

The Evidence for the Bible

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Three nights: Three subjects:

- 1) Proving the Bible
- 2) The Word on the Word
- 3) Proving the Resurrection

Section One: Proving the Bible as God's Word *Objective proof / Subjective proof. / Axiomatic proof*

I can't accept things on faith. I need rigor. I need reason. No circular arguments. (Bible true because it says so.)

Basics / facts

The word "Bible" from the Koine Greek τὰ βιβλία, tà biblíá or "the books." (The Greek word is the same as the Latin "biblia")

The Bible is sometimes referred to as "Scripture," from the Latin term "scriptura," meaning "writing."

The Bible contains 66 books. The Old Testament has 39 books. The New Testament contains 27 books.

The Bible was written by approximately 40 different men (approximately because of debates about the authorship of some books) over a period of 1500 years (essentially the time of Moses, the author of the Pentateuch, to 92-96 AD, the time of the Revelation).

Yet, they're in agreement with each other, leading to the concept of inspiration and the evidence of one unifying author behind it all. Even though the Bible addresses many very controversial topics, the writers are in unity, even across millennia.

The Bible is divided in two large sections, based on pre-Christ Jewish history and post-Christ church history. So the division between the Old and New Testaments is a literary division.

The words Testament and Covenant are very similar. The Hebrew term for covenant is berit, meaning “to bond or fetter.” It is translated into the Greek as syntheke, “binding together” or diatheke, “will, testament.”

Bible is divided into testaments and covenants. The gospels are under the old covenant.

The Bible was originally written in three languages: Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew except for parts of Daniel and Nehemiah that were written in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Koine Greek, a form of common Greek.

Old Testament/New Testament

Old Testament preserved because God chose a people to keep those books.

Dead Sea Scrolls – a collection of some 981 different manuscripts discovered between 1946/47, 1956 and 2017 in 12 caves (Qumran Caves) in the immediate vicinity of eastern Judaeen Desert, the modern West Bank. – prove that our modern Old Testament is the same as what they were reading thousands of years ago.

New Testament was preserved by repeated copying and distribution.

There are thousands more New Testament Greek manuscripts than any other ancient writing. The internal consistency of the New Testament documents is about 99.5% textually pure. That is an amazing accuracy.

In addition there are over 19,000 copies in the Syriac, Latin, Coptic, and Aramaic languages. The total supporting New Testament manuscript base is huge.

Biblical Scholars agree that the New Testament documents were all written before the close of the First Century. (Apocryphal books have

no apostolic authority)

If Jesus was crucified in 30 A.D., then that means that the entire New Testament was completed within 70 years. This is important because it means there were plenty of people around when the New Testament documents were penned who could have contested the writings. In other words, those who wrote the documents knew that if they were inaccurate, plenty of people would have pointed it out.

Christianity got its foothold in Israel, the very place where any fabrication would have been obvious.

Another important aspect of this discussion is the fact that we have a fragment of the gospel of John that dates back to around 29 years from the original writing (John Rylands Papyri 125 A.D.). This is extremely close to the original writing date. This is simply unheard of in any other ancient writing and it demonstrates that the Gospel of John is a First Century document.

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Below is a chart with some of the oldest extant New Testament manuscripts compared to when they were originally penned. Compare these time spans with the next closest which is Homer's Iliad where the closest copy from the original is 500 years later. Undoubtedly, that period of time allows for more textual corruption in its transmission. How much less so for the New Testament documents?

[Manuscript evidence for superior New Testament reliability](#) by [Matt Slick](#) 12/10/08

The New Testament documents are better preserved and more numerous than any other ancient writings. Because they are so numerous, they can be cross checked for accuracy . . . and they are very consistent.

There are presently 5,686 Greek manuscripts in existence today for the New Testament. If we were to compare the number of New Testament manuscripts to other ancient writings, we find that the New Testament manuscripts far outweigh the others in quantity.

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	Number of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Lucretius	died 55 or 53 B.C.		1100 yrs	2	----
Pliny	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750 yrs	7	----
Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200 yrs	7	----
Demosthenes	4th Cent. B.C.	A.D. 1100	800 yrs	8	----
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs	8	----
Suetonius	A.D. 75-160	A.D. 950	800 yrs	8	----
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1300 yrs	8	----
Euripides	480-406 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1300 yrs	9	----
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	A.D. 900	1200	10	----
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1000	10	----
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	----	???	20	----
Tacitus	circa A.D. 100	A.D. 1100	1000 yrs	20	----
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1100	1400	49	----
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1000	1400 yrs	193	----
Homer (Iliad)	900 B.C.	400 B.C.	500 yrs	643	95%
New Testament	1st Cent. A.D. (A.D. 50-100)	2nd Cent. A.D.	less than 100 years	5600	99.5%

Credit Ron Rhodes:

There are more than 24,000 partial and complete manuscript copies of the New Testament. They are ancient and available now for

inspection.

There are also some 86,000 quotations from the early church fathers and several thousand lectionaries.

Bottom line: The New Testament has an overwhelming amount of evidence supporting its reliability.

There are some 150,000 variants in these manuscripts. 99% hold virtually no significance whatsoever. Many of the variants simply involve a missing letter in a word. Some involve reversing the order of two words. Some involve the absence of one or more insignificant words.

No doctrine or commandment of moral faith is affected by any of them. More than 99% of the cases pertaining to the original text can be reconstructed to a practical certainty. Most of the manuscript variants concern matters of spelling, word order, tenses, and the like, no single doctrine is affected by them in any way.

By comparing the manuscript support for the Bible against manuscript support for other ancient documents and books, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that no other ancient piece of literature can stand up to the Bible.

There are enough quotations from the early church fathers that even if we did not have a single copy of the bible, scholars could still reconstruct all but 11 verses of the entire N.T. from materials written within 150 to 200 years from the time of Christ.

Psalm 12:6-7 -- The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

The original manuscripts did not contain the chapter and verse divisions in the numbered form familiar to modern readers. In antiquity Hebrew texts were divided into paragraphs (*parashot*) that were identified by two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. *Pe* indicated an "open" paragraph that began on a new line, while *Samekh* indicated a "closed" paragraph that began on the same line after a small space.

The earliest known copies of the Book of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls use these two Hebrew letters for their paragraph divisions.

The Hebrew Bible was also divided into some larger sections. In Israel the five books of Moses were divided into 154 sections so that they could be read through aloud in weekly worship over the course of three years. In Babylonia, the Torah was divided into 53 or 54 sections so it could be read through in one year.

The New Testament was divided into topical sections known as *kephalaia* (the head, or a heading) by the fourth century. **Eusebius** of Caesarea divided the gospels into parts that he listed in tables or canons. Neither of these systems corresponds with modern chapter divisions.

Archbishop Stephen Langton and **Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro** developed different schemas for systematic division of the Bible in the early 13th century. It is the system of Archbishop Langton on which the modern chapter divisions are based.

The first person to divide New Testament chapters into verses was Italian Dominican biblical scholar **Santi Pagnini** (1470–1541), but his system was never widely adopted. Robert Estienne created an alternate numbering in his 1551 edition of the Greek New Testament,

which was also used in his 1553 publication of the Bible in French. Estienne's system of division was widely adopted and it is this system that is found in almost all modern

The first English New Testament to use the verse divisions was a 1557 translation by **William Whittingham** (c. 1524-1579). The first Bible in English to use both chapters and verses was the Geneva Bible published shortly afterwards in 1560. These verse divisions soon gained acceptance as a standard way to notate verses, and have since been used in nearly all English Bibles and the vast majority of those in other languages.

As committed, Bible-believing Christians, we approach the text with certain assumptions:

- inerrancy
- sufficiency
- inspiration
- trustworthiness
- that the Bible is indeed the very word of God.

Inerrant: The original autographs are without error. As God's word, the Bible says precisely what it means to say, without omissions or superfluous information. It is exact.

Sufficient: The Bible contains everything God has chosen to reveal about Himself and we do not need more than what the Bible says in order to come to faith and receive eternal salvation.

Inspired: The Bible was written by men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God to write what they wrote. (2Peter 1:20-21 - But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.)

The Bible is not merely the opinions and memories of the authors, it contains the information and words that God's Spirit guided them to write.

Trustworthy: Currently, there are in excess of 5,600 Greek New Testament manuscripts in existence. Through comparison, scholars are able to uncover scribal errors and reconstruct the original text.

Those are fine descriptions. But, where's the evidence, outside of simply saying "the bible is true because it says it's true"?

IF it's God's word, then whatever it says about itself is true. But, first we have to establish that it actually IS God's word.

Evidence is both objective and subjective

Objective Proof

Prophecy

The search for evidence begins ...

Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy, by J. Barton Payne, lists 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament, and 578 prophecies in the New Testament. That works out to a total of 1,817 prophecies. Those prophecies take up 8,352 of the Bible's verses. So, because there are 31,124 verses in the Bible, 8,352 verses equals about 27 percent

(26.83) – meaning that roughly one-quarter of the Bible is prophetic.

Prophecy is a unique characteristic of the Bible. No other major religious literature contains prophecy on par with what the Bible declares.

Principle: *Prophecy only works if the future is definite.*

Prophecy is so central to the Bible that Deuteronomy 18:21-22 says,

“And if you say in your heart, ‘How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?’— when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.”

So God is concerned for the accuracy of His word.

Prophecy allows you to check it.

Isaiah 42:9 -- Behold, the former things have come to pass, And new things I declare; Before they spring forth I tell you of them."

Isaiah 46:9-10 -- Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure'."

John 13:19 -- "Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He."

That means, you can check it. If the Bible is God's word, then it can stand scrutiny.

Peter makes the point that accurate prophecy must come from God.

2Pet. 1:20-2:3 -- But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their agreed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Messianic Prophecy

For instance, the Bible contains many Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah to come. By some counts, there are over 400 prophecies in the Old Testament that point to the coming Messiah, His life, and His death. According to the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth perfectly fulfilled every one of them. The odds of someone doing are astronomical. And, if it's true, it's certainly evidence that the Bible is God's word.

The problem is: The prophecies and the fulfillments are all found in the Bible. So, if it's not genuinely God's word, and if the New Testament writers were simply making up a new religion, then it would be easy for them to make bogus claims about their newfound

Messiah and say that he satisfied the Old Testament details.

What about evidence that can be proven without faith at its core?

What about substantial proof from history?

The Facts (4 examples)

The prophet Isaiah foretold that a conqueror named Cyrus would destroy seemingly impregnable Babylon and subdue Egypt along with most of the rest of the known world. This same man, said Isaiah, would decide to let the Jewish exiles in his territory go free without any payment of ransom (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1; and 45:13). Isaiah made this prophecy 150 years before Cyrus was born, 180 years before Cyrus performed any of these feats (and he did, eventually, perform them all), and 80 years before the Jews were taken into exile.

History tells us that in 538 BCE Cyrus ascended to power and signed the two edicts of restoration.

Now, either the authors of the Bible (if it's fake) got really lucky, or there is in fact divinity at the heart of this book.

Jeremiah predicted that despite its fertility and despite the accessibility of its water supply, the land of Edom (today a part of Jordan) would become a barren, uninhabited wasteland (Jeremiah 49:15-20; Ezekiel 25:12-14). His description accurately tells the history of that now bleak region.

How would he know something that specific about a region of the planet? Was he merely an early meteorologist, or did he have insider

knowledge?

Daniel predicted the rise and fall of the nations that would follow Babylon, occupy that same territory, and oppress the children of Israel: Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome. He likened Medo-Persia to a bear that rose up on one side, fulfilled as Cyrus the Persian became more powerful than Darius the Mede. Daniel likened the first king of Greece to a leopard with wings, describing the speed and ferocity of Alexander the Great. But, Daniel also accurately predicted that Alexander's power would not go to his progeny, but to four generals.

And that's exactly what happened.

The testimony of Josephus. The Jewish historian records that Alexander the Great was shown a copy of Daniel when he passed through the Jewish realm. He was mightily impressed by the prophecy that referred to him and he treated the Jews kindly - as evidenced both by Josephus and other known histories of the period. Josephus also affirms the content of the book of Daniel as historical and authentic [Verm.JosDan].

Ezek. 14:12-20 --Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, if a country sins against Me by committing unfaithfulness, and I stretch out My hand against it, destroy its supply of bread, send famine against it, and cut off from it both man and beast, even *though* these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, by their *own* righteousness they could *only* deliver themselves," declares the Lord GOD. "If I were to cause wild beasts to pass through the land, and they depopulated it, and it became desolate so

that no one would pass through it because of the beasts, *though* these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either *their* sons or *their* daughters. They alone would be delivered, but the country would be desolate. Or *if* I should bring a sword on that country and say, ‘Let the sword pass through the country and cut off man and beast from it,’ even *though* these three men were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either *their* sons or *their* daughters, but they alone would be delivered. Or *if* I should send a plague against that country and pour out My wrath in blood on it, to cut off man and beast from it, even *though* Noah, Daniel, and Job were in its midst, as I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “they could not deliver either *their* son or *their* daughter. They would deliver only themselves by their righteousness.”

In Ezek. 28:3 God said, rather mockingly, to the king of Tyre, “Behold, you are wiser than Daniel;”

And, of course, Jesus Himself calls Daniel a prophet in Matt. 24:15.

Consequently, critics attempted to late-date Daniel. They said it was written after the fact (during the time of the Maccabees, 169-165 BC) and then passed off as a book of prophecy.

But, when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the Qumran caves, along with early versions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other seminal books of prophecy, the late date theory essentially fell apart. And that means that Daniel was written before the succession of kingdoms took place, in the 6th Century BC, and that makes it legitimate prophecy.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 allowed us to compare the manuscripts composing the Hebrew Bible that were a thousand years older than those we had previously possessed, and we learned that the painstaking copying systems used by the Jewish scribes---such as the Talmudists and Massoretes---effectively preserved accuracy. Archaeologist William F. Albright comments that most of the Dead Sea Scrolls “scarcely differ at all from the consonantal text of our Massoretic Bible” (from which our modern English versions are translated). “This fact,” says Albright, “proves conclusively that we must treat the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible with the utmost respect and that the free emending of difficult passages in which modern critical scholars have indulged, cannot be tolerated any longer.” [William Foxwell Albright, *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1955), p. 136.]...

Some 400 years before crucifixion was invented, both Israel's King David and the prophet Zechariah described the Messiah's death in words that perfectly depict that mode of execution. Further, they said that the body would be pierced and that none of the bones would be broken, contrary to customary procedure in cases of crucifixion (Psalm 22 and 34:20; Zechariah 12:10). Again, historians and New Testament writers confirm the fulfillment: Jesus of Nazareth died on a Roman cross, and his extraordinarily quick death eliminated the need for the usual breaking of bones. A spear was thrust into his side to verify that he was, indeed, dead.

Jesus did exist as a man, as a person. Tacitus, the Roman historian writing early in the 2nd century A.D., in his *Annals* 15.44, mentions Jesus and the Christians in his account of how the Emperor Nero

went after Christians in order to draw attention away from himself after Rome's fire of 64 AD:

“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 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, where all things Hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their Center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first Made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an Immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of Firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.”

Subjective Proof

The Bible contains promises that if we are in Christ, and Christ is in us, then things will change. Old things pass away and all things become new. And our lives and behavior will change as God conforms us into the image of His Son. If that doesn't happen, if God's Holy Spirit can be present but ineffective, then the Bible is wrong.

How many of you would be willing to say that Christianity has changed the way you think, act, and behave. How many of you have confidence and “the peace that passes understand”? That’s subjective proof.

Word on the Word

2Timothy 3:16-4:5 -- All Scripture is inspired by God (theopneustos) and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

θεόπνευστος -- *theopneustos* Theos = God. Pneuma = spirit or breath.

Matthew 22:31-33 -- “But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: ‘I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” When the crowds heard *this*, they were astonished at His teaching.

2 Peter 1:19-21 -- And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. 21For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.

Psalms 89:34 -- My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.

Romans 10:17 -- So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

So, since the Bible is verifiably true – which means that it is indeed the word of God, and therefore the best verification of itself, the best defense of itself and the best explanation of itself. The word it the best source for knowledge of God, the revelation of God’s will, and the expectations placed on all those whom He has elected and called.

The Bible is its own best authority.

What God has said is so important to God that when His Son appeared on the stage of history, He was given the name, Logos, translated “the Word.” Jesus was the word of God incarnate ... He was the embodiment of everything God had said, walking in shoe leather on this dusty ball.

Jesus is called “the Word.” Not the action. Not the work. Not the plan, intention, or purpose. The Word. Logos. Intelligence demonstrated by spoken word. Jesus was directly identified with the revelation of God through what he SAID to His people.

I don’t know how to express the supremacy of God’s word over everything else any better than by reading:

John 1:1-4 --In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

Let's go way back ---

The earliest writing of God's word is probably the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God. They were apparently written in Hebrew, a known, spoken language, so they were written for man by God. Once they were written (twice, no less), they were non-negotiable. The people of Israel had no say in the matter.

God's word is rigorous. Moses had to follow every direction and assignment in detail. He was not allowed to change it, rearrange it, modify it, simplify it, make it more palatable, or adjust it according to the majority opinion within the camp. Israel did not vote on it.

This tabernacle, made this way, with this furniture, with these sacrifices, at this time, with this incense, and this showbread, by this priest. No ifs, ands, or buts.

("God said it. I believe it. That settles it.")

As the Old Testament progressed and God revealed more and more about Himself, His prophets repeatedly pointed to God's word and emphasized it's faithfulness, stability, and dependability.

Ps. 89:34 -- "My covenant I will not violate, Nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.

The Scriptures cannot be broken (destroyed or dissolved), according to Jesus in John 10:35.

One of the most common phrases in Davidic / Psalmic literature is "According to thy word"

Jesus was adamant that Scriptures were God speaking to people.

Matthew 22:31 - "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God:

Mark 7:13 - thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

Matthew 15:3 -- He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?"

He repeatedly confirmed even the earliest accounts of Genesis, saying that God made male and female when asked about divorce (Matt. 19:4). Or, confirming Noah, or confirming Abraham, or confirming Sodom, or confirming Jonah in the fish's belly when speaking of His own death and resurrection. Or, the reign of David.

According to Amos 8:11, when God punishes people, He does so by withholding His word –

Amos 8:11 -- "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "When I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, But rather for hearing the words of the LORD."

But, the blessing of God is when His word descends --

Isaiah. 55:10-11 -- "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Isa. 66:1-2 -- "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came

into being?” declares the Lord. This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”

In the Bible, men like Isaiah or Ezekiel saw visions of God that made them tremble. The children of Israel were fearful of the dark clouds, thunders, and the voice that spoke from Sinai. But, we have become to familiar with the word that we forget to be reverently fearful ... to tremble at the word of God and know that He isn't playing around. He's serious about every word that proceeds from His mouth. So should we be.

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The Negative Argument

The denial of God's word started very early. Satan in Garden.

Genesis 3:1-7 -- Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?” And the woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.’” And the serpent said to the woman, “You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were

opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

Job's friends did not say what was right about God and He was sorely displeased with them –

Job 42:7-8 -- And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves, and My servant Job will pray for you. For I will accept him so that I may not do with you according to your folly, because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has.”

Humans think too highly of themselves and all-too-often they replace God's words with their own. For instance, in 1Chronicles 17:1-15, Nathan encouraged David to build a temple despite the fact that God had not spoken any such thing, resulting in God forming the Davidic Covenant in which God would build David a house, or a dynasty, culminating in Christ Himself, David's greater son, ruling over God's

Beware of people who claim to have heard from God when their words fail to comport with what God has already spoken in His God-breathed Scripture.

'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. (**Ezekiel 13:3**)

Jeremiah 23:30-32 -- “Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,”

declares the LORD, “who steal My words from each other. Behold, I am against the prophets,” declares the LORD, “who use their tongues and declare, ‘The Lord declares.’ “Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,” declares the LORD, “and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting; yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit,” declares the LORD.

2 Peter 3:15-16 -- And regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Jesus said, “Why do you not understand my speech? Because you cannot hear my word.” (John 8:43)

Mark 8:38 -- If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

The Positive Argument

God repeatedly declares the value of His own words and aligns Himself with them. Every word that comes from God is reliable, stable, trustworthy, and the very basis of our faith and confidence.

Psalm 138:2 - I will bow down toward Your holy temple And give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word according to all Your name.

The Jesus Examples

Rich man and Lazarus – they have Moses and the prophets

Luke 16:31 -- And he (the rich man) said, “Then I beg you, father (Abraham), that you send him (Lazarus) to my father’s house — for I have five brothers — in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” But he said, “No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!” But he said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”

If they won't believe the Word of God, they won't repent of their evil unbelief, even if someone were to rise from the grave.

Jesus on Emmaus Road – hid Himself until they saw him in the word.

Luke 24:25-27 -- And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Jesus insisted that His disciples see Him in the Scripture before He revealed Himself to them in the flesh. He prioritized what the word of God said – even placing it above the physical reality they were experiencing at that very moment.

Luke 24:44 -- Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Luke 11:27 -- And it came about while He said these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice, and said to Him, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts at which You nursed.” But

He said, “On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it.”

Matthew 4:1-4 -- Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.’” (from Deut. 8:3)

Not only did Jesus reply to Satan, but He did it with the Word of God ... three times!

Matthew 4:5:11 -- Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU’; and ‘ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.’” Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.’” (from Deut. 6:16) Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.’” (Deut 5:7) Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

If Jesus was able to drive off the temptations of Satan by standing on the Word – shouldn’t we?

Hebrews 4: 12-13 -- For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden

from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

And it's no accident that in Revelation 19:15 Jesus return with a sword proceeding from His mouth --

Revelation 19:11-16 -- And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

The Correct Reaction

The message of truth is instrumental to not only believing, but to believing properly.

Phil. 2:14-16 -- Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.

Romans 10:17 -- So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Humans come and go. The best preachers and expositors of the word in history have all died. Generation by generation men and women are raised up to call people to God through the knowledge of His word.

People pass, the word remains. The word does its work. It fulfills its purpose.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8)

As Christ said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Matt. 24:35)

It’s about the word of God.

Titus 1:1-4 -- Paul, a bond-servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior; to Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

I’ll leave you with the words taken from 2Timothy 4:1-2

“I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

“The Church’s greatest mistakes occur when the people of God listen to what a leader says without examining that instruction in the light of Scripture.” – Bryan Chapell

Proving The Resurrection of Jesus

I became convinced by the evidence, pragmatically. I became convinced by the historic evidence that there is no other answer - Jesus came up out of the grave!

What Do You Believe?

There are so many versions of Christianity out there and so many people talking about Christianity in so many different ways. Try this sometime: ask people, "Well, *why* do you believe what you believe?"

The word "believe"? "Well, I believe it because I believe it." And, you are expected to respect whatever they believe.

But, the fact that you believe something is not sufficient reason for me or anyone else to join you in that belief. The fact that you're convinced does not convince me.

So, I don't ever ask anybody to believe what I believe on the basis of the fact that I believe it. Instead, I just lay down the evidence. I say, "The Bible says this. Now you and God go work it out."

The Bible dogmatically, absolutely states some things categorically that you cannot escape and you cannot ignore. So, I tell people, "You've got one of two choices. You either face God head-on the way He represents Himself in His Word and deal with that God, or at least acknowledge that that's the God found in the Bible and then understand what you're rejecting."

But, there's no gray area in the middle.

But most people won't even look at the evidence.

I came back to the Christian faith because the facts and the evidence drove me to it.

The Facts

The great part about Christianity is that for 2000 years the facts remain the facts.

Thomas Sherlock in 1729. The text of the book is in the Old English, kind of rough to read. It's called, *The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus*. In it, Sherlock conjures up an old English court and had lawyers bring their evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. He treated it exactly the way you would treat a court case. The lawyers would state their propositions and defend them with evidence and facts. Once they'd established their positions by facts, they'd move on to the next point of contention and continue the debate. Brilliant approach.

The Case for Christ, by *Lee Strobel*. He's doing the same thing, only he's approaching it as a journalist going around to different theologians and saying, "Okay, here are the historic arguments against Jesus and His resurrection. What are your responses?" He's coming to the same conclusions.

Josh McDowell's book, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, follows Sherlock's lead in looking at the historic accounts and reaching the same conclusion.

Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853). Prior to examining the evidence concerning Christ, Greenleaf had served as professor of law at Harvard University from 1833-48. He was instrumental in organizing the university's law program. His three-volume work, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, is considered a classic of American jurisprudence. Utilizing the selfsame laws of evidence, he approached the resurrection of Jesus and ended up writing one of the most compelling defenses of the veracity of the biblical accounts ever composed - *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*,

Thomas Aquinas dealt with these exact same facts in this exact same way and came to the exact same conclusions, because the facts are the facts. You cannot escape the facts. If you're willing to face the facts, they will drive you to a conclusion.

But, I want you to be familiar with the arguments and I want you to settle these matters for yourselves.

Facts will drive you to a conclusion - a psychological conclusion that's inescapable - and that's what happened to me.

Conclusion: Jesus came up out of that grave. "Checkmate, you win!"

I have evidence! So today, I'm going to bring the evidence to you.

The Essential Message

The essence of the Christian message comes down to this: Christ died, resurrected and ascended. In the early Church, anywhere that you find the Christian message preached, these essential elements were proclaimed.

The gospel message was preached within 50 days of the actual event of Christ's resurrection. That's how early this preaching began – Pentecost. Seven weeks went by. Within 50 days, this message, in its complete form, was already being preached.

IN JERUSALEM – Where people would know whether the events described were actually true.

That means that whoever concocted the message, wherever the message came from, it was fully formed, fully understood, doctrinally established and ready to go in seven weeks. There was very little time for any "historic development."

Christ died on Passover, was laid in the grave just as the Old Testament Feast of Unleavened Bread began, and rose on the first day of the week, on the Feast of Firstfruits. 50 days later was Pentecost. That day, Peter got up and preached facts. Let's start there. Let's take a look at that - Acts 2.

Peter was standing in front of Jewish leaders who did not believe that this Christ person could possibly have risen from the dead. Now, they knew that they were responsible for killing Him.

starting at verse 22:

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man ...”

He started with a basic fact. Jesus of Nazareth. Here’s who he is. He’s a man. They would all agree, “Okay, I’m with you so far, Peter.”

“... 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:”

So far, Peter hasn’t stated anything they didn’t already know. Jesus was a man, He was from Nazareth, and He did signs, wonders and miracles that you witnessed. He laid out the facts.

Continuing with verse 23. Now, here is the part where the Jews are going to start disagreeing -

“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:”

They knew they’d taken Him, and they knew they’d slain Him. But, they were likely to disagree that it was the determinate counsel of God that had them do that. And, they certainly weren’t going to agree with that “wicked” comment.

But, there’s foreknowledge. There’s predetermination. There’s God’s sovereignty on display.

So, Peter laid out facts: he’s a man, here’s his name, here’s where he’s from, he did miracles, and you saw the miracles. That means God approved Him and you killed Him. Undeniable facts.

“Whom God hath raised up, ...”

Verse 24 continues:

“... having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”

He went back into their own Scripture and showed the Jews that everything happened exactly the way it was supposed to. Look at verse 25.

“For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.”

This is so clever. He said, “I’m going to tell you about our scripture and you know that David himself preached this very thing. He said that God would not leave His Holy One in the ground to see corruption, but would raise Him up again.” Then Peter said, “Now, when David wrote that, he wrote it in the first person, but he wasn’t speaking of himself because David’s sepulcher is right over there and he’s still in it.”

So who was David talking about when he said that?

“Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him [David], that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ [the Messiah] to sit on his throne; He [David] seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

Notice the term he used. It's a legal term. "all these people that are with me have all *witnessed* Him up walking, talking, being alive."

So, they are the witnesses. Firsthand witnesses, the best evidence you can get in court. If they are honest witnesses, you can trust their testimony.

Peter essentially said, "I've got scripture saying that the Messiah was going to die and rise up. I've got evidence that Jesus died and I've got evidence that Jesus rose again." There's the message, right from the beginning: Christ died and has resurrected. Now look where Peter goes with it:

"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

In other words, when Peter said, "He is lifted up to the Father's right hand," that's the ascension. So, within 50 days of His death, the encapsulated message of Christianity was, Christ died, He was resurrected, and He ascended. Within 50 days! That's how early the message was complete and preached openly.

The Real Jesus

Now, people who can't deal with this fact (the resurrection) don't want to deal with the Jesus of history. There's only one Jesus in history,

a different gospel and a different Christ - another gospel, another Christ (Gal. 1). Which he said, "Is not another!"

He used a word in the Greek that means, *is not equal with*, something qualitatively different. They preached the lesser gods of their imagination. For that reason, Paul concluded that if any man were to preach any other gospel than that which Paul preached, that man was to be "accursed" (Gal. 1:8).

Good and wise

Good and a wise teacher. Jesus cannot be both good and wise at the same time. He said things like, "Before Abraham was, I am," (John 8:58). Well, He said that before Abraham ever lived, He pre-existed. Or, He said, "I saw Satan cast down out of Heaven." (Luke 10:18) Well, that's crazy, unless it's true.

We don't naturally gravitate toward people who talk like that. If your neighbor suddenly told you, "Before Heaven and Earth was, I was in glory." (John 17:5) you'd conclude that you were dealing with a delusional person.

But, Jesus talked about Heaven like it was His living room. He knew it intimately! And He wasn't afraid to say so. He talked about angels, and said that the angels worshipped Him! That's utterly incredible, in the truest sense of the word, if it's not actually true.

If your neighbor claimed, "All authority in Heaven and Earth is given to me and I will judge the quick and the dead" (2 Tim. 4:1) you'd be convinced that your neighbor needed to put in a padded room.

You never, never once see in Jesus that He had any of even the slightest moral imperfection. He told us, "Judge not lest ye be judged." (Mat. 7:1) Then He went around judging like mad. Complete separation.

He never preached an ethic apart from Himself. He never said, "Do this, do this, do this, do this, and you'll be saved." Instead, He made Himself the center of the religious universe and your eternal destiny was wholly and completely dependent on what you did with Him. "I'm the way. I'm the truth. I'm the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." (John 6:45)

Ghautama Buddha came to the realization of *vanta*, which was the natural tendency in men to do evil, to do sinful things. He believed in the karmic wheel of life - that we live several terrestrial lives, life after life, working off our *karma* - paying for the things we did in our

previous life, trying to find redemption. The Buddha was aware of the fact that men are inherently evil.

He left *The Way*. The Eight-Fold Path.

Jesus never left “a way.” He said “I am the way.” (John 14:6) Jesus never left an ethic or a religion or a system behind. What you do with Me determines your eternal destiny. “

Islam. Mohammed never claimed to be deity. Mohammed said, “There is one God, Allah. Mohammed is his prophet.”

Jesus walked around saying, “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30) I and the Father are one! “I do always those things which please the Father.” (John 8:29) And, “I’m going to go to prepare a place for you that where I am you may also be.” (John 14:2-3) I will come back and get you. We will all be together, but I’ll send you the Spirit of God. Then, when He spoke of the Spirit of God coming, the Comforter, he said, “I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.” (John 14:18)

Jesus saw Himself as the complete and utter embodiment of the Trinity walking on Earth. He considered Himself equal with the Father (Phil. 2:6). Once, Philip came to Him and said, “Show us the Father and it will suffice us.” (John 14:8) But, Jesus said, “Phillip, have I been so long with you and you still don’t know me?” (John 14:9) He said, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.”

So, this idea that Jesus didn’t claim to be God is groundless. Yes He did, over and over and over again.

In Mere Christianity, **C.S. Lewis** said that when you deal with Jesus on this level you have to liken Him to a man who thinks He’s a poached egg, or you have to admit that He is God.

He cannot be a good and wise teacher because He can be good and be deluded and say all these things, but then He’s not very wise because He doesn’t know He is deluded and that He is saying things about Himself that are impossible.

Or, He could be wise and be very deceptive, but He's not good. He could be wise, telling these lies and go about telling people, "Hey, I'm God" and delude them into believing it, but that's not very good.

He is not merely a good rabbi who deserves our attention, but not our adoration. He is not simply a clever teacher who earned our admiration, but not our worship.

Look at what He actually said about Himself, face what He actually said about Himself, recognize what He said about Himself and then deal with it or walk away from it. But, dealing with a God of your imagination and a Christ of your imagination is of no value.

[The Sign of Jonah](#)

So finally, the Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "By what authority do you do these things?" (Mat. 21:23; Mark 11:28; Luke 20:2) What authority do you have to say these things or drive moneychangers from the temple? They even went so far as to say that He did miracles by the devil. (Mat. 12:24) They simply could not figure out what to do with a man who went about doing these miraculous works and then claiming, "I'm the Son of God." (Luke 11:20)

In their minds, it was utter blasphemy to equate yourself with God. That was one of the claims they used to justify killing Him. It was truly blasphemy ---

Unless He is in fact God.

They demanded a sign. Jesus replied --

"God has deigned to give one sign, the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the whale, so the Son of Man will be three days and nights in the belly of the Earth and then He will rise again." (Mat. 12:40)

That's the sign. It all comes down to that.

The Apostle Paul's entire theology came down to the resurrection.

Romans 4:25 - *He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

You need positive righteousness as high and as good as the righteousness of God to stand in God's presence. So, if Jesus died and stayed dead, if He died for your sins and that was the end of it, you still don't have anything.

1Corinthians 15:13-19 -- But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified ^[f] against God that He raised ^[g] Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹ If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

It all comes down to that! Either Jesus got up out of the grave or He didn't.

If He did, that is the single most amazing fact in human history.

If He did, then you can be satisfied that God is satisfied. You can feel free. You can understand that God is no longer angry at you and that your relationship with God has been completely set right by this once-for-all sacrifice that the book of Hebrews says "perfected forever" those for whom He died (Heb. 10:14). IF He got up.

But, if He did not get up out of the grave, then everything else He said was a **lie** and He deserves to be written off.

So what do you do about it? You look at the evidence. Either He did or He didn't get up out of the grave.

Making the Case

If you are in a court of law, it is not sufficient to merely state your conclusion. You must lay out your evidence and facts, because the facts will drive the jury to a conclusion.

You have to start with the fundamentals -- provable, known facts.

Fact 1 - Jesus actually lived.

What is the point of arguing that He died and resurrected if we do not first agree that He lived?

There is not a single legitimate, respected historian any more who disagrees with the fact that Jesus was an actual living person.

Tacitus, the Roman historian, admits that Jesus lived, that He was a man and that He was crucified. He even goes so far as to say that Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate during the time of Tiberius Caesar.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, admits that Jesus lived and that He was held to be a prophet.

Pliny the Younger wrote about the spread of Christianity around 111 AD, admitting that they considered Christ a God.

These would be astounding reports if Jesus were just a figment of someone's overactive imagination.

An offshoot of the "Jesus never lived" argument claims, "Well, the only stories you have about Jesus are in the Bible. You don't have any extra-Biblical evidence. You don't have any secular evidence."

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote what we call the Gospels, which were written as individual documents and later assembled into the canon. Of the four of them, two were first-person eyewitnesses' - Matthew and John, two of the apostles.

Luke wrote under the tutelage of Paul, who was not a firsthand eyewitness to Jesus' earthly ministry. He likely got most of the early stories from the other apostles - James and John primarily.

Mark, the shortest gospel, was written under the tutelage of Peter.

Now, they each wrote in different places to different audiences at different times.

And, they were written as letters, not as Scripture, over a roughly sixty-year time frame.

The authors supported their writing with their Scripture, the Old Testament. But, they did not set out to write new Scripture.

Later Church councils assembled those letters and agreed that they were inspired; they belonged as part of the Bible, on par with the ancient Hebrew Scriptures.

They were independent accounts written by people who had actual knowledge of historic events.

In other words, originally the gospels were extra-Biblical sources.

These were extra-Biblical sources that were then all put together and attached to the Old Testament Scriptures and we now call all of it, the Bible - the *biblios* (from which we get the word "bibliography"). The books! It is a compilation of books.

George Washington example

Even the earliest critics of Christianity never denied that Jesus existed, they only argued about the meaning and actions of His life. Early heresies erupted arguing that the resurrected Jesus was not a genuinely physical man, but an entirely spiritual entity that appeared as a man. But, even the heretics agreed that He lived.

It is impossible to believe that Jesus never lived when the whole movement could be shut down by the simple claim, "Your leader

doesn't even exist." Yet, we find no such claim by the earliest enemies of the faith.

All the evidence, physical and psychological, drives us to the conclusion that Jesus was an actual, living person.

Fact 2 - He was crucified.

Like I said, Tacitus, the Roman historian, agrees that Jesus was crucified. There are no historians - even the people who want to denounce Christianity - who disagree with the idea that He was crucified. They may argue about the effects of the crucifixion; but the event itself is central to the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, they may not agree with anything past that. They may end the story right at "He was crucified," despite the fact that the Biblical account does not end there.

But, the crucifixion is a vital part of the earliest preachment concerning Christ.

Now, a vital point concerning this fact is that He was crucified at the hands of the Romans, under the instigation of the Jewish leaders.

Both Rome and Israel had a hand in this deed.

Fact 3 - He was considered to be dead.

That's an important point. He was considered to be dead.

Joseph of Arimathaea, knowing that the High Day was coming, the first day of Unleavened Bread, went to Pilate and asked for the body.

According to John's gospel, the Jews also wanted the bodies down, so they asked Pilate to have the legs broken on the three malefactors so their bodies could be entombed before the sun went down.

The centurions went out to break Jesus' legs and when they got there it says the centurion marveled that He was already dead. He died quickly.

John 19:33-36-- “But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.”

But, that’s because Jesus did not die an ordinary death.

John 10:18 - “I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

The centurion pierced his spear into Jesus’ side and out ran blood and water. Doctors have concluded that the sack around the heart naturally fills with water during suffocation or asphyxiation, and the spear went through His ribs, piercing that sack.

My point at his juncture is simply that He was considered to be dead. The centurion was satisfied that He was dead. And, Joseph put Him in a tomb. You don’t normally wrap people in burial linen and anoint them with burial spices - which Joseph and Nicodemus did, after the manner of Jewish burial - and put them in a grave unless you’re convinced that they’re actually dead.

Jesus was considered dead. The historical record is without contradiction. The people around Him, the eyewitnesses, the Jews, and even the Romans considered Him to be actually, literally, genuinely dead.

Fact 4 - He was buried in a known, accessible tomb.

The tomb in which Jesus was laid belonged to Joseph of Arimathaea. Joseph apparently bought it for himself, but – since Jesus died so unexpectedly – Joseph put Him in it.

We know that Golgotha was outside the city walls, and if the archeologists have correctly identified the site, it's very close-by. But, that makes sense. If you force tortured criminals to carry their own crosses to the hill, it has to be close or they won't make it.

Now, the apostle John tells us that there was a garden in the place where the crucifixion took place, and the new sepulcher was in that garden (John 19:41).

So, the tomb was very near Golgotha hill, which was right outside the city walls. And, John also tells us that they laid Him there because it was the preparation for the high day and the tomb was close at hand (John 19:42).

Meanwhile, the women who followed Jesus watched to see where the body was laid. Wait three days, then anoint the body, following the custom. So, they needed to know where He was.

Without question, the historical record makes it plain that the tomb was close by, well-known and completely accessible. Hang on to that. Plant it in your memory and we'll get back to it.

Fact 5 - Jesus was then preached as raised from the dead.

That preaching happened immediately. As early as Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection, the message of Jesus' bodily appearances was circulating.

Wherever you read the gospel message, the fact of the resurrection is an integral component. He died, He raised, He walked and talked with the apostles, and He ascended into Heaven. That's the whole message and it was preached in its complete form immediately.

Now, we don't need to argue about whether He actually did rise from the dead, at this point. All I want you to agree with is that the earliest message included the preachment that Jesus raised from the tomb.

the earliest hymns, the earliest creeds, the most reliable historic sources – He is raised. In fact, the women who came to the tomb three days later were told by an angel to promote that very message.

Fact 6 - The Jewish leaders had a vested interest in disproving His resurrection.

Consider the Jewish leaders' love of power, both religious and political. Any message that claims that Jesus – the very man they killed – actually got up again, spells big trouble for them!

Jesus had said that the miracles He performed were adequate proof that He was sent from God. If He rose from the dead, then that single miracle alone was enough to condemn these Jewish leaders for their part in the murder.

But, even more importantly, if Jesus got up from His grave and could not be killed, then their entire religious system was undermined. They were no longer the leaders of Israel.

If Jesus actually was the Messiah, then the system of sacrifice was no longer necessary.

So, while there are plenty of critics of Christianity running around today, their interest in disproving the events that occurred two thousand years ago are nothing compared to the motivation the Jewish leaders had to disprove it. That's why they went on to persecute everyone who preached it.

Fact 7 - The disciples were persecuted because of this preaching.

Initially they suffered at the hands of the Jewish leaders and were later persecuted by the government of Rome. uncontested in history.

The Bible declares this fact, but extra-biblical sources are rife with this information. Whether it was Peter's imprisonments, Paul's beheading, or the Christians fed to lions in the Roman circuses and used as torches for Nero's garden; there is no question that this message brought about all sorts of torture and persecution.

The first disciples to spread this message, the eyewitnesses whose accounts we rest on, were also horribly persecuted for this message.

And, every record agrees that the earliest persecutions would have stopped immediately if the apostles would have quit preaching this message of the resurrection, the ascension and the miracles of Jesus.

Fact 8 - The tomb was empty.

Common sense. If you consider the Jewish leaders who instigated the crucifixion and you agree that He was buried in a known, accessible tomb, when the message of resurrection was preached they would have gone immediately to that tomb.

Had they discovered the body, the whole thing blows up immediately. It's axiomatic that the tomb had to be empty. Otherwise, nothing makes sense.

Now, regardless of how the tomb was vacated, it's historically untenable that the tomb remained occupied after the preaching of the resurrection began. The tomb had to be empty for the message to even get a footing.

Reviewing the Facts

- 1) Jesus actually lived as a historic, human person.
- 2) He was crucified.
- 3) He was considered to be dead.
- 4) He was buried in a known, accessible tomb.
- 5) He was preached as raised from the dead and ascended to Heaven.
- 6) The Jewish leaders had a vested interest in stopping this preaching.
- 7) The disciples were persecuted for preaching this message.
- 8) The tomb was empty.

Those facts are historically provable and can be ascertained from researching the records. They have been scrutinized and debated for hundreds of years, but they remain intact. No definitive refutation of these facts has ever been put forward.

Theories and Explanations

Theories to explain the empty tomb. The empty tomb is very powerful. Like I said, without it the whole religion comes apart. So, critics of Christianity attack it. They don't deny that it was empty. Too much history attests to that fact. But, they have come up with explanations for why the tomb was empty

The most popular theory to explain the empty tomb, even found in Scripture, is:

The disciples stole the body.

That is the argument you find in Matthew 28:11-15.

“Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.”

You see the collusion here. Everyone's involved.

But, let's make this easy for the moment. If the disciples stole the body, *they lied*. And if the disciples stole the body then all the rest of the stuff they preached - they also preached that Jesus resurrected and that He ascended – *is a lie*. So, they're serial liars.

They didn't just steal the body and say, “Well, He resurrected.” They added, “We ate with Him. He ascended off into Heaven. He's going to come back and get us so that we will be with Him in Heaven.” There's all this other stuff that they propagated – and it's all lies, if they stole the body.

The second explanation is: **The Jews took the body.**

This theory is one of the bases of “Holy Blood, Holy Grail” (which influenced the more recent book “The DiVinci Code”).

Untenable, unthinkable.

Nowhere in history do you find them ever claiming to have the body.

And two, inasmuch as they were torturing and imprisoning people to stop this preaching, and if it's a given that the Jews had a vested interest in stopping this preaching, if they actually had they body, they'd show it!

But, they never produced it. Why? Because they never had it. That's the only answer that makes sense.

And, of course, if the Jews took the body: why did they petition Pilate for a band of centurions to guard the tomb?

The next explanation is just as untenable: **The Romans took the body.**

It was an inside job. The Roman guards looked the other way while the Roman leaders made off with the corpse.

But, if you take into account the Roman persecution of early Christians -- and the Jewish riots over this religion in Rome until emperor cast all Jews, Christian or not, out of Rome -- all the Romans had to do, if they had the body, was produce it.

But again, nowhere in history do you find a single shred of evidence that the Roman leadership had the body or could lay their hands on it.

If either of those explanations is valid (Jews/Romans took body), they still don't explain the rest of the preaching. The disciples and writers of the New Testament are still liars. They went on to fabricate wild tales of Jesus resurrecting, walking and talking, and sailing off into the Heavens. The whole of the gospel message is a series of lies.

The fourth explanation is: **Wrong tomb.**

Those poor women, up too early, went to the wrong tomb. Sure, the tomb was empty, but it was the wrong one. All Christianity stemmed from that one mistake.

So, what's the answer? You go to the right tomb! It was a known, accessible tomb.

The Biblical account tell us that the women stood and watched which tomb Joseph laid Jesus in.

Now, think about it with me. If you are a group of liars making up a story, why would you include that bit of detail? Why would you point out that the women knew where the tomb was? You wouldn't want people checking the facts.

And, why would the entire tale of the Jews paying off the Roman guards exist if the tomb weren't actually empty? That's the power of the empty tomb. Everything else revolves around that empty tomb. If the women merely went to the wrong tomb, the guards wouldn't be confessing to the Jews.

If two women came running to you and told you that your best friend had risen from the dead, you'd go check it out. You would run to the place where your friend was buried. And, if they mistakenly went to the wrong gravesite, you would correct their error by going to the right one. And, that is exactly what the apostles did. They rushed to the tomb. When they got there, Peter bent down and looked in. The stone was rolled away. There was an angel there. Well that's some wrong tomb!

And, you can bet that when the Jews and Romans heard the preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead, they certainly went to the right tomb.

So, it's clear that the body was missing. The tomb was empty.

Resuscitation.

When He got into the tomb the cold air hit Him and He resuscitated! He waited there for three days, apparently to add to the suspense or appear to fulfill prophecy. Then He came dragging wearily out of the tomb, pushing the stone aside and announcing His resurrection. It was all a glorified magic trick.

But, that's nothing like the Jesus that the apostles preached. They preached a strong, vital person who walked and talked and ate with them. He had authority and even showed Thomas the wounds in His hands and side. They said He was utterly resurrected to a new body that was as at-home on Earth as it was sitting at the right hand of God.

So, to emphasize the point: if it was just a cheap parlor trick, the rest of the apostles' preaching was a fabrication, and they are still liars.

Hallucinations

Or, the women and apostles who arrived at the tomb suffered from a form of mass hallucination, where they *thought* they'd seen Him alive. But, they were just imagining it.

does not sit well with most psychologists. According to the account, the apostles were in the completely wrong state of mind for hallucinations to occur. They had no expectancy.

The women who were going to the tomb were carrying oils and spices to anoint a dead body! They were not going there expecting to find Him risen and alive. So, the idea that they would have a hallucination is unimaginable.

And, by the way, if it was just a hallucination on the part of the women, how did they manage to get everybody else to have the same hallucination? How was it that everybody else hallucinated an empty tomb? All you have to do is produce the body and the hallucination theory comes apart!

And, Paul claimed that there were more than 500 witnesses! He went on to say that the greater part of those witnesses were still alive as he was writing. So, he adjured his First Century readers to go check with them. If this was a hallucination, it was the most remarkable mass hallucination in history.

The Veracity of the Witnesses

So we're down to this. Two choices. And, like in every good court case, it always comes down to: It's either true or it's not.

None of us, 2,000 years after the fact, can be eyewitnesses. But, those who *were* eyewitnesses, who wrote this stuff for our benefit, either told the truth or they were lying.

It comes down to what legal experts call "the veracity of the witnesses."

Major evidence of their veracity

The books I listed earlier go into copious detail to make this point.

The witnesses wrote their accounts at different times in different places, under pain of death. And there are "internal indication of truth" - proof or evidence of their honesty – buried in their text.

For instance, the book of Mark is the shortest of the four gospels. Everyone agrees that Mark, tutored by Peter, wrote to Gentiles. Now, if you're a Gentile who knows nothing about historic Judaism, you don't know the book of Daniel and you've never looked at the apocryphal book of Enoch. You have no idea that the phrase *Son of Man* is one of the most powerful Messianic phrases in the Jewish lexicon. *Son of Man* - that's a powerful Messianic phrase.

So, if you're writing to Gentiles, trying to convince them that Jesus is God, and you have all these quotes where Jesus refers to Himself as the *Son of Man*, that doesn't help your case.

That helps Jews, but it doesn't help Gentiles. So if you're a liar, you're going to change that. You're going to write, "And He said He was the *Son of God*."

But, because Mark was an honest reporter, through Peter, of what actually happened, they quoted what Jesus actually said even though it hurt their case. Instead, go back and just count it: Mark - the shortest gospel - uses the term *Son of Man* more than any of the other three because that is what Jesus actually said.

That's an internal indication of the truth -- evidence of the honesty of the writers. They told the truth even if it hurt their case.

Mark also tells us more about Peter's failure than any of the other three. Now, if you are Peter and you are a liar making up a story about how your Master died and then didn't stay dead -- that He resurrected and ascended up into Heaven -- basic human nature would expect you to add stuff that would make you look good.

Remember, it's a lie. And, you'd overplay your role. You would want your reputation in history to be glowing.

Being an honest reporter, he admitted that he failed, he failed, he failed. He reported that he stuck his foot in his mouth. He admitted that Jesus called him Satan to his face. He told how he denied Him three times. He was an honest reporter of what actually happened.

Facts, little details, prove the veracity of the Gospel writers. In the book of John, you read about Jesus feeding the 5,000 with the fish and loaves and it says that before He did it, He turned to Philip and said, "Where can we go and buy bread in this area?" And, Philip replied, "Even if we had 200 pennyworth we couldn't feed all these people." But, it says that Jesus was testing him because He knew what He was going to do. (John 6:5-7)

Why Phillip? Well, you go to the book of Mark and you find out that they came across the Sea of Tiberias also called the Sea of Galilee.

And when they got to the other side, according to Luke, they landed in Bethsaida (Luke 9:10).

So, now you know that he fed the 5,000 in Bethsaida. Then you go to John's account of Jesus picking His disciples and it says that at one point some Greeks came who wanted to see Jesus and they went through Phillip, assuming Philip would be sympathetic to them because he was from Bethsaida (John 12:20-21).

So, you take all these little bits and pieces, minutia, small details that all match up, to tell the story - even though these accounts were written by different authors at different times.

if they were lying - and remember, they only had seven weeks to concoct the lie - how were they able to concoct that much detail where even if you put them side-by-side they continue to compliment each other? Liars don't work that way.

And remember, too, that some of them wrote 50 years after the fact. Wouldn't they have taken the time to aggrandize the story? Wouldn't they have forgotten some of the facts? Wouldn't they tell some stuff that wasn't real? But, they don't! Put them side-by-side and they tell the same story. They appear to be honest men.

But, more importantly, there are dramatic transitions that happen to every one of these men.

you see Peter? He's always walking around saying the wrong thing, doing the wrong thing, putting his foot in his mouth, always at the wrong place, always saying the wrong thing. He's a headstrong fisherman who was always ready to fight, pulling out his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane and lopping off the ear of the high priest's servant. He had no sense of God's timing or plan.

And yet, cataclysmically, something happened to this guy where he was willing to stand up on the Day of Pentecost - under threat of death - before the Jews and boldly proclaim, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain; Whom God hath raised up, having

loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” (Act 2: 23-24)

He went from being Mr. Wrongheaded Foot-in-Mouth to standing up and declaring, even though they put him in prison time and time again, “We ought to obey God rather than man. The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.” He preached it, and preached it, and preached it! Something changed in Peter!

Do men act like for a lie? When they know it’s a lie?

John? John and James, the two brothers, sons of Zebedee, were called the Sons of Thunder! It was Jesus’ nickname for them, Sons of Thunder, because they wanted to call down fire from the sky and burn up people who didn’t understand what they were saying. These are hardheaded guys that sent their mother to ask Jesus for the best seats in the kingdom. And yet, he became known as the Apostle of Love. Something cataclysmic changed in him.

Read his three epistles. He, more than any other New Testament writer, emphasizes Christian charity and sacrificial love. What happened to that John?

Thomas? Thomas walked around saying, “I do not believe, I do not believe.” “Doubting Thomas.” He’s the one who, when the others told him that Christ had appeared to them, said, “I won’t believe it unless I can put my fingers in the mark of His hands and feet and side.” (John 20:25)

He was pragmatic. He wanted proof. According to John’s account, Jesus showed up a week later and said, “Here I am; touch me.” That man, Thomas, got down on his knees and declared, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)

Thomas is the one who, when Jesus said, “I’m going to Jerusalem.” Thomas - always Thomas - turned to the rest and said, “Well, let’s go with Him so we can die with Him!” Always doubting.

And yet, historically, it is Thomas who went into the Himalayas, into the area of the Vedanta faith, into Babylon, Persia and India. He took the gospel to the most difficult theological group to pierce with this idea of a man, a Christ, who was God living among us, who died and rose again.

It was “Doubting Thomas” - never doubting - who went into one of the most difficult parts of the world to preach Christianity. That’s a cataclysmic change! What happened to Thomas?

“Never mind; we made it up.”

But the final evidence for me, these twelve men, if you count Paul, all scattered out into the world, separate from each other, and all suffered terrible, painful deaths for what they believed, preached, and taught.

All they had to do was say, “Never mind; we made it up.” That simple confession would have been sufficient to stop the persecution.

One was flayed with a Brahman Sword. One was whipped until his skin was peeled off. One was crucified upside-down. One was pierced through with swords. One was pierced through with spears. One was boiled in oil. One (or perhaps two) was beheaded in Rome. One was nailed to a cross, sideways. And remarkably, they all died separate from each other.

Now, psychologically I can see where if we all conspired to tell a lie, and if we all stayed together, there would be power in numbers; honor among thieves. No one would want to be the first to break rank. But, these men were separated. And, they were liars. And, they knew they were liars.

This lie, by the way, has managed to last for 2,000 years and change countless people’s lives for the better.

I can believe that a lie will change a person, but not for the better. And I can believe that maybe everyone in this room could get together and tell the lie. But, separate us? Start peeling our skin off?

Burn us at the stake? It won't be long before one of us says, "Never mind; we made it up! It's a lie! It's a lie!"

This is the critical juncture. You have to contend with the historic fact that these men went to their painful, agonizing deaths without recanting. They preferred death over denying the gospel.

That's remarkable, if they are liars.

Aquinas came to the conclusion that it was just psychologically untenable to believe that you could take these guys, separate them and torture them the way they did, for a lie. Not only do the internal indices of their gospels show them to be honest men, but the cataclysmic change in their natures and personalities proves that something happened in their lives that was so inexplicable that they willingly preached to their deaths that Christ was dead and buried, that He raised, and that He ascended.

And the final, unshakable proof in all of this is that not once anywhere - you won't find one place where any one of them recanted. Not a one!

Look in the Book of Acts. Read about Stephen. They were stoning him and as Stephen died, he looked up and declared, (Acts 7:56) "I see the heavens opened; and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."

Look at the list.

The next martyr we meet with after Stephen, according to Luke, is James the son of Zebedee. He had his head cut off under Herod Agrippa.

Philip labored diligently in upper Asia. He suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis in Phrygia. He was scourged, whipped, had his skin peeled off, was thrown in prison and afterwards crucified in A.D. 54. All he had to do was say, "Never mind; we made it up" to literally save his skin.

Matthew the Tax Collector. His labors were in Parthia and Ethiopia, where he was martyred. Matthew was slain with a halberd, thrust through with a large spear, in the city of Nadabah in A.D. 60.

James the Less, who was supposed to be the brother of Jesus, at age 94 was beaten and stoned by the Jews and finally his brains were dashed out with a club. All he had to do was say, "We made it up. It's a lie."

Matthias was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.

Andrew, he was crucified on a cross where the two ends are fixed transversely into the ground; hence the derivation of the term *St. Andrew's Cross*.

The people of Alexandria dragged Mark to pieces and finally laid his body at the foot of Serapis, their idol. Then, they stoned him to death lying there before their god.

Peter was crucified upside down because he said that he was not worthy to be crucified in the same manner of His Lord. There's psychological conviction. Something happened to that man!

Paul was beheaded at Rome.

Jude, the brother of James, was crucified.

Bartholomew was cruelly beaten and then crucified by idolaters.

Thomas, called Didymus, as I mentioned, went into Parthia and India where he excited the rage of the pagan priests and was martyred by being thrust through by the pagan priests. Despite such opposition, Thomas stayed there! He could have left! He was in India. There were no other Christians in India. All he has to do is say, "We made it up." They would have let him go; he could go to a new city and start the lie all over. The others would never know. But, he died rather than recant in the slightest; doubting nothing about the veracity of the Christ he preached.

Simon was crucified.

The idolatrous priests of Greece hanged Luke on an olive tree.

John ended up on the Isle of Patmos and was later boiled in oil and possibly beheaded.

Barnabas, it's believed, was crucified in 73 AD.

Do men die like that for lies?

Now, it is true that religious zealots will die for what they believe. We've seen that throughout history. Every religion has its martyrs. But, they die because they believe it is true.

My point here is that these men claimed to be, and are historically verified to be, the actual eyewitnesses to the events of Christ's life, death and resurrection. They actually *knew* whether or not what they were promulgating was true. The fact that they were all willing to die proves the veracity of their story. They were all, to the person, convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that their preaching was true. And, they were willing to die rather than recant.

And remember, they made up this lie in 50 days. They had a very short time to pull this together.

They were convinced that He had risen. It doesn't matter how you look at it. The evidence keeps saying that they would even hurt their story and willingly die torturous deaths, but they refused to deny their preaching or say, "We made it up."

it's psychologically untenable that these men were liars.

There's Only One Conclusion

When I reached that point in my thinking, I couldn't help but arrive at the inevitable, inescapable conclusion: These guys believed it! The historically verifiable eyewitnesses to these events believed every word they preached, and it changed them for the better! And, they all died praising God.

They were convinced. And, the historic account leaves you with only one conclusion. Jesus actually died and rose again from the grave. That's the only conclusion that makes any sense when you view the facts logically and honestly.

Now, if it is true - historically, factually, inescapably, pragmatically, logically, true - then He has every right, being who He says He is, to lay His claim on your life.

The one proof that Jesus offered as verification of His claims, the sign of Jonah, is true and accurately reported. There is simply no other explanation that makes sense.