

IS JESUS THE WAY? THE EVIDENCE SAYS YES!

The Bible is clear - "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have" (1 Peter 3:15; see also 2 Corinthians 5:11 & Colossians 4:2-6). We believe in Jesus and in the Bible by FAITH. But that faith is not a blind faith; it is an informed conviction. We have significant evidence that supports what we believe.

Much of what we believe about biblical Christianity is based on faith. But there is significant evidence that supports our faith. And it also takes faith to NOT believe in biblical Christianity.

Christianity rests solely on the shoulders of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ loves us dearly and in His own words said "For God so loved the world that He gave his His one and only Son (Jesus), that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him" (John 3:16-17).

Following is some of the significant evidence that adds credibility to our faith in Jesus:

JESUS

The key question that often arises is, what separates Jesus from all the other religious leaders that have lived throughout history (e.g. Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, Krishna, etc.)?

Jesus claimed to be God, and claimed to be the ONLY way of salvation (John 14:6). What alternatives do we have regarding the claims of Jesus? As C.S. Lewis and Josh McDowell wisely point out, we have only 3 choices regarding Jesus:

1) **LIAR** - Jesus made His claims, but deliberately lied.

Consequence: Christianity is a farce.

Problems with this conclusion include: Jesus life, His teachings, manner of death, His miracles, resurrection, His fulfillment of prophecies, and His positive influence on mankind.

2) **LUNATIC** - Jesus was sincere in His claims, but He was wrong.

Consequence: Christianity is without power and authority.

Problems with this conclusion include: Jesus gave no evidence of mental instability, His teachings have been widely respected for 2000 years, and His instructions have liberated many people from mental problems.

3) **LORD** - Jesus claims were truthful.

Consequence: Christianity is the only true way to heaven and all that do not believe will spend eternity separated from God in hell.

Evidence overwhelmingly supports this conclusion.

12 Reasons Why We Know that Jesus is Lord and the Only Way

A Key Scripture for Jesus Claim: John 13:33 – 14:6

12) **Jesus said it was so** -

Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Jesus on many occasions claimed to be God and/or the only way of salvation (Matthew 16:13-20, 26:63-64, 27:41-43; Mark 2:5-7, 14:60-64; Luke 4:17-21, 10:22; John 3:16-18, 5:16-18, 23, 31-46, 8:19, 10:30-33, 12:45, 15:23).

Jesus is a reliable witness and has tremendous credibility. His birth is celebrated worldwide (Christmas). His death and resurrection is celebrated worldwide (Good Friday & Easter). Our Calendar is based on His life (i.e. BC & AD). About two billion people today claim to follow Him in some way.

11) **Others said it was so** -

Many people claimed that Jesus was the Christ/Messiah/Savior. Examples include John the Baptist, Apostle Peter, Paul, Apostle John, Apostle Thomas, James, Nathaniel, Mark, Martha, the centurion at Jesus death, etc.

10) **The biblical record is reliable** -

The world's foremost archeologist (the late William Albright) said that every book of the New Testament was written between AD 40 - 80.

Another prominent archeologist, Dr. John A.T. Robinson, believes that the entire New Testament was written before the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

This means that the New Testament was written only a few years after the time of Jesus life.

The New Testament was written by eyewitnesses or by people that heard first hand reports from eyewitnesses (Luke 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:16; I John 1:1-3; John 19:35).

The New Testament accounts of Christ were being circulated within the lifetimes of those alive at the time of Jesus. The people reading these accounts could certainly confirm or deny the accuracy of the accounts. False statements could and would be challenged, BUT NO serious challenges ever took place. In fact, in advocating their case for the gospel, the apostles appealed to common knowledge regarding Jesus (Acts 2:22, 26:24-28).

There are early historians and writers that lend further credibility to Jesus and the biblical accounts (e.g. Papias, Irenaeus, Eusebius, Irenus, Tacitus, Lucian, Suctonius, Josephus, Celsus, Epectetus, Porphyry, Pliny the Younger, Artistides, Galenus, Lampridius, DioCassius, Emrtitus, Marcellinus, Eunapius, Zosimus, Hierades, Julian the Apostate). The Talmud (compilation of oral rabbinical traditions) speaks of Christ and several of the Apostles.

Archaeology over time has done nothing but add further support to the creditability of the Bible. The Bible describes numerous people and places, and over time archaeological discoveries have directly or indirectly validated these descriptions. Prominent Jewish archaeologist Nelson Glueck says “it may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever contradicted a biblical reference”. Another prominent archaeologist, William Albright claimed “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”.

It has been said (and not proven wrong) that there is more evidence for the reliability of the New Testament than any 10 pieces of classical literature put together. Some examples:

* Aristotle wrote poetics in 343 BC. The earliest copy we have is dated 1100 AD, 1400 years later. We have only 5 copies of those earliest manuscripts.

* Caesar's history of the Gallic wars was written around 50-58 BC. Our earliest copies are 1000 years later, and only about 10 early copies have been found.

In contrast, about 25,000 copies of early New Testament manuscripts have been found. Second place for copies of early manuscripts belongs to Homer's Iliad with 643 copies.

Another reason that supports the reliability of the Bible include it's remarkable unity. The Bible was written over a 1500 year period, by over 40 authors with a wide variety of backgrounds; was written in different places, continents and in different languages. Yet the Bible is remarkably consistent with itself and has one common theme -- that God loves us and sent Jesus to pay the price of our sins so that we can enjoy eternal life.

The Bible's reliability is further evidenced by the fact that it is by far the best selling book of all-time. Sales are in the billions, and even now over 500 million bibles or bible portions are produced each year. The Bible has also been translated into more languages than any other book in history. The Bible has been translated into over 2200 languages covering over 90% of the people in the world.

9) **Jesus Fulfilled the Attributes of God**

Jesus possessed the attributes of God and acted like God, such as when He forgave sins. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus also lived a life of moral perfection – the only person to have never sinned. Jesus received honor and worship that only God should receive (Mat 14:33, 28:9; John 5:23). And Jesus performed many miracles in front of many witnesses.

Also, the Old Testament titles describing God were applied to Jesus (e.g., Alpha and Omega, Lord, Savior, King, Judge, Light, Rock, Redeemer, Shepherd, Creator, Giver of Life, Forgiver of Sin).

Jesus is:

- Self-Existent (John 1:4, 14:6)
- Omnipresent (Mat 28:20, 18:20)
- Omniscient (John 16:30, 4:16-18, 6:64; Mat 17:22-27)
- Omnipotent (Mat 28:18; Rev 1:8; Luke 4:39-55; 7:14-15)
- Possessing Eternal Life (I John 5:11-12,20; John 1:1,4)

- Immutable (not changing) (Hebrews 13:8)

Perhaps the greatest proof that Jesus was God was His resurrection!

8) **Jesus said amazing things that have been widely respected for 2000 years -**

Virtually every religious leader who has ever lived has had good words to say about Jesus and the things He taught. The amazing teachings of Jesus are obvious even to those who do not consider themselves as His disciple.

7) **Jesus did many miracles in front of many eyewitnesses -**

A few of His many recorded miracles include:

* Raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-44). *There were many witnesses to this miracle, and even Jesus' enemies did not deny the miracle but instead wanted to kill Him because they were afraid that all people would come to believe in Him.*

* Raising Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mt 9:18-26; Mk 5:35-43; Lk 8:41-56)

* Raising the widow's son from the dead (Lk 7:11-17)

* Walking on water (Mt 14:22-23; Mk 6:45-52; Jn 6:19)

* Turning water into wine (Jn 2:1-11)

* Stilling of a storm (Mt 8:23-27; Mk 4:35-41; Lk 8:22-25)

* Supernatural catch of fish (Lk 5:1-11; Jn 21:6)

* Fig tree dried up (Mt 21:18-22; Mk 11:12-14)

* Feeding of the 5000 (Mt 14:15-21; Mk 6:34-44; Lk 9:11-17; Jn 6:1-14) and the 4000 (Mt 15:32-39)

* MANY healings, such as the blind, mute, crippled, leprosy, etc. (throughout the gospels)

* The Greatest Miracle of all-time: His own resurrection

6) **Fulfilled prophecy -**

Jesus often appealed to the prophecies of the Old Testament to substantiate His claims as the Messiah. Scholars have identified 133 messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled.

Scientist and Mathematician Peter Stoner selected 8 of these prophecies and calculated the probability of these being fulfilled by one person as one in 10 to the 17th power (i.e., a one followed by 17 zeros)! To illustrate this probability, assume you covered the entire state of Texas two feet deep with silver dollars, and mark just one coin with an 'X'. If you blindfold a person, dropped them off in the state and asked them to select just one coin, the probability of them picking the marked coin is one to the 17th power! Peter Stoner also selected 48 of these prophecies and calculated the probability of them being fulfilled in one person has been calculated as one in 10 to the 157th power (i.e., a one followed by 157 zeros)! Note: Stoner's analysis was carefully reviewed by a committee and the Executive Council of the American Scientific Affiliation and found to be dependable and accurate.

The prophecies about the Messiah were made at least 400 years before Jesus was to appear. A few of these fulfilled prophecies include:

- * A forerunner, a voice in the wilderness (John the Baptist) (Is 40:3; Mal 3:1)
- * The exact lineage (descendant of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, David)
- * Hands and feet would be pierced (i.e. crucified). This prophecy was written 800 years before crucifixion was put into effect by the Romans (Ps 22:16)
- * Born of a virgin (Is 7:14)
- * Blind, deaf and lame healed (Is 35:5,6)
- * Jews will reject (Is 8:14)
- * Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)
- * Temple of Jerusalem still standing -- it was destroyed in AD 70 (Dan 9:25,26; Zech 11:13)
- * Betrayed by a friend, for 30 pieces of silver, which were to be cast on the floor of the temple and used to buy a potter's field (Zech 11:11-13; Jer 32: 6-15)
- * Come humbly, seated on a donkey (Zech 9:9)
- * No bones broken (Ps 34:20)
- * Body would be pierced (Zech 12:10)

One of the most amazing fulfilled prophecies was made by Daniel, who predicted in Daniel 9:24-26 that in 483 years (69 "weeks" * 7) after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem the Messiah would come. The decree to rebuild Jerusalem occurred (described in Nehemiah 2:1-8), and based on 360 day years that were followed at the time, the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem occurred right on time!

5) **The TREMENDOUS transformation of His apostles after Christ's resurrection -**

At the time of the trials of Jesus and through the third day after His death, the apostles were confused and fearful. Peter strongly denied Christ three times during the trials (he even cursed!), and the Apostles were in hiding (Mat 26:56, 69-75; Mk 14:50, 66-71).

BUT, all of a sudden, three days after the death of Jesus, the apostles were RADICALLY TRANSFORMED and became extremely bold in proclaiming the gospel! Peter appeared in Jerusalem boldly preaching to thousands (at threat of death) about the resurrected Christ.

The Apostles' zealously in proclaiming the good news of the resurrection and salvation by Jesus alone came at a very high price to them. The apostles were beaten, jailed, and 11 of the 12 died horrible martyr deaths. The 12th, John, was exiled to a terrible island called Patmos. The Apostles never backed down from their testimony of the resurrection -- even in the face

of torture and death. WHY THE SUDDEN TRANSFORMATION?

Some skeptics theorize that the apostles conspired together to start a new religion, knowing that Jesus never resurrected. This theory is absolutely without support and does not even make common sense. NO ONE DIES FOR A LIE THAT THEY KNOW IS A LIE!

There have been religious zealots outside of Christianity over the years that have been willing to die for what they believe. But the key is that they THOUGHT they were dying for the truth!

The obvious answer why the apostles were so radically transformed is that THEY WERE EYEWITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS! They saw Jesus for 40 days after His resurrection.

Jesus performed many convincing signs for them. Even "doubting" Thomas was totally convinced when he saw Jesus face to face. The apostles knew that everything that Jesus ever taught them was true, and they were committed to spend the rest of their lives to share the good news no matter what the cost (2 Pet 1:16; I Jn 1:1-3; Lk 1:1-3; I Cor 15; Acts 5:40-42).

4) **Conversion of His Skeptics, such as Saul of Tarsus (Apostle Paul) -**

Saul was a brilliant, highly educated and very devout Jew. He was Christianity's most rabid antagonist (enemy) and had a goal to destroy the new Christian church.

Then something happened. The resurrected Jesus met Saul on the road to Damascus, and Saul was immediately converted and radically transformed. Saul's conversion had a tremendous impact on his character, his relationship with followers of Jesus, his message and his mission.

Saul became the Apostle Paul and became the world's foremost evangelist and defender of Christianity. He went to suffer tremendously for his outspoken support of Christianity and died a martyr's death.

Another skeptic who came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah was his half-brother James. James eventually was stoned for his commitment to Jesus.

(Reference: Book of Acts).

3) **Changes to Key Social Structures AND the Emergence of the Church**

The Jews had extremely important social structures that they felt came from God and were constantly reinforced. But after Jesus came, the Jewish followers of Jesus made significant changes to thousands of years of tradition:

- *Animal Sacrifices* – ceased, because Jesus was the once and for all sacrifice.
- *Strict obeying of the Mosaic law to be in good standing* – replaced by salvation by faith, and going beyond a mere legalistic obedience of the law.
- *Scrupulously keeping the Saturday Sabbath* – Christians worshipped on Sunday. Why? That was the day Jesus rose from the dead.

- *Monotheism (one God)* – Christians also believed in one God, but consisting of three persons in the Trinity.
- *Ordinances of Communion and Baptism* – Communion was a celebration and remembrance of the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism was done in the name of God the Father, Son & Holy Spirit, and was a means to identify with the death and resurrection of Christ.

What about the emergence of the New Testament church? Who logically should have survived – the mighty Roman Empire or the new church? The early church consisted of a small, ragtag group of people whose primary message was that a crucified carpenter from an obscure village had triumphed over the grave. But the church not only survived but also grew rapidly!

2) **Changed lives - past & present**

The Christian church grew rapidly after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and continues to grow today. Millions of people today claim to follow Jesus and to have been positively affected by becoming Christians. The testimonies of Jesus' power to change lives are numerous and in some cases defy rational explanation.

What about hypocrites? Just because some people who call themselves Christians are hypocrites does not mean that all Christians are hypocrites. There are many sincere Christians who are not hypocrites.

Christianity does not rise or fall on the way Christians have acted in the past or present. **Christianity stands or falls on the person of Jesus, and Jesus was not a hypocrite.** "Do not let an unworthy servant keep you from a worthy Lord".

1) **JESUS RESURRECTION!!!!**

There are two important facts. First, Jesus was dead prior to His placement in His tomb. Second, Jesus resurrected and walked out of the tomb a live man.

JESUS DIED

Following are some of the evidences that support the fact that Jesus was dead before He was placed in the tomb:

- * The gospel writers saw and wrote that He died (Jn 19:30; Lk 23:46; Mk 15:37; Mt 27:50).
- * Crucifixion was a very effective means of death. In Jesus case it was preceded by severe beating, crown of thorns, and carrying of cross bar from prison to his place of execution (Mt 27:29-30; Mk 15:17-19; Jn 19:2-3, 17).
- * Jesus went through six separate trials, 3 Roman and 3 Jewish. Both Jewish and Roman authorities declared Jesus to be crucified, and both had vested interests to make sure that Jesus was killed and remained dead and buried (Jn 18:13; Mt 26:57, 59; Mk 15:1; Lk 23:7, 11-25).

- * A spear was thrust into Jesus side while He was still on the cross to ensure His death (Jn 19:34).
- * Soldiers did not break His legs (as was the custom) because Jesus was already dead. (This also fulfilled the prophecies that none of the Messiah's bones would be broken, and that His side would be pierced) (Jn 19:32-33).
- * Pilate required certification of Christ's death before the body could be turned over to Joseph of Arimathea. Pilate consented to Jesus being removed from the cross only after the executioner had certified His death (Mk 15:44-45).
- * Jesus' body was wrapped in linen clothes along with 75 pounds of applied spices (Jn 19:39-40; Lk 23:50-53; Mk 15:44-46; Mt 27:57-60).

JESUS RESURRECTED

A. Tomb Security

- * Jesus body was placed in a solid rock tomb. The entrance was covered by an extremely large stone (weight about 1 ½ to 2 tons), probably rolled into place using levers (Mt 27:59-60; Mk 15:46; Lk 23:53).
- * A Roman seal was placed on the tomb entrance. This meant the tomb was protected by the full force of Roman law. Grave tampering was an offense punishable by crucifixion upside down (Mt 27:66).
- * A Roman guard unit was placed outside the tomb entrance. Guard units consisted of 4 to 16 men (Mt 27:63-65, 28:11).

B. Empty Tomb

- * The tomb was empty as both Roman and Jewish sources acknowledged. (The site of the tomb was known to Christians, Jews and the Romans).
- * The Roman Seal on the tomb was broken (a capital crime as mentioned previously).
- * The large stone was moved up and away (Lk 24:2; Mk 16:4).
- * The Roman guard unit fled. DESERTION OF YOUR POST WAS PUNISHABLE BY DEATH (Mt 28:11).
- * The grave clothes were in the tomb, but the clothes were empty (Jn 20:5-7).
- * No body was ever produced by the Roman or Jewish authorities. THE PRODUCTION OF A BODY WOULD HAVE STOPPED CHRISTIANITY DEAD IN IT'S TRACKS.

C. Jesus appeared to many

- * After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to many during a period of 40 days. He performed many convincing proofs.
- * Jesus appeared before more than 500 people, most of whom were still alive when the New Testament was written and circulated. He appeared to people that knew Him very well – family, friends, followers.

Included in the people who saw Jesus after resurrection included the Apostles and Saul of Tarsus. The effect on their lives was discussed earlier.

(Reference: Gospel accounts; Acts; I Cor 15)

What about apparent contradictions in the resurrection story? Here are some good and truthful responses:

- * Minor differences in the four gospels argue strongly against collusion and argue for the truth of the gospels.
 - If all four gospels gave EXACTLY the same story, in EXACTLY the same order, with EXACTLY the same details, we would immediately be suspicious.
 - No four people will describe events in exactly the same way, detail for detail. If they did, then likely collusion would exist.
- * There are no differences in the main/important parts of the story.
- * None of the detail differences necessarily flatly contradict each other, but in some plausible way they correlate together to paint the larger picture.
- * All of the apparent contradictions have been logically explained over the years.

Other Common Questions

(Note: for a much more detailed list of questions and answers please refer to a “The Case for Faith” by Lee Strobel).

WHY DOES A GOOD GOD ALLOW EVIL TO EXIST?

Some points to consider:

- * God did not create an evil world.
- * Evil came as a result of man selfishly choosing his own way apart from God's way (God created man with a free will).
- * Evil is temporary and will eventually be destroyed. In the end justice prevails and every evil act will be paid for (either by the person who did the act, or by Jesus Christ on the cross).

AREN'T GOOD WORKS ENOUGH TO GET INTO HEAVEN?

God is holy and righteous. Only if we NEVER sinned would our works be enough to earn our way into heaven. The Bible is clear that we are all sinners and that our works are not good enough -- we are saved only through faith in Jesus (Rm 3:23; Rm 6:23; Titus 3:5; Eph 2:8-9; Heb 11:6; Jn 6:29; Jn 14:6). Jesus paid the penalty for our sins on the cross, and now we must believe in Jesus and receive His gift of salvation (John 1:12, 3:16).

SO WHAT?

What is your response to Jesus?

Jesus said that “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:16-18).

The Bible says “to all who **received** Him, to those who **believe** in His name, he *gave* the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

Are you ready to **believe and receive** Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord? You can express your decision and commitment to Jesus but making a simple prayer to Jesus like the following:

“Dear Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and deserve to be punished for my sins. But I believe that you love me and died on the cross to pay the penalty of my sins. And now, by faith, I ask you to forgive my sins and be my Savior. Thank you Jesus for saving me, starting a personal relationship with me and taking me to Heaven when I die”.

FURTHER STUDY: Much of the material from this lesson comes from the various works of Josh McDowell. Josh has written many books, which are extremely well documented. His most thorough book is "The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict" . Other books that he has written include "More Than a Carpenter", "Answers to Questions that Skeptics Ask", and several others.

Other books that provide excellent support for reliability of Jesus include Lee Strobel’s “The Case for Christ”, D. James Kennedy’s “Skeptics Answered” and Dave Hunt’s “Defending the Faith”.

FURTHER HELP?

If you would like to talk to someone about Jesus, please call, e-mail or write! We would love to meet with you! Contact:

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