

One Minute After Death (radio transcript)

The Other Side of Life

Do you believe in life after death?[{1}](#)

Picture the operating room of a large hospital. A man is dying. As the doctors frantically try to save him, here is what he perceives and thinks:

“I am dying. I hear the doctor pronounce me dead. As I lie on the operating table, a loud, harsh buzzing reverberates in my head. At the same time, I sense myself moving very rapidly through a long, dark tunnel. Suddenly, I find myself outside of my own physical body. Like a spectator, I watch the doctor’s desperate attempts to revive my corpse.

“Soon I encounter a ‘being’ of light, a loving, warm spirit who shows me an instant replay of my life and helps me evaluate my past deeds.

“Eventually, I learn I must return to my body. I resist, for my afterlife experience has been quite pleasant. Somehow, though, I am reunited with my physical body and live.”[{2}](#)

This composite account of a near-death experience or “NDE” is adapted from the best selling book, *Life After Life*, by Dr. Raymond Moody, who brought these experiences to wide public awareness. Often the episodes involve out-of-body experiences or “OBEs.”

While writing a book on this subject, I interviewed people with some fascinating stories. A Kansas woman developed complications after major surgery. She sensed herself rising out of her body, soaring through space, and hearing heavenly

voices before returning to her body. An Arizona man in a coma for five months after a motorcycle accident said he saw his deceased father, who spoke to him.

Actress Sharon Stone has described her own close call with death. She was hospitalized with bleeding from an artery at her skull's base. "I feel that I did die," she relates. She tells of "a giant vortex of white light" and says "I kind of poof sort of took off... into this glorious bright...white light. I started to see and be met by some of my friends. people who were very dear to me. It was very, very fast, and suddenly I was back. I was in my body and I was in the room." Stone says the experience affected her "profoundly" and that she "will never be the same."[3](#)

What do these near-death experiences mean? How should we interpret them? This article offers a biblical perspective.

Interpreting Near-Death Experiences

What are some possible explanations for the NDEs? Hundreds of people claim that they have died and lived to tell about it. Are their near-death and out-of-body experiences genuine previews of the afterlife? Hallucinations caused by traumatic events? Or something else?

Some patients have been pronounced clinically dead and later are resuscitated. Others have had close calls with death, but were never really thought dead (such as survivors of automobile accidents). Still others did die permanently but described what they saw before they expired.

Determination of the point of death is a hotly debated issue. In the past, doctors relied merely on the ceasing of the heartbeat and respiration. More recently they have used the EEG or brainwave test. Whatever one considers the point of death, most would agree that these folks have come much closer to it than the majority of people living today.

A number of possible explanations for the OBEs have been offered. Different ones may apply in different situations.

The physiological explanations suggest that a “physical” condition may have caused some of the out-of-body experiences. For instance, cerebral anoxia (a shortage of oxygen in the brain) occurs when the heart stops. The brain can survive for a short while (usually only a few minutes) without receiving oxygen from the blood. Anoxia can produce abnormal mental states.[{4}](#) Patients who recover from heart failure and report OBEs may be merely reporting details of an “altered state of consciousness,” some say.[{5}](#)

Electronic brain stimulation can produce out-of-body sensations. Researchers at the Universities of Geneva and Lausanne in Switzerland placed electrodes in the brain of a woman suffering from epilepsy. As they stimulated her brain’s right angular gyrus, she reported sensing she was floating about six feet above her body.[{6}](#)

The pharmacological explanations say that drugs or anesthetics may induce some of the near-death experiences. Some primitive societies use drugs to induce OBEs in their religious ceremonies.[{7}](#) LSD and marijuana sometimes generate similar sensations.[{8}](#) Even many medically accepted drugs have produced mental states akin to those reported by the dying. Ketamine is an anesthetic that is administered intravenously[{9}](#) and produces hallucinatory reactions.[{10}](#)

Psychological and Spiritual Explanations

How should we interpret near-death experiences? What do they mean? So far this we have examined physiological and pharmacological explanations, that is, causes involving the body or drugs. Consider two other categories: psychological and spiritual explanations. The psychological explanations suggest that the individual’s mind may generate the unusual

mental experience. Sigmund Freud, writing about the difficulty of coping with the thought of death, said it would be more comfortable in our minds to picture ourselves as detached observers.[{11}](#) Some modern psychiatrists theorize that the OBE is merely a defense mechanism against the anxiety of death. That is, since the thought of one's own death is so frightening, the patient's mind invents the OBE to make it seem as if only the body is dying while the soul or spirit lives on.

Other psychologists wonder if the patient may be confusing his or her *interpretation* of the experience with what actually happened.[{12}](#) The conscious mind needs an explanation for an unusual vision; therefore, it interprets the event in familiar terms. Thus, say these psychologists, resuscitated patients report conversations with deceased relatives or religious figures common to their culture.

The spiritual explanations view many of the OBEs as real manifestations of the spiritual.

Many have noted that earlier reports of NDEs seemed to contradict some traditional Christian beliefs about the afterlife. All of the patients Christian and non-Christian reported feelings of bliss and ecstasy with no mention of unpleasantness, hell, or judgment.

However, further research uncovered negative experiences. For instance, Raymond Moody wrote of one woman who was supposedly "dead" for 15 minutes and said she saw spirits who appeared "bewildered." "They seemed to shuffle," she reported, "as someone would on a chain gang not knowing where they were going. they all had the most woebegone expressions. It was quite depressing."[{13}](#)

Dr. Moody observed, "Nothing I have encountered precludes the possibility of a hell."[{14}](#)

Some have felt that OBEs are inconsistent with the biblical

concept of a final judgment at the world's end. No one reports standing before God and being judged for eternity. Dr. Moody responds that "the end of the world has not yet taken place," so there is no inconsistency. "There may well be a final judgment," he says. "Near-death experiences in no way imply the contrary."[\[15\]](#)

So, is there a life after death?

Is There Life After Death?

The spring of my sophomore year in college, the student living in the room next to me was struck and killed by lightning. For some time after Mike's death, our fraternity was in a state of shock. My friends were asking questions like, "Is there a life after death?" and "How can we experience it?"

Is it possible to know whether there is an afterlife? What method would you use to find out?

Some suggest using the *experimental method* of science and applying it to the near-death experiences. However, these events normally are not controlled, clinical situations. They're medical emergencies. Even if scientists could establish controls, we have no mind-reading machines to verify mental/spiritual experiences. And think about recruiting subjects. Would you volunteer to undergo clinical death for research purposes?

Some suggest relying on personal *experience* to answer the question. But the experiential method has its drawbacks, too. NDEs can provide useful information, but the mind can trick us. Dreams, fantasies, hallucinations, drug trips, drunkenness, states of shock all can evoke mental images that seem real but aren't.

What if we could find a *spiritual authority*, someone with trustworthy credentials, to tell us the truth about afterlife

issues?

Following Mike's death, I encouraged my friends to consider Jesus of Nazareth as a trustworthy spiritual authority. As somewhat of a skeptic myself, I'd found the resurrection of Christ to be one of the best-attested facts of history.[{16}](#) If Jesus died and came back from the dead, He could accurately tell us what death and the afterlife are like. The fact that He successfully predicted His own resurrection[{17}](#) helps us believe that He will tell us the truth about the afterlife.

Jesus and His early followers indicated that the afterlife would be personal, that human personalities would continue to exist.[{18}](#) Eternal life would be relational, involving warm, personal relationships with God and with each other.[{19}](#) Eternal life would be enjoyable, defying our description and exceeding our imagination. "No mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him," wrote one early believer.[{20}](#) And eternal life would be eternal. It would never end. "God has given us eternal life," wrote one of Jesus' closest friends, "and this life is in His Son."[{21}](#)

The sad thing is that some people don't want to take advantage of eternal life.

How to Be Sure You'll Live Forever

Maurice Rawlings, M.D., a cardiologist, tells of a patient who had a cardiac arrest in Dr. Rawlings' office. During the attempted resuscitation, the patient screamed, "I am in hell!" "Don't stop!" he begged in terror. "Each time you quit I go back to hell!"[{22}](#)

The biblical hell, or Hades, is the current home of those who do not accept God's forgiveness. The final abode of those who refuse forgiveness is called the "lake of fire."[{23}](#)

Not a pleasant subject. But remember, God loves you and wants

you to spend eternity with Him.[{24}](#) He sent Jesus, His Son, to die and pay the penalty for our sins (attitudes and actions that fall short of God's perfection). We simply need to receive His free gift of forgiveness we can never earn it to be guaranteed eternal life. "Whoever hears my word," Jesus says, "and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."[{25}](#)

How should we interpret the near-death experiences? Here's my perspective as one who believes the evidence supports Jesus' and biblical reliability.[{26}](#) If a given NDE contradicts biblical statements or principles, I do not accept it as being completely from God. If the experience does not contradict biblical statements or principles, then it *could* be from God. (Body, drug or mind could also influence it.)

A given NDE could be completely spiritual and yet not be from God. Jesus spoke of an evil spiritual being, Satan. We are told that Satan "disguises himself as an angel of light,"[{27}](#) but Jesus called him "a liar and the father of lies."[{28}](#) I'm not accusing all near-death experiencers of being in league with the devil. Just a friendly word of caution that some may be being deceived.

Once a nightclub near Cincinnati was packed to the brim. Suddenly, a busboy stepped onto the stage, interrupted the program and announced that the building was on fire. Perhaps because they saw no smoke, many of the guests remained seated. Maybe they thought it was a joke, a part of the program, and felt comfortable with that explanation. When they finally saw the smoke, it was too late. More than 150 people died as the nightclub burned.[{29}](#)

Are you believing what you want to believe, or what the evidence shows is true? Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies."[{30}](#) I encourage you to place your faith in Jesus if you haven't yet. Then you, too, will live, even if you die.

Notes

1. This article is adapted from Rusty Wright, "One Minute After Death," *Pursuit* magazine, Vol. V, No. 2, 1996; Rusty Wright, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the End," *Collegiate Challenge*, Vol. 17, 1978, pp. 2-5; and Rusty Wright, *The Other Side of Life* (Singapore: Campus Crusade Asia Limited, 1979, 1994).
2. Adapted and paraphrased from Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D., *Life After Life* (New York: Bantam, 1976), 21-22.
3. Carolyne Zinko, "When Stone saw the light," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 28, 2002, The Features Page. The article relates Stone's description of her experience to NBC TV's Katie Couric.
4. Stanislav Grof, M. D., and Joan Halifax-Grof, "Psychedelics and the Experience of Death," in Toynbee, Koestler, and others, *Life After Death* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 196.
5. Daniel Goleman, "Back from the Brink," *Psychology Today*, April 1977, p. 59.
6. Olaf Blanke, et al., "Stimulating illusory own-body perceptions," *Nature*, Vol. 419, 19 September 2002, p. 269.
7. Michael Grosso, "Some Varieties of Out-of-Body Experience," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, April, 1976, 185,186.
8. Grof and Halifax Grof, op. cit., pp. 193-195; Stanislav Grof, "Varieties of Transpersonal Experiences: Observations from LSD Psychotherapy," *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 4:1, 1972, p. 67; Russell Noyes, Jr., M.D., and Roy Kletti, "Depersonalization in the Face of Life-Threatening Danger: An Interpretation," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, 7:2, 1976, p. 108.
9. Moody, *Life After Life*, p. 157.
10. Louis Jolyon West, M. D., "A Clinical and Theoretical Overview of Hallucinatory Phenomena" in R. K. Siegel and

L.J. West (eds.), *Hallucinations: Behavior, Experience, and Theory* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975), 292.

11. Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" (1915), *Collected Papers*, Vol. 4, Basic Books, 1959; quoted in Russell Noyes, Jr., M.D., "The Experience of Dying," *Psychiatry*, May 1972, p. 178.
12. Dr. Charles Tart in Robert A. Monroe, *Journeys Out of the Body* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1971), 6,7.
13. Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Reflections on Life After Life* (New York and Covington, Georgia: Bantam/Mockingbird, 1977), 19-21.
14. *Ibid.*, 36.
15. *Ibid.*, 36, 37.
16. See, for instance, Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 1999.
17. See, for example, Jesus' resurrection predictions in Luke 9:22 and 18:31-33; their fulfillment in Luke 24.
18. See for example Luke 23:42-43; Matthew 8:11; 2 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 17:1-8.
19. John 14:2-3; Philippians 1:23; John 17:3.
20. 1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV. See also Revelation 21:4; Hebrews 12:2.
21. 1 John 5:11 NASB.
22. Maurice Rawlings, M.D., *Beyond Death's Door* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 19-20.
23. Revelation 20:11-15.
24. John 3:16.
25. John 5:24 NIV.
26. See, for example, McDowell, *op. cit.*
27. 2 Corinthians 11:14 NASB.
28. John 8:44 NASB.
29. "They Didn't Believe It," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1977, p. 16; Hal Bruno, "The Fire Next Time," *Newsweek*, June 13, 1977, pp. 24, 27.
30. John 11:25 NASB.

“Why Does Mark’s Gospel Omit the Resurrection and the Virgin Birth?”

If Jesus really did rise from the dead, why didn’t Mark say he saw him after the fact? Is Mark not the first gospel written? If I had hung around with a guy for three years and then seen him after he had died I would certainly write about it. Also, why does Mark not mention the virgin birth? If it were so important why didn’t Paul mention it?

Your first question alludes to a textual problem in the manuscript evidence for the end of the book—namely verses 9-20 of the last chapter (Mark 16:8-20). These twelve verses *do* give an account of the resurrection of Christ. The controversy comes about in that two of the earliest (almost complete) manuscripts we have—(Sinaiticus and Vaticanus [dated mid-300’s A.D.]—*omit* the verses. What is also true is that the scribes who wrote these two codices *left some blank space* after verse 8, indicating that they *knew* of a longer ending to the Gospel of Mark, but they did not have it available from the manuscripts they were copying.

Most all other manuscripts and early versions (translations into other languages) include vs. 9-20. Even earlier evidence is found among the Early Patristic Fathers (the church leaders which followed immediately after the Apostles’ deaths), substantiating that these twelve verses were not only known two hundred years *before* Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, but that

there was support for their inclusion (since they each quoted authoritatively from the “disputed” passage (cf. Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.45, ca. A.D.145; Tatian, *Diatessaron*, ca. A.D. 170; and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.10.6 ca. A.D. 180).

Your second question alludes to the fact that Mark was the first gospel written. This is generally accepted, although there is still a persistent argument among textual critics that Matthew may have written his gospel in Aramaic *first* (which was later translated into Greek).

Your third comment about Mark is based on a wrong assumption. Mark was *not* one of the Twelve Disciples, and therefore he didn't “hang around with Jesus for three years.” What do we know about Mark, or John Mark, as he is also called? There is some scriptural evidence that the home in Jerusalem where Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover in the Upper Room the night before the crucifixion, and the place where they gathered for prayer (Acts 1:13) after Jesus was laid in the tomb, was the home of John Mark and his parents (Acts 12:12).

Also, there is an unusual event, unique to Mark's Gospel, found in Mark 14:51-52. The preceding verses describe the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the fact that “Everyone deserted Him and fled, as Jesus had predicted,” (cf. Mk. 14:27 and 14:50), including Peter. Immediately following this, Mark records the incident of a young man following Jesus, “wearing nothing but a linen sheet (a sleeping garment) over his naked body; and they seized him. But he left the linen sheet behind, and escaped naked” (Mk. 14: 51,52).

The Greek word used to describe him, *neoniskos*, indicates a young man in the prime of his life, from late teens to late thirties. Most interpreters believe that this young man was John Mark. After Jesus and the disciples had celebrated the Passover and left for Gethsemane, John Mark removed his outer cloak and went to bed wrapped in a linen sleeping garment.

Apparently a servant awakened him and made him aware of Judas' betrayal scheme, and he made his way to Gethsemane, not bothering to dress, which is where the incident occurred. He would hardly have mentioned such an incident unless it had a special significance for him as a turning point in his life.

This is the same John Mark that accompanied Paul and Barnabas later on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). This is also the same John Mark that brought about a strong contention between Paul and Barnabas as they discussed whom they would take on their **second** missionary journey (Acts 15:37-40). Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again, but Paul resisted this, because apparently John Mark, still a young man, had found the first missionary journey too "tough" and he "deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work" (Acts 15:38). So Barnabas took Mark, and Paul took Silas, resulting in two missionary teams. As he had formerly disciplined Paul (the new convert), Barnabas, a builder of men, now turned his attention to discipling John Mark.

Later on, we find that Mark became the travelling companion of the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and Peter speaks affectionately of him as "my (spiritual) son, Mark" (1 Peter 5:13). This indicates that Mark was probably converted by Peter. Even Paul later had a change of heart toward Mark, saying of him to Timothy, "Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is *useful to me* for ministry (2 Timothy 4:11)"

Let me at this point discuss the four gospels a little, as their authorship and *purpose* bear directly upon your next questions.

With regard to authorship, the crucial factor of credibility was *eyewitness* testimony: that is, the writers of the gospels either had to have personally witnessed these events or they had to have an intimate association of and verification from those who had witnessed these events (from the baptism of John

to the Resurrection).

Both *Matthew* and *John* qualify because they were both among the twelve disciples. Though not an apostle, *Mark* had the best opportunity in his mother's house in Jerusalem and his personal connection with Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and other prominent disciples for gathering the most authentic information concerning the gospel history. And we also know that Mark was the travelling companion of Peter, who is the real eyewitness reflected throughout Mark's gospel. The document has been called by some the "Gospel of Peter"!

Papias, a Church Father, mentions Mark in the early 100's as the "interpreter" of Peter, "writing down" the personal reminiscences of Peter's discourses/sermons delivered over the course of their journeys together. Clement of Alexandria, a little later in the second century, informs us that "the people of Rome were so pleased with Peter's preaching that they requested Mark, his attendant, to put it down in writing, which Peter neither encouraged nor hindered."

We learn that *Luke*, though not an eyewitness, was the travelling companion of the apostle Paul on some of his later missionary journeys. Of the four gospels, his gospel reaches the highest level of scholastic and literary quality, and his Prologue (Luke 1:1-4) gives clear indication that he gave careful consideration to the compiling of eyewitness sources available to him: "—just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word have handed them down to us" (1:2). His treatment of contemporary places, people and events in the secular Roman world have a high degree of accuracy when compared with non-biblical, historical material.

There is good evidence that both Luke and Matthew may have used Mark's gospel as a source (or a common corpus of material which preceded Mark), as well as other oral or written sources. Since the genealogy of Jesus in Luke's gospel appears to be that of Mary, there is a strong possibility that the

source for Luke's beginning chapters which record events concerning Christ's birth came directly from His mother.

Luke visited all the principal apostolic churches from Jerusalem to Rome. He met Peter, Mark, and Barnabas at Antioch, James and his elders at Jerusalem, Philip and his daughters at Caesarea, and he had first hand access and benefit to all the information which Paul himself had received by revelation or collected from personal contact with all his fellow apostles and other first generation disciples.

The four gospels are eyewitness portraits of the life and events of Jesus Christ. They do, however, reveal somewhat different purposes with respect to emphasis. The Gospel of *Matthew* without doubt was intended for the Jewish community and a primary focus on Jesus as the *Messiah* who historically fulfilled the prophetic predictions and promises mentioned throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Gospel of *Luke* portrays Christ as the "Son of Man," that is, with an emphasis on the *humanity* of Christ, and it was written primarily to the Gentile world.

The Gospel of *John* has yet a different focus. John clearly identified that his primary purpose was to prove that Jesus was *God Himself*. When John wrote his gospel near the end of the first century, Gnostics and other sects were beginning to question the divine nature of Christ, and John's major intent in his Gospel was to answer these critics.

The Gospel of *Mark* was written to demonstrate Christ as the *Servant*: "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Nativity accounts in Matthew and Luke make sense, because they would be important to establish both Messianic and human lineage. It does not, however, suit Mark's purpose, as the lineage of a "slave" or a "servant" is unimportant. This answers your question about why one would not expect Mark to

mention the virgin birth in his gospel. It did not suit his purpose.

Your final question was why Paul did not mention the Virgin Birth. I believe he does. In Galatians 4:4 we have these words: "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, **made, born of** (*ginomai*—originating, coming from) **a woman**, born under the Law." Now obviously every person born is "born" of a woman. So what is Paul referring to? He is referring specifically to two promises from the Old Testament, specifically, Isaiah 7:14 and Genesis 3:15. The Isaiah passage says: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a (miraculous) *sign*: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (God With Us)." Matthew 1:23 cites the fulfillment of this messianic promise. The sign *is* the virgin birth.

Genesis 3:15 contains the first messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. After Adam and Eve's disobedience God pronounces three judgments: upon Adam, Eve, and Satan. Addressing Satan in the verse God says: "I will put enmity (a barrier) between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; And *he* shall bruise (crush) your head, and you shall bruise *his* heel."

Following quickly after the entrance of sin comes the promise of a solution. God promises that a way will be found to undo and to rectify the consequences of their disobedience. It will involve the promise of a "seed" which is referred to by the personal pronoun "He." A conflict or battle is described which will occur at some future time and will result in a mortal blow to Satan's *head* and a non-mortal wound to the "seed's" *heel*.

Speaking to the disciples of His coming death, Jesus said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it

bears much fruit. . . Now my soul has become troubled: and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But for *this purpose* I came to this hour. . . Now judgment is upon this world; *now* the ruler (Satan) of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.' But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die" (John 12:23-33). This passage describes the mortal blow Christ inflicted upon Satan by His death and resurrection: "He shall crush your head."

The passage also alludes to the bruising, suffering and death Christ endured on the Cross—something that our Lord dreaded here, and earlier in His prayer to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Save Me from this hour; let this cup pass from Me." But in order for "the Seed of the woman" to triumph over sin, it was necessary for Him to suffer at the hands of Satan: "You shall bruise his heel."

The "enmity" or "barrier" between Satan's seed (those now contaminated by sin) and the woman's seed **is** the *virgin birth*.

Mary was that elect woman, a virgin, from whom the One Seed came. He was to be the seed of the woman, not of Adam, the man: "And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I know no man?" And the Angel said to her, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason that holy thing born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34-35).

The Virgin Birth, therefore, is very important, because without it, Jesus would be just another human being like you and me, and He would in no way qualify to be a Redeemer for even *one* sinful human being, much less for *all* humans. Shepard has observed:

"No convincing evidence against the Virgin birth of Jesus . . . can be found in the New Testament. The difficulty of accounting for His life on any other ground is greater than

*the difficulty of accepting the Virgin birth as a fact.”
(J.W. Shepard, The Christ of the Gospels. Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 1946, p. 1).*

Apart from this explanation, the context of Paul’s words in Galatians 4:4 are meaningless. He is simply referring to the broader, messianic context understood by all the Jewish community when they referred to “the woman.”

_____, I hope this material will help answer the questions you raised.

Sincerely yours,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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“Where Are the Old Testament Prophecies of Jesus’ Resurrection?”

I was reading [Cruci-fiction and Resuscitation: The Greatest Hoax in the History of Humanity?](#) to learn more about the resurrection of Jesus. When I went to the two Old Testament references he gave (Psalm 34:20, “He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken,” and Zechariah 12:10, “...they will look on Me whom they have pierced...”) as evidence of the prophecy of resurrection, I discovered that these were not prophetic at

all but simply words and phrases that were taken out of context. Can you provide me with any Old Testament writing that does speak directly of the resurrection of the messiah?

John 19:36-37

“For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, “NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.” And again another Scripture says, “THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED.”

may cite both of these OT passages. However, the one in v. 36 may actually be citing Exodus 12:46–

“It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it.”

or Numbers 9:12–

“They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute of the Passover they shall observe it.”

Thus, it is not clear whether John viewed Psalm 34:20 as having Messianic implications. And certainly it does not refer to Jesus’ resurrection. (But then, we would note, the author never indicated these verses refer to the resurrection. The article is about the crucifixion as well, which these verses do prophesy.)

The passage in Zechariah 12:10 is Messianic and would at least be consistent with the resurrection of Christ (as it probably refers to His Second Coming). Isaiah 53:10-12 would also seem to be consistent with Jesus’ resurrection:

But the LORD was pleased
To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days,
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.

As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify
the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.
Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.

However, in neither of these passages is Jesus' resurrection specifically predicted.

The only OT texts which specifically teach the doctrine of resurrection are Isaiah 26:19-21;

Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise.
You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,
For your dew is as the dew of the dawn,
And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.
Come, my people, enter into your rooms
And close your doors behind you;
Hide for a little while
Until indignation runs its course.
For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place
To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;
And the earth will reveal her bloodshed
And will no longer cover her slain.

Ezekiel 37:12-14;

"Therefore prophesy and say to them,
'Thus says the Lord GOD,
"Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up
out of your graves, My people;
and I will bring you into the land of Israel.

Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD.'"

and Daniel 12:1-3:

"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Job 19:25-27 is another possibility:

"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.
Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God;
Whom I myself shall behold,
And whom my eyes will see and not another.
My heart faints within me!

None of these texts are specifically Messianic. I do not think there are any specific predictions of Jesus' resurrection in the OT. This, I think, is partly why Jesus' disciples had such a difficult time understanding His own predictions of His

resurrection. They did not have a category for a dying and rising Messiah (i.e. raised to glory, never to die again) within world history. They only knew of a general resurrection at the end of time.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

Addendum: April 7, 2021 by Sue Bohlin

I would respectfully suggest that we can also turn to the powerful words of Peter in Acts 2:24-32, where He unfolds the realization that David had prophesied about the Lord's resurrection in Psalm 16–

“But God raised him up, having released him from the pains of death because it was not possible for him to be held in its power. For David says about him,

‘I saw the Lord always in front of me,
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken.

Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced;
my body also will live in hope,

because you will not leave my soul in Hades,
nor permit your Holy One to experience decay.

You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of joy with your presence.’

“Brothers, I can speak confidently to you about our forefather David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. So then, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, David by foreseeing this spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did his body experience decay. This

Jesus God raised up, and we are all witnesses of it.”

A (Not So) Brief Defense of Christianity

Faith

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

Truth

Many of us are hesitant or feel it's wrong to make distinctions between people or their ideas. This is because we feel it is arrogant, exclusionary, undemocratic, or socially inappropriate. We want people to like us, so we try not to be disagreeable. Ironically, this very pluralistic environment creates a hesitancy to express personal convictions for fear of offending another. In reality, this creates an atmosphere where all views held are of equal value and are therefore “true.” It also may explain why so many people today regard themselves as atheists or agnostics. Viewing so many “religious” options which profess to be THE truth, they become

agnostics or atheists, disclaiming the religious idea of "faith" altogether. Some militant atheists propose philosophical and scientific "proofs" to explain away the existence of God, hoping to convince others logically. Other atheists and agnostics have not come to their beliefs logically, but rather believe what they do simply because they prefer or are more comfortable with it.

The Need for Apologetics

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

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

2. In the light of Peter's admonition above, Christians are to

prepare themselves to share their faith with others and help remove the obstacles to faith which hinder some non-Christians from giving serious consideration to Christ and His claims upon their lives. Apologetics can help remove these obstacles and demonstrate the “reasonableness” of Christianity.

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

SECTION I: THEISM

What is the most reasonable worldview?

Metaphysical options

We have stated that the most basic philosophical question is not that NOTHING is here, but rather SOMETHING IS HERE, and it demands explanation. I am a part of some kind of reality. I have consciousness. Something is happening and I am part of it. Where did it come from? Did everything come from nothing? Or has the material universe always been here and things just accidentally got started? Or is there something or someone

that transcends the material universe and is responsible for bringing it into being, and us with it? All of these questions relate to the philosophical concept of *metaphysics*. Webster defines it thusly: "That division of philosophy which includes ontology, or the science of being, and cosmology, or the science of the fundamental causes and processes in things."

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

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

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

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

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

explore those, but first, let's briefly evaluate atheism and agnosticism.

Atheism and Agnosticism

Atheism

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

The most brilliant, highly-educated, widely-traveled human on earth today, having maximized his/her brain cells at optimum learning levels for a lifetime could not possibly "know" 1/1000th of all that *could* be known; and knowledge is now *doubling* by the years rather than by decades or centuries! Is it possible that God could still exist outside this very limited, personal/knowledge experience of one highly intelligent human being? By faith, the atheist says, "No." Another curious thing about the atheist is that before he can identify himself as one, he must first *acknowledge* the very idea, or concept, or possibility of God so he can then *deny* His existence! David saw the fallacy of this long ago when he said, "Only the fool has said in his heart, 'there is no

God.'” (Psalm 14:1). (Note: For those who desire additional, more formal material on the existence of God, see the Appendix at the end of this outline, where this subject is addressed in greater detail by such philosophers as Anthony Flew, Ludwig Feuerbach, and David Hume).[Editor’s note: Anthony Flew disavowed his atheism in 2005 after grappling with the impossibility of DNA arising from purely naturalistic, random forces.]

Agnosticism

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

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

Theism

Those who have not found atheism and agnosticism philosophically, scientifically, or personally satisfying may,

at some time in their lives consider the third alternative, that of theism. They may come to ask our next question:

“Is it reasonable to believe that God exists?”

Theism is a reasonable idea. Theologians have traditionally used several philosophical proofs in arguing for the existence of God. These arguments are not always persuasive, but that probably says as much about us as it does about the arguments. People most often reject God for reasons other than logic. These arguments, however, do provide insights that, while not PROVING the existence of God, do provide insights that may be used to show EVIDENCE of His existence.

The Cosmological Argument

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

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

Therefore, if I exist, then something must be eternal. If something is eternal, it is then either an eternal being or an eternal universe. Scientific evidence strongly suggests that the universe is not eternal, but that it had a beginning. In addition, if the non-personal universe is that which is

eternal, one must explain the presence of personal creatures within that universe. How does personal come from non-personal? If something is eternal and personal while the universe is finite and non-personal, then there must be an eternal being. If there is an eternal being, that being must by definition have certain characteristics. He must have always existed, and he must be the ultimate cause of all that we can see. He must possess infinite knowledge, or else he himself would be limited, not eternal. Similarly, he must possess infinite power and an unchanging nature.

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

The Teleological Argument

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

Some evolutionists maintain that the argument from design has been invalidated by the theory of natural selection. Richard Dawkins, a scientist at Oxford, even speaks of evolution as "The Blind Watchmaker," saying that it brings order without purpose. However, the theory of evolution faces major obstacles in scientific circles to this day, and it is grossly inadequate in its explanation of the ordered species of animals in this world. The best explanation for the order and complexity that we see in nature is that the divine Designer created it with a purpose and maintains all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17).

The Moral Argument

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

Pantheism

Pantheism offers a self-defeating alternative. Pantheism is the belief that all is god. Pantheists maintain that there are

no real distinctions between persons, creatures, or objects; that all is divine. For many years, the only pantheists most of us would have been exposed to were Buddhists. However, with the rise of the New Age movement, which is extremely pantheistic, pantheism has become a very popular worldview in North America. The hope of pantheism is an irrational one. Evil is regarded as an illusion, however real it may seem, and the cruel actions of others are attributed to their misunderstanding, or non-enlightenment. Shirley MacLaine, an actress who has been one of the most popular spokespersons for the New Age movement, writes, "There is no such thing as evil or good. There is only enlightened awareness or ignorance."

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

IS logical, and there are distinctions in our world. I am not you, and you are not me. Common sense tells us that as we converse. The pantheistic option, then, is both illogical and self-defeating. It is tragic that it has become such a popular viewpoint in our day.

The Possibility of God

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

Theistic Skepticism

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

Re-emergence of the Spiritual

Ironically, the same science which took God away then, is bringing the possibility of His existence back today. Physics and quantum mechanics have now brought us to the edge of physicality, to the extent that the sub-atomic particle structure is described by some as characterized more as spirit, ghost-like in quality. Neurophysiologists grapple with enigmatic observations which suggest that the mind transcends the brain. Psychology has developed an entirely new branch of study (parapsychology) which postulates that psycho-spiritual forces (ESP, Biofeedback, etc.) beyond the physical realm

actually function. Molecular biologists and geneticists, faced with the highly-ordered and complex structures of DNA, ascribed a word implying "intelligence" to the chaining sequences: "the genetic CODE." Astrophysics has settled on the "Big Bang theory," one which seems to contradict the idea that matter is eternal, but rather that the universe had a definite beginning. Huge as it is, the universe appears to be finite.

The Reasonability of Theism

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

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

Introduction

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

The Possibility of Revelation

What both of these men are saying is simply that if God does

exist, man cannot make contact with Him through any effort of his own. But both have forgotten one other very important possibility. If God exists and so desires, would He be able to penetrate the veil from HIS side and make His presence known? Of course He could. The next question would logically be, "Has He ever done so?" Christians would answer a resounding, "Yes!" God did so in the Person of Jesus Christ. "The Word Who was with God and was God became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory" (John 1:1,14). Theologically, this event is called the Incarnation. If true, humans have an additional source of knowing truthrevelation.

Who Was Jesus?

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

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

What do we really know about this Jesus? Some think Him merely a man, the founder of a religion, like Muhammad or Zoroaster. Others believe He lived, but His followers embellished the story and made a god out of him. Or they postulate that He was either a clever "con man" who purposefully engineered His personal circumstances toward Messianic ends, or a paranoid schizophrenic with "delusions of grandeur." Still others don't even believe He was ever an historical person. For them Jesus is a mythological figure. Before we can examine His Person,

His Work, and His extraordinary claim to be the Son of God in human flesh, we must first determine if He ever actually lived, and if so, what can the source materials tell us about the kind of man He was and about the things He did or said.

Was Jesus a Historical Person?

Introduction

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

Extra-Biblical Sources

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

Jewish Sources

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

Rabbinical Writings. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Jewish religious scholars began to codify the legal and theological traditions of Jewry based on the Old Testament.

The Mishnah (legal code) and the Gemara (commentaries on the Mishnah) developed in the early A.D. centuries to form The Talmud which was reduced from an oral tradition to writing about 500 A.D. There are a number of statements or allusions to Jesus and Christianity contained within. F. F. Bruce points out that while most of these references were hostile, they all refer without question to Jesus as a historical person. He says, "According to the earlier Rabbis whose opinions are recorded in these writings, Jesus of Nazareth was a transgressor in Israel, who practiced magic, scorned the words of the wise, led the people astray, and said he had not come to destroy the law but to add to it. He was hanged on Passover Eve for heresy and misleading the people. His disciples, of whom five are named, healed the sick in his name."

Roman Sources

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

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

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

Pliny the Younger (). In 112 A.D. Pliny Secundus, governor of Bithynia in Asia, wrote to Emperor Trajan requesting advice about how to deal with the "Christian" problem: "they were in

the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed, but to abstain from all fraud, theft and adultery, never to break their word, or deny a trust when called upon to honor it; after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind."

Archeology/Artifacts

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

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

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

Conclusion

Without the aid of the biblical documents, we here find a

Christianity and a Jesus with which we are familiar, a perspective that moves from “a good and wise man, a doer of wonderful works” to one who “practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel.” From the annals of history, we know that this man, Yeshua, underwent trial and persecution by the reigning religious and Roman authorities (including the name of the Procurator (Pilate) who pronounced sentence upon him), was executed by crucifixion, and that his teachings became the foundation for a “cult” of religious worshippers called Christians. These sources corroborate, rather than contradict, the Jesus portrayed in the biblical documents. We now turn to the crucial question of how reliable these documents are.

SECTION II: ARE THE BIBLICAL DOCUMENTS RELIABLE?

Introduction

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

Three Errors To Avoid

1. Do not assume inspiration or infallibility of the documents, with the intent of attempting to prove the inspiration or infallibility of the documents. Do not say the bible is inspired or infallible simply because it claims to be. This is circular reasoning.
2. When considering the original documents, forget about the present form of your Bible and regard them as the collection of ancient source documents that they are.

3. Do not start with modern “authorities” and then move to the documents to see if the authorities were right. Begin with the documents themselves.

Procedure for Testing a Document’s Validity

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

These tests are:

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

Internal evidence (what the document claims for itself)

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

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

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

The Old Testament

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

The Scribe

The scribe was considered a professional person in antiquity. No printing presses existed, so people were trained to copy documents. The task was usually undertaken by a devout Jew. The Scribes believed they were dealing with the very Word of God and were therefore extremely careful in copying. They did not just hastily write things down. The earliest complete copy of the Hebrew Old Testament dates from c. 900 A.D.

The Massoretic Text

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

The Dead Sea Scrolls

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

cliffs northwest of the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea Scrolls include a complete copy of the Book of Isaiah, a fragmented copy of Isaiah, containing much of Isaiah 38-6, and fragments of almost every book in the Old Testament. The majority of the fragments are from Isaiah and the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The books of Samuel, in a tattered copy, were also found and also two complete chapters of the book of Habakkuk. In addition, there were a number of nonbiblical scrolls related to the commune found.

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

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

What was learned? A comparison of the Qumran manuscript of Isaiah with the Massoretic text revealed them to be extremely close in accuracy to each other: "A comparison of Isaiah 53 shows that only 17 letters differ from the Massoretic text. Ten of these are mere differences in spelling (like our "honor" and the English "honour") and produce no change in the meaning at all. Four more are very minor differences, such as

the presence of a conjunction (and) which are stylistic rather than substantive. The other three letters are the Hebrew word for "light." This word was added to the text by someone after "they shall see" in verse 11. Out of 166 words in this chapter, only this one word is really in question, and it does not at all change the meaning of the passage. We are told by biblical scholars that this is typical of the whole manuscript of Isaiah." {3}

The Septuagint

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

Conclusion

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

The New Testament

The Greek Manuscript Evidence

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

Papyrus and Parchment

During the early Christian era, the writing material most commonly used was *papyrus*. This highly durable reed from the Nile Valley was glued together much like plywood and then allowed to dry in the sun. In the twentieth century many remains of documents (both biblical and non-biblical) on papyrus have been discovered, especially in the dry, arid lands of North Africa and the Middle East.

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

Examples

1. Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus

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

2. Older Papyri

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

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

3. Oldest Fragment

Perhaps the earliest piece of Scripture surviving is a fragment of a papyrus codex containing John 18:31-33 and 37. It is called the Rylands Papyrus (P52) and dates from 130 A.D., having been found in Egypt. The Rylands Papyrus has forced the critics to place the fourth gospel back into the first century, abandoning their earlier assertion that it could not have been written then by the Apostle John. [\[7\]](#)

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

Versions (Translations)

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

Church Fathers

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

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

A Comparison

The evidence for the early existence of the New Testament writings is clear. The wealth of materials for the New

Testament becomes even more significant when we compare it with other ancient documents which have been accepted without question.

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

Xenophon, <i>Anabasis</i>	ca. 430-355 BC	401-399 BC	385-375 BC	ca. 1350	15-25 years	1750 years
Polybius, <i>History</i>	ca. 200-120 BC	220-168 BC	ca. 150 BC	ca. 950	20-70 years	1100-1150 years

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

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

Conclusion

In his book, *The Bible and Archaeology*, Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum, stated about the New Testament, "The interval, then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established." [\[8\]](#)

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

B. F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, the creators of *The New Testament in Original Greek*, also commented: "If comparative trivialities such as changes of order, the insertion or omission of the article with proper names, and the like are

set aside, the works in our opinion still subject to doubt can hardly mount to more than a thousandth part of the whole New Testament.”[\[9\]](#) In other words, the small changes and variations in manuscripts change no major doctrine: they do not affect Christianity in the least. The message is the same with or without the variations. We have the Word of God.

The Anvil? God’s Word

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

Then looking in, I saw upon the floor

Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

“How many anvils have you had,” said I,

“To wear and batter all these hammers so?”

“Just one,” said he, and then, with twinkling eye,

“The anvil wears the hammers out, you know.”

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

For ages skeptic blows have beat upon;

Yet though the noise of falling blows was heard,

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

Author unknown

Notes

1. C.Sanders, *Introduction in Research in English Literacy* (New York: MacMillan, 1952), 143.
2. Merrill F. Unger, *Famous Archaeological Discoveries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 72.
3. R. Laird Harris, *Can I Trust My Bible?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 124.
4. Ibid., 129-30.
5. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 892.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Sir Fredric Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 288ff.
9. B.F. Westcott, and F.J.A. Hort, eds., *New Testament in Original Greek*, 1881, vol. II, 2.

SECTION III: WHO WAS JESUS?

Jesus Was a Man of History

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

Jesus Is the Unique Man of History

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

The Claims of Christ

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

Responding to the Claims

The wide divergence of opinion about who Jesus really was is not based, as we have seen, on a lack of good and adequate historical evidence; it rather comes from grappling with His unique and audacious claims listed above. There is no intellectually honest way to carve up the documents according to our own liking and philosophical preferences. Many have done this, including a great American patriot and president, Thomas Jefferson. He admired Jesus as a moral man, but would have nothing to do with the supernatural elements found in the documents. Using scissors and paste, the Sage of Monticello left on the cutting floor anything, he felt, which contravened the laws of nature. Jefferson entitled his creation, *The Life and Morals of Jesus*. Only 82 columns, or little more than one tenth of the 700 columns in the King James Bible remained. The other nine tenths of the gospel record were discarded. His book ended with the words, "There laid they Jesus (John 19:42) . . . and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre and departed (Matt. 28:60)." One way to deal with the claims is to remove the historical material which is offensive to us, such as Jefferson did. The other option is to honestly accept the historical accuracy of the documents and come up with a plausible explanation. Our choices are reduced to one of four: He was either a Liar, a Lunatic, a Legend, or our Lord.

Considering the Options

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

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

to and including His death, with composure and control.

Legend. The greatest difficulty with this option is the issue of *time*. Legends take time to develop. Yet most of the New Testament, including Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, and all of Paul's Epistles were written by 68 A.D. An equivalent amount of time today would be the interval between President Kennedy's assassination in 1963 to the present. For people to start saying Kennedy claimed to be God, forgave people's sins, and was raised from the dead would be a difficult task to make credible. There are still too many people around who knew Jack Kennedy . . . and know better.

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

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse."

Other than the fact that the Liar, Lunatic, and Legend choices are not persuasive as explanations for who Jesus was, we are still faced with the question of why we should accept Him as Lord. During the latter days of His ministry, Jesus was confronted by a hostile crowd which posed this question to Him: "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." Jesus answered, "An adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:38-40). Here we are led to understand that Jesus pointed to His bodily resurrection as THE authenticating sign by which He would confirm His own unique claims. Later on, the Apostle Paul, in speaking of the importance of this event to the faith

of a Christian would say, "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins (1 Cor. 15:13-17)." We now turn to explore the possibility of such an event occurring.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a Historical Fact

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

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

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

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

It usually takes at least two generations for false legends to develop, for the simple reason that it takes about that long for those witnesses who might contradict the tale to die off. By all accounts, however, the followers of Jesus began proclaiming *right away* that he had been raised from the dead. The books of the New Testament were written early enough that eyewitnesses could have still contradicted them, and those books at times reveal oral traditions (in the form of early creeds, songs, or sayings) that show the church's belief in

the resurrection to be even older. There does not appear to have been sufficient time for a legendary account to have developed the resurrection was talked about immediately after the death of Christ.

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

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

Jesus was buried in a known tomb, but the tomb was empty the third day. This is a fact that even the opponents of

Christianity recognized, and it's one that Christians can appeal to in their arguments for the gospel (Acts 26:26).

If the tomb had not been empty, it probably would have been treated as a shrine. It was common in first-century Judaism to regard the graves of holy men as shrines, but there is absolutely no suggestion that the grave of Jesus was ever treated in that way. His followers did not come back again and again to the place to worship, nor did they treat it with any special esteem. There was no reason to, because there was nothing inside.

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

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

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

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

Did the disciples steal the body? As noted above, this was one of the earliest skeptical explanations for the empty tomb. It may be early, but it isn't very credible. For the disciples to steal the body, they would have had to overcome guards who were stationed there specifically to prevent its theft. At the same time, they would have had to manifest a tremendous amount of courage, which is some thing they apparently did not have when they fled the night Jesus was arrested. If the disciples had stolen the body, they obviously would have known that the resurrection had not really taken place. The fact that these men suffered in life and were then killed for their faith in the resurrection strongly suggests that they believed it really happened. They did not give their lives for what they knew was a lie. The disciples did not steal the body of Jesus.

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

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

Did Jesus really die? When left with no other credible option, some have suggested that Jesus did not really die, that He only appeared to be dead, was revived, and then appeared to the disciples. This makes a mockery out of the sufferings of the cross, suggesting that a beaten and crucified man could force his way out of a guarded tomb. At the same time, it portrays Jesus as the sort of person who would willingly deceive his disciples, carrying off the greatest hoax of all

time. That the disciples would believe Him to be resurrected in triumph over death would be even more surprising if He was in fact on the edge of death after a severe beating. Jesus was truly killed, He was actually buried, and yet His grave was empty. Why? It is extremely unlikely that anybody took the body, but Jesus' disciples offered another explanation.

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

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

The Resurrection Demonstrates the Truth of Christianity

It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian faith rests on the fact of Jesus' resurrection. Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, said that his entire ministry would be worthless if the resurrection had not taken place. "If Christ has not been raised," he wrote, "then our preaching is vain,

your faith also is vain. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). On the other hand, if Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead, then Paul's message is true, faith has meaning, and we can be freed from our sins.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus is the Lord of History

The material in this outline forms the foundation for a Christian worldview. It is on these critical truths Christians have stood over the centuries. When someone asks us the REASONS for the hope that is within us that is, why we hold to the Christian faith, these are the reasons. We prefer to believe that the universe and man were created, rather than being the products of blind chance in a closed, material world. We believe that God not only created, but that He communicated, revealed Himself to humankind, through His prophets, apostles, and finally through His Son (Heb. 1:1). We believe that Jesus lived, and that His life and mission, outlined most extensively in the biblical documents but

corroborated by extra-biblical documents, are what they have purported to be over the millennia: the seeking and saving of the lost through His sacrificial death. We believe that Christianity cannot be acceptably explained, historically, by leaving a dead Jew hanging on a cross. Only His resurrection from the dead adequately explains the boldness and commitment unto death of His disciples, the forsaking of worship on the Sabbath in preference to Sunday, and the exponential growth of the church which began immediately, and has continued to this day. Every mighty river on this planethe Mississippi, the Nile, the Volgahas its source. Each one begins somewhere. Every Christian church or community in the world also has an historical source. It flows from Palestine, from Jerusalem, from a hill called Golgotha . . . and a nearby empty tomb. We said in the beginning that everyone has faith, but also pointed out that faith must have an object. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the most worthy of all objects to which we could entrust our lives, our purpose, and our destiny.

For Further Reading

Theism

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

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

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

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

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

Baker, 1976.

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

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

It may seem odd to include a book on doubt here, but it really is appropriate. Like the Yancey book noted below, this is written to believers who are having doubts about their faith. It is very readable and very encouraging. Highly recommended.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is a wonderful book that asks some of the hard questions of life. Is God unfair? Is God silent? Is God hidden? For those whose faith in God is being stretched by

doubts or trials, this book should be required reading. It is sensitive, biblical, and extremely insightful. Read it!!

The Resurrection of Jesus

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

This is an excellent book that thoroughly defends the resurrection of Jesus from a historical perspective. It is well-reasoned and very readable. Highly recommended.

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

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

The Authority of the Bible

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One of the most helpful apologetics books available, this

work discusses the uniqueness of the Bible, demonstrates the strength of its manuscript support, and also examines the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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

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

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

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

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The Mystery of Reincarnation – A Christian Perspective

Can reincarnation be true? Dr. Pat Zukeran examines evidence for this Eastern belief and compares it to the Biblical concept of resurrection.



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

Eastern Doctrine of Reincarnation

Many cultures throughout the world have long held to the concept of reincarnation. A recent Gallup Poll revealed that one in four Americans believed in reincarnation. Reincarnation literally means, "to come again in the flesh." World religions

author Geoffrey Parrinder defines reincarnation as “the belief that the soul or some power passes after death into another body.”[\[1\]](#)

Reincarnation is a major facet of the eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Many sects have variant views of reincarnation. Here is a general summary of the basic principles. Most hold to a pantheistic view of God. Pantheism comes from the Greek *pan* meaning “all” and concept of *theism* meaning “God.” In Pantheism, God is an impersonal force made up of all things; the universe is God and God is the universe. All created beings are an extension of or an emanation from God.

Living things possess a physical body and an immaterial entity called the soul, life force, or Jiva. At death, the life force separates from the body and takes a new physical form. The law of karma determines what form the individual will take. This law teaches that one’s thoughts, words, and deeds have an ethical consequence, fixing one’s lot in future existences.[\[2\]](#) Our present state is the result of actions and intentions performed in a previous life. The amount of good or bad karma attained in our present life will determine if one returns in a higher or a lower form of existence.

One will endure hundreds, even millions of reincarnations, either evolving into a higher or lower form of life to work off the debt of karma. This cycle of reincarnation is called the *law of samsara*. Eventually one hopes to work off all bad karma and free oneself from the reincarnation cycle and attain unity with the divine. This freeing from the cycle of reincarnation is called *moksha*. The soul is viewed as imprisoned in a body and must be freed to attain unity with the divine.

Each school of thought varies in their teaching regarding how one attains ultimate deliverance from the reincarnation cycle. Most agree that it is only from the human form one can attain

unity with the divine. Deliverance from the bondage of the body can be attained through various means. Some schools teach that through enlightenment that comes from knowledge, meditation, and channeling, one can break the cycle. Other schools teach that deliverance comes through faith and service to a particular deity or manifestation of the divine. In return, the deity will aid you in your quest for moksha. Other schools teach that one can attain deliverance through discipline and good works.

Much of the reincarnation teaching in the West is adapted from the teachings in the eastern religions. Is there evidence that proves reincarnation to be true? We will examine these next.

Evidences for Reincarnation

Leading reincarnation researcher Dr. Ian Stephenson, head of the department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, believes there is compelling evidence for reincarnation. Proponents give five proofs: hypnotic regression, déjà vu, Xenoglossy, birthmarks, and the Bible.

The first proof is hypnotic regression. Reincarnation proponents cite examples of individuals giving vivid and accurate descriptions of people, places, and events the individual could not have previously known. Today there is a small branch of psychology that practice past life therapy, the belief that one's present problems are the result of problems from a previous life.

However, the accuracy of facts attained from hypnosis remains highly questionable. First, some people are known to have lied under hypnosis. Second, human memory is subject to distortions of all sorts. Third, under hypnosis a patient's awareness of fantasy and reality is blurred. Dr. Kenneth Bowers, a psychologist at the University of Waterloo and Dr. Jan Dywane at McMaster University states:

“. . .although hypnosis increases recall, it also increases errors. In their study, hypnotized subjects correctly recalled twice as many items as did un hypnotized members of a control group but also made three times as many mistakes. During hypnosis, you are creating memories.”{3}

Fourth, studies have shown that under hypnosis, patients are easily influenced by leading questions. In the process of hypnosis, the patient is asked to release control of his or her consciousness and body. Hans Holzer states, “Generally women are easier to hypnotize than men. But there are exceptions even among women, who may have difficulty letting go control over their bodies and personalities, something essential if genuine hypnosis is to take place.”{4} In this state, memories can be altered by the cues from the hypnotist. For these reasons, many law courts do not consider testimony under hypnosis reliable evidence.

Past life recall can also be attributed to the influence of culture. Cultures heavily steeped in the doctrine of reincarnation create an environment conducive to past life recall. The countries of India, Sri Lanka, Burma, and western Asia have a very high number of cases. Many who make claims of past life recall win the respect of their society. In areas like these the culture can have a strong influence on one’s subconscious mind. If reincarnation is true, past life recall should be prevalent in all cultures, not primarily in one area.

Finally, the majority of the incidents occur among children. Dr. Stephenson states, “Many of those claiming to have lived before are children. Often they are very emotional when they talk of the person they used to be, and they give minute details of the life they lived.”{5} Children are the most susceptible to suggestion and their testimony should be viewed with caution.

At best, the evidence from hypnotic regress can only suggest a

possibility of reincarnation, but it does not conclusively prove it.

Déjà vu refers to a distinct feeling you have been to a place or performed an event before, while engaged in something that is presently happening. Reincarnation proponents attribute this to a previous life. However, researchers give alternate explanations. In our subconscious, we often relate a present event with a past one that the conscious mind does not remember. Since the two events are similar we often fuse the events together in our minds, thus creating an impression that we have experienced this before. Other researchers have shown that the data that enters the eye is sometimes delayed for a microsecond on its way to the brain. This leads one to think that they have seen the data before.

Xenoglossy is the sudden ability to speak a language one has never learned. Reincarnation advocates attribute this as the language one spoke in a previous life. However, cryptoamnesia can account for this phenomenon. In cryptoamnesia, an individual forgets information that was learned earlier and recalls it at a later time, not knowing its source. It is possible that one can hear foreign terms through the media or as a child and recall these when prompted.

The fourth proof is the appearance of unique birthmarks that are similar to those possessed by a deceased individual. However, it is difficult to show any connection to reincarnation. Similarity does not prove sameness.

These alternative explanations can explain most of the evidences for reincarnation. However where they fall short, we must entertain the possibility of demonic possession where a foreign spirit takes control of the person as demonstrated several times throughout the New Testament. Demonic spirits have existed for thousands of years and are not limited by time and space. The information they possess can be injected into a person's mind during possession. Eastern meditation

techniques allow for this possibility. Dr. Bro writes of Edgar Cayce, the father of the New Age movement, "Cayce's power came without equipment, in quiet. He appeared to empty himself, to hollow out his consciousness as a receptacle, a conduit." {6}

Even reincarnation advocates believe that many cases of past life recall can be attributed to possession. They confess that it is difficult to determine whether a past life recall is the result of reincarnation or possession. William de Arteaga states, "In reference to the demonic counterfeit hypothesis, we can safely say that for many past life visions it is the most solidly verified hypothesis of all." {7}

Edgar Cayce stated, "That's what I always thought, and against this I put the idea that the Devil might be tempting me to do his work by operating through me when I was conceited enough to think God had given me special power. . . ." {8}

Although the evidence can be interpreted to support reincarnation, it cannot conclusively prove it.

Biblical Evidence for Reincarnation

Although reincarnation proponents cite the Bible as proof of their claim, the Bible refutes the idea. It teaches that we live once, die once, and then enter our eternal state. Hebrews 9:26b-27 states, "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. . . ." The focus here is on the sacrificial work of Christ. Instead of the continual animal sacrifices needed to atone for sins under the old covenant, under the new covenant Christ paid for sins once and for all.

In the same way as Christ, who appeared only once, man is destined to die once. Just as there is finality in Christ's sacrifice, there is finality in man's physical death. After

that, the soul faces the judgment before God to determine one's eternal destiny. Once judgment is delivered, Scripture gives no evidence that sins can be atoned for in another time of living on earth (Rev. 20:11-15; Luke 16:19-31; Matt. 25:31-46).

The passage often appealed to by those who support reincarnation is John 9:1-3, which states, "As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" Reincarnation proponents claim that in this passage the disciples are attributing the man's blindness as the result of bad karma from a previous existence.

However, Jewish theology attributed birth defects to two factors. Prenatal sin committed by the baby after conception, but before birth, or sin committed by the parents. Genesis 25:22, the struggle of Jacob and Esau in Rachel's womb, was interpreted as a conflict that resulted from prenatal sin. Exodus 20:5 states that the parents' sin often had repercussions on their offspring. However, in the passage in John 9:1-3, Jesus refutes any connection between the man's defects and any previous sins, thus putting an end to any concept of karma.

Another passage is Matthew 11 where Jesus states that John the Baptist is Elijah. Reincarnation proponents interpret John as being the reincarnated Elijah from the Old Testament. This cannot be true for the following reasons. First, in 2 Kings 2, Elijah never died, but was taken to heaven. In the reincarnation model one must die before one can take on a new form. Second, in Matthew 17 Elijah appears with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. John the Baptist had lived and died by this time. If he had been the reincarnation of Elijah, John would have appeared instead. John came not as the reincarnation of Elijah, but in a metaphorical sense as Elijah in that he was filled with the same spirit and power as Elijah. So the Bible does not affirm reincarnation.

Reincarnation and Resurrection

The Bible teaches that what happens after death is a resurrection, not reincarnation. First Corinthians 15 is one of the clearest passages on what happens to the human soul after death. Like the reincarnation proponents, we agree that the immaterial component of man separates from the body at death and survives eternally. We both agree that the soul inhabits another bodily form.

The major difference is this: reincarnation proponents believe that the soul inhabits many bodily forms in an evolutionary progress toward union with the divine. This can happen over millions of years or in a shorter period. The Bible teaches in Hebrews 9:26b-27, as previously discussed, that we live once, die once and then enter into an eternal state.

Our eternal state is described in 1 Corinthians 15. Verse 20 states, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." By "firstfruits" Paul was drawing on the imagery found in the Old Testament. The firstfruits were prior to the main harvest and served as an example and an assurance of the harvest that was coming. So Christ's resurrection is a precursor and a guarantee of the believer's resurrection. His resurrection greatly differs from the reincarnation model.

First, Christ's resurrected body physically resembled His earthly body. It had physical properties displayed by the fact that He could be touched, He communicated, and He ate. His glorified body also possessed supernatural attributes. He was able to walk through walls, appear and disappear, and ascend to heaven.

Paul describes the glorified body as having a different kind of flesh from the earthly body. He states, "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, fish another. There are also heavenly bodies

and earthly bodies. . . .” The new body will be imperishable and immortal. It will be a spiritual body that is designed for life in heaven. The glorified body will not suffer the effects of sin or the effects of time, sickness, or pain.

The unrighteous, however, enter a state of eternal torment immediately after death. Luke 16:19-31 demonstrates this point. In this example the unrighteous wealthy man enters hell immediately at death. In Matthew 25 the goats enter a state of eternal punishment with no hope of escape.

In summary, these are the differences. First, reincarnation teaches that the migration of the soul occurs over many lifetimes while resurrection occurs once. Second, reincarnation teaches we inhabit many different bodies while resurrection teaches we inhabit only one body on earth and a glorified immortal body in heaven that resembles our earthly one. Third, reincarnation teaches we are in an evolutionary progress to union with God while resurrection teaches we arrive at our ultimate state immediately at death. The Bible does not support reincarnation and it must not be confused with the doctrine of the resurrection, which is very different.

Notes

1. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions* (Philadelphia; Westminster Press, 1971), 286.
2. John Noss, *Man's Religions*, New York: MacMillan Press, 1980, 90.
3. Elizabeth Stark, "Hypnosis on Trial," *Psychology Today*, February 1984, p. 35, as cited by Geisler and Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 67.
4. Hans Holzer, *Life Beyond*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1994, 176.
5. Dr. Ian Stephenson, quoted in *Life Beyond* by Hans Holzer, Chicago: Contemporary Press, 1994, 167.
6. Harmon Bro, *A Seer Out of Season: the Life of Edgar Cayce*,

(New York: New American Library, 1989), 13.

7. William de Arteaga, *Past Life Visions: A Christian Exploration* (New York: Seabury, 1983), p. 174, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 80.

8. Thomas Sugue, *The Story of Edgar Cayce: There is a River*, (Virginia Beach: Association for Research and Enlightenment, 1973), 219, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 79.

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“I Find the Argument for a Wednesday Crucifixion Most Compelling”

I receive the Probe-Alert and read an interesting response to another email: [“If Jesus Was Crucified on Friday, How Was He Dead for Three Nights?”](#) I use a Dake’s Bible and although I try to keep an open mind when studying his (Finis Dake) interpretations, I thought his explanation of the Wednesday crucifixion was quite compelling. Dake refers to many verses in support of his interpretation. I will endeavor to include as many of the pertinent ones (admittedly my opinion) as possible. If you have access to a Dake’s Bible, the references are included beside each verse.

Matt. 27:63 – “...after three days I will rise again.”

This shows how the Jews understood the three days and three nights of Matt. 12:40

Lev. 23:7

This verse refers to the special Sabbath two days before the weekly Sabbath.

Mat. 12:40 "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

John 19:31 "...for that Sabbath day was an high day."

This is another reference to the special Sabbath.

Luke 9:22

Although this verse merely says that He will be raised on the third day, Dake gives another perspective on the three full days and three full nights interpretation:

- When days and nights are both mentioned, then it cannot be parts of three days, but full days and nights (Ester 4:16 with 5:1; 1 Sam. 30:12 with 13; Jonah 1:17 with Mat. 12:40). See also Rev. 11:9-11.
- The Jews understood Christ to mean "after three days" or three full days and three full nights (Matt. 27:63), hence the soldiers had orders to guard the tomb at least that long.
- It was the custom to mourn for the dead three full days and nights, called "days of weeping," which were followed by four "days of lamentation," thus making seven days (Gen. 27:41; 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13; Job 2:13). According to rabbinical notion the spirit wandered about the sepulchre for three days hoping to re-enter the body, but when corruption set in the spirit left. This was believed to be on the fourth day when the loud lamentations began. Hence, on the fourth day Lazarus was supposed to stink (John 11:39).
- Herodotus testifies that embalment did not take place until after three days when the spirit was supposed to be gone (Herod. ii. 86-89). This is why the women were taking sweet spices to anoint Jesus (Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:1)

- The Jews did not accept evidence as to the identification of a dead body after three days, for corruption took place quickly in the East. Hence, this period of three full days and three full nights was wanted by God, so as to preclude all doubt that death had actually taken place, and shut out all suggestion that Christ might have been in a trance. Jews would legally have to conclude His death, should He remain dead the full three days and three nights.

Thank you for your e-mail.

As you may know there is some controversy/discussion about Passover meal and whether it was celebrated Wednesday night, or Thursday night, and some evidence which argues for both days.

I am inclined to agree with the full three days, and the Wednesday night theory.

I appreciate your sending this information (some of which I already have) and your nice summary.

If you go with Thursday, you just have to accept the fact that the Lord was in the tomb some PORTION of three days (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday).

As far as theology and/or interpretation is concerned, either (in my judgment) is acceptable since the rudimentary facts of the death, burial, and resurrection are not affected.

Warm Regards,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Why Care About History?

Jerry Solomon discusses the importance of history to the Christian worldview, encouraging believers to enjoy the blessings of God's work in space and time.

Why Care About History? Because History Defines Us

Let's listen to a typical conversation between two people who are meeting each other at a convention.

Carl: Hello! My name is Carl Simpson.

James: Hello! My name is James Cameron.

Carl: Where are you from, James?

James: Well, I grew up in the Miami area, but I've lived in Dallas for the past twenty years.

Carl: Really? I grew up in the Miami area.

James: Oh yeah, where?

Carl: Near Little Havana.

James: That's interesting. I grew up in Coral Gables.

Carl: Did you attend Coral Gables High School?

James: Yes, I did.

Carl: Did you play football?

James: As a matter of fact, yes. I was the starting fullback in 1963, my senior year.

Carl: You're kidding! I was the starting middle linebacker that year and the next. We must have "buted heads" a few

times.

James: Actually, now that I think about it, I can remember running over you a few times during the '63 game. You do recall that we won and went on to win the state championship, don't you?

Carl: Well, I certainly don't remember you running over me. But yes, I do remember your success that year. Of course you remember you won our game because of that ridiculous pass interference call on me in the end zone with 30 seconds left, don't you?

James: That was you, wasn't it? Well, looking back I have to admit it was a pretty lousy call.

Carl: I'm amazed that we've met like this after all these years. What's your occupation?

James: I work for a computer consulting firm in Dallas. That's why I'm at this convention.

Carl: That's remarkable! I work for the same type of company in Miami.

James: Well, it looks as if there is a lot we can talk about. What are you doing for dinner tonight?

Carl: I don't have any plans at the moment.

James: Great! Why don't we meet in the lobby at 6:30 and go to dinner?

Carl: Wonderful! I'll see you then!

This fictional encounter is not so farfetched that we can't identify with it. Even though we may not have been football players, all of us can share stories of how we have met people. Usually we enter such encounters by sharing our past—our history. And we listen as the person we are meeting

does the same. Our history defines us. Before we share who we are in present time, we usually share our past. In this way, and many other ways, we demonstrate the importance of history in our personal lives.

In much the same way, we tend to think of historical markers that provide us with a collective sense of cohesiveness. For example, some vividly remember the day President Roosevelt declared war on Japan. That day is indelibly written on their minds. They probably have many stories to tell about where they were and who was with them when they heard the declaration. They can share their feelings about how that day changed their lives. The same can be said of those who first heard of the assassination of President Kennedy. Or many can relate the experience of watching television as the first man walked on the moon. Events such as these will be passed from generation to generation as personal and collective markers.

What are the historical markers in your life and the lives of those you love? Do such markers make a difference in your lives? Surely the answer is a resounding "Yes"!

Why Care About History? Because the Bible Contains History

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). This most famous of biblical verses has been referenced for a variety of reasons. Let's give thought to it in light of its historical implications.

Consider the opening phrase: In the beginning. The Hebrew word for beginning means "the first—in place, time, order or rank." Thus the verse asserts that God was making history. He was doing something for the first time. He was creating the universe. An event was taking place. The Bible is clear about the fact that this was the first historical event. The universe was created, thus it is not eternal.

This amazing starting point provides a harbinger of what is to come in the biblical record. It is as if this initial declaration is intended to alert us to a critical element of the Bible: it is a historical record. It contains a record of God's actions within His creation, especially His interaction with man. "The Bible clearly delineates the decisive issues in the human struggle as a course of events in which God is everywhere active either in mercy or in judgment."{1} Thus a student of the biblical chronicle is challenged to take history seriously. This has been true from the time of the early Hebrews. "In a world where others interpreted all that happens as cyclical process, the Hebrews with their awareness of God's active revelation in external human affairs instituted the very idea of history."{2}

In our time it is critical that Christians continue in the line of the ancient Hebrews. History is under attack from many quarters for many reasons. "Some . . . consider the past without value because they assume either that anything historical is insignificant or that anything temporal is relative, or that the present has evolutionary superiority, or that only the supertemporal and eternal has divine import or, more radically, that no God whatever exists to reveal himself in history."{3} A Christian worldview, based on Scripture, cannot subscribe to such perspectives. If such views were given credence, Christianity would no longer depend on the events on which it is based. Instead, it would be viewed as the product of the mythology that some claim for it. The record of God's work among us would be reduced to nothing more than the result of someone's vivid imagination.

Of course a Christian who is mentally and spiritually vigorous will continue to affirm the authenticity of the history contained in the Bible. Consider the way in which the text propels us forward toward a grand consummation. One is hard pressed to mangle the Bible in order to assert anything other than the hand of divine providence. To put it in contemporary

terms, biblical history is going somewhere. This perspective is in contrast to those who see all history as chaotic, circular, or meaningless. The linear nature of the Bible teaches us that what has happened is important, because it touches what is happening and what will happen. "From its inception, Christianity has been a religion with a past. Without that past, Christians could have no grounded hope for the future."{4} Genesis speaks of the beginning, Revelation speaks of the end. In between, the Bible gives coherence to the beginning and the end, because the God of both is Alpha and Omega.

Why Care About History? Because Jesus Took History Seriously

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1). This startling introduction to John's gospel gives us a wealth of insight about Jesus Christ, the Word. Among those insights is that Jesus is introduced in both eternal and historic terms. As the first chapter continues, we note that the Word has entered time and space, as Francis Schaeffer was fond of saying. Consider some of the phrases:

There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man [v. 9].

He was in the world . . . [v. 10].

He came to His own . . . [v. 11].

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory . . . [v. 14].

. . . grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ [v. 17].

Note the verb forms in these phrases: coming, was, came, became, were realized. All of them are indicators of the fact

that Jesus, the Word, entered history. The importance of such observations cannot be exaggerated. Jesus entered history and made history. In fact, He is the Lord of history. Let's consider how this Lord affirmed history after such an auspicious beginning.

Early in His ministry Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth, entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and began to read from the scroll of Isaiah. In particular, He read from what we now know as chapter 61, which contains a strong prophecy concerning His ministry. After reading the text, He sat down and boldly proclaimed, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). He followed this amazing statement with a brief exposition of events surrounding the prophets Elijah and Elisha. His audience reacted by driving Him out of the city and trying to kill Him.

As always, much could be written about this incident, but let's simply reflect on what Jesus implied about history. First, Jesus took Isaiah's prophecy seriously as history. In other words, what Isaiah wrote is to be seen as something written in past time in reference to an actual future event. Second, Jesus claimed to be the one about whom Isaiah prophesied, a claim guaranteed to get the attention of His Jewish audience. Third, by referring to Elijah and Elisha, Jesus proceeded to give assent to biblical history.

One of the most profound ways in which our Lord emphasized the importance of history is found in the event of the Last Supper. "And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me'" (Luke 22:19). The last phrase, "do this in remembrance of Me," indicates how His disciples are to focus on this singular event. It is a historical marker we are not to forget.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul affirms the historicity of the Lord's Supper by quoting Jesus'

statement. Paul then interprets the supper by teaching about the result of our obedience. He writes, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:26). Thus, when we partake of the Lord's Supper we are proclaiming the awesome nature of Christ's crucifixion within the unfolding historical drama of God's work of redemption.

Why Care About History? Because Christian Beliefs are Based on History

If you call yourself a Christian, how would you explain what that means to others? Would you include historical emphases? Would you base your statements on events that took place in the past? Or would you only share what is happening in your life now? What is happening now certainly is very important, but present experiences are valid because of what happened in the past. For example, to say something about "the Christ" in your life can be meaningless historically. But the person who turns to Scripture when referring to Christ must endorse a real person acting in real history.

One of the most significant ways to establish the importance of history for Christian beliefs is to focus on two biblical turning points, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. "Christianity is . . . a historical religion in the sense that the actual occurrence of certain events like the crucifixion and the resurrection is a necessary condition for its truth." [5] This necessity distinguishes Christianity from the world religions. In contrast to the Buddha, for example, the weight of the claims of Christ rests on what He did in space and time, not just what He taught.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul expounds on this.

[v. 3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

[v. 4] and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, v. 5 and that He appeared. . . .

Let's note several things about these verses. First, Paul uses the phrase of first importance to alert his readers; there is nothing of greater importance than what he has to say to them. Second, he writes that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the events of first importance. Third, Paul not only stresses the importance of the events, he interprets them theologically and historically. Jesus died for our sins, a crucial theological statement. He was buried, and He was raised on the third day, which are historical statements. All of this was the historical culmination of Scriptural prophecy. Fourth, Paul asserts that Jesus physically appeared to over 500 people, including Peter and the disciples, James, and Paul himself.

After his stress on the historical death and resurrection, Paul continues by reasoning with his readers concerning the emptiness of Christianity without the resurrection. Ponder these familiar verses and see if one can claim to be a Christian without affirming Paul's reasoning.

[v. 12] Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

[v. 13] But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; v. 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

Please note the word *vain* and apply it to what it means to be a Christian. The word also can be translated *empty*. If the resurrection didn't happen historically, Christianity has no anchor; it is empty of ultimate meaning. Jesus is a dead prophet, or He was just another in a long list of religious teachers.

Thank God we can call ourselves Christians because Christ has been raised. There is hope; there is meaning; the Christ of the true Christian is alive.

Why Care About History? Because History Touches Our Lives

Have you ever had amnesia? Do you know someone who has suffered with it? Most of us can't affirmatively answer either of those questions. We can only imagine what it would be like to forget the past. What if you couldn't remember your name or where you were born? What if you couldn't remember your parents, or your spouse, or your children, or any of your friends? These questions help us consider how history touches our lives. In ways we seldom consider, history affects us, both positively and negatively.

We are inseparably linked to people of the past. "Without examples, without imitation, there can be no human life or civilization, no art or culture, no virtue or holiness." Think about ancient Greece, for example. It still lingers in our midst. We have been touched in numerous ways by Greek government, art, literature, and philosophy. People like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle affect contemporary American life, even if we aren't consciously aware of it.

Now think of Christian history. The Christian who chooses to take history seriously will note that he has a significant lineage. The New Testament book of Hebrews emphasizes this. In chapter 11 the writer reminds us of the faith of biblical characters such as Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, David, Samuel, and many others. In chapter 12 such characters are referred to as a "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) who are to serve as examples to us. Their deeds within space and time are important now. Then the writer focuses our attention on Jesus by stating that Jesus is ". . . the author and perfecter of faith . . . who . . . endured the cross,

despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12: 2). Note that these statements are centered on actions, such as perfecting, enduring, and despising. Such words are indicators of historical events—events that are critical for those of us who apply the word Christian to our lives.

Of course the Christian's legacy continues beyond the biblical record. Our forefathers' lives still resonate in our lives. A Roman historian wrote this about the early church: "The contagion of this superstition [Christianity] has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well." {7} This remarkable analysis provides a stirring picture of our inheritance. Wouldn't it be marvelous if those who follow us would read that we were equally contagious?

If we were to continue a retrospective of church history, we could consider the lives of people such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. Then we could enter our own era and discuss who we think will leave the strongest legacy. Such thoughts are worthy of contemplation, but there are dangers. That is, we can lose sight of how we are touched by those lives that may never enter a history book. In addition, we may be in danger of belittling how God uses us to impact His kingdom, His history. "One of the obvious features of the experience that fills our lives every day is that we never can know what will flow out of it." {8} So we may not know the result of our history, but we can know that our lives are important. We are leaving a mark within God's kingdom. He honors us as His instruments within history.

Notes

1. Carl F.H. Henry, *God Who Speaks and Shows*, vol. II of *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 250.

2. *Ibid.*, 253.

3. *Ibid.*, 281.


4. Ronald H. Nash, *Christian Faith and Historical*

- Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Probe, 1984), 153.
5. *Ibid.*, 12.
6. Robert L. Wilken, *Remembering the Christian Past* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 122.
7. Pliny the Younger, quoted in Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford, 1970), 4.
8. Daniel J. Boorstin, foreword to *The Timetables of History*, by Bernard Grun (New York: Simon and Schuster, A Touchstone Book, 1975).

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Cruci-Fiction and Resuscitation

A paid advertisement in a campus newspaper declaring Christ's resurrection a hoax was deeply disturbing to its readers. This essay raises 9 problems with the ad and answers them.

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

The title used above was the headline of a paid advertisement in a campus newspaper from a major university. Allegedly written by a university student named "Daniel," the ad appeared as a result of Resurrection Week on that campus in the spring of 1997.

I received a copy of the ad in a letter from a long-time friend of my son. He was angry, confused, and scared by the article. He opened his letter by saying, "This is one of the most upsetting articles that I have ever read. This paid advertisement' has contradicted everything that I believe in. It makes a mockery out of the way I have chosen to pattern my

life. It even frightens me.”

In this essay we are going to address the misleading statements and half-truths found in the article. A few days after receiving this correspondence, I took the article and broke it down into nine significant errors or issues raised by the author. My procedure will be quote each half-truth or misleading statement, then address it.

I do not presume that this brief treatment will completely answer all of the objections raised by the “paid advertisement,” but these thoughts were a great help to my son’s friend as he took a deeper look at his faith. I trust that they will be equally helpful to you.

Christian Scholars and the Bible

Problem #1

“Have you ever wondered why so many biblical experts are so skeptical about Jesus’ resurrection’ and why even a growing number of Christian scholars and theologians are heard saying that his resurrection is not so central to Christianity” (“Cruci-fiction”).

It appears that Daniel is only interested in going to those “biblical experts” and “Christian scholars” that support his position. It is no secret that there are a number of Christian scholars who hold a low view of the Bible and the deity of Christ, i.e., they do not believe in the veracity or trustworthiness of the Scriptures or the deity of Christ.

They very often question not only the deity of Christ and His resurrection, but also the Trinity, His uniqueness as a Savior, and His second coming. They also tend to discount hell as a place for eternal damnation and consider sin as only a mistake. They see guilt as being of no consequence because it is imposed on humanity by those who would enforce a strict moral code of conduct.

Daniel's comment about Christian scholars and theologians not considering the resurrection of Jesus being of any real importance is a ridiculous notion that denigrates the uniqueness of Jesus and ultimately places Him on the same plane as Buddha, Krishna, or any other "holy man" in history. Jesus is totally unique and that distinct difference is based on His resurrection in bodily form. Without the Resurrection, there is no salvation for we are still in our sin.

Next, we will look at Daniel's assumption that there were tens and possibly hundreds of "gospels" in existence at the time the church selectively chose the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as a basis for understanding God's truth, along with his assertion that the Apostle Paul fabricated these writings to alter the truth.

Numerous Gospels

Problem #2

Now we are going to look at the question of the canon: just where did the Bible come from and how can we know that it is trustworthy?

Our antagonist, Daniel, continues by making this statement:

"Since preachers have often failed to inform the people of what really happened in events surrounding the so called resurrection,' I will make an attempt to give the most possible accurate picture. Our information source will be the four surviving gospels even though they have been carefully selected by the Church from a pool of a multitude of gospels' tens, possibly hundreds. . . . The four surviving gospels were edited and corrected over time to best fit the doctrines worked out earlier by Paul" ("Cruci-fiction").

There is no doubt that there were a number of "gospels" circulating during and after the first century. But, Daniel's problem is that he does not have an understanding of how the

Bible was canonized. There were several ways various writings were judged to be authentic. If they failed in any one area, they were suspect overall.

First, for a gospel or other book to be considered authentic by the early church, the author must have been an Apostle, one who had been with Jesus during His ministry.

Remember that Jesus promised His disciples the Holy Spirit would enable them to remember His teachings so that they could communicate them accurately to others. He said to the Apostles, "These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (John 16:25-26). Jesus, who is absolutely reliable, believed that what the disciples wrote about Him would be just as true as if He wrote it Himself. That means that it would be historically accurate.

Second, the book had to be authoritative. Did it come from the hand of God? The previous passage indicates that a genuine message from God would come through the Holy Spirit.

Third, is it prophetic? Was it written by a man of God?

Fourth, is it authentic? When in doubt about a manuscript, the Church fathers threw it out.

Fifth, is it dynamic? Did it contain the life-transforming power of God?

Sixth, was the book received and used by the people and considered to be authentic and authoritative?

Daniel uses Irenaeus as a source for the idea of tens, even hundreds, of possible gospels circulating in the first century and subtly implies that he (Irenaeus) questioned their authenticity out of hand. However, we know that Irenaeus, according to historical documentation, gave credence to the

four Gospels of the Bible.

Irenaeus was a student of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, had been a Christian for eighty-six years, and was a disciple of John the Apostle. Irenaeus wrote the following regarding the four Gospels of the New Testament:

So firm is the ground upon which the Gospels rest, that the very heretics themselves bear witness to them, and, starting from these (documents), each one of them endeavors to establish his own particular doctrine. For as there are four quarters of the world in which we live, and four universal winds, and as the Church dispersed over all the earth, and the gospel is the pillar and base of the Church and the breath of life, so it is natural that it should have four pillars, breathing immortality from every quarter and kindling the life of men anew. Whence it is manifest that the Word, the architect of all things, who sits upon the cherubim and holds all things together, having been manifested to men, has given us the gospel in fourfold form, but held together by one Spirit (Against Heresies III).

It seems as if Irenaeus would probably differ with Daniel on this count.

The latter part of Daniel's statement, "The four surviving gospels were edited and corrected over time to best fit the doctrines worked out earlier by Paul" holds no water as well.

Daniel makes it seem that Paul was the official editor of the New Testament and that nothing made the canon unless he approved of its inclusion.

Daniel seems to overlook the fact that the books of the Bible were decided upon by Church Councils and not individuals. Plus, there is an overwhelming amount of manuscript evidence to help the inquiring student to recognize that there was no wholesale editing of the Gospels. (For more information on

this, see the Probe article [Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?](#))

Remember these manuscripts were being used daily by the Church and those using the Scripture were contemporaries of Paul. If, in fact, he had edited or distorted the writings of the Apostles, he would have had his hand called (see Acts 17:10-11) and would have been ostracized. The fact is, it didn't happen.

Crucifixion and Prophecies

Problem #3 Next, our antagonist, Daniel, questions the fact that Jesus really died on the cross and makes this statement regarding the event.

"In order to speed up death of the crucified , he ordered the soldiers to break the legs of both criminals, but not those of Jesus" ("Cruci-fiction").

It appears that Daniel is not familiar with prophecy and, in particular, those prophecies relating to Jesus' death. Psalms 34:20 says, "He keeps all his bones; Not one of them is broken." The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in John 19:33 where it is said, "But coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs."

The Romans were not novices when it came to crucifixion and death. They knew a dead person when they saw one. It seems that Daniel cannot accept this possibility.

Problem #4

"But one soldier thrust a lance into his side. How can one see that a person is dead without a careful close inspection of signs of life as heartbeat and breathing? How many times are people pulled from water, fires, car wrecks who appear to be dead, but then are resurrected?' And if the soldier saw that Jesus was dead, why the lancing? No reason for it.

“Moreover, Romans never lanced the crucified. If the soldier did not get special orders from Pilate and if he was only a bit suspicious that Jesus was alive (as he had all reasons to be), he would have broken Jesus’ legs like anyone else’s, no preferential treatment. It seems that the lancing (was) observed only by a mysterious anonymous witness” (“Crucifixion”).

Once again Daniel is allowing his bias to overtake his lack of understanding of the prophecies surrounding the Crucifixion

Zechariah 12:10 says, “They will look on me whom they have pierced.”

John 19:34 offers the fulfillment of this prophecy. It reads, “But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear.”

Daniel is caught up with the notion that Jesus did not die on the cross, but seemed to have fainted and was resuscitated at a later time, thereby ignoring some basic facts regarding the death of Christ. There is no record that any of the onlookers questioned the fact of Jesus’ death; also the centurion gave testimony of the death of Jesus to Pilate (Mark 15:44).

Furthermore, the piercing of His side confirmed that Jesus was indeed dead. But, equally important is the fact that from the wound came both blood and water. John 19:34 35 gives us an eyewitness account of the effect of the piercing. We read that blood and water poured from the wound, but had Jesus been alive at the time of the piercing, strong spurts of blood would have come forth with every heartbeat. Instead, we are told that a semi-dark red clot was seeping out and was separate from a flow of watery serum. These signs are evidence of massive clotting of the blood in the main arteries and, therefore, proof of death.

Problem #5

Next in our analysis of Christ's crucifixion, we are going to deal with several problems about which our antagonist, Daniel, attempts to create doubt. In doing so, we catch Daniel using poor logic to make his case against the Resurrection.

Daniel continues by observing that the lancing of Jesus was *"observed only by a mysterious anonymous witness which appears only in John's gospel (and) was the author's initiative to correct the previously written three gospels which did not document any such lancing"* ("Cruci-fiction").

Each of the gospel writers had different interests: Matthew was a tax-collector; Mark was the son of Mary and close to the Apostles; Luke was a physician; and John was a fisherman. Each of these men likewise had a different perspective in their Gospel narrative. Luke, although he was a physician, wrote his Gospel as a historical account. John offers the reader no account of the birth of Jesus, His baptism, or His temptations; it tells us nothing of the Last Supper, nothing of Gethsemane, and nothing of the Ascension, to name just a few omissions.

However, if we are to use Daniel's logic we would have to discount all these facts because they were not mentioned in all four Gospels that "survived the editing of Paul."

Genealogies of Christ

Problem #6

"When Matthew and Luke were independently editing the earlier Mark's gospel, they knew that its contemporary critics pointed out that the Messiah must come from David's line and Mark did not mention Jesus' genealogy. So each made up his own list of names" ("Cruci-fiction").

Here, Daniel seems to be a bit lazy. Instead of doing a little research to gain an understanding of Jesus' lineage, he simply makes the comment that each writer just made it up to suit his

own wishes.

In Judaism a man's lineage was his pedigree. It was a matter of high regard for a Jew to have direct lineage from Abraham, thereby proving his Jewishness. The Gospel writers had different reasons for including Jesus' pedigree.

As Daniel points out, the genealogies given by Matthew and Luke are quite different. There are several possibilities for this occurrence.

Luke includes the genealogy between Adam and Abraham. The section between Abraham and David is the same in both Matthew and Luke. However, the genealogies between David and Joseph are almost completely different. Why is this?

One school of thought is that both genealogies are symbolic and that Matthew gives us the line of royal descent of Jesus and Luke gives us the line of priestly descent.

Another school of thought is that one genealogy (Matthew's) gives Christ's ancestral line from Abraham through Joseph (Jesus' legal father, though not His natural one) establishing Jesus' legal right to the throne of David. This fits the Jewishness of the Gospel of Matthew. The second part of this approach is that the genealogy in Luke traces Jesus' ancestry from Mary (Jesus' physical mother) back to Adam (physical father of the human race). (There are some minor concerns about the spelling of some names in this genealogy, but this seems to be the best answer.) It is also very compatible with the universal character of the book of Luke.

The fact is that we do not fully know which genealogical approach is more correct. However, we do know that genealogies were extremely important to the Jews and the idea of making them up is preposterous and would have been exposed.

Our next discussion will center on the claim that Jesus did not die on the cross, but only swooned.

Burial of Christ

Problem #7

“Thus Jesus was taken off the cross after approximately three hours by Joseph of Arimathea and was buried on his property in his new tomb that he (Joseph) had hewn in the rock.’ Why there? Why didn’t Joseph bury Jesus in the ground as most people were buried, but instead he put him into his own tomb? Because in the ground Jesus would have certainly suffocated. Moreover, Joseph knew that he would be able to reuse the tomb in the future” (“Cruci-fiction”).

It is true that the Romans normally buried those who were crucified in a pit unless the body was claimed. The body of Jesus was not claimed by a family member or by one of the disciples. They were evidently too scared and feared the possible outcome of doing so. It was Joseph of Arimathea who desired a more appropriate resting place for the body of the Lord.

Joseph realized that he had to move quickly in order to accomplish his goal of burial because the Sabbath was close. There was no time for elaborate preparations, and Joseph did what any other believer would have done he made his newly hewn sepulcher available to our Lord.

The tomb was in close proximity to Golgotha and spared Joseph and Nicodemus the trouble of preparing a burial site along with the need to prepare the body.

Problem #8

“What would you do in Joseph’s place knowing Jesus had only been on the cross three hours and had not had his legs broken? Exactly what Joseph did. Once dark settled, he took several of his servants and unrolled the stone to get Jesus out. According to all expectations, Jesus was alive, so Joseph got him out and rolled the stone back. Only the next day did the

Pharisees realize their mistake and asked Pilate to guard the tomb, by which time Jesus was resting in Joseph's house" ("Cruci-fiction").

On the surface this argument sounds plausible. However, it does not take into account the fact that Joseph fully believed and recognized that Jesus was indeed dead. If he were to follow through, as Daniel suggests, by removing the stone and taking Jesus to his home for recuperation, he would have been directly disobeying Jewish law.

Jewish law prohibited a Jew from working on the Sabbath. They had very strict ideas about what comprised work. It is highly unlikely that Joseph would have risked the penalty for breaking the Sabbath for removing a body that he believed was dead. For what purpose? To risk the penalty of death for breaking the Sabbath?

According to scholars, the stone that was placed at the entrance of the tomb was not only larger than what would normally be used, but one that would take twenty men to move. Beyond the above, if Joseph did return with twenty men to remove the stone and release Jesus, it would be most unlikely that it could have been kept secret. It is untenable to think that such a conspiracy would have succeeded.

Likewise, it is ludicrous to suggest that after the Roman guard was posted and the tomb sealed, that evidence of tampering—should someone be so foolhardy as to try it—would have escaped the notice of the highly trained Roman soldiers. They knew the penalty for failure was death.

Problem #9

"Next we are told that after Sabbath was over women came to the tomb. Why? To anoint the body with spices as Mark 16:1 says? No! It is not a Jewish custom to open graves and anoint corpses which have already been buried and which have been fermenting for two days!" ("Cruci-fiction").

Here Daniel is correct. However he does not take into account the special circumstances under which Jesus was interred.

Under normal conditions a body would have been properly prepared with ample time in which to complete the task. Joseph and Nicodemus had very little time to accomplish their duty before the Sabbath restrictions were imposed. The women sitting at the preparation site saw that the process was incomplete according to their custom and subsequently desired to prepare the body in the proper way. Therefore, they made plans to return after the Sabbath and finish the process by anointing the body with sweet spices, nard, or some costly unguent.

Perhaps the most damaging piece of information to Daniel's hypothesis is the fact that the grave clothes were left undisturbed in the place where the body was laid. The body of Jesus was wrapped from the armpits to the ankles with strips of linen twelve inches wide. The linen wraps were then wound around the body placing spices, aloes, and other fine ointments between the wraps. It is believed that a minimum of seventy pounds of spices were used in the process and as much as a hundred pounds were used for someone of Jesus' position.

The grave clothes constituted quite a mass encasing the body. If we are to assume Daniel's position that Joseph and several of his servants took the body, we would expect that they were concerned about being detected. Therefore, they would have likely been in a great hurry, and we should expect that the grave clothes would have been left in great disarray with spices trailing out the doorway, not to mention that it would have been difficult to have placed the grave clothes neatly back on the resting place in the dark while being in a great hurry to do so.

However, the observers did not find spices and wrappings trailing out of the doorway. The grave clothes were intact, undisturbed with the exception of the head napkin that was

placed slightly above where it should have been found.

John R. W. Stott in his book, *Basic Christianity*, makes this observation: “The body had disappeared. It would have vaporized, being transmuted into something new and different and wonderful. It would have passed through the grave clothes, as it was later to pass through closed doors, leaving them untouched and almost undisturbed. For the body clothes, under the weight of one hundred pounds of spices, once support of the body had been removed, would have subsided or collapsed, and would now be lying flat.”

The grave clothes represent an undeniable fact: Jesus was not bodily or physically removed from their bondage, but He was indeed raised, transmuted from them in the glorious act of the Resurrection.

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Jesus Must Have Risen: Disciples' Lives Changed

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 500 at the same time, most of whom are still living" (I Corinthians 15: 3-6). 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 10 out of the 11 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 1 1/2 to 2-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 grave clothes 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 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 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 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 attempts to explain away the evidence run into a brick wall of facts that point to one conclusion: Christ is risen.

The above does not constitute 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.

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" (Revelation 3:20).

Worth considering?

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One Minute After Death – A Christian Understanding of What Happens at Death

Rusty Wright examines the question of what happens to us after we die. Many Christians have questions about this and there is a lot of information floating around on the topic. Rusty applies a biblical worldview perspective to explain a distinctly Christian view of this topic we all have an interest in. When we examine the Bible, we can develop a clearer picture of God's answer to this question.

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

"I was dying. I heard the doctor pronounce me dead. As I lay on the operating table of the large hospital, a loud, harsh buzzing began to reverberate in my head. At the same time, I sensed myself moving quickly through a long, dark tunnel. Then suddenly I found myself outside my own physical body! Like a spectator, I watched the doctor's desperate attempts to revive my corpse.

“Soon...I encountered a ‘being’ of light who showed me an instant replay of my life and helped me evaluate my past deeds.

“Finally I learned that my time to die had not yet come and that I had to return to my body. I resisted, for I had found my afterlife experience to be quite pleasant. Yet somehow I was reunited with my physical body and lived.”[{1}](#) Many people have reported near-death experiences (NDEs). What do they mean? What happens when we die?

While writing a book on this subject, I interviewed people with fascinating stories. A Kansas woman developed complications after major surgery. She sensed herself rising out of her body, soaring through space, and hearing heavenly voices before returning to her body.

An Arizona man in a coma five months after a motorcycle accident said he saw his deceased father, who spoke with him.

Various theories attempt to explain these NDEs. Physiological explanations suggest a physical cause—perhaps a blow to the head or lack of oxygen in the brain. Pharmacological explanations point to drugs or anesthetics. Psychological explanations propose mental causes such as defense mechanisms or wish fulfillment. Spiritual explanations cite NDEs as previews of the afterlife, either genuine (if divine) or distorted (if demonic). Applications of these theories can be complex.[{2}](#) During my sophomore year at Duke University, the student in the room next to mine was struck by lightning and killed instantly. For days our fraternity was in a state of shock. People were asking questions such as, “Where is Mike now?” “Is there life after death?” “If so, what is it like?”

LIFE AFTER DEATH?

Can we know whether there is life after death? What method would we use to find out?

The experimental method, useful for scientific questions, is inadequate for evaluating NDEs. It is impossible in medical emergencies to establish the required controlled situations and repeatability. Scientists also have no mind-reading machines to evaluate mental/spiritual experiences. And finding volunteers for NDE experiments would be difficult.

The experiential method receives mixed reviews. NDEs can provide useful information, but the mind can trick us. Dreams, fantasies, hallucinations, drug trips, drunkenness, states of shock—all can evoke mental images that seem real but aren't.

Some suggest a spiritual method for evaluating these phenomena. What if we could find a spiritual authority, someone with trustworthy credentials, to tell us the truth about afterlife issues?

Following Mike's death, I explained to the men in our fraternity that an increasing number of educated men and women believe that Jesus Christ is a trustworthy spiritual authority. Once I, myself, was skeptical of Christianity, but examining the evidences for Jesus' resurrection convinced me He could be trusted. I found the resurrection of Christ one of the best attested facts of history.[\[3\]](#) If Jesus died and came back from the dead, He could accurately tell us what death and the afterlife are like. The fact that He successfully predicted His own resurrection helps us believe that He will tell us the truth about the afterlife. What did Jesus and those He taught say about it?

WHAT IS THE AFTERLIFE LIKE?

Jesus indicated that the afterlife will be personal.

Our personalities will not be annihilated. We won't blend into the great impersonal ocean of cosmic consciousness, as some propose. We will continue to exist. We will not become angels, as others suggest. Angels are "ministering spirits" sent out

to serve believers in Christ.{4} They are already-created beings, distinct from humans.{5} At the moment Jesus died on the cross He cried out, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

Earlier, a thief who hung on a cross next to His said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus responded, “I tell you the truth. today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43).

Jesus believed that His own spirit was going to be with God. He also believed that the thief (apparently the thief’s soul or spirit) would be with Him in heaven that same day. Clearly, Jesus was not thinking of death as annihilation but as a separation from the physical body.

Elsewhere Jesus implied that our personalities somehow remain intact after death. He once said, “Many will come. . .and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11).

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the forefathers of the Jewish nation—had died centuries earlier. Yet Jesus, speaking about a future event, mentioned them by name. He implied that their personalities were maintained.

Did you ever wonder if you’ll be able to see departed loved ones after you die? Apparently those who participate in eternal life will be able to recognize each other. King David, who reigned over the ancient nation of Israel around 1000 B.C., spoke of being with his dead son again.{6} Jesus’ disciples once caught a glimpse of Moses and Elijah, two long-dead heroes of Israel, and recognized them. {7}

Jesus taught that eternal life will be relational.

Life in heaven will focus on a personal relationship with Him and on meaningful relationships with each other. These will be the warmest and most enriching relationships we could ever

have.

Before His death, Jesus promised His disciples that one day they would be with Him again: "I am going. . .to prepare a place for you. And. . .I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3).

Paul, a first-century believer in Jesus, wrote about his "desire to depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23).

Jesus defined life in heaven when He said, "This is eternal life: that they [people who believe in Him] may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). In other words, eternal life will involve getting to know God and the meaning of life better.

Eternal life will be enjoyable.

Paul also wrote, "No mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

John, Jesus' disciple, wrote, "[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4). Another New Testament writer encourages us to "fix our eyes on Jesus...who, for the joy set before him endured the cross...and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). Eternal life with God will be joy that defies description and exceeds our imagination.

Life after death will be eternal.

It will never end. Have you ever watched a movie so good you wished it would never end?

Have you ever savored a dessert so sweet, you wished it would last and last? Have you ever had a relationship so fulfilling you hoped it would go on forever? Eternal life will be that good, and better! It will never end. "God has given us eternal life," wrote John, "and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11).

Jesus taught that eternal life involves all of the positive and none of the negative. God loves us and desires only the best for us now and in eternity.

How sad that some people don't take advantage of all He has provided.

DON'T STOP!

Chattanooga cardiologist Maurice Rawlings, M.D., tells of a patient who had a cardiac arrest in Dr. Rawlings' office. Throughout the attempted resuscitation, the patient faded in and out. Each time the doctor interrupted the heart massage, the patient appeared to die again.

When the man came to, he screamed, "I am in hell!" A look of sheer terror clouded his face. "Don't stop!" he begged. "Don't you understand? I am in hell. Each time you quit I go back to hell! Don't let me go back to hell!" The patient survived and put his faith in Christ to take away his sins and secure his place in heaven.[{8}](#) The place the Bible calls hell, or hades, is the current home of those who do not accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness. It is a place of constant, conscious torment.[{9}](#) Hades is not the final dwelling place of those who die without a personal relationship with Christ. John says these will be judged at the "great white throne" judgment. Since no one's deeds are sufficient to earn eternal life, those without Christ's pardon will be cast into the "lake of fire."[{10}](#) Jesus said that "the eternal fire...has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

Not a pleasant subject. But remember, God does not want you to perish in hell. He loves you and wants you to spend eternity with Him. Not without Him.[{11}](#) Paul wrote that God our Savior wants all people to be saved (or made safe from the consequences of sin, which is separation from God). He wants us to know Him because He is truth.[{12}](#) God sent Jesus Christ, His Son, to pay the penalty for our sins (attitudes and

actions that fall short of God's perfection). Jesus literally went through hell for us. We simply need to receive His free gift of forgiveness—we can never earn it—to be guaranteed eternal life. "Whoever hears my word, Jesus says, "and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24).

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

According to the latest figures, the death rate in this country is still 100 percent. Every day on this planet about 140,000 people die.

What most of us are interested in is not "What happens to people when they die?" but "What will happen to me when I die?"

Some seek to avoid the issue of death or to insulate themselves from concern through popularity, possessions, pursuits, or power. Many feel that whatever belief makes you feel comfortable is OK. Do any of these descriptions fit you?

A nightclub near Cincinnati was packed one evening. Suddenly a busboy stepped onto the stage, interrupted the program, and announced that the building was on fire. Perhaps because they saw no smoke, many of the guests remained seated. Maybe they thought it was a joke, a part of the show. When they finally saw the smoke, it was too late. More than 150 people died as the nightclub burned.

As you consider death, are you believing what you want to believe or what the evidence shows is true? Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25).

Place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you, too, will live even if you die.

Notes

1. Adapted from Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D., *Life After Life* (New York: Bantam, 1976), pp. 21-22.
2. For a more complete discussion, see the book from which this article is adapted: Rusty Wright, *The Other Side of Life* (Singapore: Campus Crusade Asia Limited, 1979, 1994).
3. See, for example, Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972).
4. Hebrews 1:14.
5. Hebrews 2:16.
6. 2 Samuel 12:23.
7. Matthew 17:14.
8. Maurice Rawlings, M.D., *Beyond Death's Door* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), pp. 19-20.
9. Luke 16:23-24.
10. Revelation 20:11-15.
11. John 3:16.
12. I Timothy 2:3-4

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