

**Session 5:  
The Case for  
Christianity**

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# **Session 5: The Case for Christianity**

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# Table of Contents

The Case for the Bible.....	7
The New Testament.....	9
New Testament History.....	17
The Old Testament.....	20
The Case for Jesus.....	37
The Historical Record.....	39
Who Was Jesus?.....	53
His Teachings.....	55
His Trial.....	57
Equality With God.....	61
Worship.....	66
Forgiveness.....	69
The Olivet Discourse.....	71
The Son of God.....	72
Who Was Jesus?.....	74
The Case for the Resurrection.....	81
The Testimony of the Gospels.....	84
The Existence Of The Church.....	86
The Claims of Christ.....	91
The Death of Christ.....	94
The Empty Tomb.....	100
The Empty Tomb.....	108
Conclusion.....	113
Appendix A: Messianic Prophecies.....	117
I. His Person.....	118
II. His Nature.....	122
III. His Appearing.....	125
IV. His Offices.....	129
V. His Mission and Ministry.....	131
VI. His Suffering and Death.....	135



# The Case for the Bible

The message of Christianity is essentially this: all have sinned against God, and the wages of sin is death. If our sins are not forgiven then God will condemn us and cast us into Hell. However, forgiveness can be obtained through Jesus Christ. Those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus will be saved. When they are judged they will be found faultless and will inherit eternal life.

As you can see, the message of Christianity depends upon the person of Jesus Christ. In order for the gospel to be true and have genuine saving power, Jesus Christ has to be a real person who actually existed. He had to have been born in Bethlehem, lived a sinless life, died a cruel death on a Roman cross, and then raised to life again on the third day. If these events are not true – if Jesus never lived at all, or if He was not crucified, or if He was crucified but never rose again – then Christianity is false and the gospel can save no one.

In other words, Christianity is not some vague search for “enlightenment”. It is not about “finding the real you” or “living your best life now” or becoming “empowered”. Christianity makes a lot of claims about the past, and it depends upon those historical claims. If these claims are false then the entire religion crumbles to the ground. In order for Christianity to be of any value at all it must be *true*.

But how do we know that it is true? Some people say “Well, you just have to take it on faith.” I realize that sounds very spiritual and holy, but it's actually a terrible answer. If you go up to someone who isn't a Christian and ask them why they don't believe in Jesus, a lot of times they will say “Well, I just don't have that kind of faith.” What they are actually saying is that they

find it impossible to believe things that they don't think are true. When you tell them “just have faith”, they interpret that to mean “You need to believe in things that are dumb and can't possibly be real”. The world equates faith with magical thinking.

A much better word to use is *trust*. When God tells us to have faith in Him, what He is really asking us to do is to trust Him. However, God didn't stop there; He has actually given us *reasons* to trust Him. God did not simply say “I'm going to tell you things, but I'm not going to give you any reason to believe that they are true. You'll just have to believe them, even though they sound stupid.” Instead He gave us “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3).

Believe it or not, Christianity is actually *reasonable*. There are good reasons to believe that its claims are true. Many people in the Church act as if “reason” is some sort of demonic concept, but it's not. The word “reason” actually appears quite a few times in the Bible. God Himself reasoned with people:

**Isaiah 1:18:** “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

Did you see that? *God reasoned with people!* Thinking things through is *not* evil or sinful.

Samuel the prophet reasoned with the nation of Israel:

**I Samuel 12:6:** “And Samuel said unto the people, It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt.

7 Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers.”



How did Samuel reason with the people? By reminding them of the past. Samuel actually used the Jews' own history to give them *reasons* to believe God. He used facts, evidence, and logic to make his case.

It's worth noting that Jesus Himself said that we were to love God with all of our *mind*:

**Mark 12:30:** “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.”

Despite all of this, a lot of people seem to leave their mind at the door when it comes to talking about the Bible. The truth is that God has provided us with many reasons to trust Him. God does not ask for blind faith; instead He has provided us with a great deal of evidence. When people come to us and say “How do you know the Bible is true?”, it's actually possible to give *reasons* to trust the Scriptures.

What we are going to do in this lesson is take a look at some of the reasons why we can trust the Bible. How do we know that it is really what it claims to be? How do we know it can be trusted? Let's take a look and find out.

## **The New Testament**

The New Testament contains the account of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It reveals the gospel, the letters to the churches, the early church's history, and the apocalyptic letter of Revelation. But how do we know that it is what it claims to be? After all, it was written a long time ago.

What evidence do we have that it isn't some kind of modern forgery? Do we have any reason to believe that its contents can be trusted?

Well, we actually have a *lot* of reasons for trusting it. First of all, the New Testament is *by far* the most widely copied book from antiquity:

“On the basis of manuscript tradition alone, the works that make up the Christians' New Testament were the most frequently copied and widely circulated books of antiquity.” (Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism*, p50)

The number of ancient New Testament manuscripts that have been discovered is staggering, and far outclasses any other ancient document. There are a total of 25,000 copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. The second runner-up is Homer's *Illiad*, which has only 643 surviving manuscripts:

“There are now more than 5,686 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions (MSS), and we have close to, if not more than, 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, Homer's *Illiad* is second, with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. The first complete preserved text of Homer dates from the thirteenth century.” (Leach, *Our Bible: How We Got It*, p145)

Not only are there vastly more copies of the New Testament available than any other ancient document, but the

time interval between today and the oldest known copy is also far shorter. The first complete text of Homer is dated more than *a thousand years* after the original. By contrast, copies of the New Testament exist that were made only 250 to 300 years after the originals:

“...besides number, the manuscripts of the New Testament differ from those of the classical authors . . . In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest extant manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament. The books of the New Testament were written in the latter part of the first century; the earliest extant manuscripts (trifling scraps excepted) are of the fourth century – say from 250 to 300 years later. This may sound a considerable interval, but it is nothing to that which parts of most of the great classical authors from their earliest manuscripts. We believe that we have in all essentials an accurate text of the seven extant plays of Sophocles; yet the earliest substantial manuscript upon which it is based was written more than 1400 years after the poet's death.”  
(Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, p4)

People believe that they have an accurate copy of Sophocles' plays, even though the oldest known copy is dated *1400 years* after his death. By that standard, a 250-year gap is nothing. As Kenyon said, there are *no other cases* where the time interval is as short as it is for the New Testament.

But that's not all. We even possess manuscript fragments that date to within 100 years of the originals:

“The oldest known MSS of most of the Greek classical authors are dated a thousand years or more after the author's death. The time interval for the Latin authors is somewhat less, varying down to a minimum of three centuries in the case of Virgil. In the case of the New Testament, however, two of the most important MSS were written within 300 years after the New Testament was completed, and some virtually complete New Testament books as well as extensive fragmentary MSS of many parts of the New Testament date back to one century from the original writings.” (Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, p16)

So, not only is there a tremendous wealth of manuscripts – far, far more than for any other ancient document – but the gap between the originals and the oldest copy is quite brief. Scholars have no problem accepting a thousand-year gap for other ancient documents; after all, no one argues that we can't trust the plays of Sophocles because of the 1400-year gap. The fact that the gap for the New Testament is just a couple centuries makes it even more certain that it is reliable:

“Since scholars accept as generally trustworthy the writings of the ancient classics even though the earliest MSS were written so long after the original writings and the number of extant MSS is in many instances so small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the New Testament is likewise assured.” (Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, p16)

It's important to realize that many ancient documents managed to survive by the slimmest chance. Some manuscripts

were only preserved in a single ancient copy, while others don't have *any* ancient copies available at all:

“The works of several ancient authors are preserved to us by the thinnest possible thread of transmission. For example, the compendious history of Rome by Velleius Paterculus survived to modern times in only one incomplete manuscript, from which the *editio princeps* was made – and this lone manuscript was lost in the seventeenth century after being copied by Beatus Rhenanus at Amerbach. Even the *Annals* of the famous historian Tacitus is extant, so far as the first six books are concerned, in but a single manuscript, dating from the ninth century. In 1870 the only known manuscript of the *Epistle to Diognetus*, an early Christian composition which editors usually include in the corpus of Apostolic Fathers, perished in a fire at the municipal library in Strasbourg. In contrast with these figures, the textual critic of the New Testament is embarrassed by the wealth of his material.” (Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p34)

This extreme rarity seems very reasonable when you think about all the things that can happen to a document during a span of two thousand years. During that time there can be fires, floods, wars, earthquakes, and all sorts of disasters – not to mention the normal ravages of time. It takes a very special set of circumstances for *anything* to survive that long. Yet, the New Testament doesn't depend on one or two surviving manuscripts; instead there are more than 25,000. That is more than impressive. There is literally nothing else like it:

“In real terms, the New Testament is easily the best attested ancient writing in terms of the sheer number of documents, the time span between the events and the document, and the variety of documents available to sustain or contradict it. There is nothing in ancient manuscript evidence to match such textual availability and integrity.” (Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God*, p162)

This means that if there is *any* ancient document that can be trusted as being reliable and free from corruption, it is the New Testament. It is by *far* the most trustworthy, and has the most manuscript evidence to back it up.

But that's not all. Throughout the course of history many people have quoted the New Testament. The early Church Fathers referred to it in their commentaries, sermons, and letters. In fact, they referred to it so many times that if the New Testament was somehow lost entirely, it would be possible to reconstruct nearly the *entire thing* just from those quotations:

“Besides textual evidence derived from New Testament Greek manuscripts and from early versions, the textual critic has available the numerous scriptural quotations included in the commentaries, sermons, and other treatises written by early Church Fathers. Indeed, so extensive are these citations that if all other sources of our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.” (Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, p86)

To give you an idea of how extensive these quotations are

– and how old they are – one researcher stated that there are 32,000 quotations of the New Testament that date before 325 AD:

“... a brief inventory at this point will reveal that there were some 32,000 citations of the New Testament prior to the time of the Council of Nicea (325). These 32,000 quotations are by no means exhaustive, and they do not even include the fourth-century writers. Just adding the number of references used by one other writer, Eusebius, who flourished prior to and contemporary with the Council at Nicea, will bring the total number of citations of the New Testament to over 36,000.” (Geisler, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p353-354)

All of this is evidence that demonstrates that the New Testament has not been corrupted or lost through the centuries. There is simply no other ancient manuscript that has this much evidence to back it up. It is truly in a class all its own.

It's also important to remember that the New Testament contains a tremendous amount of firsthand material. It is not a collection of stories that were collected thirdhand from someone who knew someone else. A great deal of the New Testament is actually a *firsthand* account, and it was written while the people who had experienced the events were still alive:

“The earliest preaches of the gospel knew the value of . . . first-hand testimony, and appealed to it time and time again. 'we are witnesses of these things,' was their constant and confident assertion. And it can have been by no means so easy as some writers seem to think to invent words and deeds of Jesus in those early years,

when so many of His disciples were about, who could remember what had and had not happened.

“And it was not only friendly eyewitnesses that the early preachers had to reckon with; there were others less well disposed who were also conversant with the main facts of the ministry and death of Jesus. The disciples could not afford to risk inaccuracies (not to speak of willful manipulation of facts), which would at once be exposed by those who would be only too glad to do so. On the contrary, one of the strong points in the original apostolic preaching is the confident appeal to the knowledge of the hearers; they not only said, “We are witnesses of these things,” but also, “As you yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22). Had there been any tendency to depart from the facts in any material respect, the possible presence of hostile witnesses in the audience would have served as a further corrective.” (Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, p33, 44-46)

This is an important point. The New Testament was *not* written hundreds of years after all of the witnesses had died. The fact that it was written by people who had actually been there and *seen the events themselves* gives it a tremendous amount of reliability:

“...the books of the New Testament were not written down a century or more after the events they described but during the lifetimes of those involved in the accounts themselves. Therefore, the New Testament must be regarded by scholars today as a competent primary source



document from the first century” (Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, p34-35)

Some people may say “Well, sure, it's a firsthand account, but the writers were all fans of Jesus. Since they're obviously biased you can't trust their testimony.” This is actually a very foolish objection. If you really want to know what actually happened, the very best people you could ask *are the people who were there*:

“The objection that the writings are partisan involves a significant but false implication that witnesses cannot be reliable if they were close to the one about whom they gave testimony. This is clearly false. Survivors of the Jewish holocaust were close to the events they have described to the world. That very fact puts them in the best position to know what happened. They were there, and it happened to them . . . The New Testament witnesses should not be disqualified because they were close to the events they relate.” (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p381)

Not only does the New Testament give us firsthand information, but it actually gives us *multiple* firsthand accounts of the life of Christ. It is truly remarkable.

## **New Testament History**

Another key factor in this issue is the evidence of the historical record. Every time the Bible has been put to the test it

has been found accurate. No historical discovery has ever disproven anything in the Bible or shown it to be in error:

“It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.” (Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: History of Negev*, 31)

This is a critical point. As was mentioned at the beginning of this lesson, the Bible makes many historical claims, and those claims are central to its message. It talks about rulers, kingdoms, people, cities, events, and wars. It speaks of certain things that happened at certain times to certain people – and *none* of its historical claims have ever been found to be in error. Time and time again history has verified that the Bible is exactly right in its assertions:

“The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries, certain phrases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history.” (Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p127-128)

The reason this matters is because the Bible contains two types of information: things that we *can't* test, and things that we *can* test. The fact that it passes every historical test gives us a good *reason* to trust it in matters that we can't verify. Think of it this way: if the Bible was full of errors in matters relating to history and geography, then who would trust it in the much greater matters of spirituality and eternal destiny? The

tremendous accuracy of the Bible offers us good grounds for believing all of its contents.

For example, Luke had a great deal to say about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. One of the things we know about Luke is that he was a first-rate historian who paid a lot of attention to detail:

“Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness.” (Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, p81).

“In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities and nine islands without an error.” (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p47)

“For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.” (Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, p189)

In fact, Luke's history reveals that he had a great deal of firsthand knowledge:

- Specialized details, which would not have been widely known except to a contemporary researcher such as Luke who traveled widely. These details include exact titles of officials, identification of army units, and information about major routes.
- Details archaeologists know are accurate but can't verify as to the precise time period. Some of these are unlikely to have been known except to a writer who

had visited the districts.

- Correlation of dates of known kings and governors with the chronology of the narrative.
- Facts appropriate to the date of Paul or his immediate contemporary in the church but not to a date earlier or later.
- Offhand geographical references that bespeak familiarity with common knowledge.
- Materials the immediacy of which suggests that the author was recounting a recent experience, rather than shaping or editing a text long ago after it had been written.
- Cultural or idiomatic items now known to be peculiar to the first-century atmosphere.  
(*Evidence for Christianity*, p97)

If Luke was careless with his facts about history then it would be easy to suspect that he was also careless about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The fact that he showed such tremendous care in describing everything – even minute details – gives us solid reasons for believing that his account of Christ is also reliable.

## The Old Testament

There are far fewer ancient manuscripts of the Old Testament than there are of the New Testament. Considering the extreme age of the Old Testament, though, this really shouldn't come as a surprise. It's very easy for a document to be destroyed

over the course of a couple thousand years! However, even given the extreme age of the Old Testament, there are still hundreds of ancient manuscript copies of it:

“Several reasons have been suggested for the scarcity of early Hebrew manuscripts. The first and most obvious reason is a combination of antiquity and destructibility; two to three thousand years is a long time to expect ancient documents to last. Nonetheless, several lines of evidence support the conclusion that their quality is very good. . .

“There are several important collections of Hebrew manuscripts today. The first collection of Hebrew manuscripts, made by Benjamin Kennicot (1776-80) and published by Oxford, listed 615 manuscripts of the Old Testament. Later, Giovanni de Rossi (1784-8) published a list of 731 manuscripts. The most important manuscript discoveries in modern times are those of the Cairo Geniza (1890s) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947 and following years).”  
(*Evidence for Christianity*, p106)

The oldest of these manuscripts date to the third century BC, which puts them *before* the time of Christ:

“The most significant Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts date from between the third century BC and the fourteenth century AD. Of these, the most remarkable manuscripts are those of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date from the third century BC to the first century AD. They include one complete Old Testament book

(Isaiah) and thousands of fragments, which together represent every Old Testament book except Esther. The Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts are highly significant because they confirm the accuracy of other manuscripts dated much later." (*Evidence for Christianity*, p107)

One of the remarkable facts about these ancient Old Testament manuscripts is their quality. It is very common for copies of ancient documents to change over time, as people make copying mistakes or change their contents. Yet the Old Testament does not demonstrate this degradation over time at all. Astonishingly, the oldest copies are virtually identical to the more recent copies:

"It should be clearly understood that in this respect, the Old Testament differs from all other pre-Christian works of literature of which we have any knowledge. To be sure, we do not possess so many different manuscripts of pagan productions, coming from such widely separated eras, as we do in the case of the Old Testament. But where we do, for example, in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the variations are of a far more extensive and serious nature. Quite starting differences appear, for example, between chapter 15 contained in the Papyrus of Ani (written in the Eighteenth Dynasty) and the Turin Papyrus (from the Twenty-sixth Dynasty or later). Whole clauses are inserted or left out, and the sense in corresponding columns of text is in some cases altogether different. Apart from divine superintendence of the transmission of the Hebrew text, there is no particular reason why the same phenomenon of divergence and

change would not appear between Hebrew manuscripts produced centuries apart. For example, even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (AD 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling. They do not affect the message of revelation in the slightest.” (Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p23-25)

The fact that the text has *not* changed over time gives us a very solid reason to trust it. However, there is more. Like the New Testament, the Old Testament makes many historical claims – claims about kings, kingdoms, cities, and people. These historical, testable claims have been found to be accurate time and time again:

“The Hebrew Scriptures contain the names of 26 or more foreign kings whose names have been found on documents contemporary with the kings. The names of most of these kings are found to be spelled on their own monuments, or in documents from the time in which they reigned in the same manner that they are spelled in the documents of the Old Testament. The changes in spelling of others are in accordance with the laws of phonetic change as those laws were in operation at the time when the Hebrew Documents claim to have been written. In the case of two or three names only are there letters, or spellings, that cannot as yet

be explained with certainty; but even in these few cases it cannot be shown that the spelling in the Hebrew text is wrong. Contrariwise, the names of many of the kings of Judah and Israel are found on the Assyrian contemporary documents with the same spelling as that which we find in the present Hebrew text.

“In 144 cases of transliteration from Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Moabite into Hebrew and in 40 cases of the opposite, or 184 in all, the evidence shows that for 2300 to 2900 years the text of the proper names in the Hebrew Bible has been transmitted with the most minute accuracy. That the original scribes should have written them with such close conformity to correct philological principles is a wonderful proof of their thorough care and scholarship; further, that the Hebrew text should have been transmitted by copyists through so many centuries is a phenomenon unequaled in the history of literature.” (Wilson, *A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament*, p64, 71)

This phenomenal accuracy and lack of change over time did not happen by accident. The copyists who were responsible for making copies of the Old Testament took extreme care to avoid errors. They followed a very strict set of rules:

- Each column must have no less than 48 and no more than 60 lines. The entire copy must first be lined.
- No word or letter could be written from memory. The scribe must have an authentic copy before him, and he must read and pronounce each word aloud before writing it.



- Revisions must be made within 30 days after the work was finished; otherwise it was worthless. If three mistakes were found on any page then the entire manuscript was condemned.
- Every word and every letter was counted. If a letter was omitted, an extra letter inserted, or if one letter touched another, the manuscript was condemned and destroyed.

An incredibly exacting system was developed to check the validity of the text. It was so good that they could tell if *just one consonant* was left out of the entire Old Testament:

“[The Masoretes were well disciplined and treated the text] with the greatest imaginable reverence, and devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal slips. They counted, for example, the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book; they pointed out the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the whole Hebrew Bible, and made even more detailed calculations than these. 'Everything countable seem to be counted,' says Wheeler Robinson, and they made up mnemonics by which the various totals might be readily remembered.” (Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, p117)

“The scribes could tell if one consonant was left out of, say, the entire book of Isaiah or the entire Hebrew Bible. They built in so many safeguards that they knew when they finished that they had an exact copy.” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p112)

These people were serious about making an exact copy of the Old Testament. In fact, they were fanatical about it:

“A factor that runs throughout the above discussion of the Hebrew manuscript evidence is the Jewish reverence for the Scriptures. With respect to the Jewish Scriptures, however, it was not scribal accuracy alone that guaranteed their product. Rather, it was their almost superstitious reverence for the Bible. According to the Talmud, not only were there specifications for the kind of skins to be used and the size of the columns, but also the scribe was required to perform a religious ritual before writing the name of God. Rules governed the kind of ink used, dictated the spacing of words, and prohibited writing anything from memory. The lines – and even the letters – were counted methodically. If a manuscript was found to contain **even one mistake**, it was discarded and destroyed. This scribal formalism was responsible, at least in part, for the extreme care exercised in copying the Scriptures. It was also for this reason that there were only a few manuscripts (because the rules demanded the destruction of defective copies)” (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p552)

That last part is critical. Not only were defective copies destroyed, but older copies tended to be destroyed as well. This is because as a copy grew older it would get damaged, and since a damaged copy could not be trusted it was therefore only fit to be thrown away:

“The same extreme care which was devoted to

the transcription of manuscripts is also at the bottom of the disappearance of the earlier copies. When a manuscript had been copied with the exactitude prescribed by the Talmud, and had been duly verified, it was accepted as authentic and regarded as being of equal value with any other copy. If all were equally correct, *age gave no advantage to a manuscript*; on the contrary age was a positive disadvantage, since a manuscript was liable to become defaced or damaged in the lapse of time. A damaged or imperfect copy was at once condemned as unfit for use.

“Attached to each synagogue was a “Gheniza”, or lumber cupboard, in which defective manuscripts were laid aside; and from these receptacles some of the oldest manuscripts now extant have in modern times been recovered. Thus, far from regarding an older copy of the Scriptures as more valuable, the Jewish habit has been to prefer the newer, as being the most perfect and free from damage. The older copies, once consigned to the “Gheniza” naturally perished, either from neglect or from being deliberately burned when the “Gheniza” became overcrowded.

“The absence of very old copies of the Hebrew Bible need not, therefore, either surprise or disquiet us. If, to the causes already enumerated, we add the repeated persecutions (involving much destruction of property) to which the Jews have been subject, the disappearance of the ancient manuscripts is adequately accounted for, and those which

remain may be accepted as preserving which alone they profess to preserve – namely, the Masoretic text.” (Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, p43)

Even though the practice was to destroy old copies, there are some ancient copies that have survived over time. In fact, there are even copies of the Old Testament that predate the birth of Christ:

“...the most important documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls are copies of the Old Testament text dating from more than a century *before* the birth of Christ.” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p114)

The Isaiah scroll is dated to 125 BC (*Evidence for Christianity*, p115). Before the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, some people claimed that the Old Testament prophecies about Christ were added to the text after Christ's life and therefore could not be trusted. However, that claim is no longer valid. The prophecies about Christ were *not* inserted into the text at a later date; they were there all along – and Christ fulfilled them perfectly. The fact that we have copies of Bible prophecies that *predate the events*, coupled with the fact that they were fulfilled perfectly, goes very far to demonstrate that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be and can be trusted.

Time and time again the Bible is put to the test and found to be accurate. There was a time when historians dismissed large portions of the Old Testament as myth or fable, but that is no longer possible:

“In the nineteenth century, the Biblical critic could hold with good reason that there never was a Sargon, that the Hittites either did not

exist or were insignificant, that the patriarchal accounts had a late background, that the sevenfold lampstand of the tabernacle was a late concept, that the Davidic Empire was not as extensive as the Bible implied, that Belshazzar never existed, and that a host of other supposed errors and impossibilities existed in the Biblical record.

“Archaeological discoveries showed, on the contrary, that Sargon existed and lived in a palatial dwelling some twelve miles north of Nineveh, that the Hittites not only existed but were a significant people, that the background of the patriarchs fit the time indicated in the Bible, that the concept of a sevenfold lamp existed in the Early Iron Age, that a significant city given in the record of David's Empire lies far to the north, that Belshazzar existed and ruled over Babylon, and that a host of other supposed errors and contradictions are not errors at all.” (Free, “Archaeology and Higher Criticism”, 30, 31)

There was a time when people laughed at the idea that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Critics claimed that no such cities ever existed and that the whole story was just a myth. However, history has finally caught up with what the Bible said all along:

“The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was thought to be spurious until evidence revealed that all five of the cities mentioned in the Bible were in fact centers of commerce in the area and were geographically situated as the Scriptures describe. The biblical description of their

demise seems to be no less accurate. Evidence points to earthquake activity and to layers of the earth being disrupted and even hurled high into the air. Bitumen is plentiful there, and an accurate description would be that brimstone (bituminous pitch) was hurled down on those cities that had rejected God. There is evidence that the layers of sedimentary rock have been molded together by intense heat. . ." (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p50-51)

History has also shown that the city of Jericho was destroyed just as the Bible said:

"During the excavations of Jericho (1930-36), Garstang found something so startling that he and two other members of the team prepared and signed a statement describing what was found. In reference to these findings Garstang says: "As to the main fact, then, there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over their ruins into the city. Why so unusual? Because the walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards. And yet in Joshua 6:20 we read, 'The wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city!' The walls were made to fall outward." (Garstang, *The Foundations of Bible History; Joshua, Judges*, p146)

Historians once claimed that King David was just a myth. They have been proven wrong:

“A remarkable inscription from the ninth century BC that refers to both the [House of David], and to the [King of Israel]. This is the first time that the name of David has been found in any ancient inscription outside the Bible. That the inscription refers not simply to a [David] but to the House of David, the dynasty of the great Israelite king, is even more remarkable... this may be the oldest extra-biblical reference to Israel in Semitic script. If this inscription proves anything, it shows that both Israel and Judah, contrary to the claims of some scholarly biblical minimizers, were important kingdoms at this time.” (Biram, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 1994, p26)

In fact, not one historical find has ever demonstrated an error in the Bible:

“In every period of Old Testament history, we find that there is good evidence from archeology that the Scriptures speak the truth. In many instances, the Scriptures even reflect firsthand knowledge of the times and customs it describes. While many have doubted the accuracy of the Bible, time and continued research have consistently demonstrated that the Word of God is better informed than its critics.

“In fact, while thousands of finds from the ancient world support in broad outline and often in detail the biblical picture, not one incontrovertible find has ever contradicted the

Bible." (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p52)

Instead of disproving the Bible, archaeological finds are demonstrating that the Bible knew exactly what it was talking about all along. As new facts come to light about ancient cultures and customs, passages in the Bible suddenly start to make a lot more sense:

"Over 1,000 clay tablets were found in 1925 in the excavation of a Mesopotamian site known today as Yorgan Tepe. Subsequent work brought forth another 3,000 tablets and revealed the ancient site as "Nuzi." The tablets, written about 1500 BC, illuminate the background of the Biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. One instance will be cited: When Jacob and Rachel left the home of Laban, Rachel stole Laban's family images or 'teraphim.' When Laban discovered the theft, he pursued his daughter and son-in-law, and after a long journey overtook them (Genesis 31:19-23). Commentators have long wondered why he would go to such pains to recover images he could have replaced easily in the local shops. The Nuzi tablets record one instance of a son-in-law who possessed the family images having the right to lay legal claim to his father-in-law's property, a fact which explains Laban's anxiety. This and other evidence from the Nuzi tablets fits the background of the Patriarchal accounts into the early period when the patriarchs lived, and does not support the critical view – which holds that the accounts were written 1000 years after their time." (Free, *His Magazine*, May 1949,



p20)

For example, it may seem strange to us that Esau sold his birthright in exchange for food, but that's not unheard of. In that time period it was legally possible to do exactly that:

“In one Nuzi tablet, there is a record of a man named Tupkitilla, who transferred his inheritance rights concerning a grove to his brother, Kurpazah, in exchange for three sheep. Esau used a similar technique in exchanging his inheritance rights to obtain the desired pottage.”  
(Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p68-69)

Nor was it all that strange for Joseph to become the prime minister of Egypt. There were other people from ancient times who had similar things happen to them:

“Joseph's being lifted from slavery to prime minister of Egypt has caused some critical eyebrows to rise, but we have some archaeological accounts of similar things happening in the Land of the Nile.

“A Canaanite Meri-Ra, became armor-bearer to Pharaoh; another Canaanite, Ben-Mat-Ana, was appointed to the high position of interpreter; and a Semite, Yanhamu or Jauhamu, became deputy to Amenhotep III, with charge over the granaries of the delta, a responsibility similar to that of Joseph before and during the famine.

“When Pharaoh appointed Joseph prime minister, he was given a ring and a gold chain or collar which is normal procedure for Egyptian office promotions.” (Vos, *Genesis and*

*Archaeology*, p106)

“Asiatic slaves in Egypt, attached to the households of officials, are well-known in later Middle-Kingdom Egypt (c. 1850-1700 BC) and Semites could rise to high position (even the throne, before the Hyksos period), as did the chancellor Hur. Joseph's career would fall easily enough into the period of the late thirteenth and early fifteenth dynasties. The role of dreams is, of course, well-known at all periods. From Egypt, we have a dream-reader's textbook in a copy of c. 1300 BC, originating some centuries earlier; such works are known in first-millennium Assyria also.” (Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World*, 74)

As strange as Jacob's life may seem to us, it is actually supported by the historical record:

“Other [Nuzi] texts show that a bride was ordinarily chosen for a son by his father, as the patriarchs did; that a man had to pay a dowry to his father-in-law, or to work for his father-in-law if he could not afford the dowry, as poor Jacob had to do; that the orally expressed will of a father could not be changed after it had been pronounced, as in Isaac's refusal to change the blessings pronounced over Jacob even though they had been obtained by deception; that a bride ordinarily received from her father a slave girl as a personal maid, as Leah and Rachel did when they were married to Jacob; that the theft of cult objects or of a god was punishable by death, which was why Jacob consented to the

death of the one with whom the stolen gods of his father-in-law were found; that the strange relationship between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar is vividly illustrated by the laws of the ancient Assyrians and Hittites” (Horn, *Christianity Today*, June 21 1968, p14)

Another item that historians use to have a problem with was the Bible's account of Belshazzar. Historians have since discovered that it wasn't an error at all:

“Records found in Babylon's famous hanging gardens have shown that Jehoiachin and his five sons were given a monthly ration and a place to live and were treated well (2 Kings 25:27-30). The name of Belshazzar caused problems because there was not only no mention of him but no room for him in the list of Babylonian kings. However, Nabodonius left a record that he appointed his son, Belshazzar (Daniel 5), to reign for a few years in his absence. Hence, Nabodonius was still king, but Belshazzar ruled in the capital. Also, the edict of Cyrus as recorded by Ezra seemed to fit the picture of Isaiah's prophecies too well to be real, until a cylinder was found that confirmed the decree in all the important details” (Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p52)

The bottom line is that not only has the Bible's text been preserved over time, but its contents have been put to the test and demonstrated to be accurate time and time again:

“In summary, archaeological discoveries show at point after point that the biblical record is

confirmed and commended as trustworthy. This confirmation is not confined to a few general instances.” (Free, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113, p225)

Why can we trust the Bible? Because it has been demonstrated to be trustworthy. If the Bible were full of mistakes and inaccuracies then it would make sense to doubt its message, but instead we find it to be rock-solid. This gives us a good rational basis for believing that it can be trusted in *all* matters.

# The Case for Jesus

As we discussed in the previous lesson, Christianity is based completely on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Unlike some other religions, it is not about “inner peace” or the search for nirvana. In order for the gospel to be true, Jesus has to have been a real, historical figure who actually lived, who died on the cross, and who was then raised back to life. If those things did not happen – if Jesus is not a historical fact – then Christianity falls apart and is powerless to save anyone. It is not enough for Jesus to be an inspiring story or an uplifting myth; in order for anyone to be saved, the Bible's story of Jesus has to be *true*. This is how one person put it:

“True Christianity, the Christianity of the New Testament documents, is absolutely dependent upon history. At the heart of New Testament faith is the assertion that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a real event in time and space, i.e., as historical realities, are the indispensable foundations of Christian faith. To my mind, then, Christianity is best defined as the recitation of, the celebration of, and the participation in God's acts in history, which as the New Testament writings emphasize have found their culmination in Jesus Christ.” (Hagner, *New Testament Criticism and Interpretation*, p73-74)

The gospel depends upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Everything falls apart if Jesus never existed, or if

He was not crucified, or if He was not God, or if He never rose from the dead. In other words, if the Bible's account of Jesus Christ is not true then there is no gospel.

So what does history have to say about Jesus? We know that the Bible has a great deal to say about Him, but is there any evidence *outside* of the Bible to indicate that Jesus was a real, historical figure?

The answer is a resounding yes. Even secular historians will admit that Jesus really existed, and that his existence is every bit as certain as the existence of men such as Julius Caesar:

“Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth', but they do not do so on the grounds of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories.” (Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable*, p72, 119)

Now, this is not to say that all historians actually believe that Jesus was God. What it does mean is that the historical existence of Jesus Christ is beyond dispute. The historical record is clear:

“No serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus.” (Betz, *What Do We Know About Jesus*, p9)

The account of Jesus that people are most familiar with is the one found in the Scriptures. However, the Bible is not the only historical document that talks about Jesus. There are other accounts of Jesus that can be found in the historical record, and in this lesson we are going to take a look at a number of them.

# The Historical Record

The Roman historian **Cornelius Tacitus** (who lived from AD 55 – 120) has been called the greatest historian of ancient Rome. He lived during the reigns of more than a half-dozen emperors, and he is highly respected for his integrity (Habermas, VHCELJ, 87). When Tacitus wrote about Emperor Nero, he alluded to the death of Christ and to the existence of Christians at Rome:

“But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. 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: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.” (Annals XV. 44)

Tacitus not only testifies that Christ actually existed, but that He was put to death by Pontius Pilate. This is very valuable information, for it speaks against those who claim that Christ was not a real person. Tacitus also refers to a “pernicious superstition”, which is a reference to the Christian belief that Christ rose from the dead. He then goes on to say that Christians

were persecuted (the superstition was “repressed for a time”), but that the religion flourished in the face of persecution. All of this agrees with the account of the early church that we find in the book of Acts. Tacitus even mentions the fact that this “superstition” made its way to Rome – which agrees with what we find in the New Testament.

Another person who mentioned Christ is **Lucian of Samosata**, who was a Greek satirist of the latter half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Although Lucian despised Christians, he never argued that Christ did not exist:

“The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguishing personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account ... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.” (Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13)

Not only does Lucian agree that Christ really existed, but he even testifies that Christ was crucified. These things are taken as historical facts. Lucian does not dispute them or try to argue that there never was such a person as Christ.

In Acts 18:2, Luke records the fact that Claudius expelled all of the Jews from Rome. This event was corroborated by the



Roman historian **Suetonius**, who also mentions the person of Christ:

“Suetonius was a Roman historian and a court official under Hadrian and an annalist of the imperial house. In his Life of Claudius (25.4) he said 'As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [another spelling of Christus], he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.”

But that's not all. In Mark 15:33 we are told that when Christ was crucified, there was darkness over the land from the sixth hour to the ninth hour. If that event really happened then you would expect to find some mention of it in the historical record – and that is exactly what we *do* find. The ancient historian **Thallus** mentions this period of darkness, and tries to claim that it was just a three-hour-long eclipse:

“One of the first secular writers who mentions Christ is Thallus. Dated perhaps around AD 52, Thallus “wrote a history of the Eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War to his own time” (Habermas, VHCELJ, 93). Unfortunately, his writing now exists only in fragments that have been cited by other writers. One such writer is Julius Africanus, a Christian who penned his work around AD 221. One interesting passage relates to a comment made by Thallus about the darkness that enveloped the land during the late afternoon hours when Jesus died on the cross. As Africanus reports: “Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away the darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonably, as it seems to me

(unreasonably, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died)'" (Julius Africanus, Chronography, 18.1)

The problem with Thallus' argument is that, as Julius points out, a solar eclipse *cannot* take place during a full moon. Solar eclipses can only happen when the moon is between the Sun and the Earth, which is called a *new moon*. A full moon occurs when the moon is *opposite* the sun. Thallus' explanation of this event is ridiculous and obviously wrong.

What's really significant is that this period of darkness that *just happened* to coincide with the crucifixion of Christ was well-known, and the ancient world found themselves struggling to explain it:

"This reference shows that the Gospel account of the darkness that fell upon the land during Christ's crucifixion was well known and required a naturalistic explanation from non-Christians. Thallus did not doubt that Jesus had been crucified and that an unusual event had occurred in nature that required an explanation. What occupied his mind was the task of coming up with a different interpretation. The basic facts were not called into question." (Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable*, p113)

In other words, the reality of Christ was not questioned – nor was the fact of His crucifixion, or the fact of the period of darkness. No one during that era tried to argue that it was all just a myth or a fairy tale.

Another ancient person who record this period of darkness was **Phlegon**:

“Another secular authority, Phlegon, wrote a history called *Chronicles*. While this work has been lost, Julius Africanus preserved a small fragment of it in his writing. Like Thallus, Phlegon confirms that darkness came upon the earth at Jesus' crucifixion, and he, too, explains it as the result of a solar eclipse: 'During the time of Tiberius Caesar an eclipse of the sun occurred during the full moon'" (Africanus, *Chronography*, 18.1)

**Origen** mentioned it as well:

“Aside from Africanus, Phlegon's reference to this event is also mentioned by the third-century Christian apologist Origen (*Contra Celsum*, 2.14, 33, 59) and the sixth-century writer Philopoh (*De. Opif. Mund. II 21*)” (McDowell/Wilson, *He Walked Among Us*, p36)

As you can see, this strange period of darkness was every bit as puzzling to the ancient world as one might expect.

The fame of Jesus can be seen in a letter that was written sometime after AD 70 by **Mara Bar-Serapion**. This man was a Syrian, and he wrote a letter from prison to his son to encourage him to pursue wisdom. In his letter he compared Jesus to the philosophers Socrates and Pythagoras:

“What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the

Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; He lived on in the teaching which He had given.” (Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable*, p114)

Now, this man was definitely not a Christian. Not only did he put Jesus on the same level as Socrates and Pythagoras, but he also thought that Christ lived on through His teachings instead of *through His bodily resurrection*. Nevertheless, this man did not question the fact that Christ actually lived. He believed that Jesus was every bit as real as Socrates and Pythagoras.

There are also Jewish records that testify to the reality of Christ. The **Babylonian Talmud** is a set of documents that were collected during the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries (AD). The Talmud records the fact that Jesus was executed for “sorcery” and for “leading Israel astray”. It even records the fact that He was killed on the eve of the Passover:

“It has been taught: On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu. And an announcer went out, in front of him, for forty days (saying): 'He is going to be stoned, because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor, let him come and plead in his behalf.' But, not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of Passover.”

(Sanhedrin 43a, cf. *t. Sanh.* 10:11; *y. Sanh.* 7.12; *Tg. Esther* 7:9).

“Yeshu” translates through Greek to English as “Jesus”. Some other versions of this passage refer to him as being a Nazarene, which makes the connection even stronger. It's also worth noting that the word “hanged” is another way to refer to crucifixion:

**Luke 23:39:** “And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.”

**Galatians 3:13:** “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:”

The fact that the Talmud states that the crucifixion occurred “on the eve of Passover” agrees with the Biblical account:

**John 19:14:** “And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!”

The Talmud affirms them fact that Jesus actually lived, that the Jewish authorities were involved in His sentencing, and that He was crucified on the eve of the Passover. It even refers to the miracles of Christ by claiming that He was a sorcerer, which meant they accused Him of using demonic power to do His work. That happens to be exactly the response that the Bible records:

**Mark 3:22:** “And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by

the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.”

The Bible says that the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of using demonic power to work miracles, and the Talmud records exactly the same thing. Once again we find that the historical record agrees with the Biblical account.

Interestingly, the Babylonian Talmud also attempts to debunk the virgin birth of Christ:

...the Babylonian Talmud states, “R. Shimeon ben Azzi said [concerning Jesus]: 'I found a genealogical roll in Jerusalem wherein was recorded, Such-an-one is a bastard of an adulteress’” (b.Yebamoth 49a; m. Yebam. 4:13). In yet another passage we find, “His mother was Miriam, a women's hairdresser. As they say ... 'this one strayed from her husband’” (b.Sabb. 104b). In still another passage we are told that Mary, “who was the descendant of princes and governors, played the harlot with carpenters” (b. Sanh. 106a).

Here we find the Jewish authorities trying to explain away the obvious miracle of the virgin birth of Christ. The reference to “princes and governors” refers to the lineage of Mary, who was a descendant of King David. The mention of “carpenters” refers to Joseph, who was a carpenter. The Jews are saying that since Joseph was not Christ's father, Mary must have committed adultery. We find the same argument being made by the Pharisees in the Bible:

**John 8:41b:** “. . . Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.”

The fact that the Talmud would even bother to offer this false argument must mean that the virgin birth of Christ was public knowledge, and the Jewish authorities felt they had to make some kind of response. It's worth noting that the Talmud does *not* try to argue that Jesus never existed at all.

Another person who testified about Jesus was **Clement**, who was the bishop of Rome during the end of the first century. In order to settle a dispute at Corinth he wrote a letter called *Corinthians*. In that letter, he said:

“The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order. Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe.”  
(*Corinthians*, 42)

This passage demonstrates that the gospel came from Jesus Christ, who appointed and sent out the apostles. The apostles then went all over the world to preach the gospel and set up churches. This agrees with the account of the early Church that we find in the book of Acts.

**Ignatius** (AD 35 – AD 107), the bishop of Antioch and a disciple of Peter, Paul, and John, also testified to the existence of Christ. While on the way to be executed in Rome he wrote seven

letters. Here are some of the things that he had to say about Jesus:

“Jesus Christ who was of the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe on Him . . .” (*Trallians*, 9)

“He is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, but Son of God by the Divine will and power, truly born of a virgin and baptized by John that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him, truly nailed up in the flesh for our sakes under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch (of which fruit are we – that is, of His most blessed passion); that He might set up an ensign unto all ages through His resurrection.” (*Smyrneans*, 1)

“Be ye fully persuaded concerning the birth and the passion and the resurrection, which took place in the time of the governorship of Pontius Pilate; for these things were truly and certainly done by Jesus Christ our hope.” (*Magnesians*, 11)

Ignatius was obviously convinced that Jesus was a real person, who was born of a virgin, sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, crucified, and then raised from the dead. He had no doubts about the reality of Jesus Christ – and he lived during the lifetime of the apostles themselves.

Another disciple of the apostles was **Quadratus**, who was



the bishop of Athens. Quadratus (who died in AD 129) was one of the earliest apologists. Although his defense of the faith has been lost, the Church historian Eusebius (AD 260 - 340) preserved all that remains of Quadratus's defense of the faith to the Roman Emperor Hadrian (c. AD 125):

“The deeds of our Savior were always before you, for they were true miracles; those that were healed, those that were raised from the dead, who were seen, not only when healed and when raised, but were always present. They remained living a long time, not only whilst our Lord was on earth, but likewise when he had left the earth. So that some of them have also lived to our own times.” (Eusebius, IV:III).

As you can see, Quadratus affirms the actual existence of Jesus through the historicity of His miracles. In his argument Quadratus makes a number of key points:

“(1) The facticity of Jesus' miracles could be checked by interested persons, since they were done publicly. With regard to the actual types of miracles, (2) some were healed and (3) some were raised from the dead. (4) There were eyewitnesses of these miracles at the time they occurred. (5) Many of those healed or raised were still alive when Jesus 'left the earth' and some were reportedly still alive in Quadratus' own time.” (Habermas, *The Verdict of History*, p144).

This testifies to the fact that the miracles of Jesus were widely known, that there were many eyewitnesses, and that it was easily possible to confirm the miraculous accounts – not only

by talking with people who had seen them, but by talking to the people who had been involved.

As you can see, there is actually quite a bit of evidence in the historical record that affirms the existence of Jesus. The case for the existence of Jesus is quite solid:

“The result of the examination of the sources outside the New Testament that bear directly or indirectly on our knowledge of Jesus is to confirm his historical existence, his unusual powers, the devotion of his followers, the continued existence of the movement after his death at the hands of the Roman governor in Jerusalem, and the penetration of Christianity into the upper strata of society in Rome itself by the later first century.” (Kee, *What Can We Know About Jesus?*, p19)

The Bible's account of the life of Christ is not some sort of myth that cannot be verified. In fact, the historical record corroborates virtually all of the key points of the life of Christ:

“The Non-Christian sources establish beyond reasonable doubt the following minimum: (1) Jesus was truly a historical person . . . (2) Jesus lived in Palestine in the first century of our era. (3) The Jewish leadership was involved in the death of Jesus. (4) Jesus was crucified by the Romans under the governorship of Pontius Pilate. (5) Jesus' ministry was associated with wonder/sorcery.” (Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ*, p49)

“Even if we did not have the New Testament of Christian writings, we would be able to

conclude from such non-Christian writings as Josephus, the Talmud, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger that: (1) Jesus was a Jewish teacher; (2) many people believed that he performed healings and exorcisms; (3) he was rejected by the Jewish leaders; (4) he was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius; (5) despite this shameful death, his followers, who believed that he was still alive, spread beyond Palestine so that there were multitudes of them in Rome by AD 64; (6) all kinds of people from the cities and countryside – men and women, slave and free – worshiped him as God by the beginning of the second century.” (Yamauchi, *Jesus Under Fire*, 221, 222)

The bottom line is that we have many good reasons to believe that Jesus actually existed. He is not just a myth or a legend; He is a true part of history.



# Who Was Jesus?

In the last lesson we took a look at what the historical record has to say about Jesus. We saw that there is a lot of evidence *outside* the Bible that proves that Jesus Christ really existed. He is *not* a myth or a fairy tale, but is every bit as real as Julius Caesar or Socrates. There cannot be any doubt that Jesus Christ is real.

However, that brings up another question: just who was Jesus? Was He merely a good teacher, as many people have claimed, or was He more than that? This is a question that each person must face:

“The challenge posed to every succeeding generation by the New Testament witness to Jesus is not so much, 'What did he teach?' but 'Who is he?' And what is his relevance for us?”  
(McGarth, *Understanding Jesus*, p16)

The significance of Jesus is impossible to overstate. He is by far the most important person who has ever lived. The impact He has had on the world is absolutely staggering. No one else even comes close:

“This Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced

effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times." (Philip Schaff, *The Person of Christ*, 1913)

But who was this man? Many people have claimed that Christ was just a good man who gave wise advice and who helped the poor. But that is *not* what Jesus claimed. He never said that He was simply a good teacher; instead He claimed to be God. This stands in stark contrast to all other religious figures. No other leader of any major religion has ever claimed to be God, or has managed to convince so many people that He actually *was* God:

"Not one *recognized* religious leader, not Moses, Paul, Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, etc., has ever claimed to be God; that is, with the exception of Jesus Christ. Christ is the only religious leader who has ever claimed to be deity and the only individual ever who has convinced a great portion of the world that He is God." (Schultz, *The Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, p209)

Some people teach that Jesus never claimed to be God. They say that although His followers revered Him as God, Jesus never took that step. In this lesson we are going to take a look at the evidence and discover that Jesus really *did* claim to be God. In fact, that is the very claim that resulted in His crucifixion.

# His Teachings

One of the things that often gets overlooked is that His teachings were given from a godlike perspective. This is easy to miss if you're not looking for it, but Jesus did not teach the way that others do. When Jesus finished giving the Sermon on the Mount, the crowd who heard him was astonished. Matthew explains why:

**Matthew 7:28:** “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:  
29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”

The reason Jesus' teachings were so astonishing is because He taught *as if He was in charge*. He acted as if everything that He said was final and beyond question:

“His teachings were ultimate, final – above those of Moses and the prophets. He never added any afterthoughts or revisions; He never retracted or changed; He never guessed, 'supposed,' or spoke with any uncertainty. This is all so contrary to human teachers and teachings.”  
(Meldau, *101 Proofs of the Deity of Christ from the Gospels*, p5)

For example, no other teacher would dare to put their own teachings above that of the Mosaic Law. Jesus, however, did exactly that:

**Matthew 5:21:** “Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and

whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

**Matthew 5:27:** “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

**Matthew 5:31:** “It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.”

It's no wonder that the crowd was astonished! No other teacher would even consider saying “Yes, that's what the Law says, but I have something even greater to tell you.” Jesus didn't teach the way a scribe would; instead He taught as if He was in charge. He put Himself on a different level – and that is exactly what led to His crucifixion.



# His Trial

When Jesus was arrested and brought before the High Priest, He was asked a question. Christ's response to this question led to His execution:

**Mark 14:60:** “And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?

61 But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?

62 And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

63 Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?

64 Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.”

As you can see, Jesus was sentenced to death for blasphemy, and that charge was leveled against Him *because He claimed to be God*. Jesus' claim to divinity is what resulted in His death. In fact, that is what this trial was all about. The court wasn't really that concerned about anything Jesus had done. The real question that faced the religious leadership was the *identity* of Jesus:

“Unique among criminal trials is this one in which not the actions but the identity of the accused is the issue. The criminal charge laid against Christ, the confession or testimony or,

rather, act in presence of the court, on which He was convicted, the interrogation by the Roman governor and the inscription and proclamation on His cross at the time of execution are all concerned with the one question of Christ's real identity and dignity. 'What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?' (Linton, *The Sanhedrin Verdict*, p7)

Even Pilate was concerned about the identity of the man who stood before him:

**Luke 23:3:** "And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it."

In our day it may sound like Jesus is being evasive in His answer to Pilate, but that's actually not the case. In ancient times that was actually the polite way to respond to a very serious question:

"These answers are really identical. The formulae 'Thou hast said' or 'Ye say that I am,', which to modern ears sound evasive, had no such connotation to the contemporary Jewish mind. 'Thou sayest' was the traditional form in which a cultivated Jew replied to a question of grave or sad import. Courtesy forbade a direct 'yes' or 'no.'" (Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p26)

Looking back at the passage, we can see that the High Priest was very upset with the answer that Jesus gave. In order to understand why His assertion was considered to be blasphemy, we need to take a look at the Old Testament. Jesus' response was

actually a reference to two different Old Testament passages:

**Psalm 110:1:** "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

**Daniel 7:13:** "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

In other words, Jesus claimed that He was the one who would sit at the right hand of God, that God would give Him an eternal kingdom, and that all people and nations would worship Him for the rest of time. By doing this He was claiming to be far more than just a man. He was making a clear and unmistakable claim to divinity:

"Jesus may even be indicting his interrogators by this way of phrasing things. But he does not stop here. He goes on to add, "and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62b). This reply combines allusions to Daniel 7:13 and Psalm 110:1. In this context, "Son of man" means far more than a simple human being. Jesus is describing himself as the "one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven" who "approached the Ancient of Days

and was led into his presence” and given authority and power over all humanity, leading to universal worship and everlasting dominion (Daniel 7:13-4). This claim to be far more than a mere mortal is probably what elicited the verdict of blasphemy from the Jewish high court.” (Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, p341-43)

Moreover, the way that Jesus made this claim was very clever. By handling the questioning as He did, He got the court to admit who He was before they sentenced Him to death:

“The Sanhedrin caught all three points. They summed them up in one question. “Art thou then the Son of God?” Their question invited an affirmative answer. It was the equivalent of a declarative statement on their part. So Jesus simply replied, “Ye say that I am.” Therefore, He made them admit to His identity before they formally found Him guilty of death. It was a clever strategy on Jesus' part. He would die not merely upon His own admission to deity but also upon theirs. . . According to them there was no need for other testimony. For they had heard Him themselves. So they condemned Him by the words “of his own mouth.” But He also condemned them by their words. They could not say that they did not proclaim the Son of God guilty of death.” (Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke*, p322)

The point that I want to draw out of this is that Jesus really *did* claim to be God. In fact, *that is why He was crucified!* Not only do we have His own testimony for that, but we also

have the testimony of the court that sentenced Him to death:

“But since they condemn the Savior as a blasphemer by reason of his own confession, the judges prove officially and on oath that Jesus confessed not only that he was the theocratical Messiah King and human son of God, but also that he was the divine Messiah and the essential Son of God, and that He on account of this confession was put to death.” (Felder, *Christ and the Critics*, vol. 1, p306)

The Bible could not be more clear about this point:

**John 19:7:** "The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."

Of course, this is not the first time Jesus made this claim. Jesus made that same claim all throughout His ministry.

## Equality With God

One of the many astonishing things that Jesus said was that He was equal to God:

**John 10:25:** “Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.

26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,

and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

32 Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?

33 The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God."

The claim to divinity in verse 30 was so clear that the Jews immediately tried to kill Jesus. They understood exactly what He was saying. Jesus claimed to be equal with God, to be on the same level as God, and to be the same sort of being as God. That is why they immediately tried to stone Him:

"The Jews could regard Jesus' word only as blasphemy, and they proceeded to take the judgment into their own hands. It was laid down in the Law that blasphemy was to be punished by stoning (Lev. 24:16). But these men were not allowing the due process of law to take their course. They were not preparing an indictment so that the authorities could take the requisite action. In their fury they were preparing to be judges and executioners in one. 'Again' will refer back to their previous attempt at stoning (John

8:59).” (Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, p524)

There was no doubt in *anyone's* mind that Jesus had just claimed to be God – and Jesus did not try to say that they had misunderstood Him. Christ said exactly what He meant to say.

On top of that, Jesus kept referring to God as “*my Father*”. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray, He commanded them to call God “*our Father*”. But Jesus Himself never did that. Instead He acted as if His relationship to God was very different from everyone else's:

**John 5:17:** “But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.

18 Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.”

Not only did Jesus claim to have a special and unique relationship with God, but He also put His works on the same level as the works of God:

“Jesus distinctly says, 'My Father'. Not 'our Father,' a claim to a peculiar relation to the Father. . . Jesus put himself on par with God's activity and thus justifies His healing on the Sabbath.” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p82-83)

As we can see, the Jews were not pleased. They understood what Jesus was claiming, and on the basis of His claim to divinity they sought to kill Him:

“The Jews were angry because of Jesus' violation

of the Sabbath, but they were furious when he was so presumptuous as to claim equality with the Father. This claim of Jesus widened the breach between his critics and himself, for they understood that by it he was asserting his deity. His explanation shows that he did not claim identity with the Father as one person, but he asserted his unity with the Father in a relationship that could be described as sonship.” (Tenney, *The Gospel According to John*, p64)

But Jesus went even further. He even claimed that the holy name of God belonged to Him, and that He was the great I AM of the Old Testament:

**John 8:58:** “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.  
59 Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.”

Jesus could not have been any more clear. Not only did He claim to be an eternal being who existed long before the patriarch Abraham was ever born, but He even claimed to be God. On top of that, He said these things with an oath:

“He said unto them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you...' Prefaced by a double Amen – the strongest oath – our Lord claims the incommunicable name of the Divine Being. The Jews recognize His meaning, and, horrified, they seek to stone Him.” (Spurr, *Jesus is God*, p54)

To those not familiar with the Old Testament, what Jesus



said may not seem that startling. However, Jesus was doing nothing less than claiming the holy name of God for Himself. In the Old Testament, when Moses asked God for His name, this is what God said:

**Exodus 3:13:** “And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?  
14 And God said unto Moses, I Am That I Am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I Am hath sent me unto you.”

God told Moses that His name was I AM – and Jesus claimed to be the eternally existent I AM. This was as clear a claim to divinity as any Jew could possibly make. Nor is there any question that the crowd had simply misunderstood Him:

“That we must also understand the expression 'I am' as intended to declare the full deity of Christ is clear from the fact that Jesus did not attempt an explanation. He did not try to convince the Jews that they had misunderstood Him, but rather He repeated the statement several times on various occasions.” (Campbell, *The Greek Terminology for the Deity of Christ*, p12-13)

But Jesus didn't stop there. He even told the Jews that He was due the same honor as God Himself:

**John 5:23:** “That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.”

Jesus was very clear about this: He said that people should honor Him *just as they honor God*. Not only that, but those who dishonored Him were actually dishonoring God! Claiming that you deserve the same treatment as God is *no different from claiming to be God*.

Jesus even said that knowing Him was the same thing as knowing God:

**John 8:19:** “Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.”

**John 14:8:** “Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?”

All of these statements are clear claims to divinity. Jesus taught that knowing Him was the same thing as knowing God, and seeing Him was the same thing as seeing God. Jesus was very clear about who He claimed to be.

## Worship

When Cornelius tried to worship Peter, the apostle immediately stopped him:

**Acts 10:25:** “And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.”

Likewise, when John tried to worship an angel, the angel immediately stopped him:

**Revelation 19:10:** “And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

The reason they were so quick to stop themselves from being worshiped is because God is the only one who may be worshiped. The Lord was very clear about this. God is a jealous God, and He outlaws all worship of anyone or anything except Himself:

**Exodus 20:3:** “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.”

**Isaiah 42:8:** “I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.”

Even Jesus taught that only God was worthy of worship:

**Matthew 4:10:** “Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

It is therefore amazing to see that all sorts of people worshiped Jesus, and Jesus *never tried to stop any of them*. Instead He accepted their worship:

**Matthew 8:2:** “And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

**John 9:35:** “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

36 He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

37 And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.

38 And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.”

**Matthew 14:33:** “Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”

**John 20:28:** “And Thomas answered and said

unto him, My Lord and my God."

Even though worship is reserved for God alone, Jesus never rebuked anyone for worshiping Him. Even though Thomas actually called Him God, Jesus never rebuked him for it. Not only did Jesus claim to be God, but He also *accepted worship from men*. That is another clear claim to divinity.

## Forgiveness

As if all of these other claims were not enough, Jesus also forgave people's sins:

**Mark 2:5:** "When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

6 But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,

7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)

11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house."

The reason this is a claim to divinity is because the scribes were right – God is the only one who can forgive sins. You see, sins are offenses against God, and the only person who can forgive an offense is the one who has been injured. If Bob hits Frank, the only person who can forgive Bob is Frank. Sally can't come along and forgive Bob because Sally isn't the injured party. *Only the injured party can offer forgiveness.* When Jesus forgave sins, He was claiming a divine prerogative. He was acting as God and claiming to be God:

“None on earth has either authority or right to forgive sin. None could forgive sin save the One against whom all have sinned. When Christ forgave sin, as He certainly did, He was not exercising a human prerogative. Since none but God can forgive sins, it is conclusively demonstrated that Christ, since He forgave sins, is God, and being God, is from everlasting.” (Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 5, p21)

But Jesus didn't stop there. He went on to claim that He was the one who would judge all of mankind for their actions:

**John 5:26:** “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;  
27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.”

That is a truly remarkable thing to say. Jesus claimed that He was the Judge of men, and that their eternal destinies would depend on their treatment of Him and their acceptance of His words! Those who believed on Him would be saved, and those who rejected Him would be condemned. Only God could say

such a thing:

“Not only will Jesus be the judge, but the criterion of judgment will be men's attitude to him as shown in their treatment of his 'brethren' or their response to his word . . . It is hard to exaggerate the magnitude of this claim. Imagine a minister addressing his congregation in these terms today: 'Listen attentively to my words. Your eternal destiny depends on it. I shall return at the end of the world to judge you, and your fate will be settled according to your obedience to me.' Such a preacher would not long escape the attention of the police or the psychiatrists.” (Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p31-32)

Telling people that He would return at the end of time to judge all of mankind for their actions, and that their eternal destinies depended on their treatment of Him, was a very clear claim to divinity.

## The Olivet Discourse

On top of all of that, Jesus made these claims *while facing death*. When Jesus was on the way to be arrested by an angry mob, He told His disciples this:

**John 14:1:** “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

Even though Jesus was about to be executed, He *still* told His disciples to believe on Him. Even though Jesus was about to die, He claimed that He would *come back for them*. That is a truly remarkable thing to do:

“He was doomed to death, the death that overtakes all men. Nevertheless, He had the audacity to demand that they make Him an object of faith. He made Himself the key to the question of destiny, and clearly stated that their future depended on His work. He promised to prepare a place for them, and to return to claim them.” (Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, p213)

It is an astounding thing to say “Yes, I'm about to die, but don't worry – I'll return from death and will be back for you.” Anyone who says something like that is claiming to be far more than a mere mortal.

## The Son of God

There is another claim to divinity that doesn't get nearly as much attention. Throughout Jesus' ministry He often claimed to be the Son of God:

**Luke 22:70:** “Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am.”



**John 3:18:** “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

**John 9:35:** “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

**John 10:36:** “Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?”

To us this claim may seem unclear or uncertain, but there was nothing uncertain about it. The claim to be the Son of God was nothing less than a claim to be divine:

“Though the phrase 'son of' can mean 'offspring of,' it also carries the meaning, 'of the order of.' Thus in the Old Testament 'sons of the prophets' meant of the order of prophets (I Kings 20:35), and 'sons of the singers' meant of the order of the singers (Neh. 12:28). The designation 'Son of God' when used of our Lord means of the order of God and is a strong and clear claim to full Deity.” (Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p248)

By claiming to be the Son of God, Jesus could not have been any clearer if He had said, “Yes, I am God Himself”.

# Who Was Jesus?

As we can see, Jesus claimed to be God many times during His ministry, and He made that claim in many different ways. In fact, His persistent claim to divinity is the very reason He was condemned to death at His trial. There can be no doubt about it: *Jesus claimed to be God.*

Now, there are many people who reject the idea that Jesus was God but accept Him as a good man or a great teacher. The problem is that it is impossible to be a great teacher *and* claim to be God at the same time. Claiming to be divine is a very serious thing to do:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either 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 mad man or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”  
(Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p40-41)

Anyone who claims to be God is either a liar, a lunatic, or

God Himself. Those are your only three choices. Now, there are some who may say that Jesus was just a liar, but that creates its own set of problems. If Jesus was a liar, then not only did He mislead millions of people (many of them to terrible deaths), but His foolish lie cost Him His own life:

“If, when Jesus made His claims, He knew He was not God, then He was lying. But if He was a liar, then He was also a hypocrite, because He told others to be honest, whatever the cost, while He, at the same time, was teaching and living a colossal lie.

“More than that, He was a demon, because He deliberately told others to trust Him for their eternal destiny. If He could not back up His claims and knew they were false, then He was unspeakably evil in deliberately misleading so many followers down through the centuries.

“Last, He would also be a fool, because it was His claims to deity that led to His crucifixion. . .

“If Jesus was a liar, a con man, and therefore an evil, foolish man, then how can we explain the fact that He left us with the most profound moral instruction and powerful moral example that anyone has ever left? Could a deceiver – an imposter of monstrous proportions – teach such unselfish ethical truths and live such a morally exemplary life as Jesus did? The very notion is incredible.” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p380)

Is it reasonable to believe that a depraved liar could lead the most amazingly moral and selfless life that the world was ever seen? Is it likely that anyone could exhibit the incredible

integrity of Christ while proclaiming such a terrible lie, and then to continue lying even when it meant a terrible and painful death? How could a depraved liar – a true demon from Hell – possibly demonstrate such incredible integrity and love?

“It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character which through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love; has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments and conditions; has been not only the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive to its practice . . . The simple record of these three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists.” (Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, p8; Grounds, *The Reason for Our Hope*, p34)

It is simply *impossible* to look at the life of Christ and believe that He was a demonic liar. Yet, it's also obvious that He was not a madman who mistakenly believed that He was God. Jesus simply does not display any of the characteristics of the insane:

“This testimony, if not true, must be down right blasphemy or madness. The former hypothesis cannot stand a moment before the moral purity and dignity of Jesus, revealed in His every word and work, and acknowledged by universal consent. Self-deception in a matter so momentous, and with an intellect in all respects so clear and so sound, is equally out of the

question. How could He be an enthusiast or a madman who never lost the even balance of His mind, who sailed serenely over all the troubles and persecutions, as the sun above the clouds, who always returned the wisest answer to tempting questions, who calmly and deliberately predicted His death on the cross, His resurrection on the third day, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the founding of His Church, the destruction of Jerusalem – predictions which have been literally fulfilled? A character so original, so complete, so uniformly consistent, so perfect, so human and yet so high above all human greatness, can be neither a fraud nor a fiction.” (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, p109)

There is no doubt that Jesus claimed to be God. However, it is also clear that Jesus was not a liar, a madman, or an imposter. None of those characteristics fit the bill:

“The hypothesis of imposture is so revolting to moral as well as common sense, that its mere statement is its condemnation . . . No scholar of any decency and any self-respect would now dare to profess it openly. How, in the name of logic, common sense, and experience, could an imposter – that is a deceitful, selfish, depraved man – have invented, and consistently maintained from the beginning to end, the purest and noblest character known in history with the most perfect air of truth and reality? How could he have conceived and successfully carried out a plan of unparalleled beneficence, moral magnitude, and sublimity, and sacrificed

his own life for it, in the face of the strongest prejudices of his people and ages?" (Schaff, *The Person of Christ*, p94-95)

The evidence is clear. Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic:

"A measure of your insanity is the size of the gap between what you think you are and what you really are. If I think I am the greatest philosopher in America, I am only an arrogant fool; if I think I am Napoleon, I am probably over the edge; if I think I am a butterfly, I am fully embarked from the sunny shores of sanity. But if I think I am God, I am even more insane because the gap between anything finite and the infinite God is even greater than the gap between any two finite things, even a man and a butterfly . . .

"Well, then, why [was not Jesus a] liar or lunatic? . . . Almost no one who has read the Gospels can honestly and seriously consider that option. The savviness, the canniness, the human wisdom, the attractiveness of Jesus emerges from the Gospels with unavoidable force to any but the most hardened and prejudiced reader . . . Compare Jesus with liars . . . or lunatics like the dying Nietzsche. Jesus has in abundance precisely those three qualities that liars and lunatics most conspicuously lack: (1) his practical wisdom, his ability to read human hearts; (2) his deep and winning love, his passionate compassion, his ability to attract people and make them feel at home and forgiven, his authority, "not as the scribes"; (3) his ability to astonish, his unpredictability, his creativity. Liars and lunatics are all so dull and

predictable! No one who knows both the Gospel and human beings can seriously entertain the possibility that Jesus was a liar or a lunatic, a bad man.” (Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith*, p60-61)

This leaves only one choice. If Jesus was not a liar, and if He was not insane, then *He must be God*. That is the only option that is left to us. It's worth noting that those who knew Jesus best believed that He was indeed exactly who He said He was:

**John 11:27:** “She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”

**John 20:28:** “And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.”

**John 20:31:** “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”

Jesus did indeed claim to be God – and the reason He made that claim is because *that is exactly who He is*.





# The Case for the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the core truths of Christianity. In fact, the Bible says that it is *the* core truth. If there is no resurrection then there is no Christianity:

**1 Corinthians 15:12:** “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?

13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:

14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.

15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.

16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:

17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.

18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

There are some people who say “Well, even if Christianity isn't true and even if there was no resurrection, living for God would still be worth it. Living well is its own reward.” The apostle Paul strongly disagreed: in fact, he said that if this life is the only one we get then “we are of all men *most miserable*”. In other words, if this is all we get then *Christianity isn't worth it*. We

would all be better off living as pagans and finding something else to do with our time.

Paul could not be more clear: if Christ has not risen from the dead then we are all still in our sins and we will all go to Hell. Salvation depends upon the resurrection. If there is no resurrection then there is no forgiveness, and if there is no forgiveness then we are all doomed. In that case we might as well eat, drink, be merry, and enjoy what little time we have left. The resurrection is *that important*.

Some people have this idea that the resurrection was just a spiritual resurrection – that Jesus didn't actually rise bodily from the grave. However, that is not what the Bible teaches. A “spiritual” resurrection is utterly useless:

“If Christ did not rise in the same physical body that was placed in the tomb, then the resurrection loses its value as an evidential proof of His claim to be God (John 8:58; 10:30). The resurrection cannot verify Jesus' claim to be God unless He was resurrected in the body in which He was crucified. That body was a literal, physical body. Unless Jesus rose in a material body, there is no way to verify His resurrection. It loses its historically persuasive value.” (Geisler, *The Battle for the Resurrection*, p36)

If Jesus didn't rise bodily from the grave, and if His body is still in the tomb, then what reason do we have for believing that the resurrection happened at all? Why would anyone ever believe that Jesus really rose from the dead *if His body is still there?* The only resurrection that could prove His claim to be God was a *physical* resurrection. The body that died *had to* come back to life. If it did not then Christianity is a lie that can save no one.

Now, some people might argue that the resurrection is a

matter of doctrine, and it can't be proved one way or another. I think that belief is a serious error. What we really want to know is whether the resurrection is a genuine, historical fact. It either *did* happen, or it *didn't*:

“The *meaning* of the resurrection is a theological matter, but the fact of the resurrection is a historical matter; the nature of the resurrection body of Jesus may be a mystery, but the fact that the body disappeared from the tomb is a matter to be decided upon by historical evidence.

“The place is of geographical definiteness, the man who owned the tomb was a man living in the first half of the first century; that tomb was made out of rock in a hillside near Jerusalem, and was not composed of some mythological gossamer, or cloud-dust, but is something which has geographical significance. The guards put before that tomb were not aerial beings from Mt. Olympus; the Sanhedrin was a body of men meeting frequently in Jerusalem. As a vast mass of literature tells us, this person, Jesus, was a living person, a man among men, whatever else He was, and the disciples who went out to preach the risen Lord were men among men, men who ate, drank, slept, suffered, worked, died. What is there “doctrinal” about this? This is a historical problem.” (Smith, *Therefore Stand*, p386)

But what evidence do we have that the resurrection really happened? How do we know that Jesus really did rise from the dead? Well, let's take a look and find out.

# The Testimony of the Gospels

First of all, the Bible testifies that Jesus rose from the dead. We are told that His tomb was empty:

**John 20:2:** “Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.”

That an angel announced His resurrection:

**Matthew 28:5:** “And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.  
6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”

That the living Jesus appeared to His disciples:

**Mark 16:9:** “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.

10 And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept.

11 And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.

12 After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country.

13 And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.

14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen.”

On top of that, He also appeared to a crowd of more than 500 people:

**1 Corinthians 15:3:** “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

Each of the four gospels teaches that Jesus rose bodily from the dead (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20) and was seen by many eyewitnesses. The testimony of the New Testament is very clear on this point:

“The New Testament reverberates and glistens with the reality of Jesus' resurrection. The

Gospels record Jesus' teaching that he must be betrayed, killed, and rise again. Then they all testify that his tomb was empty and that he appeared to his disciples as he said. The book of Acts records the preaching of the resurrected Christ as its central fact. The various New Testament letters and the book of Revelation would melt into nothingness without a resurrected Jesus. The resurrection is attested to by four separate Gospels, the history of the early church (Acts), by the letters of Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude, and the letter to the Hebrews. There is a diversity of credible witnesses. Since the New Testament volumes show considerable fitness in terms of historical reliability . . . this is a good initial reason to accept the resurrection as an objective reality." (Groothuis, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy*, p273)

But is this account true? After all, the claim of the resurrection is the central claim of all of Christianity; without it there is nothing left. What other reasons do we have for believing that this really happened?

## **The Existence Of The Church**

One of the points that people don't often think about is that if there was no resurrection there would be no Church. When Christ was crucified, His disciples were utterly broken:

"Without the belief in the resurrection the Christian faith could not have come into being.

The disciples would have remained crushed and defeated men. Even had they continued to remember Jesus as their beloved teacher, his crucifixion would have forever silenced any hopes of his being the Messiah. The cross would have remained the sad and shameful end of his career. The origin of Christianity therefore hinges on the belief of the early disciples that God had raised Jesus from the dead.” (Craig, *Knowing the Truth About the Resurrection*, p116-17)

If Christ never rose from the dead then there would never have been any gospel to spread to the world. His death would have disproved His claims to be the Messiah. The disciples would have had nothing to preach to the world and no reason to risk their lives. After all, what message would they have to share – that Jesus lived a good life and then died, and that was the end of it? The only way the Church could have ever come into being is if Christ really did raise from the dead:

“Christianity does not hold the resurrection to be one among many tenets of belief. Without faith in the resurrection *there would be no Christianity at all*. The Christian church would never have begun; the Jesus-movement would have fizzled out like a damp squib with His execution. Christianity stands or falls with the truth of the resurrection.” (Green, *Man Alive*, p61)

The message that the apostles preached was never about living a good life. What they preached was the resurrection of Jesus:

“From the very first the conviction that Jesus had been raised from death has been that by which their very existence has stood or fallen. There was no other motive to account for them, to explain them . . . At no point within the New Testament is there any evidence that the Christians stood for an original philosophy of life or an original ethic. Their sole function is to bear witness to what they claim as an event – the raising of Jesus from among the dead . . . The one really distinctive thing for which the Christians stood was their declaration that Jesus had been raised from the dead according to God's design, and the consequent estimate of Him as in a unique sense Son of God and representative man, and the resulting conception of the way to reconciliation.” (Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History*, p100-101)

If Jesus never rose from the dead then the apostles would not have had a message to proclaim. There would have been no good news to share with the world.

What was it that Peter preached in his very first sermon on the day of Pentecost? It was the death and resurrection of Christ:

**Acts 2:22:** “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and



slain:

24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”

The message of the Church has *always* been the resurrection of Christ, and that was true from its very earliest days. It's worth noting that this was not an easy message to proclaim. The disciples preached Jesus even though doing so caused them to be hunted, persecuted, and eventually executed:

“The great truths which the apostles declared were, that Christ had risen from the dead, and that only through repentance from sin, and faith in Him, could men hope for salvation. This doctrine they asserted with one voice, everywhere, not only under the greatest discouragements, but in the face of the most appalling errors that can be presented to the mind of man. Their master had recently perished as a malefactor; by the sentence of a public tribunal. His religion sought to overthrow the religions of the whole world. The laws of every country were against the teachings of His disciples. The interests and passions of all the rulers and great men in the world were against them. The fashion of the world was against them.

“Propagating this new faith, even in the most inoffensive and peaceful manner, they could expect nothing but contempt, opposition, revilings, bitter persecutions, stripes, imprisonments, torments, and cruel deaths. Yet this faith they zealously did propagate; and all these miseries they endured undismayed, nay,

rejoicing. As one after another was put to a miserable death, the survivors only prosecuted their work with increased vigor and resolution. The annals of military warfare afford scarcely an example of the like heroic constancy, patience, and unblenching courage. They had every possible motive to review carefully the grounds of their faith, and the evidences of the great facts and truths which they asserted; and these motives were pressed upon their attention with the most melancholy and terrific frequency.

“It was therefore impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact . . .” (Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists*, p28-30)

The disciples had every reason *not* to preach Jesus, and yet they proclaimed Him anyway. In fact, the resurrection wasn't even a subject of debate. The Church has always accepted it as truth:

“In both ecclesiastical history and creedal history the resurrection is affirmed from the earliest times. It is mentioned in Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians* (AD 95), the earliest document of church history and so continuously throughout all of the patristic period. It appears in all forms of the *Apostles' Creed* and is never debated.” (Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences*, p192)

The fact that the Christian Church even exists is strong

evidence that the resurrection actually happened.

## The Claims of Christ

As we saw in our previous lesson, Christ did not simply claim to be a wise teacher or a good moral example. Instead He declared Himself to be God. On top of that, He repeatedly said that He was going to be crucified but that He would come back to life:

**Matthew 16:21:** “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”

**Matthew 17:9:** “And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.”

**Matthew 17:22:** “And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men:  
23 And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.”

**Matthew 20:18:** “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death,

19 And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.”

**Matthew 26:32:** “But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.”

The passages above are just the claims that are recorded in the book of Matthew; the other gospels have similar passages. Jesus said *repeatedly* that He was going to be crucified and would then rise again. In fact, He staked His proof of being the Messiah on it:

**Matthew 12:38:** “Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

39 But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

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.”

Jesus said that the way people would know that He was truly the Messiah, the Son of God, was by His crucifixion and resurrection. That would be the sign that He was who He claimed to be:

“Christ Himself deliberately staked His whole claim to the credit of men upon His resurrection. When asked for a sign He pointed to this sign as His single and sufficient credential.” (Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History*, p103)

When we read these passages we tend to glance right over them without really understanding the gravity of what Jesus was saying. If Jesus was an imposter then these statements were completely insane. After all, He claimed that His true identity would be proven *by His death and resurrection*:

“It was this same Jesus, the Christ who, among many other remarkable things, said and repeated something which, proceeding from any other being would have condemned him at once as either a bloated egotist or a dangerously unbalanced person. That Jesus said He was going up to Jerusalem to die is not so remarkable enough, though all the details He gave about that death, weeks and months before He died, are together a prophetic phenomenon. But when He said that He himself *would rise again from the dead*, the third day after He was crucified, He said something that only a fool would dare say, if he expected longer the devotion of any disciples – unless He was sure He was going to rise. No founder of any world religion known to men ever dared say a thing like that!” (Smith, *Great Certainty in This Hour of World Crises*, p10-11)

Christ never said “You should trust me because I'm wise and clever”. Instead He pointed to His resurrection as the sign. If He had not risen from the dead, everyone would have lost faith in Him. Even His enemies understood this:

**Matthew 27:62:** “Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,

63 Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.”

If Jesus had failed to rise from the dead then His entire ministry would have been disproven. His defeated disciples would have abandoned all hope, and the Church would never have been born. Christianity would have died then and there.

## The Death of Christ

There are some people who argue that Christ never really died. However, that claim is simply impossible. In fact, we know far more about the final hours of the life of Christ than we do of any other historical figure:

“Let it simply be said that we know more about the details of the hours immediately before and the actual death of Jesus, in and near Jerusalem, than we know about the death of any other one man in all the ancient world.” (Smith, *Therefore Stand*, p360)

We also know far more about His burial than we do the burial of anyone else in the ancient world:

“We know more about the burial of the Lord

Jesus than we know of the burial of any single character in all of ancient history. We know infinitely more about His burial than we do the burial of any Old Testament character, of any king of Babylon, Pharaoh of Egypt, any philosopher of Greece, or triumphant Caesar. We know who took His body from the cross; we know something of the wrapping of the body in spices, and burial cloths; we know the very tomb in which this body was placed, the name of the man who owned it, Joseph, of a town known as Arimathaea. We know even where this tomb was located, in a garden nigh to the place where He was crucified, outside the city walls. We have four records of this burial of our Lord, all of them in amazing agreement, the record of Matthew, a disciple of Christ who was there when Jesus was crucified; the record of Mark, which some say was written within ten years of our Lord's ascension; the record of Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, and a great historian; and the record of John, who was the last to leave the cross, and, with Peter, the first of the Twelve on Easter to behold the empty tomb." (Smith, *Therefore Stand*, p370-371)

As we saw in the first lesson in this series, the four gospels (which record the life of Christ) were written within a matter of decades of the actual events. That is strong evidence that their accounts are accurate and trustworthy:

"...we can ask ourselves whether it is probable that such a book, describing events that occurred about thirty or forty years previously, could have been accepted and cherished if the

stories of abnormal events in it were false or mythical. It is impossible, because the memory of all elderly persons regarding events of thirty or forty years before is perfectly clear.

“No one could now issue a biography of Queen Victoria, who died thirty-one years ago, full of anecdotes which were quite untrue. They would be contradicted at once. They would certainly not be generally accepted and passed on as true. Hence, there is a great improbability that the account of the resurrection given by Mark, which agrees substantially with that given in the other Gospels is a pure invention. This mythical theory has had to be abandoned because it will not bear close scrutiny.” (Fleming, as cited by Smith, *Therefore Stand*, p427-28)

There can be no doubt that Jesus was actually dead. The Romans believed that He was dead:

“It is St. Mark who lays stress upon Pilate's wonder at hearing that Christ was already dead, and upon his personal questioning of the centurion before he would give leave for the removal of the body from the Cross. The Roman soldiers were not unfamiliar with the evidences of death, or with the sight of death following upon crucifixion.” (Day, *On the Evidence for the Resurrection*, p46-48)

The Jews believed that He was dead:

“The account in St. Matthew's Gospel of the guarding of the sepulchre is clear evidence that the Jews, for their part, believed that Jesus was



dead.” (Day, *On the Evidence for the Resurrection*, p46-48)

The details of the crucifixion are strong evidence that what Jesus went through resulted in death:

“The death of Christ was due, not to physical exhaustion, or to the pains of crucifixion, but to agony of mind producing rupture of the heart. His energy of mind and body in the act of dissolution proves beyond contradiction that His death was not the result of exhaustion; the soldier's spear was the means to exhibiting to the world that His death was due to a cardiac rupture.” (Day, *On the Evidence for the Resurrection*, p48-49)

The evidence of the “blood and water” is strong evidence of death:

“We are told on eyewitness authority that “blood and water” came out of the pierced side of Jesus (John 19:34, 35). The eyewitness clearly attached great importance to this. Had Jesus been alive when the spear pierced His side, strong spouts of blood would have emerged with every heart beat. Instead, the observer noticed semisolid dark red clot seeping out, distinct and separate from the accompanying watery serum. This is evidence of massive clotting of the blood in the main arteries, and is exceptionally strong medical proof of death. It is all the more impressive because the evangelist could not possibly have realized its significance to a pathologist. The “blood and water” from the

spear-thrust is proof positive that Jesus was already dead.” (Green, *Man Alive*, p33)

It is foolish to think that Jesus somehow survived the crucifixion, laid in the tomb for three days, and then strolled out to announce to His disciples that He was alive. He simply could not have survived:

“[are we to believe] that after the rigors and pains of trial, mockery, flogging and crucifixion He could survive thirty-six hours in a stone sepulchre with neither warmth nor food nor medical care? That He could then rally sufficiently to perform the superhuman feat of shifting the boulder which secured the mouth of the tomb, and this without disturbing the Roman guard? That then, weak and sickly and hungry, He could appear to the disciples in such a way as to give them the impression that He had vanquished death? That He could go on to claim that He had died and risen, could send them into all the world and promise to be with them unto the end of time? That He could live somewhere in hiding for forty days, making occasional surprise appearances, and then finally disappear without any explanation? Such credulity is more incredible than Thomas' unbelief.” (Stott, *Basic Christianity*, p48-49)

It is simply not reasonable to believe that the sight of a half-dead Christ could possibly have inspired any hope in His disciples:

“It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about

weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening, and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which he had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship.” (Strauss, *The Life of Jesus for the People*, p412)

Nor are the post-resurrection actions of Christ at all likely if He had never really died at all:

“On His feet, which had been pierced through and through only two days back, He walks without difficulty the two leagues between Emmaus and Jerusalem. He is so active, that during the repast He disappears suddenly out of sight of His fellow-travelers, and when they return to the capital to announce the good news to the apostles, they find Him there again! He has overtaken them. With the same quickness which characterizes all His movements, He presents Himself suddenly in the room in which the disciples are assembled. . . Are these the actions of a man who had just been taken down half-dead from the cross, and who has been laid in a grave in a condition of complete exhaustion? No.” (Kevan, *The Resurrection of*

*Christ, p9-10)*

Given the evidence, it is unreasonable to claim that Jesus never actually died. The evidence for His crucifixion and death is simply overwhelming.

## The Empty Tomb

One of the most important pieces of this entire account is the fact that the body of Jesus was buried in a tomb:

**Matthew 27:57:** “When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple:

58 He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.

59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.”

It was vital that Jesus be put in a tomb, and it was vital that someone guard the tomb. If Jesus had been thrown into a common mass grave, it would have been impossible to demonstrate that He had truly risen from the dead. Likewise, if the tomb had not been guarded then there would be no way to prove that His body had not been stolen:

“Had the boy of Christ merely been thrown into

a common grave and left unattended, there would have been no possible reason for the anxiety of His enemies to spread the report that the body had been stolen.” (Major, as cited in Smith, *Therefore Stand*, p578)

The tomb is the heart of the story. If Jesus Christ truly rose from the dead then that means the tomb had to have been empty. If there was still a body in the tomb then no one would have believed in the resurrection story:

“If the burial story is basically reliable, then the inference that Jesus' tomb was found empty lies close at hand. For if the burial story is fundamentally accurate, the site of Jesus' tomb would have been known to Jew and Christian alike. But in that case, it would have been impossible for the resurrection faith to survive in the face of a tomb containing the corpse of Jesus. The disciples could not have believed in Jesus' resurrection; even if they had, scarcely anyone else would have believed them as they preached Jesus' resurrection; and their Jewish opponents could have exposed the whole affair, perhaps even by displaying the body . . . No one can affirm the historicity of the burial story and plausibly deny the historicity of the empty tomb.” (Craig, “Did Jesus Rise From The Dead?”, as cited in Wilkins, *Jesus Under Fire*, p146-7)

If the tomb was not empty then the priests could have destroyed Christianity by displaying the body and proving that the resurrection was false – but we'll get to that a bit later.

Not only does the evidence say that Jesus was buried in a tomb, but it also says that the tomb was sealed with a giant

stone:

“The question as to how they were to remove this stone must of necessity have been a source of considerable perplexity to the women. Two of them at least had witnessed the interment and knew roughly how things stood. The stone, which is known to have been large and of considerable weight, was their great difficulty. When, therefore, we find in the earliest record, the Gospel of St. Mark, the words: “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb?” we can hardly avoid feeling that this preoccupation of the women with the question of the stone is not only a psychological necessity of the problem, but a definitely historical element in the situation right up to the moment of their arrival at the grave.” (Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p76)

“Let us begin by considering first its size and probable character. . . . No doubt . . . the stone was large and consequently very heavy. This fact is asserted or implied by all the writers who refer to it. St. Mark says it was “exceeding great.” St. Matthew speaks of it as “a great stone.” Peter said, “for the stone was great.” Additional testimony on this point is furnished by the reported anxiety of the women as to how they should move it. If the stone had not been of considerable weight the combined strength of three women should have been capable of moving it. We receive, therefore, a very definite impression that it was at least too weighty for the women to remove unaided. All this has a

very definite bearing upon the case.” (Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p147)

It says that the stone was sealed by the Romans:

“The sealing was done in the presence of the Roman guards who were left in charge to protect this stamp of Roman authority and power. They did their best to prevent theft and the resurrection, but they overreached themselves and provided additional witness to the fact of the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus.” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p239)

“The door could not be opened, therefore, without breaking the seal; which was a crime against the authority of the proprietor of the seal. The guard was to prevent the duplicity of the disciples; the seal was to secure against the collusion of the guard.” (Whedon, *Commentary of the Gospels Matthew - Mark*, p343)

It also says that the tomb was guarded by Roman soldiers:

“Led by Annas and Caiaphas, their chief priests, a deputation of Jewish leaders sought out Pilate, to request that the tomb wherein Jesus was buried be sealed and that a Roman guard be stationed around it, giving as their motive their fear that the friends of Jesus might come stealthily by night and steal His body in order to make it appear that a resurrection had taken place.

“To this request the acquiescent Pilate

responded: 'Ye shall have a guard; go your way; make it secure according to your wish.' They went their way, attended by a guard of Roman soldiers numbering from ten to thirty who, under their direction, sealed the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea with the Imperial Seals of Rome, affixing thereto in wax the official stamp of the procurator himself which it would be a high crime even to deface. Thus did these zealous enemies of Jesus unwittingly prepare in advance an unanswerable challenge to their subsequent explanation of the resurrection – an explanation which did not, and could not, in the very nature of things explain [it]." (Roper, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?*, p23-24)

Some people claim that the guards were actually Temple police, and not Roman soldiers. However, the evidence is against that:

"If they were the temple police, why worry about Pilate hearing about it? There is no indication that he would have jurisdiction over them. The writer feels this is what happened: They were a Roman guard to which Pilate had given instructions to secure the grave in order to satisfy and keep peace with the religious hierarchy. The chief priests had cautiously sought a Roman guard: 'Therefore command that the tomb be made secure' (Matthew 27:64)

"If the priests had wanted to post temple police at the tomb, they would not have needed the orders of the governor to do it. As it happened, the Roman soldiers came to the chief priests for protection, because they knew that they would



have influence over Pilate and would keep them from being executed: “We will win him [the governor, Pilate] over and keep you out of trouble (Matt. 28:14).” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p289)

The Roman soldiers who guarded the tomb were true professionals. They took their jobs very seriously, and had a fanatical attention to duty:

“Commanding the guard was a centurion designated by Pilate, presumably one in which he had full confidence, whose name according to tradition was Petronius. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that these representatives of the Emperor could have been trusted to perform their duty to guard a tomb quite as strictly and as faithfully as they had executed a crucifixion. They had not the slightest interest in the task to which they were assigned. Their sole purpose and obligation was rigidly to perform their duty as soldiers of the empire of Rome to which they had dedicated their allegiance. The Roman seal affixed to the stone before Joseph's tomb was far more sacred to them than all the philosophy of Israel of the sanctity of her ancient creed. Soldiers cold-blooded enough to gamble over a dying victim's cloak are not the kind of men to be hoodwinked by timid Galileans or to jeopardize their Roman necks by sleeping on their post.” (Roper, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?*, p33)

It is highly unlikely that they would have fallen asleep. The punishment for falling asleep on a night watch was certain death:

“The punishment for quitting post was death, according to the laws (Dion. Hal, *Antiq. Rom.* VIII.79). The most famous discourse on the strictness of camp discipline is that of Polybius VI. 37, 38, which indicates that the fear of punishments produced faultless attention to duty, especially in the night watches. It carries weight from the prestige of the author, who was describing what he had an opportunity to see with his own eyes.” (Currie, *The Military Discipline of the Romans*, p41-43)

“In the various writers of [Justinian's] Digest 49.16, eighteen offenses of soldiers are mentioned punishable by death. They are as follows . . . leaving the night watch (-10.1) . . .” (Currie, *The Military Discipline of the Romans*, p49-50)

Given all of these precautions, it's absurd to think that the disciples stole the body. Not only was it being guarded by Roman soldiers, but there is also the fact that the disciples were terrified by the death of Christ and were huddling in fear of their lives:

“They were not naturally either very brave or large-minded. In the most cowardly fashion, when their Master was arrested, they 'all forsook Him' and fled, leaving Him to face His fate alone.” (Hanson, *The Resurrection and the Life*, p24-26)

The idea that they would bravely challenge a group of professional Roman soldiers, in order to steal the body so that they could then be executed for preaching the resurrection of

Christ, is completely ludicrous. Not only was it out of character for them, but they had nothing to gain and everything to lose:

“They are Galileans, for the most part fisher-folk, all of them more or less strangers to cities and to the ways of city life. One by one, they had become adherents of the young Teacher from Nazareth and devoted to His way of life. They had followed Him gladly and reverently unto the hour of crisis came. When He was arrested on the outskirts of the Garden of Gethsemane, they all fell back and away, awed by the torches and the clamor and the rattling sabers.

“[The disciples] secreted themselves in their lodgings and nothing is heard of them until the startling news is brought to them by the Magdalene on the morning of the third day. Thereupon, two – and two only – have the temerity to venture forth to learn for themselves of the news brought to them by Mary could be as reported by her or was as they themselves believed, just “idle talk.” The whole demeanor of the disciples is one of abject fright and self-preservation.” (Roper, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?*, p34-35)

There can be no doubt about it: Jesus was crucified, He died, and He was then buried in a tomb that was sealed by a giant rock and guarded by Roman soldiers. That makes what happened next all the more fascinating.

# The Empty Tomb

Something of tremendous significance utterly changed the lives of the disciples. This terrified band of men were changed overnight into dynamic missionaries – people who were willing to sacrifice their very lives.

What makes this all the more amazing is that the disciples were not expecting the resurrection. They fully expected Jesus to remain dead:

“They believed Him to be dead, and they did not expect Him to rise again from the dead – at least, in our accepted sense of it. Of this there is abundant evidence from the moment of His death, in the burial-spices brought by Nicodemus, in those prepared by the women (both of which were intended as against corruption), in the sorrow of the women at the empty tomb, in their supposition that the Body had been removed, in the perplexity and bearing of the Apostles, in the doubts of so many, and indeed in the express statement: 'For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead'” (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p623)

Nor were the disciples interested in believing that Jesus had risen from the dead. The initial reports of His resurrection were met with extreme skepticism:

“The apostles were dejected and depressed in their conclusion that Christ was not their expected Messiah (Luke 24:21). In such a condition, they can hardly be considered the

subjects of hopeful visions and hallucinations. These were not men ready to believe. The very fact that Jesus rebuked them for their unbelief indicates that Thomas was not the only one who was a hardheaded skeptic. At one time or another Jesus rebuked all of the eleven apostles for their unbelief in His resurrection (Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:25-27, 38, 41; John 20:24-27). This proves they were finally convinced against their will." (John Ankerberg, Josh Weldon)

It's clear that the disciples would never have stolen the body from the tomb; in fact, they were utterly incapable of it. Nevertheless, something happened that caused the tomb to become empty. *No one* – not even the enemies of the gospel – ever doubted that the body of Christ was no longer in His tomb. Not one of the people who hated the apostles and who persecuted them from city to city ever claimed that the body was still there. All the high priest had to do to disprove this new religion was display Christ's body, but that never happened:

"If ever a fact of ancient history may count as indisputable, it should be the empty tomb. From Easter Sunday on there must have been a tomb, clearly known as the tomb of Jesus, that did not contain His body. This much is beyond dispute: Christian teaching from the very beginning promoted a living, resurrected Savior. The Jewish authorities strongly opposed this teaching and were prepared to go to any lengths in order to suppress it. Their job would have been easy if they could have invited potential converts for a quick stroll to the tomb and there produced Christ's body. That would have been the end of the Christian message. The fact that a

church centering around the risen Christ could come about demonstrates that there must have been an empty tomb." (Corduan, *No Doubt About It*, p222)

No one would have accepted the resurrection if there was still a body in the tomb. The only way that the Church could ever have come into existence is if the tomb was empty:

"The empty tomb is a *sine qua non* of the resurrection. The notion that Jesus rose from the dead with a new body while his old body still lay in the grave is a modern conception. Jewish mentality would never have accepted a division of two bodies. Even if the disciples failed to check the empty tomb, the Jewish authorities could have been guilty of no such oversight. When therefore the disciples began to preach the resurrection in Jerusalem and people responded, and when religious authorities stood helplessly by, the tomb must have been empty. The simple fact that the Christian fellowship, founded on belief in Jesus' resurrection, came into existence and flourished in the very city where he was executed and buried is powerful evidence for the historicity of the empty tomb." (Craig, "Did Jesus Rise From The Dead?", as cited in Wilkins, *Jesus Under Fire*, p151-52)

It is very significant that no one ever argued that the tomb was not empty. Everyone agreed that the body of Christ was gone:

"In all the fragments and echoes of this far-off controversy which have come down to us we are

nowhere told that any responsible person asserted that the body of Jesus was still in the tomb. We are only given reasons why it was not there. Running all through these ancient documents is the persistent assumption that the tomb of Christ was vacant.” (Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p115)

When Peter proclaimed the empty tomb just a few weeks after the crucifixion, no one stepped up to argue with him about it:

“In Acts 2, Luke records Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. There was no refutation given by the Jews to his bold proclamation of Christ's resurrection. Why? Because the evidence of the empty tomb was there for anyone to examine if they wanted to disclaim it. However, everyone knew that the grave no longer held the body of Jesus Christ.” (*Evidence for Christianity*, p307)

So what happened to the body? It's highly unlikely that the supposed story of the soldiers was true. After all, the penalty for sleeping on watch was death:

“The soldiers cannot have alleged they were asleep, for they well know that the penalty of sleeping upon a watch was death – always rigorously enforced.” (Thorburn, *The Resurrection Narratives and Modern Criticism*, p179-82).

Nor is it very likely that in a situation this high-profile, *every single one* of the guards would have suddenly stop caring and neglected the duty that their very lives depended upon:

“If anything were needed to complete the proof of the reality of Christ's resurrection, it would be the silliness of the explanation which the guards were bribed to give it. That a whole guard should go to sleep on their watch at all, was not very likely; that they should do it in a case like this, where there was such anxiety on the part of the authorities that the grave should remain undisturbed, was in the last degree improbable.” (Jamieson, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, p133)

The story that the soldiers spread in order to explain the empty tomb was likewise utterly ridiculous. It was an obvious lie:

“They gave the soldiers money and told them to explain that the disciples had come at night and stolen the body while they were asleep. That story is so obviously false that Matthew does not even bother to refute it! What judge would listen to you if you said that while you were asleep, your neighbor came into your house and stole your television set? Who knows what goes on while he's asleep? Testimony like this would be laughed out of any court.” (Little, *Know Why You Believe*, p63-64)

The fact that no one ever tried to prosecute the disciples for stealing the body is proof that even the Jewish authorities didn't believe their own story:

“That the Jewish rulers did not believe what they instructed and bribed the soldiers to say, is



almost self-evident. If they did, why were not the disciples at once arrested and examined? For such an act was imputed to them involved a serious offense against the existent authorities. Why were they not compelled to give up the body? . . . why were they not punished for the crime? . . . It is nowhere intimated that the rulers even attempted to substantiate the charge.” (Selwyn, as cited in Smith, *Therefore Stand*, p578-79)

## Conclusion

Some have tried to argue that the resurrection story is just a myth. However, the evidence just doesn't support that argument:

“The most drastic way of dismissing the evidence would be to say that these stories were mere fabrications, that they were pure lies. But, so far as I know, not a single critic today would take such an attitude. In fact, it would be an impossible position. Think of the number of witnesses, over 500. Think of the character of the witnesses, men and women who gave the world the highest ethical teaching it has ever known, and who even on the testimony of their enemies lived it out in their lives. Think of the psychological absurdity of picturing a little band of defeated cowards cowering in an upper room one day and a few days later transformed into a company that no persecution could silence –

and then attempting to attribute this dramatic change to nothing more convincing than a miserable fabrication they were trying to foist upon the world. That simply wouldn't make sense." (Anderson, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ," *Christianity Today*, March 29 1968, p5-6)

The message of the resurrection wasn't some strange teaching that appeared centuries after all of the eyewitnesses were dead, and long after any possible refuting evidence was lost. The truth is that the Church began just weeks after the death of Jesus, during the lives of people who were very familiar with what had happened:

"Note that when the disciples of Jesus proclaimed the resurrection, they did so as eyewitnesses and they did so while people were still alive who had had contact with the events they spoke of. In 56 AD Paul wrote that over 500 people had seen the risen Jesus and that most of them were still alive (1 Corinthians 15:6 ff.) It passes the bounds of credibility that the early Christians could have manufactured such a tale and then preached it among those who might easily have refuted it simply by producing the body of Jesus." (Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, p78)

All of this points to the fact that the resurrection really happened. If the resurrection really did happen, then that is solid evidence that Jesus was truly who He said He was:

"Could the Man who predicted His death and resurrection, only to have it come to pass exactly as He had said, be anything but God?" (Corduan,

*No Doubt About It, p227)*

Jesus said that He would prove His identity by dying and then coming back to life – and that is exactly what He did.



# Appendix A: Messianic Prophecies

In the Old Testament there are many prophecies that speak about a coming Messiah who would save mankind from their sins. These prophecies (which date back to hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of years before Christ) foretell in great detail what the Messiah was going to be like and what He was going to do. The extent of these prophecies are quite astonishing and provide amazing evidence that Jesus really is the Messiah. It is not an easy thing to predict what is going to happen next week, let alone next year – but to predict things that will happen a thousand years from now, with extreme precision, goes far beyond a series of simple “lucky guesses”. The fact is that Jesus really is the promised Messiah! He fulfilled all of the prophecies perfectly – including being executed and then raising back to life again.

This paper isn't intended to be an exhaustive study of all messianic prophecies. Instead what I'd like to do is present a number of prophecies from the Old Testament that speak of the person and work of the Messiah. As you will see, God was *very* clear about what the Messiah was going to be like. This makes it possible to recognize Him for what He really is, and tell Him apart from all imposters. There is only one man who meets all of these requirements, and that is Jesus.

# I. His Person

## 1. He would be a descendant of Abraham

One of the first prophecies about the coming Messiah was that He would be a descendant of Abraham:

**Genesis 22:15:** “And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gates of his enemies;

18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”

The book of Galatians links this prophecy to Christ:

**Galatians 3:16:** “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He said not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”

It is important to note that verse 18 says “in thy *seed* all the nations of the Earth” would be blessed. The word “seed” is actually *singular* and refers to a single person. God was telling

Abraham that he would have a descendent that would be a blessing to all nations. This descendent was the Messiah, who would go on to be a blessing to all nations by saving them from their sins through His death on the cross.

## **2. He would be from the Tribe of Judah**

Besides being a descendant of Abraham, the Messiah would also come from the tribe of Judah:

**Genesis 49:10:** “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

This means that the Messiah was going to be Jewish, and would come from a specific Jewish tribe. The word “Shiloh” is difficult to translate and literally means “whose right it is”. The Messiah is the one who has the right to rule. This verse could be rephrased to read like this:

“The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes whose right it is, and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.”

This teaches us several things. First, the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. Second, the Messiah would be a king. Third, the Messiah would come before the tribe of Judah lost its identity. When the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the genealogical records were destroyed as well. It is now impossible to tell the tribe of Judah apart from the rest of the tribes; with

the destruction of the records, all of the tribes have lost their identities. Therefore, the Messiah had to come before the records were destroyed in 70 AD. No Messiah could appear after that date.

Jesus *was* born of the tribe of Judah, and He was born decades before 70 AD – just as the prophecies foretold. One day He will return and reign as the King of Kings from Jerusalem. In that day He will rule over the nations, and all the peoples of the world will serve Him.

### 3. He would be a son of David

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would come out of the line of Jesse:

**Isaiah 11:1:** “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

2 And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord;”

Jeremiah further prophesied that He would come from the house of David:

**Jeremiah 23:5:** “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby



he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

Jesus fulfills both of these requirements. The genealogical records in the New Testament prove that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, and the offspring of David.

#### **4. He would be both God and man**

The Bible is clear that the Messiah would be both God and man. This can be found in a host of passages: Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6-7, Jeremiah 23:5-6, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 12:10, Zechariah 13:7, Psalm 80:17, and Psalm 110:1-7. For example:

**Isaiah 9:6:** “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

Jesus was not just a man; He was also God as well – part of the eternal Trinity. Jesus really *is* the “mighty God”, as Isaiah foretold. He was fully God and fully man at the same time.

## 5. He will live eternally

The prophet Nathan told King David that the Messiah would come from one of David's children and that His throne would last forever:

**I Chronicles 17:10:** “And since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel. Moreover I will subdue all thine enemies. Furthermore I tell thee that the Lord will build thee an house.

11 And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom.

12 He shall build me an house, and I will establish his throne forever.

13 I will be his father, and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee:

14 But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom forever: and his throne shall be established forevermore.”

This cannot be talking about Solomon because Solomon's throne did not last forever. The throne of the Messiah, however, is an eternal one that will never fade away. He will rule for all of eternity.

## II. His Nature

## 1. He would be full of the Holy Spirit

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be full of the Holy Spirit:

**Isaiah 42:1:** “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

2 He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.

3 A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.”

This passage is quoted in Matthew 12:15-21 and is applied to Jesus. He was indeed full of the Holy Spirit, and He did many mighty miracles.

## 2. He would be humble

Zechariah prophesied that the Messiah would be humble:

**Zechariah 9:9:** “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

10 And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim,

and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.”

This passage is quoted in Matthew 21:4-5 and is applied to Jesus.

### **3. He would be gentle**

The book of Isaiah tells us that the Messiah would be gentle:

**Isaiah 42:3:** “A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.”

### **4. He would be the son of God**

The Old Testament was clear that the Messiah would not just be the son of man, but would also be the Son of God:

**Psalm 2:7:** “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou

shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.  
10 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.  
11 Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.  
12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.”

This passage is quoted and applied to Jesus in Acts 13:33.

## 5. He would be the Good Shepherd

This can be seen in a number of places, one of which is in Zechariah:

**Zechariah 13:7:** “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.”

This passage is quoted and applied to Jesus in Matthew 26:31.

## III. His Appearing

## 1. He would be born of a virgin

This can be seen in the famous passage in Isaiah:

**Isaiah 7:14:** “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

There are some who claim that the word “virgin” in this verse doesn't actually mean virgin. That is incorrect. In fact, the Hebrew word used here is the only one available that even *could* mean virgin; none of the other words that Isaiah could have used had that possible meaning. There simply is no Hebrew word that *only* means virgin, and Isaiah used the best one available.

However, the Bible makes it clear that this was a virgin birth in two ways. First, when this verse is quoted in Matthew 1:23, the Greek word used to translate Isaiah 7:14 explicitly means virgin. Second, in verse 14 we can see that this is intended to be a sign. There is nothing miraculous about a young woman giving birth to a child; that happens all the time. This verse only becomes miraculous if a *virgin* was to conceive and bear a son.

## 2. He would be preceded by a herald

The Bible teaches that before the Messiah came someone else would come to tell the world that the Messiah was about to appear. This was prophesied by Isaiah:

**Isaiah 40:3:** “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord,

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

Malachi also mentions this:

**Malachi 3:1:** “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.”

These verses are applied to John the Baptist in John 1:23.

### **3. He would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David**

This can be seen in Micah:

**Micah 5:2:** “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.”

This passage is quoted in Matthew 2:5-6. The reason the passage mentions Bethlehem-Ephratah is because there were

two Bethlehems in Israel, and God was specifying which one the Messiah was going to come from.

#### **4. He would be seen riding on a donkey**

This can be seen in the book of Zechariah:

**Zechariah 9:9:** “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

#### **5. He would appear before 70 AD**

As was mentioned earlier, the Old Testament was very specific that the Messiah was going to be of the tribe of Judah and of the lineage of David. However, the genealogical records were stored in the Temple in Jerusalem, and they were all destroyed when the Romans conquered Jerusalem in 70 AD. At that point the identity of the tribes were lost, which made it impossible for there to be a tribe of Judah. The Messiah had to come before that point because it was impossible to come afterward. After all, He could not come of the tribe of Judah if there was no longer a tribe of Judah!



## IV. His Offices

### 1. He would be a king

This can be seen in many passages:

**Genesis 49:10:** “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

**Numbers 24:17:** “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. ...

19 Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.”

**Isaiah 9:7:** “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

**I Chronicles 17:14:** “But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom forever: and his throne shall be established forevermore.”

See also Psalm 2:7-12, Psalm 110:1-7.

## 2. He would be a priest

It was also prophesied that the Messiah would be a priest. This can be found in Psalms:

**Psalm 110:4:** “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.”

Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14:17-24. His priesthood, and its relevance to Christ, is discussed in Hebrews 5, 6, and 7.

## 3. He would be a prophet

The third office of the Messiah was that of a prophet:

**Deuteronomy 18:15:** The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken ...

18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

19 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”

# V. His Mission and Ministry

## 1. He would be specially trained

In one of the “Servant Songs” of Isaiah, the Bible hints that the Messiah was specially trained by God for His mission:

**Isaiah 50:4:** “The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.”

## 2. He would bring salvation to the Gentile nations

This can be found in Isaiah:

**Isaiah 42:1:** “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. ...

6: I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles;”

**Isaiah 49:6:** “And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the

Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.”

### **3. He would be rejected at first**

This can be seen in many passages: Isaiah 49:1-13, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Zechariah 11:1-17, Zechariah 12:10, Psalm 22, Psalm 110:1-7. For example:

**Isaiah 53:3:** “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

### **4. He would appear to fail but would actually be successful**

The Old Testament was clear that although the Messiah would be rejected and would suffer greatly (as was seen in point #3), He would not fail in His mission:

**Isaiah 42:4:** “He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.”

## 5. He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver

This was prophesied by Zechariah:

**Zechariah 11:12:** “And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver.

13 And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord.”

Matthew records that Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16) and that the silver was used to purchase the potter's field (Matthew 27:3-10). It should be noted that the Lord was being sarcastic when He called the amount a “goodly price”; Exodus 21:32 records that 30 pieces of silver was the amount required to repay for a dead slave. That was the “goodly price” that was put on the Son of God.

## 6. His rejection would result in an attack upon Israel and the scattering of the people

This can be found in the book of Zechariah:

**Zechariah 13:7:** “Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

8 And it shall come to pass, that in all the land,

saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein.

9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God."

Jesus applied this prophecy to Himself in Matthew 26:31. In 70 AD the Roman army attacked the land of Israel, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and slaughtered more than a million people. Jesus had warned in Matthew 23:35-6 that the generation alive at that time would face severe judgment. Since they rejected their Messiah, their house was left desolate (Matthew 23:38).

In Luke 21:20-24 Jesus warned His followers to flee from Jerusalem when they saw it being besieged by armies. In 66 AD the Romans came and besieged the city. When they temporarily eased the siege later that year the entire Christian community in Jerusalem abandoned the city and left. In 68 AD the Romans besieged it again, and in 70 AD they leveled the city and the Temple. No stone of the Temple was left on top of the other. The reason for this was because when the Temple burned down the gold that covered its walls melted and ran down into the cracks, so the Romans were forced to tear it apart stone by stone to recover the gold.

## **7. He would eventually be accepted**

This can be seen in Isaiah 49. The theme of that chapter is that Israel has not been forgotten; the day will come when it will be restored.

## 8. He would be seated at the right hand of God

This can be seen in Psalm 110:

**Psalm 110:1:** “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”

This passage is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 22:41-45.

# VI. His Suffering and Death

## 1. He would suffer

This can be seen in a number of different passages. Both Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52-3 go into great detail about the Messiah's sufferings. A few of these verses are:

**Psalm 22:1:** “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? . . .

14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.”

**Isaiah 52:13:** “Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and

be very high.

14 As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: . . .

53:5: But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

## 2. He would be tried and condemned to death

Isaiah speaks of this:

**Isaiah 53:7:** “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.”

Notice it says that he was “taken from prison and from judgment”, which implies a trial and imprisonment. It also says that he was “cut off out of the land of the living”, which speaks of the Messiah's execution. The passage adds that “he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth” - speaking of the way the Messiah would conduct Himself at the trial.



### 3. He would die

This can be seen in Isaiah 53:8, where it says that the Messiah would be cut off “out of the land of the living”. This is also spoken of in Psalms:

**Psalm 16:9:** “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.

10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”

The word “hell” here is Sheol, which simply refers to the grave or the resting place of the dead. If the Messiah's soul is in the grave then the Messiah is obviously dead – and as we saw in Isaiah, the reason the Messiah was dead was because He was executed. At the same time, verse 10 says that the Messiah would not stay in the grave for long. In fact, verse 10 says He would not even be in the grave long enough for His body to start decaying.

### 4. He would die a violent death by means of piercing

This can be seen in Zechariah:

**Zechariah 12:10:** “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and

shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

## 5. His death would be substitutionary

This can be seen in Isaiah 53:5:

**Isaiah 53:5:** “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

Notice how the verse says that the Messiah would be wounded and beaten for *our* sins. He was not punished for what He did but for what we had done.

## 6. His death would result in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple

This is mentioned in Daniel:

**Daniel 9:26:** “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.”

As we can see, after the Messiah is “cut off” (or executed,

but “not for himself” – His death was substitutionary) the city and the sanctuary would both be destroyed. In this context, the city was Jerusalem and the sanctuary was the Temple. Both of these were destroyed after the Messiah was executed.

## **7. He would be buried in a rich man's tomb**

Isaiah speaks of this:

**Isaiah 53:9:** “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.”

## **8. He would be resurrected**

This is hinted at in a number of passages but it can be most clearly seen in Psalm 16:10:

**Psalm 16:10:** “ For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”

As we've pointed out before, the word translated “hell” is actually Sheol, which simply speaks of the resting place of the dead. If the Messiah's soul was not going to be left in the grave then that means that He would be raised back to life – and if His body was not going to see corruption then He wasn't going to be in the grave long enough to start decaying.

## **9. He would bring justification to those who believe in Him**

This can be seen in Isaiah 53:

**Isaiah 53:11:** “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”