saw the spring of water, they rejoiced with great joy, and were satisfied, themselves and all their cattle and their beasts.

Wherefore they gave thanks to God.

Historians and textual scholars such as F. F. Bruce have concluded that Muhammad incorporated this story from the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*.[\[3\]](#)

Another infant narrative from the Qur'an teaches that not long after Jesus' birth, Mary presents the infant to her people, several of whom question her regarding the baby. In her defense she points to the infant, which confuses the people since the child is only an infant. Then to everyone's surprise, the newborn Jesus speaks saying:

I am indeed a servant of Allah, He has given me revelation and made me a Prophet; And He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live. [He] has made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable; So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life [again]. Such was (Prophet) Jesus, the son of Mary. A saying of truth, concerning what they doubt (Sura 19:30-33).

This account teaches that shortly after his birth, Jesus spoke, proclaiming His calling as the prophet of Allah, and defending the innocence of His mother Mary. The source of this story is another pseudo-gospel, the *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior*.[\[4\]](#) According to Wallace, this apocryphal work was written in the fifth or sixth century AD.[\[5\]](#) This work states:

We have found it recorded in the book of Josephus the Chief Priest, who was in the time of Christ (and men say that he was Caiaphas), that this man said that Jesus spake when He was in the cradle, and said to Mary His Mother, "Verily I am Jesus, the Son of God, the Word which thou hast borne, according as the angel Gabriel gave thee the good news; and

My Father hath sent Me for the salvation of the world."

Here we see the parallels between the Qur'an and this apocryphal work. This work specifically mentions the infant Jesus speaking from his cradle, declaring His calling from God.

A third account in the Qur'an records Jesus making birds out of clay and then bringing them to life. Sura 3:49 states:

I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what you eat and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you, if you did believe.

This story of Christ breathing life into clay birds has no parallel in the Gospels. Instead, this story comes from another apocryphal work, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Historical evidence indicates this Gospel was not written by Thomas; moreover, it was not even written in the lifetime of the apostles. The earliest manuscript of this Gospel dates from the sixth century AD., but most scholars date this work in the late second century.[\[6\]](#) New Testament scholar Wilhelm Schneemelcher writes that the author was most likely not Jewish but a Gentile Christian. He asserts the fact that "the author was of gentile Christian origin may be assumed with certainty, since his work betrays no knowledge of things Jewish."[\[7\]](#)

Another account of Jesus in this *Infancy Gospel* reveals a capricious child who inflicts painful revenge several times on those who cross him in a manner he does not like. Fred Lapham states, "[M]any of the stories in the earlier part of the work are morally offensive and indefensible, showing the growing

Jesus to be cruel, callous, and vindictive, and exercising power without regard for the consequences.”[\[8\]](#) This account portrays a young Jesus contrary to that in the Gospels. A vengeful and bad-tempered Jesus would be contrary to the description given in Luke which states that he was “filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him” (Lk. 2:40). Also, a child of the character portrayed in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* would not likely be described as growing in “wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Lk. 2:52).

There are several concerns regarding the accounts of Christ in the Qur’an. First, the infancy accounts of Christ contradict the Gospels. The Qur’an teaches that Jesus was born in the desert under a palm tree while the New Testament Gospels teach that Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem in a stable (Lk. 2:7). The infancy narratives in the Qur’an teach that Jesus performed miracles in his infancy and childhood. However, John 2:11 states that Jesus’ first miracle was performed in Cana of Galilee at the beginning of His ministry. Since the Qur’an and the Bible present contrary accounts of the life of Christ, both cannot be true at the same time.

What Does the Historical Evidence Support?

The historical evidence strongly confirms the New Testament Gospel accounts. First of all, two of these authors—Matthew and John—were eyewitnesses. Meanwhile, Mark and Luke derived their facts from the apostles themselves. There are numerous facts that support this to be the case. The internal evidence, archaeology, manuscript evidence, quotes from the early Church Fathers, and ancient non-Christian historical works affirm the first century date and historical accuracy of the gospels.[\[9\]](#)

Muhammad wrote the Qur’an nearly six centuries after the life of Christ. Unlike the Gospel writers who relied on eyewitness sources, Islam’s defense is that the angel Gabriel revealed

the information to Muhammad. However, the parallels to Gnostic apocryphal works reveal that Muhammad's sources came from a mixture of Christian fables and Gnostic works that were prevalent in Arabia at that time.

Muhammad no doubt had interaction with Christians. There were several Christian communities in Arabia, and he would have also met Christian traders traveling in caravans along the trade routes. Also his first wife, Khadija, had a cousin named Waraqa who was a Christian.[\[10\]](#) These Christian and Gnostic "Christian" sources told Muhammad stories from the New Testament and also the fables and apocryphal stories spreading at that time. Since Muhammad was illiterate, he was not able to read and research these sources for himself; instead he relied on second or third hand accounts told to him. As he retold the stories, some of the details were changed due to an incorrect telling, a lapse in memory, or a desire for them to better fit his belief system.

In creating the Qur'an, Muhammad does recount some biblical stories, but he also relies on apocryphal sources written centuries after the eyewitnesses. These works present a Gnostic refashioning of Christ and have shown to be unhistorical in nature. Since they were not derived from apostolic sources and presented a false view of Christ, they were never considered part of inspired Scripture. The evidence strongly favors the New Testament Gospel accounts over the Qur'an. Since the Qur'an presents stories contrary to the Gospels, its historical accuracy and inspiration comes into question. Also, if Muhammad recorded false stories regarding the infant life of Christ, one must also question his understanding of the nature of Christ as well.

In citing apocryphal works as unreliable, one may fairly question whether the Bible quotes apocryphal works. Indeed, there are occasions where the Bible does quote from uninspired sources. One of the most questioned are Jude's references to the *Assumption of Moses* (Jude 9) and the *Book of Enoch* (Jude

14-15). However, these two references do not present a theological or historical problem since they do not present any teaching contrary to biblical revelation. So, although Jude does quote uninspired sources, there is no reason to reject the inspiration of Jude. Although the *Assumption of Moses* and the *Book of Enoch* are apocryphal works, Jude is referencing portions that are true and consistent with other areas of the Bible. Therefore, this does not affect either the doctrine of inspiration or the integrity of Jude's book.

In contrast, the birth and infancy account of Christ in the Qur'an is problematic since it both contradicts the New Testament Gospels and presents a contrary view regarding the nature of Christ. Therefore, unlike Jude, it is inconsistent with the New Testament, and we must decide whether it is the Qur'an or the Gospels that are in error.

The Life of Christ

The Qur'an speaks on five aspects of Christ's life. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was a prophet of God but rejects the deity of Christ. However, it does affirm that Christ lived a remarkable life. The Qur'an affirms the virgin birth of Christ (Sura 3:42-47; 19:16-21). The Qur'an affirms the prophetic call of Christ. It also affirms that Christ performed many miracles. The Qur'an affirms that Christ was sinless (Sura 19:16-21). However, it rejects the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and instead teaches that Christ did not suffer physical death but God raised Him up to heaven (Sura 4:158).

What is significant to realize is that, comparing Jesus to Muhammad in the Qur'an, Jesus performs greater works than Muhammad. First, according to the Qur'an, Christ is born of a virgin while there is nothing miraculous regarding the birth of Muhammad. Second, the Qur'an teaches that Christ accomplished many miracles, but Muhammad does not perform any

in the Qur'an. The Qur'an teaches that true prophets of God are confirmed by miracles. It teaches that previous prophets Moses and Jesus were confirmed as prophets by their miracles (Sura 7:106-8; 116-119; 5:113). However, when the people ask Muhammad to do so, he refuses, stating that the Jews witnessed miracles from the prophets but remained in unbelief (Sura 28:47-51; 17:90-95). If, according to the Qur'an, God confirmed His prophets through miracles, a question remains as to why He would not confirm Muhammad with the same "seal" of the prophets. This certainly was within God's ability to accomplish.

Contemporary Muslim author Isma'il Al-Faruqi claims that "Muslims do not claim any miracles for Muhammad. In their view, what proves Muhammad's prophethood is the sublime beauty and greatness of the revelation itself, the Holy Qur'an, not any inexplicable breaches of natural law which confound human reason."[\[11\]](#) Muslim scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali admitted that Muhammad did not perform any miracle "in the sense of a reversing of Nature."[\[12\]](#)

Muslim apologists point to the miracle accounts of Muhammad in the *Hadith*, a record of the sayings of Muhammad. However, the Qur'an is the inspired book of God, and the *Hadith* does not carry the authority of the Qur'an. The *Hadith* was written nearly one to two centuries after the life of Muhammad. Since this follows the pattern historians such as A.N. Sherwin-White have identified of miracle accounts that appear two generations after the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, the alleged miracle accounts in the *Hadith* stand in question. Moreover, the *Hadith* accounts seem to also go against the spirit of Muhammad in the Qur'an who repeatedly refused to perform miracles (3:181-84; 4:153; 6:8-9). It is also significant to note that many Muslim scholars such as Sahih Bukhari, who is considered to be the most reliable collector of the sayings in the *Hadith*, believed the vast majority of the miracle stories to be false.[\[13\]](#)

When pressed to defend the miracles of Muhammad, some point to Muhammad's night journey in Sura 19 in which he claims to have been transported to Jerusalem and then ascended to heaven on the back of a mule (Sura 17:1). There is no reason to take this passage as referring to a literal trip to heaven as even many Muslim scholars do not take it as such. The noted translator of the Qur'an, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, comments on this passage, noting that "it opens with the mystic Vision of the Ascension of the Holy Prophet; he is transported from the Sacred Mosque (of Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (of Jerusalem) at night and shown some of the Signs of God."[\[14\]](#) Even according to one of the earliest Islamic traditions, Muhammad's wife A'isha reported that "the apostle's body remained where it was but God removed his spirit by night."[\[15\]](#) Further, even if this were to be understood as a miracle claim, there is no evidence presented to test its authenticity. Since it lacks testability, it has no apologetic value.[\[16\]](#)

Another miracle is the prophecy of victory at the Battle of Badr (Sura 3:123; 8:17). However, it is a stretch to call this a supernatural miracle. It is common that generals will predict victory over an enemy army to inspire his troops. Also, Muhammad did not prophesy his defeat at the Battle of Uhud a year later.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam teach that God confirms His messengers through miracles. The Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the apostles have the testimony of miracles but this is lacking in the testimony of Muhammad. The miracle testimony of Christ affirms that He was more than a prophet.

The Resurrection

The Qur'an rejects the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ because Muslims believe that Allah would not allow His prophet to die such a shameful kind of death. The

Qur'an teaches that Jesus did not die on the cross. Sura 4:157-159 states:

That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God';—But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:— Nay, God raised him up unto Himself; and God is exalted in power, wise;—And there is none of the people of the Book but must believe in him before his death; And on the Day of Judgment He will be a witness against them.

Muslims believe that Jesus did not die on the cross but escaped death and was taken up to heaven. The phrase "God raised him up unto Himself" is understood to teach that Jesus was taken up alive to heaven, never experiencing death. Based on the phrase, "it was made to appear to them," orthodox Muslims have traditionally interpreted this to mean that God made someone else look like Jesus, and this person was crucified instead of Christ. There are various views regarding the identity of this substitute. Candidates include Judas, Simon of Cyrene, or a teen age boy.

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus predicted His death and resurrection (Matt. 26:2; Mk. 10:33; 14:8; Jn. 2:19). The Bible records the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which is central to the preaching of the apostles and to Christianity. The Qur'an and the Gospels cannot be true at the same time since they present contradictory accounts. One must examine the historical evidence and determine which account the evidence supports.

There is strong evidence to support the historicity of the Gospels and the fact that they were written by first century eyewitnesses or their close associates.[\[17\]](#) We also have

thousands of ancient manuscripts dated as early as the beginning of the second century, confirming that the Gospels have been accurately preserved.{18} There are also several non-Christian Roman and Jewish historical works that affirm both the death of Christ and that Christians believed He had risen from the dead. These include the writings of Tacitus, Thallus, Lucian, Josephus, and the Jewish Talmud.{19} Finally, the preaching of the death and resurrection of Christ began just days after His death on the cross, and has been continuously preached since then for over two thousand years. This account was proclaimed from the beginning, not generations after the resurrection.

The Qur'an's account is not built on historical evidence but rather a commitment to Muslim theology. There is little historical evidence to support the Qur'an in its denial of the crucifixion and resurrection and its assertion that someone else took Jesus' place on the cross. To support their view, Muslims often appeal to the "Lost Gospels." These are the Gnostic Gospels such as the *Gospel of Judas* and others. However, these have proven to be non-apostolic works, written centuries after the life of the apostles. They are not regarded as historically accurate and were written by Gnostics attempting to refashion Jesus in their image.{20}

The death and resurrection of Christ is one of the most reliably recorded events in ancient history. The historical evidence strongly favors the Gospel account. Therefore, the Qur'an would be in error, and its inspiration must, therefore, be questioned.

Conclusion

As we have studied, the Qur'an and the Bible present contrary views on the nature and life of Christ. The Qur'an rejects the deity of Christ and the death and resurrection of Christ. The Qur'an presents stories regarding the infancy of Christ that

are contrary to the New Testament and rely on Gnostic apocryphal works as its source. The Qur'an rejects major doctrines and events recorded in the Bible. Since the historical evidence upholds the Gospels, the perfection and inspiration of the Qur'an is in question since its teachings contradict major doctrines and events taught in the New Testament.

That being said, from a survey of the Qur'an, one should realize that even in the Qur'an, Jesus is greater than Muhammad. First, Jesus' titles in the Qur'an are greater. Despite rejecting the deity of Christ, the Qur'an gives Jesus several honorary titles. He is given the titles of Messiah, the Word of God, the Spirit of God (Sura 4:169-71), the Speech of Truth (Sura 19:34-35), a Sign unto Men, and Mercy from God (Sura 19:21). Although these titles may refer to deity in Christian theology, Muslims do not equate these titles in the same way.

Second, Jesus' miracles in the Qur'an are greater, for the Qur'an affirms several miraculous aspects of Christ's life. The Qur'an affirms the virgin birth of Christ (Sura 19:16-21; 3:37-45). The Qur'an also affirms that Christ performed miracles (Sura 3:37-45; 43: 63-65). The Qur'an also affirms the prophethood of Christ (19:29-31). The Qur'an also affirms that Christ did not die but was raised up to heaven by God (4:158; 19:33). In contrast, according to the Qur'an, there is very little, if anything, supernatural regarding the life of Muhammad.

Even in the Qur'an, Jesus lived a life that is much more extraordinary than Muhammad. Since this is evident in the Qur'an, it would be wise for all Muslims to study the life of Jesus in the Bible. Not only is the Bible an accurate historical record, but it is a text that Muhammad encouraged Muslims to study (Sura 10:94; 2:136; 4:163; 5:56; 5:68; 35:31). Muhammad believed the Bible in the sixth century AD was accurate. We have many ancient New Testaments that predate

the sixth century. Examples include the Chester Beatty Papyri (AD 250), Codex Vaticanus (AD 325 – 350), Codex Sinaiticus (AD 340), Codex Alexandrinus (AD 450), the Latin Vulgate (fourth century AD), and Syriac New Testament (AD 508). From these we can be assured that we have accurate copies of the New Testament that predate the sixth century.

I encourage all Muslims, therefore, to read the New Testament and learn what it says about Jesus Christ. One will soon discover that He was more than a prophet; He was indeed the unique Son Of God.

Notes

1. Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 78.
2. Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 156.
3. F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), 172-73.
4. St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur'an* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1905), ch. 4, section 3.
5. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, 156.
6. Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Santa Rosa, CA.: Polebridge Press, 1995), 91-92.
7. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 442.
8. Fred Lapham, *An Introduction to the New Testament Apocrypha* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 130.
9. See Patrick Zukeran, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels," Probe Ministries, 2004, probe.org/historical-reliability-of-the-gospels
10. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1967), 83.
11. Isma'il Al-Faruqi, *Islam* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1984), 20, quoted in Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb,

- Answering Islam : The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 105.
12. Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam : The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 167.
13. Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 169.
14. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, "Introduction to Sura XVII," in *Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Cairo, Egypt: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri, n.d.) 691.
15. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 183.
16. Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 2nd ed., 164.
17. Zukeran, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels."
18. Ibid.
19. Patrick Zukeran, "Jesus in Ancient Non-Christian Sources," Evidence and Answers, bit.ly/18XCiME
20. Patrick Zukeran. "Discerning Fact from Fiction in *The Da Vinci Code*," Evidence and Answers, evidenceandanswers.org/articles/DaVinciCodeA1.pdf

© 2008 Probe Ministries

A Doctor's Journey with Cancer

When you suddenly learn you might have only 18 months to live, its a good time to sort out what really matters in life.

Last December, Yang Chen, MD, dismissed an aching pain under his shoulder as muscle strain. Five weeks later, as the pain

persisted, a chest x-ray brought shocking results: possible lung cancer that might have spread.

A highly acclaimed specialist and medical professor at the University of Colorado Denver, Yang knew the average survival rate for his condition could be under 18 months. He didn't smoke and had no family history of cancer. He was stunned. His life changed in an instant.

I wondered how I would break the news to my unsuspecting wife and three young children, he recalls. Who would take care of my family if I died?

Swirling Vortex of Uncertainty

When I heard his story, I felt a jab of recognition. In 1996, my doctor said I might have cancer. That word sent me into a swirling vortex of uncertainty. But I was fortunate; within a month, I learned my condition was benign.

Yang did not get such good news. He now knows he has an inoperable tumor. He's undergoing chemotherapy. It's uncertain whether radiation will help. Yet through it all, he seems remarkably calm and positive. At a time when one might understandably focus on oneself, he's even assisting other cancer patients and their families to cope with their own challenges. What's his secret?

I learned about Yang's personal inner resources when we first met in the 1980s. He worked at the Mayo Clinic and brought me to Rochester, Minnesota, to present a seminar for Mayo and IBM professionals on a less ponderous theme, Love, Sex and the Single Lifestyle. With the audience, we laughed and explored relationship mysteries. He felt it was essential that people consider the spiritual aspect of relationships, as well as the psychological and physical.

Later he founded a global network to train medical professionals how to interact with patients on spiritual

matters. Many seriously ill patients want their doctors to discuss spiritual needs and the profession is taking note.

Reality Blog

Now a patient himself, Yang exhibits strength drawn from the faith that has enriched his life. He has established a website www.aDoctorsJourneyWithCancer.net to chronicle his journey and offer hope and encouragement to others. The site presents a compelling real-life drama as it happens.

As a follower of Jesus, Yang notes [biblical references](#) to Gods light shining in our hearts and people of faith being like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. He sees himself as a broken clay jar through which Gods light can shine to point others who suffer to comfort and faith.

As he draws on divine strength, he reflects on Paul, a first-century believer who wrote, We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair.

A dedicated scientist, Yang is convinced that what he believes about God is true and includes information about evidences for faith. Hes also got plenty to help the hurting and the curious navigate through their pain, cope with emotional turmoil, and find answers to lifes perplexing questions about death, dying, the afterlife, handling anxiety, and more.

With perhaps less than 18 months to live, Yang Chen knows whats most important in his life. He invites web surfers to walk with me for part, or all, of my journey. If Im ever in his position, I hope I can blend suffering with service while displaying the serenity and trust I observe in him. Visit [his website](#) and youll see what I mean.

© 2008 Rusty Wright

“You Shouldn’t Talk About Evidence When the Subject Is Faith”

In your article [“Evidence for the Existence of God,”](#) the link between the remarkable things about earth and God is called “faith.” I believe in God. The author misuses the word “evidence.”

The author takes away from issues of religion and faith by throwing in a reference to “Saving the Whales” because there are all sorts of flawed and fraudulent environmental agendas floating around by various groups and the true conservationists are not represented by these groups. “Saving the Whales” is fraught with political ramifications and does not belong in a commentary supposedly “proving” the existence of God. The title of this article is inaccurate and is a disservice to your organization.

Thanks for your comments about my article.

If I indicated that I was trying to “prove” the existence of God, then please help me see where, so I can change it. I don’t think anyone can prove the existence of God, but we can point to evidence for Him. I am very aware that our sinfulness makes it easy for people to dismiss perfectly good evidence of our Creator NOT because the evidence isn’t good enough, but because they are disturbed by the implications of the existence of a God to whom we are all accountable.

My reference to “Saving the Whales” was simply to make the point that people resort to the moral argument regardless of their relationship to God, because our morality is ingrained

in us as people made in the image of God. The politics of that movement really don't have anything to do with the point I was making; I was only concerned with the motivation behind it.

I do think that evidence and faith are not diametrically opposed. We have faith not just because we choose to believe, but because there is good reason to believe; and that constitutes evidence. I think Christianity is an evidential faith; that's why Jesus appeared to over 500 people after His resurrection, so there would be eyewitness testimony (evidence) of the foundation of our faith. For some, the faith comes first, and for others, the evidence comes first and THEN they put their trust in God. Either way, the important thing is the object of our faith and not how we got to Him.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

7 Questions Skeptics Ask – Radio Transcript

Rusty Wright considers some common questions skeptics ask about our belief in Christianity. He shows us how to answer these questions from an informed biblical worldview.

Questions of Faith

Picture the scene. You're discussing your faith with a coworker or neighbor, perhaps over lunch or coffee. You explain your beliefs but your friend has questions:

How could a loving God allow evil and suffering? The Bible is

full of contradictions. What about people who've never heard of Jesus?

How do you feel about these questions and objections? Anxious? Confused? Defensive? Combative?

Sensitively and appropriately answering questions that skeptics ask you can be an important part of helping them to consider Jesus. Peter told us, "In your hearts set apart 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."[\[1\]](#) This series looks at seven common questions skeptics ask and gives you some pointers on how to respond. Consider first a story.

As the flight from Chicago to Dallas climbed in the sky, I became engrossed in conversation with the passenger to my left. "Aimee," a French businesswoman, asked me about my work. On learning I was a Christian communicator, she related that a professing Christian had signed a contract with her, attempted to lead her to Christ, then later deceitfully undercut her. "How could a Christian do such a thing?" she asked.

I told her that Christians weren't perfect, that some fail miserably, that many are honest and caring, but that it is Jesus we ultimately trust. Aimee asked question after question: How can you believe the Bible? Why do Christians say there is only one way to God? How does one become a Christian?

I tried to answer her concerns tactfully and explained the message of grace as clearly as I could. Stories I told of personal pain seemed to open her up to consider God's love for her. She did not come to Christ in that encounter, but she seemed to leave it with a new understanding.

Hurting people everywhere need God. Many are open to considering Him, but they often have questions they want answered before they are willing to accept Christ. As

Christian communicators seek to blend grace with truth,^{2} an increasing number of skeptics may give an ear and become seekers or believers.

As you interact with skeptics, compliment them where you can. Jesus complimented the skeptical Nathanael for his pursuit of truth.^{3} Listen to their concerns. Your listening ear speaks volumes. It may surprise you to learn that your attitude can be just as important as what you know.

Dealing with Objections

How do you deal with questions and objections to faith that your friends may pose?

When I was a skeptical student, my sometimes-relentless questions gave my Campus Crusade for Christ friends at Duke University plenty of practice! I wanted to know if Christianity was true. After trusting Christ as Savior, I still had questions.

Bob Prall, the local Campus Crusade director, took interest in me. At first his answers irritated me, but as I thought them through they began to make sense. For two years I followed him around campus, watching him interact. Today, as I am privileged to encounter inquisitive people around the globe, much of my speech and manner derive from my mentor.

Consider some guidelines. Pray for wisdom, for His love for inquirers^{4} and for your questioner's heart. If appropriate, briefly share the gospel first. The Holy Spirit may draw your friends to Christ. Don't push, though. It may be best to answer their questions first.

Some questions may be intellectual smokescreens. Once a Georgia Tech philosophy professor peppered me with questions, which I answered as best I could.

Then I asked him, If I could answer all your questions to your

satisfaction, would you put your life in Jesus' hands? His reply: "[Expletive deleted] no!"

Okay. This first objection is one you might have heard:

1. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.

I once gave a speech arguing *for* this proposition. Later, I reconsidered. In the 1960s, many women took the drug thalidomide seeking easier pregnancies. Often they delivered deformed babies. Sincerely swallowing two white pills may cure your headache if the pills are aspirin. If they are roach poison, results may differ.

After discussing this point, a widely respected psychologist told me, "I guess a person could be sincere in what he or she believed, but be sincerely wrong." Ultimately faith is only as valid as its object. Jesus demonstrated by His life, death and resurrection that He is a worthy object for faith.[\[5\]](#)

Focus on Jesus. Bob Prall taught me to say, "I don't have answers to every question. But if my conclusion about Jesus is wrong, I have a bigger problem. What do I do with the evidence for His resurrection, His deity and the prophecies He fulfilled? And what do I do with changed lives, including my own?"

I don't have complete answers to every concern you will encounter, but in what follows I'll outline some short responses that might be useful.

The second question is:

2. Why is there evil and suffering?

Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion that humans invent to satisfy their security needs. To him, a benevolent, all-powerful God seemed incongruent with natural disasters and human evil.

God, though sovereign, gave us freedom to follow Him or to disobey Him. Oxford scholar C.S. Lewis estimated that eighty percent of human suffering stems from human choice. Lewis called pain "God's megaphone" that alerts us to our need for Him.[{6}](#) This response does not answer all concerns (because God sometimes does intervene to thwart evil) but it suggests that the problem of evil is not as great an intellectual obstacle to belief as some imagine.

Pain's emotional barrier to belief, however, remains formidable. When I see God, items on my long list of questions for Him will include a painful and unwanted divorce, betrayal by trusted coworkers, and all sorts of disappointing human behavior and natural disasters. Yet in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection[{7}](#) I have seen enough to trust Him when He says He "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God."[{8}](#)

3. What about those who never hear of Jesus?

Moses said, "The secret things belong to the LORD."[{9}](#) Some issues may remain mysteries. God's perfect love and justice far exceed our own. Whatever He decides will be loving and fair. One can make a case that God will make the necessary information available to someone who wants to know Him. An example: Cornelius, a devout military official. The New Testament records that God assigned Peter to tell him about Jesus.[{10}](#)

A friend once told me that many asking this question seek a personal loophole, a way so they won't need to believe in Christ. That statement angered me, but it also described me. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* wrote, "If you are worried about the people outside [of faith in Christ], the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself."[{11}](#) If Christianity is true, the most logical behavior for someone concerned about those without Christ's message would be to trust Christ and go tell them about Him.

Here's a tip: When someone asks you a difficult question, if you don't know the answer, admit it. Many skeptics appreciate honesty. Don't bluff. It's dishonest and often detectable.

4. What about all the contradictions in the Bible?

Ask your questioner for specific examples of contradictions. Often people have none, but rely on hearsay. If there is a specific example, consider these guidelines as you respond.

Omission does not necessarily create contradiction. Luke, for example, writes of two angels at Jesus' tomb after the Resurrection.[{12}](#) Matthew mentions "an angel."[{13}](#) Is this a contradiction? If Matthew stated that only one angel was present, the accounts would be dissonant. As it stands, they can be harmonized.

Differing accounts aren't necessarily contradictory. Matthew and Luke, for example, differ in their accounts of Jesus' birth. Luke records Joseph and Mary starting in Nazareth, traveling to Bethlehem (Jesus' birthplace), and returning to Nazareth.[{14}](#) Matthew starts with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, relates the family's journey to Egypt to escape King Herod's rage, and recounts their travel to Nazareth after Herod's death.[{15}](#) The Gospels never claim to be exhaustive records. Biographers must be selective. The accounts seem complementary, not contradictory.

Time precludes more complex examples here. But time and again, supposed biblical problems fade in light of logic, history, and archaeology. The Bible's track record under scrutiny argues for its trustworthiness.

5. Isn't Christianity just a psychological crutch?

My mentor Bob Prall has often said, "If Christianity is a psychological crutch, then Jesus Christ came because there was an epidemic of broken legs." Christianity claims to meet real human needs such as those for forgiveness, love, identity and

self-acceptance. We might describe Jesus not as a crutch but an iron lung, essential for life itself.

Christian faith and its benefits can be described in psychological terms but that does not negate its validity. "Does it work?" is not the same question as, "Is it true?" Evidence supports Christianity's truthfulness, so we would expect it to work in individual lives, as millions attest.

A caution as you answer questions: Don't offer "proof" but rather evidences for faith. "Proof" can imply an airtight case, which you don't have. Aim for certainty "beyond a reasonable doubt," just as an attorney might in court.

Don't quarrel. Lovingly and intelligently present evidence to willing listeners, not to win arguments but to share good news. Be kind and gentle.[{16}](#) Your life and friendship can communicate powerfully.

6. How can Jesus be the only way to God?

When I was in secondary school, a recent alumnus visited, saying he had found Christ at Harvard. I respected his character and tact and listened intently. But I could not stomach Jesus' claim that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."[{17}](#) That seemed way too narrow.

Two years later, my spiritual and intellectual journey had changed my view. The logic that drew me (reluctantly) to his position involves three questions:

- *If God exists, could there be only one way to reach Him? To be open-minded, I had to admit this possibility.*
- *Why consider Jesus as a candidate for that possible one way? He claimed it. His plan of rescuing humans "by grace...through faith... not...works"[{18}](#) was distinct from those requiring works, as many other religions do. These two kinds*

of systems were mutually exclusive. Both could be false or either could be true, but both could not be true.

• Was Jesus' plan true? Historical evidence for His resurrection, fulfilled prophecy[{19}](#) and deity, and for the reliability of the New Testament[{20}](#) convinced me I could trust His words.

One more common objection:

7. I could never take the blind leap of faith that believing in Christ requires.

We exercise faith every day. Few of us comprehend everything about electricity or aerodynamics, but we have evidence of their validity. Whenever we use electric lights or airplanes, we exercise faith not blind faith, but faith based on evidence. Christians act similarly. The evidence for Jesus is compelling, so one can trust Him on that basis.

As you respond to inquirers, realize that many barriers to faith are emotional rather than merely intellectual.

As a teenager, I nearly was expelled from secondary school for some problems I helped create. In my pain and anger I wondered, "Why would God allow this to happen?" I was mad at God! In retrospect, I realize I was blaming Him for my own bad choices. My personal anguish at the time kept me from seeing that.

Your questioners may be turned off because Christians haven't acted like Jesus. Maybe they're angry at God because of personal illness, a broken relationship, a loved one's death, or personal pain. Ask God for patience and love as you seek to blend grace with truth. He may use you to help skeptics become seekers and seekers become His children. I hope He does.

Notes

1. 1 Peter 3:15 NIV.
 2. John 1:14.
 3. John 1:45-47.
 4. Romans 9:1-3; 10:1.
 5. For useful discussions of evidences regarding Jesus, visit www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com.
 6. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 89-103 ff. The Problem of Pain was first published in 1940.
 7. A short summary of Resurrection evidences is at Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, "Who's Got the Body?" 1976, www.probe.org/whos-got-the-body/.
 8. Romans 8:28 NASB.
- For more complete treatment of this subject, see Rick Rood, "The Problem of Evil," 1996, www.probe.org/the-problem-of-evil/ ; Dr. Ray Bohlin, "Where Was God on September 11?" 2002, www.probe.org/where-was-god-on-sept-11-the-problem-of-evil/.
9. Deuteronomy 29:29 NASB.
 10. Acts 10.
 11. C.S. Lewis, "The Case for Christianity," reprinted from *Mere Christianity*; in *The Best of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 449. The Case for Christianity is copyright 1947 by The Macmillan Company.
 12. Luke 24:1-9.
 13. Matthew 28:1-8.
 14. Luke 1:26-2:40.

15. Matthew 1:18-2:23.

16. 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

17. John 14:6 NASB.

18. Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB.

19. A summary of some of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled is at Rusty Wright, "Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?" 2004, www.probe.org/are-you-listening-do-you-hear-what-i-hear/.

20. A summary of evidences for New Testament reliability is at Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, "The New Testament: Can I Trust It?" 1976, www.probe.org/the-new-testament-can-i-trust-it/.

Adapted from Rusty Wright, "7 Questions Skeptics Ask," *Moody Magazine*, March/April 2002. Copyright 2002 Rusty Wright. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2005 Probe Ministries

"Help Me Know That God is Really There"

I read your article [Evidence for God's Existence](#). I have always believed in God until recently when I read some articles by James Randi known to most people as "The Amazing Randi." He seems to be able to disprove the divine power of people who claim to be able to talk to the dead and move objects with their minds with scientific proof that they are merely just cheap parlor tricks. I believe he is correct not

only because he says so but because the bible tells us that Jesus was the last person on earth who could do such things as tell the future or perform miracles etc. But what if Jesus knew these parlor tricks which are as old as the hills? I saw Siegfried and Roy make an elephant disappear right before my very eyes in front of a thousand people and admit to trickery. Who is to say that Jesus didn't know how to fool the average person in the same way thousands of years ago? Please understand that I am not being a wise guy. I truly have issues with this because I was such a firm believer in God and Jesus Christ. If God doesn't exist, then I am truly alone and have wasted many hours and prayers on things that would or wouldn't happen anyway with or without my prayers.

Also, I have been talking to myself all these years and I must be crazy. I realize the consequences of my decision not to believe in God if I am wrong. Somehow that seems trivial while I am still alive. I still go to church every Sunday with my wife. I don't let on that my faith has been diminished because my wife is such a good God-fearing woman and I don't want to impose my beliefs on her or anyone else. Especially if I am wrong. What it boils down to is if science can prove that the existence of God is only something that exists in my mind, and the voice I hear inside myself is my own self, then I am guilty of being a fool. For he who teaches himself has a fool for a master. True the earth is a miracle in itself and surely no parlor trick. I can't explain how it all began if there is no God. But we as just mankind can't even begin to explain any theory with our limited knowledge of the universe. If Siegfried and Roy can make an elephant disappear in front of all those people and admit it is a trick, yet nobody can figure out how it was done, than it is understandable that the beginning of the world which must be a far greater "trick" and is something that we as ordinary individuals can never figure out. Bad things happen in this world that I feel shouldn't. I love my family and my pets. I don't want to see them die. But they must die just as I must die. What if there isn't anything

after death and you just lie there in the ground. That beautiful gift of life has been destroyed. I can't accept that a loving God would take these things away from me or anyone who hold them so near and dear to their heart. Could it be that God is for the weak minded who need direction and discipline to get through life without going off course for their own good? Is life just a crap shoot anyway where what ever happens, happens whether you pray or not? Please forgive me if I have offended you with my talk of disbelief but I thought if anyone could answer my questions, you could. I don't mean any disrespect. I need to know that God is really there to hear my prayers and help me to make decisions. I need to know that I am not on my own in this world and my prayers are heard and answered according to his word not just my imagination or wishful thinking.

Dear _____,

Bless your heart! Thank you you SO MUCH for sharing your deep thoughts and fears with me. I have two things to say in response.

1. The best thing Jesus ever did to prove that what He did was true miracles and not tricks was to rise from the dead. How do you counterfeit THAT? The resurrection is the strongest evidence for the truth of Christianity that we have. Consider that the disciples, who had been so disheartened by His death (even though He had promised several times to rise from the dead), were so turned around by seeing Him alive again that they changed the world and were willing to die for their belief in a risen Savior. If it were only a trick, no one would have died for a lie. May I suggest you get a hold of Lee Strobel's book *The Case for Christ* and shore up your faith? I think that book will really help. (Consider also other people—like Strobel the former skeptic—who set out to prove the resurrection false, like Frank Morison, and were so overwhelmed by the evidence that they became believers and wrote books like *Who Moved the Stone?*)

2. I believe that the doubts that assail you are nothing more than spiritual warfare. I think you are being attacked by the spiritual forces of darkness, and I gently suggest you read Ephesians 6 and put on the armor of faith to fight these horrible attacks. I have also been impressed by Kay Arthur's book *Lord, Is It Warfare?* to help deal with spiritual warfare in the form of attacking doubts.

_____, I am completely convinced that this period of doubts in your life is like being outside on a bright sunny day when the sun disappears because it is obscured by a cloud. . . temporarily. You are not alone—you would not BELIEVE how many e-mails I get just like yours. You have put your faith in an eternal truth, not in lie. I promise.

Cheerily in Jesus,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

7 Questions Skeptics Ask About the Validity of Christianity

Rusty Wright considers some common questions skeptics ask about our belief in Christianity. He shows us how to answer these questions from an informed biblical worldview.

Questions of Faith

Picture the scene. You're discussing your faith with a coworker or neighbor, perhaps over lunch or coffee. You explain your beliefs but your friend questions:

How could a loving God allow evil and suffering? The Bible is full of contradictions. What about people who've never heard of Jesus?

How do you feel about these questions and objections? Anxious? Confused? Defensive? Combative?

Sensitively and appropriately answering questions that skeptics ask you can be an important part of helping them to consider Jesus. Peter told us, "In your hearts set apart 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."[\[1\]](#) This series looks at seven common questions skeptics ask and gives you some pointers on how to respond. Consider first a story.

As the flight from Chicago to Dallas climbed in the sky, I became engrossed in conversation with the passenger to my left. "Aimee," a French businesswoman, asked me about my work. On learning I was a Christian communicator, she related that a professing Christian had signed a contract with her, attempted to lead her to Christ, then later deceitfully undercut her. "How could a Christian do such a thing?" she asked.

I told her that Christians weren't perfect, that some fail miserably, that many are honest and caring, but that it is Jesus we ultimately trust. Aimee asked question after question: "How can you believe the Bible?" "Why do Christians say there is only one way to God?" "How does one become a Christian?"

I tried to answer her concerns tactfully and explained the message of grace as clearly as I could. Stories I told of personal pain seemed to open her up to consider God's love for her. She did not come to Christ in that encounter, but she seemed to leave it with a new understanding.

Hurting people everywhere need God. Many are open to considering Him, but they often have questions they want

answered before they are willing to accept Christ. As Christian communicators seek to blend grace with truth,[{2}](#) an increasing number of skeptics may give an ear and become seekers or believers.

As you interact with skeptics, compliment them where you can. Jesus complimented the skeptical Nathanael for his pursuit of truth.[{3}](#) Listen to their concerns. Your listening ear speaks volumes. It may surprise you to learn that your attitude can be just as important as what you know.

Dealing with Objections

How do you deal with questions and objections to faith that your friends may pose?

When I was a skeptical student, my sometimes-relentless questions gave my Campus Crusade for Christ friends at Duke University plenty of practice! I wanted to know if Christianity was true. After trusting Christ as Savior, I still had questions.

Bob Prall, the local Campus Crusade director, took interest in me. At first his answers irritated me, but as I thought them through they began to make sense. For two years I followed him around campus, watching him interact. Today, as I am privileged to encounter inquisitive people around the globe, much of my speech and manner derive from my mentor.

Consider some guidelines. Pray for wisdom, for His love for inquirers[{4}](#) and for your questioner's heart. If appropriate, briefly share the gospel first. The Holy Spirit may draw your friends to Christ. Don't push, though. It may be best to answer their questions first.

Some questions may be intellectual smokescreens. Once a Georgia Tech philosophy professor peppered me with questions, which I answered as best I could.

Then I asked him, "If I could answer all your questions to your satisfaction, would you put your life in Jesus' hands?" His reply: "[Expletive deleted] no!"

Okay. This first objection is one you might have heard:

1. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.

I once gave a speech arguing *for* this proposition. Later, I reconsidered. In the 1960s, many women took the drug thalidomide seeking easier pregnancies. Often they delivered deformed babies. Sincerely swallowing two white pills may cure your headache if the pills are aspirin. If they are roach poison, results may differ.

After discussing this point, a widely respected psychologist told me, "I guess a person could be sincere in what he or she believed, but be sincerely wrong." Ultimately faith is only as valid as its object. Jesus demonstrated by His life, death and resurrection that He is a worthy object for faith.[\[5\]](#)

Focus on Jesus. Bob Prall taught me to say, "I don't have answers to every question. But if my conclusion about Jesus is wrong, I have a bigger problem. What do I do with the evidence for His resurrection, His deity and the prophecies He fulfilled? And what do I do with changed lives, including my own?"

I don't have complete answers to every concern you will encounter, but in what follows I'll outline some short responses that might be useful.

The second question is:

2. Why is there evil and suffering?

Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion that humans invent to satisfy their security needs. To him, a benevolent, all-powerful God seemed incongruent with natural disasters and

human evil.

God, though sovereign, gave us freedom to follow Him or to disobey Him. Oxford scholar C.S. Lewis estimated that eighty percent of human suffering stems from human choice. Lewis called pain “God’s megaphone” that alerts us to our need for Him.[{6}](#) This response does not answer all concerns (because God sometimes does intervene to thwart evil) but it suggests that the problem of evil is not as great an intellectual obstacle to belief as some imagine.

Pain’s emotional barrier to belief, however, remains formidable. When I see God, items on my long list of questions for Him will include a painful and unwanted divorce, betrayal by trusted coworkers, and all sorts of disappointing human behavior and natural disasters. Yet in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection[{7}](#) I have seen enough to trust Him when He says He “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.”[{8}](#)

3. What about those who never hear of Jesus?

Moses said, “The secret things belong to the LORD.”[{9}](#) Some issues may remain mysteries. God’s perfect love and justice far exceed our own. Whatever He decides will be loving and fair. One can make a case that God will make the necessary information available to someone who wants to know Him. An example: Cornelius, a devout military official. The New Testament records that God assigned Peter to tell him about Jesus.[{10}](#)

A friend once told me that many asking this question seek a personal loophole, a way so they won’t need to believe in Christ. That statement angered me, but it also described me. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* wrote, “If you are worried about the people outside [of faith in Christ], the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself.”[{11}](#) If Christianity is true, the most logical

behavior for someone concerned about those without Christ's message would be to trust Christ and go tell them about Him.

Here's a tip: When someone asks you a difficult question, if you don't know the answer, admit it. Many skeptics appreciate honesty. Don't bluff. It's dishonest and often detectable.

4. What about all the contradictions in the Bible?

Ask your questioner for specific examples of contradictions. Often people have none, but rely on hearsay. If there is a specific example, consider these guidelines as you respond.

Omission does not necessarily create contradiction. Luke, for example, writes of two angels at Jesus' tomb after the Resurrection.[{12}](#) Matthew mentions "an angel."[{13}](#) Is this a contradiction? If Matthew stated that only one angel was present, the accounts would be dissonant. As it stands, they can be harmonized.

Differing accounts aren't necessarily contradictory. Matthew and Luke, for example, differ in their accounts of Jesus' birth. Luke records Joseph and Mary starting in Nazareth, traveling to Bethlehem (Jesus' birthplace), and returning to Nazareth.[{14}](#) Matthew starts with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, relates the family's journey to Egypt to escape King Herod's rage, and recounts their travel to Nazareth after Herod's death.[{15}](#) The Gospels never claim to be exhaustive records. Biographers must be selective. The accounts seem complementary, not contradictory.

Time precludes more complex examples here. But time and again, supposed biblical problems fade in light of logic, history, and archaeology. The Bible's track record under scrutiny argues for its trustworthiness.

5. Isn't Christianity just a psychological crutch?

My mentor Bob Prall has often said, "If Christianity is a

psychological crutch, then Jesus Christ came because there was an epidemic of broken legs." Christianity claims to meet real human needs such as those for forgiveness, love, identity and self-acceptance. We might describe Jesus not as a crutch but an iron lung, essential for life itself.

Christian faith and its benefits can be described in psychological terms but that does not negate its validity. "Does it work?" is not the same question as, "Is it true?" Evidence supports Christianity's truthfulness, so we would expect it to work in individual lives, as millions attest.

A caution as you answer questions: Don't offer "proof" but rather evidences for faith. "Proof" can imply an airtight case, which you don't have. Aim for certainty "beyond a reasonable doubt," just as an attorney might in court.

Don't quarrel. Lovingly and intelligently present evidence to willing listeners, not to win arguments but to share good news. Be kind and gentle.[\[16\]](#) Your life and friendship can communicate powerfully.

6. How can Jesus be the only way to God?

When I was in secondary school, a recent alumnus visited, saying he had found Christ at Harvard. I respected his character and tact and listened intently. But I could not stomach Jesus' claim that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."[\[17\]](#) That seemed way too narrow.

Two years later, my spiritual and intellectual journey had changed my view. The logic that drew me (reluctantly) to his position involves three questions:

- *If God exists, could there be only one way to reach Him?* To be open-minded, I had to admit this possibility.
- *Why consider Jesus as a candidate for that possible one*

way? He claimed it. His plan of rescuing humans – “by grace...through faith...not...works”{18} was distinct from those requiring works, as many other religions do. These two kinds of systems were mutually exclusive. Both could be false or either could be true, but both could not be true.

- *Was Jesus’ plan true?* Historical evidence for His resurrection, fulfilled prophecy{19} and deity, and for the reliability of the New Testament{20} convinced me I could trust His words.

One more common objection:

7. I could never take the blind leap of faith that believing in Christ requires.

We exercise faith every day. Few of us comprehend everything about electricity or aerodynamics, but we have evidence of their validity. Whenever we use electric lights or airplanes, we exercise faith – not blind faith, but faith based on evidence. Christians act similarly. The evidence for Jesus is compelling, so one can trust Him on that basis.

As you respond to inquirers, realize that many barriers to faith are emotional rather than merely intellectual.

As a teenager, I nearly was expelled from secondary school for some problems I helped create. In my pain and anger I wondered, “Why would God allow this to happen?” I was mad at God! In retrospect, I realize I was blaming Him for my own bad choices. My personal anguish at the time kept me from seeing that.

Your questioners may be turned off because Christians haven’t acted like Jesus. Maybe they’re angry at God because of personal illness, a broken relationship, a loved one’s death, or personal pain. Ask God for patience and love as you seek to blend grace with truth. He may use you to help skeptics become seekers and seekers become His children. I hope He does.

Notes

1. 1 Peter 3:15 NIV.
2. John 1:14.
3. John 1:45-47.
4. Romans 9:1-3; 10:1.
5. For useful discussions of evidences regarding Jesus, visit www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com.
6. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 89-103 ff. The Problem of Pain was first published in 1940.
7. A short summary of Resurrection evidences is at Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, "Who's Got the Body?" 1976, www.probe.org/whos-got-the-body/.
8. Romans 8:28 NASB.
For more complete treatment of this subject, see Rick Rood, "The Problem of Evil," 1996, www.probe.org/the-problem-of-evil/; Dr. Ray Bohlin, "Where Was God on September 11?" 2002, www.probe.org/where-was-god-on-sept-11-the-problem-of-evil/.
9. Deuteronomy 29:29 NASB.
10. Acts 10.
11. C.S. Lewis, "The Case for Christianity," reprinted from *Mere Christianity*; in *The Best of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), 449. The Case for Christianity is copyright 1947 by The Macmillan Company.
12. Luke 24:1-9.
13. Matthew 28:1-8.
14. Luke 1:26-2:40.
15. Matthew 1:18-2:23.
16. 2 Timothy 2:24-26.
17. John 14:6 NASB.
18. Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB.
19. A summary of some of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled is at Rusty Wright, "Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?" 2004, www.probe.org/are-you-listening-do-you-hear-what-i-hear/.
20. A summary of evidences for New Testament reliability is at

Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, "The New Testament: Can I Trust It?" 1976, www.probe.org/the-new-testament-can-i-trust-it/.

Adapted from Rusty Wright, "7 Questions Skeptics Ask," *Moody Magazine*, March/April 2002. Copyright© 2002 Rusty Wright. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

© 2005 Probe Ministries