



4

## A seemingly crazy claim

Did God visit Earth?



## BOOKLET 4

# A seemingly crazy claim

Did God visit Earth?

## Why Christians believe Christianity to be true

A simple and authentic explanation of things you might not otherwise hear

A Shining Lights Trust (NZ) resource

By Dave Mann © 2023

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DAVE MANN, AUTHOR



# A crazy claim

Without a doubt, Jesus is the most significant person to have ever lived. No one in history comes anywhere close. His influence is global, and so profound in our culture that many of his values have become like ‘the air we breathe’.

Also, where some have had great influence for ‘bad’ — like Karl Marx or Hitler, Jesus’ influence has been for remarkable good. Jesus gifted values of love and charity to the world, affecting the very way we think.

- But Jesus didn’t claim to be just a good man!



## REVISION

We have covered three areas in this series so far:

**Booklet 1:** Reasons Christians believe a Creator God exists

**Booklet 2:** Reasons from history, archaeological and textual analysis that explain why they trust the Bible as an accurate record of history in which God has revealed himself to us.

**Booklet 3:** Fulfilled predictions — which prove the hand of God behind the Bible, while also pointing to a ‘coming Messiah’ — with predictions that Jesus specifically fulfilled.

The next logical question is: Who is Jesus? This booklet is called his ‘crazy claim’ because, more than claiming to be a good man, teacher or prophet, Jesus claimed to be God visiting Earth.

It’s not a normal claim!



## Could it be true?

In the West, Jesus is so much a part of our heritage that it becomes easy to forget how radical and transformative he was, or how genuinely significant his claim was. If anyone else claimed to be God, we'd consider them completely bonkers!

What makes this topic so important to discuss is the fact that about two billion people across the globe today (let alone in history) see reason to believe Jesus' claim to be true!

Others, however, feel sceptical of Jesus' claim. This includes some academics, who have sought by various means to 'reinterpret' or 'rewrite' Jesus. They've tried to present him as an ordinary human being. The real Jesus, they suggest, would roll over in his grave if he knew people were worshipping him!

Popular depictions of Jesus, like in the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*, have portrayed Jesus as a man uncertain about his identity and mission.

In this booklet we will therefore consider whether Jesus was clear about his identity, or confused, and then the importance of his coming back to life — including why so many have become convinced that this did actually happen.

Please remember in this discussion that, if a God does exist, miracles are possible. The question is not therefore whether it's possible for God to come to Earth as a human, but whether or not he actually did!

# PART I. DID JESUS REALLY CLAIM TO BE GOD?

Some suggest Jesus didn't claim to be God — using the Bible as their evidence. Let's then consider this suggestion.

## 1. *Might Jesus have seen himself as ordinary — and then changed his mind?*

Monty Python's comedy movie, *The Life of Brian*, depicts a Jesus-like character who was falsely 'accused' of performing a miracle, and then assumed by the people to be the Messiah. Brian ends up dying because he couldn't convince the people he *wasn't* the Messiah. Has history interpreted Jesus wrongly like poor old Brian?

A common title for Jesus today is the 'Son of God'. Yet, while this title comes from the Bible, in the Gospel accounts it's clear that Jesus avoided using it. Instead, he called himself the 'Son of Man'. What was he saying, and why not just openly admit that he believed he was the Son of God?

On face value it looked like he was saying he's just another human (like Brian in the movie). Some have therefore suggested Jesus only saw himself as a man, but maybe later changed his mind.

This suggestion is, however, hard to sustain for a cultural reason. First-century writers didn't see people as developing or changing over time. To them, a person's actions through time merely revealed what the person was truly like all along.<sup>2</sup> The suggestion is, therefore, more of a Western idea than one that fits First Century Palestine.



It also doesn't fit the clear message of the Gospel accounts. They make it obvious that Jesus knew who he was from a young age. For example, they record Jesus at the Temple as a teenager, already believing God was his Father.<sup>3</sup>

The message of the Gospels isn't that Jesus was confused or changing his mind. They are instead telling us who he was — while living in a society that couldn't accept his claim!

## ***2. Why did Jesus sometimes hide his identity?***

If he knew or believed himself to be the 'God-Man', why not just say so?





## a. Redefining your identity broke cultural norms

In their culture a person's identity came from (a) their parents, (b) where they lived and (c) their job.

Therefore, in their culture, Jesus already had an accepted identity. He was Jesus, the son of Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth!

The problem is that Jesus wanted to redefine that, but in those times, you didn't get to 'break away' from your parents like we do in our culture today. It's normal for us to leave home to establish our own identity (dress-style, career, hobbies, home). This was not the case for a first-century Jew.



*"Human identity was established by the group and was confirmed to the individual by members of the group. Life was not by and large about establishing one's unique place in the world, discovering one's distinctive character or making personal claims for oneself."<sup>4</sup>*

New Testament Professor, Ben Witherington, III

How then could a person 'break the mould' in that culture? The answer is: *others had to confer that new identity upon them!*

Jesus couldn't therefore just say, *"I'm breaking the mould. I'm not actually just a carpenter — I'm the Messiah."* Instead, he had to live the life of the Messiah, and do the things the Messiah would do — and wait for people to recognise and confirm that identity. Only then could he confirm or deny what they suggested.

Once we understand this cultural factor, several other things begin to make sense. For example, after some time Jesus asked his disciples, *"Who do people say I am?"* and *"Who do you say I am?"* Peter answered, *"You are the Christ"*, and Jesus confirmed it.<sup>5</sup> Even with his closest friends, Jesus waited for them to work it out — and there are other examples of this same pattern.<sup>6</sup>

## b. The Jews expected the Messiah to be a military leader

A second reason why Jesus 'hid' his identity is that openly claiming to be the Messiah could have resulted in a military uprising, and his death.



While Jesus was coming as the spiritual Saviour of the world to save us from the sin and selfishness of our hearts, the Jews were awaiting a military Saviour of Israel to save them from the military occupation of the Roman Empire!

Knowing this makes sense of examples like in Mark 1:40-44 where Jesus healed a man of leprosy, but then told him, “*See that you don’t tell this to anyone*” Jesus was hiding from too much attention too early on, and from a misunderstanding of his mission. The expectation of a military leader arising who performed miracles, and who would re-establish the nation of Israel, was deeply entrenched.

Even Jesus’ disciples still held hope that Jesus might physically fight the Romans until his final arrest!<sup>7</sup> So Jesus hid his claim to buy time, to redefine his mission and purpose.

## c. There was no concept of the trinity (God as Father, Son and Spirit)

A third reason Jesus may have avoided claiming divinity was because it would have made no sense to them — resulting in the accusation of blasphemy (making yourself equal to God). For example, how could God be in heaven but also on Earth as a divine human? Even though this was predicted, it made no sense.

Even today, Christians must accept by faith the idea that God can be our Heavenly Father in heaven — while present on Earth as the Holy Spirit, while also existing as Jesus.

Claiming to be the ‘Son of God’ would most likely have resulted in a

premature effort to kill him for blasphemy. So, Jesus was careful with his words — allowing people to examine his life and the Scriptures, to come to their own conclusion in their own time!

### **3. Are there other ways Jesus told us he was Divine?**

While Jesus was careful not to say out loud that he was the ‘Son of God’, he made this claim in other ways, fitting the cultural norms of the time.

Here are eight other ways Jesus told people who he was.

#### **a. He announced it at the beginning of his ministry**

At the start of Jesus’ ministry, it’s recorded that he went into the synagogue at Nazareth, where he was handed a scroll to read with the book of Isaiah (from the Bible) on it. Choosing a passage that predicted the Messiah’s ministry of preaching and healing, he said, *“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*<sup>8</sup> His point was clear — though no one other than his mother probably believed it yet.

#### **b. He allowed people to worship him**

For example, Jesus heals a man born blind, and the guy starts to worship him.<sup>9</sup> The right and humble thing to do would be to stop the man — but Jesus strangely didn’t.

Later, ‘doubting Thomas’ (one of Jesus’ disciples) finally realises who Jesus is. He declares, *“My Lord and my God!”*<sup>10</sup> — and Jesus accepts the praise!



### c. He claimed to forgive sin (wrongdoing)

In Jewish and Christian belief, only God can forgive the sinful choices that bring guilt to our 'hearts' and corrupt our thoughts and decisions.

Then in Mark 2:5-7, a paralysed man is carried to Jesus by friends. They wanted Jesus to heal the man — but Jesus instead says, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” The Bible records the reaction of the religious leaders who were watching. “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”



Jesus in disagreement with the Scribes and Pharisees

*Jesus then said, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralysed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’?”*

Obviously, to forgive his sins is harder. Only God can do that. However, no human could miraculously heal a paralysed man either. So, what would it mean if Jesus performed such a miracle?

*Jesus said, “But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on Earth to forgive sins. So he said to the paralysed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.”*

And the man was healed in full view of everyone.



#### d. He claimed to have an authority higher than the Law

The 'Law' refers to the first five books of the Bible in which God gives various moral, ceremonial (worship), governmental and health laws to Israel. The Law's purpose was to help establish Israel as a new nation. God gave these commands through Moses, who, to the Jewish people, was the greatest man ever to have lived.

Jesus then refers to the Mosaic Law saying things like, “...it was said to you... but I now say to you.” In each case he added to the law.<sup>11</sup> It was outrageous! Who has authority to set aside the divinely inspired Jewish Scriptures, let alone to add to them with his own teachings?

Yet Jesus taught with such authority that people couldn't bring themselves to deny that he might have that authority.<sup>12</sup>



### e. His miracles left little doubt

Some of Jesus' miracles were simply outstanding! One day Jesus walked on water and calmed a storm in full sight of his disciples, who were overwhelmed by it. They declared, *"Truly you are the Son of God"*<sup>13</sup> — and Jesus accepted their praise.



Even the sceptical religious leaders admitted to him, *"we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."*<sup>14</sup>

As noted in booklet 3, the writings of various other historians from the time, like Josephus<sup>15</sup> and the Jewish Talmud<sup>16</sup>, who were not followers of Jesus, also affirmed that he was a miracle worker. As far as history goes, Jesus did perform miracles.

### f. He made statements that subtly claimed Divinity

One of the most obvious examples of his divinity was the way Jesus addressed God as his *Father*. The word he used for Father was 'Abba' — which was the *"word of closest intimacy."* No one in Israel had ever addressed God in this way.<sup>17</sup>



How the Pharisees reacted proves the point that this level of intimacy with God was unheard of. It says they tried *"all the more to kill him"* because *"he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God"* (John 5:18).

### g. He eventually made his claim clear

As one example, the words “I AM” were considered one of God’s names. This came from a question Moses put to God for his name — to which God replied, ‘I AM. Tell them the I AM has sent you’.<sup>18</sup> These words became sacred to the Israelites — and then Jesus said, “*very truly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I am.*”<sup>19</sup>

One scholar commented on the significance of this, saying,

*“In one single statement the supreme truth about the supreme Man is made known — His pre-existence, His absolute existence.”<sup>20</sup>*



According to Mosaic Law, if a Jew heard another Jew say blasphemous words like this, they had to stone that person to death<sup>21</sup> — which is exactly what the crowd then tried to do.<sup>22</sup> (Their attempt failed.)

Their response was, however, only correct if Jesus was not the Son of God, which is the point!

### *What happened next?*



One by one, Jesus' followers changed their minds about who he was. 'Jesus the Carpenter from Nazareth' gradually became 'Jesus the Messiah'. It then gradually dawned upon the disciples that Jesus was also claiming more than this: to be 'God clothed in flesh, living amongst us to achieve an unbelievably humble purpose'. It was a head-spinner!

Jesus described his claim and purpose in what has become the most well-known verse in the Bible. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

### ***What did Jesus mean by 'Son of Man'?***

While the obvious meaning of 'Son of Man' was 'just another human', the term 'Son of Man' had a second possible meaning. The book Daniel in the Bible (530B.C.) predicted a coming Messiah who would have the divine power of God — and he is called a 'son of man' (meaning he would be a human).



*"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a **son of man**, coming with the clouds of heavens... He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."*

— Daniel 7:13-14

Jews and Christians are called to only worship God.

(Anybody or anything else is considered blasphemous.) This

'Son of Man' referred to by Daniel — who had authority, glory, sovereign power, and who was to be worshipped — *was therefore also God!*



The same idea of a 'God-Man' (God visiting Earth) is predicted in other places — Isaiah 9:6-7 being a notable example.

*"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."*

How could God become a human? It's a shocking and confusing prediction.

How could God limit himself to 'fit' inside a human body?

How could God be here on Earth — and at the same time exist beyond our time/space dimension?

## ***Then Jesus confirmed it***

At the end of his ministry, Jesus finally confirmed what he had meant. At his trials, Caiaphas a high priest asked him, *“Are you the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the Blessed One?”*

After three years of refusing to directly answer the religious leaders about who he was, Jesus said, *“I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Mark 14:61-65).

In saying this, he quoted directly from Daniel 7!

With these words he finally told them what he had meant by the words ‘Son of Man’ all along!

The religious leaders responded by accusing him of blasphemy, and to seek his death — which they achieved the very next day.

*“Unique among criminal trials is this one in which not the actions but the identity of the accused is the issue. ...where the charge, confession, and even the inscription placed above his head on the cross... all are concerned with the one question of Christ’s real identity”<sup>23</sup>*

Irwin H. Linton, a lawyer who examined this matter.



## PART II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION

Now we're clear that Jesus did claim to be the 'Son of God' (God on Earth), we reach the main event.

As the Bible explains it, Jesus died for our wrongdoing. However, without the resurrection (his coming back to life), what would all this mean?

If Jesus stayed dead, how could he be God?

However, if he did rise from death — that means everything!

In fact, the Christian faith hinges on Jesus' resurrection. As the Bible itself says, *"...if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith"* (Corinthians 15:14).

(Remember, the question here is not whether the miracle of the resurrection can happen. If a God exists, miracles can happen. The question is if it did happen or not.)

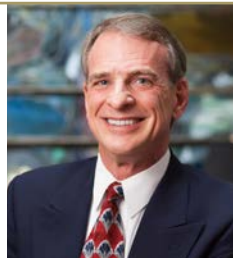
### Objections to his resurrection

Sceptics of miracles have proposed various theories across the past 200 years to 'explain away' the resurrection. Some have suggested Jesus was somehow not fully dead — and was resuscitated. Maybe he was merely unconscious, having fainted, or was in a coma and then woke up. Another suggestion was that they got the wrong tomb, and that's why they found it empty.



The Bible also records the Jewish leaders of the time using another explanation. It documents how the Roman guard (at the tomb) were paid to say the disciples had stolen the body from under their noses (Matthew 28:11-15). In return, the Jewish leaders helped to protect their lives (because death was the penalty for failure as a military guard).

In recent times, American philosopher William Lane Craig investigated the various historical records and objections to the resurrection — to clarify where scholarship was up to after 200 years of active scepticism from academics. His findings were remarkable, because he concluded that there is near universal acceptance in the following four areas.



## THE FOUR AREAS NEARLY EVERY SCHOLAR AGREES UPON

### ***Fact 1. Jesus did die and was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in his personal tomb.***

The four Gospel writers independently verify this. A multitude saw it. A soldier thrust a spear into Jesus' side to check he was dead — and those soldiers were experts in killing people. The Gospel accounts record that the spear caused a flow of 'blood and water' to come from Jesus' side.

Modern doctors confirm what the ancients could not have understood — that this proves Jesus' heart had ruptured, further demonstrating that there is no question Jesus was dead!<sup>24</sup>

Of interest, Joseph (whose tomb was used) was a member of the ruling council who condemned Jesus to death — making him someone the disciples and early Christians should have disliked. Yet still they record that he was the one to provide a place for Jesus to be buried.



According to the late John A. T. Robinson of Cambridge University, with evidence coming from various directions, the burial of Jesus in the tomb is now, “one of the earliest and best-attested (evidenced) facts about Jesus.”<sup>25</sup>

***Fact 2. The women found the tomb empty on the Sunday.***

Today the idea that the tomb was empty is rarely debated. Both the Roman guards placed outside the tomb, and the Jewish leaders of the day — who didn’t like Jesus, agreed the tomb was empty.

***Fact 3. On multiple occasions, individuals and groups met with Christ.***

The Bible records that, after the miracle of Jesus’ resurrection, he met and ate with his followers several times over 50 days. This included speaking to a large crowd of more than 500 people on one occasion.

Remarkably, philosopher Craig’s research revealed that this detail is now rarely questioned — even by those not believing in the resurrection itself.

A study conducted by Gary Habermas, an American New Testament scholar and theologian, on the views of scholars since 1975 revealed that there is near universal agreement on the appearances of Jesus after his death.<sup>26</sup>

Even Gerd Lüdemann, the leading German critic of the resurrection, admits,



*"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."<sup>27</sup>*

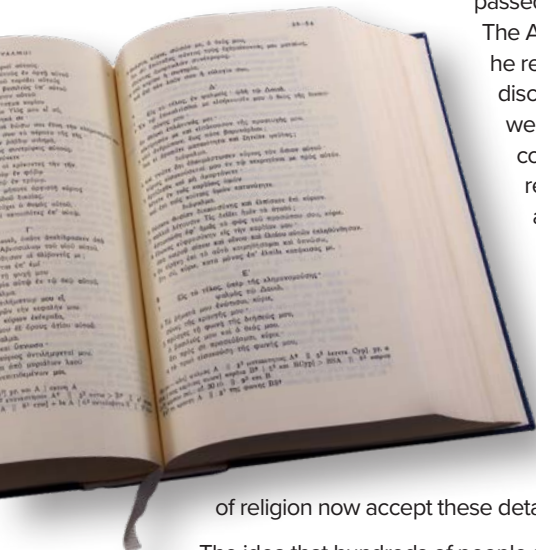
Key to this shared perspective among scholars is the early dating of the New Testament books — as discussed in booklet 2 of this series. The earliest declaration of Jesus' divinity (as in booklet 2) is now widely accepted to be 1 Corinthians 15:4-8 — this being a quotation of an early creed (a passed-on statement of belief).<sup>28</sup>

The Apostle Paul indicates that he received this creed from the disciples at Jerusalem when he went there three years after his conversion in about A.D.35.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the creed can be dated to about A.D.38.<sup>30</sup>

To have existed by A.D.38 the creed must have been written prior — and firmly believed as a fact before that (noting the earliest date for Jesus' death and resurrection is A.D.30). As a result, even sceptics of miracles and

of religion now accept these details and dates.

The idea that hundreds of people saw something that convinced them Jesus had risen is therefore rarely debated.



#### ***Fact 4. The disciples believed Jesus had risen from the dead.***

This is to say, it wasn't just a 'spiritual Jesus' with them — like a ghost, but instead the actual (material, physical) Jesus, literally raised from death, with the holes in his hands, feet, and side still in his body.

The disciples' belief and claim of a risen Christ is surprising because they would naturally have been inclined to believe the opposite. The Jews of that time did not have a concept of a dying and rising Messiah. Jesus' resurrection is not the kind of story they would have made up.



For example, the Gospel accounts tell how the disciples ran in fear at the time of Jesus' arrest and death. They did not even believe his prediction that he would die and then rise again to life. At his death they were found grieving — trying to work out how they could have been so deceived.<sup>31</sup> Jewish tradition also asserted that anyone who died on a tree was under God's curse, further suggesting to them (culturally) that Jesus could not be who he claimed. Also, Jewish people believe that rising from the dead cannot happen until the final resurrection — when those who have submitted their hearts to their Creator are raised to eternal life.

Yet they stood to say that Jesus was raised back to life!

Imagine someone you know well had recently died, and yet they walked into the room you are in today. You could work out if it really was or wasn't them!

Imagine if you then spent a few weeks with them. Even if they were a superb actor, you would work it out if it really was or wasn't them!

The disciples spent 50 days with the risen Jesus, and they were entirely convinced!



## How strongly did they believe it was him?

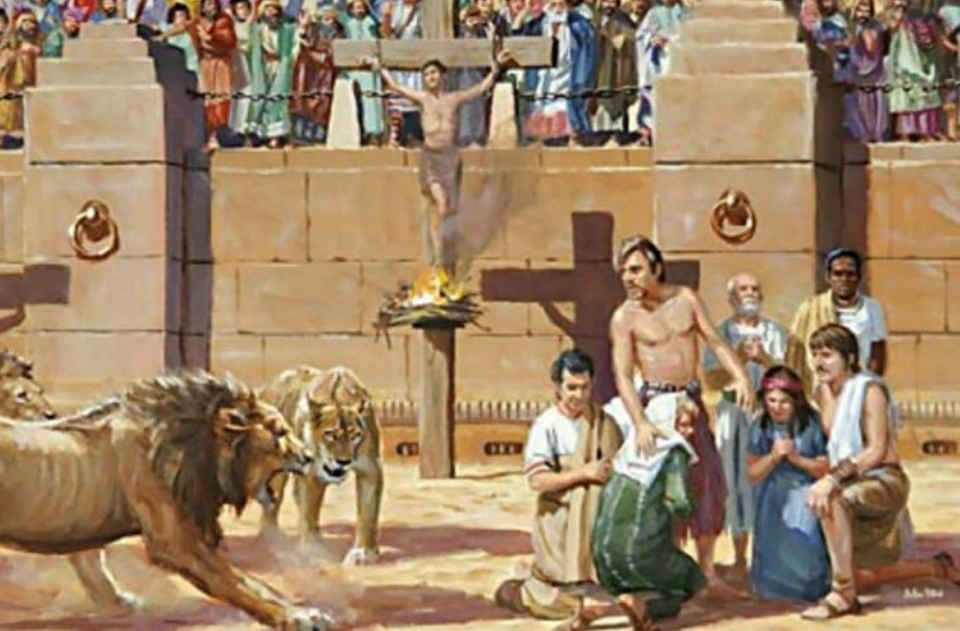
Enough to die for it. All history stands to testify that people don't die for things they know are not true.

Jesus' resurrection transformed his followers into fearless preachers. Church tradition records that all but one of the remaining disciples were killed for their beliefs.

Even Jesus' brother James, who had not believed Jesus was the Messiah, was convinced. He ended up being a key leader in the early Church (after Jesus' disciple, also called James, was killed) — and was also killed (by stoning) specifically for his claim that Jesus (his brother) was the 'God-Man' and Messiah.

It wasn't just a handful of people who became convinced either. Hundreds of people saw Jesus in those 50 days — and the message then spread very quickly, very broadly.





These believers were also remarkably bold in their efforts, even fearless. They started to care for people with leprosy, widows, and orphans. They sold possessions to help the poor. They purchased slaves in the slave markets to set them free.

They then embraced unimaginable sufferings for their claim — without backing down. For example, the Romans famously persecuted early Christians by throwing them to the lions as entertainment, tearing others in two, and covering them in oil to be burnt as candles.

All they had to do to survive was to deny their claims about Jesus — but they wouldn't.

They were killed in their hundreds — and then their thousands.

Fleeing for safety with their families, the early Christians travelled the known world, spreading the message even faster and further.

Thomas, as one example, went as far as India. Remarkably, there are still Christians in Kerala State today who have kept the traditions and faith Thomas spread alive for 2,000 years! That one state of India is, to this day, majority Christian.

Similarly, the disciple Andrew is said to have taken the message to Russia, starting what has continued as the Orthodox Church there. In yet another direction, it is believed it was Matthew who took the message as far as Ethiopia — later being martyred (killed) in the region.

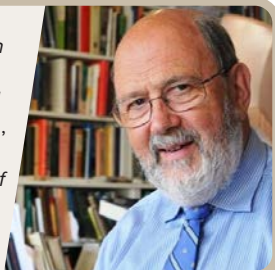
Luke Johnson, a New Testament scholar from Emory University, muses,

*“some sort of powerful, transformative experience is required to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was.”<sup>32</sup>*



N. T. Wright, an eminent British scholar and theologian, concludes,

*“that is why, as a historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him.”<sup>33</sup> Having studied the matter at length, Wright concluded that the evidence was “as certain as those regarding the death of Augustus Caesar in A.D. 14 and the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70!”<sup>34</sup>*



One of the world's leading Jewish theologians, the late Pinchas Lapide, who taught at Hebrew University in Israel (and who was not a Christian) said that the evidence convinced him that the God of Israel raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead!<sup>35</sup> This is particularly remarkable, noting he still did not accept that this risen Jesus was the Jewish Messiah.

The historic evidence for the resurrection is very strong!



## LET'S REVIEW THE ALTERNATIVES AGAIN...

### The conspiracy hypothesis

This theory suggests the disciples deliberately deceived everyone. However, it's a big lie to convince multitudes of and then travel, suffer and die for!

### The apparent death hypothesis

Some sceptics suggest Jesus merely fainted or became unconscious for a couple of days.

### The hallucination hypothesis

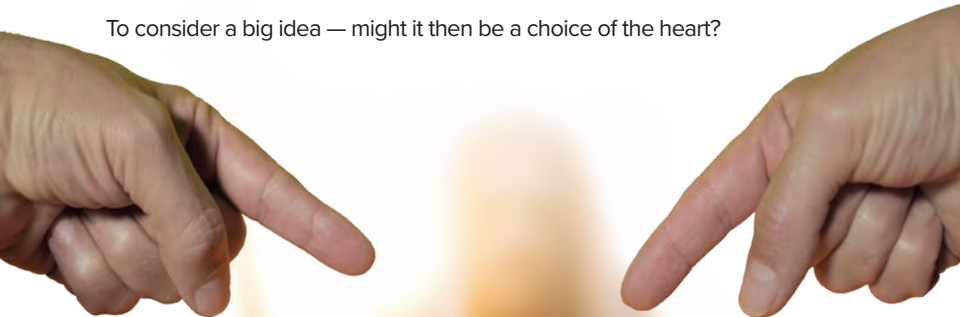
Other sceptical critics suggest that those who saw Jesus alive afterwards somehow all hallucinated the same things at the same times and places. However, these are nearly universally rejected by scholarship today.

Today, the above suggestions that throw scepticism upon the resurrection are nearly universally rejected by scholarship. Craig comments — *thanks to the extent of the evidence we now know — that this puts the sceptical critic in a difficult position.*<sup>36</sup> Nothing but the resurrection makes any sense

as to why the disciples and other witnesses of Jesus' life were radically transformed into fearless preachers, and of the influence they then had.

So, if conclusions are to be based upon evidence, we see that those who choose not to believe in the resurrection actually do so as a conscious choice — not because of the evidence. This is no different to a rejection of the idea of God, or of the reliability of the Bible as a book of history, or even of the possibility of miracles. These things are doubted not because the evidence supports the scepticism — but as a choice.

To consider a big idea — might it then be a choice of the heart?



## Conclusion?

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### The evidence points to a person

#### *— It's something we're supposed to notice*

For the Christian, the recorded history combined with the miraculously fulfilled predictions therefore takes us past a mere religious idea. It points us to a person — Jesus! This is what Christians conclude that God is wanting us to notice from the predictions, and from history!

So, the Christian is a person who has looked at Jesus, and his life, teachings, miracles and resurrection, to decide if he 'fits the picture.' Realising that he does, they choose to trust he was who he claimed to be and reach out to God with faith.

This is to say, it's not one factor that causes a person to embrace a belief and follow it with their life, but many factors, and there's more to come.

## WHERE TO NEXT?

We need to look deeper at Jesus because he didn't only claim to be the man from God. He claimed to be the only way to God. It is, again, a very big truth claim.

If true, this means that Jesus' message is relevant to every person of every class and culture and religion. In fact, to claim to be the only way to God could be said to be quite arrogant — unless it's true.

How are we to assess this? How do Christians make sense of this? What are the balances? What about the other religions?

Thanks for engaging with this brief investigation into why Christians believe Christianity to be true.





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## Endnotes

- 1 Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Zondervan, 1998), p176.
- 2 A recent study by R.A. Burridge on Greco-Roman biographies of that time confirmed this cultural understanding. Other biographies of the time include the likes of Plutarch's *Lives*, Josephus's *Life of Apion* or Tacitus's *Agricola*. The four Gospels share the same biographical style, so the same principle applies. To quote New Testament Professor Ben Witherington, "...the authors assume that a person's character does not develop over time. To the contrary, time is thought to simply reveal the character a person has always had. Human personality was viewed as static..." "...Knowing what we now know on this front, it becomes very difficult to psychoanalyze Jesus on the basis of texts that by and large don't believe in developmental theories of personality..." ["The Christology of Jesus Revisited" by Ben Witherington III, in *To Everyone An Answer*, Eds. Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (InterVarsity Press, 2004), p147].
- 3 Staying on at Jerusalem without his parents' awareness, 13-year-old Jesus (now culturally affirmed as a man, not a child) is re-found by his mother, who says, "Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you". Jesus replied, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:48-50). What is significant is how this reflects that Jesus already called God his Father! While little is written of Jesus' earlier years, in this small glimpse we see something of his self-perception regarding his unique relationship with God.
- 4 Ben Witherington III, p147.
- 5 Mark 8:27-30
- 6 Another example is when John the Baptist had doubts about whether Jesus was the promised Messiah. He sent his friends to ask Jesus. Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised..." (Matthew 11:4-5). While saying "Yes" would have been easier, in their cultural way, John had to come to his own conclusion. So Jesus pointed to the evidence and said, "...report to John what you see and hear..."
- 7 Luke 22:38 and Luke 24:49-51.
- 8 Luke 4:14-21
- 9 John 9:35-3
- 10 John 21:28
- 11 This example is from the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. Jesus said this seven times in this one sermon. See Matthew 5:20, 22, 26, 28, 32, 34, 44.
- 12 Matthew 7:28-29. As another example of this point, the Jews had various ceremonial laws, including regarding what they were allowed to eat. Then Jesus said, "It is not what enters a man that defiles him, but what comes out of his mouth". Just like that, he set aside huge portions of the Old Testament book of Leviticus.



- 13 Matthew 14:33
- 14 John 3:2
- 15 For those aware of the textual issues, this refers to the 10th-century copy of Josephus' work, not the 4th-century copy in which it seems that edits (intended as corrections) were made during copying, as per footnotes in booklet 2.
- 16 There are two strains of the Talmud, the Palestinian and the Babylonian. The Babylonian, in Sanhedrin 43a, is the historical reference referred to here.
- 17 Theologian Michael Green confirms, "Nobody before Him in all the history of Israel had addressed God by this word [Abba]... ..Jews were accustomed to praying to God as Father: but the word they used was Abhinu..." [Michael Green, *Run Away World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1968), p99-100 as in Josh McDowell, *New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p153]. In doing this, "He made a claim that the Jews could not misinterpret..." [Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary series. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1971), p309 as in McDowell, p142].
- 18 In Exodus 3:14. The Hebrew word for 'Lord' also sounds like it may be derived from the Hebrew for 'I am'.
- 19 John 8:58
- 20 C.S. Lewis, *The Glory of Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p92 as in McDowell, p142-143.
- 21 Leviticus 24:13-16
- 22 John 8:59.
- 23 Irwin H Linton, *The Sanhedrin Verdict* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, Bible Truth Depot, 1943), p7 as in McDowell, p139.
- 24 Modern medicine confirms that the flow of blood and water verifies that his heart had burst from overwork due to a lack of blood. This fits Jesus' torture, with his crucifixion preceded by a whipping designed to drain blood from the body.
- 25 John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), p131.
- 26 Gary Habermas, "Experience of the Risen Jesus: The Foundational Historical Issue in the Early Proclamation of the Resurrection," *Dialog* 45 (2006): p292 — referenced in 'Historical Facts Pertinent to Jesus' Resurrection' at [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)
- 27 Gerd Lüdemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus?*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville, Kent.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p80.
- 28 Find a more detailed discussion in Ralph Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1974), p57-59.
- 29 Galatians 1:18-19 and Acts 9:26-29
- 30 Because the books of the New Testament were written within the lifetimes of many of the Apostles and first believers, inaccuracies would have been pointed out by other eyewitnesses if they existed, bringing the letters to disrepute — instead of being fully trusted as they were.
- 31 Luke 24:13-19. At this time, they did not call Jesus the Messiah or recognise him as the Son of God. They called him a prophet and miracle worker — which is a lot less than they were hoping for. They were trying to work out how the man they believed to be the Messiah could have died.
- 32 Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), p136, as in 'The Resurrection of Jesus' [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)
- 33 N. T. Wright, "The New Unimproved Jesus," *Christianity Today* (September 13, 1993), p26.
- 34 N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), p710, as in 'Historical Facts Pertinent to Jesus' Resurrection' at [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)
- 35 Pinchas Lapide, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (London: SPCK, 1983). [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)
- 36 For more information read W.L. Craigs summary of his research in 'The Resurrection of Jesus' at [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)





*I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than . . . that Christ died and rose again from the dead.*



— Thomas Arnold, History Professor, Oxford University

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