

# A Brief Case for Christianity

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Like all events that have happened in the past, analyzing the truth of Christianity requires an evaluation of the claims using legal and historical methods. Things that happened in the past cannot be proven scientifically because they cannot be recreated. For instance, we cannot prove scientifically that George Washington was the first president of the United States because we cannot recreate the American Revolution; but we can conclude beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was the first president by evaluating the writings, archaeological evidence of that time. While we cannot speak to George Washington, we would give the greatest weight to his writings and other eyewitness accounts of the events surrounding his presidency.

Bible scholars Norman Geisler and Frank Turek suggest the following line of reasoning when assessing the claims of Christianity:

1. The New Testament is historically reliable
2. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God
3. Jesus' claim was confirmed by:
  - a. Fulfillment of all messianic prophecies
  - b. His sinless and miraculous life
  - c. His prediction and accomplishment of His resurrection
4. Therefore Jesus is God
5. Whatever Jesus teaches is true
6. Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God
7. Therefore, the Bible is the Word of God

Let's consider each of these points in order. If the truth of each point can be shown, then the conclusions are sound.

## **1. The New Testament is historically reliable**

One of the amazing things about the Bible is that it was written over a period of 1500 years in three languages and by forty different authors. Yet the Bible tells one unified story of the Glory of God and the redemption of mankind through the work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament was completed in the first century. Nearly 6,000 partial and complete Greek manuscripts from the early days of the church survive to this day. Far more early copies of the New Testament exist than any other ancient book. In contrast, only eight manuscripts of *Thucydides' History* still survive.<sup>1</sup> The New Testament manuscripts include fragments of the Gospel of John dating to about A. D. 130, and complete Gospels of Luke and John dating to A. D. 200. By analyzing these manuscripts, scholars have concluded that the New

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<sup>1</sup>Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 27.

Testament transmission accuracy is 99.5%. Other ancient books have transmission accuracy in the 90 to 95% range. Scholars have concluded that none of the variations in manuscripts affects in any way the beliefs of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> The following table compares books from the ancient world with respect to the date of the earliest copies that have survived to this day, the number of copies surviving to this day, and the time span that elapsed between the writing of the original book and the surviving copies.

**Manuscripts of the Ancient World**

Author/ Book	Date Written	Earliest Copies	Time Gap	Number of Copies
Herodotus <i>History</i>	480-425BC	AD 900	1350 years	8
Thucydides <i>History</i>	460-400 BC	AD 900	1300 years	8
Demosthenes	300 BC	AD 1100	1400 years	200
Plato	400 BC	AD 900	1300 years	7
Tacitus <i>Annals</i>	AD 100	AD 1100	1000 years	20
Pliny <i>Natural History</i>	AD 61-113	AD 850	750 years	7
New Testament	AD 50-100	AD 114-250	50-150 years	5366

As is easily seen from this table, there is far more manuscript evidence for the New Testament than any other ancient book. The New Testament was carefully copied because the scribes who copied it believed it to be the Word of God. Contrary to claims about the existence of lost books of the Bible, the books selected for inclusion in the New Testament were written by eyewitnesses to the events or their close associates in the first century. Books that could not be traced to an apostle, or were inconsistent with the teachings of the apostles, who were eyewitnesses, were rejected by the early church. By A.D. 200, an early version of the New Testament, the Old Latin Translation, included all of the books found in

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<sup>2</sup>Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 531-37.

the modern New Testament except Hebrews, James, and 1 and 2 Peter. While discussion continued about the inclusion of a few books, by AD 367, the church affirmed all of twenty-seven books contained in the present-day New Testament as canonical. So we can conclude that the New Testament is a historically reliable book that can be traced to eyewitnesses of the life of Christ and their close associates.

Beyond all of this, the disciples were so convinced of the truth of their message, they were willing to die for their beliefs. Christ's disciples and many others died excruciating and painful deaths for their beliefs or for refusing to worship Roman gods.<sup>3</sup> In many cases their lives would have been spared if they had recanted and denied Christ—but they refused and died by stoning, excoriation, beheading, crucifixion, or by being burnt at the stake—by the hundreds if not thousands they died!<sup>4</sup> It has been said that someone might die for the truth or even for a righteous cause. Someone might even die for a good man, but nobody will willingly die for a lie! If the disciple's story about Jesus' resurrection had been a lie, they never would have paid the ultimate price to hide a lie. This tells us that the disciples had to believe that their story was true.

## **2. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God**

That Jesus claimed to be God can easily be seen from Jesus' words recorded in the New Testament. Here are a few examples:

**John 10:30 "I and the Father are one."**

**Mark 14:61-63 . . . the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need?"**

**John 4:25-26 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."**

## **3. Jesus' claim was confirmed by** **a. Fulfillment of all messianic prophecies**

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<sup>3</sup>Geisler, 382-3.

<sup>4</sup>Foxe's Book of Martyrs

The Bible contains over fifty prophecies about the coming messiah that God would send into the world. The table below shows a few of these. The probability that forty-eight of the messianic prophecies could be randomly fulfilled in the life of a single individual is 1 in 10<sup>157</sup>.

<b>Prophecy</b>	<b>Old Testament Prophecy</b>	<b>New Testament Fulfillment</b>
<b>Messiah will be born to a virgin</b>	<b>Isaiah 7:14</b>	<b>Matthew 1:23</b>
<b>Messiah will be born in Bethlehem</b>	<b>Micah 5:2</b>	<b>Matthew 2:1,6</b>
<b>Messiah will enter Jerusalem to cheering crowds and riding on a colt</b>	<b>Zechariah 9:9</b>	<b>Matthew 21:1-11</b>
<b>Messiah will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver</b>	<b>Zechariah 11:12-13</b>	<b>Matthew 26:14-16</b>
<b>Messiah, offered drink mixed with gall</b>	<b>Psalms 69:21</b>	<b>Matthew 27:34</b>
<b>Messiah's clothes to be gambled for</b>	<b>Psalms 22:18</b>	<b>Matthew 27:35</b>
<b>Messiah's trust in God to be mocked</b>	<b>Psalms 22:7-8</b>	<b>Matthew 27:43</b>
<b>Messiah to be pierced</b>	<b>Zechariah 12:10</b>	<b>John 19:34</b>
<b>Messiah's grave to be among the rich</b>	<b>Isaiah 53:9</b>	<b>Matthew 27:57-60</b>
<b>Messiah will be resurrected</b>	<b>Psalms 16:10</b>	<b>Acts 2:24-28</b>

#### **b. His sinless and miraculous life**

The New Testament includes eyewitness accounts of 35 instantaneous miracles performed by Christ, often before hundreds of watching people. The New Testament tells us that Jesus healed the sick and the blind, controlled natural forces and was able to raise people from the dead. Jesus was able to turn water into wine and to feed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. As amazing as these miracles seem, they would be trivial for the Son of God. Before raising Lazarus who had been dead for four days, Jesus said:

**"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."**<sup>5</sup> (John 11:25)

Jesus prayed and commanded Lazarus to come out of his tomb. The New Testament records the following account:

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said,

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<sup>5</sup>John 11:25

**"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me. "When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go.""**<sup>6</sup>

Jesus changed many hearts and minds that day. The Apostle John tells us:

**Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.**<sup>7</sup>

The New Testament writers also reveal that Jesus led a sinless life:

**For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1Peter 2:21-23)**

### **c. His prediction and accomplishment of His resurrection**

John relates Jesus' prediction of His death and resurrection:

**The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (John 2:18-22)**

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the resurrection is the complete change made by the disciples of Jesus and Saul of Tarsus:

- The Apostles went from demoralized and dejected at the crucifixion to boldly proclaiming the Gospel a few short weeks later—this can only be explained by the fact that they encountered the resurrected Christ.
- Paul was the chief persecutor of the church and did a rapid 180° turn and quickly became its most ardent evangelist— this can only be explained by the fact that he encountered the resurrected Christ.
- Paul suffered unspeakable torment and traveled about 20,000 miles to spread the Gospel. This can only be explained by the fact that they encountered the resurrected Christ.

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<sup>6</sup>John 11:41-44

<sup>7</sup>John 11:45

- Paul, the apostles, and early Christians willingly went to their deaths rather than renounce the Gospel—no one would knowingly die for a lie. Here is our understanding of how Jesus and His followers of Jesus died for their beliefs:

♦ Christ	Crucified
♦ Stephen	Stoned
♦ Paul	Beheaded
♦ Peter	Crucified
♦ James	Stoned and beaten
♦ Mark	Drawn with ropes onto fire
♦ Simon	Crucified
♦ Phillip	Crucified and stoned
♦ Bartholomew	Beaten, crucified, excoriated, beheaded
♦ Andrew	Crucified
♦ Matthew	Run through with spear

That Jesus died on the cross instead of defending himself before Pontius Pilate indicates that He believed the cross was part of His mission. That the disciples and the Paul died for their beliefs means that they believed Jesus message that He was the Son of God. The only possible explanation for the complete change of heart exhibited by Paul and the disciples is that they saw the risen Christ. Many followers of Jesus could have had their lives spared if they had recanted their claims and sworn allegiance to the Roman gods. The Roman Emperor Trajan instructs Pliny, a Roman governor, to let Christian go free if they recant and worship the Roman Gods:

No search should be made for these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that [he] is not (that is, by adoring our gods) he shall be pardoned on the grounds of repentance.<sup>8</sup>

Paul writes in a letter to the Corinthians:

**Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1Corinthians 15:1-8)**

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<sup>8</sup>Trajan's letter to Pliny

In this passage, Paul defines what the Gospel is and tells us that over 500 people have seen the resurrected Christ—he even says that some of them are still alive—so in essence he is saying, go check it out for yourself. He would not do that unless what he was saying was true. Theologian N.T. Wright and Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia see the resurrection account as follows:

The Historian has to say, “How do we explain that this movement spread like wildfire with Jesus as the Messiah, even though Jesus had been crucified?” The answer has to be, it can only be, because He was raised from the dead.

~N.T. Wright

It is not irrational to accept the testimony of eyewitnesses who had nothing to gain? . . . The wise do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. So everything from Easter morning to the Ascension had to be made up by groveling enthusiasts as part of their plan to get themselves martyred.

~Antonin Scalia

#### **4. Therefore Jesus is God**

If Jesus came back to life after being dead for three days, we can reach no other conclusion than, He was what He claimed to be, the Son of God.

#### **5. Whatever Jesus teaches is true**

Since we conclude that Jesus is the Son of God, whatever he taught must be true.

#### **6. Jesus taught that the Bible is the Word of God**

Jesus tells us that the Bible is the Word of God. He promises to send the Holy Spirit to guide the Apostle into all truth.

*According to Jesus the Bible is Imperishable:*

**"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."**  
(Mat 5:17-18)

*According to Jesus the Scriptures (Bible) are true:*

**But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." ( Mat 22:29)**

**"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." (John 17:17)**

**"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (Joh 16:12-13)**

## **7. Therefore the Bible is the Word of God**

If the one who rose from the dead says that the Bible is true, it follows that we should believe Him

## **8. We must understand and seek to live by the Word of God**

If the Bible is the Word of God then it only makes sense that we would seek to understand it and live by it. Every person has to examine the facts and reach his or her own conclusion. This summary presents only a small part of the information and evidence available about Christianity. The following books are good sources for much more evidence in support of Christianity:

*Unshakeable Foundations* by Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino

*I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist* by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek

*A Ready Defense* by Josh McDowell and Bill Wilson