

The Case for Christ

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I. Introduction

The question, “Who is Jesus Christ?,” is one of the most important questions a person could ask. Two important American thinkers, Thomas Paine and Bertrand Russell, dismissed Christ for lack of historical evidence. Yet the apostolic writers affirmed the historicity of Christ. Paul wrote that Christ appeared after His resurrection to more than 500 observers (1 Cor 15:6). Peter was an eyewitness to Jesus Christ in His majesty (2 Pet 1:16). John affirmed that Christ manifested Himself physically to him (1 Jn 1:1). Clearly historically verifiable information was important to the apostles.

II. The Case for Christ’s Resurrection¹

Gary Habermas wrote the chapter, “The Case for Christ’s Resurrection,” in the book, *To Everyone an Answer*. He employed the results of his recent study of fourteen hundred recent manuscripts on the subject. He focused on material on which the vast majority of those researchers agreed, despite their widely varied theological positions. He presents his conclusions and concentrates on two topics seldom discussed in detail: first, that the early followers of Jesus at least *thought* they had seen Him resurrected; and second, on the disciples’ conversion in light of recent religious and political transformations.

A. The Disciples’ Experiences of the Risen Jesus

In contemporary studies of the historical Jesus, some items are supported by a broad scholarly consensus:

- that Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God was his central message;
- that Jesus died by crucifixion; and
- that Jesus’ early disciples at least *thought* they had seen the risen Jesus.

The focus in this section is on the third point, for which there are several evidences.

1. *Support for the disciples’ experiences*

First, we have the dramatic conversion of the apostle Paul. A former persecutor of the church and brilliant scholar, he is almost always thought to be the best witness among New Testament (NT) writers. He clearly points out that the risen Jesus appeared personally to him (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; Gal 1:16). His testimony is also told three times in Acts (9:1-8; 22:3-11; 26:9-18).

Second, Paul provides plenty of additional evidence for the claim that Jesus had appeared to his early followers. Essentially all critical scholars today agree that in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul records an ancient oral tradition that summarizes the content of the Christian gospel. Paul is clear that this material is not his own but was passed down to him in a

¹ This section is based on Habermas, Gary R., “The Case for Christ’s Resurrection,” in Beckwith, Francis J., W. L. Craig, and J. P. Moreland (eds.). *To Everyone an Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

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manner equivalent to rabbinic tradition. Paul likely received this material when he visited Jerusalem just three years after his conversion, when he visited Peter and James (Gal 1:18-19). Even critical skeptics generally conclude that Paul received this material within just a few years after Jesus' death, in the early or mid 30s.

Third, Paul was exceptionally careful to ascertain the content of the gospel message, which centered on the resurrection. He made a second trip to Jerusalem specifically for the purpose of checking out his gospel preaching (Gal 2:1-10). During his first visit, he met with Peter and James; on the second, he met with those men and John (Gal 2:9). These four men were certainly the chief apostles of the early church. Thus not only did Paul searched out the matter carefully, but we have the assurance that his message of Jesus' resurrection appearances agreed with the original apostles (Gal 2:9; cf. Acts 15:23-25).

Fourth, not only did the other apostles confirm Paul's message, but we also have the reverse testimony. After reporting a list of Jesus' resurrection appearances, Paul explains that he knew what the other apostles were preaching on the subject, and that it was the same as his teaching (1 Cor 15:11).

Fifth, other early creedal texts found in the NT, primarily in Acts (1:21-22; 2:22-36; 3:13-16; 4:8-10; 5:29-32; 10:39-43; 13:28-31; 17:1-3; 17:30-31; cf. Lk 24:34), provide insight to the earliest resurrection preaching. The risen Christ is at the center of each of these traditions.

Sixth, consider the conversion of James, Jesus' brother, who was an unbeliever and probably a skeptic during his brother's public ministry (Mk 3:21-35; Jn 7:5). Then, just a few years later, James is the pastor of the Jerusalem church (Gal 1:18-19; 2:1-10; cf. Acts 15:13-21). In between, James had met the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15:7).

Seventh, the empty tomb seriously complicates the search for a naturalistic explanation. The Gospels are in unanimous agreement that women were the earliest witnesses to the empty tomb; this is remarkable because female testimony was generally disallowed in a law court for serious matters. The inclusion of this material is potentially embarrassing and its inclusion makes sense only if it actually happened. The empty tomb accounts are attested by multiple sources. The empty tomb is implied in the early pre-Pauline creed (1 Cor 15:3-4), and conceded by Jewish leaders (Mt 28:11-15). Most critical scholars believe that the tomb where Jesus was buried was later discovered to be empty.

Finally, there is no question the disciples' belief that they had actually seen Jesus after his death led to a radical transformation in their lives, even to the point of being willing to die for their faith.

No other hypothesis is a even a viable rival to the conclusion that the early disciples at least thought that they had witnessed Jesus' appearances after he had died. Next, Habermas moves from the recognized historical fact that the disciples believed this to their actually having seen the risen Jesus.

2. ***From conviction to event***

It seems clear that Jesus' disciples were utterly convinced that he had appeared to them after his death. Unbelievers would seemingly have to reply by severing the connection between what the disciples thought and what really happened. One approach is to respond that, whatever the data, these sorts of miraculous events simply do not occur in our world. Or, they could respond with the agnostic plea that we do not know what actually occurred. Nevertheless, most critical scholars concede that none of these options work. For instance, Steven T. Davis states, "All of the alternative hypotheses with which I am familiar are historically weak; some are so weak that they collapse of their own weight once spelled out.... The alternative theories that have been proposed are not only weaker but far weaker at explaining the available historical evidence."²

Given that the skeptic would have to account for the disciples being sure that they had seen the risen Jesus, the most popular naturalistic response is to suggest that they saw hallucinations. There are numerous problems with such a response:

- Hallucinations are private experiences, while clearly groups of people claimed to see Jesus on multiple occasions.
- The disciples' despair indicates they were not in the frame of mind to see hallucinations.
- There were far too many different times, places, and personalities involved.
- Jesus' body should still be located in the tomb.
- Hallucinations rarely transform lives.
- Paul and James were converted, though neither had a desire to see Jesus.

Due to the failure of alternatives, the impressive evidences that make the case for the disciples' experiences as strong as anything in the NT now become impressive evidences for the resurrection appearances themselves.

B. The Uniqueness of the Disciples' Transformations

Virtually no one disputes the disciples' radical transformations. Before Jesus died, his followers abandoned and even denied him³. Afterward, they were willing to die for their faith, and many were martyred. Even critical scholars are in agreement that Jesus' resurrection appearances were the intervening events between the disciples' confusion and exultation.

Admittedly, life conversions have happened for untrue causes. But there is a qualitative difference between what happened to the disciples and what we sometimes see today. More than being sold out to a cause, the disciples gave their lives precisely because they were absolutely convinced they had seen the risen Jesus. Their transformations were not caused by an ideology, like the others, but their new outlook was expressly based on a personal experience – the profound conviction that they had actually seen the risen Jesus.

² Davis, Stephen T., "Is Belief in the Resurrection Rational?," *Philo* 2 (1999): 57-58. Quoted in *To Everyone An Answer*, p. 194.

Steven T. Davis is Russell K. Pitzer Professor of Philosophy at Claremont McKenna College.

³ Mt 26:56, 69-74; Mk 14:50, 66-72; Lk 22:55-72; Jn 18:25-27.

And although believers today have not seen Jesus (1 Pet 1:8), we have the next best thing – very powerful evidence that the disciples did.

III. Questions About History and Jesus⁴

A. What is History?

Christianity's central teaching – the gospel – claims that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are historical facts, that Christianity is an historically verifiable religion. Indeed, the apostle Paul affirms that if Christ did not rise from the dead, then Christianity is simply false (1 Cor 15:12-15).

The historical method is similar to both the scientific method and forensic science when applied to investigations concerning unobserved and unrepeatable events from the past. History is similar to origin science in its goal of establishing the probability of singular events in the past.

B. Are Miracles Possible?

Some discount the NT as a reliable source of history based on the fact that it contains miracles. David Hume argued that there is “uniform experience against miracles.” C. S. Lewis countered that miracles (and, for that matter, history) are outside the realm of science: “What cannot be trusted to recur is not material for science: that is why history is not one of the sciences.”⁵

Miracles are special acts of God, and acts of God are only possible if there is a God who can act. Indeed, as Lewis said, “Nature herself as a whole is *not* natural... the universe is one great miracle.”⁶ We conclude that miracles do make sense in a theistic universe.

C. How Can We Test the Reliability of Ancient Documents?

Unlike many other religions, Christianity is based on historical evidence that can be tested and found to be true or false. One essential legal rule is that declarations must give the time and place. The NT does so with utmost precision (e.g., Luke 3:1-2).

We will consider three criteria for establishing the reliability and accuracy of any piece of literature from antiquity:⁷

- Bibliographical Test: Since we do not have the original documents (autographs), how reliable and accurate are the copies we have in regard to the number of

⁴ This section is based on Chapter 12, “Questions About History and Jesus” in Geisler and Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations*.

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⁵ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 134.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷ C. Sanders, *Introduction to Research in English Literary History* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 143ff.

manuscripts, and what is the time interval between the original and the copy or copies in existence?

- Internal Test: Is the text internally consistent?
- External Test: What other pieces of literature confirm the accuracy of the inner testimony of the document?

D. Does the New Testament Pass the Bibliographical Test?

The two basic questions are: (1) Not having the original documents, how reliable are the copies we have? and (2) What is the time interval between the original and the extant copy or copies?

We will see that there is more abundant and accurate manuscript evidence for the NT than for any other book from the ancient world. For instance, the *John Rylands Fragment*, a papyrus containing five verses from the Gospel of John (18:31-33, 37-38), was found in Egypt and is dated between A.D. 117 and 138. This discovery destroyed the idea that the NT was written down during the second century in order to provide time for myths to grow around the truth.

In fact, there are 5,686 Greek manuscripts extant, as well as more than 24,000 in Latin and other languages. For comparison, the nearest ancient text in this regard is Homer's *Iliad*, with a mere 643 copies.

The typical time span between the original and earliest copy of non-Biblical ancient texts is over 1,000 years. However, the NT has a fragment within one generation of its original composition; whole books within 100 years; most of the NT within 200 years, and the entire NT within 250 years from the date of its completion.

Further, the degree of accuracy of the NT copies, ascertained by comparing the various copies, is about 99%. Most ancient books do not survive with enough manuscripts to make that determination possible. Not only that, but only about one-eighth of all the variants have any weight, as most of them are merely mechanical matters such as spelling or style.

The large number of manuscripts, the short time span between the original and the earliest copy, and the accuracy of the NT all bear witness that the NT is the most historically accurate and reliable document from all of antiquity. If one cannot trust the NT at this point, he must reject all of ancient history, which rests on much weaker evidence.

E. Does the New Testament Pass the Internal Test?

Aristotle's dictum holds that, if it can be shown that the author has not contradicted himself, the benefit of the doubt is to be given to the author of the document itself, and not arrogated by the critic. In the NT, no real contradictions have been proven, and apparent discrepancies are expected in independent reliable testimony. We must consider the language, culture, geography, and history of the time in which the document was written.

Language. Consider how various English words, such as *day* or *strike* may be used in different ways. We need to keep this in mind when reading the Bible, which was written in Hebrew and Greek.

Culture. Jewish concepts such as the Sabbath, rituals, temple ceremonies, and other Jewish customs must be grasped in order to fully understand the Gospel of Matthew, for instance.

Geography. The reader must be familiar with the geography of the Bible.

History. In the Gospel of John, history is the key to understanding the interplay between Pilate and Jesus.

We should also consider the psychology of testimony – how witnesses of the same event will recall it with a certain level of discrepancy. For instance, one person might recall an event in strict chronological order, mentioning minute events. Another might recall it thematically, omitting, condensing, and expanding certain aspects. What are the essential guidelines for deciding if their testimony is true?

Complete Agreement on the Main Points. With regard to the NT and Jesus, the eyewitnesses reached a clear consensus on the main points of His miraculous life, how He died, and His resurrection from the dead.

Complete Agreement on Significant Details Supporting the Main Points. The Gospel accounts all agree on the significant details supporting the virgin birth, the calling of the twelve disciples, the reactions of the religious and political leaders, and that Jesus had both a religious and political trial and was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate.

Geisler and Bocchino apply Aristotle's dictum to matter of Judas's death. Matthew records it as suicide by hanging (Mt 27:5), while Luke records it as when Judas fell down and his body "burst open" (Ac 1:18). How can these accounts be reconciled? It is quite possible that Judas did indeed die by hanging. Later, perhaps the branch on which he was hanging broke, and his body was torn on the sharp rocks on which he landed.

F. Does the New Testament Pass the External Test?

The external test involves sources apart from the NT that confirm the NT's accuracy, reliability, and authenticity. We consider several.

1. Flavius Josephus

The Jewish historian Josephus was born of a priestly family in AD 37 and became a Pharisee. He was a commander of Jewish forces in Galilee against the Romans, but surrendered when defeat seemed inevitable. After the fall of Jerusalem, he settled comfortably in Rome, where he wrote a history of their nation. These works include *History of the Jewish War*, an *Autobiography*, and the twenty volumes of *Antiquities of the Jews*. Many of the figures well known to us from the NT are present in Josephus's works – the

Herod family; the Roman emperors; Pilate, Felix, and Festus; the high priestly families, and so forth. As examples of independent verification of the NT, consider:

- The sudden death of Herod Agrippa, narrated by Luke (Acts 12:19-23), is recorded also by Josephus (Antiquities, xix.8.2).
- Josephus mentions John the Baptist and James the brother of the Lord Jesus, in a manner quite independent of the NT. James is referred to as “the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ.”
- Josephus refers to Christ, perhaps sarcastically, as “a wise man, if indeed we should call him a man; for he was a doer of marvelous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure.”

2. Early Gentile Writers

Early Gentile writers confirm the historicity of Christ:

- *Thallus* wrote ca. AD 52 about the darkness which fell upon the land during the crucifixion of Christ.
- *Cornelius Tacitus* wrote ca. AD 113 about the “superstition” of Christ in regard to Nero’s blame of the Christians for the great fire of Rome.
- *C. Plinius Secundus* (Pliny the Younger) wrote in AD 112 in detail of the practices of the practices of the Christians.

Summing up the non-Christian testimonies about Christ, we get the following picture, which confirms the view of Christ presented in the Gospels:

- Jesus was from Nazareth;
- He lived a wise and virtuous life;
- He was crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar at Passover time, being considered the Jewish king;
- He was believed by his disciples to have been raised from the dead three days later;
- His enemies acknowledged that he performed unusual feats they called “sorcery”;
- His small band of disciples multiplied rapidly, spreading even as far as Rome;
- His disciples denied polytheism, lived moral lives, and worshiped Christ as Divine.

3. Archaeology

Two archaeological discoveries illuminate the death of Christ.

The Nazareth Decree, a slab of stone found in Nazareth in 1878, was inscribed with a decree from Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) that no graves should be disturbed or bodies extracted or moved, under penalty of death. A likely explanation for such a severe punishment is that Claudius, having heard of the Christian doctrine of resurrection and Jesus’ empty tomb decided not to let any such report surface again.

Yohanan, a crucifixion victim, was discovered in a Jerusalem burial site dated to AD 70. He had a seven-inch nail driven through both his feet, with evidence that similar spikes had been put between the two bones of each lower arm. His legs had been crushed by a blow,

consistent with crucifragium. All of these details are consistent with NT descriptions of crucifixion.

Other archaeological discoveries bear witness to places described in the NT:

- The Pavement of John 19:13
- The pool of Bethesda
- Jacob's well
- The pool of Siloam
- The ancient cities of Bethlehem, Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, and Chorazin
- Pilate's residence in Jerusalem.

Archaeologist Nelson Glueck has boldly asserted that "it may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."⁸

G. Are the New Testament Authors Reliable Eyewitnesses?

Simon Greenleaf⁹ established rules for credible evidence in *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*. There are five main points for determining the credibility of witnesses:

- *Their honesty.* A person ordinarily speaks the truth when there is no prevailing motive of inducement to the contrary. Applied to the disciples, they would have had no reason to persist in a gross falsehood, if that had been the case. Instead, there is no plausible motivation for believing their testimony was false.
- *Their ability.* The ability of a witness to speak the truth depends on the opportunities that he has had for observing the fact, the accuracy of his powers of discernment, and the faithfulness of his memory. Until the contrary is shown by an objector, it is always to be presumed that people are honest and of sound mind, and of ordinary intelligence. Matthew was trained by his calling to habits of severe investigation and suspicious scrutiny; Luke's profession demanded a similar exactness of observation. The other two evangelists were considered too unlearned to forge the story of their Master's life.
- *The number and the consistency of their testimony.* The discrepancies between the narratives of the several evangelists, when carefully examined, will not be found sufficient to invalidate their testimony. Instead, many seeming contradictions, upon closer examination, will be found to be in substantial agreement.
- *The conformity of their testimony with experience.*

⁸ N. Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1969, p. 31.

Nelson Glueck (1900-1971) was an American rabbi, academic, and archaeologist. He served as president of Hebrew Union College from 1947 until his death, and his pioneering work in biblical archaeology resulted in the discovery of 1,500 ancient sites.

⁹ **Simon Greenleaf** (1783-1853), the famous Royall Professor of Law at Harvard University, is considered one of the academicians most responsible for helping Harvard law School gain an eminent standing among the legal schools in the U.S.

- *The coincidence of their testimony with collateral and contemporaneous facts and circumstances.* The Christian testimony should be judged in a fair and consistent manner.

Much of ancient history was not recorded by eyewitnesses or contemporaries, yet is considered sufficiently reliable to inform us of major events. In contrast, the NT dates within the lifetime of contemporary eyewitnesses. For example:

- Most of the 500 eyewitnesses of the resurrection spoken of by Paul were still alive when he wrote 1 Cor. in AD 55-56.
- Acts was written between AD 60 and 62, thus placing the Gospel of Luke to an even earlier date.
- The NT books can solidly be dated before AD 90.
- One or two of the Gospels could have been written as early as seven years after the crucifixion. All were certainly written within the lifetimes of eyewitnesses and contemporaries.

Had the evangelists been false historians, they would not have committed themselves upon so many particulars. There is also a striking naturalness in the characters presented. There is also a nakedness of the narratives – the absence of all parade by the writers about their own integrity, of a desire to excite astonishment, and of all appearances of design to exalt their Master. Their simplicity and artlessness should not pass unnoticed in readily stating even those things most disparaging to themselves.

IV. The Nature of Jesus Christ¹⁰

A. Who Was Jesus?

The Nicene Creed (AD 325) states the uniform belief of all orthodox Christianity that Christ was fully God and fully Man. All heresies regarding Christ deny one or the other of these.

1. *Jesus Was Fully Human*

Some insist that Jesus only appeared to be human, that He was a phantom – an apparition with no physical substance. If true, this doctrine, called Docetism, would mean that Christ was not really tempted as we are, did not really die, and cannot be our substitute in atoning for our sins.

His development. Jesus went through all of the normal processes of human development. He was conceived in His mother's womb by the Holy Spirit (Mt 1:18, 20; Lk 1:34-35), was born normally at fully term (Lk 2:6-7), grew normally as a boy (Lk 2:40-52), and aged normally (Jn 8:57).

His affections. Jesus displayed all off the traits of humanity in His needs. Physically, He hungered (Mt 4:2), thirsted (Jn 19:28), became tired (Mk 4:28), and breathed (Lk 23:46) as a human. Emotionally, He expressed sorrow (Mt 26:38; Jn 11:35), wonder (Mk 6:6), anger and grief (Mk 3:5), compassion (Mk 4:1). He was also tempted to sin, though He did not yield to temptation (Mt 4:1; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13; Heb 2:18, 4:15).

His death. Jesus died a human death, witnessed by many people, including John, some women followers, soldiers, and a mocking crowd (Lk 23:48-49; Jn 19:25-27). His death was confirmed by professional executioners (Jn 19:32-34), and He was buried in accordance with the customs of His time (Jn 19:38-41). Clearly, Jesus was human.

2. *Jesus Was Fully God*

He claimed to be Yahweh. Yahweh (YHWH) is the covenant name given by God for Himself (Ex 3:14), and is considered so holy that a Jew would not pronounce it. In light of this, it is no wonder that the Jews picked up stones and accused Jesus of blasphemy when He claimed to be Yahweh. Jesus said "I am the Good Shepherd" (Jn 10:11), but the Old Testament (OT) said, "[Yahweh] is my shepherd." Consider also:

- Jesus claimed to be the judge of all men (Mt 25:31ff; Jn 5:27ff; cf. Joel 3:12).
- Jesus prayed for the Father to restore glory to Him (Jn 17-5; cf. Isa 42:8).
- Jesus spoke of Himself as the Bridegroom (Mt 25:1; cf. Isa 62:5; Hosea 2:16).
- Jesus claimed to be the First and the Last (Rev 1:17; cf. Isa 42:8).
- Jesus claimed to be "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12; cf. Ps 27:1).

¹⁰ This section is based on the chapter "Questions About Jesus Christ" in *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook on Christian Evidences*, by Geisler and Brooks.

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Finally, Jesus stated “Before Abraham was, I AM” (Jn 8:58). He thus claimed not only to be in existence before Abraham, but to be equal with the I AM of Exodus 3:14. The Jews around Him clearly understood His meaning and picked up stones to kill Him for blaspheming (Jn 10:31-33; cf. Mk 14:62; Jn 18:5-6).

He claimed equality with God. Jesus also claimed for Himself the prerogatives of God, such as healing (Mk 2:5ff); giving life, raising the dead, and judging (Jn 5:21, 25-29; cf. 1Sa 2:6; Dt 32:35, 39; Ps 49:15; Joel 3:12). He also claimed that He should be honored as God (Jn 5:23).

He claimed to be Messiah-God. The OT is clear that the coming Messiah who would deliver Israel would be God Himself (Isa 9:6; Ps 45:6; cf. Heb 1:8; Ps 110:1). Jesus applied messianic prophecies to Himself (Mt 22:43-44; cf. Ps 110:1; and “Ancient of Days” Dan 7:9, 13, 22), thereby claiming equality with God.

He accepted worship. The OT (Ex 20:1-5; Dt 5:6-9) and NT (Ac 14:15; Rev 22:8-9) forbid worshiping anyone other than God. Yet Jesus accepted worship on numerous occasions (Mt 8:2, 9:18, 14:33, 15:25, 20:20; Mk 5:6; Jn 9:38, 20:28).

He claimed equal authority with God. Jesus also put His words on a par with God’s. “You have heard that the ancients were told ... but I say to you” (Mt 5:21-22) is repeated over and over again. Other passages include Mt 28:18-19; Jn 13:34; and Mt 5:18 and Mt 24:35.

He requested prayer in His name. Jesus not only asked men to believe in Him and obey His commandments, but also He asked them to pray in His name (Jn 14:13-14, 15:7, 14:6). The disciples responded by not only praying in Jesus’ name (1Cor 5:4), but to Christ (Ac 7:59).

Clearly, Jesus claimed to be equal with Yahweh of the OT.

B. What Claims Did the Disciples Make About Jesus?

They attributed to Jesus titles of Deity. The apostles agreed with their Master, calling Him “the true light” (Jn 1:9), and ascribing many other titles to Him (Rev 1:17; 1 Cor. 10:4; 1Pe 2:6-8 [cf. Ps 18:2, 95:1]; Eph. 5:28-33; Rev 21:2; 1Pe 5:4; Heb 13:20). He is seen as the forgiver of sins (Ac 5:31; Col 3:13; cf. Jer 31:34; Ps 130:4) and “Savior of the world” (Jn 4:2; cf. Isa 43:3).

They considered Him to be Messiah-God. Luke calls Jesus Immanuel – God with us (cf. Isa 7:14). The very title “Christ” has the same meaning as the Hebrew “Messiah” (Anointed). Jesus is the One who was pierced (Jn 19:37; cf. Zech 12:10. Paul interprets Isaiah’s message (“For I am God, and there is no other. ... To Me every knee will bow, and every tongue will swear” (Isa 45:22-23) as applying to his Lord (Phil 2:10-11) – in other words, everyone will call Jesus both Messiah (Christ) and Yahweh (Lord).

They attributed the powers of God to Him. According to the apostles, Jesus raised the dead (Jn 11), forgave sins (Ac 5:31; 13:38), and is the creator and sustainer of the universe (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16-17).

They associated His name with God's. Jesus' name appears alongside God's, often in Trinitarian formulations (Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Mt 28:19; 2Cor 13:14).

They called Him God directly. Thomas called Jesus God directly (Jn 20:28). Other passages include Col 2:9; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8; Phil 2:5-8; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; John 1:1.

They said He was superior to angels. Jesus was considered to be not simply more than a man, but greater than any created being (Eph 1:21; Mt 8:32; Rev 22:8-9; Heb 1:5-6).

C. What Evidence Did Jesus Give to Support His Claims?

Not only did Jesus claim to be Deity, He gave several lines of evidence to support it.

He fulfilled Messianic prophecies. There are dozens of prophecies in the OT regarding the Messiah. Some of the most significant prophecies which Jesus fulfilled are:

- He was born of a woman (Gen 3:15; Gal 4:4)
- He was born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Mt 1:21ff)
- He would be "cut off" 483 years after the declaration to reconstruct the temple in 444 BC (Dan 9:24ff).
- He was of the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, 22:18; Mt 1:1; Gal 3:16).
- He was of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10; Lk 3:23, 33; Heb 7:14)
- He was of the house of David (2Sa 7:12ff; Mt 1:1).
- He was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Mt 2:1; Lk 2:4-7).
- He was anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isa 11:2; Mt 3:16-17).
- He was heralded by the messenger of the Lord (John the Baptist) (Isa 40:3; Mal 3:1; Mt 3:1-2).
- He would perform miracles (Isa 35:5-6; Mt 9:35).
- He would cleanse the temple (Mal 3:1; Mt 21:12ff).
- He would be rejected by Jews (Ps 118:22; 1Pe 2:7)
- He would die a humiliating death (Ps 22; Isa 53) involving:
 - rejection (Isa 53:3; Jn 1:10-11; 7:5, 48).
 - silence before His accusers (Isa 53:7; Mt 27:12-19).
 - being mocked (Ps 22:7-8; Mt 27:31).
 - piercing His hands and feet (Ps 22:16; Lk 23:33).
 - being crucified with thieves (Isa 53:12; Mt 27:38).
 - praying for His persecutors (Isa 53:12; Lk 23:43)
 - piercing His side (Zech 12:10; Jn 19:34)
 - buried in a rich man's tomb (Isa 53:9; Mt 27:57-60)
 - casting lots for His garments (Ps 22:18; Jn 19:23-24).
- He would rise from the dead (Ps 16:10; Mk 16:6; Ac 2:31)
- He would ascend to heaven (Ps 16:10; Mk 16:6; Ac 2:31)
- He would sit down at the right hand of God (Ps 110:1; Heb 1:3).

He led a miraculous and sinless life. Although Jesus' enemies brought false accusations, Pilate could find no guilt in Him (Lk 23:4). A soldier and a thief at the cross agreed (Lk 23:47, 41). His disciples, those closest to Him agreed. Peter called Him "a Lamb without blemish or defect" (1Pe 1:19) and added, "Nor was any deceit found in His mouth (2:22). John called Him "Jesus Christ the righteous" (1Jn 2:1), while Paul stated that He "knew no sin" (2Cor 5:21).

Regarding the miraculous nature of His ministry, He turned water to wine (Jn 2:7ff), walked on water (Mt 14:25), multiplied bread (Jn 6:11ff), opened the eyes of the blind (Mk 9:7ff), made the lame to walk (Mk 2:3ff), and cast out demons (Mk 3:11ff). He even raised the dead on several occasions (Jn 11:43-44; Lk 7:11-15; Mk 5:35ff). When asked if He was the Messiah, He used His miracles as evidence (Mt 11:4-5).

He was resurrected. Nothing like Jesus' resurrection is claimed by any other religion, and no miracle has as much historical evidence to confirm it. Jesus appeared to more than 500 of His disciples on at least eight different occasions over a 40-day period following His resurrection. He conversed with them, ate with them, let them touch Him, and cooked breakfast for them.

D. Old Testament and the Resurrection

The apostles applied specific passages of the OT to the resurrection of Christ (Ps. 16:8-11; cf. Ac 2:25-31, 17:2-3). The OT also teaches the Resurrection by logical inference. The Messiah was to die (Ps 22; Isa 53) and have an enduring political reign from Jerusalem (Isa 9:6; Dan 2:44; Zech 13:1). The only way to reconcile these teachings is if the Messiah who dies is raised from the dead to reign forever.

E. Jesus Predicted His Own Resurrection

Jesus also predicted His resurrection on several occasions. Even in the earliest part of His ministry, He said "Destroy this temple [His body], and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). He compared His burial and resurrection to Jonah's three days in the sea monster (Mt 12:40). His resurrection became a frequent theme of His ministry (Mk 8:31). Jesus even taught that He would raise Himself from the dead (Jn 10:18).

Karl Popper pointed out that whenever a "risky prediction" is fulfilled, it counts as confirmation of the theory.¹¹

F. Jesus Actually Died on the Cross

The Koran claims that Jesus only pretended to be dead (Surah IV:157), and many skeptics have said that He appeared to be dead, possibly being drugged, but revived while in the tomb. The medical evidence, however, clearly indicates that Jesus died a natural physical death, as illustrated in the 1986 *Journal of the American Medical Association* article, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ."¹²

¹¹ Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, p. 36.

¹² Edwards, W. D., W. J. Gabel, and F. E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 21 March 1986, p. 1463.

1. There is no evidence that Jesus was drugged. He turned down the painkiller commonly given to crucifixion victims (Mk 15:23). Just before death, He took just a sip of sour wine to allow His parched throat to speak (v. 36).
2. Jesus experience a severe loss of blood. He “sweat, as it were, great drops of blood” (Lk 22:44), indicating the rare condition of hematidrosis. He had been beaten and whipped repeatedly with a Roman scourge with pieces of bone or metal on its tip, which tore skeletal muscles and set the stages for circulatory shock. A crown of thorns had been placed on His head. Finally, He had about four nails – about 5 to 7 inches in length and about 3/8 inch square – driven into his hands and feet.
3. His side was pierced with a spear, as evidenced by a flow of blood and “water” (Jn 19:34; likely pleural or pericardial fluid). Though Jesus was likely dead even before this point, He clearly could not have survived this final thrust.
4. Although the standard procedure for crucifixion was to break the victim’s legs so that he could not lift himself to exhale, the Roman executioners declared Jesus dead without breaking His legs (v. 33).
5. Pilate asked for assurance that Jesus was really dead before releasing the body for burial.
6. Jesus was embalmed with about 75-100 pounds of spices, bandaged, and laid in a guarded tomb (v. 39-40). Even if He had woken up in the tomb, He could not have unwrapped Himself, rolled back the tomb entrance stone, overcome the guards, and escaped unnoticed (Mt 27:60). Further, if Jesus had managed all this, His appearance would have been more like a resuscitated wretch than a resurrected Savior.

G. Jesus Rose Bodily From the Grave

Not only did Jesus die, but He also rose in the same physical body in which He died. By reviewing alternate explanations, we can clearly see that only the Resurrection can explain all the facts.

Objection: Joseph of Arimathea took the body. The objections to this theory are threefold. First, Joseph, himself a disciple, had no reason to steal the body (Lk 23:50-51). Second, he had no time. He was a devout Jew and would not have broken the Sabbath, especially at Passover (v. 50-56). He would have been seen at night with torches; there was a Roman guard posted the day after the Sabbath in front of the tomb (Mt 27:62-66); and the following morning women came by dawn (Lk 24:1). Finally, the body was never found, even though nearly two months elapsed before the disciples began preaching.

Objection: Roman or Jewish authorities took the body. This theory doesn’t even make sense. If they had the body, why would they accuse the disciples of stealing it? (Mt 28:11-15) Besides, they could have stopped the Resurrection story cold by simply bringing forth the body.

Objection: The disciples took the body. This does not fit with what we know of the lives of these men. They were not dishonest, nor did they follow cleverly devised tales (2Pe 1:16). Nor were they clever men trying to make Christ’s predictions come true. On the night of His crucifixion, they did not even understand that He was going to die, let alone be raised (Jn 13:36). They were bewildered by the empty tomb (20:9), and they hid in fear of the Jews

(20:19). Clearly they were not the sort of men who would steal a body from a heavily guarded tomb.

Objection: The tomb was never visited. The Gospels clearly say that several people went to the tomb: some women (Mk 16:1), John, and Peter (Jn 20:3-8). Further, the guards would have made a thorough search before reporting to the Jewish leaders (Mt 28:11ff).

Objection: The women went to the wrong tomb. If this were the case, the authorities could have sent them to the right tomb and shown them the body, thereby easily disproving all claims to a resurrection.

H. Jesus Appeared in a Resurrected Body

The most outstanding proof that Jesus rose from the dead is that He was seen by more than 500 people on twelve different occasions. The creed-like statements recorded in 1 Cor. 15:3-5 are from very early in the life of the church.

Jesus rose bodily, not just spiritually. The term “spiritual body” (Gr. *pneumatikos soma*) in v. 44 means a spirit-dominated or supernatural body, in contrast to the “natural body” (Gr. *psychikos soma*) we now possess. Jesus ate flesh and bones (Lk 24:39), ate fish (v. 42-43) and challenged doubters to touch Him and see (v. 39). He told Thomas to “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side” (Jn 20:27). It is impossible to suggest that the disciples saw a spirit or illusion.

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