

June 4th — Mountaintops of Faith: Creation, Exodus, Resurrection

There are three mountaintops of faith:

1. **Creation** = Proof that there is a _____. See Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:18-25
2. **Exodus** = Proof that _____ is God. See Exodus 7:4-5, 8:10, 9:14-16, 10:1-2, 12:12, 14:4, 30-31; Joshua 2:9-11
3. **Resurrection** = Proof that Jesus is the _____, the _____. See John 20:24-31, Acts 2:22-36, Romans 1:4

Note: if the resurrection is true, then the creation and the exodus are true.

1. Jesus regarded Genesis 1-11 as a historical record — Matthew 19:3-6, John 8:44, Luke 17:26-27 ... see also Luke 3:35-38
2. Jesus accepted the Exodus as a historical event and the foundation of His nation — John 5:45-47, 6:30-32, Mark 14:12-16.

A mountaintop of faith is to a skeptic what Mt. Everest is to most people: unconquerable and unyielding. They can't get around it. Conversely, mountaintops of faith lift believers high above the sin and doubt of this world to a closer walk with God. They are objective, historical foundations of faith, bedrocks of certainty in an age of doubt. See Habakkuk 3:16-19.

Our study for this quarter is concerned with the evidence that substantiates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There is no subject of greater significance to the Christian or the unbeliever than this (see next lesson).

Key Takeaways:

1. The resurrection is *the* proof that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.
2. The resurrection is a matter of historical record, of objective fact.
3. The truth of the resurrection confirms the truth of the entire Bible.
4. The resurrection is a peak of certainty in valleys of doubt. This study will help your faith reach its summit!

June 7th — The Significance of the Resurrection to the Christian and the Unbeliever

1 Corinthians 15:3-4 = the kernel of the gospel. The death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Christ are of FIRST IMPORTANCE to the Christian. They are the foundation of our faith, the guarantor of our hope.

The plan of salvation. Morality. The family. Bible authority. The work of the church. Marriage and divorce. The importance of ALL of these subjects pales in comparison to the significance of the resurrection. Indeed, these subjects only matter BECAUSE the resurrection is true! Observe:

1. Read Peter's sermon in **Acts 2:22-36**. Pay attention to his conclusion in v36 and his response in v38. Would his response in v38 be true if what he said in v32 was false? Also note **1 John 2:1-2, 3:4**.
2. Read **Ephesians 5:22-27**. What weight does this pattern for marriage carry if Jesus' body is still in the tomb?
3. Read **Matthew 28:18-20**. First, would Jesus have even been around to say this if His body was still in the tomb? Second, would He have the right to rule over salvation if His body was still in the tomb?
4. Read **1 Timothy 3:14-16**. Do the divisions in the brotherhood over the work of the local church even MATTER if Christ's body is still in the tomb?
5. The point: if the resurrection happened, then these doctrines and so many more are worthy of our allegiance and practice. If it didn't... **1 Corinthians 15:12-19**.

If the resurrection happened, then...

1. We have the advantage in evangelism: **Acts 17:1-3**.
2. We have access to a moral/spiritual power that can make us more righteous than we would've thought possible or conceived of: **John 18:10-11, 1 Peter 2:21-24**.
3. We can endure with joyful confidence: **Hebrews 10:32-39...12:1-2**.
4. Heaven is for real: **1 Peter 1:3-4**.

Note the significance of the resurrection for unbelievers in **Acts 17:22-31** as...

1. A light to absolute truth.
2. An evangelistic tool.
3. A guarantee of judgment.

Key Takeaways: The resurrection undergirds every doctrine of Christianity, makes the Christian life possible and joyful, and can rescue the world from its unbelief.

June 11th, 14th — Concepts & Worldviews

1. **Gospel** = The good news of the atoning death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Mark 1:1, 16:15-16, 19-20; John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.
2. **Atonement** = Christ's death was a substitutionary sacrifice in order to bear away the guilt of man's sin by satisfying God's wrath. This is what makes forgiveness possible, thus freeing man from his greatest bondage: sin. Upon His ascension He became King of redemption and High Priest of atonement, where He continually ministers to provide for man's forgiveness. A synonym for this concept is "propitiation." Leviticus 1:4, 4:20...26...31...35, 10:17; Isaiah 53:4-5... 10-11; Romans 3:21-25; Hebrews 2:14-17...4:14-5:1...9:22; 1 John 2:2.
3. **The Theme of the Bible as expressed in Genesis 3:15** = Christ's complete and total victory over the dominion of Satan and the curse of sin and death that he lured man under. This is the first promise of a redeemer, spoken after man fell under the bondage of sin. The Bible slowly unveils the fulfillment of this promise until it reaches its culmination in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. John 12:31, 16:11; Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 54-57; Hebrews 2:14-17; Revelation 12:9, 20:2.
4. **Resurrection** = "Resurrection" refers to more than one type of resurrection in the Bible, but for our purposes we will limit our concept to Christ's resurrection and the resurrection of all men. Jesus' mortal flesh died on the cross and then three days later was restored to life when it was reunited with His divine spirit (James 2:26). He was seen in His resurrected body for a period of forty days (Acts 1:3). Unlike everyone else that experienced a resurrection, Jesus did not die again but ascended to heaven in order to reign for man's redemption (Acts 1:1-8). His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension served to confirm His identity, atone for man's sin, and break the curse of death for all men, thus guaranteeing a resurrection for all at the end of time (1 Corinthians 15). These concepts are the focus of our study.
5. **Faith** = A rational belief in the gospel based on objective evidence. This is not the only way the Bible uses the word "faith," but it's a key concept for the purposes of our study. The Bible does NOT encourage blind faith, as we'll see in the next lesson.

6. **Evidence** = Reasons to believe in the gospel. The gospel lays out “many convincing proofs” that give people a reason to put their faith in it. The proofs that we have are not demonstrable, like solving a math problem or conducting a scientific experiment, nor are they sensory (based in personal experience). Nor are they subjective (existing in the mind, as in Mormonism). The proofs that we have are the testimony of men that either witnessed the resurrected Jesus or interviewed people that did. If we can judge their testimony to be credible, then we have proof. With any other figure or event, such testimony is considered objective, historical proof. Yet, we have no evidence at our disposal that can convince someone of the resurrection of Jesus against their will. What each person must decide is if they have enough evidence to believe. Further thoughts to consider:

“In historical inquiry, the historian combs through the data, considers all the possibilities, and seeks to determine which scenario best explains the data... The standards of evidence do not require that the case for something is irrefutable. Such 100 percent certainty is only possible in the rarest of circumstances. Rather, the standard requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt in criminal cases and proof that makes the truth of an accusation more probable than not in civil cases... the standard for belief that something was really said or truly happened [is] at the point when the reasons for accepting it significantly outweigh the reasons for rejecting it... Therefore, when it comes to proving any historical event, we must remember that we are looking for whether we can ascertain with a reasonable amount of certainty that the event occurred.” Gary R. Habermas & Michael R. Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, pages 32-33.

“Scientific proof is based on showing that something is a fact by repeating the event in the presence of the person questioning the fact. It is done in a controlled environment where observations can be made, data collected, and hypotheses empirically verified... Testing the truth of a hypothesis by the use of controlled experiments is one of the key techniques of the modern scientific method... If the scientific method were the only method we had for proving facts, you couldn't prove you had lunch today. There's no way you could repeat that event in a controlled situation. Thankfully, the other method of proof, the *legal-historical method*, is based on showing that something is a fact beyond reasonable doubt. In other words, we reach a verdict on the weight of the evidence and have no rational basis for doubting the decision.

Legal-historical proof depends on three kinds of testimony: oral testimony, written testimony, and exhibits (such as a gun, a bullet, or a notebook). Using the legal-historical method to determine the facts, you could prove beyond a reasonable doubt that you went to lunch today. Your friends saw you there, the waiter remembers seeing you, you have the restaurant receipt, and there's a stain on your shirt... [The] scientific method can be used to prove only repeatable things. It isn't adequate for proving or disproving questions about persons or events in history. The scientific method isn't appropriate for answering such questions as, *Did Abraham Lincoln live? Was Martin Luther King Jr. a civil rights leader? Who was Jesus of Nazareth? Was Christopher Columbus a real person? Was Jesus Christ raised from the dead?* These questions are outside the realm of scientific proof, and we must place them in the realm of legal-historical proof." Josh McDowell & Dave Sterrett, *Who Is Jesus... Really?*, pages 120-122.

7. **Miracles** = Supernatural events that reveal God's existence, nature, and purpose. These events are God's direct intervention in the natural world that often suspend or overturn nature's laws. Supernatural events by definition cannot be explained by the laws of nature. Miracles serve to give man an objective reason to trust and obey God and His Son. The resurrection of Jesus has been called the chief miracle. Miracles will be covered in future lessons.
8. **Naturalism** = A philosophy that holds that everything that happens is naturally occurring. Supernatural occurrences such as miracles are denied, and anything that either seems to be or is claimed to be miraculous either never happened or is actually a naturally occurring phenomenon. The fallacies of naturalism will be dealt with in a later class.
9. **Atheism** = The philosophy that God does not exist. Paul taught that sinful attitudes and sinful behavior motivate man to deny God's existence. This philosophy is illogical and ahistorical, and has dire moral and eternal consequences. Romans 1:4, 18-32.
10. **Agnosticism** = The philosophy that absolute truth (specifically absolute religious truth) cannot be known or discovered. The agnostic believes he cannot be certain whether or not God exists. Some people may arrive at this philosophy because they're genuinely uncertain, but others get here because of intellectual cowardice—they just want to dodge the truth. John 18:33-38.

11. **Deism** = The deist believes in God, but only because his reason and the natural world lead him to that conclusion. The deist might be convinced of intelligent design in nature, but he rejects the inspiration of the Bible and supernatural events like the resurrection of Jesus. He doesn't believe he needs these things in order to know that God exists. The God of deism set the world in motion and then afterward never directly intervened in his creation. In recent years, sociologists have coined the term "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" to describe the religious views of young Americans. The key tenets (taken verbatim from Wikipedia) are:
- a. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
 - b. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
 - c. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
 - d. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
 - e. Good people go to heaven when they die.
12. **Paganism** = The belief that many gods exist. Pagans consider the religions and practices of all cultures as being equally valid. In practical terms, this means that religion is true only for the individual worshipper and not universally true for nor applicable to everyone. Western civilization is rapidly repaganizing. Acts 17:16-32.

The Takeaways:

1. When it comes to Christianity, the resurrection is "the crux of the matter."
2. The resurrection is the stumbling block to every other worldview.
3. You don't need scientific proof to know that the resurrection occurred, nor do you have to witness it for yourself, nor do you have to depend on some feeling in your heart. The legal-historical method is enough to demonstrate the historicity of the resurrection. The evidence that we have consists of oral and written testimony of eyewitness accounts of the resurrected Jesus. Each person must weigh the testimony against the facts to determine if it is credible, and each must decide for himself if the evidence is sufficient enough reason to believe.

June 21st — Three “Troubling” Texts

The Texts: John 20:29, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 11:1

The Meaning Given to Them: You don’t need evidence. Your belief in something is the “evidence” that it is real. —**Or**— You don’t HAVE evidence. The only thing that makes Jesus and heaven real to you is your faith in them. But it’s a blind faith, as even the Bible admits.

The Context (and Harmony): First, harmony. What kind of faith does the Bible encourage its readers to have? See Exodus 4:1-9; Mark 16:9-20; John 10:37-38, 20:30-31; Acts 17:1-3, 11-12; Hebrews 2:3-4. Now consider the context:

John 20:18-31

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

Hebrews 10:32-12:12

The Takeaways: ALWAYS interpret by context and harmony. A faith that’s blind isn’t a faith worth having. A faith that’s blind is a faith that won’t save. A faith that’s blind is a faith that can’t stand up to scrutiny. Thank God that there IS a reason to believe in the resurrection! And rejoice in knowing that your faith is just as blessed as Thomas’ was, that the resurrection guarantees that you too will be raised, and that your trust in God to keep His promises assures that He will! When properly understood, these three texts aren’t troubling at all, but quite comforting!

June 25th - July 5th — The Kernel of the Gospel

Key Texts

These are the historical records contained in six books that have survived for two millennia that tell of Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and appearances:

1. Matthew 26:31-28:20
2. Mark 14:27-16:20
3. Luke 22:39-24:53
4. John 18:1-21:25
5. Acts 1:1-11, 9:1-9 (22:6-11, 26:12-18)
6. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

Kernel of the Gospel

Jesus' Death

The medical evidence for the suffering and death of Jesus is overwhelming:

1. Possible ailment in the garden — Luke 22:44
2. Physical abuse at His "trial" — Matthew 26:67, Mark 14:16, Luke 22:63, John 18:22
3. Scourging — Matthew 27:26, Mark 15:15, John 19:1
4. Beating and crown of thorns — Matthew 27:27-31, Mark 15:16-20, John 19:2-5
5. Carrying the crossbeam — Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26, John 19:17
6. Nails in hands and feet — Matthew 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:33, John 19:18
7. Position of the body on the cross
8. Spear thrust into side to confirm death — John 19:31-35

Jesus' Burial = Proof of Death

1. Owner of the fresh tomb, Joseph of Arimathea — Matthew 27:57, 60
2. Burial clothes — Matthew 27:59, Mark 15:46, Luke 23:53, John 19:40
3. Burial spices — John 19:39-40
4. Burial stone — Matthew 27:60, Mark 15:46
5. Guard placed at the tomb — Matthew 27:62-66
6. Sealed the tomb — Matthew 27:66

Jesus' Resurrection

1. No one sees the exact moment of resurrection, and if the story was fabricated, that would've been recorded!
2. The tomb was found empty. The stone was rolled back to let people see that it was empty — Matthew 28:2, Mark 16:3-4, Luke 24:2, John 20:1
3. Burial clothes found neatly folded — Luke 24:12, John 20:5-7
4. If the guards were asleep, then how did they know what happened to the body? — Matthew 28:11-15
5. In the first century, it was never debated whether or not the tomb was found empty—the question was always how it came to be empty: naturally, or supernaturally?

Jesus' Appearances = Proof of Life

This is a list of the appearances of Christ that are submitted as proof of life. His appearances were not designed to only serve that purpose, but it's this purpose that we're mainly concerned with. It's possible that some happened at the same time (like #8 and #9).

1. Mary Magdalene, in Jerusalem on Sunday morning — Mark 16:9-11, John 20:11-18
2. The other women that went to the tomb, in Jerusalem on Sunday morning — Matthew 28:9-10, Luke 24:9-11
3. Peter, maybe early afternoon that Sunday — Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:5
4. Two on the road to Emmaus, Sunday afternoon and evening — Mark 16:12-13, Luke 24:13-35
5. The eleven minus Thomas, Sunday evening at the table — Mark 16:14
6. The eleven including Thomas, one week later — John 20:26-31
7. Seven disciples, at the sea of Galilee — John 21:1-14
8. Eleven disciples, on a mountain in Galilee — Matthew 28:16-17
9. More than five hundred brethren at one time — 1 Corinthians 15:6
10. James — 1 Corinthians 15:7
11. All the apostles at the ascension, forty days after resurrection Sunday — Luke 24:44-49, Acts 1:3-8
12. Paul — Acts 9:1-9 (22:6-11, 26:12-18)

The Takeaways:

1. The kernel of the gospel consists of two primary facts and two confirming facts: Jesus died and was buried (proof that He died), and He arose and appeared (proof that He has risen).
2. The medical evidence for His death is tremendous, and we know far more about His manner of death and burial than we do for many other historical figures.
3. The nature of His resurrection and appearances often run counterintuitive to how we would expect them to play out if this story had been made up.

Addendum to Kernel of the Gospel¹

- 1. Testimony attested to by multiple independent witnesses is usually considered stronger than the testimony of one witness.**
 - a. Matthew, John — both in the room when Jesus appeared, John alone at the cross when Jesus died, both present for later appearances and ascension
 - b. Mark — testimony perhaps from Peter, to whom Jesus appeared separately but was also in the room when He first appeared, and present at other appearances and ascension
 - c. Luke — 1:2, how many eyewitnesses??
 - d. Paul — not a member of Christ's inner circle, not even a disciple when he says he sees Jesus

- 2. Affirmation by a neutral or hostile source is usually considered stronger than affirmation from a friendly source, since bias in favor of the person or position is absent.**
 - a. Paul!
 - b. Pharisees, Matthew 28:13
 - c. Secular sources confirm Christ's death by crucifixion

- 3. People usually don't make up details regarding a story that would tend to weaken their position.**
 - a. Mary, John 20:11-14
 - b. Two disciples, Luke 24:13-16

- 4. Eyewitness testimony is usually considered stronger than testimony heard from a second- or thirdhand source.**
 - a. Matthew, John — John 19:32-35
 - b. Paul
 - c. Luke and Mark record eyewitness testimony. Luke, while a secondhand account, it should be noted is strikingly detailed in ways that other accounts are not.

- 5. An early testimony from very close to the event in question is usually considered more reliable than one received years after the event.**
 - a. Internal evidence of documents, manuscripts
 - b. Note 1 Corinthians 15:3-7. Spring of 57 AD is when he wrote that he received it, but when did he receive it? AT THE LATEST, 35 AD (Galatians 1:16-18). Within five years of the crucifixion people are talking about resurrection. Obviously people believed in resurrection prior to Paul's conversion: it's the only way to explain why he didn't succeed in destroying the movement.

¹ These principles of historiography are taken from *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, by Gary Habermas and Michael Licona.

July 9-12th - Age and Textual Accuracy of the Manuscripts

External Dating and Accuracy of Old Testament

1. Greek translation of OT, c. 250 - 100 B.C. Known as the Septuagint, it is usually referred to in marginal footnotes of modern Bibles by the abbreviation LXX. It is frequently quoted by New Testament speakers/authors. Examples: Acts 2:25-26, 4:26; 1 Peter 2:22. The existence of this translation proves that the prophecies of Christ were not made up after the fact.
2. The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, contain a complete copy of the scroll of Isaiah (24-feet long). Approximate date is 100 B.C. See Isaiah 53. The discovery of these scrolls confirmed the integrity of our copies of the Old Testament and the prophecies they contain. You can view them online at deadseascrolls.org.il

External Dating of New Testament Manuscripts

We have no originals of the New Testament documents. All we have are copies. But that in and of itself is not a problem. Below are several ancient books for which all we have are copies. Note how many of each that we possess vs. how many copies of the NT we possess. Also observe that our copies of the New Testament show up a lot sooner than our copies of these other ancient writings.

The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, by Josh McDowell, p. 38

Author	Book	Date Written	Earliest Copies	Time Gap	No. of Copies
Homer	Iliad	800 B.C.	c. 400 B.C.	c. 400 yrs.	643
Herodotus	History	480-425 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,350 yrs.	8
Thucydides	History	460-400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,300 yrs.	8
Plato		400 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,300 yrs.	7
Demosthenes		300 B.C.	c. A.D. 1100	c. 1,400 yrs.	200
Caesar	Gallic Wars	100-44 B.C.	c. A.D. 900	c. 1,000 yrs.	10
Livy	History of Rome	59 B.C.-A.D. 17	4 th cent. (partial) mostly 10 th cent.	c. 400 yrs. c. 1,000 yrs.	1 partial 19 copies
Tacitus	Annals	A.D. 100	c. A.D. 1100	c. 1,000 yrs.	20
Pliny Secundus	Natural History	A.D. 61-113	c. A.D. 850	c. 750 yrs.	7
New Testament		A.D. 50-100	c. 114 (fragment) c. 200 (books) c. 250 (most of N.T.) c. 325 (complete N.T.)	+50 yrs. 100 yrs. 150 yrs. 225 yrs.	5366

Compared to most works of antiquity, the New Testament is overwhelmingly credible in its transmission by sheer number of copies that can be compared

with one another and by the remarkably shortened time gap between the copies and the originals! And, please note that if we cannot trust our New Testament copies, then we cannot trust ANY copies of ANY ancient text!

Other considerations:

1. 5,000+ copies of Greek manuscripts
 - a. Alexandrian Manuscript, 375 - 425 AD
 - b. Sinaitic Manuscript, 300 - 350 AD
 - c. Vatican Manuscript, 300 - 350 AD
 - d. Bodmer Papyrus II, 200 AD
 - e. Chester Beatty Papyri, 150 AD (contains 4 gospels and Acts)
 - f. John Rylands Manuscript, 130 AD (contains John 18:31-33, 37-38)
2. 19,000+ versions (translations into other languages)
 - a. Syriac
 - b. Egyptian
 - c. Latin
 - d. Dated to 2nd century AD (100's), but our copies are not that old.
3. 19,000+ quotations just of the gospels in the "early Christian writings" (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Eusebius. Dated from 2nd to 4th centuries AD (100's to 300's). If the New Testament was destroyed, virtually all of it could be reconstructed from the quotations alone.

Internal Dating of the New Testament Manuscripts

1. The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD is predicted in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Since Jerusalem's destruction is not recorded in any of these books, then we can conclude that they were written prior to 70 AD.
2. Acts concludes with Paul in Rome c. 63 AD. Since it was written after Luke's gospel (compare Luke 1:1-4 with Acts 1:1), we can conclude that Luke's gospel was written prior to this date. Other events Acts omits that imply an early date of 63 AD:
 - a. Nero's persecution of Christians, 64 AD
 - b. The Jewish-Roman War, 66-73 AD
 - c. Peter and Paul's executions (mid to late 60's)
3. 1 Corinthians was written in the spring of 57 AD. The accuracy of dating Paul's letter to the Corinthians is made possible by knowing when Paul established the church there. During his time in Achaia, Gallio was proconsul (Acts 18:12). Secular history confirms that Gallio was proconsul from 51-52 AD. By having this date, and matching Paul's itinerary in his letter with his travels in Acts, and

noting the chronological markers in Luke's history of the apostles, we arrive at a likely date of 57 AD.

The Textual Accuracy of the Manuscripts

“A textual variant is any instance where the New Testament manuscripts have alternative wordings. According to Dr. Bart Ehrman of Chapel Hill, there are between 300,000 and 400,000 variants among New Testament manuscripts. Given that the Greek New Testament of today has roughly 138,000 words, the idea that there are two to three times as many variants as words might seem disturbing. The truth, however, is that the large number of variants is a direct result of the extremely large number of New Testament manuscripts available. The more manuscripts you possess, the more variants: the fewer the manuscripts, the fewer the variants.

“By far the most significant category of variants is spelling differences. The name John, for example, may be spelled with one *n* or with two. Clearly, a variation of this sort in no way jeopardizes the meaning of the text. Spelling differences account for roughly seventy-five percent of all variants. That's between 225,000 and 300,000 of all the variants! Another large category of variants consists of the synonyms used across manuscripts. For instance, some manuscripts may refer to Jesus by His proper name, while others may say, 'Lord' or 'He.' Such differences hardly call the meaning of the text into question.” *Is the Bible True... Really?*, Josh McDowell & Dave Sterrett, pgs. 81-82.

For thought: let's say we have the same text from multiple manuscripts with different errors in each manuscript. If we compare them, can we reconstruct the original text?

- “I can do all t#ings through Christ who strengthens me.”
- “I can do all th#ngs through Christ who strengthens me.”
- “I can do all thi#gs through Christ who strengthens me.”
- “I can do all thin#s through Christ who strengthens me.”

In examples like these, we see that the variations do not cause us to forever lose the original text, nor do they fundamentally change the meaning. Maybe 1% of the variations affect the meaning of a text, but no critical doctrines are threatened by these variants. For example, compare 1 John 1:4 in the New American Standard Bible with the New King James Version.

The Takeaway:

Here's what this doesn't prove: it doesn't prove that the text is true. What it does prove is that we have a true text. In other words, we have accurate copies of what Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul wrote, and those copies indicate that these documents were written in the first century.

July 16th - Historical and Geographical Accuracy of the Manuscripts

Historical Accuracy

1. **Luke 2:1-2** — One of the few disputed historical markers of Luke's account. No outside archaeological evidence has been unearthed to confirm what Luke wrote about the census. Secular history records a census taken in 6 AD by a Quirinius who was governor of Syria. This census occurred after Jesus' birth, while the one that Luke records in his gospel takes place prior to the birth of Jesus (4 BC). The later census is referenced in Acts 5:37. Contradiction? Only if the two censuses cannot both be true. But there is nothing in secular history that blatantly contradicts the census Luke records, nor is there anything that demands that Quirinius (if it was the same man) could not be involved in both. The real difficulty people have with this census is that nothing from secular history has been found to confirm it yet, but absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.
2. **Acts 12:23** — Herod Agrippa I's death in 44 AD is confirmed by Josephus.
3. **Acts 17:6** — People once doubted Luke's reference to politarchs in Thessalonica, but archaeology has proven him correct. This was an office of administration, that served executive and judicial functions in cities. Arches bearing inscriptions that refer to politarchs (rulers of the citizens) are on display in the British Museum.
4. **Acts 18:12** — Gallio's proconsulship was confirmed by the discovery of an inscription that placed his reign from 51-52 AD. Proconsuls were only in power for two years.
5. **Acts 24:27** — Festus' procuratorship began roughly 59-60 AD. His governorship is also confirmed by Josephus.

Geographical Accuracy

1. The location of Jericho — Luke 18:35, Mark 10:46. "Jericho was in at least four different locations as much as a quarter of a mile apart in ancient times. The city was destroyed and resettled near another water supply or a new road or nearer a mountain or whatever. The point is, you can be coming out of one site where Jericho existed and be going into another one, like moving from one part of suburban Chicago to another part of suburban Chicago." *The Case for Christ*, Lee Strobel, page 98.
2. The pool of Bethesda with its five porticoes — John 5:1-15. This was disputed until archaeology discovered it.

Comparison to the Book of Mormon

Archaeology's repeated affirmation of the New Testament's accuracy provides important corroboration for its reliability. This is in stark contrast with how archaeology has proved to be devastating for Mormonism.

Although Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church, claimed that his *Book of Mormon* is "the most correct of any book upon the earth," archaeology has repeatedly failed to substantiate its claims about events that supposedly occurred long ago in the Americas.

I remember writing to the Smithsonian Institute to inquire about whether there was any evidence supporting the claims of Mormonism, only to be told in unequivocal terms that its archaeologists see "no direct connection between the archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book."

As authors John Ankenberg and John Weldon concluded in a book on the topic, "In other words, no *Book of Mormon* cities have ever been located, no *Book of Mormon* person, place, nation, or name has ever been found, no *Book of Mormon* artifacts, no *Book of Mormon* scriptures, no *Book of Mormon* inscriptions ... nothing which demonstrates the *Book of Mormon* is anything other than myth or invention has ever been found."

—Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, page 107

The Testimony of an Unbeliever

William Ramsay was known for his careful attention to New Testament events, particularly the [Book of Acts](#) and [Pauline Epistles](#). When he first went to Asia Minor, many of the cities mentioned in Acts had no known location and almost nothing was known of their detailed history or politics. The Acts of the Apostles was the only record and Ramsay, skeptical, fully expected his own research to prove the author of Acts hopelessly inaccurate since no man could possibly know the details of Asia Minor more than a hundred years after the event—this is, when Acts was then supposed to have been written. He therefore set out to put the writer of Acts on trial. He devoted his life to unearthing the ancient cities and documents of Asia Minor. After a lifetime of study, however, he concluded: 'Further study ... showed that the book could bear the most minute scrutiny as an authority for the facts of the Aegean world, and that it was written with such judgment, skill, art and perception of truth as to be a model of historical statement' (*The Bearing of Recent Discovery*, p. 85). On page 89 of the same book, Ramsay accounted, 'I set out to look for truth on the borderland where Greece and Asia meet, and found it there [in Acts]. You may press the words of Luke in a

degree beyond any other historian's and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment...'

—https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Mitchell_Ramsay

The Takeaway: “If Luke was so painstakingly accurate in his historical reporting... on what logical basis may we assume he was credulous or inaccurate in his reporting of matters that were far more important, not only to him but to others as well?” Lee Strobel, *ibid.*, page 99.

Indeed, what’s true of Luke would also be true of Matthew, Mark, John, and Paul!

July 19th — The Authors of the Manuscripts

Strictly speaking, the four gospels are anonymous. How then do we know who wrote them?

******The early Christian writings all testify that the books that bear these men's names were indeed authored by them².***

Matthew

1. Papias (c.80-c.155 AD)

“Matthew composed the Logia in the Hebrew tongue; and each one interpreted them as he was able.” INT, p. 131 (Dates from pp. 12ff of Thiessen’s *Introduction to the New Testament*)

2. Irenaeus (c.140-203 AD)

“Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect.’ Irenaeus claims he knew Polycarp [c.69- 155, srf] in his early youth, and that Polycarp always taught the things he had learned from the apostles.” INT, p.131

3. Origen [c.185-253 AD]

“Origen also assigned this Gospel to Matthew.” INT, p. 132

Note: Our MSS of Matthew’s gospel are in Greek. Matthew was a Jew, and collected taxes for Rome. It is possible he wrote his gospel in *both* Hebrew and Greek and the Hebrew version dropped out of use. We do not know. The point here is to show that Matthew was indeed the author of the book we know as “The Gospel According to Matthew.” INT, p. 134.

Mark

1. Papias (c.80-c.155 AD)

“And the Elder³ said this also: Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered without however recording in order what was either said or done by Christ...So then Mark made no mistake, while he thus wrote down some things as

² The following references are taken from Steve Fontenot’s class material on *The Internal Evidences of the Gospels*, and this section quotes heavily from Thiessen’s *Introduction to the New Testament*.

³ Perhaps a reference to the apostle John.

he remembered them; for he made it his own care not to omit anything that he had heard, or to set down any false statement therein.” INT, p. 140 (Mark did sustain a close spiritual relationship with Peter, 1 Pt 5:13.)

2. Irenaeus (c.140-203 AD)
“After their departure (exodon), Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter.” INT, p. 141
3. “Clement of Alexandria [c.155-c.215, srf], Tertullian [c.150-222, srf], Origen [c.185-253, srf], Eusebius [c.265-340, srf], all ascribe the second Gospel to Mark.” INT, p. 141
4. Title, *Kata Markon*, found in earliest MSS - INT, p. 141

Luke

1. Muratorian Fragment (c. 170 AD)
“The first document definitely to ascribe the Gospel to Luke is the Muratorian Fragment.” INT, p. 151
2. Irenaeus (c.140-203 AD)
“Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him.” INT, p. 151
3. Clement of Alexandria (c.155-c.215 AD)
“Clement of Alexandria also definitely ascribes the Gospel to Luke.” INT, p. 151
4. Internal evidence that same writer as Acts. Compare the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts. “We” sections and medical language in Acts strongly favor Lukan authorship.

John

1. Theophilus of Antioch (c. 115-188 AD)
“John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.”” INT, p. 163
2. Muratorian Fragment (c. 170 AD)

“John, one of the disciples, wrote a fourth book of the Gospels.” INT, p. 163

3. Irenaeus (c.140-203 AD)

“Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.” Ibid, p. 164 “His testimony is perhaps the most important of all the testimonies, for he was a pupil of Polycarp, and Polycarp was a friend of the Apostle John.” INT, pp. 163-164.

4. Clement of Alexandria (c.155-c.215 AD)

“John, he last of all, seeing that what was corporal was set forth in the Gospels, on the entreaty of his intimate friends and inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel.” INT, p. 165.

5. Internal evidence through process of elimination favors John.

******Every single manuscript that contains a title (i.e., “The Gospel According to Matthew”) always attributes Matthew to Matthew, Mark to Mark, Luke to Luke, and John to John.***

Now, let’s examine what we know about the authors and how this can help us evaluate their testimony⁴.

1. Matthew — a tax-collector (Matthew 9:9), he was perhaps the unlikeliest of candidates to be one of the original twelve. He would’ve been naturally suspicious of people and always on the lookout for fraud. Furthermore, tax-collectors were scorned by Jews as turncoats that milked their countrymen to succor the might of Rome. This disdain is shown in Matthew 10:10-13, 18:17. Clearly Matthew was not the kind of man to be easily swayed by the prevailing opinions of his day. As one of the twelve disciples, Matthew would’ve been an eyewitness of most of what he records.
2. Mark — Known as John-Mark elsewhere, he was a traveling companion of Paul and Barnabas as well as Barnabas’ nephew (see Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:36-41; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24; Colossians 4:10; 1 Peter 5:13). Peter’s first epistle

⁴ I’m indebted to Simon Greenleaf’s *The Testimony of the Evangelists* for much of the following perspectives.

reveals a close relationship with Mark. There is some internal evidence that Mark did get much of his information from Peter, an eyewitness, i.e., Mark 14:43-54.

3. Luke — the beloved physician (Colossians 4:14), he was a frequent traveling companion of Paul (Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, 27:1-28:16), and provided a “biography” of both Jesus and Paul in his writings. He manifests a physician’s attention to detail in his gospel, i.e., Luke 5:12 (compare Matthew 8:2, Mark 1:40), Luke 6:6 (Matthew 12:10, Mark 3:1), Luke 8:55 (Matthew 9:25, Mark 5:42). As a physician Luke would’ve been predisposed to accepting naturalistic explanations for most of the kinds of events he records. For example, he knew where babies came from (typically not from women who were virgins), and he would’ve known that scourging and crucifixion were sufficient causes of death, and that dead people tend to stay dead. Yet, he was sincerely convinced that Jesus was the Son of God. Luke says in his prologue that he spoke to eyewitnesses (1:1-4).
4. John — Jesus’ best friend among the twelve disciples, and an eyewitness of the events he writes about, including the death of Jesus (John 19:25-35). John was the first male disciple to arrive at the empty tomb, followed by Peter (John 20:1-10). Among the twelve, there are some events that Peter, James, and John alone were able to witness, i.e., the resurrection of Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:51), the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1), and Jesus’ distress and grief in the garden just prior to His arrest and betrayal (Matthew 26:37).
5. Paul — the single greatest enemy of Christianity in the first century (Acts 8:3, 9:1, 13, 21, 22:4, 19, 26:10; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13), Paul is the unlikeliest of people to write of the risen Jesus. He chronicles his own witness in 1 Corinthians 15, and Luke records Paul’s experience three times in Acts 9, 22, and 26. Indeed, Jesus’ appearance to Paul again demonstrates the counterintuitive nature of the gospel story: rather than appearing to any of the villains complicit in His murder in the gospels (i.e., Pilate, Caiaphas, Herod), instead He appears to the most zealous Jew that ever lived. Paul’s devotion to the Law of Moses shows that he did not make the decision to convert lightly; he would’ve known that he was risking eternal damnation if he had mistakenly put his faith in a false Messiah. Paul could not have been dishonest since he was throwing himself headlong into the crosshairs of the very persecution he helped foment, nor could he have been easily deceived since he was a fiercely independent man, nor was he delusional since he had a keen intellect that was honed at the feet of Gamaliel.

Now, let's finally consider other data to determine their honesty, ability, and consistency.

1. **Honesty** — That these five men thought they were right and truthful in their assertions cannot be denied. Matthew and John would've seen firsthand the threats and murder that Paul rained down on the early church (Acts 8:1-4). Paul also was on the receiving end of such tortures (2 Corinthians 11:24-25). Yet they persisted in their testimony. They had the confidence of their convictions.
2. **Ability** — That these men were of sound mind and body is confirmed by the archaeological and historical accuracy of their writings. Furthermore, their occupations, backgrounds, and closeness to the events render them credible eyewitnesses and credible documentarians of eyewitness accounts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
3. **Consistency** — No contradictions have been established between the five writers in their six documents over the four key facts of the gospel. More on this in the next lesson. Furthermore, their written testimony would've been tested by the oral preaching that the early church first received prior to the New Testament being written (Acts 2:42, Galatians 1:6-9, 2 Thessalonians 2:15, 1 John 1:1-3).

The Takeaway: We can be certain...

1. That the four gospels and Acts and 1 Corinthians were either written by eyewitnesses or were founded on eyewitness testimony, the highest level of credibility. These are primary source documents.
2. That the authors were not gullible, dishonest, or inconsistent in their stories.
3. That they were reliable historians, no more biased than the rest of us. Their writings are not the product of credulous, uninformed minds, nor are their writings unrealistically dispassionate.

Addendum:

Why not the so-called "lost gospels"? Why aren't they considered along with the New Testament? These are otherwise known as the gnostic gospels, books such as The Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Judas, etc. They can be found in books like The Nag Hammadi Library, for sale on Amazon. These works have various historical/cultural errors within them that

reliable authors like Luke obviously do not have, and one quotes from the Diatessaron, a harmony of the gospels that was compiled around 160-175 AD, which means that this so-called “gospel” would’ve been circulated even later than that. Though they bear the names of famous and influential figures of the early church, these texts often conflict with the teachings of Jesus relayed to us in the canonical gospels. These names would’ve been used by the writers to give them an air of legitimacy, which is strikingly different from the four gospels as they are all technically anonymous. I know of no good reason to include them in a serious discussion of the historical Jesus. For a further examination of the significant problems of these “gospels,” see Lee Strobel’s *The Case for the Real Jesus*.

July 23rd — The Agreement of the Manuscripts

Now we turn our attention to the question of contradictions in the manuscripts. Do they exist? Skeptics says yes, and that they exist in abundance! To answer these criticisms, we must remember two things:

1. A contradiction only exists if two things cannot both be true.
2. Specifics do not exclude.

Here is a list of key events recorded that allegedly contain contradictions. Read over them and make notes and write down any questions you may have. Explanations will be offered in class.

1. The exact time when Jesus was crucified — Mark 15:25, John 19:13-17
2. The inscription on the cross — Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, John 19:19
3. How many thieves reviled Jesus — Matthew 27:44, Luke 23:39
4. When the tomb was opened — Matthew 28:1-7, John 20:2
5. Jesus' attitude toward touch — John 20:17, 27
6. When the women came to the tomb — Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, John 20:1

7. Who went to the tomb — Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:10, John 20:1

8. How many angels were at the tomb — Matthew 28:2, Mark 16:5, Luke 24:4, John 20:12

9. The conduct of the women after they left the tomb — Matthew 28:7-8, Mark 16:8, Luke 24:5-10

10. The “missing” forty days — Luke 24:36-53, Acts 1:3

The Takeaway:

No charge of contradiction can be sustained against the manuscripts. Thus, we have no reason to doubt their honesty. Moreover, the accounts differ in enough details to indicate that they are not the product of collusion.

July 26th — The First Stubborn Fact: Jesus Died by Crucifixion

“Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.” — John Adams, revolutionary and founding father, in a speech for the defense of British Soldiers on trial for the Boston “Massacre” of 1770

Previously, we have seen that Christianity is rooted in history. Its founding documents encourage faith in Jesus as the Christ on the basis of the historical fact of His resurrection from the dead. By “faith” we mean the willful commitment of an informed mind. Thus, we were encouraged to pursue a study of the evidence for faith in Jesus, so that our faith would not rest on family, tradition, culture, or church teaching, but upon bedrocks of objective evidence independent of the feelings and subjective thinking of man.

From there, we examined the kernel of the gospel recorded in six books by five authors, four central facts of Christianity upon which all of its statements, commands, and promises are built: the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus Christ. This entailed an examination of the medical evidence for the suffering and death of Christ, the fact and unique features of His burial, the counterintuitive nature of His resurrection, and the reliability and credibility of the witnesses to His resurrection.

Next, we tested the documents that contain these four crucial facts. We discovered them to be accurate textually: they have been faithfully transmitted to us through the millennia without contamination and corruption. We discovered them to be accurate historically and archaeologically: the stones cry out “Amen!” to, and ancient manuscripts of secular writers corroborate the time and place of the gospel message. We discovered the authors of the documents to be truthful, able, and consistent in their documentation: their backgrounds, professions, and experiences lean in favor of their testimony of the risen Jesus. Finally, we discovered the agreement of the documents: no charge of contradiction can be sustained against them, and they vary enough in specific details to rule out the charge of collusion.

Now what?

We can only know that Jesus is the Christ on the basis of testimony. We must weigh the testimony against the evidence available to us. So far we know that we have true texts from men who were truthful. And perhaps for some the evidence we have examined is enough to sway them to faith.

But can we go further? Yes.

Now we begin an examination of what I call five “stubborn” facts. Each of these will overlap with things we have previously discussed, but we will be looking at them from a fresh perspective. These are facts for which the evidence is so strong that even many unbelievers are forced to acknowledge their historicity.

Our task is to consider each of these facts individually, and then see what inference we should draw when we harmonize them together.

We begin with the first “stubborn” fact: Jesus died by crucifixion.

Secular Confirmation of Christ’s Crucifixion

“By secular I mean ‘pagan’—non-Christian, non-Jewish, and generally anti-Christian. Many ancient secular writers mention Jesus and the movement He birthed. The fact that they are usually antagonistic to Christianity makes them especially good witnesses, since they have nothing to gain by admitting the historicity of the events surrounding a religious leader and His following, which they disdain.” Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pg. 120.

The following five quotes are taken from *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pages 120-125.

I. Cornelius Tacitus (c. 55-120 AD), renowned Roman historian

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 the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.

2. **Lucian of Samosata** (c. 125-180+ AD), Greek satirist

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

3. **Mara Bar-Serapion** (this is an excerpt from a letter written some time after 70 AD)

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

If the pagans had nothing to gain by confirming the fact of Christ's crucifixion, how much more so the Jews? Yet they too testify to the truth of Jesus' death on the cross.

Jewish Confirmation of Christ's Crucifixion

4. **Josephus** (c. 37/38-100+ AD), Jewish historian

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise 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. ...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;... And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day.

5. **The Talmud** (some time in the second century AD), a Jewish commentary on the Law

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

"It should be noted that Jewish writings of antiquity never denied the existence, miracles, and execution of Jesus," Gary Habermas & Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, pg. 257.

It's precisely because of these quotations that I refuse to entertain the notion that Jesus never existed. Even Bart Ehrman, atheist/agnostic author of *Misquoting Jesus* and professor of the course "How Jesus Became God," says, "The crucifixion of Jesus by the Romans is one of the most secure facts we have about his life."⁵

⁵<https://ehrmanblog.org/why-was-jesus-killed-for-members/>

Now we turn our attention to the fastest growing religion in the world: Islam. While Muslims accept Jesus as a prophet, they categorically deny His deity. But not only do they deny supernatural aspects of Jesus, they even deny some vital natural facts about Him as well. What does the holy book of the Muslims have to say about the crucifixion of Jesus?

The Koran: An Ahistorical Rejection of the Crucifixion

The Koran, Sura 4, 157-158

That they said (in boast), “We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah”;- but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:-

Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise;-

The problems with this include: very, very late testimony (c. 609-632 AD), and the contradicting early, primary source testimony and the second and thirdhand testimony that confirms Jesus’ death by crucifixion, by both believers and skeptics. Furthermore, there is the question of motive. Both pagans and Jews in the first and second centuries felt they had nothing to lose by admitting the crucifixion of Jesus. But what do Muslims have to gain by claiming that Jesus was not crucified? This destroys the doctrine of atonement and thus negates man’s need for Jesus as Savior. Additionally, if the Koran is correct about the crucifixion then it would bolster Islam’s claim that the New Testament has been corrupted—despite thousands of manuscripts that prove that the gospel message has retained its integrity for two thousand years.

So, why not accept Mohammed as God’s prophet? Because if he was God’s prophet then he ought to have had a better grasp of history!

The Takeaway:

There can be no doubt that Jesus died by crucifixion! The authenticity of the gospels is once again vindicated, and this time by the enemies of Christ. This fact

is crucial to establish, for we cannot make the case for the resurrection without first making the case for the crucifixion.

Addendum

1. At this point in our study, it is obvious that any fair-minded person interested in objective truth should concede that the gospels are reliable historical documents, even if that person does not yet believe in inspiration or is not convinced that the resurrection happened. Our previous studies have revealed that *at the bare minimum* the Four Gospels and Acts are unfailingly reliable in all matters of secular history, geopolitics, and archaeology. What I'm saying is that even if someone doubts the supernatural tales of these books they really can't doubt their natural tales. A person may doubt the virgin birth, but they can't deny that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. A person may doubt the resurrection, but they can't deny that Jesus was crucified by Pilate at the instigation of the Jews. And if said person has any doubts about the natural details of the gospels, then these quotes from pagan and Jewish sources ought to put such doubts to rest. This is critical, ***because NONE of our five "stubborn" facts involve the supernatural, and yet they make the case for the greatest supernatural event in history!***
2. So then, when it comes to establishing that Jesus died by crucifixion, one cannot simply dismiss the Four Gospels because they contain incredible stories. Even if the books were not written by inspiration of the Spirit, even if they contradicted one another on some minor details, *you would still be left with four historical documents that affirm that a man came back from the dead, and we would still be faced with their testimony.* Apart from this there is the testimony of the early Christian writings that also tells us that Jesus died by crucifixion. But the strength of the quotations we've focused on in this lesson is that these statements come from unlikely sources. We expect someone like Matthew to tell us Jesus died on the cross; ***we don't expect Tacitus to tell us this because he obviously has no interest in preaching the gospel.***

July 30th — The Second Stubborn Fact: The Disciples Believed they Saw the Risen Jesus

We have established that there can be no doubt of Jesus' death by crucifixion. Now we examine how we can know that the disciples believed they saw the risen Jesus after the crucifixion.

Note how this fact is worded: we're not arguing that the disciples did see Him, but that they BELIEVED they saw Him.

The Gospel Writers' Claim

1. Matthew 28:1-20
2. Mark 16:1-20
3. Luke 24:1-53
4. John 20:1-21:25
5. Acts 2:14-36...3:12-26...5:29-32...10:34-43. In Acts, Luke records the sermons of the apostles that asserted their belief in Jesus' resurrection. So we have oral tradition⁶ that confirms their belief a few decades before written tradition (the four gospels, Acts, 1 Corinthians) confirms it once again.

Paul's Claim

1. Paul affirmed that the apostles all believed Jesus arose and appeared to them — 1 Corinthians 15:8-11.
2. Paul was acquainted with Peter, James (the Lord's brother), and John — Galatians 1:18-19, 2:1-14. So he was in a position to know what they believed.
3. We think of the New Testament today as a complete body of literature, but it wasn't that way in the first century. It was all written in the first century but it came together slowly over a period of a few decades. Paul, therefore, was an independent source, writing separately from the other writers—including the other apostles. His corroboration of what they believed then is valuable to us.

⁶ By tradition I simply mean something that's been handed down. See Mark 7:3-4.

4. As with Peter and the original apostles, Luke records Paul's sermons that testify to his belief in the appearance of the risen Jesus. For example, Acts 13:16-41.

So we have oral and written tradition preserved in the New Testament that confirms that the disciples believed they saw the risen Jesus. But we have further confirmation in the early Christian writings.

Early Christian Writings⁷

1. Clement of Rome (c. 30-100 AD) may be the Clement mentioned in Philippians 4:3. A letter received by the Corinthians from Clement is dated about 95 AD. Irenaeus (sometime around 185 AD) said that Clement knew the apostles, particularly Peter. In his letter to the Corinthians, Clement mentions that the apostles had "complete certainty caused by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ."
2. Polycarp (c. 69-155 AD) was said by Irenaeus to have known John. Polycarp mentioned the resurrection of Jesus five times in a letter he wrote in 110 AD. Among those references were an explanation of transformations that took place in "Paul himself and the other apostles," because "they did not love the present age, but him who died for our benefit and for our sake was raised by God."

Their Claims were Sincere

1. The Four Gospels and Acts testify that the disciples were cowards on Passover, and conquerors on Pentecost. This would indicate that their beliefs were sincere. For example, see Acts 5:27-42. Paul wrote about his own suffering, and Luke recorded it (Acts 14:19, 2 Corinthians 11:24-25). Remember: Paul more than anyone else would've known the hardships waiting for him once he became a Christian.
2. Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius, Dionysius of Corinth (through a quote preserved in the writings of Eusebius), Tertullian, and Origen all confirm the willingness of the apostles to suffer for their testimony. Tertullian and Origen write of Peter and Paul's deaths at the hands of Nero, for example. There is no record of any of the apostles recanting under torture, which is why their enemies

⁷ The following information is borrowed from *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, pages 49-63.

would've wanted them to suffer in the first place: to discredit their previous testimony of the risen Jesus, and thereby to discourage others from believing in what they said. Indeed, some of these so-called "church fathers" that chronicled the sufferings of the apostles became themselves martyrs in their own time, and were doubtless inspired by the apostles' own examples.

3. The fact that the apostles suffered doesn't mean that they were right. It just means they were sincere. Muslim Jihadists suffer for their faith, but that doesn't make them right. But the difference between modern-day martyrs and the apostles is tremendous: "Modern martyrs act solely out of their trust in beliefs that others have taught them. The apostles died for holding to their own testimony that they had *personally* seen the risen Jesus. Contemporary martyrs die for what they *believe* to be true. The disciples of Jesus died for what they *knew* to be either true or false" (Habermas & Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, pg.59).

The Takeaway:

Even the highly critical New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann agreed that historical criticism can establish "the fact that the first disciples came to believe in the resurrection" and that they thought they had seen the risen Jesus. Atheistic New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdemann concludes, "It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ." Paul Fredricksen of Boston University comments, "I know in their own terms what they saw was the raised Jesus. That's what they say and then all the historic evidence we have afterwards attests to their conviction that that's what they saw. I'm not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn't there. I don't know what they saw. But I do know that as a historian that they must have seen something." Ibid., pg. 60.

The above quotes from unbelievers show that we can be certain that the apostles thought they had seen the risen Jesus. As we will later observe, many attempts to explain the resurrection with a naturalistic alternative implicitly acknowledge that the disciples had to have seen something. But more than that, they had to have seen something that produced a profound change in their character—something so convincing that it brought the most violent anti-Christian into their fold. We will discuss his conversion next.

August 2nd — The Third Stubborn Fact: Paul the Persecutor Became the Preacher

Paul's conversion has been touched on in previous studies, but today we'll consider some other interesting features of his transition from Judaism to Christianity.

Saul the Persecutor

1. Paul's conversion is well documented by himself and Luke — Acts 8:3, 9:1, 13, 21, 22:4, 19, 26:10; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13
2. Within three years of his conversion, his story was being told among the Christians of Judea — Galatians 1:18-23, Acts 9:26-30. This means that it was common knowledge that Paul was a stalwart anti-Christian prior to his conversion.
3. So we have Luke's historical account of Paul's former life in Judaism, Paul's own admission of his staunch Judaism, and the word-of-mouth that circulated in the early church about his past persecutions. We've already observed that Luke is a reliable historian of the highest integrity and we've already observed that Paul was not a liar. The additional reports from Judea only underscore that Paul was a zealous keeper of the Law of Moses prior to preaching Jesus.

Paul the Preacher

1. Why the change? Paul and Luke both say it was because he saw the risen Jesus — 1 Corinthians 15:8; Acts 9, 22, 26. So Jesus' resurrection is not only testified to firsthand by His disciples (Matthew and John), but also by His fiercest enemy!
2. Was Paul sincere? Yes — 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; Acts 14:19, 16:19-24, 17:5, 17:13-15, 18:12-13, 21:27-36, 23:12-35
3. Paul and Luke both document Paul's sufferings. They are also recorded by Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysius of Corinth, and Origen. Observe:

That Paul is beheaded has been written in their own blood. And if a heretic wishes his confidence to rest upon a public record, the archives

of the empire will speak, as would the stones of Jerusalem. We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then does Paul obtain a birth suited to Roman citizenship, when in Rome he springs to life again ennobled by martyrdom.

—Tertullian, writing before 200 AD. Nero reigned c. 54-68 AD. (*The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, pg. 58).

So what?

1. First, Paul's claimed his reason for converting was seeing Jesus face-to-face. None of us can make this claim today. Paul did not claim to convert on the basis of secondhand testimony (what others told him about Jesus, Galatians 1:11-12, 1; 1 Corinthians 11:23). When we come to faith in the risen Jesus today, we do so on the basis of secondhand testimony, whether we hear about Jesus from our parents, our preachers, or we read Paul's and Luke's words for ourselves. So Paul is in a unique position when he's making his claim to have seen Jesus and when he chooses to convert to Christianity.
2. But should we give Paul's claim any special consideration? Muhammed claimed to have been visited by the angel Gabriel and given revelation by him. Joseph Smith claimed the angel Moroni gave him special revelation. Why shouldn't we give attention to them? Because we're not simply listening to testimony; we're weighing the evidence. We've previously discussed how the Koran and Book of Mormon have some serious problems weighing against them, problems of history and archaeology. Also, "it is thought by many that Muhammad's dissatisfaction with the paganism and idolatry in his society existed prior to his alleged revelations. If this is true, his embracing of monotheism is not out of the ordinary, and no conversion from polytheism is required. On the other hand, Paul seems to have been quite content with, and extremely sold out to, his cause in Judaism. Indeed, he was on his way to arrest Christians on his own initiative when his experience occurred. His radical conversion must be accounted for" (*The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, pg. 283). Whether Muhammad had already abandoned the faith of his culture and family is really irrelevant; what we do know is that Paul was the most dedicated Jew of the first century, a "Hebrew of Hebrews," and his sudden, total religious makeover in the face of certain suffering must still be reckoned with.

The Takeaway:

Here's what the skeptics cannot deny: Jesus died by crucifixion; the disciples believed they saw the risen Jesus; and Paul switched from persecutor to preacher, proclaiming the resurrection despite the abuse he suffered. Two more to go!

August 6th — The Fourth Stubborn Fact: James Converted from Skeptical Sibling to Suffering Servant

&

The Fifth Stubborn Fact: The Tomb was Found Empty

The Conversion of James

1. James was one of the brothers of Jesus — Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3
2. Jesus' brothers were noted skeptics — John 7:3-5
3. But James became a Christian, and moreover a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church — Galatians 1:18-19, Acts 15:12-21
4. He wrote to Christians in the first century encouraging them to steadfastly endure suffering for Christ's sake with joy (James 1:2-4), and he himself practiced the same:

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 lawbreakers, he delivered them over to be stoned.

—Josephus (*The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pg. 126)

5. So the question is: why the change? That Jesus' brother James suffered a martyr's death is beyond doubt, as is his earlier skepticism. Obviously, it's embarrassing for John to say that Jesus' brothers were skeptics—that admission potentially damages the case he's making for Christ. So then, the best explanation for him recording it is that John was simply interested in telling the truth. So we have confirmed skepticism, and confirmed belief. Again, why the change? 1 Corinthians 15:7 provides us with an answer. At the very least one would have to concede that James *believed* he saw his brother risen from the dead.

The Empty Tomb

1. The gospel of the resurrection was first preached in Jerusalem (Acts 2:14-36), the city in which Jesus had been crucified and buried. It would've been a short walk from the feast of Pentecost to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea to find out if the apostles were telling the truth about the empty tomb. Simply put, the message would've never gotten off the ground if the body was still in the ground. The Jews would've known where Jesus had been buried—why didn't they produce the body on Pentecost?
 - a. Sometimes the objection is made that Jesus' body would've decomposed beyond recognition over the course of fifty days and that that's why it wasn't hauled out by the Jews on the day of Pentecost or afterwards.
 - b. But is this true? "There are at least two problems with this view: First, in the arid climate of Jerusalem, a corpse's hair, stature, and distinctive wounds would have been identifiable, even after fifty days. Second, regardless of the condition of his body, the enemies of Jesus would still have found benefit in producing the corpse. Even a barely recognizable corpse could have dissuaded some believers, possibly weakening and ultimately toppling the entire movement" (*The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, pg. 70).
2. Even Jesus' enemies admitted that the tomb was found empty — Matthew 28:11-15.
3. Finally, there's the testimony of the women. They were the ones to find the tomb empty and report it to the male disciples. This is striking because of the low regard Jews and pagans had for women⁸.
 - a. "Sooner let the words of the Law be burnt than delivered to women."
— The Talmud
 - b. "The world cannot exist without males and without females—happy is he whose children are males, and woe to him whose children are females."
— The Talmud
 - c. "But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex, nor let servants be admitted to give testimony on account of the ignobility of their soul; since it is probable that they may not speak truth, either out of hope of gain, or fear of punishment."
— Josephus

⁸ All quotes taken from *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*.

- d. “Any evidence which a woman [gives] is not valid (to offer), also they are not valid to offer. This is equivalent to saying that one who is Rabbinically accounted a robber is qualified to give the same evidence as a woman.”
—The Talmud
- e. The above Jewish quotes might shed some additional light on why the male disciples reacted the way they did in Luke 24:11.
- f. “Whereas men and women had hitherto always sat together, Augustus confined women to the back rows even at gladiatorial shows: the only ones exempt from this rule being the Vestal Virgins, for whom separate accommodation was provided, facing the praetor’s tribunal. No women at all were allowed to witness the athletic contests; indeed, when the audience clamored at the Games for a special boxing match to celebrate his appointment as Chief Priest, Augustus postponed this until early the next morning, and issued a proclamation to the effect that it was the Chief Priest’s desire that women should not attend the Theatre before ten o’clock.” — Suetonius (c. 115 AD), writing about Caesar Augustus (emperor from 27 BC to 14 AD)
- g. The fact that women are submitted as the initial witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Jesus in all four gospels affirms the truth of their testimony. If Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were inventing this story then they wouldn’t have chosen women as the first witnesses of the empty tomb because their culture and audience were prejudiced against a woman’s testimony at the outset.

The Takeaway:

Five stubborn facts: Jesus died by crucifixion; the disciples believed they saw the risen Jesus; Paul converted from persecutor to preacher; James converted from skeptic to servant; and the tomb was found empty. Now, harmonize them and draw an inference. What’s the most logical way to explain and account for all five facts?

“Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.” — Sherlock Holmes

August 9th — Eliminating the Impossible, Pt. 1

“Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.” — Sherlock Holmes

We’ve poured over the kernel of the gospel, tested the documents, nailed down five stubborn facts for which the evidence is so strong that even skeptics are forced to admit them. We know the claims and the facts of the case. Now, let’s put our knowledge to the test.

“Why is it considered incredible among you if God does raise the dead?,” said Paul in Acts 26:8. There are those that consider the resurrection of Jesus to be impossible. Once eliminated as an option, they substitute an alternative explanation. But as we will see, these naturalistic explanations are what’s truly impossible, and the resurrection, while admittedly being improbable, is indeed the best and most likely explanation. Verily, our faith in the evidence in support of the resurrection will only be strengthened by testing the alternative explanations for the resurrection of Jesus.

Let’s begin.

Anti-Supernatural Bias (Naturalism)

We previously discussed naturalism in our lesson on Concepts & Worldviews (pg. 5). Naturalistic objections that outright deny the existence and possibility of miracles take many forms. Of course, there’s a preexisting bias that makes a bias against miracles attractive at the outset. Read Acts 26:8—some of the people that Paul was referring to were Jews, those that believed in God. Yet, because of their self-righteousness and preconceived notions of the Messiah’s kingdom, they rejected the crucified Savior. For this reason they held it incredible that God would raise Jesus, cursed in their view as evident by His being hung on a tree.

But others today consider it incredible that God would raise the dead because of...

Disbelief in God — Many reject miracles because they first reject God. If there is no God, then there are no miracles. But, is there a God? If so, how do you know it? See pg. 1. If there is a God, then miracles are not only possible, they are likely.

Total Belief in Science — One might argue that we should only believe in what science can prove, and science cannot prove the resurrection. But is science the only way to know that something is true? See pgs. 4-5. Furthermore, if someone argues that we should only believe in what science can prove, that begs the question: has that statement been scientifically proven?

Resurrections are Disproved by Science — Science is a method of inquiry that allows us to know and comprehend the workings of the natural world. Emphasis on *natural*. *Natural resurrections* have been disproved by science; people don't come back from the dead due to natural processes. But everything about the resurrection of Jesus—the facts, the claims, the socio-cultural context—all points to a supernatural cause. God's miraculous handiwork always leaves His fingerprints.

Deistic Preconceptions — For a refresher on deism, see pg. 6. A deist or skeptic might argue that since God created everything to be governed by natural law, then He cannot violate said natural law: to do so would be to contradict His very nature. If this is true then God would never have raised Jesus from the dead, because natural law (the law of biogenesis) tells us that life does not come from non-life. But how can someone that would say we can't know God scientifically or the resurrection's truth scientifically turn around and assert that they know how said God should operate? Do they

know that *scientifically*? Fact is, if there is an all-powerful Creator then there's nothing stopping Him from suspending or overturning the laws of nature on a whim, and even more so when it would serve a purpose. Additionally, natural laws are not prescriptive but descriptive: they don't tell you the way things ought to be, they just tell you the way things generally are. There is no list of commandments in the universe that dictates that "Thou shalt never cause life to originate from non-life." What the law of biogenesis communicates is that, generally speaking, all things being equal, one should not expect life to come from non-life. But this does not prohibit God from making that happen; if He wants to make a dead body alive once more, He's free to do so. Finally, the *facts* of Jesus' resurrection indicate that God *did* intervene in the natural world, and in a way that defied natural law.

The Improbability of Miracles — David Hume argued thusly: miracles are by definition rare; natural law describes what we see in nature regularly; we have more evidence for the regular than we do the rare; wise people believe something based on the quantity of evidence; therefore, no wise person should believe in miracles. His reasoning appears formidable, ironclad, and irrefutable at first, but falls apart upon closer examination. Think about it: if he's right, you could never believe that someone hit a hole in one! It's true that we should take probability into account when deciding what to believe or disbelieve in. For example, we should believe that we are more likely to die in a car crash than in a terrorist attack or nuclear war based on probability, and ought to take safety precautions consistent with that belief based on probability. But, Hume conflates quantity of evidence with quality of evidence, and those are not the same thing. We have *high quality* evidence in support of the resurrection of Jesus, a strictly one-off event. Lastly, wise people don't take probability into account *alone*—they also take facts into account! It's improbable that someone will hit a hole in one, but the fact is that people do it! So we ought to consider probability *and* facts. And we have five stubborn facts... One last thing: if someone argues that miracles are rare and "uniform experience" does not confirm their existence, how does someone know that? Wouldn't they have to have ALL the facts of EVERY case throughout ALL time? Are they not essentially claiming to be all-knowing and ever-present? And if they are, *then Who are they making themselves out to be?!?!*

The Counterfeit “Miracles” of Today — Since there are so-called miracles today that are obvious frauds, then we cannot believe the claim that Jesus miraculously arose from the dead. But does the presence of counterfeit money mean that there’s no real money? Does the existence of real estate scams mean that there’s no real property for sale by honest sellers? Just how far are we willing to take this line of reasoning? Yes, there are fakes—always have been. There have always been false gods, and there has always been the living God. There have always been fake miracles, and there has always been the real deal. People have always been expected to discern the true from the false, and we must do the same: Exodus 7:11, 22, 8:7...8:18-19; Acts 8:9-11...8:6-7, 13; Matthew 7:21-23. And in the case of the Jesus’ resurrection, we don’t just have to take the Bible’s word for it—we have evidence for it. What evidence do we have? See pgs. 27-41.

The Takeaway:

These are some of the fallacies of naturalism and its objections to the resurrection. Naturalism is a presupposed bias against the supernatural, without objective evidence or consistent application of logic in its corner. There is no reason to embrace it as a logical, fact-based philosophy. It is anything but!

It is impossible for naturalism to explain the five stubborn facts. Nor does it have intellectual finesse enough to dodge the age, accuracy, authors, and agreement of the manuscripts. It dies on the hill of atheism, while faith lives on the mountaintops.

August 13th — Eliminating the Impossible, Pt. 2

“Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.” — Sherlock Holmes

Skeptics have some tall mountains to climb—they must either: discredit the evidence we have gathered, harmonized, and drawn inferences from; demonstrate some fallacy in our logic; or build an alternative case that is at least as plausible if not more so than the resurrection of Jesus.

The philosophy of naturalism and its resulting objections are an attempt to demonstrate a fallacy in our logic, but it does so by assuming without proof or consistent rational argument that there either is no God or there is a deistic god. It embarrassingly fails to address the facts of the case. It seeks to remove miracles from the equation at the outset, but it glaringly ignores the evidence that supports the occurrence of a miracle.

We will see some similar dismissals in the next set of “impossible” explanations for the resurrection in this lesson.

These objections are grouped together on the basis of “legend”—one assumes that everything about Jesus is legendary, or that there was a historical Jesus upon which legends were built years later. The latter explanation attempts to build an alternative case, but is highly implausible. The former makes no honest attempt to do anything except blow off the gospel story.

Let’s begin.

Ahistorical Rejection

There are those who say that Jesus never existed. We have refused to even entertain this as a possibility over the course of our study. Yet, it’s not unlikely that you may hear this objection to the gospel. How would you address it?

Below, list the five stubborn facts (pgs. 27-41). If a person says that Jesus never lived, they are dismissing the resurrection without fairly examining the evidence. They are completely failing to explain the evidence. Of the five facts, this objection would only explain the final one: the empty tomb. If Jesus never lived, then there's no body to put in or take out of a tomb. But does this objection hold up in light of the other four facts? And is there anything particularly damaging to this objection contained in the first fact? Appealing to these facts may not persuade someone that makes this objection that there was a man named Jesus or that He was the Son of God, but it at least will give you the ammunition you need to defend your own faith and establish it in historical fact.

The “Recycled Pagan Myth” Objection

This is not a new objection, but it has experienced a renaissance in the last several years because of movies like *Zeitgeist* that allege that the gospel story is just a retelling of older pagan myths that all told stories of gods that died and rose again.

Zeitgeist is available for free on YouTube and proposes several conspiracy theories that expose how ruling elites control the masses. Not every critique in the movie is unreasonable—there are valid concerns expressed about the Federal Reserve banking system, and that makes the other allegations in the film potentially more convincing: a lie is best told when mingled with truth. But it begins by asserting that Christianity is nothing new: it's the same-old pagan tale with a new name and face. Some of the evidence submitted to the viewer in support of this claim includes the

observance of Jesus' birth on December 25th, a traditional pagan festival date. Is this objection a valid critique of the gospels? If not, why not?

Below is a list of gods that skeptics appeal to as evidence that the gospel recycled older pagan stories. Do some research online to see what you can find out about these gods and their alleged resurrections:

1. Osiris

2. Tammuz

3. Adonis

4. Attis

5. Marduk

Now, let's raise some questions: are these accounts strikingly close to the resurrection accounts of Jesus, or is there just a vague similarity at best?

How old is the earliest account of Adonis' resurrection? By comparison, when were the texts containing the kernel of the gospel written? Refer back to pgs. 12-14. What might we conclude from the comparisons of these dates?

How certain can we be that these earlier pagan tales contained stories of bodily resurrection? Look back on the appearances of Jesus contained in the kernel of the gospel (pg. 9). What particular facets of His resurrection indicate a whole, bodily resurrection?

Finally, what evidence is there to conclude that these gods were real beings in history? Do we have any evidence that confirms their historicity such as we do with Christ? And, do these legends in any way allow a skeptic to get around the evidence we have for the resurrection of Christ?

“The Legend Grew Over Time” Objection

Some say that while Jesus did live and die, His followers over time embellished His history and turned Him into something He never was. Historically, there can be no doubt that He was at least a great teacher with a great following and a great and terrible death. But was He much more? If He was, there would be indicators of His supernatural greatness from the earliest teachings of the gospel. Review pgs. 11-14, 33-34, 36. Is this objection valid?

The Takeaway:

Jesus was a man of history—He really lived and died, and lived again. The gospel writers and preachers did not recycle pagan myths; pagan myths recycled gospel truth. And there can be no doubt that “from the beginning,” what the disciples saw with their eyes, heard with their ears, and touched with their hands concerning the risen Jesus was proclaimed through all the world (1 John 1:1).

August 16th — Eliminating the Impossible, Pt. 3

Here's the tall mountain the skeptic must climb to discredit the resurrection: he must show that the historical evidence has been fabricated, or that we have misinterpreted it, or that there is a better way to explain it. So far we have seen that the philosophy of naturalism and the theory that the gospel is just a recycled pagan myth both completely fail to do any of these three things.

Now we turn to the various objections that all rest on the same premise: the resurrection story is a fraud. These are attempts to explain away the evidence for the resurrection. They offer up “better” ways to explain the resurrection.

The Stolen Body Theory

The “golden oldie” of fraud theories, this one has been around since the first century. See Matthew 28:11-15. How should we respond to this? Below are some suggestions.

First, list the five stubborn facts below. Which of the facts does this fraud theory seek to “explain”? Which ones does it absolutely fail to explain?

Second, were the disciples in any frame of mind to steal the body? If they were, were they in any position to steal the body (see pgs. 8-9)?

Third, if the guards were asleep then could they even know what happened to the body? And if they had truly fallen asleep, would they have ever admitted it? See Acts 12:19, 16:27.

Fourth, based on everything we have studied thus far, can we be certain of the sincerity of the disciples' claims that they saw the risen Jesus? How can we be?

Fifth, if the Jews really believed the disciples had stolen the body, did they not have the means at their disposal to find out who did it and how? What means did they have?

The Swoon Theory

This fraud theory has also been around a long time. It is very popular among skeptics. Here's the theory: instead of dying, Jesus became unconscious on the cross. Instead of a resurrection, Jesus experienced a resuscitation in the coolness of the tomb. Upon reviving, He got out of the tomb on His own. Once again, let's reason our way through this.

First, list the five stubborn facts. Which facts does this theory seek to "explain"? Which facts does it fail to explain?

Second, would this theory explain the description of Jesus in His appearance to Paul to Acts 9:3, 22:6, 26:13?

Third, would it explain this reasonable critique from skeptic David Strauss? “It is impossible that one who had just come forth from the grave half dead, who crept about weak and ill, who stood in need of medical treatment, of bandaging, strengthening, and tender care... could ever have given to the disciples the impression that He was a conqueror over death and the grave—that He was the Prince of Life.” *The Gospel Argument for God*, by Kenny Chumbley, pg. 60. Note also the facts about His burial on pg. 8. Think of the insurmountable difficulties a body like Jesus’ would’ve had in getting out of the tomb on its own: the crippling wounds from scourging and crucifixion, the burial clothes, the added weight on the body, etc.

Fourth, does it explain the medical evidence for the death of Jesus? See pg. 8. What was the final, definitive evidence given by John that Jesus died? For additional insight, see the class website and open the PDF “The Issue of Blood and Water.”

The Hallucination Theory

This theory is easy enough to understand: the disciples thought they saw something that they really did not see. How do we respond?

Once again, list the five stubborn facts. Which ones does this theory “explain”? Which ones does it not explain?

Second, do groups experience hallucinations? The *exact same* hallucinations? Look back over the list of Jesus’ appearances on pg. 9. Write down the sizes of the various groups Jesus appeared to.

The Takeaway:

All charges of fraud fail to adequately, satisfactorily address ALL the facts of the case. Indeed, it takes more faith to be an atheist than it does to accept the evidence for the resurrection.

Let’s let Jewish skeptic Gaalyah Cornfeld sum it up for us: “Certainly [the naturalistic theories] stand as tributes to human ingenuity, [but] they all require at least as much faith to believe in their validity as in the resurrection itself... None of these theories, then, offers any solid base for historical reconstruction of what happened... and all of them raise far more difficulties than they solve” (*The Historical Jesus*, pg. 180, 182).

August 20th — The Authority of the Manuscripts

What have we done so far?

We began at the base of the mountain, along with unbelievers. We both realized the significance of the resurrection to Christianity: if it is true, then Jesus is the Son of God. If it is not, then Jesus is just another charlatan. Indeed, this peak stands tallest, taller than creation which confirms that there is a God, taller than the exodus which confirms that Jehovah is God. The mountain testifies to the deity and necessity of Christ—by scaling it we could know whether or not there was any hope to be had in Christ. So we had a choice: climb, or stay at the base of the mountain.

We began to climb the mountain. We examined the kernel of the gospel, four facts offering proof of death and life: Jesus was killed, buried, raised, and seen. These four facts were documented by five authors in six books.

We kept climbing. We submitted the documents to various tests to ascertain their age, accuracy, authors, and agreement. By every standard of measure that all works of antiquity are subjected to, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the book of Acts, and 1 Corinthians were found to be historical records.

We kept on climbing. We looked for historical facts so well evidenced that even honest skeptics must concede them. We discovered that Jesus died by crucifixion; His disciples believed He appeared to them after His death; Paul the persecutor became the preacher of the resurrected Jesus; James, Jesus' skeptical sibling, became a suffering servant of the risen Jesus; and the tomb of Jesus was found empty. When we harmonized these five stubborn facts, the only conclusion that we could draw was that Jesus was raised from the dead.

And we kept on climbing. The skeptics we met at the base of the mountain decided to make their stand on some smaller hills: the hills of atheism, agnosticism, deism, paganism, etc. They tried to find some fallacy in our logic, they tried to discredit the evidence, they tried to offer an alternative just as plausible if not more so than the resurrection. They failed. "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no

matter how improbable, must be the truth.” Skepticism died on the hill of disbelief; faith lives on the mountaintop.

Now, we have arrived. We are on the mountaintop. If Jesus is raised, then He is the Son of God. Jesus is raised, therefore He is the Son of God.

So what?

Some say that the Bible cannot be used to prove the Bible’s own claims, such as claims to its inspiration, but this is as ridiculous as not letting an accused man speak in his own defense at his trial. We let the Bible speak in its own defense, assessing and later accepting its credibility on the basis of its historical reliability. But we never assumed its inspiration in its defense. We should never assume that which must be proved.

“Christians do not believe that Jesus is God because the Bible is inspired; they believe the Bible is inspired because Jesus is God.” — Kenny Chumbley, *The Gospel Argument for God*, pg. 88.

If Jesus is the Son of God, then the Bible is inspired. Jesus is the Son of God, therefore the Bible is inspired.

In this lesson we will briefly touch on the subject of the Bible’s inspiration and canonicity. Since Jesus has been raised from the dead, we can be certain that the Bible was written by God through the agency of man (inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:16), and that we have a complete catalogue of inspired books (canonicity).

Inspiration

If the Bible is inspired, then it is inerrant. This is self-evident: a book written by an infallible God would necessarily be error-proof. So then by inerrant we mean that it is free of errors: there are no errors in the history it records, the commands it issues, the morals it encourages, or the hope that it offers.

The Old Testament

1. Jesus accepted Old Testament as a body of inspired literature: Matthew 22:31-32, 43; Mark 7:9-10, 13, Luke 24:44, etc. How else could the prophecies have accurately foretold His coming unless they were written by God?
2. Jesus accepted the Old Testament as historical fact: Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4), Cain and Abel (Luke 11:51), Noah and the Flood (Matthew 24:38), Abraham (John 8:56-58), Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 11:24), Lot's wife (Luke 17:32), Isaac and Jacob (Matthew 8:11), the exodus (Mark 14:12-16), the manna in the wilderness (John 6:32), the bronze serpent (John 3:14), Jonah and the fish (Matthew 12:40), Daniel (Matthew 24:15), etc.
3. Jesus accepted the copies and translations (the Septuagint) of the Old Testament as accurate reflections of the originals: Deuteronomy 17:18, Luke 4:17.
4. Jesus accepted the Old Testament as a moral and spiritual guide to deliver Him from Satan's schemes: Matthew 4:1-11.
5. Jesus accepted that the Old Testament should not be altered to accommodate man's tradition: Matthew 15:1-14.

The New Testament

1. Jesus promised to guide the apostles into all truth through the agency of the Holy Spirit: Matthew 19:28, John 16:13, Acts 2:42
2. Jesus' apostles claimed they were writing inspired documents: 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, 14:37, 1 Thessalonians 2:13...2 Thessalonians 2:13-15, 2 Peter 3:18...5:12,

2 Peter 3:15-16, Ephesians 2:20...3:5; and they worked miracles to confirm their message was given to them by God, Mark 16:17-20, Hebrews 2:3-4.

Canonicity

By “canon”, we mean an officially accepted list of books. “Canon” comes from a root word that we translate “reed.” Reeds were measuring rods, or “standards.” Origen coined the term “canon” in connection with the Scriptures. It came to mean “list” or “index.” As one man said, **“A book is not the word of God because it is accepted by the people of God. Rather, it is accepted by the people of God because it is the word of God.”** But, Jesus didn’t leave us a list of which books are canonical and which aren’t; however, there are some tests we can subject them to in order to determine their canonicity. This is critical: Colossians 4:16 tells us that the early churches shared their letters. How did they know which letters to share *and* treat with the greatest reverence when they copied and circulated them? Whether or not a book is “apostolic” is the test of a book’s canonicity (its deserving of acceptance). By “apostolic” we mean that it was recognized by an apostle. Here are the tests and other evidences by which we can conclude that we have a trustworthy canon:

1. Apostolic authority: John 13:20; 2 Peter 3:2, 3:15-16; 1 John 4:6; Revelation 22:18-19
2. Apostolic endorsement of NT prophets: 1 Timothy 5:18 (Luke 10:7); Ephesians 2:20...3:5
3. The early Christian writings accept the same canonical books that we do today, particularly those of Origen (c. 185-254 AD). The writings of these men indicate that some of the books in our New Testament were of questionable canonicity, and there were debates over which ones were inspired and which ones were not in the second and third centuries. By this time the miraculous gift of discerning of spirits would’ve died out, so it’s understandable that a debate would have occurred and would have been documented in their writings. But, this “messy” process and rigorous back-and-forth is also good for believers today, because it shows that believers back then took their responsibility to only accept those books which God had written seriously. Moreover, we have Syriac and Latin translations

- from the mid-second century that list every New Testament book except 2 Peter, and 2 Peter's inclusion is documented by early Egyptian Christians.⁹
4. Books had to present their credentials to their readers, namely if their message had been miraculously confirmed or could pass the test of being compared to what God had already revealed and confirmed: Mark 16:19-20; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4.
 5. There were those in the first century who could distinguish between true prophecy and false prophecy: 1 Corinthians 12:10.
 6. Recipients would have recognized distinguishing marks/handwriting in the letters to know if they were from inspired sources: 1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 3:17.
 7. Lastly, churches would've known who they were receiving letters from as well. There would've been a "paper trail" that would've connected the messenger (Ephesians 6:21-22, Philippians 2:25) to the penman (Romans 16:22) to the apostle or prophet.

The Takeaway:

Christians do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God because the Bible is inspired; we believe that the Bible is inspired because Jesus is the Son of God. Both Old and New Testaments were written by God's Holy Spirit, through the agency of man, for our learning and salvation. Being then inspired documents, they are inerrant: their history, morals, commands, and hope are all true. We can have confidence in the value of every single word in our Bible, and we can have confidence that we have a complete catalogue of inspired books, a canon of Scripture worthy of our acceptance.

⁹<http://apologeticspress.org/APContent.aspx?category=13&article=968&topic=103> — "The Canon and Extra-Canonical Writings"

August 23rd — Stumbling Blocks to Faith, Pt. 1

With the case for the resurrection having been made, we now must turn our attention to three stumbling blocks to faith that believers still must overcome. Our intent is to see how the resurrection helps us overcome them.

The Theory of Evolution

Of course, there are scientific and logical ways to respond to this stumbling block to faith. Our focus is to undergird those responses with an objection founded on the resurrection.

If Jesus is raised, He is the Son of God. Jesus is raised, therefore He is the Son of God. So then, we should consider what Jesus had to say about the creation and His credentials that give His words authority.

1. Matthew 19:3-6 = Jesus' thoughts on creation
 - a. Did Jesus treat Genesis as a historical record?
 - b. Which passages in Genesis did Jesus quote from? His quotations and the His harmonization of them are significant. What's the significance?
 - c. What phrase appears in v4 and v8?
2. John 1:1-18 = Jesus' credentials
 - a. Was Jesus was an eyewitness to and participant in creation, vv1-3?
 - b. Though Jesus' words were recorded thousands of years after creation, He worked wonders to reveal and confirm His divinity, chief among them His resurrection, which John alludes to in vv14-18. So the time lag between His participation in creation and the records we have thousands of years later that detail His participation in creation is not an issue for the Christian.

3. Supporters of evolutionary theory need not be skeptics; they can also be believers. But if someone argues that Genesis 1 and 2 are not a historical narrative of what happened at the beginning, then what vital doctrines and concepts that we have covered in the course of this study would be undermined?

Modern-Day Paganism

As was the case in ancient Israel, modern-day Christians can be influenced by the pagans that surround us today. “If there’s only one God then why are there so many religions?,” someone says. Our society emphasizes “tolerance” and “multiculturalism” as virtues, and by extension it denies that Christianity has a monopoly on truth—one religion’s truth claims are no more valid than any other religion’s, except in heart of the individual believers who buy into a religion. It’s fine if a Christian is convinced that Jesus is God’s Son, but he shouldn’t be so narrow-minded as to think that everyone else must accept Jesus the same way that he does.

Christians can be intimidated by the intolerant enforcers of this trend who label anybody that deviates from their opinion a “bigot” or “intolerant.” Nobody likes to be thought of and ridiculed as being backwards or mean-spirited, and nobody likes to be attacked or threatened physically because of their beliefs. But that’s the world we live in, and that’s the risk we’ve agreed to take in order to stand for truth. And the world’s lost souls are worth the risk. More importantly, the Lamb of God is worth the risk.

The pluralistic society in which we live, and its political correctness which serves as a form of mind control masquerading as “manners” and “civility,” can either lead someone away from Christ or severely blunt their zeal and neuter their courage to make a stand for objective truth.

We will consider one of Paul's sermons recorded in Acts to help us formulate a Christian response to this challenge.

1. First, read Romans 1:18-25. Does the practice of myriads of different religions and the worship of thousands of different gods indicate that there is not a single true God out there? Or, could it be argued that man's impulse to worship *something* indicates that man was made by a God, and simply chose to exalt his own passions above that God's will?

2. Now, read Acts 17:16-34.
 - a. Should Christians be intimidated by the paganism and unbelief surrounding us, or should we see it as a challenge that needs to be met, and an opportunity to test the truth of the things we have placed our confidence in, and an opportunity to plant the seed in others? See vv16, 23

 - b. Note Paul's reasoning. While he displays some familiarity with their religion (v28), does Paul base his argument on how well he knows their religion and the errors or inconsistencies it contains? Or, does he simply argue for truth from the basis of its supporting evidence?

 - c. Which two mountaintops of faith does Paul submit as evidence? See vv24-26, 31.

 - d. For thought: why would Paul not appeal to the exodus? Surely, given that he's preaching the unknown God to them, the exodus would have been a

good argument to make on behalf of the unknown God. Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice?” in Exodus 5:2. The ten plagues were designed to answer that question. Give some thought on why appealing to the exodus may not be the strongest argument to make.

- e. Did Paul work a miracle to support his argument? Miracles were the credentials of apostles, the *experts* on Christianity and the evidence for the resurrection in the first century. Do you have to be an expert to make the case that Paul makes here?

- f. What did Paul aim to do with this sermon? He wanted them to...
 - i. Seek God (v27). Read the sermon. Give some thought to what this would include based on vv27, 29-31.

 - ii. To *all* come to God, regardless of background, religion, race, language, etc. See vv24, 25, 26, 30-31.

 - iii. To give God His proper reverence and place in man’s world and man’s history. See vv24-28, 31.

 - iv. Should these not also be our aims in learning and presenting the evidence for God and for Jesus? Can we do it in a way that’s bold yet compassionate, firm but polite, exclusive in its truth claims but fair to the truth that exists in other religions? Paul did!

The Takeaway:

Christians that stand on the rock of Christ's resurrection will still find their faith challenged. Two such challenges are the theory of evolution and modern-day paganism. These challenges can be met by science, logic, and knowing the inconsistencies and errors of these worldviews. But the greatest protection against their influence is to remind ourselves of Jesus' role in creation, confirmed by His resurrection, and how the evidence for Jesus as the Creator and Savior is unique to Christianity alone. These evidences can thwart attempts to undermine the historicity of the Genesis account—and by extension *any* text in the Bible that people find unfashionable—and can rescue an ignorant, immoral world from its unbelief.

August 27th — Stumbling Blocks to Faith, Pt. 2

The Problem of Pain and Suffering

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do the righteous suffer? It's an old question! It's the question of Job and Psalm 73.

This conundrum is the greatest challenge to Christianity. We will examine the argument made against Christianity on the grounds that bad things shouldn't happen to good people, and then we will see what light the Bible and the resurrection may shed on this problem.

The Argument: Evil exists—bad things happen to good people, and a good God would do something about it. So why doesn't He? Because He doesn't exist.

Some observations about this objection:

1. On what basis can someone who doesn't believe in God objectively talk about evil? Who are they to say what evil is and is not?
2. When people look at the suffering in this world, say a good parent who must bury their child that died of sickness, and then see the prosperity of a wicked man with a large family, it's natural to say, "That's not fair!" But, where does this universal sense of "fairness" and "how things ought to be" come from?!

Some general causes of suffering in Scripture:

1. Man's evil choices — Ecclesiastes 7:29
2. The consequences of Adam and Eve's sin — Genesis 3:16-19
3. Random chance — Ecclesiastes 9:11
4. God's plan — Genesis 50:20
5. The devil's wagers — Job 1:6-12

6. God's judgments — Genesis 18:22-33

These are general causes that *may* explain why someone is suffering, but often when people ask “Why do bad things happen to good people?,” what they’re really asking is “Why is this happening to me?” The Bible gives us general answers to the broad problem of suffering, but you would have to be a prophet to know why someone in particular today is suffering in a particular way.

While the problem of pain is not entirely without an answer, when it comes to giving specific answers to specific cases we are forced to admit “I don't know.” One of the worst mistakes people can make is to put their faith in what they don't know: see Genesis 42:21, Job 4:7-8, Luke 13:1-5, John 9:1-3. People think they know how the world should work and why things are the way they are when it comes to suffering, and in fact they do not. Job thought he had the right to question God's justice in letting a good man suffer, but when he was confronted with his ignorance over God's reign in nature he was forced to admit that he had no cause for complaint. He thought he knew the way the world should work, but he didn't. What he did know, however, was that there was a God.

What does the Christian know? The Christian knows that Jesus is the Son of God, and the Christian knows this because of the evidence for the resurrection.

And the Christian would agree that a good God would do something about the pain and suffering of this world. But the Christian would say that God already has done something about it, and that just because He's not done something about it on our clock doesn't mean we should think He's unreal.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Hebrews 2:14-17

The Takeaway:

The Christian does not know the reason why bad things happen to good people in each and every specific case. The Christian does know that God has already solved the problem of pain and suffering through the resurrection. By returning to the resurrection, we reframe the question: is man's most pressing concern why bad things happen to good people, or is it why the worst thing happened to the best Man?