

Apologetics Study

EVIDENCES FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Compiled by Richard Helsby

Please send comments and suggestions to rhelsby@cheerful.com

This is an introductory small group study on Christian Apologetics. Please note that this is a compilation and selection of existing material, and that throughout this study I have referenced the original literature sources. It is highly recommended that you consult these sources if a more in-depth study is required.

Table of Contents

STUDY ONE – APOLOGETICS INTRODUCTION.....	5
WHY APOLOGETICS?	6
<i>Obedience</i>	6
<i>Removing Barriers</i>	6
<i>Strengthens Christians</i>	6
INTELLECTUAL SUICIDE?.....	7
LOGICAL COURSE OVERVIEW.....	7
STUDY TWO – DID JESUS EXIST?.....	12
INTRODUCTION	12
EVIDENCE FROM CHRISTIAN SOURCES FOR THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS	12
EVIDENCE FROM SECULAR SOURCES FOR THE HISTORICITY OF JESUS.....	12
<i>Cornelius Tacitus</i>	13
<i>Flavius Josephus</i>	13
<i>Thallus, The Samaritan-Born Historian</i>	14
<i>Pliny the Younger</i>	15
<i>Lucian of Samosata</i>	15
<i>Suetonius</i>	16
<i>Mara Bar-Serpaion</i>	16
<i>The Rabbinic Writings</i>	16
CONCLUSION	17
STUDY THREE – IS SCRIPTURE RELIABLE AS A HISTORICAL RECORD?	20
STUDY THREE – PART 1 – THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST	21
HOW MANY COPIES OF NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS ARE AVAILABLE?	21
WHAT LENGTH OF TIME PASSED BETWEEN THE ORIGINAL AND THE EARLIEST COPIES?	22
WHAT VARIANCES EXIST BETWEEN THE COPIES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT	23
COMMENTS ON COLLUSION	23
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL TEST CONCLUSION	24
STUDY THREE – PART 2 – THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST	28
WHEN WAS THE NT WRITTEN?	29
DOES THE NT CONTAIN “GOSPEL FICTIONS” OR LIES?	31
DOES THE NT CONTAIN MYTHS?	34
WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF ALL THE SUPERNATURAL EVENTS RECORDED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT	
DOCUMENTS?.....	43
DOES THE NT CONTAIN CONTRADICTIONS?.....	44
<i>What constitutes a contradiction?</i>	44
<i>The approach to apparent contradictions</i>	45
<i>Difference versus Contradiction</i>	46
<i>Translation</i>	46
<i>Use of Language</i>	47
<i>Context</i>	47
<i>Which standards to use?</i>	47
<i>Descriptions of God</i>	48
<i>External Contradictions</i>	49
<i>Conclusion</i>	49
INTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST CONCLUSION	49
STUDY THREE – PART 3 – THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST?	50
THE EVIDENCE FROM EXTRA-BIBLICAL AUTHORS	50
THE EVIDENCE FROM MARTYRS	50
ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE	50
HISTORICAL-GEOGRAPHICAL EVIDENCE	52
JEWISH CULTURAL EVIDENCE	53

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE TEST CONCLUSION	54
STUDY THREE – CONCLUSION.....	54
STUDY FOUR - DID JESUS CLAIM TO BE GOD?	59
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE	59
THE DIFFICULTY OF THIS ISSUE	60
DID JESUS MAKE ANY CLAIMS TO DEITY?	60
WAS JESUS MISUNDERSTOOD?	62
EVIDENCE FOR JESUS’ DEITY.....	62
<i>Jesus’ use of divine titles / names</i>	63
YHWH - Lord	63
Son of God	63
Son of Man	64
Abba - Father.....	65
<i>Jesus’ claims to be God</i>	65
Jesus’ claims to pre-existence	65
Jesus’ claims to be omnipresent	66
Jesus’ claims to be omniscient	66
Jesus’ claims to be omnipotent.....	66
Jesus asks for and accepts worship as God.....	67
Jesus’ claims to authority - authority that only God has.....	67
Jesus makes claims that make no sense if he is not God.....	69
Additional claims about his nature and powers	70
Jesus’ claims to equality with God.....	71
<i>How those around Jesus Christ responded to Him</i> ^[16]	73
CONCLUSION	74
STUDY FIVE – WAS JESUS WHO HE CLAIMED TO BE?	77
THE POSSIBILITY	77
WHO WAS JESUS?	77
<i>Was Jesus a Liar?</i>	79
<i>Was Jesus a noble Liar?</i>	81
<i>Was Jesus honestly mistaken?</i>	82
<i>Was Jesus a lunatic?</i>	83
<i>Did Jesus claim to be God in a non-literal, mystical sense?</i>	86
CONCLUSION	88
WHY ARE MANY NOT CONVINCED?.....	89
STUDY SIX – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS	94
FOUR STEPS IN THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY	94
DO JESUS’ CLAIMS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?	97
THE SCEPTICS PRAYER	97
APPENDIX – ADDITIONAL SECTIONS.....	103
THE RESURRECTION: HOAX OR HISTORY?	104
<i>The importance of the Resurrection</i>	104
<i>The Argument for the Resurrection</i>	104
Jesus didn’t die – The Swoon Theory.....	105
The disciples were deceivers – The Conspiracy Theory.....	107
The disciples were deceived - Hallucination Theory	108
The disciples were myth-makers - Myth Theory	110
Jesus Rose	111
Conclusion.....	114
DOES GOD EXIST?	118
<i>The Possibility</i>	118
<i>Observational Evidence for the Existence of God</i>	119
Anthropological Research	119
Astronomical Observation of Design	119
The Improbability of “Mere” Chance.....	120
Our Inherent Sense of Right and Wrong.....	121
Origin of the Universe	122
The Beginning of Time.....	122
<i>Philosophical Arguments for the Existence of God</i>	123
Pascal’s Wager ^[1]	123

Cosmological Arguments	124
The Argument from Efficient Causality ^[1]	124
The Argument from Change ^[1]	125
The Argument from Time and Contingency ^[1]	125
The Argument from Degrees of Perfection ^[1]	126
The Design Argument ^[1]	126
The Kalam Argument ^[1]	127
The Argument from Contingency ^[1]	128
Psychological Arguments	129
The Argument from the Origin of the Idea of God ^[1]	129
The Moral Argument ^[1]	129
The Argument from Morality / Conscience ^[1]	130
The Argument from Desire ^[1]	131
The Argument from Truth ^[1]	131
The Argument from Religious experience ^[1]	132
The Common Consent Argument ^[1]	132
<i>Conclusion</i>	134
ARE MIRACLES POSSIBLE?	138
<i>What is a Miracle?</i>	138
<i>Two Different Questions</i>	138
<i>Arguments for the Possibility of Miracles</i>	138
<i>Conclusion</i>	139
<i>Related issues</i>	139
What about Science and Miracles?	139
Is it not more likely that miracles never really occurred as described?	140
A BRIEF NOTE ON PROPHETIC EVIDENCE	144
<i>Common Objections</i>	144
The prophecies were written at or after the time of Jesus	144
Fulfilled prophecy in Jesus was deliberate	144
Fulfilled prophecy in Jesus was coincidental, an accident	144
<i>Important Old Testament Prophecies About Jesus</i>	145
<i>Conclusion</i>	147
BIBLIOGRAPHY	149

Study One – Apologetics Introduction

The term apologetics is derived from the Greek word *apologia*. The English equivalent of *apologia* is *defense*, or literally, 'a speech for the defense'.^[31 p.2] An *apologia* typically focuses on explaining, justifying, or making clear the grounds for some course of action, belief, or position. This study focuses on Christian apologetics, a reasoned defense of Christianity.

Discussion Groups

This Apologetic Study has been designed with a small discussion group in mind. The material is broken up into 8 to 10 weekly modules, and the group should meet once a week in order to discuss the material covered in the previous week. This discussion will prove to be invaluable as you work through concepts, various evidences, and gain insights from one another.

To facilitate this discussion, a number of questions are provided throughout the study material. Participants are encouraged to bring questions, raise difficulties, and to point out weaknesses and strengths in the material. The discussion group should provide an environment where open and honest discussion can take place.

For this first introductory module, it would be worthwhile to get to know the different members of the group. Who they are, where they come from, how did they land up on this course, what are they hoping to gain from it, etc. It may also be a good idea to let each member of the group read a paragraph or two as you work through this introductory material.

The responsibility of giving a reasoned defense of Christianity is *not* the job of a select few theologians who specialize in apologetics. The Bible makes it clear that the job of defending Christianity belongs to every Christian and that all Christians should be prepared to do this at any time.^[31, p.7] Christians are commanded to be prepared to give an answer for the reason that they have hope in Jesus Christ. "... *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have...*" (1 Peter 3:15)

Jude supports Peter's exhortation, instructing his readers to "*contend earnestly for the faith*" (Jude 3). He was instructing them to defend Christianity against the false teachings that were arising in the church.^[31, p.7]

A Christian's reason for their hope in Jesus should include how and why they became a Christian e.g. Paul's account in Acts 22. It should also include their current relationship with, and experience of God; as well as a knowledge of who Jesus Christ is, and why what he did is so fundamentally important i.e. explaining the 'Good News' or 'Gospel'.

This apologetics study will examine only one aspect of a Christian's reason for trusting (placing one's faith) in Jesus Christ. It will examine intellectual reasoning, arguments and factual evidence for Christianity.

Why Apologetics?

Obedience

The first reason, for the Christian, is out of obedience to God's will. Refusal to give a reason for faith is disobedience to God (1 Peter 3:15).^[1 p.22] Christians are also encouraged to love God with all of their heart, soul and *mind* (Matthew 22:37). Moreover, by defending the truths of God, Christians defend His honor and name, thereby bringing God glory. As the apostle Paul said, "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).^[31 p.8]

There are at least another two practical reasons for doing apologetics: to break down barriers preventing non-Christians from seriously considering Christianity,^[31 p.7] and to instruct and strengthen Christians.^[1 p.22]

Removing Barriers

People deserve to hear and understand the case for Christianity. When they raise intellectual objections, they should receive concrete, verifiable answers that support the authenticity of Christianity. We live in a world with many contradicting beliefs and claims. What do we do when these views and beliefs clash - when contradicting beliefs all declare to reflect divine truth? Which set of beliefs should someone accept? Without any clear, objective way of choosing, we might throw up our arms in despair and reject all religions, believing that there is no way to intelligently discern which, if any, is really true. Or we might arbitrarily choose one, or even sample several options to try and discover what we like best.^[31 p.4,6]

Discussion: What were / are some of the reasons that you do not believe in the truth of Christianity? Have you ever spoken to a person who refuses to believe that Christianity is true or even relevant? What did they say?

Many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, decide whether to believe or not with their hearts, much more than with their heads. Even a perfect argument does not move people as much as emotion, desire and concrete experience. When it comes to convincing non-Christians about the truth of Christianity, apologetics aims at getting to the heart *through* the head. Generally, we can't believe what we know to be untrue, and we can't love what we believe to be unreal. Arguments may not bring a person to faith, but they can certainly keep a person away from faith.^[1 p.21] Christian apologetics aims to address the arguments and intellectual barriers that people may have when it comes to considering the truth of Christianity.

Strengthens Christians

Many Christians are comfortable in their faith and don't feel a need to back it up with evidence. However, many do desire the affirmation of apologetics to strengthen their faith. Although, when speaking to doubting Thomas, Jesus commends those who believe without 'seeing' (John 20:29), he still provided Thomas with the evidence he desired (John 20:24-27).^[31 p.9]

Much of the world rejects Jesus Christ as God and all the other major beliefs of the Christian faith. Christians are confronted with ideologies that contradict or attempt to refute their beliefs. God can and does use apologetics to help believers whose faith is wavering and to ease the suffering caused by doubt. Apologetics can be especially reassuring to new believers seeking to rationally justify their step of faith. It is a

wonderful and joyful experience to discover that one's faith is firmly grounded on objective truths that are confirmed by sensible, verifiable evidence. ^[31 p. 9]

Intellectual Suicide?

Christians do not have to commit 'intellectual suicide' in order to have faith. It is not a blind trusting of something unknown or uncertain. In fact, people are to love God with their heart, soul and *minds* (Matthew 22:37). Apologetics aims to demonstrate that Christianity is grounded in objective and historical fact.

Apologetics can bring you to faith in the same sense as a car can bring you to the sea. The car can't swim, you have to jump in the sea in order to do that. But you can't jump in from a hundred miles inland. You need a car to first bring you to the point where you can make a leap of faith into the sea. Faith *is* a leap, but a leap into the light, not into the dark. ^[1 p. 21]

Discussion: What do you think is meant by a 'leap of faith into the dark', and a 'leap of faith into the light'? What are the differences between the two?

One last point on the use of apologetics. The goal of apologetics is not victory but truth. It is aimed against unbelief, not unbelievers. The arguer's tone, sincerity, care, concern, listening and respect matter as much as their logic – probably more. The world was not won for Christ by arguments but by holiness: "What you are speaks so loudly, I can hardly hear what you say". ^[1 p. 22,23]

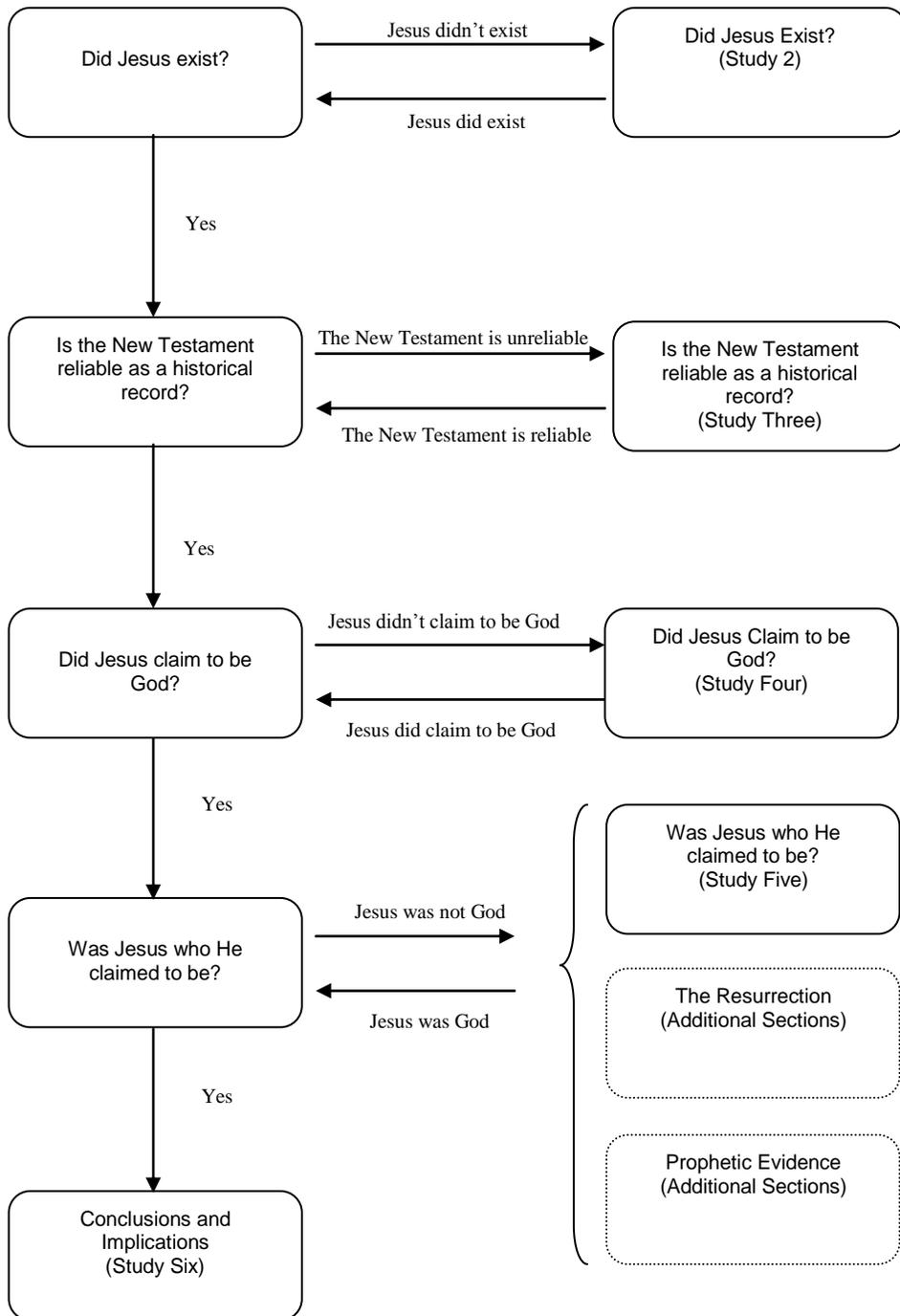
Discussion: How should apologetics (arguments and reasoning) be, and not be, used? How important is a Christian's life / life-style when discussing Christianity?

Logical Course Overview

This course will first look at the question of Jesus' historicity i.e. did Jesus really exist or was he just a myth. It will then seek to establish that Scripture (the New Testament) is reliable as a historical record, and that Christ's claims to divinity are found in Scripture. It will then examine the truth of these claims. The logical structure, and high-level apologetic argument covered in this course is therefore:

1. Jesus existed;
2. The New Testament is reliable as a historical record;
3. Christ's claims to divinity are found in Scripture;
4. Christ's claims are true

The diagram of the following page illustrates how the material in this study fits into this logical structure.



- The Bibliographical Test (Study 3 Part 1)
- The Internal Evidence Test (Study 3 Part 2)
- The External Evidence Test (Study 3 Part 3)

- Does the NT contain "Gospel Fictions" or lies?
- Does the NT contain myths?
- What are we to make of all the supernatural events recorded in the New Testament documents?
- Are miracles possible? (Additional Sections)
- Does God exist? (Additional Sections)

Course Overview

Discussion questions and exercises

Note that while some of these exercises may be repetitious, they will assist in the internalization of the material.

Break into smaller groups of two or three and work through the following:

- **Describe in your own words what is meant by the term 'Christian Apologetics'.**

- **Who should study apologetics and be able to give a reasoned defense of Christianity?**

- **If Christians are to have 'child-like faith', why should they bother with apologetics? (List at least three reasons, including brief explanations)**

- **What difference, if any, could apologetics make to your everyday life?**

- **Have you ever seen anyone use logic and arguments to break another person down? What should they have done? What changes might you need to make in the way you discuss issues with others?**

- **What are the implications if Jesus' claims to be God are true? If it is true, what difference could or should it make in people's lives?**

Once you have completed these questions, the entire group may want to discuss points that they found interesting.

Discussion Groups

Preparation required for the following week

Please read the following

- “Study Two – Did Jesus Exist?”

Possible discussion questions for when the group meets next week

It may be worthwhile discussing some of these questions in pairs.

- Have you ever met anyone that claimed that Jesus did not really exist?
- What is one of the primary reasons why the “Jesus-myth” is not taken seriously?
- Why would some object to using the New Testament documents as evidence for the existence of Jesus? Are these objections legitimate? Why or why not?
- Name two reliable non-Christian sources for the historicity of Jesus. Who were they? What was the gist of what they wrote?
- Which of the historical references to Jesus do you find the most interesting, and why?
- What would you tell someone who believes that Jesus did not exist?

Study Two – Did Jesus Exist?

Introduction

One of the ideas that persist today is the “Jesus-myth” – the idea that Jesus did not even exist. This idea has been around for some time, and was first significantly publicized in the 1800’s by a German scholar named Bruno Bauer. ^[3]

To think about: What would you currently say in response to the statements that ‘Jesus never existed’ or that ‘Jesus is just a myth’

Does the “Jesus-myth” have any scholarly support? The answer is a definitive “no”. One has to ignore a great deal of evidence, and treat the evidence left over most unfairly, in order to deny that Jesus existed. Support for the "Jesus-myth" does not come from historians, but from writers operating far out of their field. ^[3] For historians, the historicity of Jesus is as sure as that of Julius Caesar. ^[5 p. 81]

Before we look at some of the available evidence for the historicity (real historical existence) of Jesus Christ, it is worth noting a primary reason why the “Jesus-myth” is not taken seriously: the fact that we have no evidence that the historicity of Jesus was questioned in the first centuries. Surely, if Jesus did not exist, this would have been the first thing that opponents of Christianity, especially those in the Jewish community, would have highlighted. ^[4]

Evidence from Christian Sources for the Historicity of Jesus

These sources include the twenty-seven different New Testament Documents and the writings of the early Church Fathers (e.g. Polycarp, Eusebius, Irenaeus, Ignatius, Justin and Origen). Most historians would agree that these sources are sufficient to testify to the existence of Jesus. After all, what we know about Alexander the Great could fit on only a few sheets of paper; yet, no one doubts that Alexander existed. ^[3] The issue whether these sources are reliable reports of the details of Jesus’ life is another matter, and will be dealt with later.

To think about: What would some objections be to referring to the New Testament and early Church Fathers writings as evidence for the existence of Jesus? What could you say in response to these objections?

Evidence from Secular Sources for the Historicity of Jesus

J.P. Holding³ concludes that we find three levels of source material:

- Highly reliable sources: Tacitus and Josephus.
- Moderately reliable sources: Thallus, Pliny, and Lucian.
- Marginally reliable or unreliable sources: Suetonius, the letter of Mara Bar-Serapion, and the Talmud.

Cornelius Tacitus

Tacitus was a Roman historian writing early in the second century AD (112 AD). His Annals provide us with a single reference to Jesus of considerable value. The following is a full quote of the relevant cite, from Annals 15.44. Jesus and the Christians are mentioned in an account of how the Emperor Nero went after Christians in order to draw attention away from himself after Rome's fire of 64 AD: ^[3]

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. ^[3]

Is this Tacitus a reliable source? Is there good reason to trust what he says? The answer here is: Absolutely! The Tacitean literature is full of praise for the accuracy, care, critical capability, and trustworthiness of the work of Tacitus. ^[3]

- **What does Tacitus tell us about the historical existence of Jesus?**

Flavius Josephus

Josephus (born AD 37) was a Jewish historian. He became a Pharisee at the age 19 and in A.D. 66 he was the commander of Jewish forces in Galilee. After being captured, he was attached to the Roman headquarters. ^[5 p. 82] In Josephus' antiquities, there are two quotes that mention Jesus. Here is the first and smaller quote:

Antiquities 20.9.1 But the younger Ananus who, as we said, received the high priesthood, was of a bold disposition and exceptionally daring; he followed the party of the Sadducees, who are severe in judgment above all the Jews, as we have already shown. As therefore Ananus was of such a disposition, he thought he had now a good opportunity, as Festus was now dead, and Albinus was still on the road; so he assembled a council of judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James, together with some others, and having accused them as law-breakers, he delivered them over to be stoned. ^[3]

Evidence favors highly the genuineness of this passage. ^[3]

- **What evidence presented here by Josephus opposes the Jesus-myth?**

Here is the second Josephus reference, the Testimonium Flavianum, as it is popularly called. The authenticity of the passage was first questioned in the 16th century; one of its most significant detractors was the French sceptic Voltaire.^[3] The passage reads:

Antiquities 18.3.3 Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day.^[3]

The fact that there are interpolations (additions) here is seldom questioned; very few scholars hold that the entirety of the passage is genuine. It is doubtful, however, that the entire passage was ‘made up’, but rather that interpolations were added at a later stage.^[3]

In summary, the evidence points to the authenticity of the first quote, and accepts the second quote acknowledging interpolations.^[3]

Thallus, The Samaritan-Born Historian

He is one of the first Gentile writers who mentions Christ. In 52 A.D. he wrote attempting to give a natural explanation for the darkness which occurred at the crucifixion of Jesus. However, his writings have disappeared and we only know of them from fragments cited by other writers. One such writer is Julius Africanus, a Christian writer about 221 A.D.^[5 p. 84] One very interesting passage relates to a comment from Thallus. Julius Africanus writes:

“Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonably, as it seems to me’ (unreasonably, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died).”⁵

- **What can we infer about the existence of Jesus from this reference to Thallus' histories?**

From the reference we see that the Gospel account of the darkness (Matthew 27:45) which fell upon the land during Christ’s crucifixion was well known and required a naturalistic explanation from those non-believers who witnessed it.^[5 p. 84] Note that the word 'Gospel' often refers to one of the four main New Testament books: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.

Pliny the Younger

Pliny the Younger was Governor of Bithynia. His correspondence in 106 A.D. with the emperor Trajan included a report on proceedings against Christians. In an extended explanation to his supervisor, Pliny explained that he had been killing both men and women, boys and girls. There were so many being put to death that he wondered if he should continue killing anyone who was discovered to be a Christian, or if he should kill only certain ones. He goes on to say that he also forced them to "curse Christ, which a genuine Christian cannot be induced to do." [5 p. 83] He also described their actions and practices as follows:

They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word, not to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up. [5 p. 83]

- **What does Pliny reveal about the early Christians and the existence of Jesus?**

Is this a genuine reference, or are there doubts about its veracity? Although a few critics in the previous centuries claimed otherwise, there is really no doubt about the genuineness of this reference. That it is some kind of Christian creation is a position that is not taken seriously today. [3]

What is important, is the testimony by Pliny that Christians died for their faith. This was extremely unlikely to have happened if Jesus had not existed. [3]

Lucian of Samosata

From this satirist and playwright of the second century, we have two quotes from a play entitled "The Passing of Peregrinus." The hero of the tale, Peregrinus, was a Cynic philosopher who became a Christian, rose in prominence in the Christian community, then returned to Cynicism. Lucian's attack is not so much on Christianity, but on the person of Peregrinus who took advantage of the Christians' simplicity and gullibility. [3]

He alludes to Christ as

"... the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult to the world ... Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers ... after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshiping the crucified sophist himself and live under his laws." [5 p. 82]

Although, Jesus isn't mentioned by name, there is no doubt that he is referring to Jesus. No one else was ever worshipped by the Christians. [3]

- **How could this reference be used to support the historical existence of Jesus?**

Suetonius

Suetonius was a court official and annalist under Hadrian, 120 A.D. ^[5 p.83] He wrote the following:

"As the Jews were making constant disturbance at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome". ^[5 p.83]

The main objection to using this passage is that the word "Chrestus" as Suetonius spells it. Because of this, some say that it does not refer to Jesus Christ. ^[3] Others believe that it is an alternative spelling for Christus – a name used to refer to Jesus Christ. ^[5 p.83]

Note that Luke possibly references this same expulsion in Acts 18:1-2.

Mara Bar-Serpaion

Mara Bar-Serpaion sent a letter to his son Serapion. His letter contains following:

“What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their Kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; He lived on in the teaching which He had given.” ^[5 p. 84]

This reference to Jesus is not particularly valuable. We have no idea what qualifications the writer of this letter held. We are not even sure when this letter was written, other than that it was after 73 AD. At best, it offers us a special insight into how one particular non-Christian viewed the person of Jesus. ^[3]

It is, however, clear that the writer regarded Jesus as a "real" person like Socrates and Pythagoras - and not as a myth or an invention of Christianity, as the Christ-mythicists would argue. ^[3]

The Rabbinic Writings

The Talmud citations (Jewish writings from AD 100-500) are contested and some feel that they hold little value when it comes to the historicity of Christ. However, a worthwhile point that can be derived from the Talmud is that it provides no indication that Jesus was a mythical figure. Although the rabbinic sources may not contain clear references to Jesus - from the fact that the Talmudists concentrated on smearing Jesus' legitimacy rather than focusing on the issue of Jesus' existence, we may deduce that they had no grounds whatever for doubting his historical existence. ^[3]

The following is an example from one of the writings (note that the Talmud uses the term *hanging* when referring to Roman crucifixion)

“On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (of Nazareth) ... he hath practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel. Let everyone knowing aught in his defense come and plead for him. But they found naught in his defense and hanged him on the eve of Passover” [5 p.86]

- **Why is it significant that the Rabbinic writings concentrated on smearing Jesus' legitimacy instead of dealing with the issue of his existence?**
-
-
-
-
-

To think about: Which of the historical references to Jesus do you find the most interesting, and why?

Conclusion

There is large documented support, both Christian and secular, for the historical existence of Jesus Christ. The Jesus-myth is a groundless speculation, contrary to all evidence, and totally without basis. There can be no doubt that Jesus Christ is valid historical person.

Discussion Groups

Preparation required for the following week

Please read the following

- The introduction to “Study Three – Is Scripture reliable as a historical record?”
- “Study Three – Part 1 – The Bibliographical Test”

Possible discussion questions for when the group meets next week

- How does a person test the reliability of a historical document? What three tests should be applied to the document? Briefly describe these tests in your own words.
- Can you think of any other tests that should be used?
- Why is it important that the New Testament be a reliable historical document?
- In the Bibliographical test, how do we establish that we have accurate copies of the original documents?
- What difference does it make if there are only a few copies and many variances?
- What difference does it make if our earliest copy of an ancient document is dated hundreds of years after the original was written?
- How many copies of the New Testament manuscripts are available? How does this compare to other ancient literature?
- What length of time passed between the original and earliest copies? How does this compare to other ancient literature?
- What variances exist between the copies of the New Testament? How does this compare to other ancient literature?
- What is it important that no core belief of Christianity is dependent on any textual variant?
- What do you think are the three main arguments against the possibility of later purposeful changes to the text of the New Testament?
- In your own words, state what the Bibliographical test is, and how and why the New Testament documents pass it so well?

Study Three – Is Scripture reliable as a historical record?

We now need to determine whether we can make use of the New Testament as a reliable historical record. Does the New Testament contain an accurate account of the life of Jesus Christ?

In order to determine its reliability, we need to test the New Testament with the same criteria that all historical documents are tested. One this is done, we will find that if one discards the Bible as being unreliable, we must discard almost all ancient literature as being unreliable! ^[5 p. 73]

There are three tests that should be applied to any ancient documents – the bibliographical test, the internal evidence test and the external evidence test. ^[6 p. 43]

- 1) The Bibliographical test. This is an examination of the textual transmission by which the documents reach us. In other words, this determines whether or not the text that we have now is the same as what was originally recorded. Has the text been changed over time? Can we be sure that the documents of the New Testament that we now have, are the same as the ones originally recorded? ^[6 p. 43]
- 2) The Internal evidence test. This determines whether what is written is credible (accurate/true) and to what extent. Were the writers of the New Testament telling the truth? ^[6 p. 51]
- 3) The External evidence test. This determines whether other historical material confirms or denies the internal testimony of the documents. What sources are there, apart from the literature under analysis that substantiates its accuracy, reliability, and authenticity? ^[6 p. 54]

To think about: Can you think of any other tests that should be used?

- **Why is it important to establish that the New Testament is a reliable historical document? List some possible reasons.**

We now look at the New Testament with respect to the three tests.

Study Three – Part 1 – The Bibliographical Test

This is an examination of the textual transmission by which the documents reached us. As we no longer have the original documents, how reliable are the copies we currently have? How can we be sure that the documents we have, are accurate copies of the originals? How can we be sure that there have not been significant changes or errors made in the process of copying over the years?

In order to establish that we have accurate copies of the original documents, the Bibliographical test examines the following questions:

1. How many copies of the document in question are available and what variances exist between the copies? ^[7]

This enables us to compare the copies with each other. The more copies we have the better the comparisons that we can make. If the copies of a document are filled with significant differences, then it would not be possible to know what the original author wrote! But if the variances are few and minor, then the process of copying over the years has been faithful to the original. ^[7]

2. What length of time passed between the original and the earliest copies? ^[7]

If the earliest copies we have were written hundreds of years after the original, a lot of changes could have been made and we wouldn't know about it. But a short interval of time would increase our assurance in the reliability of the copies. ^[7]

How many copies of New Testament manuscripts are available?

There are now over 5,300 known Greek manuscripts; over 10 000 Latin Vulgate manuscripts and at least 9300 other early versions (e.g. Ethiopic, Slavic, Armenian, Arabic). If we add these all together, there are more than 24 000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today! ^[5 p. 39]

Lets us compare this amount with the number of copies of other ancient historical writings: ^[5 p. 42]

- a) The 'Iliad' by Homer has the second greatest number of manuscript copies of any work of antiquity. There are 643 manuscript copies. Here are some examples of other works of antiquity:
- b) Caesar's "Gallic wars" (10 manuscript copies)
- c) Livy (20 manuscript copies)
- d) Plato's 'Tetralogies' (7 manuscript copies)
- e) Pliny The Younger's 'History' (7 manuscript copies)
- f) Sophocles (193 manuscript copies)

The number of manuscript copies of the New Testament *far* surpasses the number of copies of any other ancient document.

- **What difference would it make if there were only a few copies of the original New Testament?**

What length of time passed between the original and the earliest copies?

Several papyrus fragments, which contain significant portions of the New Testament, have been dated to within 50-150 years of the original New Testament documents.^[7]

Examples include:

- a) John Ryland’s MS (130 AD) contains a portion of the Gospel of John and was found in Egypt
- b) Bodmer Papyrus II (150-200 AD) contains most of John
- c) Chester Beatty Papyri (200 AD) contains major portions of the New Testament

We also have several nearly complete New Testament Greek manuscripts, which were copied within 300-400 years of the originals^[7], for example:

- a) Codex Sinaiticus (350 AD), found near Mt. Sinai
- b) Codex Alexandrinus (400 AD), found near Alexandria in Egypt
- c) Codex Vaticanus (325-350AD), located at the Vatican in Rome

In fact, there are 500 different copies of the New Testament that are earlier than 500 AD.^[1 p. 162]

Let us again compare this with other classical manuscripts^[7]:

- a) The ‘Iliad’ by Homer – the earliest copy is 500 years removed from the original
- b) Caesar's "Gallic wars" – 1000 years
- c) Livy - 350 years (and the earliest copy is only a fragment).
- d) Plato’s ‘Tetralogies’ – 1200 years.
- e) Pliny The Younger’s ‘History’ – 750 years.

Since scholars accept as generally trustworthy the writings of the ancient classics, even though the earliest manuscripts were written so long after the original writings and the number of existing manuscripts is in many instances so small, it is clear that the reliability of the text of the New Testament is likewise assured.^[6 p. 45]

- **What difference would it make if our earliest copy of the New Testament was dated hundreds of years after the original was written?**

What variances exist between the copies of the New Testament

The process of critically studying a text, examining the copyists' errors, omissions, additions and other corruptions which have crept into the text since it was first written is known as textual criticism. Scholars use this process to determine how much of the document we are able to recover and designate as authentic.

With respect to the New Testament, there are *some* variations between the many thousands of manuscripts available. However, the vast majority are very minor (spelling, differences in phraseology, etc.) and modern translations of the New Testament text often note the differences in footnotes. ^[7]

Textual criticism of the New Testament documents is no different from textual criticism of any other secular texts. ^[3] Having said this, it is significant to note that textual criticism has been able to recover the New Testament text with **99%** accuracy. We are able to say that 99% of our current copy of the New Testament documents is an accurate copy of the originals! Furthermore, no doctrine (core belief) of Christianity is dependent on **any** textual variant. ^[8]

- **What is it important that no core belief of Christianity is dependent on any textual variant?**

Comments on Collusion

One objection that is sometimes raised is that the later church conspired to eliminate discrepancies and made purposeful changes to the text of the New Testament. Although we examine this claim more thoroughly in the Internal Evidence Test (the section on possible Gospel Fictions), it is worth making certain points here.

- Textual conspiracies such as are often suggested would be practically impossible - there is no way that the church could have eliminated ALL known readings of a given text! ^[8]
- No other ancient work is available in so many copies and languages, and yet all these various versions agree in content. ^[1 p. 194]
- The numerous manuscripts were located over a wide geographical distribution (for example Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Greece, and Italy). Yet, there are only trifling discrepancies. The differences that do exist are quite minor and are predominately the result of unintentional mistakes. ^{[1 p. 194] & [8]}
- The New Testament documents could not have been corrupted without a great outcry on the part of all orthodox Christians. ^[1 p. 195]
- The quotations of the New Testament books by the early church Fathers all coincide. ^[1 p. 195] In fact, the early church Fathers quote the New Testament so extensively that all of the New Testament, except for eleven verses, can be found in

their existing works. ^[5 p. 51]

- There is no precise time when the falsification could have occurred as the New Testament documents are cited by the church Fathers in regular and close succession. The text could not have been falsified before the church Fathers writings, as then the apostles were still alive and could refute such tampering. ^[1 p. 195]
- Also working against any idea that some important text was lost or added is evidence that textual criticism was already in process as early as the second and third century. Origen complains of negligence and audacity by scribes; Jerome takes note of various scribal errors, and so on. They were on guard against any variations. ^[8]
- The text of the New Testament is every bit as reliable as the text of the classical works of antiquity. To reject the textual reliability of the New Testament would be to reverse all the rules of criticism and to reject all the works of antiquity, since the text of those works is less certain than that of the New Testament. ^[1 p. 195]
- There is no solid textual evidence to support the idea that the church made deliberate changes to the New Testament. ^[8]

Bibliographical Test Conclusion

The evidence for our New Testament writings is so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning. ^[7] Most historians accept the textual accuracy of other ancient works on far less adequate manuscript grounds than is available for the New Testament. ^[8]

The New Testament passes the tests for historical documents better than any other ancient historical document, and we can safely say that our present New Testament text is a very accurate copy of the original!

Now that we have established the textual reliability of the New Testament, we need to establish whether its accounts are historically reliable. This leads us to the internal and external evidence tests.

Discussion questions and exercises

- **How does a person test the reliability of a historical document? What three tests should be applied to the document? Briefly, describe these tests in your own words.**

- **In the Bibliographical test, how do we establish that we have accurate copies of the original documents?**

- **How many copies of the New Testament manuscripts are available? How does this compare to other ancient literature?**

Discussion Groups

Preparation required for the following week

Please read the following: Study Three – Part 2 – The Internal Evidence Test

- Introduction
- When was the NT written?
- Does the NT contain “Gospel Fictions” or lies?
- Does the NT contain myths?

Possible discussion questions for when the group meets next week

- What does the internal evidence test aim to achieve?

When was the NT written?

- What difference would it make if the New Testament was written both geographically and chronologically ‘far’ from the life of Jesus?
- What sort of ‘errors’ could a writer make if they were not recording events as eyewitnesses themselves, or as interviewers of eyewitnesses? Are these ‘errors’ found in the New Testament? What does this imply about when it was written?
- Can you think of any references in the New Testament that contain proper names, dates, cultural details, historical events, customs and opinions of life in and around Jerusalem?
- Why is it so significant that eyewitnesses were alive when the New Testament was written?

Does the NT contain “Gospel Fictions” or lies?

- What are five good reasons why we can conclude that the New Testament does not contain created fictions or lies? How would you explain these to points to a friend?
- If you had to lie, how much punishment would you be able to endure before confessing?
- What evidence is there for the claim that the NT contains created fictions and/or lies?

Does the NT contain myths?

- Why do you think this is such a common assumption?
- How does the style of the NT and the style of myth differ?
- Why is it so important that a number of generations need to pass before true history can be replaced by myth?
- How does the dating of the New Testament, and the Bibliographical test oppose the necessary requirements for the ‘myth’ theory?
- How do the miraculous accounts of Jesus differ to the accounts of other religious leaders such as Buddha and Muhammad?
- What affect on the myth theory does the New Testament writers’ claim to be telling historical fact make?
- What are three good reasons why we can conclude that the New Testament does not contain myth? How would you explain these points to a friend?

Study Three – Part 2 – The Internal Evidence Test

This test determines whether what is written is credible (accurate/true) and to what extent. We may have what the New Testament writers originally wrote (the Bibliographical test), but were they telling the truth? ^[6 p.51]

There are some principles that we need to bear in mind when we determine a document's acceptability. Law professor and historian, John Warwick Montgomery, applies the following four 'fundamental principles of laws of evidence' to the New Testament documents: ^[31 p. 42]

1. The ancient documents rule

In order to establish the credibility of a document, Aristotle's dictum is to be followed by the literary critic. This dictum states: "The benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself, and not arrogated by the critic to himself." In other words, one must listen to the claims of the New Testament under analysis, and not assume fraud or error unless the authors disqualify themselves by contradictions or known factual inaccuracies. ^[6 p. 51]

2. The parol evidence rule

External, oral testimony or tradition will not be received in evidence to add to, subtract from, vary, or contradict an executed written instrument such as a will. This rule insists that the New Testament documents should be allowed to 'interpret itself' and not be twisted to external, extra-biblical data. In other words, we should not interpret the documents in the light of our own - or other's - preconceived assumptions. For example, we should not simply dismiss the New Testament as unreliable because we feel that miracles cannot happen. We should not make up our minds before we have examined the evidence. ^[31 p. 42]

3. The hearsay rule

"A witness must testify 'of his own knowledge', not on the basis of what has come to him indirectly from others i.e. hearsay. Were the writers on the New Testament documents eyewitnesses of the events that they recorded? ^[31 p. 42]

4. The cross-examination principle

The more a witness is subjected to close and searching cross examination, the more confidence we can place in their testimony. Were the witnesses of Jesus and his life subjected to severe opposition - hostile cross-examiners who would destroy the case of Christianity if the early Christian's testimony been contradicted by the facts? ^[31 p. 42]

When these four legal principles are considered, with regards to the credibility and accuracy of the New Testament documents, we find that the documents should be unequivocally pronounced valid and reliable as evidence about Jesus Christ. ^[31 p. 42]

In order to establish this historical credibility of the New Testament documents we will examine the following questions:

a) When was the New Testament of the Bible written?

The witness's nearness both geographically and chronologically to the events recorded, is closely linked to their ability to tell the truth. If the writers of the New Testament wrote their accounts hundreds of years after Jesus' existence, or never even stayed in the same vicinity, how can we trust their reports about him?

b) Does the New Testament contain "Gospel Fictions" or lies?

Did the writers of the New Testament, or the early church, create stories and sayings for Jesus as they saw fit? Did the writers lie?

c) Does the New Testament contain myths?

Do the accounts of Jesus contain myths? If not, what are we to make of all the supernatural events recorded in the New Testament documents?

d) Does the New Testament contain contradictions?

- Which one of the 'fundamental principles of laws of evidence' does question (a) above relate to? What about question (d)?

When was the NT written?

The witness's nearness both geographically and chronologically to the events recorded, is closely linked to their ability to tell the truth. Did the New Testament writers record their accounts of the life of Jesus hundreds of years after Jesus' actual existence? Did they even come from the same geographical region as Jesus? Were the writers of the New Testament eyewitnesses (or did they relate the accounts of eyewitnesses) to the life and teachings of Jesus?

The New Testament writers certainly claimed to be eyewitnesses and to have interviewed eyewitnesses: ^[5 p.61]

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-3)

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (2 Peter 1:16)

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. (1 John 1:3)

The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. (John 19:35)

The New Testament documents also show an intimate knowledge of Jerusalem prior to its destruction in AD 70. The documents are full of proper names, dates, cultural details, historical events, customs and opinions of that time. ^[1 p. 193]

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar--when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene (Luke 3:1)

To think about: Can you think of any references in the New Testament that contain proper names, dates, cultural details, historical events, customs and opinions of life in and around Jerusalem.

The New Testament also does not contain any anachronisms i.e. it does not place any person, or event in a time where it does not belong; there are no errors in fixing dates or referring to events, circumstances or customs. The writers of the New Testament certainly appear to have been first century Jews who were witnesses to the events. ^[1 p.194]

Historians, however, also has to deal with the eyewitness who consciously or unconsciously tells falsehoods, even though they are near to the event and are competent to tell the truth. ^[6 p. 52]

Before examining the truth of their claims, it is worth examining when the actual New Testament documents were written. The dating of the New Testament documents is greatly debated topic and the dating ranges from 40 - 100 AD (depending on liberal / conservative scholars). However, we do find that there is no good reason to date ANY of the Gospels (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) later than 70 AD. We also find that Paul's letters, which contain all the main claims that are in the Gospels, were written between 49 and 65 AD! ^{[9] & [5 p. 62]}

We can therefore state that the New Testament was written in the same generation in which the events took place. It was circulated among the very people about whom these documents spoke, while they were still alive to deny them. Both first and second-generation eyewitnesses were alive when the New Testament was written! ^[2]

- **What difference would it make if the New Testament was written both far away from, and long after the life of Jesus?**

- **What sort of ‘errors’ could a writer make if they were not recording events as eyewitnesses themselves, or as interviewers of eyewitnesses? Are these ‘errors’ found in the New Testament? What does this imply about when it was written?**

- **Why is it so significant that eyewitnesses were alive when the New Testament was written?**

Let us now examine the issue of whether the writers of the New Testament recorded falsehoods.

Does the NT contain “Gospel Fictions” or lies?

It is commonly assumed that the church and New Testament writers felt free to create stories and sayings for Jesus as they saw fit. They point out that many passages are likely to be products of the Church's faith rather than actual historical events. We will examine some arguments and reasons why we can safely conclude that the New Testament does not contain these created ‘Gospel Fictions’ or lies.

- Eyewitnesses would not permit such creation.

How could the authors of these supposed “pieces of historical fiction” expect to get them past the eyewitnesses? The eyewitnesses could act as a check against imaginations, exercise control over the developing tradition and examine doubtful statements concerning Jesus' ministry. There were a number of early disciples / eyewitness (hundreds, and even thousands). The early church did not grow up in isolation, in some corner, but in the full glare of publicity in the great cities of the Roman Empire.^[9]

It was also not only friendly eyewitnesses that they had to deal with. They could not afford to risk inaccuracies and especially not any manipulation of the facts. The many hostile witnesses, who were also aware of the main facts surrounding the life of Jesus Christ, would at once expose these. In fact, one of the strong points of the preaching of the early followers of Jesus, was their confident appeal to the knowledge of their audience. They not only said, "We are witnesses of these things", but also, "As you yourselves know". (2 Peter 1:16 and Acts 2:22)^[6 p. 53]

- **Which one of the 'fundamental principles of laws of evidence' relates to the presence of hostile witnesses? Describe the principle in your own words.**

- Why would the church have created such a difficult faith to follow?

Certainly, they could have made things much easier on themselves by, for example, permitting sacrifices to the Emperor of Rome or perhaps making the difficult passages easier to understand!^[9]

- Why are there no passages relevant to later church issues?

Much of what is in the Gospels is not relevant to the early church. If there are passages that were created and put on Jesus' lips, and were therefore products of the early church, why are there not teachings of Jesus on subjects critical to the early church? Such as circumcision, speaking in tongues, Jewish/Gentile unity, divorce of non-Christian spouses, women in the ministry. If the church felt free to invent Jesus' sayings, why not some sayings on these issues?^[9]

- Arguments for Gospel fictions involve a lot of speculation and have to discredit the evidence we do have.^[9]

The Fiction theories are necessary complicated as they demand an explanation of

- a) what happened in the ministry of Jesus
- b) why the early church said something different
- c) why the early church wrote up stories which bore little relation to the historical events.

- Strong oral tradition guards against such fabrication.

The church had a solid oral tradition (and this is even stronger when considering the likely possibility that Jesus' sayings were also written somewhere), how did anyone get away with creating new sayings of Jesus? Anything not agreeing with what Jesus said would have been rejected.^[9]

- How does one account for the presence in the Gospels of stories derogatory to revered leaders of the early church?

Examples include accounts such as the competition of the apostles for high places in the kingdom, their flight after Jesus' arrest and Peter's denial of Jesus.^[6 p. 53]

- How does one account for the presence in the Gospel's of stories 'derogatory' to Jesus?^[6 p. 53]

Examples include: the failure of Christ to work miracles in Galilee, the references of some auditors to His possible insanity, His confessions of ignorance as to the future, His moments of bitterness, and His despairing cry on the cross. No one reading these scenes

can doubt the reality of the figure behind them.

- Paul differentiates between what is from him and what is from God. ^[9]

Paul (in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 12) indicates that a difference was recognized between the words of Jesus and his own words. If he could simply add to what God said, why did he feel the need to clarify the difference?

- The gospel events were too well known for any someone to plausibly get away with alteration

For example, consider the analogy of how easily World War II was remembered twenty to thirty years afterward. If someone suggested some seriously distorted version of the events of those days, no one would be fooled.

Also, consider the example of the release of Nelson Mandela. Suppose that, thirty years after his release from prison, a non-fiction best-seller portrayed a thoroughly consistent picture of Nelson Mandela having never left prison, but rather dying in his cell before he was released. Although most of us did not know him personally, we would certainly know enough to contribute to a rebuttal.

- How could this fabrication not only be accepted, but serve to motivate the followers of Jesus to the point where they quickly took this "new" Gospel and risked their lives evangelizing the entire Mediterranean world? ^[9]

Lies are always told for some selfish advantage. They did not benefit at all by claiming that their Master was God incarnate. They were ostracized, criticized, rejected, persecuted, and in many cases martyred. They were hated, scorned, persecuted, excommunicated, imprisoned, tortured, exiled, crucified, boiled alive, roasted, beheaded, disemboweled and fed to lions. Nor did they make lots of money by making the claims that they did. ^[1 p.186]

To think about: If you had to lie, how much punishment would you be able to endure before confessing?

- How do we explain that none of Jesus' followers cracked under pressure or persecutions and admitted that their accounts of Jesus were a fabrication?

The historical fact is that no follower of Jesus ever confessed, freely or under pressure, bribe or even torture, that their accounts of Jesus were a lie, a deliberate deception. ^[1 p. 185]

- The character of the disciples argues against such a conspiracy on the part of all of them, with no dissenters

They were honest, simple, common peasants, not cunning, conniving liars. Their words and deeds proved their sincerity. They willingly died for their "conspiracy". Nothing proves sincerity like martyrdom. ^[1 p. 185]

- If they lied, they carefully intertwined fact and fiction.

There is great accuracy used in describing events, places, and people (as confirmed by archaeology). ^[2]

- In suffering and dying for a lie, they would have had to go against everything Jesus and they themselves taught! ^[2]

“Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’, and your ‘No’, ‘No’ ” - Jesus (Matthew 5:37)

“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour” - Paul (Ephesians 4:25)

“If you want to enter life, obey the commandments ... Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony...” Jesus (Matthew 19:18)

“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” - Peter (1 Peter 2:1)

- The book with some of the world's highest standard and loftiest goals would have to have been composed by liars, frauds, and deceivers! ^[2]

What book presents a higher standard of love and morality than the New Testament? For example, Jesus' "Sermon On The Mount" (Matthew 5-7) and Paul's "Discourse On Love" (1 Corinthians 13)

- There is no evidence for this position

There is only speculation. To state that they writers of the New Testament lied, we must argue from silence - this is an incredibly weak argument. To raise the point that they lied as a mere possibility does not constitute advancing evidence for the speculation. ^[17]

To think about: Can you think of any evidence supporting the claim that the New Testament contains created fictions and/or lies?

- **What do you think is the best argument against the claim that the writers of the New Testament lied? Why?**

Does the NT contain myths?

If the church and New Testament writers did not deliberately lie or create Gospel fictions, perhaps their accounts of Jesus are myth. They are neither literally true nor literally false, but rather spiritually or symbolically true.

To think about: Why do you think that the 'myth' theory is such a widely held belief?

We now examine arguments and reasons why we can conclude that the New Testament does not contain myths.

- The style of the New Testament is not the style of myth, but that of real, though unscientific, eyewitness description. ^[1 p. 163]

Any literary scholar who knows and appreciates myths can verify this. Unlike myths, the NT contains no overblown, spectacular, childish exaggerated events. ^[1 p. 189]

Unlike myths, the NT has psychological depth. Myths involve spectacular external events and do not add much internal depth of character. The character depth and development of everyone in the Gospels - especially Jesus, is remarkable. ^[1 p. 189]

Unlike Myths, the NT is not verbose. Myths are verbose; the Gospels have an incredible economy of words. ^[1 p. 189]

In the New Testament documents, there are also indications of eyewitness description. For example the detail of Jesus writing in the sand when asked whether to stone the adulteress or not (John 8:6). Why is the detail there? It accomplishes nothing. The only explanation is that the writer saw it. The Gospels are full of these little details, both of external observation and internal feelings that are found only in eyewitness descriptions or modern realistic fiction. ^[1 p. 189]

It may be worthwhile to take a quick look, for purposes of comparison, at the closest thing we have around the time of the Gospels to an attempt at a realistic fantasy. This is the story of Apollonius of Tyana, written around A.D. 220 by Flavius Philostratus. There is some evidence that a sage named Apollonius may really have lived, and thus Philostratus's work is a real example of what some have thought the Gospel's to be: a fictionalized account of the life of a real sage and teacher, introducing miraculous elements to build up the prestige of the central figure. It therefore gives us a good look at what a real example of a fictionalized biography would look like; written at a time and place not too far removed from those in which the Gospels were written. ^[1 p. 190]

When examining this writing, the first thing we notice is the fairy-tale atmosphere. There is a rather nice little vampire story. There are animal stories about, for instance, snakes in India big enough to drag off and eat an elephant. The sage wanders from country to country and wherever he goes he is likely to be entertained by the king or emperor, who holds long conversations with him and sends him on his way with camels and precious stones. ^[1 p. 190]

Here is a typical passage about healing miracles: "A woman who had had seven miscarriages was cured through the prayers of her husband, as follows. The Wise Man told the husband, when his wife was in labor, to bring a live rabbit under his cloak to the place where she was, walk around her and immediately release the rabbit; for she would lose her womb as well as her baby if the rabbit was not immediately driven away." ^[1 p. 190]

The point is that this is what you get when the imagination goes to work. Once the boundaries of fact are crossed, we wander into 'fairyland'. But the New Testament documents are set firmly in the real Palestine of the first century, and the little details are not picturesque inventions but the real details that only an eyewitness or a skilled realistic novelist can give. ^[1 p. 190]

- To be a myth, the writers of the Gospels must have invented the new genre of realistic fantasy nineteen centuries before it was reinvented in the 20th century.

If the details found in the Gospels were invented, then a first-century tax collector (Matthew), a “young man” (Mark), a doctor (Luke), and a fisherman (John) all independently invented a new genre of realistic fantasy! ^[1 p. 189]

- There is not enough time for myths and legends to have been developed and incorporated into the Gospels.

Classical historians suggest that one or more generations need to pass before a myth can prevail. ^[10] In fact, the early proponents of this theory claimed that the New Testament had to have been written after AD 150 for the myth to have taken hold. ^[1 p. 163] Several generations have to pass before the added mythological elements can be mistakenly believed as facts. ^[1 p. 190]

However, there is only a **twenty-year** interval before we find documented information about Jesus. Paul's letters, which affirm all the main claims of the Gospels such as Christ's divinity and resurrection from the dead, were written in the 50's AD! ^[10] This is a far cry from the one or more generations required by historians for myth to develop, be accepted and replace the true historical account.

In fact, a challenge was made in the 1800's to produce a single example anywhere in history of a great myth or legend arising around a historical figure and being generally believed within thirty years after that figure's death. No one has ever answered that challenge. ^[1 p. 191]

Apologists do not simply say that any legends should have "waited" a certain amount of time before forming. What they say is that it takes time for legends to be able to "stick", to earn the status truth and thus replace or supplement what was really true. ^[10]

Legends could arise, but they would then be countered by the hard facts and they would then die within a short period unless they were put together so late that it was impossible to check their validity by normal means. ^[10]

The so-called "legends" of Christianity (divinity claims, resurrection, etc.) were "invented" (as the sceptics say) so early that they therefore would still be in the squashable stage at their most critical period. But the fact that they were not squashed is testimony that they are not legends. ^[10]

In other words, they were not legends, and they were not invented - they actually happened! ^[10]

Additional Note 1 ^[10]

As many sceptics often use other myth examples and compare them to the account of Jesus, here is a rough observation of the three basic stages in the progress of similar movements.

1. Initial acceptance.

This is where everyone gets excited and picks up on the new movement, for whatever reason. In this stage, the movement thrives and grows.

2. Critical analysis.

Also known as Disillusionment, Crash and Burn, etc. Call this the place where things get rough. It is where people discover that the movement is based on false premises, and it all goes downhill from there.

3. Alteration for survival.

In order to survive, the movement must change dramatically. This usually leads to a slow death and possibly total extermination. It is also the stage (very late) when legends are produced that cannot be contramanded by accessible methods of verification, precisely because they have been developed so late.

The key difference between other examples and Christianity is that Christianity survived Stage 2 above. Especially, when considering that its most basic claim, the Resurrection, could have been easily countermanded if it were false. ^[10]

All that had to be done was wheel the body of Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem, or take some other assertive action against the Apostles. As it is, the best that could apparently be done was say that the disciples stole the body, and that did not work. ^[10]

Additional Note 2

What about other cases where myths and legends of miracles developed around a religious founder – for example, Buddha and Muhammad? ^[1 p. 191]

Myths indeed developed, but at least two or three generations had to pass before such myths surfaced and were believed. This is in stark contrast to the “myths” of Jesus which go back to the very earliest time and documents. ^{[1 p. 191] & [10]}

- **In your own words, describe why is it so important that a number of generations need to pass before true history can be replaced by myth?**

- There is no evidence of the earlier ‘non-mythic’ layer

If a mythic “layer” had been added later, we should find some evidence, at least indirectly and second-hand, of this earlier layer. An earlier layer where Jesus was not divine, did not claim divinity, performed no miracles, and did not rise from the dead. We find instead an absolute and total absence of any such evidence anywhere, either internal (in the New Testament texts themselves) or external, anywhere else, in Christian, anti-Christian, or non-Christian sources. ^[1 p. 191]

- The accounts include dozens of little details of life in first-century Israel that could not have been known by someone not living in that time and place and there are no second-century anachronisms, either in language or content. ^[1 p. 163]

Here are some examples including specific details

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (John 12:3)

Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn (John 21:11)

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron (Luke 1:5)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar--when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene (Luke 3:1)

- Who invented this myth and with what motive?

Whether it was his first disciples or some later generation, no possible motive can account for this invention. For until the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313, Christians were subject to persecution, often tortured and martyred, and hated and oppressed for their beliefs. No one invents an elaborate practical joke in order to be crucified, stoned or beheaded. ^[1 p. 164]

And if they didn't know they would be persecuted for their "myth" they would certainly give it up as soon as they were. Yet no one ever confessed that they made it all up - even when martyred. Some refused martyrdom, rejecting Christ and worshipping the emperor, to save their lives; but not one of these ever said Christ was a myth they had fabricated. They simply did what the emperor commanded them to do to save their lives. ^[1 p. 164]

- First-century Jews and Christians were not prone to believe myths.

They were already more "demythologized" than any other people. The orthodox Jews were adamantly, even intolerantly, opposed to the polytheistic myths of paganism and to any attempts to reconcile their religion with others. Nor would anyone be less likely to confuse myth and fact than a Jew. ^[1 p. 164]

Imagine this: The transcendent God who for millennia had strictly forbidden his chosen people to confuse him with a creature as the pagans did - this Creator-God became a creature, a man-a crucified criminal. Hardly a myth that arises naturally in the Jewish mind. ^[1 p. 157]

If it was not the Jews but the Gentiles who started the myth, where did the myth come from in the New Testament? Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, twenty-five were written by Jews. ^[1 p. 157]

- Eyewitness testimony would have refuted any myths

The myth could never have been believed as fact because it would have been refuted by eyewitness of the real Jesus. Eyewitnesses would not permit such creation and the gospel events were too well known for people to 'get away' with alteration. ^{[1 p. 157] & [9]}

- Why has the "myth" continued to attract the brightest minds in history?¹

For example, Paul of Tarsus, John the Evangelist, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, John Damascene, Origen, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Boethius, Erigena, Anselm, Abelard, Aquinas, Bonaventura, Scotus, Ockham, Nicholas of Cusa, Cajetan, Luther,

Calvin, Kepler, Ignatius Loyola, Dante, da Vinci, Michelangelo, Descartes, Pascal, Leibniz, Berkeley, Copernicus, Newton, Kierkegaard, Newmand, Pasteur, Jaspers, Marcel, Galileo, Tolstoy, Chesterton, Dostoyevsky, T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis and the list goes on. ^[1 p. 157]

- The NT could not be myth misinterpreted and confused with fact because it specifically distinguishes the two and rejects the mythic interpretation. ^[1 p. 192]

Peter explicitly makes the point that the Gospel story is historical fact, not cleverly devised myths. (see 2 Peter 1:16)

Since it explicitly says it is not myth then if it is myth then it is a deliberate lie - not a myth i.e. once the New Testament distinguishes myth from fact, it becomes a lie if it is not a fact. ^[1 p. 192] This leads us to the previous section (Does the NT contain “Gospel Fictions” or lies?) where we adequately showed that the New Testament documents do not contain ‘Gospel Fictions’ or lies.

• What do you think is the best argument against the claim that the New Testament contains myths? Why?

If the New Testament document do not contain myths, or fabricated accounts, then the only option left to us is that the New Testaments writers recorded accurate historical accounts of the life of Jesus. They were indeed telling the truth.

To think about: Is this really the only option? Are there other possible explanations or objections as to why we should not accept the accounts of Jesus as accurate? How plausible are these explanations?

To think about: What are some possible 'problems' or difficulties with the conclusion that the New Testament is an accurate account of the life of Jesus?

Discussion questions and exercises

- **What does the internal evidence test aim to achieve?**

- **When do scholars say that the New Testament was written? Give one reason to support their claim.**

- **Name three good reasons why we can conclude that the New Testament does not contain created fictions or lies. How would you explain these points to a friend?**

- **How do the writing styles of the New Testament and 'myth' differ?**

- **How does the dating of the New Testament, and the findings of the Bibliographical test oppose the claim that the New Testament contains myths?**

- **How do the miraculous accounts of Jesus differ to the accounts of other religious leaders such as Buddha and Muhammad?**

- **What are the logical consequences, with regards to the myth theory, of the New Testament writers' claim to be telling historical fact?**

- **What are three good reasons why we can conclude that the New Testament does not contain myths? How would you explain these points to a friend?**

Discussion Groups

Preparation required for the following week

Please read the following:

Study Three – Part 2 – The Internal Evidence Test

- What are we to make of all the supernatural events recorded in the New Testament documents?
- Does the NT contain contradictions?
- Internal Evidence Test Conclusion

Study Three – Part 3 – The External Evidence Test

Study Three - Conclusion

Possible discussion questions for when the group meets next week

The Internal Evidence Test

- What does common sense say about a document that contains miraculous supernatural accounts? How could the acknowledgement of the existence of God effect this view?
- Are you open to idea of examining historical data for the actuality of a miracle? Why, or why not?
- Can you think of any apparent contradictions in the New Testament documents?
- Describe in your own words what constitutes a contradiction. How does this differ to a 'Difference'?
- Briefly describe four mistakes that can be made when trying to determine if a contradiction exists.
- How does the lack of external contradictions support the early dating of the New Testament?

External Evidence Test

- If the New Testament was filled with archeological inaccuracies, what impact would this have on its reliability?
- How would the historical setting influence one's ability to remember what was said there?
- How does the New Testament fare with respect to the External evidence test?

Conclusion

- Briefly, state how the reliability of a historical document is determined. Describe the three tests that need to be performed. Summarize what we can conclude about the New Testament once we have subjected it to these three tests
- If we still decide to dismiss the New Testament as unreliable, what do we then have to conclude about nearly all other ancient literature?
- Many people accept the reliability of ancient literature that is less reliable than the New Testament documents - but still refuse to accept the reliability of the New Testament documents. What are some possible reasons for this?
- If you had to talk to a friend about the reliability of the New Testament, how would you summarize and describe the evidence?

What are we to make of all the supernatural events recorded in the New Testament documents?

If we are to accept the New Testament documents as an accurate historical account of the life of Jesus, we face the question “What are we to make of all the supernatural events that are recorded?”

To think about: What does common sense say about a document that contains miraculous supernatural accounts? How could the acknowledgement of the existence of God effect this view?

Many doubt the validity of such miraculous events. What then are we to make of the New Testament which contains numerous stories of the miraculous? There are accounts of blind people who immediately received their sight, lame people walking, and dead people being raised. ^[11 p. 78]

Due to these accounts, should we automatically dismiss the New Testament documents as containing unreliable information? The answer to this lies with the question “Are miracles possible?”, for if miracles are possible, then the accounts in the New Testament could well be true and should not be simply dismissed. As this question is an important one, a separate section is devoted to answering it. *Please see the section on “Are miracles possible?”*

- **Are you open to idea of examining historical data for the actuality of a miracle? Why, or why not?**

We find in this section that the real problem is not so much with miracles, as with the whole concept of God. Once we accept the existence of God, there is no problem with miracles, as God is by definition all-powerful and fully capable of bringing them about. ^[22] For those who doubt the existence of God, there is also an additional section dealing with this all-important issue. *Please see the section entitled “Does God exist?”*

Discussion Group - Additional Note

After this weeks study, the group may wish to devote a week to examining the two issues: Are miracles possible, and does God exist. These sections, along with possible discussion questions, are available in the appendix.

There is in fact more than adequate evidence to conclude that God does exist. It then follows that miracles are indeed possible. Once we have established the possibility of

miracles, we should then be open to examining their actuality. Whether or not a given miracle has occurred now becomes a historical matter that calls for investigation.^[20]

The fact that the New Testament documents contain accounts of the miraculous is therefore, not a reason to dismiss them. We should rather subject them to honest and careful historical examination. Moreover, if the New Testament is correct in its claim that it contains reliable information about God interacting with humankind, then we would actually expect it to contain accounts of the miraculous.

To think about: If God were to interact with humankind, what would you expect to happen? How does this differ, or agree with the accounts in the New Testament?

The rest of this study sets out to carefully and honestly examine evidence for, potentially, the greatest miracle of all time; the miracle of the Incarnation – God taking on human form.

Note too, that because of the approach taken in this Apologetics study, one does not have to accept the supernatural accounts of the life of Jesus in order to continue. Later, we will be examining additional evidences for the truth of what Jesus claimed (“Who was Jesus”), and the truth of his resurrection (“The Resurrection: Hoax or History?”).

Does the NT contain contradictions?

Another common objection to the historical reliability of the New Testament documents is that it is full of contradictions. It is a popular idea that the New Testament disagrees with itself, casting considerable doubt on its own trustworthiness. However, it is easy to accuse the New Testament documents of inaccuracies, but it is quite another matter to prove it.^[6 p. 126]

- **Which one of the 'fundamental principles of laws of evidence' does the question "Does the New Testament contain contradictions" relate to?**

What constitutes a contradiction?

What in fact constitutes a contradiction? The law of non-contradiction, which is the basis of all logical thinking, states that a thing cannot be both *A* and *non-A* at the same time, in the same place, and in the same manner. It cannot be both raining and not raining at the same time in the same location.^[6 p. 127]

If a person can demonstrate a violation of this principle in the New Testament, then and only then can they prove a contradiction. For example, if the Bible said – which it does not – that Jesus died by crucifixion both at Jerusalem and at Nazareth at the same time, this would be a provable error.^[6 p. 127]

To think about: Can you think of any apparent contradictions in the New Testament documents?

The approach to apparent contradictions

When it comes to ‘apparent’ contradictions, we should not minimize or exaggerate the problem, and we must always begin by giving the author the benefit of the doubt. This is the rule in other literature, and it should also be the rule here. ^[6 p. 127]

Here are three typical examples of supposed self-contradictions (internal contradictions) in the New Testament. ^[1 p. 215]

1. The chronological order of events in the life of Jesus is not the same in any two of the four Gospels. ^[1 p. 215]
2. One account of Judas’s death says he hanged himself (Matthew 27:5); another says he fell down and his body burst open (Acts 1:18). ^[1 p. 215]
3. Matthew relates how two blind men met Jesus at Jericho, while both Mark and Luke mention only one. ^[6 p. 127]

We need to take recognition of two points with respect to questions like these.

First, a sense of perspective is needed. There is nothing substantial about these apparent contradictions. The New Testament documents could well be historically accurate in all its teachings, its message and in what Jesus said and did, even while being incorrect in incidental details like these. ^[1 p. 216] Secondly, even these minor contradictions have possible explanations. For example

1. Only Luke, who was a Greek doctor, claimed anything like exact chronological order. ^[1 p. 216]
2. Perhaps Judas’s noose broke. ^[1 p. 216]
3. Neither of the accounts actually denies the other (see the next section on Difference versus Contradiction).

It is obviously unwise to get overly creative when resolving seemingly contradictory accounts. When invoking speculative factors - which indeed, ultimately and by nature, are arguments from silence - we should choose only reasonable speculations that fit in with the characters, setting, the known facts of the situation, and human nature. ^[12]

For example, in point two above, a possible reconstruction would be as follows. Judas hanged himself on a tree on the edge of a precipice that overlooked the valley of Hinnom. After he hung there for a time, the limb of the tree snapped or the rope gave way and Judas fell down the ledge, mangling his body in the process. This fall could have been before or after death, as either would fit this explanation. This possibility is entirely natural when the terrain of the valley of Hinnom is examined. From the bottom of the valley, you can see rocky terraces 25 to 40 feet in height and almost perpendicular. There are still trees that grow around the ledges and a rocky pavement at the bottom. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that Judas struck one of the jagged rocks on his way down, tearing his body open. ^[6 p. 130]

- **Do you think that the above explanation is reasonable? Why or why not?**

Note that when resolving seemingly contradictory accounts for legal proceedings, speculation of some degree is often invoked. What must be determined, however, is how reasonable that speculation is.^[12]

It is worth stressing that when a possible explanation is given to a supposed contradiction, it is unreasonable to state that the passage contains a demonstrable error.^[6 p. 128]

Difference versus Contradiction

Concerning point three above (the accounts of the blind man/men at Jericho), suppose that you talk to a headmaster of a local school and the history teacher at that school. Later you see a friend, say John, and tell him that you talked to the headmaster today. An hour after that you see another friend, James, and tell him you talked to both the headmaster and the history teacher. Your friends compare notes, and there seems to be a contradiction – but there is not. Since you had not told John that you talked *only* to the headmaster, you did not contradict what you told James. The statements made by John and James were different, not contradictory.^[6 p. 127]

This was highlighted when we considered the manner of Judas' death. Matthew relates that Judas hanged himself, while Peter tells us he fell and was crushed by the impact. As demonstrated by the possible reconstruction of his death, the two statements are indeed different, but not contradictory.^[6 p. 130]

There is a distinction between difference and contradiction. Many biblical statements fall into this category, and people sometimes think they find errors in passages when actually they simply do not read these passages correctly.^[6 p. 127]

Translation

Another reason why two passages may appear contradictory is that the translation is not as accurate as it could be. Knowledge of the original languages of the Bible can immediately solve these difficulties.^[6 p. 127]

A classic example of this involves the accounts of Paul's conversion. In the book of Acts it states "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." (Acts 9:7 King James Version), and then a bit later it states "And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me." (Acts 22:9 KJV). The statements seem contradictory, with one saying Paul's companions heard a voice and the other saying no voice was heard.^[6 p. 128]

- **How do these two verses appear to contradict each other?**
- | |
|--|
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |

However, if we examine the Greek we find that the construction of the verb 'to hear' is not the same in both accounts. In the first case it means that something is being heard, that sounds are reaching the ear; nothing is indicated as to whether a person understands

what he hears or not. In the second case, it describes a hearing that involves mental understanding. Acts 22:9 does not deny that the associates of Paul heard certain sounds; it simply declares that they did not understand what was being said. Our English idiom in this case, is simply not as expressive as the Greek. ^[6 p. 128]

Note too that certain translations, for example the King James Bible, were put together before the availability of some of the linguistic, archaeological and cultural information that we have today, and passages may therefore be more likely to 'appear' contradictory.

Use of Language

The Bible - which is, after all, a composition of literature - makes use of various literary techniques such as metaphor. ^[12]

One particular type of verse that is often highlighted as containing contradictions are those that use the word "all" or some form of it. We would recognize that a statement like, "Everybody in the world likes ice cream," or, "I'm putting all I have into it" as an idiomatic statement indicating strong feeling or considerable weight. However, people apply this incorrectly to the Bible. If the Bible says "All the kings of the world came to Solomon for his wisdom," then they unfairly say that this is a contradiction, as not every king in the world actually came to visit Solomon. It is, however, obvious that such a phrase simply means that Solomon was famous for his wisdom and that a considerable number of rulers (not all) admired his wisdom and came to him to partake of it.

When examining a passage for a supposed contradiction, we need to be aware of any language devices that are used. ^[12]

To think about: Can you think of any passages in the New Testament that makes use of a literary technique? Do you think John 21:25 falls into this category?

Context

Context is an important issue when considering any quoted phrase, whether in the Bible or elsewhere. Most sceptics would probably agree with the statement, and say out loud, "I believe Christians are wrong when they say that the Bible contains no contradictions." If we were to quote them thereafter as saying, "I believe...the Bible contains no contradictions," they would definitely disagree. Obviously, context is important. ^[12]

To think about: Can you think of any passages in the New Testament that when taken out of context would result in a contradiction?

Which standards to use?

We need to be careful of making a judgement based on 20th century standards of what constitutes a mistake - when in fact, we ought to judge by the standards of the day in which the Bible was written. For example, many of the passages that make use of Proverbial literature (parts of the New Testament and much of the Old Testament) can be seen as containing contradictions if they treated as incorrectly. ^[14]

Wisdom literature was (and still is) characterized by language of exclusivity. This is partially attributable to the fact that it was intended to be short, compact, and easily

memorized. Because of these characteristics, the genre cannot be read as though it were absolute.^[13]

Here are two modern examples:^[13]

1. "He who hesitates is lost."
This frequently used proverb alludes to the fact that quick action leads to success, whereas self-doubt means disaster. Obviously this is not always true: Self-doubt may lead to preservation in some instances!
2. "Practice makes perfect." Does it always? Obviously not, for internal skills are a factor as well - and even then perfection is a difficult goal.

Material in the Bible that belongs in the proverbial/wisdom genre cannot be read absolutely and used to claim error and/or contradiction.^[13]

To think about: Can you think of any passages in the New Testament that fall into the proverbial/wisdom genre?

Another example is that of exact numbers. Ancient histories rarely claimed exact numbers. Inexact estimates were common and expected. So was the use of symbolic numbers instead of literal numbers to describe real events. In the Old Testament, we sometimes find examples of this, for example the populations of peoples and armies are often estimated differently in different accounts of the same events. Once we understand the use of number in ancient histories, such passages, can not be taken as evidence for a contradictions.^[1 p. 216]

We must be careful of incorrectly imposing our modern standards of accuracy on certain material in the Bible that was never intended to have it.^[1 p. 216]

Descriptions of God

Certain supposed contradictions need to be addressed on a philosophical and theological level. The following are some apparent contradictions that fall into this category:^[1 p. 216]

1. On the one hand, God is just and punishes the wicked. On the other hand, he is merciful and revokes the eternal punishment of those who repent of their wickedness.
2. On the one hand, God is absolutely one. On the other hand, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit are also called "God", so he is three.
3. On the one hand, God is awesome and terrifying. On the other hand, he is compassionate and comforting.

There are many such examples and a proper discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this study. To address these issues, both philosophy and theology is involved. The main point worth noting here is that despite the large number of issues raised, these 'contradictions' have all been competently refuted. For completeness sake here are some possible high-level answers to the above mentioned 'contradictions':^[1 p. 216]

1. God does not compromise either his justice or his mercy. The two are reconciled through Jesus' death. Jesus gets the justice and we get the mercy.
2. He is one in being and essence, three in person.
3. He is both awesome and loving. What is more awesome than love? The 'fear' of awe and respect is quite compatible with mature love' and the other kind of fear, craven fear, is the response love can evoke in the soul of the immature. The same God of holy love can be comforting to a saint and threatening to a sinner.

These are only a few samples of the large amount of similar issues that have risen in the last two thousand years. Despite the large number, the intellectual credentials of biblical theology remain impressive and unrefuted.

External Contradictions

What about external sources for contradictions? Has archeology found anything to invalidate the claims of the Bible? The answer is an emphatic ‘No’. The results have been that the Biblical claims have been proved, or considered probable. None of the Biblical accounts have been disproved by archeology. Many claims have been made (e.g. that Luke recorded incorrect details about the location of certain cities, and that Jericho fell long before the Jews came), and then later withdrawn in the light of new evidence. ^[1 p. 217]

To think about: If the New Testament documents were written long after the events that the authors claimed to be eyewitnesses to, what sort of errors could we expect to find? How does the absence of such errors support the reliability of the New Testament?

There may still be some unanswered questions (e.g. Why didn’t the Jews leave any physical remains as evidence of the exodus?) but these are simply unanswered questions and not disproofs. ^[1 p. 217]

Support for the New Testament by external sources will be discussed again when examining the External Evidence Test.

Conclusion

Over the years, people have argued over hundreds of ‘apparent’ contradiction examples. We have only mentioned a few here. However, in all the cases, **not a single supposed contradiction has ever been proved!** ^[1 p. 220]

Internal Evidence Test Conclusion

In examining whether the New Testament is credible (accurate/true) in its accounts of Jesus, we investigated whether the authors of the documents disqualify themselves by contradictions or known factual inaccuracies. We did this by examining when the New Testament was written (as the witness’s nearness geographically and chronologically is closely linked to their ability to tell the truth), if it contains contradictions, and then exploring possible alternatives to its accuracy and credibility, namely does it contain fabrications, lies or myths.

We discovered that the New Testament was written in the same generation in which the events took place and that it was circulated among the very people about whom these documents spoke - while they were still alive to deny them. We discovered a number of reasons why we can safely conclude that the authors of the New Testament did not invent stories (“Gospel Fictions”) or tell lies. We also concluded that the accounts of Jesus are not myth and that the New Testament does not contain contradictions.

In terms of the Internal Evidence Test, the New Testament documents pass with flying colours. When examining the internal testimony of the New Testament documents we can conclude that they are highly credible and accurate in their historical accounts.

Study Three – Part 3 – The External Evidence Test?

The third test of historicity is that of external evidence – whether other historical material confirms or denies the internal testimony of the documents themselves. In other words, what sources (and other external factors) are there, apart from the literature under analysis, which substantiates its accuracy, reliability, and authenticity? ^[6 p. 54]

The evidence from extra-Biblical authors

Two friends of the apostle John confirm the internal evidence from John's accounts. The historian Eusebius preserves writings of Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (AD 130). ^[6 p. 54]

The Elder [apostle John] used to say this also: "Mark, having been the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately all that he [Peter] mentioned, whether sayings or doings of Christ, not however, in order. For he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord; but afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter ... So then Mark made no mistake ... for he paid attention to this one thing, not to omit anything that he had heard, nor to include any false statements among them. ⁶

Ireneus, Bishop of Lyons in AD 180, who was a student of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (who had been a Christian for eighty-six years and was a disciple of John the Apostle), wrote ^[6 p. 54]

Matthew published his gospel among the Hebrews [i.e. Jews] in their own tongue, when Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel in Rome and founding the church there. After their departure [i.e. death, which strong tradition places at the time of the Neronian persecution in 64], Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself handed down to us in writing the substance of Peter's preaching. Luke, the follower of Paul, set down in a book the gospel preached by his teacher. Then John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned on His breast [this is a reference to John 13:15 and 21:20], himself produced his gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia. ⁶

The evidence from martyrs

There are numerous examples of people who were prepared to die because of their faith – a faith based on the reliability and trustworthiness of the New Testament accounts. Here are two examples:

Ignatius (AD 70-110). He was Bishop of Antioch and was martyred for his faith in Christ. He knew all the apostles and was a disciple of Polycarp. Ignatius is said to have been thrown to the lions in the colosseum at Rome. He had ample material and witnesses to discover scriptural trustworthiness, and the fact that he was prepared to die for his faith, supports the reliability of the Scripture (the New Testament documents) on which his faith rested. ^{[6 p. 437] [5 p. 51]}

Polycarp (AD 70-156) was a disciple of John and was martyred at 86 years of age because of his relentless devotion to Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. He was burned at the stake. His death demonstrated his trust in the accuracy of the Scripture as he certainly had ample contacts to know the truth. ^{[6 p. 437] [5 p. 51]}

To think about: Would you die for something you knew to be a lie?

Archeological Evidence

Archeology often provides some extremely powerful external evidence. It provides evidence of accuracy about the events that are recorded. Does archeology support or contradict the testimony of the New Testament documents? Not too long ago, some discounted the Biblical record because it frequently referred to things not mentioned by

any source outside the Bible. However, discoveries by archaeologists in recent years have vindicated the New Testament. ^[2] For example,

- A census, and Quirinius governor at the time of Jesus' birth? - Luke 2:1-3

It was once argued that Luke was in error and that there was no such census; that Quirinius was not governor of Syria at that time and that people did not have to return to their ancestral home. ^[2]

But archaeological discoveries have proven otherwise. We now know that the Romans had a regular enrolment of taxpayers and held censuses every 14 years (begun by Augustus Caesar). An inscription found in Antioch tells of Quirinius being governor of Syria around 7 B.C. (evidently he was governor twice). ^[2]

A papyrus found in Egypt says concerning the conducting of a census: "Because of the approaching census it is necessary that all those residing for any cause away from their home should at once prepare to return to their own governments in order that they may complete the family registration of the enrolment..." ^[2]

- Who is this Lysanias? - Luke 3:1

The only Lysanias known to ancient historians was one who was killed in 36 B.C. This caused some to question Luke's reliability. ^[2]

However, an inscription was found near Damascus. It speaks of "Freedman of Lysanias the tetrarch" and is dated between 14 and 29 AD. ^[2]

- Whoever heard of "The Pavement" (Gabbatha)? - John 19:13

For centuries there was no record of the court called "The Pavement" or "Gabbatha". This caused many to say "It's a myth" and, "See, it (the Bible) is not historical" ^[2]

But William F. Albright in "The Archaeology of Palestine" shows otherwise. This court was the court of the Tower of Antonia. The court was destroyed in 66-70 A.D. during the siege of Jerusalem. It was left buried when the city was rebuilt in the time of Hadrian and was not discovered until recently. ^[2]

- Iconium a city of Phrygia? - Acts 14:6

Archaeologists at first believed Luke's implication to be wrong. That Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia and Iconium was not. They based their belief on the writings of Romans such as Cicero who indicated that Iconium was in Lycaonia. Thus, archaeologists said the book of Acts was unreliable. ^[2]

But in 1910, Sir William Ramsay found a monument, which showed that Iconium was indeed a Phrygian city. Later discoveries continued to confirm this. ^[2]

- Whoever heard of "Politarchs"? - Acts 17:6

Since the term, "Rulers Of The City" (Greek "Politarchs"), is not found in the classical literature of the Greeks, it was assumed that Luke was wrong to refer to such an office. ^[2]

However, some 19 inscriptions have now been found that make use of this title. Five of these are in reference to Thessalonica. ^[2]

To think about: Which one of the above example do you find the most interesting?

- **If the New Testament was filled with archeological inaccuracies, what impact would this have on its reliability?**

This is just a sampling of the evidence, for entire books have been written providing further examples. Just how accurate is the New Testament in its historical description? ^[2]

"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference." – Nelson Glueck (noted Jewish archaeologist). ^[2]

"Archeology has confirmed countless passages which have been rejected by critics as unhistorical or contradictory to known facts." - Archeologist Joseph Free. ^[5 p. 65]

Of special interest is the testimony of Sir William Ramsay. He was trained in the German historical school of the mid- nineteenth century. He was taught that the book of Acts was a product of the mid-second century AD. He was firmly convinced of this and started out his career in archaeology to prove it. However, he was compelled to a complete reversal of his beliefs due to the overwhelming evidence uncovered in his research. His conclusion: ^[2]

"Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense...in short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians."

Historical-Geographical Evidence

Historical geography seeks to relate events in history to geographic locations. Knowing what has happened in a certain location in the past, reveals why Jesus would do and say something at that location when He was there. ^[6 p. 81]

To think about: How would the historical setting influence one's ability to remember what was said there?

The Gospel writers often casually refer to geographical features that indicate how familiar they are with the land. Jesus also seems to have done and said certain things in relationship to His surroundings. ^[6 p. 81] Here are some examples:

At the base of the 9,000-foot high "rock" of Mt Hermon at Caesarea-Philippi, Jesus says to Peter,

“You are Peter [Greek, Petros, a stone], and upon this rock [Greek petra, large rock, bedrock] I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it” (Matthew 16:18). ^[6 p. 82]

From Capernaum on the northwest shore of the sea, one could see several cities on top of hills all around the sea. Directly opposite, on the southeast shore lay Hoppus, the largest city visible to those in Capernaum. Its primary location was not down by the water but high on a hill overlooking the sea. Several other cities and villages perched on hilltops around the Sea of Galilee. This location adds additional insight into Jesus’ statement,

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14) ^[6 p. 83]

Galilee is a volcanic area. Volcanic rock is everywhere, and thorns grow there rapidly in the summer months. When Jesus told His parable of the four soils, His listeners would have related well to what He said. (Matthew 13:1) ^[6 p. 83]

Mustard trees still grow in Israel, and one can readily see that their minute seeds (hundreds can fit on the tip of a finger) and 15-foot height fit precisely with Jesus’ parable: ^[6 p. 84]

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches." (Matthew 13:31,32)

In Jerusalem, from the steps on the southern side of the Temple where rabbis often addressed their pupils, the chalk-white tombstones that cover the Mount of Olives are clearly visible. Jesus may well have looked in that direction as He proclaimed: ^[6 p. 83]

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” (Matthew 23:27)

Since it would be practically impossible for a later Gentile writer to have knowledge of the historical-geographical context surrounding an event in Jesus’ life, these incidents provide good evidence that what the New Testament writers describe actually happened. ^[6 p. 81]

Jewish Cultural Evidence

The setting of all four Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) is unmistakably first-century Hebrew. Some events may seem strange to us but are perfectly natural in the Jewish culture of Jesus’ day. ^[6 p. 86]

Luke 2:24 speaks of one of many cultural practices mentioned in the Gospel narratives. In obedience to Leviticus 12:2,6,8, Joseph and Mary brought the sacrifice required after the birth of a child. Their offering of two turtledoves or pigeons indicates that they were among the poor of the land. ^[6 p. 86]

Luke 7:38, speaks of a woman weeping and wetting Jesus’ feet with her tears. Weeping was an important part of Jewish culture. Professional mourners were hired for funerals, and many Jews had ‘tear vases’ where they collected the tears of their grief. ^[6 p. 86]

Hebrew marriage customs help to explain what otherwise appears to be a contradiction in Matthew 1:18,19. In verse 18, Mary is only betrothed to Joseph, whereas in verse 19, Joseph is called her ‘husband’. This makes sense when we realise that engagement among the Hebrews was considered the beginning of marriage, it was as legally binding

as marriage itself, and could not be broken off except by a bill of divorce. It therefore makes sense when Joseph is called the “husband” of Mary. ^[6 p. 86]

To think about: Can you think of any other examples?

There are many other such examples, and the author’s inclusion of accurate details of first-century Jewish culture provides additional evidence for the accuracy and reliability of the New Testament accounts.

External Evidence Test Conclusion

The New Testament more than satisfactorily passes the External Evidence Test. Not only is there external material that confirms the internal testimony of the documents, but factors such as archeology, historical-geography and Jewish customs all lend support to the accuracy of the New Testament. We can again conclude that historical material strongly confirms the accuracy and reliability of the New Testament documents.

Study Three – Conclusion

In order to determine whether we can make use of the New Testament as a reliable historical record - an accurate account of the life of Jesus Christ – we have tested the New Testament documents with the same criteria that all historical documents are tested.

The Bibliographical test enabled us to establish that due to

1. the large number of document copies,
2. the short time period between the original documents and the existing copies, and
3. the negligent number of textual variances between copies,

we can safely conclude that we have **very accurate copies** of the New Testament documents. In fact, the New Testament passes this test better than any other ancient historical document.

The Internal Evidence test enabled us to establish that as,

1. the New Testament authors were either eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus or had first hand information (e.g. interviewed eyewitnesses),
2. the New Testament does not contain 'gospel fictions' or lies,
3. the New Testament does not contain myths, and that
4. the New Testament does not contain contradictions,

we can conclude that the New Testament documents are **highly credible** (accurate/true) in their historical accounts about the life of Jesus.

The External Evidence test enabled us to establish that due to

1. evidence from extra-Biblical authors,
2. evidence from martyrs,
3. archeological evidence,
4. historical-geographical evidence, and
5. Jewish cultural evidence,

the content of the New Testament documents is **strongly confirmed by additional historical material**.

The New Testament documents satisfactorily pass each of the tests of historicity. If we are to discard the New Testament as unreliable in its accounts about Jesus, then we must discard almost all ancient literature as being unreliable! ^[5 p.73]

To think about: Many people accept the reliability of ancient literature that is less reliable than the New Testament documents - but still refuse to accept the reliability of the New Testament documents. What are some possible reasons for this?

We cannot apply one standard or test to secular literature and another to the New Testament. We need to apply the same test, whether the literature under investigation is secular or religious. Having done this, we can say that the New Testament is trustworthy and historically reliable in its witness about Jesus. ^[6 p. 55]

"There exists no document from the ancient world witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies and offering so superb an array of historical data on which an intelligent decision may be made. An honest [person] cannot dismiss a source of this kind" – Dr. Clark H. Pinnock ^[6 p. 55]

Discussion questions and exercises

- Explain in your own words how the 'existence of God' could influence a person's view of miracles?

- Describe in your own words what constitutes a contradiction. How does this differ to a 'Difference'?

- Briefly describe four mistakes that can be made when trying to determine if a contradiction exists. Use examples where possible.

- If we decide to dismiss the New Testament as unreliable, what do we then have to conclude about nearly all other ancient literature?

Discussion Group - Additional Note

Before continuing with the next study, the group may wish to devote a week to examining the two issues: Are miracles possible, and does God exist. These sections, along with possible discussion questions, are available in the appendix.

Discussion Groups

Preparation required for the following week

Please read the following:

- Study Four – Did Jesus Claim to be God?

Possible discussion questions for when the group meets next week

- Describe why it is important to establish whether or not Jesus claimed to be God.
- Why does the New Testament have to be established as reliable before we can determine whether or not Jesus claimed to be God?
- What do you think is the most important consequence, or inference, that follows from Jesus claiming to be God?
- What are some of the difficulties you have with someone claiming to be God?
- How do you think non-Christians would react to someone saying that Jesus claimed to be God?
- If you were an early opponent of Christianity, would you have declared that Jesus did not claim to be God? Under what circumstances could you (or would you) not do this?
- Could Jesus have been misunderstood? Why or why not?
- What do you think are the five strongest claims to deity made by Jesus? How would you go about explaining these points to someone else?
- How would you describe to a friend the significance of the fact that within twenty years of Jesus' crucifixion, the belief that he was God was well established?
- Briefly, explain how Jesus used divine titles to claim that he was God?
- Which one of these claims about Jesus' nature and power do you think is the strongest claim to deity? Why?
- When might the discussion of Jesus' claims be side-tracked by the differences between God the Father, and God the Son? Is it sufficient to simply say that Jesus claimed to be God, without a detailed examination of the different 'persons' of the trinity? Why or why not?

Study Four - Did Jesus Claim to be God?

The Importance of the Issue

This issue is crucially important for at least five reasons

1. The divinity of Christ is the most distinctively Christian belief or doctrine of them all. A Christian is most essentially defined as one who believes that Jesus was God. And no other religion has a doctrine that is even similar. Buddhists do not believe that Buddha was God and Muslims do not believe that Muhammad was God. ^[1 p. 151]
2. This doctrine works like a skeleton key, unlocking all the other doctrinal doors of Christianity. Christians believe each of their many doctrines not because they have reasoned their own way to them, but on the divine authority of the One who taught them, as recorded in the Bible and transmitted by the church. If Jesus Christ was only human, he could have made mistakes. Thus, anyone who wants to dissent from any of Christ's unpopular teachings will want to deny his divinity. And there are bound to be things in his teachings that each of us finds offensive - if we look at the totality of those teachings rather than confining ourselves to comfortable and familiar ones. ^[1 p. 152]
3. If Christ is divine, then the incarnation (God taking on human form) is the most important event in history. It is the hinge of history. It changes everything. If Jesus Christ is God, then when he died on the cross, he provided a means for God and humans to be reconciled. No event in history could be more important to every person on earth than that. ^[1 p. 152]
4. It has tremendous implications for us now. For if Jesus Christ is God, then, since he is omnipotent and present right now, he can transform you and your life right now as nothing and no one else possibly can. ^[1 p. 152]
5. If Christ is divine, he has right to our entire lives, including our inner life and out thoughts. If Christ is divine, our absolute obligation is to believe everything he says and obey everything he commands. ^[1 p. 152]

- **Briefly describe why it is important to establish whether or not Jesus claimed to be God**

The difficulty of this issue

Christians ought to realise how difficult, how scandalous, how objectionable, how apparently unbelievable and absurd this doctrine is bound to appear to others. ^[1]

The difficulty is a double one. First, there is the immediate, instinctive, intuitive shock. Second, on the reflective, rational level this claim seems absurd. It is the claim of a man who came from a woman's womb, grew from a baby, got hungry and tired and angry, suffered and died – to be divine! It is not only intuitively shocking, but it also seems logically self-contradictory. ^[1 p. 153]

To think about: Once a Christian realises how difficult this doctrine is, what impact does this realisation have on (a) understanding the reaction of non-Christians, and (b) the appreciation of their own belief (especially as its astounding nature dulls with familiarity).

Before we attempt to address these difficulties and the validity of Christ's claim to be God, we need to establish that he did indeed make such a claim. Many suggest that Jesus either never made any claims to deity; that His claims were altered by His biased followers; or, that His claims were misunderstood by His ignorant followers. ^[15]

Did Jesus make any claims to deity?

When we examine the New Testament documents, we find that Jesus makes numerous claims to deity - to be God. The sceptics who doubt this, generally doubt the accuracy and credibility of the documents themselves, but as we have shown in the previous sections, the New Testament documents **are** historical reliable. They more than satisfactorily pass each of the tests of historicity and are therefore reliable in their accounts of the life of Jesus.

To think about: Why does the New Testament have to be established as reliable before we can determine whether or not Jesus claimed to be God?

It may also be worth noting a few additional points that support the fact that Jesus **did** make claims to deity.

- There is ample indication that the early church based its doctrine on things Jesus said and did, including His claims to divinity, rather than inventing what He said and did after formulating the doctrines. ^[15]

Those that deny Jesus made any extraordinary personal claims face the very severe problem of explaining how it is that the worship of Jesus as Lord and God came about at all in the early church. ^[16] This is even more problematic when we realize that within twenty years of the crucifixion a full-blown Christology (theory/doctrine) proclaiming Jesus as God incarnate (God in human form) existed. How does one explain this worship by monotheistic Jews of one of their countrymen as God incarnate, apart from the claims of Jesus himself? ^[15]

The oldest liturgical prayer recorded, in 1 Corinthians 16:22, is dated at around 55 AD. It refers to Jesus as Lord - a divine title reserved for God. Paul's letters, written between 49 and 65 AD exhibit the same fully evolved Christology; logically, he must have gotten it from sometime earlier than 49 AD. Paul cites creeds, hymns and sayings of Jesus that

must have been come from earlier (Romans 1:3-4; 1 Corinthians 11:23; Colossians. 1:15-16; Philippians. 2:6-11; 1 Timothy. 3:16; 2 Timothy. 2:8). These items translate easily into Aramaic and show features of Hebrew poetry and thought-forms, which allows us to trace their origins to Jesus' first followers in Judea, between 33 and 48 AD. ^[15]

The oldest Christian document shows Paul repeatedly calling Jesus 'Christ' (the title "Christ" is a Greek equivalent to the Jewish term "Messiah" - the king and deliverer / saviour expected by the Jewish people). He does this in a way that suggests that, within twenty years of Jesus' death and resurrection, this comprehensive title for Jesus' identity and powers was simply taken for granted by Paul and his readers. The title had almost become Jesus' second (personal) name (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 3; 5:23, 28). In his letters Paul uses 'Christ' 270 times but never considers it necessary to argue explicitly that Jesus is 'the Christ' whom Israel expected. ^[15]

All of this leads to the inevitable conclusion that the concept of Jesus as divine quite definitely existed within, at the very least, a decade of the crucifixion, and therefore, was likely to have been asserted before His death by Jesus Himself, as is recorded in the Gospels. ^[15]

- **How would you describe to a friend the significance of the fact that within twenty years of Jesus' crucifixion, the belief that he was God was well established?**
-
-
-
-
-
-

- The claims of Jesus to be God make sense of his trial and crucifixion. ^[1 p. 163]

The Jewish sensitivity to blasphemy was unique; no one else would so fanatically insist on death as punishment for claiming divinity. Throughout the Roman world, the prevailing attitude towards the gods was “the more, the merrier”. ^[1 p. 163]

The political excuse that he was Caesar's rival was a lie trumped up to justify his execution, since Roman law did not recognize blasphemy as ground for execution and the Jews had no legal power to enforce their own religious laws of capital punishment under Roman rule. ^[1 p. 164]

- The enemies of Christianity would have declared that Jesus never made such claims ^[15]

If Jesus never claimed to be divine, and never claimed it in the sense that is indicated in the Gospels, it is reasonable to expect that the enemies of Christianity and the early church would have declared that Jesus never made such claims, or that he was misunderstood. Some did indeed do this, but wrote quite some time after the fact. There is no record contemporary or closely contemporary with Jesus (first century AD) that

indicates that He never made any special claims for Himself, or that the church invented the claims. Even after that time, however, the major sceptics of the first several centuries never argued this point. The Jesus-never-claimed-divinity argument had not been advanced by sceptics of the time, and if it was used, perhaps by some sceptic whose works we have totally lost, it was so easily dismissed or so lacked adequate credibility that it could not be used by the best anti-Christian sceptics. ^[15]

To think about: If you were an early opponent of Christianity, would you have declared that Jesus did not claim to be God? Under what circumstances could you (or would you) not do this?

- A parallel movement, that acclaimed Jesus as merely a good teacher, would have emerged alongside Christianity. ^[15]

As it is, there are no existing texts from the first century, or even from the century thereafter, that represent Jesus as claiming to be only human or only a prophet. He is always portrayed as making exalted claims to a super-human status. ^[15]

Was Jesus Misunderstood?

What about the idea that Jesus did say some or all of the things the Gospels attribute to Him, but that He was misunderstood by his followers. Regrettably, with this objection often comes either some outrageous interpretation of the claims of Jesus that would never have held water in Judaism - or nothing at all but the suggestion itself without alternative. (One must, of course, when making this suggestion, should actually name some alternative interpretations of the claims of Jesus and show that these "alternative interpretations" would hold water within the social and historical context of the New Testament records). ^[15]

It may be objected that Jesus spoke rather cryptically at times, so that perhaps He truly was misunderstood. But as we will see, it is hardly plausible that Jesus' claims were misunderstood; they are too clear-cut when understood in the context of the time and place they were made. ^[15]

We are also told that Jesus *did* explain things to His disciples privately after the crowds were gone: "He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything." (Mark 4:34). This was standard practice for an inner circle of disciple. For a practical example of this, see the 'Parable of the Sower' in Matthew 13. These disciples, of course, represent the people who wrote (Matthew, John) or else supplied information (Mark, Luke) for the Gospels. ^[15]

This argument is best defeated by examining the actual claims attributed to Jesus in the New Testament. ^[15]

Evidence for Jesus' Deity

Not one recognized religious leader, not Moses, Paul, Buddha, Mohammed, Confucious, etc., has ever claimed to be God; that is, with the exception of Jesus Christ. Christ is the only religious leader who has ever claimed to be deity and the only individual ever who has convinced a great portion of the world that He is God. ^[5 p.89]

Jesus' use of divine titles / names

YHWH - Lord

In the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), the sacred name for God was YHWH, likely pronounced Yahweh. Yahweh (see Exodus 3:14) basically means "He who is", or "I am who I am". ^[31 p. 78] The Jewish people out of sheer reverence refused even to pronounce this name. ^[5 p. 99] Jesus, however, used this name when referring to himself!

John 8.24: "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be [or 'I am he'], you will indeed die in your sins."

John 8.28: "... then you will know that I am the one I claim to be [or 'I am he']..."

John 8.58-59: "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him...

Notice how, in the last reference, the listeners immediately understood his claim. They picked up stones to execute him - the punishment for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16). ^[16]

Buy using this title to refer to himself, Jesus was making an explicit claim to be YHWH, to be God!

Son of God

A son is of the same nature, the same species, the same essence, as his father. Jesus called God his Father, thereby saying that he is of the same nature as God. ^[1 p. 150]

Jesus makes it clear that he is not just 'a son of God' or one of the 'sons of God' but **'the son of God'** (the phrase 'sons of God' is sometimes used to refer to men or angels in the Old Testament). In every instance where Jesus refers to himself as 'God's Son', or to God as 'my Father', he implies that he is the one and only Son of God; co-equal and co-eternal with God. ^[5 p. 100]

Matthew 16.15-17: "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

Mark 14.62: Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus.

John 5.17-23: Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

Notice several things about this important passage: ^[16]

(1) Jesus claim to be the Son is understood by the audience as blasphemy--a claim to deity!

(2) Jesus response is NOT to say 'hey, but I am using sonship differently than that-I am NOT claiming to be God'--instead He simply continues describing the incredible unity between Himself and the Father (the Father's works are the Son's works, the Son knows everything the Father does, the Son gives life just like the Father does, the Father entrusts all judgment to the Son, the Son is supposed to be honored 'just as' the Father is honored, dishonoring the Son is equivalent to dishonoring the Father).

These are incredible claims. Jesus' disciples and his enemies clearly understood from their Jewish backgrounds that by Jesus applying the term 'Son of God' to himself, he was claiming to be equal to God. ^[5 p. 101]

Son of Man

Jesus often used the title "Son of man" to refer to himself. This title occurs in the Old Testament (Daniel 7: 13,14), and by the time of Jesus had tremendous messianic significance.

Daniel 7.13,14: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

Notice too the many divine qualities that are associated with the 'Son of Man'. By using this title, Jesus clearly believed himself to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah - the King and deliverer / saviour expected by the Jews. ^[5 p. 102]
It is also worth noting there was a belief that the Messiah was to be divine ^[31 p. 83]

Matthew 11.6,7: "... But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take our mat and go home." And the man got up and went home.

Matthew 16:13-17 "When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven"

Mark 14.62-64: Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven". The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

Notice too the response of the High. Jesus' claims to be the Danielic messiah and to be the Son of God were understood by the 1st century Palestinian Jew to be claims to deity! ^[16]

Once one takes together, the 80+ passages in which Jesus makes use of the title "Son of Man", we see indisputable evidence that Jesus proclaimed His divine identity through the title "Son of Man." ^[15]

Abba - Father

Jesus asserted that He had a relationship with God, which no one had ever claimed before. It comes out of the Aramaic word *Abba* which He often used, especially in prayer. Nobody before Him in all the history of Israel had addressed God by this word.

The Jews were accustomed to praying to God the Father: but the word they used was *Abhinu*, a form of address which was essentially an appeal to God for mercy and forgiveness. There is no appeal for mercy in Jesus' mode of address, *Abba*. It is the familiar word of closest intimacy. By using it, he differentiated between His own relationship with God as Father and that of other people. ^[5 p. 102]

The Jewish leaders of the day, immediately, realized the implications of the word *Abba*, and charged Him with blasphemy. ^[5 p. 102]

John 5.17-18: Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

- **Briefly, explain how Jesus used divine titles to claim that he was God?**

Jesus' claims to be God

The New Testament reveals that Jesus claimed to have attributes that only God could possess.

~~Jesus' claims to pre-existence~~

Jesus claimed to have been pre-existent before his birth--he was around before Abraham. ^[16]

John 8.58-59: "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him--Notice: This statement actually goes beyond pre-existence--it is an explicit claim to be YHWH. ^[16]

Jesus claimed to have been pre-existent in heaven with glory before His incarnation (God taking on human form) ^[16]

John 3.13: No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven -- the Son of Man

John 6.38: For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me

John 8.23: But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world"

Jesus' claims to be omnipresent

Jesus makes claims to be omnipresent - everywhere present at the same time. ^[31 p. 76]

Matthew 18.20: For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Matthew 28.20: "... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus' claims to be omniscient

Jesus makes claims to be omniscient - to have infinite knowledge. ^[31 p. 77]

John 16.30: "Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God." "You believe at last!" Jesus answered.

John 13.21,26: "After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.... It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon."

Matthew 12.25: "Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them..."

Matthew 24:25: "... See, I have told you ahead of time"

Luke 22:31: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat"

Jesus' claims to be omnipotent

Jesus makes claims to be omnipotent - to be all powerful. ^[31 p. 77]

Matthew 28.18: Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

John 5.227: "And he [God] has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."

John 10.17,18: "... I lay down my life... I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again"

John 6.37,39: "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away... I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day"

John 1.3: Through him [Jesus] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

Luke 4.38-40: Jesus ... rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.

Mark 4.41: They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

Luke 4.36: All the people were amazed and said to each other, "What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!"

- Describe four characteristics of God that Jesus claimed he had.

Jesus asks for and accepts worship as God

In the Jewish culture worship is reserved for God. ^[5 p. 95]

Jeremiah 17.5: This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man..."

Matthew 4.10: Jesus said to him... "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"

However, Jesus makes claims pertaining to the worship of himself! He holds himself out as a legitimate object of religious faith. ^[16]

Mark 9:42: "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin..."

John 9.35-38: Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped him.

Notice: In this passage Jesus affirms himself as both a legitimate object of religious faith and as a legitimate object of worship! (No rebuke is given to the man at all for worshipping Jesus--even in the presence of the Pharisees!) ^[16]

It is important to note that Jesus never corrects those who accuse him of making himself equal to God, or those who called him "God". ^[16]

John 5.17: See the previous note in the discussion of Jesus' "Son of God" title

John 8.58-59: See the previous note in the discussion of Jesus' "YHWH" title

John 20.28-29: Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Jesus' claims to authority - authority that only God has

- Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins. ^[16]

Luke 7.48-49: Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Mark 2.5-10: When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...."

A rather strong statement of divine authority, and the context shows that it was a blasphemous assertion if He was not God!. Notice that He does not answer their charges with a "Hold on now! I am not claiming to be God! I am claiming something less!"^[16]

- Jesus had authority over the laws of the Sabbath - laws created by God.^[16]

Mark 2.28: So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

- Jesus claims that the elect, and that the angels are his.^[16]

Mark 13.26-27: "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Notice: Jesus identifies himself with the Divine figure in Daniel 7.13, talks of his coming with 'great glory', calls the angels 'HIS angels', calls the elect "HIS elect", and somehow is able to gather them together from all places on the globe. There are quite a few strong deity claims in this little passage!^[16]

- Jesus implied that he had the ability/authority to abolish the law.^[16]

Matthew 5.17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them..."

- Jesus implied a divine authority.^[16]

Matthew 5: The "you have heard...but I say to you" passages are generally considered to be statements of divine authority [16]

- Jesus had the authority to give authority over evil to others.^[16]

Luke 10.19: I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you

- Jesus claims to have universal authority.^[16]

John 17.2: For you granted him authority over all people.^[16]

- Jesus has authority to confer a kingdom in the same manner that the God does. ^[16]

Luke 22.29: And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me

- **Describe four examples of authority that God has, and that Jesus claimed he also had.**

Jesus makes claims that make no sense if he is not God

- His claims that his words will outlast time itself. ^[16]

Mark 13.31: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away

- His claims that the eternal destiny of people depend on their response to Him. ^[16]

Matthew 7:21-23: Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Notice that Jesus makes people's eternal destiny contingent upon HIS approval of them! What an incredible claim! ^[16]

- **Describe your initial response to this claim made by Jesus?**

- His claims to be absolutely perfect / sinless. ^[16]

John 8.46: Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?

Would a normal human being, with ethical standards as high as Jesus, ever claim to be sinless? ^[16]

- Other claims that are ludicrous if Jesus is not God.

John 15.5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Note: this is another passage that makes no sense without a divine Jesus. How could the phrase 'apart from me you can do nothing' make any sense--if Jesus were not God--omnipotent, omnipresent deity? ^[16]

John 17.10: All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. -- Note that Jesus is praying to God in this verse

Unless Jesus is truly God, this statement is ridiculous. ^[16]

Additional claims about his nature and powers

- Jesus is often linked to the word 'Lord'.

Mark 11.3: If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'

Mark 5.19: Jesus... said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him."

He even states he will be addressed as "Lord" (Mt 7.21-22a). This word is equitable with the title "Adonai" applied to God in the Old Testament, which logically means that Jesus thought of Himself as being God, or worthy of God's divine title - which amounts to the same thing! ^[15]

- Jesus claimed to be greater than the Temple, than the prophet Jonah, and than King Solomon. ^[16]

Matthew 12.6: I tell you that one greater than the temple is here

Matthew 12.41-42: The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here

- Jesus claims to be able to give freedom.

John 8.36: So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed

- Jesus claims to be able to raise himself from the dead.

John 10.17,18: The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life -- only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.

This incredible passage has Jesus affirming that He can 'raise Himself from the dead' ^[16]

- Jesus claims that he is responsible for sending prophets. ^[15]

Matthew 23.34: Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town

In Jewish belief, it is God who is responsible for sending prophets. In saying that He will send prophets, Jesus is equating Himself with God - assuming a role reserved for God alone. ^[15]

- Jesus claims loyalty greater than all human loyalties. ^[16]

Matthew 10.37: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me

Notice that Jesus claims allegiance and loyalty greater than the strongest of relationships--the family. Only a relationship with God supersedes those relationships! ^[16]

- **Which one of these claims about Jesus' nature and power do you think is the strongest claim to deity? Why?**

Jesus' claims to equality with God

- He claims to be, and is repeatedly called, the potentially blasphemous title "Son of God".

See the previous discussion on the title "Son of God"

- Jesus claims that one's response to Him is equated to one's response to God. ^[16]

John 15.23: He who hates me hates my Father as well.

This passage is preposterous if Jesus is not 'identical' in both character and action with God the Father

- Jesus claims that he should be honoured to the same extent as God is honoured. ^[16]

John 5.22: Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him

- Jesus claims that to see Him is to see God. ^[16]

John 14.9: Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

John 12.44, 45: When a man... looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.

- Jesus claims that to believe in Him is to believe in God. ^[16]

John 12.44: When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me.

- Jesus claims that to know Him is to know God. ^[31 p. 82]

John 8.19: If you knew me, you would know my Father also.

- He never corrects those who accuse him of making himself equal to nor those who called him "GOD". ^[16]

See the previous discussion on this point

- He claims that his coming to the Jewish people was the same as God's coming. ^[16]

Luke 19.43,44: The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

- He claims to operate with, and to the same extent as God ^[16]

John 5.17: Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

- He claims direct equality with God ^[16]

John 10.30-39: I and the Father are one." 31 Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, 32 but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" 33 "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." 34 Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? 35 If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came -- and the Scripture cannot be broken -- 36 what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? 37 Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. 38 But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." 39 Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

This passage is so very clear as to the intent and content of Jesus' claims--they were explicitly claims to being God! His affirmation of unity (30) is understood immediately as being a claim to deity (33). Jesus defends his affirmation with a technical argument in Rabbinic style. The general argument type is like this: "If it is okay to use the term X in a limited sense on Y, then it is certainly okay to use it in an

expanded sense on a Z that is so much more than Y". In this passage, He thus argues that if it was okay in the psalms to call the Israelite leaders 'elohim' once, then it was certainly appropriate to call the pre-existent One, special of the Father, perfect image of the Father's character and actions, "GOD". And, once again, they understand that claim to real deity and try to seize him! His claims were quite clear - He was claiming to be fully God. ^[16]

• **Briefly list all the claims where Jesus describes himself as equivalent to God?**

How those around Jesus Christ responded to Him ^[16]

- God calls him "Son" and declares that He is "pleased" with Jesus (Matthew 3.16)
- God tells some of the disciples to pay attention to Jesus (Matthew 17.5)
- Evil spirits knew he was the Son of God (Matthew 8.28-29; 3.11) and the Holy One of God (Matthew 1.23)
- His enemies knew he was claiming to be God (Matthew 9.3; 26.63; John 5.18; 10.33)--and accused him of blasphemy.
- Some of the general populace called/considered him God (Luke 7.16; 8.39-40)
- John the Baptist recognized Jesus' radical superiority to himself (Matthew 3.13; John 1.26-30,34)
- The disciples and those whose lives He touched worshipped Him (Matthew 14.33; John 9.35)
- He was repeatedly called the Son of God (Matthew 14.33; 16.16; John 1.26-30,34; John 1.49; 11.27)
- He was called "God" directly (John 20.27)
- Later Rabbinical writings 'remember' some of these exorbitant claims of Jesus.

To think about: What would be your natural response to someone who claimed to be God?

If we step back from the data at this point, and look at it in its entirety, we cannot but be overwhelmed by the massiveness of it! We might be able to argue away a little here, and a little there, but the sheer bulk of this cannot be moved. One cannot stop an avalanche 'one rock at a time'. We come face to face with the reality that the Jesus shared **all** of the

attributes, glory, and status of God. The claims above are simply too numerous and to consistently understood as being claims to deity. ^[16]

Conclusion

The argument that Jesus never claimed to be divine is in fact nothing more than an unsupported conjecture, an argument from silence competing against the scream of the available data. Each of the above claims, and every known document of the church, even the heretical ones, acknowledge that Jesus claimed divinity. There is absolutely no evidence to the contrary that can be cited. ^[15]

Jesus claimed to be God. No matter how hard we try to dissect it or explain it away, the evidence points directly to that most special claim made by Jesus. One must now answer His question: "Who do you say that I am?" ^[15] We now look at the truth of Jesus' claims.

To think about: What do you think is the most important consequence, or inference, that follows from Jesus claiming to be God?

Additional Note

For a detailed examination on the concept of God (Father, Son and Spirit), please see the Trinity series by Glen Miller¹⁶. The data in Scripture is very, very clear: there are three 'individuals' in the Bible who may be called God without error and without blasphemy, who interact with one another and with us. These three individuals affirm, however, that there is only **one God**. As one can imagine from the above, this belief has been a source of *much* controversy, much discussion, much polemic, much error, much confusion, and many sceptical attacks. In simplest terms, the concept of the Trinity is that there are three Persons who can accurately be called 'the One God'. Some feel a little uncomfortable with the notions of 'being' and 'essence' so they prefer the notion of 'unit'. So they get "three Persons in one ultimate unit". ^[16]

While the relationship between God the Father, Son and Spirit may be difficult one to grasp, the most important, undeniable point is this: **Jesus claimed to be God**

To think about: When might the differences between God the Father, and God the Son sidetrack the discussion about Jesus' claims? Is it sufficient to say that Jesus claimed to be God, without an in-depth, detailed examination of the different 'persons' of the trinity?

Discussion Groups

Preparation required for the following week

Please read the following:

- Study Five – Was Jesus who He claimed to be?

Possible discussion questions for when the group meets next week

- Do you think that it is possible for God to take on human form? Why, or why not?
- What assumptions do we have to make before we can examine the arguments for Jesus' identity? Have these assumptions been adequately covered in previous sections? If not, what do you think still needs to be discussed and examined?
- Are there any other options to the statement that Jesus was either a liar, lunatic or that he did not mean for his claims to be taken literally? What evidence exists for these alternatives? How does this evidence compare to the evidence that we have for him being Lord?
- What do you think are the three main reasons for concluding that Jesus was not a liar? Why?
- If Jesus was a liar, was he necessarily evil, a hypocrite, and a fool? Why or why not?
- What do you think are the three main reasons for concluding that Jesus was not honestly mistaken? Why?
- What do you think are the three main reasons for concluding that Jesus was not a lunatic? Why?
- What do you think are the three main reasons for concluding that Jesus did not mean his claims in a non-literal, mystical sense? Why?
- Which of Jesus' claims in the previous section do not lend themselves to a non-literal, mystical interpretation?
- What evidence is there for the truth of Jesus' claim to be God?
- What do you think is the primary reason for the rejection of Jesus and his claims? Do you, or did you reject Jesus at some stage? What are / were your reasons for doing so?
- If Jesus' claim to be God is true, what are the implications?
- How could you present the argument for who Jesus is, simply and clearly, to someone else?

Study Five – Was Jesus who He claimed to be?

The evidence is clear: Jesus did make claims to be divine; His followers did not create or misunderstand His claims. So now we have the natural question: Was Jesus who He claimed to be? ^[18]

To think about: Do you think that it is possible for God to take on human form? Why, or why not?

The Possibility

Is it possible that God take on a human form (incarnation)? Two points are worth noting here about this possibility.

1. How do the critics who say that God could never take on a human form and nature, know what God can or cannot do? ^[1 p. 154] How can they prove that it is not possible!
2. If a being exists worthy of the name “God”, that being must be omnipotent, that is, able to do anything that is intrinsically possible, anything that is meaningful, anything that does not involve a self-contradiction (like a rock that is not a rock, or a rock too heavy for infinite power to lift). God becoming human, however miraculous, is not a self-contradiction. Therefore, the Incarnation is possible. ^[1 p. 154]

Additional Note

At this point, if you have not already done so, it may be worthwhile examining the arguments for the existence of God and Miracles. These sections are in the appendix.

Who was Jesus?

We now examine an argument for actuality of Christ’s divinity. It is based on this simple question, “If Jesus is not God, as Christians say he is, then who was he?” ^[1 p. 158]

To think about: As we have already shown the New Testament documents to be historically reliable, could we now conclude that Jesus was who he claimed to be? Do we need to look at additional arguments?

There are really only four possible answers to the question. The outline for the argument for Jesus Christ’s divinity is that: ^[1 p. 158]

1. Jesus was either Lord, liar, lunatic or guru
2. He could not possibly be a liar, lunatic or guru
3. Therefore “Jesus is Lord

To think about: If Jesus was not who he claimed to be, then he was either a liar, lunatic or he did not mean for his claims to be taken literally (i.e. he was a guru). Are there any other options? What evidence exists for each of these options?

Note that the argument depends on previously established premises, namely

1. Jesus existed,
2. the New Testament contains reliable information about him (i.e. it does not contain lies, fabrications or myths), and that
3. Jesus did claim to be God

To think about: Have these assumptions been adequately covered in previous sections? If not, what do you think still needs to be discussed and examined?

With regards to Jesus' claims to divinity,

1. He meant it literally
 - 1.1. It is true _____ Divine (God)
 - 1.2. It is false
 - 1.2.1. He knew it was false _____ Liar, Noble liar
 - 1.2.2. He didn't know it was false _____ Lunatic, Honestly mistaken
2. He meant it non-literally, mystically _____ Guru

To think about: If a person states that Jesus never claimed to be God, then the issue of the reliability of the New Testament (e.g. that it does not contain lies or myths) would have to be dealt with before this argument can be used.

Let us examine these possibilities.

1. He meant it literally
1.1. It is true (Jesus is God)

This option is examined at the end of this section.

1.2. It is false
1.2.1. He knew it was false (Liar / Noble liar)

If Jesus meant his claims literally and he knew that his claims were false, then must have been a liar or perhaps a liar with good intentions i.e. a noble liar.

Discussion: If Jesus meant his claims literally and he knew that his claims were false, who could he have been apart from a liar or a noble liar?

Was Jesus a Liar?

The following are reasons why we can conclude that Jesus was not a liar.

- He had the wrong psychological profile. ^[1 p. 160]

He was unselfish, loving, caring, compassionate and passionate about teaching truth and helping others to truth. Liars lie for selfish reasons, like money, fame, pleasure or power. Jesus, on the other hand, gave up all worldly goods, and life itself.

- There is no conceivable motive for his lie. ^[1 p. 160]

It brought him hatred, rejection, misunderstanding, persecution, torture and death. ^[1 p. 160]
Who in history has gone to their death for the sake of something like this that they knew was a lie? ^[18]

- He could not have hoped that his "lie" would be successful. ^[1 p. 160]

The Jews were the least likely people in the world to have worshipped a man, and Jesus, as a Jew, would have known that. Why did he go to the Jewish nation? Why go as a Nazarene carpenter to a country so small in size and population and so thoroughly adhering the undivided unity of God? Why didn't he go to Egypt or, even more, to Greece, where they believed in various gods and various manifestations of them?

- How could he have invented and maintained the lie? ^[5 p. 106]

How could a deceitful man have invented, and maintained from the beginning to the end, the purest and noblest character known in history with the most perfect air of truth and reality.

- If Jesus was only a man and claimed to be God, was He an atheist himself? ^[18]

Did He think that the God of the Old Testament would not judge him?

"I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols," (Isaiah 42.8)

"I will not yield my glory to another," (Isaiah 48.11)

To have lied about being God, Jesus would have had to have had no fear of God whatsoever. He must have had some assurance that God wasn't going to incinerate Him for claiming to be divine and accepting the worship of others. To not fear God, Jesus would have had to have been an atheist! ^[18]

- How did Jesus manage to pass on high standards of truth? ^[18]

If Jesus was a liar, how did he somehow manage to pass on such high standards of truth?

"... we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God." 2 Corinthians 4.2

"For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you." 1 Thessalonians 2.3

- How do we explain the changed lives of Jesus' disciples.

The disciples were so convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead that they were prepared to be ostracized, criticized, rejected, persecuted, and in many cases martyred. They were hated, scorned, persecuted, excommunicated, imprisoned, tortured, exiled, crucified, boiled alive, roasted, beheaded, disemboweled and fed to lions. ^[1 p.186] How does a crucified liar manage to bring about such a change?

- We would have to conclude that Jesus was therefore a hypocrite, evil and a fool! ^[5 p. 104]

If we say that Jesus was lying, we also have to accept some extreme logical conclusions!

If Jesus was a liar then he was also a hypocrite because He told others to be honest, whatever the cost, while He himself taught and lived a colossal lie.

“If you want to enter life, obey the commandments ... Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony...” Jesus (Matthew 19:18)

If he was a liar then he was also evil, for He told others to trust Him for their eternal destiny. If He couldn't back up His claims and knew it, then He was unspeakably evil.

John 8.24: "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."

If he was a liar then he was also a fool because it was His claims to deity that led to His crucifixion.

Matthew 26.63: The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied ... Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered.

Are you prepared to call Jesus a hypocrite, evil and a fool in the light of his life, teachings and death?

To think about: If Jesus was a liar, was he necessarily evil, a hypocrite, and a fool? Why, or why not?

Quite simply, someone who lived as Jesus lived, taught as Jesus taught and died as Jesus died could not have been a liar. ^[5 p. 106]

- **List five reasons that oppose the assumption that Jesus lied about being God.**

- **List three questions that a person needs to answer if they are to claim that Jesus lied about being God.**

Was Jesus a noble Liar?

Could Jesus have felt that his teachings were so important as to have falsely claimed special authority from God in order to persuade people to follow him? Could he have believed in all sincerity that following his teachings would lead people into the kingdom of God and/or eternal life, and that he said what he thought was necessary to get people to follow him? In the cases where his lying actually contradicted his own teachings, could he have been forfeiting his own eternal security, for the sake of others? ^[18]

The following are reasons why Jesus could not have been a noble liar.

- If Jesus was so noble why did He choose the ignoble method of trickery to get people to follow Him? Were not more noble methods available? ^[18]
- If Jesus was so noble, but had no divine power, why did He claim to be able to heal people when He could not? ^[18]
- It would be much more difficult to get Jews to believe a human was God incarnate than it would be to get them to adopt morally superior principles. ^[18]
- Since his teachings were based on a true understanding of the OT, what need was there to go as far as trickery and blasphemy? Many of the principles they would have agreed with anyway! ^[18]
- Why would Jesus forfeit His salvation, for the sake of teachings that (other than His claims to divinity) were not that radical to first-century Jewish ears in the first place? ^[18]
- If Jesus' main concern was to get as many people into the Kingdom of God as possible, then this would have been the worst way to do it. ^[18]

If Jesus the Noble Liar succeeds then everyone who follows Him will worship Him, rather than the true God of Israel. ^[18]

- Who in history has gone to their death for the sake of something like this that they knew was a lie? ^[18]

Where is the 'historical precedent' for such alleged actions? Many have died for principles they believed were true and righteous. For e.g. Socrates, and the noble souls who hid Jews in their cellars to protect them from the Nazis. But, where has there ever been someone so "noble" that they perpetrated the most outrageous possible lie, something they knew was a lie, and died for it, even a lie that was beneficial? ^[18]

To think about: Which of the previous arguments against Jesus being a liar are also valid when refuting the noble liar hypothesis?

In summary, the whole idea of Jesus as a noble liar is intuitively suspect, highly speculative and groundless.^[18]

- **What do you think are the three best reasons opposing the assumption that Jesus was a noble liar?**

1.2.2. He didn't know it was false (Lunatic, Honestly Mistaken)

Perhaps Jesus did not know that his claims were false. Could he simply have made a mistake?

Was Jesus honestly mistaken?

Was Jesus simply honestly mistaken about him being God? The following are arguments against this possibility.

- Considering Jesus' claims, proof that he was mistaken would be clearly evident.^[18]

If one takes oneself to be messiah, and/or divine, then eventually one must act like a messiah: righting wrongs, coming to the rescue, healing disease, raising the dead, trampling the military opposition, etc.

If one fails to act like the messiah, and if they are only honestly / sincerely mistaken, then they would have to face facts and realize their mistake!

- Where in history was there a "honestly mistaken" messiah who made the claims that Jesus did, had the degree of success that Jesus did.^[18]

If Jesus went about doing the things that He did, He would have been very lucky to be 'successful' and get as far as the Crucifixion. Then we still have the Resurrection appearances and the work and lives of the Apostles (writers of the New Testament) to explain!^[18]

- No Jew could sincerely think they were God^[1 p. 161]

No group in history was less likely to confuse the Creator with a creature than the Jews. They were the only people who had an absolute, and absolutely clear, distinction between the divine and the human.

- How does one come to believe, or make, a mistake of this nature? To actually believe that you are God! ^[18]

Data indicates that a normal, healthy human psyche cannot sincerely hold the sincere conviction of its own Godhood.

To think about: How could someone sane mistakenly think that they were God?

- There is no evidence that Jesus did make such a mistake, or even doubted what he believed. The ‘honestly mistaken’ argument is an argument from silence, there is no evidence for it and it also goes against the data we do have. ^[18]

- **What do you think is the strongest reason or argument against the assumption that "Jesus was honestly mistaken about being God"? Why?**

In conclusion: to make the claims of Christ you would have to be a lunatic, not someone ‘honestly mistaken’. To claim literally that you are God, especially in a fiercely monotheistic culture, and then to tell others that their eternal destiny depends on believing in you, is not the thinking of someone making an honest mistake. Especially when, considering the nature of the claims of Jesus, proof of being mistaken would be all too evident! To think that you are God, when you are not, is not an honest mistake it is the thinking of a lunatic. ^[5 p. 106]

Was Jesus a lunatic?

What if Jesus was mentally deranged and had a mistaken view of himself? Could Jesus have been a lunatic? The following are arguments against the possibility of Jesus being a lunatic.

- Because the psychological profiles of lunatics and Jesus are opposite. ^[1 p. 159]

There are lunatics in asylums who sincerely believe that they are God. The “divinity complex” is a recognized mental disorder and its character traits are well known: egotism, narcissism, inflexibility, dullness, predictability, inability to understand and love others as they really are and, the inability to creatively relate to others. In other words, this is the polar opposite of the personality of Jesus! ^[1 p. 159]

Subjects of the complex generally demand attention and are very egotistical. While they may also exhibit generosity and kindness, subjects of a divinity delusion will try to make themselves the center of attention and display extreme selfishness and self-promotion. ^[18]

Jesus, however, behaved consistently under pressure, as one in complete possession of his faculties.^[18] He showed none of the symptoms of the 'divinity complex'. His teachings were not the ravings of a lunatic. He never exhibited signs of paranoia or schizophrenia. He was never rash or impulsive. Under all circumstances, even when suffering the anguish of the crucifixion, Jesus appeared self-assured and in complete possession of His senses.

In Jesus we don't observe any of the abnormalities and imbalance that usually go along with being deranged. Lunatics lack practical wisdom, tough love, and unpredictable creativity. Jesus possessed all these things.^[1 p. 159]

To think about: Can you think of any situations where Jesus displayed practical wisdom, tough love and unpredictable creativity?

- Someone with a 'divinity complex' would be incapable of sound rational thought on moral issues.^[18]

The teachings of someone with a divinity complex may include sound morality, but that morality is obviously parroted from other sources, showing almost no creativity. It is also includes obscure, or even nonsensical ideas.^[18]

Regardless on what subject He spoke, His advice was always profound, insightful, intelligible, and reliable. His instructions in all areas of human relationships (religious, moral, political, psychological, social) were so reliable that they have molded and shaped Western civilization for nearly twenty centuries!

- **List some of Jesus' teachings that have influenced Western civilization.**
- | |
|--|
| |
| |
| |
| |

- How could a lunatic maintain from the beginning to the end, the purest and noblest character known in history without any indication of insanity?

Jesus simply does not exhibit the type of behaviour that is associated with the divinity complex. He behaved consistently under pressure, as one in complete possession of his faculties.^[18]

- The reaction of others was not that of a reaction to a lunatic.^[1 p. 160]

When we meet a lunatic, we are uncomfortable because we feel superior to him; when his enemies met Jesus they were uncomfortable for the opposite reason. A lunatic does not make you feel personally challenged, only embarrassed and eventually, bored. However, Jesus made everyone feel challenged and uncomfortable, never bored.^[1 p. 160]

- Someone with the 'divinity complex' would be obviously raving mad, and thus incapable of influencing people. ^[18]

While many delusions do not keep their sufferers from leading an otherwise normal life, the delusion that one is divine represents another level of mental illness entirely. ^[18]

The complex is consistent, it does not lend itself to periods where one is sane and rational, and it does not develop slowly over time. It is accompanied by serious behavioral problems; none of which Jesus ever exhibited. ^[18]

A person suffering from the divinity complex is not likely to fool many people, and not for very long. ^[18] Jesus was not only able to convince people that He was God - He convinced them to such a degree that they were prepared to die for Him!

It is also important to note that Christianity grew up among people who had seen and heard Jesus in person. It began in Jerusalem and flourished in Judea, places where Jesus spent a great deal of time and was known by many people. ^[18] A person suffering from the divinity complex, literally claiming to be God, would be never have had the success and have received the reaction that Jesus received. People attentively listened to, respected, loyally followed, and treated Jesus with awe and wonder. Sceptics wondered who he could be, and how he could possibly have the right to make the claims that he did! How would a person, who would have been an obviously lunatic, receive such a response?

To think about: Why is it significant that Jesus' early followers were eyewitnesses to his life?

- We would have to conclude that the expert of human nature who knew how to live the proper life did not understand himself properly. ^[18]

Even sceptics agree that Jesus was a good moral teacher. However, being a good moral teacher implies you know something about personal psychology as well. The irony, pointed out by many authors including C. S. Lewis, is that with this "lunatic" option, Jesus knew enough about reality (human nature) and psychology to prescribe morality to others so they could live the best possible life but somehow was mistaken about his own psychology/nature. ^[18]

In other words, the expert of human nature who knew how to live the proper life did not understand himself properly! ^[18]

The portrait of Jesus in the Gospels does not fit with the lunacy theory, except by argument from silence i.e. there is simply no evidence for this lunacy option! ^[18]

- **Describe the characteristics of a lunatic who thinks that they are God. Describe how these characteristics differ to those of Jesus.**

2. He meant it non-literally, mystically (Guru)

Did Jesus claim to be God in a non-literal, mystical sense?

Perhaps Jesus never meant for us to understand him literally, but rather in a mystical way. Yes, Jesus was God, and knew it, and claimed it - but we are all God. Jesus was an enlightened mystic, a guru, who realized his own inner divinity. There are thousands of people today, as in the past, who claim to be God but are neither liars nor lunatics. Why couldn't Jesus fit into this well-established and well-populated class? ^[1 p. 165]

Firstly, the arguments against Jesus being misunderstood (in the study on "Did Jesus claim to be God") are also relevant here. Jesus made a point of explaining what he meant to His disciples, and his claims are simply too numerous and clear-cut to be misunderstood. His claims and teachings **do not** lend themselves to the mystical, guru interpretation.

To think about: Which of Jesus' claims are too clear-cut to fit with a mystical interpretation.

Another important argument against Jesus meaning that he was God in a non-literal, mystical (Guru) way is because Jesus was a Jew. ^[1 p. 165]

The contradictions between the religious Judaism of Jesus and the teaching of gurus (and their eastern equivalents) are simply too many and too great. There can hardly be a more impossible synthesis than one between Judaism and Hinduism (guru). Jesus clearly taught the way of Judaism and cannot be seen as a guru. ^[1 p. 170]

To see Jesus as a guru is to uproot his Jewishness. It would be a complete uprooting of his identity. If Jesus was some type of guru then he utterly failed to get any one of the guru's teachings across to anybody, ever for almost two thousand years. He misled his followers on every one of the following essential points where Judaism and Eastern mysticism conflict. ^[1 p. 166]

Here are several contradictions between Jesus' Judaism and the universal teaching of all gurus ^[1 p. 166]

1. Judaism is a public religion of collective observance of a public law (Torah) and a belief in a public book (Scriptures). Gurus teach a private, individual, inner experience that can't be communicated by words. ^[1 p. 166]
2. Gurus believe that we and everything else in the world is God. Judaism says that God is distinct from the world. To confuse or identify a creature with the Creator is a idolatry (a terrible sin). ^[1 p. 166]
3. For Jews God is a person. The supreme revelation of God was to Moses when he told Moses his own true eternal name "I AM". "I" is the name of Ultimate Reality - God. For gurus "I" is the name of ultimate illusion. Individuality, personality, selfhood is the supreme illusion which must be seen through (dispelled) to attain the supreme truth of enlightenment. ^[1 p. 166]
4. Judaism teaches you are to fill your mind with God and his laws. Gurus teach that you are to empty your mind and become one with everything. ^[1]
5. For Jews God has made himself known publicly in deeds and words divinely inspired writings. For gurus God is unknowable, except wordlessly in mystical experience. ^[1 p. 167]
6. For Jews time and matter are real because God created them. God has revealed himself in historical events. God is known and loved within time. God brings about salvation in time, in history, in the messianic age. They look at time and forward. For gurus time and history are ultimately unreal, illusory, projections of unenlightened consciousness. Salvation is found in timelessness. They look away from time or backwards. ^[1 p. 167]
7. For Jews God is the active initiator. Religion is not our search for God but God's search for us. For gurus God is passive. We find him, not he us. ^[1 p. 167]
8. For Jews God is moral, is righteous, is holy and his command to us is "Be holy, for I am holy", gives commandments, has a will, discriminates, hates evil and loves good. For gurus God, is amoral, has no will, has no law, has no preferences. ^[1 p. 168]
9. Gurus teach God does not judge, there is no sin, there is no separation from God, there is no hell, everyone automatically gets to heaven eventually. Jews teach an eternal ultimate justice and judgement from God, the possibility of eternal separation from God and that not everyone is automatically guaranteed salvation. ^[1 p. 169]

On all of the previously mentioned points he was understood to teach the distinctively Jewish, not mystical (guru) doctrine. An "enlightened master" who can't teach is a contradiction. If he was an enlightened master, then Jesus was the worst teacher in history! ^[1 p. 169]

He never told anyone to convert from Judaism. He claimed to have come to fulfill the law the prophets, not destroy them. He did not found a new religion, he fulfilled the old one. Despite the arguments between Jews and Christians, there is not the slightest

suggestion that these are two alternative religions or that the Old Testament teachings are false. ^[1 p. 169]

Jesus also had no way of learning eastern religions! He never travelled from his native land. The stories that he did are myths that were started centuries later. No documents of any kind suggest this for the first few centuries A.D. He would not have learned Oriental mysticism in Israel; the Jews were not open, tolerant or pluralistic. Even in the cases of Jewish mysticism (e.g. the Essenes), they were far more Western than Eastern on all of the previously mentioned points. ^[1 p. 170]

To think about: How reliable is supposed 'information' about Jesus, when it is 'revealed' centuries after his life?

There is hardly a more impossible synthesis as the one between Judaism and eastern mysticism– the very synthesis proposed by suggesting that “Jesus claimed to be God in a non-literal, mystical sense”.

Conclusion

We determined that there are really only four possible answers to the question “Who is Jesus?” We then saw that he could not possibly be a liar, lunatic or a guru, thus leaving us with one last option – He was who He claimed to be. Jesus was God!

However intuitively difficult this may seem, it is the only explanation for the data

- It is possible as it has no internal or external inconsistencies. ^[1 p. 171]
- It is probable as God could well have done this; A good, wise, clever, loving God might well do just what the Gospels say he did in Christ: become human and die to save us. ^[1 p. 171]
- It works. It has enlightened and transformed lives. It has created saints who have lived and died for this ‘lie’, ‘lunacy’, ‘myth’ or ‘misunderstanding’. ^[1 p. 171]
- It gives the greatest hope, and meaning and purpose proposed to human life. ^[1 p. 171]
- It is the only rational, honest alternative. Data and argument compel us to it. ^[1 p. 171]

To think about: What implications does the conclusion that "Jesus was God" have?

We have examined an incredible amount of evidence supporting the fact that Jesus was who he claimed to be.

Discussion Note

Additional evidence for the truth of Jesus’ claims is the evidence for His resurrection, and the evidence from Old Testament prophecies. These sections are in the appendix.

Why then are many (apart from those who still have intellectual reservations) not convinced?

Why are many not convinced?

1. Generally not for rational reasons. The vast majority of those who disbelieve in Christ's divinity disbelieve for other reasons, not because they have confronted the arguments. ^[1 p. 171]
2. Sometimes, the thing hated and rejected is not Christ, but Christians. It has been said that "the only good argument against Christianity is Christians" - Chesterton ^[1 p. 172]
3. Sometimes, it is fear of the church and its teachings and authority that scares people away. The church is a concrete, visible, present institution that makes demands on our intellect to believe and our will to practice a whole way of life that conflicts with out natural inclinations. Exactly like Jesus, who did the very same thing. ^[1 p. 172]
4. The reluctance is usually moral. To admit that Jesus is divine is to admit his absolute authority over your life, including all aspects of your private life. We are all addicts to something, selfishness at least. That is the meaning of sin, the very disease Jesus came to cure. Of course, the cancer is going to fear the surgeon. That is exactly what you would expect. That is not a reason to disbelieve the surgeon's claim to be the specialist. Just the opposite. ^[1 p. 172]
5. Some people are afraid of the supernatural because it is mysterious and uncontrollable. It goes against our understanding of reality. If there is a supernatural God, and if this God did such a strange thing as becoming a man, then this greatly challenges our view of reality. ^[1 p. 172]
6. Sometimes, it may be simple pride, a refusal to hand over control of our lives. ^[1 p. 172]
7. It is not intellectually fashionable to believe in Christ as anything more than a human teacher. ^[1 p. 172]
8. It goes against our desire for equality. The notion that Christ alone is God - superior, authoritative, supernatural - and that Christ's teaching and person is far greater than other religious leaders, no matter how much great and good wisdom may be contained in their teachings, is hard for us to accept. The notion that all religions are not equal, offends our 'religion' of equality, which makes no demands on us to discriminate and choose one and to justify that choice. ^[1 p. 172]

NONE of these eight causes of unbelief is a reason, only a MOTIVE; that is they are subjective and psychological, not objective and logical. ^[1 p. 172]

- **If you do not / did not believe that Jesus was who he claimed to be, what is / was your reason? Is it an intellectual difficulty with this conclusion, or is it more like one of the above mentioned motives?**

If everything that has been said so far is true, then a surprising consequence necessarily follows. It is that there are only two things that are needed for anyone to worship Jesus Christ as God, that is intellectual honesty and the moral honesty that goes with it. This is exactly the attitude most unbelievers praise and claim to have: tough-minded, sceptical, scientific, logical honesty. However, if one really has that attitude, then it will lead them to belief in Jesus Christ. ^[1 p. 173]

To think about: Many Christians are accused of wishful thinking. However, in the light of all the evidence presented, which position looks more like myth, fairy tale, wishful thinking, subjective projection, and human invention? And which looks like the cold, hard, objective truth? ^[1 p. 173]

Discussion questions and exercises

- **Give a high level outline of the argument used to determine whether or not Jesus is God.**

- **What three reasons could you give to persuade someone that Jesus was not a liar? Give a brief explanation of each reason.**

- **What three reasons could you give to persuade someone that Jesus was not a noble liar? Give a brief explanation of each reason.**

- **What three reasons could you give to persuade someone that Jesus wasn't honestly mistaken. Give a brief explanation of each reason.**

- **What three reasons could you give to persuade someone that Jesus wasn't a lunatic. Give a brief explanation of each reason.**

- **Describe two reasons why we can conclude that Jesus didn't claim to be God in a non-literal, mystical sense.**

Discussion Group - Additional Note

Before completing the final study, the group may wish to devote a week to examining additional evidences supporting Jesus' claim to be God. The sections on "The Resurrection: Hoax or History?" and "A Brief Note On Prophetic Evidence" can be found in the appendix.

Discussion Groups

Preparation required for the following week

Please read the following:

- Study Six – Conclusions and Implications

Possible discussion questions for when the group meets next week

- Which of the four steps to becoming a Christian is easiest to take? Which is the hardest? Why?
- How would you describe sin and repentance?
- How could someone's commitment to Jesus vary if they a) accept him once they have realised the consequences of sin and that He is the only solution, b) accept him for what they can get, internal peace, eternal life, etc?
- Do you think some step is missing from the four presented here? If so, what?
- How easier is it for someone to honestly desire truth? What makes it easy, and/or hard?
- Do you think this study presents enough evidence for accepting Christianity as true? If not, what do you think is lacking? How could this be addressed?
- Do you agree that if Jesus was who he claimed to be, then a person's acceptance or denial of him is the most important decision they could make?

Study Six – Conclusions and Implications

For all those who participated in this apologetic study, you are either

- 1) a Christian - in which case you were not studying apologetics to find out whether Christianity is true or false, but to try to understand it better and to learn how to argue for it and persuade others of its truth ^[1 p. 384], or
- 2) not a Christian – in which case you are probably reading this study out of curiosity, to find out why Christians believe the things they believe and also, hopefully, out of an honest search for truth, an open-minded wondering whether this thing is really true after all. ^[1 p. 384]

This apologetics study presented factual evidence for the truth of Christianity. It examined intellectual reasons and arguments supporting a person's decision to become a follower of Jesus Christ (a Christian).

When examining the material, we found the following logical structure to hold true

1. Jesus existed;
2. The New Testament is reliable as a historical record;
3. Christ's claims to divinity are found in Scripture;
4. Christ's claims are true

Now, if Jesus' claim to be God is true, then what difference does it make? To answer this, we have a look at how this apologetic study fits into the entire Christian journey. For believers this can assist in explaining their belief to others. For non-believers it can serve as a travel agent's layout of the stages ahead on the Christian road; it is what travelers who choose to go further down this road will be in for. ^[1 p. 384]

Four Steps in the Christian Journey

- 1) The first step is mental belief. This is first because you cannot take any other step toward a goal unless you believe it exists. You cannot seek or deal with a Person you do not believe exists. You cannot pray to a God that you think is dead. ^[1 p. 384]

This study was designed to persuade you to take that first step by means of rational arguments. If you have already taken that step and believe that Christianity is true, this study is designed to help you to persuade others to take that first step. ^[1 p. 385]

If you are a non-believer and still do not find the material in this study convincing, I would like to encourage you to continue your honest search for truth. There are many more comprehensive and detailed Christian apologetic books and materials available. You may also find Pascal's Wager (in the section on "Does God exist?") and the sceptics prayer (later in this section) useful in your search.

However, this first step is a mere beginning. Much, much more is in store for the believer. The first step is like believing in the accuracy of a road map; the next three steps are like actually using the map. ^[1 p. 385]

2) Step two is called repentance.

Before we can adequately discuss what repentance is, we need to understand the concept, and consequence of sin.

Sin is technically defined as breaking the law of God; it is wrongdoing of any kind – a violation of God’s rules and standards. It is well summed up by the saying “I’ll do it my way”. We live our lives making daily “I’ll do it my way” choices. Choices involving aspects such as our temper, our tongue, our sexuality, our relationships, and our attitudes. We are in charge of our *own* lives and make our *own* decisions. ^[30]

What are the consequences of this? Simply put, the result is that we are separated from God – both now and forever. Separated from our Holy Creator by our unholiness. Sin creates an eternal gap or chasm between each one of us and God; a gap that we cannot bridge on our own. The result of sin, is spiritual death – eternal separation from the person who created us and loves us the most – God. The consequence for sin, is therefore, a spiritual ‘death penalty’. ^[30]

Romans 3.23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
Isaiah 59.2: But your iniquities have separated you from your God
Romans 6.23: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord

This highlights the significance and importance of Jesus Christ. It provides the answer as to why God entered human history. How could this penalty be paid? How could this gap caused by sin be removed? How could God and humans be reconciled? None of us can ever pay this penalty, as we are the guilty ones. Someone innocent had to pay the price – but there is only one innocent, sinless person ... Jesus Christ ... God! Jesus Christ, through His death, paid the penalty for the sin in our life. ^[30]

1 Peter 3.18: For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous [Jesus] for the unrighteous [me], to bring you to God
Romans 5.8: But God demonstrates His own love toward us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us
John 14.6: Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life'. No one comes to the Father, except through me'
Acts 4:12: Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

What then is repentance? It is not merely feeling guilty or sorry for your sins, but choosing – with that most fundamental and deep down part of your soul, your will - to turn out of the road you are now traveling down (the “I’ll do it my way” road), because you have been convinced that it is not the right road, the true road, the road designed for you by God, the road that leads to God. In the full sense, repentance means renouncing the lord of your present road – the “evil one” (Matthew 13:19), the “father of lies” (John 8:44) and the “ruler of this world” (John 14:30) – so that you can give yourself instead to Jesus Christ, your rightful lord. It is change of fundamental allegiance - like changing sides in a war. ^[1 p. 385]

To think about: How could someone's commitment to Jesus vary if they a) accept him once they have realised the consequences of sin and that He is the only solution, b) accept him for what they can get, internal peace, eternal life, etc?

3) The third step, which is the other side of repentance, is faith.

Not just mental belief (that is step one) but accepting and receiving Jesus Christ as God and Saviour and Lord of your soul, your life, your destiny. The first step is believing the road map; the second is turning out of your present road; the third is turning into another road. ^[1 p. 385]

You are willing to put a self-run life behind you, realizing that Jesus and the sin He died for should not both be in your life. You are putting all your trust in Jesus to forgive your sins and to give you eternal life (Acts 3:19). Being reconciled, beginning a relationship, with God. ^[30]

John 1.12: Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

Acts 3.19: Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out

Romans 6.23: ... the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord

4) The fourth step is traveling down His way, actually living the Christian life.

Step three is faith, step four is works – good works, works of love. The two necessarily go together. In step three the tree of Christ's life is planted in you; in step four it bears fruit. For "faith without works is dead" (James 1:26). ^[1 p. 385] It involves growing and deepening your relationship with God. Daily studying God's message to us (the Bible), speaking to Him (prayer), spending time with others that know God (church, fellowship) and making life decisions by asking "What would Jesus do?" ^[30]

These steps constitute the Christian journey. The requirements for the life that Jesus spoke about: "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10)

To think about: Do you think some step is missing from the four presented here? If so, what?

These four steps put this study into perspective, as it only hopes to persuade your honest reasoning that Christianity is true (step one). This is necessary but not sufficient. No one will launch a boat thinking the sea is only a myth; but believing in the sea is not sufficient to become a sailor. ^[1 p. 385]

Do Jesus' claims make a difference?

Yes, definitely! For if Jesus Christ is God, then when he died on the cross, he provided the *only* means for God and humans to be reconciled. Nothing in history could be more important to every person on earth than that. For being God, he is omnipotent and present right now, and he can transform you and your life right now as nothing and no one else possibly can. If Christ is divine, he has right to our entire lives, including our inner life and out thoughts. If Christ is divine, our absolute obligation is to believe everything he says and obey everything he commands. ^[1 p. 152]

To think about: The following is a suggested prayer when starting on the Christian Journey: "Lord Jesus, I want to know You personally. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I ask you to come into my life as my Lord and Saviour. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Please take control of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be"

- **Do you agree that if Jesus was who he claimed to be, then a person's acceptance or denial of him is the most important decision they could make? Why or why not?**

The Sceptics Prayer

But – you may reply – even after examining all the evidences and arguments presented, I am still uncertain as to whether Christ is God. I'm not even sure if there is a God. ^[1 p. 387]

Here is a way to find out whether Christianity is true or not – pray. Tell Jesus Christ that you are seeking the truth – seeking him, if he is the truth. Ask him to fulfill his promise that all who seek him will find him (Matthew 7:7). In his own time of course. He promised that you would find, but he didn't promise a schedule. He's a lover not a train. ^[1 p. 387]

If Christianity is true, he will. Such a prayer constitutes a scientifically fair test of the Christian "hypothesis" – that is, if you do not put unfair restrictions on God, like demanding a miracle (your way, not his) or certainty by tomorrow (your time, not his). The demand that God act like your servant is hardly a scientifically fair test of the hypothesis that there is a God who is your King. ^[1 p. 387]

But all this King asks for at first is honesty, not faking a faith you do not have. Honesty is a choice of the will – the choice to seek the truth no matter what or where. This is the most momentous choice you can make. Honesty is infinitely more momentous than we often think. It is also much harder than we think. Our culture trivializes honesty into

merely “sharing your feelings.” Shallow honesty seeks “sharing”, deep honesty seeks truth.^[1 p. 387]

To think about: How easier is it for someone to honestly desire truth? What makes it easy, and/or hard?

What then could a sceptic pray? Perhaps something along the lines of the following.

God, I don't know whether you even exist. I'm a sceptic. I doubt. I think you may be only a myth. But I'm not certain (at least not when I'm completely honest with myself). So if you do exist, and if you really did promise to reward all seekers, you must be hearing me now. So I hereby declare myself a seeker, a seeker of the truth, whatever it is and wherever it is. I want to know the truth and live the truth. If you are the truth, please help me.

This study has appealed to the intellect, this last section is infinitely more important: the appeal to the will to be honest and open to truth.^[1 p. 388] If you are not convinced of the truth of Christianity, then we encourage you to commit yourself to the honest seeking of truth – to pray the sceptics prayer.

If you have come to an intellectual belief that Christianity is true, then we encourage you to act on this truth, to share this truth, and to take the next steps involved in the Christian journey. This is the most important decision that you could ever make.

Appendix – Additional sections

Discussion Groups

Possible discussion questions for "The Resurrection: Hoax or History"

- List three reasons why the resurrection is important?
- Can a person still be a Christian and not believe in an actual, historical resurrection?
- What are the alternatives to Jesus having risen from the dead? Which of these alternatives are covered in this section, which are covered in the rest of the apologetic study, and which are not covered at all?
- What do you think are the three main reasons for concluding that the swoon theory is false? Why?
- What do you think are the three main reasons for concluding that the conspiracy theory is false? Why?
- What do you think are the three main reasons for concluding that the hallucination theory is false? Why?
- Do you think it is permissible for the arguments against the hallucination, and swoon theory to make use of the New Testament text?
- Could there be another alternative to Jesus having risen – perhaps one that combines a couple of theories? What evidence can you think of that is for and against these alternatives?
- What do you think are the three main reasons for concluding that the myth theory is false? Why?
- What evidence is there in support of the actual, historical resurrection of Jesus?
- What do you think of the statement “No matter how great the evidence for the truth of the resurrection - people are simply not prepared to surrender control of their life to God”
- How could you present the argument for the resurrection, simply and clearly, to someone else?

The Resurrection: Hoax or History?

Every sermon preached by every Christian in the New Testament centers on the resurrection. The message that flashed across the ancient world, set hearts on fire, changed lives and turned the world upside down was not “love your neighbour.” Every morally sane person already knew that; it was not news. The news was that a man who claimed to be the Son of God and the Saviour of the world had risen from the dead. ^[1 p. 176]

The importance of the Resurrection

- Jesus Christ, and his historical resurrection from the dead forms the factual foundation upon which Christianity is based. ^[19] As Paul said, “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” – 1 Corinthians 15:14

To think about: Can a person still be a Christian and not believe in an actual, historical resurrection?

- The resurrection is of crucial practical importance because it completes our salvation. Jesus came to save us from sin and its consequence, spiritual separation from God (spiritual death - Romans 6:23). ^[1 p. 177]
- The resurrection also sharply distinguishes Jesus from all other religious founder. The bones of Abraham and Muhammad and Buddha are all still here on earth. Jesus’ tomb is empty. ^[1 p. 177]
- If Jesus really rose from the dead, then it validates his claim to be divine and not merely human. ^[1 p. 176]

If Jesus Christ is God, then when he died on the cross, he provided a means for God and humans to be reconciled. Nothing in history could be more important to every person on earth than that. It also has tremendous implications for us now. For if Jesus Christ is God, then, since he is omnipotent and present right now, he can transform you and your life right now as nothing and no one else possibly can. If Christ is divine, he has right to our entire lives, including our inner life and our thoughts. If Christ is divine, our absolute obligation is to believe everything he says and obey everything he commands. ^[1 p. 152]

The Argument for the Resurrection

What we **do not** need to presuppose ^[1 p. 181]

1. the New Testament is infallible / divinely inspired or even true
2. there really was an empty tomb or post resurrection appearances (as recorded)
3. that miracles happen (note the sceptic must also not presuppose that they do not)

We need to presuppose only two things, both of which are hard data, empirical data, which no one denies: ^[1 p. 181]

1. the existence of the New Testament texts as we have them
2. the existence (but not necessarily the truth) of the Christian religion as we find it today

The question is this: Which theory about what really happened, can account for the data?^[1 p. 182]

There are five possible theories: Christianity, hallucinations, myth, conspiracy and swoon. The following is an outline of the argument.^[1 p. 182]

1. Jesus died
 - a) Jesus rose Christianity
 - b) Jesus didn't rise
 - i) the apostles were deceived Hallucination
 - ii) the apostles were myth-makers Myth
 - iii) the apostles were deceivers Conspiracy
2. Jesus didn't die Swoon

To think about: Can you think of any other alternatives? How plausible are these alternatives?

Note that we will not consider far-out ideas that responsible historians have never taken seriously. For example, that Jesus was a Martian who came in a flying saucer, or that Jesus never existed (for additional information on this last possibility, see the section on "Did Jesus exist?")^[1 p. 182]

Note that the resurrection is not directly observable, but the data is directly observable. We will attempt to argue that the only possible adequate explanation of this data is the Christian one.^[1 p. 182]

By refuting the other theories (Hallucination, Conspiracy, Swoon and Myth) we will have proved the truth of the resurrection. In addition, some evidence supporting the resurrection will also be mentioned.^[1 p. 182]

The four non-believing theories shall be examined in the following order: from the simplest, least popular and most easily refuted to the most confusing, most popular and most complexly refuted: first swoon, then conspiracy, then hallucination and finally myth.^[1 p. 183]

Jesus didn't die – The Swoon Theory

Could Jesus have only swooned (fainted) and then later have resuscitated?^[1 p. 183]

The following arguments refute this Swoon Theory.

Note that as the swoon theory does not challenge the data in the New Testament texts (It uses them and explains them by swoon rather than resurrection), the data, therefore, is also used in countering the swoon theory.^[1 p. 183]

To think about: Do you think the above assumption is valid? Why, or why not?

- Jesus could not have survived crucifixion

Roman procedures were very careful to eliminate that possibility. Roman law even laid the death penalty on any soldier who let a capital prisoner escape in any way. This includes bungling a crucifixion. It was never done. ^[1 p. 183] It would be virtually impossible medically for Jesus to have survived the rigors of his torture and crucifixion, much less not to have died of exposure in the tomb. ^[19]

- The Roman soldier was sure that Jesus was dead ^[1 p. 183]

The fact that the Roman soldier did not break Jesus' legs, as he did to the other two crucified criminals (John 19:31-33) means the soldier was sure that Jesus was dead. Breaking the legs hastened the death so that corpse could be taken down before the Sabbath (v. 31)

- Eyewitness testimony confirms a medical condition that results in death ^[1 p. 183]

John, an eyewitness, saw blood and water come from Jesus' pierced side (John 19:34-35). This shows that Jesus' lungs had collapsed and that he had died of asphyxiation.

- The body was totally encased in winding sheets and entombed ^[1 p. 183]

See John 19:38-42. The body was wrapped in **75 pounds** of spices as was the custom. ^[6 p. 225]

- The post-resurrection appearances convinced the disciples that Jesus was alive ^[1 p. 183]

See John 20:19-29. How could the disciples have been so transformed and confident, if Jesus had merely struggled out of a swoon, in bad need of a doctor? A half-dead, staggering sick man who has just had a narrow escape is not worshiped fearlessly as divine lord and conqueror of death.

- How were the Roman guards overpowered by a swooning corpse? ^[1 p. 183]

If the disciples were involved, they then lied when writing the gospels, which leads to the conspiracy theory (or the myth theory if you hold the NT accounts were altered / created over time)

- How could a swooning half-dead man have moved the great stone at the door of the tomb? ^[1 p. 183]

This question has remained unanswered. The Romans or Jews would not have moved it as it was in both their interests to keep the tomb sealed. The Jews had put the stone there in the first place. The Roman guards would be killed if they let the body 'escape'.

What about the Jewish authorities report that the disciples had stolen the body (Matt 28:11-15)? This story is unbelievable, as Roman guards would not fall asleep on a job, as they would lose their lives. Even if they did fall asleep, the crowd and the effort and the noise it would have taken to move an enormous boulder would have wakened them. Furthermore, this objection leads us to the Conspiracy Theory.

- If Jesus awoke from a swoon, where did he go? ^[1 p. 184]

How did he disappear? With a past like Jesus' you would expect to find some data on his post-death life. There is none.

- Most simply, the Swoon theory necessarily turns into the Conspiracy theory, or the Hallucination theory because the disciples testified that Jesus did not swoon but really died and rose (or Myth theory if they did not really testify to this). ^[1 p. 184]

- **Briefly, explain three good reasons for concluding that the swoon theory is false?**

The disciples were deceivers – The Conspiracy Theory

If Jesus did not swoon, perhaps he did die, and the disciples deceived people into thinking that he was alive.

The detailed evidence and support for the reliability of the New Testament (including the many reasons why we can conclude that the New Testament accounts do not contain fabrications or lies) refutes this theory. Please the section on “Is Scripture Reliable as a Historical Record?” and in particular "Does the NT contain Gospel Fictions or Lies?"

The following are additional reasons why the disciples could not have made up the whole story.

- The Jews never produced the corpse ^[1 p. 186]

If the resurrection was a hoax, the Jews needed only to produce the corpse and that would have been the end of it. The Jews and Romans were on the ‘same side’, so having access to the body was possible.

If they couldn’t get the body, because the disciples stole it, how did the disciples do this? If the disciples stole the body, how in the world would unarmed fisherman and peasants overpower the Roman guard, move the stone, and take the body?

- The disciples could not have gotten away with proclaiming the resurrection in Jerusalem- same time, same place, and full of eyewitnesses to the events- if it was a lie. ^[1 p. 186]

The Gospels were written in such a temporal and geographical proximity to the events that they record, that it would have been almost impossible to fabricate events. The fact that the disciples were able to proclaim the resurrection in Jerusalem in the

face of their enemies a few weeks after the crucifixion shows that what they proclaimed was true.

- The conspiracy would have been unearthed by the disciple's adversaries

These powerful adversaries, the Jews and the Romans, had both the interest and the power to expose any fraud. Yet, they could not! ^[1 p. 186]

How could this 'conspiracy' or 'lie' cause such a transformation? Imagine twelve peasants changing the Roman world with a lie. How did they come up with such a conspiracy – were they the most creative, clever, intelligent fantasists in history – far surpassing Shakespeare, or Tolkien? Who sustained them, what made them act? Even when facing extreme conditions (being ostracized, criticized, rejected, persecuted, martyred, hated, scorned, persecuted, excommunicated, imprisoned, tortured, exiled, crucified, boiled alive, roasted, beheaded, disemboweled and fed to lions) not one of them confessed to the resurrection being a fake, a lie, or a deliberate deception! ^[1 p. 185]

If the resurrection was a concocted, conspired lie, it violates **all known** historical and psychological laws of lying. It is, then, as unscientific, as unrepeatably, unique and untestable as the resurrection itself, but unlike the resurrection, it also goes against all the evidence we do have. ^[1 p. 186]

- **Briefly, explain three good reasons for concluding that the conspiracy theory is false?**

The disciples were deceived - Hallucination Theory

If you thought you saw a dead man walking and talking, would you not think it more likely that you were hallucinating, rather than that you were seeing correctly? Similarly, could those who saw Jesus have been hallucinating?

The following is a refutation of this Hallucination Theory.

Note that as the hallucination theory does not challenge the data in the New Testament texts (It uses them and explains them by hallucination rather than resurrection), the data, therefore, is also used in countering the hallucination theory.

- There were too many witnesses for them all to be hallucinating ^[1 p. 186]

Hallucinations are private, individual, and subjective. In the situations in which Jesus was seen, this was not the case. Jesus was seen by numerous people: Mary Magdalene,

the disciples, two disciples at Emmaus, fishermen, James (his brother or cousin) and 500 hundred people at once (I Corinthians 15:3-8). ^[1 p. 186]

When Paul wrote about the witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:6, which is dated between 54-57 AD ^[6 p. 91]) he states that most of these 500 witnesses were still alive, and that any reader could check the truth by questioning them. He could not have done this and gotten away with it, if it were not true, especially considering the power, resources and number of his enemies. ^[1 p. 187]

- The five hundred witnesses saw Christ together, at the same time and place ^[1 p. 187]

This is even more remarkable than five hundred private “hallucination” at different times and places of the same Jesus. How can five hundred people have the same “hallucination” of a living Jesus (not a vision) at the same time and same place?

- The appearance of Christ lasted for too long to be a hallucination ^[1 p. 187]

Hallucinations usually last a few seconds or minutes; rarely hours. The appearance of Christ lasted for 40 days! (Acts 1:3)

- Hallucinations usually only happen once, except for the insane. This one returned many times, to ordinary people ^[1 p. 187]

For example: John 20:19-21:14, Acts 1:3

- Jesus acted like a real person ^[1 p. 187]

Hallucinations come from within, from what we already know, at least unconsciously. This one said and did surprising and unexpected things (Acts 1:4,9) - like a real person and unlike a dream.

- Hallucinations do not eat ^[1 p. 187]

The resurrected Christ did, on at least two occasions (Luke 24:42- 43, John 21:1-14). ¹

- The disciples touched him ^[1 p. 187]

For example: Matt. 28:9, Luke 24:39, John 20:27 ¹

- The disciples spoke with him, and he spoke back ^[1 p. 187]

Hallucinations do not hold profound, extended conversations with you. Unless, you have the kind of mental disorder that isolates you. But this ‘hallucination’ conversed with at least eleven people at once, for forty days (Acts 1:3)

- The apostles could not have believed in the "hallucination" if Jesus' corpse had still been in the tomb ^[1 p. 187]

They would have checked for the corpse. If it was there, they could not have believed in the "hallucination".

- The Jews could have produced the body ^[1 p. 187]

If the apostles had hallucinated then spread their hallucinogenic story, the Jews would have stopped it by producing the body of Jesus - unless the disciples had stolen it, in which case we are dealing with the conspiracy theory.

- Hallucinations would not lead to belief in Jesus' resurrection. ^[19]

As projections of one's own mind, hallucinations cannot contain anything that is not already in the mind. But Jesus' resurrection differed from the Jewish conception in two fundamental ways. In Jewish thought the resurrection always occurred after the end of the world, not within history, and concerned all the people, not just an isolated individual. Jesus' resurrection was both within history and of one individual person. Thus, hallucinations would not have elicited belief in Jesus' resurrection, an idea that ran solidly against the Jewish mode of thought.

- The hallucination theory only explains the post resurrection appearances and not all the other data ^[1 p. 188]

It does not explain data such as the empty tomb, the rolled-away stone, and the inability to produce the corpse.

- **Briefly, explain three good reasons for concluding that the hallucination theory is false?**

The disciples were myth-makers - Myth Theory

If the swoon, conspiracy and hallucination theory do not hold, the sceptic is left with one last option – the Myth Theory. Could the resurrection accounts be myth - neither literally true nor literally false, but spiritually or symbolically true. ^[1 p. 189]

The detailed evidence and support for the reliability of the New Testament (including the many reasons why we can conclude that the New Testament accounts do not contain myths) refutes this theory. Please the section on “Is Scripture Reliable as a Historical Record?” and in particular "Does the NT contain Myths?"

An additional piece of evidence against the myth theory is that there are events in the resurrection account that would not be included in a mythical account.

The first witnesses of the resurrection were women. In 1st century Judaism, women had low social status and no legal right to serve as witnesses. If it was a myth, the inventors surely would not have the empty tomb discovered by women. If, the writers were

reporting what they saw, they would have to tell the truth, however socially and legally inconvenient.^[1 p. 192]

Another important reason why the New Testament, and its accounts of the resurrection, could not be myth misinterpreted and confused with fact, is because it specifically distinguishes the two and repudiates the mythic interpretation. Peter explicitly makes the point that the Gospel story is historical fact, not cleverly devised myths. (see 2 Peter 1:16).^[1 p. 192]

Since, it explicitly says it is not myth, then if it is myth, it is a deliberate lie. Once the New Testament distinguishes myth from fact, it becomes a lie if it is not a fact. This leads us back to the previously discredited theories (Conspiracy, Hallucination and Swoon).^[1 p. 192]

- **Briefly, explain two good reasons for concluding that the myth theory is false? (You may wish to refer back to the section on the Internal Evidence Test)**

Jesus Rose

As all the other theories have been refuted, we are left with the final option, that Jesus rose from the dead!

To think about: Could there be another alternative to Jesus having risen – perhaps one that combines a couple of theories? What evidence can you think of that is for and against these alternatives?

The following additional evidence supports of this position.

- Resurrection appearances – there were early witnesses

1 Corinthians, in which Paul wrote about witnesses to the resurrected Jesus, is dated between 54-57 AD.^[6 p. 91]

1Corinthians 15.3: For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

In this reference, Paul states that most of these 500 witnesses were still alive, and that any reader could check the truth by questioning them!^[1 p. 182]

We should also consider that in this passage, Paul is quoting an old Christian formula which he received and in turn passed on to his converts. Paul was in Jerusalem three years after his conversion on a fact-finding mission.

Galatians 1.18: Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days

During which he conferred with Peter and James over a two-week period. He probably received the formula at this time, if not before. Since Paul was converted in AD 33, the list of witnesses goes back to within the first five years after Jesus' death. Therefore, we can not dismiss the appearances of Jesus as mythical or legendary. This large number of witnesses that Paul was referring to, were indeed eyewitnesses!

We cannot deny that these appearances occurred. Paul's information makes it certain that on separate occasions various individuals and groups saw Jesus alive from the dead! ^[19]

- Jesus' tomb was empty

The empty tomb of Jesus has come to be one of the generally accepted facts concerning the historical Jesus. ^[19]

If we examine the evidence, we are forced to conclude that Jesus' tomb was empty.

The historical reliability of the burial story supports the empty tomb. If the burial account is accurate, then the site of Jesus' grave was known to Jew and Christian alike. ^[19] In that case we can deduce that the tomb was indeed empty, for if Jesus had not risen and the burial site were known:

- a) the disciples could never have believed in the resurrection of Jesus. For a first century Jew the idea that a man might be raised from the dead while his body remained in the tomb was simply a contradiction in terms. ^[19]
- b) Even if the disciples had believed in the resurrection of Jesus, it is doubtful they would have generated any following. So long as the body was in the tomb, a Christian movement founded on belief in the resurrection of the dead man would have been an impossible folly. ^[19]
- c) The Jewish authorities would have exposed the whole affair. The quickest and surest answer to the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus would have been simply to point to his grave on the hillside. ^[19]

Note that the burial story is one of the most historically certain traditions we have concerning Jesus. ^[19] The following are some of the reasons why.

- a) The burial is mentioned in the third line of the old Christian formula quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. ^[19]

In the formula cited by Paul the expression "he was raised" following the phrase "he was buried" implies the empty tomb. ^[19] The phrase "on the third day" probably points to the discovery of the empty tomb. Very briefly summarized, the point is that since no one actually witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, how did Christians come to date it "on the third day?" The most probable answer is that they did so because this was the

day of the discovery of the empty tomb by Jesus' women followers. Hence, the resurrection itself came to be dated on that day. Thus, in the old Christian formula quoted by Paul we have extremely early evidence for the existence of Jesus' empty tomb. ^[19]

- b) The story itself lacks any traces of legendary development. The story is simple and not the style of myth. ^[19]

Remember too, that the tomb was probably discovered empty by women. To understand this point one has to recall two facts about the role of women in Jewish society.

- i) Woman occupied a low rung on the Jewish social ladder. ^[19]
- ii) The testimony of women was regarded as so worthless that they were not even permitted to serve as legal witnesses in a court of law. Any later legend would certainly have made the male disciples discover the empty tomb. ^[19]

- c) The story comports with archeological evidence concerning the types and location of tombs existing in Jesus' day. ^[19]
- d) No other competing burial traditions exist. ^[19]
- e) The earliest Jewish argument presupposes the empty tomb.

The earliest Jewish response to the proclamation of the resurrection was an attempt to explain away the empty tomb.

Matthew 28.12: When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'"

Thus, the evidence of the adversaries of the disciples provides evidence in support of the empty tomb. ^[19]

No wonder, considering all these reasons, it is widely recognized that the empty tomb of Jesus is a simple historical fact. ^[19]

To think about: How does the empty tomb support the theory that Jesus Rose?

- **Why can we be certain that Jesus' tomb was empty? Give a brief summary of the arguments presented above.**
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

- The origin of the Christian Way.

Even the most sceptical scholars admit that the earliest disciples at least believed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Indeed, they pinned nearly everything on it. Without belief in the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity could never have come into being. The crucifixion would have remained the final tragedy in the life of Jesus. The origin of Christianity hinges on the belief of these earliest disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. ^[19]

The question now inevitably arises: how does one explain the origin of that belief? ^[19]

If one denies that Jesus really did rise from the dead, then they must explain the disciples' belief that he did rise either in terms of Jewish influences or in terms of Christian influences. ^[19]

Now clearly, it can't be the result of Christian influences, for at that time there wasn't any Christianity yet! Since belief in Jesus' resurrection was the foundation for the origin of the Christian faith, it can't be a belief formed as a result of that faith. ^[19]

But neither can the belief in the resurrection be explained as a result of Jewish influences. The Jewish conception of resurrection differed in two important, fundamental respects from Jesus' resurrection. In Jewish thought the resurrection to eternal life always occurred after the end of the world, not within history, and concerned all the people, not just an isolated individual. Jesus' resurrection was both within history and of one individual person. ^[19]

The disciples, therefore, confronted with Jesus' crucifixion and death, would only have looked forward to the resurrection at the final day and would probably have carefully kept their master's tomb as a shrine, where his bones could reside until the resurrection. They would not have come up with the idea that he was already raised. ^[19]

The disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection, therefore, cannot be explained as the result of either Christian or Jewish influences. Left to themselves, the disciples would never have come up with such an idea as Jesus' resurrection. And remember: they were fishermen and tax collectors, not theologians. ^[19]

Here is a belief nothing in terms of previous historical influences can account for. We have a situation in which a large number of people held firmly to this belief, which cannot be explained in terms of the Old Testament or the Pharisees, and these people held onto this belief until the Jews finally threw them out of the synagogue. ^[19]

The resurrection of Jesus is therefore the best explanation for the origin of the Christian faith. ^[19]

Conclusion

No alternative to the real resurrection of Jesus Christ has yet explained: the existence of the Gospels, the origin of the Christian faith, the failure of Christ's enemies to produce his corpse, the empty tomb, or the accounts of the resurrection appearances. ^[1 p. 195]

Modern scholarship recognizes no plausible explanatory alternative to the resurrection of Jesus. Those who refuse to accept the resurrection as a fact of history are simply left without an explanation!

Discussion questions and exercises

- **List three reasons why the resurrection is important?**

- **What are the alternatives to Jesus having risen from the dead? Which of these alternatives are covered in this section, which are covered in the rest of the apologetic study, and which are not covered at all?**

- **What evidence is there in support of the actual, historical resurrection of Jesus?**

Discussion Groups

Possible discussion questions for "Does God Exist?"

- How would you define the concept of God?
- How could someone know that there is no God? What reasons would they give?
- In your own words, briefly describe the six observational evidences for the existence of God.
- What is the danger in saying that because a majority believe something, it must be true? Is a majority a proof for truth?
- What do you find the most interesting about the astronomical observation of design, and the improbability of mere chance?
- If our inherent sense of morality did not come from God, where could it have come from? If there were no absolute standards, what would we base right and wrong on?
- Of what practical use is Pascal's wager?
- Which of the cosmological arguments do you find the weakest? Why?
- Which of the cosmological arguments do you find the most useful? Why? How could you clearly convey this argument to another person?
- Which of the psychological arguments do you find the weakest? Why?
- Which of the psychological arguments do you find the most useful? Why? How could you clearly convey this argument to another person?
- In the light of all the evidence, many do not believe in a God. What could some of their reasons be?
- Once we agree that God exists, should we be interested in finding out what God is like?

Does God exist?

Is there anything beyond what we can see and touch? Is the universe self-sufficient and uncaused, its form the result of random motions, devoid of any plan or purpose? Or is there a being outside the universe, outside of matter, space and time? A perfect, unchanging and uncaused being? ^[1 p. 48] Is there truly a God? A supreme all-powerful being? A creator of the universe? Moreover, how can someone even be sure that such a being exists? ^[11 p. 43]

To think about: How would you define the concept of God?

The demonstration of the existence of God is no trivial matter and is an exercise, which in order to do it any justice, is far beyond the scope of this study. We will only look briefly at a number of observations and philosophical arguments, which attempt to find an answer to this very important question.

The Possibility

Before we look at some of the evidences, consider the following: If a person opposes the possibility of there being a God, then **any** evidence can be rationalized or explained away. It is just like when someone is dead set against the idea that people walked on the moon; then no amount of proof is going to change their thinking. Satellite footage of the astronauts walking on the moon, moon rocks of foreign composition, the testimony of the astronauts, written reports from their mission . . . all the evidence would be worthless, because the person has already concluded that people cannot go to the moon. ^[26]

So before one looks at the evidence to prove God's existence, one should determine if they are even open to the possibility of the existence of God, and if not, why not? It is one thing to, through honest examination of arguments and evidence to conclude that God does not exist, and another entirely to simply dismiss any possibility of God's existence without careful thought. An examination of one's motivation and reasoning on the topic is very important, *before* the evidence is examined.

- **Are you open to the possibility of God's existence? Why or why not?**

Also, note that is very difficult to **know** that there is definitely no God. In order for someone to emphatically know this, implies that they would have to know all things. ^[27] Our incomplete knowledge should at least open us to the possibility of the existence of God.

To think about: How could someone know that there is no God? What reasons would they give?

One may also find it a little surprising that many people believe in God not out of desperation or wish fulfillment, but as an honest response to the compelling facts before them. ^[26]

Observational Evidence for the Existence of God

Anthropological Research

Anthropological research indicates that there is a universal belief in God. Anthropology is the science of human kind, that deals with origin and development of races, cultures, customs, and beliefs of humankind. Anthropological research has indicated that among the farthest and most remote primitive people today, there is a universal belief in God. Even in the earliest histories and legends of people all around the world, the original concept was of one God, who was the Creator. An original high God seems once to have been in their consciousness even in those societies, which are today polytheistic; believing, and worshiping more than one god. ^[26]

Throughout history, in all cultures of the world, people have been convinced there is a God. Could one say with any sense of confidence that all those people have been mistaken? Billions of people, who represent diverse sociological, intellectual, emotional, educational backgrounds ... all came to the same conclusion that there is a Creator, a God to be worshipped. ^[26]

To think about: What is the danger in saying that because a majority believe something, it must be true? Is a majority a proof for truth?

Astronomical Observation of Design

Now that the limits and parameters of the universe have come within the measuring capacity of astronomers and physicists, the design characteristics of the universe are being examined and acknowledged. ^[28]

One of the remarkable discoveries of the past 30 years has been the recognition that small changes in any of the universal constants produce surprisingly dramatic changes in the universe, rendering it unsuitable for life, not just as we know it, but for life of any conceivable type. In excess of 100 examples have been documented in the technical literature and summarized. ^[29]

The degree of fine-tuning required for many of these parameters is utterly amazing. For example, if the strong nuclear force were even two percent stronger or two percent weaker, the universe would never be able to support life. The expansion rate of the universe also had to be fine-tuned to an accuracy of one part in 10^{55} in order to support life. ^[28]

Another example involves the mass density of the universe, which determines how efficiently nuclear fusion operates in the cosmos. If the mass density is too great, too much deuterium (a heavy isotope of hydrogen with one proton and one neutron in the nucleus) is made in the first few minutes of the universe's existence. This extra deuterium will cause all the stars to burn much too quickly and erratically for any of them to support a planet with life upon it. On the other hand, if the mass density is too small, so little deuterium and helium is made in the first few minutes that the heavier elements necessary for life will never form in the stars. What this means is that the approximately

one hundred billion trillion stars we observe in the universe, no more and no less, are needed for life to be possible in the universe! The mass density of the universe has also to be just right in order for life to develop i.e. every one of those stars is needed just for us to have the possibility of existence! ^[28]

It is not just the universe that bears evidence for design. The sun and the earth also reveal such evidence. When examining the many parameters which are required in order for a planet to support life, one can safely conclude that much fewer than a trillionth of a trillionth of a percent of all stars will have a planet capable of sustaining advanced life. Considering that the observable universe contains less than a trillion galaxies, each averaging a hundred billion stars, we can see the **not even one planet** would be expected, by natural processes alone, to possess the necessary conditions to sustain life. ^[28]

Astronomers have discovered that the characteristics and parameters of the universe and our solar system are so finely tuned to support life that nothing less than a personal, intelligent Creator can explain the degree of fine-tuning. ^[28]

- **Write a four-line summary of how "Astronomical Observation of Design" supports the conclusion that God exists.**
-
-
-
-

The Improbability of "Mere" Chance

However, in spite of all this evidence for design, some non-theists claim that our existence is simply testimony to the fact that the extremely unlikely did, indeed, take place by chance. In other words, we would not be here to report the event unless that highly unlikely event actually took place. ^[28]

A reply to this argument has been developed by philosophers William Lane Craig and Richard Swinburne: ^[28]

Suppose a hundred sharpshooters are sent to execute a prisoner by firing squad and the prisoner survives. The prisoner should not be surprised that he does not observe that he is dead. After all, if he were dead, he could not observe his death. Nonetheless, he should be surprised that he observes that he is alive. ^[28]

The prisoner could conclude, since he is alive, that all the sharpshooters missed by some extremely unlikely chance. He may wish to attribute his survival to an incredible bit of good luck, but he would be far more rational to conclude that the guns were loaded with blanks or that the sharpshooters all deliberately missed. That is, someone must have purposed that he should live. Likewise, the rational conclusion to draw from the incredible fine-tuning of the universe and the solar system is that someone purposed that we should live. ^[28]

Another consideration is the total lack of analogy in the world of observed natural processes. We do not see spontaneous generation of anything highly complex and fine-tuned. Also, how much more complex, and information-loaded is the simplest of organisms. Nothing produced by the ingenuity of man can compare with the complexity

and efficiency of even the simplest of organisms. Organisms, in fact, are so complex that with all man's study of them we as yet know relatively little of how to build and operate them. ^[28]

The distinguished astronomer Sir Frederick Hoyle showed how even the amino acids randomly coming together in a human cell is mathematically absurd. Regarding our lives, Sir Hoyle illustrated the weakness of "chance" with the following analogy. "What are the chances that a tornado might blow through a junkyard containing all the parts of a 747, accidentally assemble them into a plane, and leave it ready for take-off? The possibilities are so small as to be negligible even if a tornado were to blow through enough junkyards to fill the whole universe!" ^[26]

In all of life we see a reasonable law of cause and effect. Every effect had a cause. When one considers the intricacies of our life and universe, it is reasonable to think that an intelligent, Creator provided for everything we need for life. ^[26]

- **What do you find the most interesting about the astronomical observation of design, and the improbability of mere chance?**
-
-
-
-
-
-

Our Inherent Sense of Right and Wrong

Humankind's inherent sense of right and wrong cannot be biologically explained. Even a thief gets upset and feels wronged when someone steals from him. There arises in all of us, of any culture, universal feelings of right and wrong. If someone violently grabs a child from a family and rapes that child, there is an anger and revulsion and a rage to confront that act as evil, regardless of the culture. Where did we get this sense of wrong? ^[26]

What about courage, love, dying for a cause, dignity, duty and compassion, where did these come from? If people are merely products of physical evolution, material and biological substances, why do we have a sense of right? How do we explain a universal law in the conscience of all people that says murder for fun is wrong? Do not all people sense that a humble spirit and a focus on meeting the needs of others are admirable qualities? ^[26]

We all agree that some moralities are better than others. If no set of moral ideas were truer or better than any other, then there would be no sense in preferring civilized morality to savage morality. If there were no difference, how could one even say that Nazi morality was wrong! ^[22]

This inherent morality has resulted in many concluding that there is a God behind the universe. He has put a moral law within us and he is intensely interested in right conduct - in fair play, unselfishness, courage, good faith, honesty and truthfulness. ^[22]

To think about: If our inherent sense of morality did not come from God, where could it have come from? If there were no absolute standards, what would we base right and wrong on?

Origin of the Universe

Cosmology, the theory of the universe, is not neutral when it comes to philosophy and theology. A universe that eternally existed is much more suitable to a worldview that excludes a God. By the same token, a universe that began seems to demand a first cause; for who could imagine such an effect without a sufficient cause? ^[29]

Albert Einstein's study of general relativity yielded the surprising result that everything in the universe is simultaneously expanding and decelerating. The only physical phenomenon which expands and decelerates at the same time is an explosion. However, if the universe is the aftermath of an explosion ('Big Bang'), then sometime in the past it must have had a beginning. There must have been a moment at which the explosion began. If it had a beginning, then there must be a Beginner. ^[29]

Einstein's own world view initially kept him from adopting such a conclusion, but once astronomer Edwin Hubble proved that the galaxies indeed are expanding away from one another in the manner predicted by Einstein's original formulation of general relativity, Einstein gave grudging acceptance to the necessity for a beginning, and to the presence of a superior reasoning power. ^[28]

Others were not so ready to concede a theistic world view. Through the years they proposed a variety of alternatives such as the hesitating universe, the steady state universe and the oscillating universe. However, these models for the universe have evaporated in the face of new measurements and discoveries. ^[28]

- **Do you agree with the statement that "If the universe had a beginning, then there must be a Beginner"? Why or why not?**

The Beginning of Time

In 1968 and 1970 three British astrophysicists, Stephen Hawking, George Ellis, and Roger Penrose, extended the solution of the equations of general relativity to include space and time. Their papers showed that if these equations are valid for the universe, then, under reasonably general conditions, space and time also must have an origin, concurrent with that for matter and energy. In other words, time itself is finite. ^[28]

With the knowledge that time has a beginning, and a relatively recent beginning (17 +/- 3 billion years), science is pointing strongly to a universe that began. Evidence for a

creation event is receiving general acceptance throughout the physical science community. ^[28]

With all the evidence pointing to a beginning, we are left in need of a cause, a beginner – God.

Additional Note

The common origin of matter, energy, space, and time proves that the act(s) of creation must have transcended the dimensions and substance of the universe. For a brief discussion on how this is in fact a powerful argument for the biblical account of origins, please see “*Astronomical Evidences for the God of the Bible*” by Hugh Ross (<http://www.wvcw.org/astroevi.html>). For a discussion on the application of quantum mechanics to the origin of the universe, please see the same article.

Philosophical Arguments for the Existence of God

Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, include twenty arguments for the existence of God in their “**Handbook of Christian Apologetics**”.^[1] Most of their arguments will be briefly touched on here – for a more in-depth and thorough study, I suggest obtaining their book, or a book similar in content. Many of these arguments are quite complex, and much thought and effort is required when working through them.

Pascal's Wager^[1]

Suppose that you, after examining all the following arguments, still feel that the arguments are inconclusive. Then there is another, different kind of argument left. It has come to be known as Pascal's Wager. It is not a proof for the existence of God, but can help us in our search for God in the absence of such proof.

Let us suppose that reason cannot decide for sure whether God exists. Since the question is of such importance that, we must decide somehow, then we must “wager” if we cannot prove. So we are asked: Where are you going to place your bet?

If you place it with God, you lose nothing, even if it turns out that God does not exist. But if you place it against God, and you are wrong and God does exist, you lose everything: God, eternity, heaven, infinite gain.

Suppose God does not exist and I believe in him. In that case, what awaits me after death is not eternal life, but most likely, eternal nonexistence. But what if God, my creator and the source of all good, does exist; and I do not believe in him. He offers me his love and his life, and I reject it. There are answers to my greatest questions, there is fulfillment of my deepest desires; but I decide to spurn it all. In that case, I lose everything.

The Wager can seem purely selfish. However, it can be reformulated to appeal to a higher moral motive: If there is a God of infinite goodness, and he justly deserves my allegiance and faith, I risk doing the greatest injustice by not acknowledging him.

The wager cannot – or should not – coerce belief. But it can be an incentive for us to search for God, to study and reread the arguments that seek to show that there is Something – or Someone – who is the ultimate explanation of the universe and of my life. It could at least motivate “The Prayer of the Sceptic”: “God, I don't know whether you exist or not, but if you do, please show me who you are.”

With this in mind, let's examine some of the Philosophical arguments for the existence of God.

To think about: Of what practical use is Pascal's wager? Who do you think would find this argument interesting / persuasive?

Cosmological Arguments

These arguments take their data from without, they are not the simplest of arguments, and therefore may not be convincing to many people.

The Argument from Efficient Causality ⁽¹⁾

- 1) Some things cause other things to be. For example, a man playing the piano is causing the music that we hear. If he stops, so does the music.
- 2) Assume that all things are caused to exist by other things right now, i.e. there is no Uncaused Being, no God.
- 3) So right now, all things, including all those things which are causing other things to be, need a cause.
- 4) Therefore, 'everything that exists', stands in need of being caused to exist.
- 5) But what is causing everything to exist? Beyond everything that is, there can only be nothing.
- 6) Therefore everything in reality is dependent on something, and that something is nothing
- 7) But this (6) is absurd
- 8) Therefore the hypothesis (2) that there is no Uncaused Being is absurd. There must be something uncaused, something on which all things that need an efficient cause of being are dependent.

In other words, if everyone has to borrow a certain book, but no one actually has it, then no one will ever get it. Therefore, there must exist a God: an Uncaused Being who does not have to receive existence like us – and like every other link in the chain of receivers.

Objection: Why do we need an uncaused cause? Why could there not simply be an endless series of things mutually keeping each other in being?

Reply: Things have got to exist in order to be mutually dependent. If things depended upon each other for their entire being, then they would have to be simultaneously cause and effect of each other – this is absurd i.e. A causes B, B causes C, and C causes A. This is saying everything would have to be given being at the same time, but nothing could exist to give it. And that means that nothing would actually be – which is clearly false.

- **Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).**

The Argument from Change

- 1) The material world is a world of change - things change from state to state. For example, a great oak tree grows from a tiny acorn, and a person grows to be two meters in height.
- 2) When something comes to be in a certain state,
 - a) it was not this 'new state' that caused the change. For until it comes to be, it does not exist, and if it does not yet exist, it cannot cause anything.
 - b) it was not the thing itself that caused the change. It only has the potential for change. Nothing can give itself what it does not have. The *result* of change cannot actually exist *before* the change. The changing thing begins with only the potential to change, but it needs to be acted on by other things outside, if that potential is to be made actual.
- 3) Therefore, something other than the thing itself causes the change.
- 4) However, this other thing(s) is also changing. It also needs something outside itself to actualize its potential.
- 5) The universe is the sum total of all these moving things, however many there are
- 6) However, the whole universe is in the process of change.
- 7) Therefore the universe requires an outside force to actualize it
- 8) Therefore, there is some force outside (in addition to) the universe, some real being transcendent to the universe. This is one of the things meant by "God"

In other words

- 1) If there is nothing outside the material universe, then nothing can cause the universe to change
- 2) But the universe does change
- 3) Therefore, there must be something in addition to the material universe.
- 4) Moreover, the universe is the sum total of all matter, space and time. These three things depend on each other.
- 5) Therefore, this being outside the universe is outside matter, space and time. It is not a changing thing; it is the unchanging Source of change.

- **Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).**

The Argument from Time and Contingency

- 1) We notice around us things that come into being and go out of being. A tree, for example, grows from a tiny shoot, flowers brilliantly, then withers and dies.
- 2) Whatever comes into being, or goes out of being, does not **have** to be. Its nonbeing is a real possibility. For example, the tree did not have to exist (to be).
- 3) Suppose that for everything, it does not have to be. Nonbeing for everything is a real possibility.
- 4) Now, suppose that the universe began to exist. Then all being must trace its origin to some past moment before which existed – literally – nothing at all. But
- 5) From nothing comes nothing. So
- 6) The universe could not have begun. The universe has always been.
- 7) Therefore, for the infinitely long duration of cosmic history, all being had the built-in possibility not to be.

- 8) But, if in an infinite time that possibility was never realized, then it could not have been a real possibility at all.
- 9) Therefore, our hypothesis (3) that “nonbeing for everything is a real possibility” is untrue
- 10) Therefore there must exist something which has to exist, which cannot not exist. This sort of being is called necessary.
- 11) Either this necessity belongs to the thing in itself or it is derived from another. If derived from another there must ultimately exist a being whose necessity is not derived, that is, an absolutely necessary being
- 12) This absolutely necessary being is God

- Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).

The Argument from Degrees of Perfection ⁽¹⁾

- 1) We notice things that vary in certain ways. For example, a shade of colour can be lighter or darker than another.
- 2) Some, we arrange in terms of more or less. And, when we do, we naturally think of them on a scale approaching most and least. For example, we think of the lighter as approaching the brightness of pure white, and the darker as approaching the ‘darkness’ of pitch black.
- 3) We recognize this scale in ‘being’ - that it is better to be, than not to be; that intelligent being, is better than unintelligent being; that a being able to give and receive love is better than one that cannot; that our way of being is better, richer and fuller than that of a stone, a flower, an earthworm, an ant, or even a baby seal.
- 4) But if these degrees of perfection are applicable to ‘being’, then there must exist a ‘best’, a source and real standard of all the perfections that we recognize belong to us as beings.
- 5) This absolutely perfect being – the “Being” of all beings,” “the Perfection of all perfections” – is God

- Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).

The Design Argument ⁽¹⁾

- 1) The universe displays a staggering amount of order. The things we observe, and the way these things relate to other things outside themselves can fill even the most casual observer with wonder.
- 2) Either this intelligible order is the product of chance or of intelligent design
- 3) Not chance
- 4) Therefore the universe is the product of intelligent design
- 5) Design comes only from a mind, a designer.
- 6) Therefore, the universe is the product of an intelligent designer

It is obviously the third premise that is crucial. Ultimately, nonbelievers tell us that, it is indeed by chance and not by and design that the universe exists the way it does. It just so happens to have this order, and the burden of proof is on believers to demonstrate why this could not be so by chance alone.

However, this seems a bit backward. It is surely up to nonbelievers to produce a credible alternative to design, especially when considering the degree of chance required for such an order to exist.

In addition, “chance” is simply not credible. For we can only understand chance against a background, or norm, of order. To say that something happened “by chance” is to say that it did not turn out as we would have expected, or that it did turn out in a way we would not have expected. However, this expectation is only possible if there is order. If you take away order and speak of chance alone as a kind of ultimate source, you have taken away the only background that allows us to speak meaningfully of chance at all. Instead of thinking of chance against a background of order, nonbelievers are saying we are to think of order – overwhelmingly intricate and present everywhere – against a random and purposeless background of chance. This surely, is the wrong way round. Chance is the exception, not the rule – the burden of proof should be on the unbelievers to demonstrate why, and how this incredible design could happen by chance alone.

- **Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).**

The Kalam Argument ^[1]

- 1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause for its coming into being.
- 2) The universe began to exist
- 3) Therefore, the universe has a cause for its coming into being

The first premise is obviously true. For the second premise, there is both support from natural science (Big Bang) and philosophical arguments in favour of the beginning of the universe. The following is an example

- 1) Assume that the universe never began
- 2) Therefore, it always was
- 3) If it always was, then it is infinitely old
- 4) If it is infinitely old, then an infinite amount of time would have to have elapsed before (say) today
- 5) Therefore an infinite number of days must have been completed, i.e. an infinite task was completed (an infinite task is one that requires infinitely many steps to precede it). There was one day succeeding another, one bit of time being added to what went before – in order for the present day to arrive.
- 6) But an infinite task can never be completed, as
 - a) An infinite number of steps can never be completed. The steps would be unending. The task could also not be completed in infinite time, as infinite time would also be unending; just as the steps would be.
 - b) Therefore, the task would – could – never be completed

- c) How about the step just before the end? Could that point ever be reached? Well, if the task is really infinite, then an infinity of steps must also have preceded *it*.
 - d) Therefore, the step just before the end could also never be reached
 - e) But then neither could the step just before that one.
 - f) Therefore, no step in the sequence could be reached, because an infinity of steps must always have preceded any step. And each step (infinite task) would have had to have been completed – which can not happen (b)
 - g) Therefore an infinite sequence can never reach, by temporal succession, any point at all
- 7) Therefore, either the present day has not been reached, or the process of reaching it was not infinite
 - 8) Obviously, the present day has been reached.
 - 9) So the process of reaching it was not infinite. In other words, the universe began to exist.

This leaves us with a cause for the universe coming into being, a Creator.

- Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).

The Argument from Contingency ^[11]

- 1) If something exists, there must exist what it takes for that thing to exist
- 2) The universe – the collections of beings in space and time – exists
- 3) Therefore, there must exist what it takes for the universe to exist
- 4) What it takes for the universe to exist cannot exist within the universe or be bounded by space and time
- 5) Therefore, what it takes for the universe to exist must transcend both space and time

- Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).

- Which of the cosmological arguments do you find to be the most convincing? Why? Which do you find to be the least convincing?

Psychological Arguments

These arguments take their data from within.

The Argument from the Origin of the Idea of God ^[11]

- 1) We have ideas of many things
- 2) These ideas must arise either from ourselves or from things outside us
- 3) One of the ideas we have is the idea of God – an infinite, all-perfect being
- 4) This idea could not have been caused by ourselves, because we know ourselves to be limited and imperfect, and no effect can be greater than its cause
- 5) Therefore, the idea must have been caused by something outside us which has nothing less than the qualities contained in the idea of God
- 6) But only God himself has those qualities.
- 7) Therefore God himself must be the cause of the idea we have of him
- 8) Therefore God exists

Objection: The idea of God can easily arise from us noticing degrees of perfection among finite beings – some are more perfect (or less perfect) than others. And to reach the idea of God we just project the scale upward and outward to infinity. Thus there seems to be no need for an actually existing God to account for the existence of the idea. All we need is the experience of things varying in degrees of perfection, and a mind capable of thinking away perceived limitations

Reply: How can we think away limitations or imperfection unless we first recognize it as such? And how can we recognize it as such unless we already have some notion of infinite perfection? To recognize things as imperfect or finite involves the possession of a standard in thought that makes the recognition possible.

Where does this standard come from? Not from your experience of yourself or of the world that exists outside you. For the idea of infinite perfection is already presupposed in our thinking about all these things and judging them imperfect. Therefore none of them can be the origin of the idea of God; only God himself can be that.

- **Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).**

The Moral Argument ^[11]

- 1) Real moral obligation is a fact. We are really, truly, objectively obligated to do good and avoid evil
- 2) Either the atheistic view of reality is correct or the “religious” one
- 3) But the atheistic one is incompatible with there being moral obligation
- 4) Therefore the “religious” view of reality is correct.

The first premise is claiming that human beings really are morally obligated; that our duties arise from the way things really are, and not simply from our desires, or subjective disposition. It is claiming, in other words, that moral values or obligations themselves – and not merely the belief in moral values – are objective facts.

Most people would agree with this. We just need to see or suffer violence or injustice, in order to immediately recognize that some things ought never to be done.

Atheists, who don't believe in God, tell us that we are a chance product; this, however, does not account for moral good, moral obligation, or a moral standard against which human desires can be judged. If I say that there is an obligation to feed the hungry, according to this view, I would be stating a fact about my wants and desires and nothing else. I would be saying that I want to feed the hungry, and that I choose to act on that desire. But this amounts to an admission that neither I nor anyone else is really obliged to feed the hungry – that, in fact, no one has any real obligations at all. This reasoning holds for any moral issue, such as feeding the hungry or stopping innocent people from being murdered. This atheistic view of reality is not compatible with the view that there is genuine moral obligation.

This argument shows that those who hold the view that we are objectively morally obligated, may be inconsistent with what they may also believe about the origin and destiny of the universe. If they move to correct the inconsistency, it will be a move toward the religious view and away from the atheistic one.

- **Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).**

The Argument from Morality / Conscience ^[10]

Many people say that there is no universally binding moral obligations, that we must all follow our own private conscience. But that very admission is enough of a premise to prove the existence of God.

No one, even the most consistent subjectivist, believes that it is ever good for anyone to deliberately and knowingly disobey his or her own conscience. Even if different people's consciences tell them to do or avoid totally different things, there remains one moral absolute for everyone: never disobey your own conscience.

Now where did conscience get such an absolute authority – an authority admitted even by the moral subjective and relativist. There are only four possibilities

- 1) From something less than me (nature)
- 2) From me (individual)
- 3) From others equal to me (society)
- 4) From something above me (God)

Let's consider each of these possibilities in order.

- 1) How can I be absolutely obligated by something less than me – for example, by animal instinct or practical need for material survival?
- 2) How can I obligate myself absolutely? Am I absolute? Do I have the right to demand absolute obedience from anyone, even myself? And if I am the one who locked myself in this prison of obligation, I can also let myself out, thus destroying the absoluteness of the obligation which we admitted as our premise.

- 3) How can society obligate me? What right do my equals have to impose their values on me? Does quantity make quality? Do a million human beings make a relative into an absolute? Is “society” God?
- 4) The only source of absolute moral obligation left is something superior to me. This binds my will, morally, with rightful demands for complete obedience

Thus God, is the only adequate source and ground for the absolute moral obligation we all feel to obey our conscience. Conscience is thus explainable only as the voice of God in our soul.

- Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).

The Argument from Desire ⁽¹⁾

- 1) Every natural, innate desire in us corresponds to some real object that can satisfy that desire
- 2) But there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature can satisfy
- 3) Therefore, there must exist something more than time, earth and creatures, which can satisfy this desire.
- 4) This something is what people call “God” and “life with God forever”

C.S. Lewis, who uses this argument in a number of places, summarizes it as follows: Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

- Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).

The Argument from Truth ⁽¹⁾

- 1) Our limited minds can discover eternal truths about being
- 2) Truth properly resides in a mind
- 3) But the human mind is not eternal
- 4) Therefore there must exist an eternal mind in which these truths reside

- Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).

The Argument from Religious Experience [11]

- 1) Many people of different eras and of widely different cultures claim to have had an experience of the “divine.”
- 2) It is inconceivable that so many people could have been so utterly wrong about the nature and content of their own experience.
- 3) Therefore, there exists a “divine” reality which many people of different eras and of widely different cultures have experienced.

Many claim that they are “united with” or “taken up into” a boundless and overwhelming Knowledge and Love, a Love that fills them with itself but infinitely exceeds their capacity to receive.

The question is, are we to believe them? There are an enormous number of such claims. Either they are true or not. In evaluating them, we should take into account:

- 1) The consistency of these claims (are they self-consistent as well as consistent with that we know otherwise to be true?);
- 2) The character of those who make these claims (do these persons seem honest, decent, trustworthy?); and
- 3) The effects these experiences have had in their own lives and the lives of others (have these persons become more loving as a result of what they experienced? More genuinely caring and giving? Or alternatively, have they become vain and self-absorbed?)

- **Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).**

The Common Consent Argument [11]

This proof is in some ways like the argument from religious experience and on other ways like the argument from desire. It argues that

- 1) Belief in God – that Being to whom reverence and worship are properly due – is common to almost all people of every era.
- 2) Either the vast majority of people have been wrong about this most profound element of their lives or they have not.
- 3) It is most plausible to believe that they have not.
- 4) Therefore it is most plausible to believe that God exists.

Everyone admits that religious belief is widespread throughout human history. But does this undisputed fact amount to evidence in favour of the truth of religious claims? No one disputes the reality of our feelings of reverence, attitudes of worship, acts of adoration. But if God does not exist, then these things have never once – *never once* – had a real object. Is it really plausible to believe that?

The capacity for reverence and worship certainly seems to belong to us by nature. And it is hard to believe that this natural capacity can never, in the nature of things, be fulfilled, especially when so many testify that it has been. True enough, it is conceivable that this side of our nature is doomed to frustration; it is thinkable that those millions upon millions

who claim to have found the Holy One who is worthy of reverence and worship were deluded. But is it likely?

Objection: But the majority is not infallible. Most people were wrong about the movements of the sun and the earth. So why not about the existence of God?

Reply: Even though the people were wrong about the theory, they still experienced the sun and earth and motion. They were simply mistaken in thinking that the motion they perceived was the sun's. But if God does not exist, what is it that believers have been experiencing? The level of illusion goes far beyond any other example of collective error.

For believing in God is like having a relationship with a person. If God never existed, neither did this relationship. You were responding with reverence and love to no one; and no one was there to receive and answer your response. It is as if you believe yourself to be happily married, when in fact you live along in a broke down apartment.

Now, such a mass delusion is conceivable, but what is the likely truth? It is more reasonable to believe that God really is there, given such widespread belief in him - unless atheists can come up with a very persuasive explanation for religious belief, one that takes full account of the experience of believers and shows that their experience is best explained as delusion and not insight. However, atheists have never done so.

• Give this argument a rating between 1 and 10 (10 being totally convincing).

• Which of the psychological arguments do you find to be the most convincing? Why? Which do you find to be the least convincing?

Conclusion

In this section, we examined many different kinds of arguments for the existence of God. Some were straightforward, while others quite abstract and difficult. Some of the arguments were not watertight proofs, but rather, showed only a strong probability for the existence of God. However, all the arguments, together, like a twined rope, make for a very strong case for the existence of God. ^[1 p. 49] There is more than ample evidence to conclude that God exists.

To think about: In the light of all the evidence, many do not believe in a God. What could some of their reasons be?

This, however, raises many other questions. Questions, such as, who is God and what is God like? The rest of this apologetic study examines this question. For if Jesus Christ's claims to be God are indeed true, then someone who wants to know who God is, and what God is like, needs only to look at Jesus Christ. How important it is then, to examine the truth of the life and claims of Jesus Christ!

To think about: Once we agree that God exists, should we be interested in finding out what God is like?

Discussion Groups

Possible discussion questions for " Are Miracles Possible?"

- How would you define a miracle?
- What is the difference between the possibility of miracles, and the actuality of a miracle? How would you go about investigating each of these?
- If God exists, how can we then conclude that miracles are possible?
- Are Science and the miraculous contradictory? Can one be both a scientist and believe in miracles? How?
- If miracles are unlikely and unusual, why should we even have to investigate them?

Are miracles possible?

What is a Miracle?

A miracle is a striking and religiously significant intervention of God in the system of natural causes. ^[1 p. 109]

Two Different Questions

There are two different questions, firstly “Are miracles possible?” and secondly, “Are miracles actual?” The answer to this second question requires knowledge of events in history. Some form of historical investigation is required in order to determine whether a miracle has actually happened. ^[1 p. 109]

However, nearly all people that deny that miracles have actually happened, have not done so because of historical investigation, but rather philosophical arguments; arguments that are supposed to prove that miracles cannot happen. ^[1 p. 109]

To think about: Do you think miracles are possible? Why or why not?

How does a person justify so strong a claim that no miracles have *ever* happened in the entire course of human history? Did they examine every alleged miracle story, sift through all the evidence on a case-by-case basis? Of course not; that kind of investigation would take lifetimes. How then could such a claim ever be justified? Only if there exists arguments showing that miracles are impossible or vastly improbable. That would free us from the need to take any evidence for miracles seriously, because we would already know that it is not really worth considering at all. ^[1 p. 110]

We therefore need to start by examining arguments for the possibility of miracles. This then allows us, or opens us up to examining the historical question of whether or not they really happened.

Arguments for the Possibility of Miracles

Obviously, you cannot believe miracles have happened without believing that a miracle-worker exists. So behind the important question of whether or not miracles are possible, lies the even bigger question, “Does God exist?” If one does not believe in God, then you will not accept the miraculous.

The conclusion of the previous section “Does God exist?” is the foundation for the argument for the possibility of miracles.

Once we have established that God exists, there are two arguments for the possibility of miracles: one from the side of God, the miracle-worker, or the cause, and the other from the side of the world, or the effect. ^[1 p. 110]

Firstly, there is no defense against miracles in God’s nature, no assurance that God would *not* work a miracle. For if there is a God, he is all-powerful (omnipotent), and therefore would be able to work miracles. So there is no obstacle to miracles in God. If there is a God, miracles are possible. ^[1 p. 110]

Second, there is no obstacle or defense against miracles on the part of the world of nature. If God created it in the first place, that is, if nature is open to the possibilities of existing or not existing, then it is open to the possibilities of containing miracles or not containing them. In other words, if the author can create the play, he can change it too. And if the play is dependent on God, its author, for its very existence, then it is also dependent on him for whatever else he may want to do in it. ^[1 p. 110] If God exists, then He is capable of transcending natural law, of which He is the author. ^[22]

Conclusion

For those who battle to accept the possibility of miracles, the real problem is not so much with miracles, as with the whole concept of God. Once we accept the existence of God, there is no problem with miracles, as God is by definition all-powerful and fully capable of bringing them about. ^{2[2]}

Once we have established that miracles are possible, we should be open to examining their actuality. Whether or not a given miracle has occurred becomes a historical matter that calls for investigation. ^[20] The rest of this Apologetic study asks you to do exactly that, to carefully and honestly examine evidences for the miracle of the Incarnation – God taking on human form.

- **If God exists, how can we then conclude that miracles are possible?**

Related issues

What about Science and Miracles?

The success of modern science in describing the world in terms of cosmic regularity has led some to rule out miracles as an outdated and impossible concept. This is an unwarranted philosophical assumption and not a scientific conclusion. ^[20]

To think about: Are Science and the miraculous contradictory? Can one be both a scientist and believe in miracles? How?

Science consists of knowledge based on observed facts and tested truths arranged in an orderly system. Science operates by assuming certain things given, and an order or regularity that makes empirical (based on experiment and observation) investigation possible. ^[1 p. 112] Science depends upon observation and replication.

That is why questions like: “How come the world of matter exists at all – rather than nothing?” or “What caused the Big Bang – the absolute beginning of all material being?” are also not, strictly speaking, questions within physical science. This does not mean that such questions are meaningless, only that science cannot answer them. ^[1 p. 112] Scientific understanding is based on constant repetition of events. ^[24]

Miracles, such as God taking on human form or Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, are by their very nature unprecedented events. No one can replicate these, or similar, events in order to observe them. ^[21]

A scientist who, say, believes that God caused the universe to exist has not abandoned scientific method, but merely acknowledges its limits. ^[1 p. 113]

Also, note that once we have established that God exists, we can conclude that that miracles are not in conflict with any natural law. Rather, miracles are unusual events caused by God, and the laws of nature are generalizations about ordinary events caused by Him. ^[22]

The question of whether miracles are possible is not scientific, but philosophical. Science can only say miracles do not occur in the ordinary course of nature. ^[22] It cannot determine the possibility of their existence.

For an interesting argument showing that the methodology and “laws” of science, actually support the miraculous, please see “*Truth Journal, Miracles and Modern Scientific Thought*” by Professor Norman Geisler (<http://www.origins.org/truth/1truth19.html>)

- **What would you say to someone that says that they don't believe in miracles as they are unscientific?**
- | |
|--|
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |
| |

Is it not more likely that miracles never really occurred as described?

As a miracle, by definition, goes against some law of nature, is it not therefore an unlikely event? It is therefore always more likely that the event never really occurred as described (or remembered)? ^[1 p. 111]

While miracles are certainly unusual, how do we know whether they are likely to happen or not? We only know this, if we have already decided whether or not it is likely that God exists - or that he would ever work a miracle. ^[1 p. 112]

To assume that miracles are unlikely, one is assuming that God does not exist or does not intervene in nature, and therefore the event reported is not a miracle at all. ^[1 p. 112]

Suppose, for example, that we are asking whether Jesus rose from the dead. We need to consider whether to believe the various reports of his resurrection that are recorded in the New Testament. It won't do to dismiss them simply on the ground that "that sort of thing has never been observed." We can't know that unless we already know that the reports in the New Testament are mistaken. ^[25]

While miracles may be unusual, this fact **does not** allow us to conclude their impossibility – that they never really occurred as described. We should still be open to honest and careful historical investigation of their actuality.

- **If miracles are unlikely and unusual, why should we even have to investigate them?**
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Discussion Groups

Possible discussion questions for " A Brief Note On Propheic Evidence"

- How does predictive prophecy allow us to conclude the following
(1) There is a divine intellect behind the Old and New Testaments (2) There is a God
(3) Jesus' claim to be God was true, and (4) The Bible is inspired by God.
- Refute three common objections to the use of prophetic evidence as support for the truth of Jesus' claim to be God
- Which of the prophecies about Jesus do you find the most interesting? Why?
- Describe four Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, and how Jesus fulfilled them.

A Brief Note on Prophetic Evidence

One of the important evidences for the truth of Jesus' claims to be God is that of fulfilled prophecy. The early followers of Jesus Christ often appealed to fulfilled prophecy as proof that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. ^[31 p. 78] In fact, the Old Testament, which was written over a 1000-year period, contains a few hundred references to the coming Messiah. All of these were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, thereby establishing a solid confirmation of His credentials as the Messiah. ^[5 p. 141] Although we will not cover this topic in any great depth, it is worth having a quick look at some of the prophetic evidence.

To think about: How does predictive prophecy allow us to conclude the following (1) There is a divine intellect behind the Old and New Testaments (2) There is a God (3) Jesus' claim to be God was true, and (4) The Bible is inspired by God.

Firstly, what are some common objections to predictive prophecies?

Common Objections

The prophecies were written at or after the time of Jesus

If you are not satisfied with 450B.C. as the historic date for the completion of the Old Testament, then take into consideration the following: The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, was initiated in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.). It is rather obvious that if you have a Greek translation initiated in 250 B.C., then you had to have the Hebrew text from which it was written. This will suffice to indicate that there was at least a 250-year gap between the prophecies being written down and their fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. ^[5 p. 144]

Fulfilled prophecy in Jesus was deliberate

The above objection may seem plausible until we realize that many of the prophecies concerning the Messiah were totally beyond the human control of Jesus. He could not deliberately fulfill prophecies such as his place of birth, time of birth, manner of birth, betrayal, manner of death, piercing, burial and people's reactions. ^[5 p. 144]

Fulfilled prophecy in Jesus was coincidental, an accident

One might argue that *some* of the prophecies may be fulfilled by any number of historical figures. This is partly true, one might find *one or two* prophecies fulfilled in other men. However, if one examines all the prophecies together, no one but Jesus could fulfill them all. ^[5 p. 144]

Peter Stoner and Robert Newman, in their book *Science Speaks*, demonstrate the statistical improbability of any one man, accidentally or deliberately, from the day of these prophecies down to the present time, fulfilling just eight of the hundreds of prophecies Jesus fulfilled. They demonstrate that the chance of this happening is 1 in 10¹⁷ power - 1 chance in 1000000000000000000. ^[31 p. 78]

Stoner gives an illustration that helps to visualize the magnitude of such odds: ^[31 p. 78]

Suppose that we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote using their own wisdom.

It is mathematically absurd to claim that Jesus accidentally or deliberately fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

Important Old Testament Prophecies About Jesus

The Bible contains several hundred prophecies relating to the birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and future return of Jesus Christ. Some of the most important prophecies about Jesus are as follows: ^{[31 p. 79] [5 p. 144]}

- **Born of a virgin**

Prophecy - Isaiah 7.14: Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [means God with us]

Fulfillment - Matthew 1.18,24,25: ... she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. And Joseph ... had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

- **Born in Bethlehem**

Prophecy - Micah 5.2: But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times

Fulfillment - Matthew 2.1: ... Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea... (see also Luke 2.4-7)

- **Preceded by a forerunner**

Prophecy - Malachi 3.1: "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty.

Fulfillment - Matthew 3:1,2 ... John the Baptist came, preaching in the desert of Judea (see also Matthew 11:10)

- **Entered Jerusalem on a donkey**

Prophecy - Zechariah 9.9: Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Fulfillment - Luke 19:35,36,37: They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen" (see also Matthew 21.4-5)

- **Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver**

Prophecy - Zechariah 11.12: I told them, "If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they paid me thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter.

Fulfillment - Matthew 26.15: "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins

Fulfillment - Matthew 27.5,7: So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. ... So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners

- **Spat on and struck**

Prophecy - Isaiah 50.6: I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting

Fulfillment - Matthew 26.67: Then they spat in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him

- **Crucified with other prisoners & made intercession for his persecutors**

Prophecy - Isaiah 53.12: because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Fulfillment - Matthew 27.38: Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left

Fulfillment - Luke 23.34: Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

- **Pierced through hands and feet**

Prophecy - Psalm 22.16: a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet

Fulfillment - Luke 23:33 ...they crucified him... - John 20.25-27: Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hands into his side, I will not believe it.

- **Pierced through His side**

Prophecy - Zechariah 12.10: They will look on me, the one they have pierced

Fulfillment - John 19.34: one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear

- **Soldiers gambled for clothing**

Prophecy - Psalm 22.18: They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing

Fulfillment - Luke 23.34: And they divided up his clothes by casting lots

- **Buried in a rich man's tomb**

Prophecy - Isaiah 53.9: He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and the rich in his death

Fulfillment - Matthew 27.57-60: there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph... Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock

- Would be resurrected

Prophecy - Psalm 16.10: because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay

Fulfillment - Matthew 28.6: He is not here; he has risen, just as he said

To think about: Which of the prophecies about Jesus do you find the most interesting? Why?

Conclusion

These are only some of the many prophecies that support Jesus' claim to deity. In the Old Testament, there are 60 major messianic prophecies and approximately 270 ramifications that were fulfilled in one person, Jesus Christ. ^[6 p. 212] No wonder Jesus and his early followers appealed to fulfilled prophecy to substantiate His claim!

Bibliography

1. *"Handbook of Christian Apologetics"*, Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli, Monarch Publications, 1995
2. *The "Executable Outlines" Series: Christian Apologetics*, Mark A. Copeland, http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/
3. *"Jesus. Shattering the Christ-Myth. The Reliability of the Secular References to Jesus"*, Tekton: *Building Blocks for Christian Faith*, J. P. Holding, <http://tektonics.org/jesusexist/jesusexisthub.html>
4. *Tekton: Building Blocks for Christian Faith*, J. P. Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/index.html>
5. *Evidence That Demands A Verdict Volume 1*, Josh McDowell, Here's Life Publishing, Inc., San Bernardino, CA 92402
6. *A Ready Defense*, Josh McDowell, Here's Life Publishing, Inc., San Bernardino, CA 92402
7. *The "Executable Outlines" Series: Christian Apologetics*, Mark A. Copeland, http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/
8. *The New Testament. The Textual Reliability of the New Testament*, J. P. Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/lp/nttextcrit.html>
9. *The New Testament. Gospel Dates. Gospel Authors, Gospels Freedoms*, J. P. Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/ntdocdef/gospdefhub.html>
10. *Grasping At Greasy Straws*, J. P. Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/lp/pricer02.html>
11. *Answers to Tough Questions about the Christian Faith*, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, 1980, Here's Life Publishers, Inc., San Bernardino, CA 92402
12. *Answering a List of Biblical Contradictions*, James Patrick Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/lp/merrit01.html>.
13. *Proverbial Literature*, James Patrick Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/lp/proverbiallit.html>
14. *Inerrancy and Human Ignorance*, James Patrick Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/gk/inerrancy.html>
15. *Jesus, The Divine Claims of Jesus. The Assertion of Godhood*, J. P. Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/jesusclaims/jesusclaimshub.html>
16. *The Trinity Series*, Glenn Miller, <http://www.christian-thinktank.com/trin01.html>
17. *Rebuttal to Jury Chapter 7, The Trilemma on Trial, Or, the Identity of Jesus Ignored*, J. P. Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/lp/perry01.html>

18. *Jesus, On the Trail of the Trilemma, Choosing Your Path on the Identity of Jesus*, J. P. Holding, <http://www.tektonics.org/jesusclaims/trilemma.html>
19. *Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, William Lane Craig <http://www.leaderu.com/truth/1truth22.html>
20. *Are Miracles Possible?*, Gary W. Jensen, *ChristianAnswers.Net*, <http://www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-t011.html>
21. *Has science disproved the miracles associated with Jesus Christ?*, Dr. Ron Rhodes, *www.ChristianAnswers.Net*, <http://www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/rfsm-miracles.html>
22. *Chapter Five - Science and Miracles, Apologetics Study*, John Fok, <http://home.hkstar.com/~johnfok1/Apologetics/5.htm> [appears to be no longer available on the Internet]
23. *Chapter Twelve - The Existence of God, Apologetics Study*, John Fok, <http://home.hkstar.com/~johnfok1/Apologetics/12.htm> [appears to be no longer available on the Internet]
24. *Truth Journal, Miracles and Modern Scientific Thought*, Professor Norman Geisler, <http://www.origins.org/truth/1truth19.html>
25. *Hume On Miracles*, Wes Morrison, <http://stripe.colorado.edu/~morrsto/miracle3.html> [appears to be no longer available on the Internet]
26. *Is There a God?*, Marilyn Adamson, <http://www.origins.org/everystudent/isthere/isthere2.html>
27. *Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry, Questions and Objections Part 3*, http://www.carm.org/40_objections/40-3.htm
28. *Astronomical Evidences for the God of the Bible*, Hugh Ross, Ph.D, <http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/astroevid.shtml>
29. *The Real Issue, Scientific Evidence for the Existence of God*, Dr. Walter Bradley, <http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9403/evidence.html>
30. *Yours for Life, How to Have Life's Most Important Relationship*, Ron Hutchcraft, *Ron Hutchcraft Ministries*, <http://www.gospelcom.net/rhm/yours/>
31. *Defending Your Faith: Reliable answers for a new generation of sceptics and seekers*, Dan Story, *Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, 1997*