

Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

(Matthew 11:28-30)

*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

(John 14:6-7)

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history many liberal scholars and the general public itself have given a variety of answers to the question: “Who is Jesus of Nazareth?” Some hold on to claims that reject His deity as scriptural teaching and maintain that the Trinity was never part of the teaching of Jesus or His disciples, but a mere invention of the Church centuries later. These see our Lord as a good moral teacher, but totally reject the Bible’s claim for His deity and atoning death on the Cross for our redemption.

To the other extreme, over the last few centuries, some liberal thinkers have even asserted that the picture portrayed of Jesus in the New Testament is not a factual one. These radical claims were often backed up with the assertion that there is little or no evidence in history about Him outside the Bible.

In his essay, *Why I Am not a Christian*, philosopher Bertrand Russell boldly declared: “Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if he did, we don’t know anything about him.”

All these opinions, as we will see in this book, can be totally refuted and contradicted, not only by historical records, but also by plain logic.

Dear reader, I invite you to follow me through the following chapters, where we will examine the writings of just a few of the many first-century historians, who make reference to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the movement He founded.

We will also examine the witness from the New Testament evangelists, who give reliable eye-witness reports to Christ’s life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven; and the testimonies of some of the greatest legal minds in history, who became devote Christians after carefully examining the biblical records these disciples left us.

Finally, we will examine and explore Jesus' fulfilment of more than three-hundred Old Testament prophecies in His short life here on Earth, and the unparalleled influence that He has exercised over the whole Western World and beyond to this very day.

PART ONE

SECULAR EVIDENCE FOR THE HISTORICAL JESUS

The more I see His beauty,
The more I know His grace,
The more I long, unhindered,
To gaze upon His face.

Anonymous

EVIDENCE FROM FIRST CENTURY HISTORIANS

One would have great difficulty in today's world to find knowledgeable people who would agree with such claims as those made by Bertrand Russell quoted above. As I stated previously, many have raised questions about Christ and criticized what the Bible says about Him, but the number of those who claim Jesus never existed at all, or that if He did, we have no evidence for Him outside the New Testament, make statements that are based on a very poor knowledge of historical fact and are therefore without foundation.

We have a great number of secular historians of the first century who casually refer to Jesus. The fact that these casual references are usually antagonistic to our Lord and His followers makes them especially good witnesses to His ministry, since they had nothing to gain from admitting the historicity of the events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of the religious Leader whom they scorned and ridiculed.

These non-Christian writers referred to Jesus casually because it related to the incident they were writing about. Professor Emeritus at the Boston University, Howard Clark Kee, said that the results of the examination of these secular sources, that bear directly or indirectly on our knowledge of Jesus, are to:

Confirm Christ's historical existence, His unusual powers, the devotion of His followers, the continued existence of the movement after His death at the hands of the Roman governor in Jerusalem, and the penetration of Christianity into the upper strata of society in Rome itself by the latter first century.

Similarly, Dr Habermas, a leading researcher and writer on the historical events surrounding Christ, concluded after much research that the ancient extra-biblical sources present a surprisingly large amount of detail concerning both the life of Jesus and the nature of early Christianity. “It is quite extraordinary,” he said, “That we could provide a broad outline of the major facts of Jesus’ life from secular history alone.”

One particular reference to our Lord and Christianity comes from the well-known Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus (A.D. 55-120), who lived through the reigns of many Roman emperors. His most acclaimed works are the *Annals* and the *Histories*. Writing of the reign of Emperor Nero, Tacitus makes reference to the death of Jesus and the existence of Christians at Rome:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

Many biblical scholars have speculated that the “*mischievous superstition*” to which Tacitus refers is most likely a reference to the resurrection. The same is true for one of the references made by Suetonius. Cambridge lecturer Markus Bockmuehl declared that the reports of Tacitus provide us with independent confirmation that Jesus Christ lived and was formally executed in Judea in the reign of Tiberius, and during Pontius Pilate’s office as procurator.

Suetonius, another well-known Roman historian, and chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian, mentions the sect under one named Chrestus. He wrote that the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus so Hadrian expelled them from Rome. This writer, although an enemy to Christianity, still recognised its existence. In another of his works, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Suetonius makes reference to the fire that swept through Rome in 64 A.D. under the reign of Nero: "Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition."

Lucian of Samosata, a Greek satirist of the latter half of the second century, spoke scornfully of Christ and said He was the Man who was crucified in Palestine because He introduced a new cult called Christianity into the world. Lucian wrote of Jesus never once assuming that He or His followers were unreal or imaginary. In his work *The Death of Peregrine* he wrote:

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

Pliny the Younger, a Roman official and governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor (A.D.112), wrote a rather detailed report to Emperor Trajan to seek counsel as to how he must treat the Christians who refused to acknowledge the emperor as God. He explained that he had been killing so many that he wondered if he should continue to kill all who were Christians or only certain ones. Pliny goes on to say that he had made some to curse Christ. In the same letter he also describes early Christian worship practices:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, not to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it.

The Testimony of a Jewish Historian

Another magnificent tribute comes from the writer Josephus, the greatest of Jewish historians. Writing about the middle of the first century, he further attests to the truth that Christ was not just an invention of the Christian Church, but a real historical figure. Flavius Josephus was born in A.D. 37 and was the son of a priest. Because Josephus was a well-educated man, he rose to a well-respected position in the Jewish community, and at the age of nineteen was led to join the Pharisee movement. Some years later he travelled to Rome to plead before Nero for the release of some fellow priests and returned to Jerusalem greatly impressed by the great power of the Roman Empire.

As a result, he tried everything to prevent the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66 A.D., but being unable to restrain the rebellion he himself joined it and was captured by the Romans at the fall of

Jotapata. However, Josephus later became friends with Vespasian, and after being released from prison he returned to Jerusalem with Titus, Vespasian's son, where he served the Roman commander as interpreter and mediator. But once again he failed to convince the Jews to surrender and in A.D. 70 the city fell to the Romans and was completely demolished.

Soon after, Josephus returned to Rome with Titus and settled there, having gained the rights of a Roman citizen, and adopted the emperor's family name – Flavius. There he began his literary work and became the author of the most significant extra-biblical writings of the first century. In A.D. 94 he published the second and longest of his major works, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, which has been for Christians one of the most fascinating contributions to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He wrote:

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

This passage from Josephus' *Antiquities*, which has come to be known as the *Testimonium*, is considered by many Bible critics to be an interpolation, since, they declare, it is unlikely that Josephus, a Pharisee and Jew, would affirm that Jesus was the Christ and had

been proven to be so by fulfilled prophecy, by His miraculous powers and by His resurrection from the dead. In other words, they concluded that Josephus' reference to Jesus could not possibly be genuine.

However, in their defence, none of the critics who criticize this passage can produce a single, ancient copy of Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* that does not contain this passage on Jesus Christ. Neither can they explain how a Christian editor could have altered each of the widely distributed versions during the centuries following their publication. In his popular work, *History of the Christian Church*, the famous historian Philip Schaff declared that all ancient copies of Josephus' book, including the early Slavonic and Arabic language versions, contain this passage about Christ.

It can also be said that if the events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of the Lord actually occurred, as recorded in the four Gospels, it would be very unlikely that the historian Josephus would have failed to mention them in his narrative of that turbulent period. The renowned historian, and former Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, F. F. Bruce suggested that the phrase, "*If it be lawful to call him a man,*" may indicate that the text is authentic, but that Josephus is writing in sarcastic reference to the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God.

Josephus Makes Reference to James and John the Baptist

Following the Testimonium Josephus also refers to Jesus as the brother of James, who was martyred under the high priest Ananias. He wrote: "He assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some of his companions, and when he formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned."

This passage undoubtedly confirms the New Testament reports that Jesus was a real Person of the first century and was identified by His followers as the Christ. The historian also confirmed the Gospel's account of the existence and martyrdom of John the Baptist:

Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, who was called the Baptist; for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness towards one another and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism.

First Century Historians Witness to Darkness at Noon

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour... at that moment... the earth shook and the rocks were split.

(Matthew 27:45,51b)

One of the most intriguing biblical mysteries is the account of the supernatural darkness that covered the light from the Sun for three hours during the afternoon when Jesus' body hung on the Cross. Three of the Gospel writers recorded this extraordinary miracle and, amazingly, two Greek, pagan historians, Thallus and Phlegon. Thallus wrote his historical book in Syria around A.D. 52, only twenty years after the resurrection of Christ. He tried to explain away the great darkness which fell upon the land during the crucifixion, that reached Rome also where he lived. He wrote, "It must have been an eclipse."

Julius Africanus, a North African Christian leader writing in A.D. 215, mentions Thallus' account of the supernatural darkness. He explained that Thallus' theory was impossible because an eclipse of the Sun cannot occur at the same time there is a full moon. Though Thallus' explanation was certainly wrong, his historical reference greatly confirms the Gospels' account regarding this miraculous event, which was well known and required a naturalistic explanation from those outside the Church. But not only, many centuries in advance the prophet Amos recorded a prophecy that accurately predicted that a day would come when the Sun would appear to *go down at noon*:

And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day: and I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation.

(Amos 8:9-10)

The other first-century secular authority comes from Phlegon. He also recorded that an unprecedented darkness, and a devastating earthquake, occurred at noon. The Christian historian Eusebius quoted from Phlegon's historical records as follows:

And so writes Phlegon ... "In the fourth year of the two hundred and second Olympiad there was a great and extraordinary eclipse of the sun, distinguished among all that happened before. At the sixth hour (12.00 am) the day was turned into dark night so that the stars in heaven were seen, and there was an earthquake in Bithynia which overthrew many houses in the city of Nice."

Evidence from Roman Public Archives

In the first few centuries of the early Christian era the official Roman government archives were available to be studied by scholars and government officials. Every year the governor of each Roman province had to submit an official report to the Roman Senate concerning the wars, laws, taxes, trials, and unusual events that occurred during their watch. The Christian writer Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) wrote a book entitled *Apology*, where he defended the Christian faith and the Gospels' account of the events surrounding Christ's crucifixion. He wrote:

At the same time at noon day there was a great darkness. They thought it to be an eclipse, who did not know that this also was foretold concerning Christ. And some have denied it, not knowing the cause of such darkness. And yet you have that remarkable event recorded in your archives.

The Christian martyr and teacher Lucian of Antioch also stated that the Roman Empire's public archives contained a record of this supernatural event that established the miraculous nature of Christ's death on the Cross: "Look into your annals; there you will find that in the time of Pilate, when Christ suffered, the sun was obscured, and the light of day was interrupted with darkness."

The fact that these Christian teachers and writers, in an attempt to defend their faith, appealed to their readers to check out the extraordinary events surrounding Christ's trial and death on the Cross in the Roman public archives provides compelling evidence that such official records existed in their day.

Syrian Philosopher Makes Reference to Jesus

The British Museum has a letter written in around 73 A.D. by a non-Christian named Mara Bar Serapion to his son in prison, encouraging him to pursue wisdom. In his letter he compares Christ to the philosophers Socrates and Pythagoras. Although this man was not a Christian, his reference to Jesus indicates that he did not question the fact that Christ was a historical character. His letter says:

What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgement for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king?

It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea, the Jews ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise king die for good; he lived on in the teaching he had given.

The Megiddo Church Inscription

In 2005 a prayer hall was discovered outside the Megiddo prison. The floor of the prayer hall features a detailed mosaic floor with inscriptions that consecrate the Church to *God, Jesus Christ*. This

find verifies that the Christian Church recognized the divinity of Jesus as early as the third century.

References Found in Jewish and Muslim Writings

Similar to the secular historical records that mention Jesus Christ, the ones found in ancient Jewish and Muslim religious sources are just as unfriendly and hostile towards Christianity and its Founder and beliefs. But all these remarks, however kind and unkind they may be, only serve to give more convincing proof that the Man Jesus Christ did exist.

The Talmudic Writings:

The Talmudic writings are an ancient collection of rabbinical laws and comments on the Law of Moses that preserve the oral tradition of the Jewish people. The Talmud was gradually compiled between A.D. 100 and A.D. 500. One compilation was made in Jerusalem and another more expanded compilation was made in Babylon in A.D. 500 circa. The most significant text that bears witness to the life and ministry of Jesus is found in the Babylonian Talmud. It says:

On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, “He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favour let him come forward and plead on his behalf.” But since nothing was brought forward in his favour, he was hanged on the eve of Passover.

In another translation of this text it says *Yeshu the Nazarene*, which makes the reference to Jesus Christ even stronger. Moreover, the word *hanged* used in the above text is another way to refer to death by crucifixion, as can be seen from the following passages recorded in the New Testament:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

(Galatians 3:13-14)

The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

(Acts 13:27-30)

In the above account the Jewish Talmud clearly affirms the historicity of Jesus and His death by crucifixion. The text also makes reference to the fact that Jesus was crucified on, "The eve of Passover," which completely agrees with the Gospel of John. Finally, the Talmud account attests to Christ's miracles, even though it attempts to explain them away as the work of a sorcerer or magician, of which the Gospels also make mention:

While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons."

(Matthew 9:32-35)

The Jewish rabbi Moses Maimonides (A.D. 1200) wrote about Jesus in his *Mishnah Torah*. In another of his works, *The Laws of Kings and their Wars*, he wrote: “Jesus of Nazareth who aspired to be the Messiah... was executed by the court.”

We find another reference to Christ in the Muslim Quran, where also His mother Mary is mentioned. It refers to Christ as a messenger and totally denies His deity. It says: “Christ the son of Mary who was no more than a messenger, many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth” (Surah 5:75).

In light of all these testimonies, and the many other independent secular accounts available, many modern scholars and professors of history claim that we have more and better historical documentation for Jesus today than for any other religious founder who ever lived. Even if we did not have in our possession the records of the New Testament writers, we would be able to conclude from the many non-Christian sources at hand that: (1) Jesus was from Nazareth; (2) He was a wise and holy Man; (3) He was crucified in Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate; (4) He was believed to have been raised from the dead by His followers; (5) His enemies admitted that He performed unusual miracles and wonders, which they called sorcery; (6) after His death His disciples multiplied rapidly even as far as Rome; (7) His disciples worshipped Jesus as God.

A Final Word to the Faithful Enquirer

As can be seen from the above analysis, at hand we have a clear and remarkably consistent display of hostile, non-Christian historical evidence about the most remarkable Person whose life, teachings, death and resurrection have made a dramatic unparalleled impact on the course of history.

Therefore, it is safe to say that any attempts from those who assert the Lord’s non-existence, or deny His life and ministry, can be

refuted at every turn. The 1974 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica reached the same conclusion:

These independent accounts prove that in ancient times even the opponents of Christianity never doubted the historicity of Christ, which was disputed for the first time and on inadequate grounds by several authors at the end of the eighteenth, during the nineteenth, and at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Consequently, every fair-minded historian and earnest seeker of truth will agree with the conclusion of Professor F. F. Bruce when he said:

Some writers may toy with the fancy of a Christ-myth, but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not the historians who propagate the Christ-myth theories.

PART TWO

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR CHRIST'S DEITY

My earnest wish is
To paint in true colours
The goodness of God to me, and
The depth of my own ingratitude.

Madame Jeanne Guyon

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EVIDENCE FROM EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

Although there is abundant and compelling evidence from many first-century secular sources, whose writings bear testimony to the historicity of Christ, and the fact that the early Church worshipped Him as God from the very beginning, it is, however, the New Testament evangelists who give us the strongest evidence concerning the life, death and resurrection of the most famous and controversial Person in world history.

These first-century eye-witness reporters encourage us to examine for ourselves the importance of their witness to the identity of Jesus and His relevance to each one of us today. They challenge us to consider not only what our Lord did and taught, but, more importantly, who He claimed to be. Let us take a look at just a few of the beautiful records they left for us.

Jesus Claims Equality with the Father

When Jesus was here on Earth, He spoke of Himself in the most extraordinary terms. He claimed to be the “*bread of life*,” and promised that, “*He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.*” He claimed to be the “*light of the world*,” and pledged that whoever followed Him would never walk in darkness but would have the light of life. He also claimed to be the “*way the truth and the life*” and that no one could come to God except through Him.

These are quite remarkable statements, as no other person in human history has ever made the incredible claim to be the means by which other peoples’ spiritual hunger could be satisfied, or the means by which they could enter into a right relationship with God the Father. Yet Jesus made many other claims which transcend

even these. Although He is never reported as using the phrase *I am God*, there are many instances in which Jesus made the same stupendous claim using other terms. He taught that all men should honour Him as they honour the Father, and that to know and see Him was equal to knowing and seeing the Father:

Philip said to him, "Lord show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"

(John 14:8-10b)

Then Jesus cried out: "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness."

(John 12:44-47)

What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one. The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God."

(John 10:29-34)

In the above account it is clear that the Jews understood Jesus' words as a direct claim to deity. Their response shows that they fully understood that He was making Himself equal to God the

Father. According to the Jewish Law, claims like these were regarded as blasphemy and worthy of a crime punishable by death. Again, in chapter eight of John's Gospel, Jesus is in a dialogue with His opponents and they claim Abraham is their father. Our Lord responds by saying:

Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad. Then the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

(John 8:56-59)

By relying on the Old Testament we see that in the above passage Jesus is referring to chapter three of Exodus where God reveals Himself to Moses as *I AM*. This is a title which speaks of absolute timeless self-existence and qualities which can be true only of God. By using the divine name *I AM*, Jesus is again making a clear claim to deity and pre-existence, and the reaction of His opponents prove that they understood His references to mean exactly this. Their knowledge of Moses' Law prompted them to take the judgement into their own hands and they set about to stone Him to death under the charge of blasphemy.

Jesus also used the divine name during the last evening of His life; just before being taken into custody by the detachment of soldiers sent to arrest Him. In John chapter eighteen our Lord asked the approaching troops, "*Whom are you looking for?*" When they replied, "*Jesus of Nazareth,*" He told them, "*I am he.*" This all seems quite normal, yet the soldiers' reaction was incredible. When Jesus said, "*I am he,*" they drew back and fell to the ground. At that point there was no resistance from Jesus and His followers and yet an entire detachment of troops collapsed to the ground in a heap.

The only credible explanation for this seems to rest in the phrase that Christ used to identify Himself. Biblical translators have added the word *he* in order to round out the sentence, but what Jesus actually said was *I AM*. There was something about the majesty and glory of these words and the way in which they were spoken that brought the squad of armed soldiers to the ground in a spectacular demonstration of the presence and power of God. It is also very clear from the four Gospel accounts concerning Jesus' trial that the main crime He was convicted of was blasphemy:

Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming in the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death."

(Matthew 26:63-67)

Knowing that the prophet Daniel had spoken of the Messiah as one like *a son of man*, Jesus deliberately referred to Himself in this manner several times in the New Testament, because of its non-political tone. According to Jewish custom, the only occasion when a high priest was permitted to tear his garment was to express the horror of any blasphemy uttered in his presence. It was only to Jesus' reply that the high priest did so, in this case, and proceeded to have Jesus condemned to death. The accusation against our Lord would have been correct if He was not who He claimed to be.

Jesus Makes Indirect Claims to Deity

In addition to openly declaring His equality to God the Father, Christ said and did a lot of things which, although not direct claims to be God, show that He regarded Himself as being in the same position. On one occasion He asked the Pharisees a very clever and important question:

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet?' If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?"

(Mark 12:35-37b)

Here Jesus puts His shallow-minded opponents into a difficult situation. The only explanation was that the Lord whom God addressed was His Divine Son, who could only become the Son of David later through the incarnation.

Unlike any other religious leader, Christ also frequently appealed to His ability to prove equality with God the Father by predicting the future or by performing spectacular miracles. On one occasion He forgave a man of his sins and appealed to His miracles to prove His divine authority to do so:

And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." Then some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk?' But so that you may know that the Son of Man has

authority on earth to forgive sins” – he then said to the paralytic – “stand up, take your bed and go to your home.”

(Matthew 9:2-7)

Such a question as that posed to the religious leaders would have been impossible for the Jews to answer. Statements like these are easy to say, but to accompany them with performance would require the power of God. Jesus was aware that His audience had doubts about His statements so He proved His authority to them by healing the paralytic.

If Jesus were an impostor, He would have found it easier to just say to the paralyzed man, “Go your way, your sins are forgiven.” However, in healing him, Christ proved that He not only had the power to heal the illness, but the authority to deal with what is often its root cause – sin. At this He was again accused of blasphemy by the scribes for taking to Himself a position reserved for God alone. Endorsements of Jesus’ claims to deity are not only found in the four Gospels, but in many other parts of the Bible as well. They are many in number, but we can mention one or two of them here, as they speak of our Lord doing things which only God could do – create and sustain the Universe. The apostle Paul says of Him:

For by him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him.

(Colossians 1:16-17)

Paul then goes on to say in Colossians that Jesus is *before all things* and that *by Him all things hold together*. In other words, it is *His* power and wisdom which holds our cosmos together and prevents it from becoming a chaos. It would be difficult to make these statements of Paul clearer or more comprehensive, and to no other person, but to God, could they be referred.

If Jesus Wasn't God, He Wasn't Good

As I stated above, it is very significant that not one recognized religious leader has ever claimed to be God; that is with the exception of Jesus Christ. Jesus actually taught that the entire world revolves around Himself and that the eternal destiny of every living soul is dependent on their acceptance or rejection of Him. These were stupendous claims for anyone to make and would certainly need to be tested. C.S. Lewis, former Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge University, pointed out how anyone making such claims as those made by Christ could not be considered a “*good man*” if such claims were false. Lewis claimed that either Jesus was who He claimed to be, or else He was completely insane:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him. “I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg, or else he would be the devil from hell. You must make your choice. Either Jesus was, and is, the Son of God: or else He was a madman or something worse... So, let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.

We can also say that if Jesus' claims to deity were false, then He was not only a lunatic, but also a liar and hypocrite, because He taught others to be honest while He Himself was living a great lie.

However, this alternative is quite impossible when we consider the miracles and deeds our Lord performed, the words He spoke and the profound impact He has had on the entire world over the last two thousand years.

After examining the evidence for Christ's deity, especially in light of the things we just mentioned, the renowned historian Philip Schaff described how absurd it would be to even contemplate the idea that He was anyone other than God's Divine Son. He wrote:

This testimony if not true, must be downright blasphemy or madness. The former hypothesis cannot stand a moment before the moral purity and dignity of Jesus revealed in His every word and work, and acknowledged by universal consent. Self-deception in a matter so momentous and with an intellect in all respects so clear and so sound, is equally out of the question.

How could He be an enthusiast or a madman who never lost the even balance of His mind, who sailed serenely over all the troubles and persecutions as the sun above the clouds, who always returned the wisest answers to tempting questions, who calmly and deliberately predicted His death on the cross, His resurrection on the third day, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the founding of His Church, the destruction of Jerusalem – predictions which have been literally fulfilled?

A character so original, so complete, so uniformly consistent, so perfect, so human and yet so high above all human greatness can neither be a fraud nor fiction.

As we continue to examine the evidence for the deity of Jesus Christ in the following pages, I am fully convinced that you also

will conclude that He could not possibly have been a madman or a liar, or a mere human teacher, as some accept. Therefore, we must carefully consider the final remaining possibility of this analysis that C.S. Lewis left us with: “We are faced with a frightening alternative. Either Jesus was exactly what He said, or else He was insane or something worse. However strange or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”

PART THREE

COMPELLING EVIDENCE SUPPORTING JESUS' CLAIMS

Who can think, without admiring?
Who can hear, and nothing feel?
See the Lord of life expiring,
Yet retain a heart of steel?

Anonymous

03

THE UNPRECEDENTED INFLUENCE OF HIS EXAMPLE AND TEACHING

If we reject the New Testament witness to the identity of Jesus Christ, it would be quite impossible to account for the fact that He left the world with the most profound moral instructions and example that any other human being has ever left. His words and moral laws have been the foundation for entire civilizations in the Western World and beyond. Of this great unprecedented influence the great historian Kenneth Scott Latourette wrote:

As the centuries pass, the evidence is accumulating that, measured by His effect on history, Jesus is the most influential life ever lived on this planet and that influence appears to be mounting.

In a popular work, entitled *Books that Changed the World*, a former president of the American Library Association, Robert B. Downs, concluded similarly:

The Bible has exercised a more profound and continuous influence upon Western civilization than any other literary work... The Jurisprudence and customs of the West have been shaped by the legal and ethical precepts of the Bible.

Despite the amazing progress and advances in the field of science, medicine and technology over the last twenty centuries, no one has ever improved on the wise words of Jesus of Nazareth. To this very day millions of people live with presuppositions based on New

Testament literature without even knowing it. Scholar Griffith Thomas continues these thoughts:

When Jesus left this earth, He told His disciples that after His departure they should do greater works than He had done, and the centuries of Christianity have borne out the truth of this statement. Works greater in kind have been done, and are being done. Jesus Christ is doing more wonderful things today than ever He did when on earth, redeeming souls, changing lives, transforming characters, exalting ideals, inspiring philanthropies, and making for the best, truest, and highest in human life and progress...

We are therefore justified in calling attention to the influence of Christ through the age as one of the greatest, most direct, and most self-evident proofs that Christianity is Christ, and that Christ has to be accounted for. It is impossible to consider this question solely as one of history, it touches life at every point today.

Many modern people are totally unaware that Christianity deserves much credit for many of the political, social, educational, humanitarian and cultural advances present in Western society today. When we examine these benefits of the Christian faith to humankind, we must remember that it is the New Testament teachings lived out in practical ways that play the central role. Examples of these benefits can be seen in:

1. The founding of nearly all major American universities, such as Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, and Princeton.

- 2.The protection of the importance of family life, which greatly contributes to the stabilization of society.
- 3.The development of medicine and healthcare, involving the establishment of many of the first hospitals.
- 4.The founding of political freedom and human rights, which include the protection of women and the abolition of slavery.
- 5.The establishment of humanitarian organizations that embrace the sick, the lonely, the dying, the mentally ill, the homeless and the uneducated.
- 6.The advances of modern science.
- 7.The civilizing of many barbarian and primitive cultures.
- 8.The inspiration for the greatest works of art, music and so forth.

Some Bible critics have tried to counter all of this by quoting instances of the Bible being used as justification for many appalling actions over the centuries. They mention the notorious Inquisitions which the Roman Catholic Church set up to punish the alleged heretics, that reached its peak in Spain from 1481 to 1517. Also the Crusades, the so-called holy wars of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which the same church organized to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims, to mention a few.

In recent times there have been many other smaller examples of professing Christian organizations that frequently misquote the Bible to support their erroneous doctrines. But there is absolutely no justification in the Bible for any of these events. In fact, the Word of God gives a clear warning against those who distort the plain teaching of Scripture, and it cannot be blamed for the cruel

behaviour of misguided religious leaders who have misinterpreted and misapplied its teaching.

So, while it is true that Christianity has had its share of corrupt leaders and religious zealots, who have introduced policies and practices that are completely at odds with the ideals established by Jesus Christ, the Bible's track record for transforming lives for the better in a dying world is still unparalleled in human history.

Of its impact the mighty and well respected Jew Benjamin Disraeli pays this tribute: "Has not Jesus conquered Europe and changed its name to Christendom?" Again, speaking of the permanent value of the life-giving words of Jesus of Nazareth, theologian and apologist Bernard Ramm wrote:

Statistically speaking, the Gospels are the greatest literature ever written. They are loved more, read by more people, quoted by more authors, translated into more tongues, represented in more art, set to more music, than any other book or books written by any man in any century and in any land. But the words of Christ are not great on the grounds that they have such a statistical edge over anybody else's words. They are read more, quoted more, loved more, believed more, and translated more because they are the greatest words ever spoken.

And where is their greatness? Their greatness lies in the pure lucid spirituality in dealing clearly, definitively, and authoritatively with the greatest problems that throb in the human breast; namely, who is God? Does He love me? What should I do to please Him? How does He look at my sin? How can I be forgiven? Where will I go when I die? How must I treat others? No other man's words have the appeal of Jesus' words because no other man can answer these

fundamental human questions as Jesus answered them. They are the kind of words and the kind of answers we would expect God to give.

As we continue to examine the incredible influence and impact that the moral teachings of Jesus Christ have had on subsequent history, we can only conclude that it is nothing short of incredible. In an essay called *The Incomparable Christ* an anonymous nineteenth-century writer puts it wonderfully:

More than nineteen hundred years ago there was a Man born contrary to the laws of life. This Man lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity. He did not travel extensively. Only once did He cross the boundary of the country in which He lived; that was during His exile in childhood. He possessed neither wealth nor influence.

His relatives were inconspicuous, and had neither training nor formal education. In infancy He startled a king; in childhood He puzzled doctors; in manhood He ruled the course of nature, walked upon the billows as if pavements, and hushed the sea to sleep. He healed the multitudes without medicine and made no charge for His service.

He never wrote a book, and yet all the libraries of the country could not hold the books that have been written about Him. He never wrote a song, and yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all the song writers combined. He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students.

He never marshalled an army, nor drafted a soldier, nor fired a gun; and yet no leader ever had more

volunteers who have, under His orders, made more rebels stack arms and surrender without a shot fired. He never practiced psychiatry, and yet He has healed more broken hearts than all the doctors far and near. Once each week the wheels of commerce cease their turning and multitudes wend their way to worshipping assemblies to pay homage and respect to Him.

The names of the past proud statesmen of Greece and Rome have come and gone. The names of the past scientists, philosophers, and theologians have come and gone; but the name of this Man abounds more and more. Though time has spread nineteen hundred years between the people of this generation and the scene of His crucifixion, yet He still lives.

Herod could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him. He stands forth upon the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory, proclaimed of God, acknowledged by angels, adored by saints, and feared by devils, as the living personal Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

04

HIS MIRACLES AND DEEDS

During His short ministry on Earth Christ performed some of the most remarkable miracles ever seen to man. Missing limbs began to grow; blind eyes were opened; the deaf and dumb began to hear and speak; the lame walked; empty eye sockets miraculously received an eye; and the demon possessed were set free from evil spirits and became God worshippers. So great were the crowds that followed Jesus that an invalid had to be lowered through a hole in the roof to get near Him and receive healing:

And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

(Mark 6:56)

They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

(Luke 6:18-20)

As we stated elsewhere, the Lord said that these miracles were in themselves evidence that He was from God:

Do not believe me unless I do what my father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.

(John 10:37-39)

Jesus' miracles demonstrated a supreme authority over nature and the elements that could belong only to God, the author of those forces. As we saw previously in *Colossians 1:16-17*, all things were created by and through Him, and He alone is able to supplement, adjust and recreate as only an intelligent Creator can do.

Griffith Thomas described Christ's miracles as the very essence of His being: "It is noteworthy that one of the words very frequently used of these miracles in the Gospels is the ordinary term *works*. They were the natural and necessary outcome of His life, the expression in act of what He Himself was."

Jesus also appealed to the miracles and healings He performed as confirmation of His credentials to be the Messiah predicted by the Old Testament prophets:

And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them."

(Luke 7:22-23)

However, it is not necessary to go back to the miracles Jesus performed while He walked the towns of Galilee to prove that He was the Son of God. He is exercising that same power today in the lives of countless millions of people, and anyone from the lowest to the greatest can test it.

People from every tribe, race, colour, and nationality can testify that they came to Christ burdened with a terrible sense of guilt and that He gave them absolute peace. Despite their differences in social, economic and intellectual backgrounds, these believers all unite in a common experience of their encounter with the risen Lord Jesus.

As Griffith Thomas rightly commented: "There is, as it has been well said, a fifth Gospel being written; the work of Jesus Christ in

the hearts and lives of men and nations.” The divine power that the Son of God is exerting today over the lives of men, women and children proves beyond any doubt that He is God.

HIS LOVING CHARACTER

Jesus must have been the most wonderful Person to be around. The Gospels tell us that crowds flocked from every village and town in Israel and beyond to see Him. Yet it was not merely Jesus' teaching and miracles that made Him so appealing, but His love for others. It attracted the most notorious of sinners to start a pure new life in Christ. The apostle Paul declared that the greatest demonstration of God's love for us is that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us on the Cross:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

(Romans 5:6-9)

Those who claim that God the Father cannot be a God of either justice or love have failed to see that in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ in our place is both of these things together. When His Son was dying on the Cross, God Himself was suffering in the place of others and paying the punishment for our sin.

The loving and pure character of our Lord is almost universally acknowledged, and has made such an impact on humankind that even after two-thousand years of world history that impact is still vibrant and alive. In fact, so beautiful and unique is Jesus' personality that He has impressed millions of people who would not even call themselves Christians.

Robert Green Ingersoll declared: "I wish to say once and for all, to that great and serene Man, I gladly pay the homage of my

admiration and my tears.” And Philip Schaff could not have described Jesus more perfectly when he said:

His zeal never degenerated into passion, nor His constancy into obstinacy, nor His benevolence into weakness, nor His tenderness into sentimentality. His un-worldliness was free from indifference and unsociability, His dignity from pride and presumption, His affectability from undue familiarity, His self-denial from moroseness, His temperance from austerity. He combined childlike innocence with manly strength, absorbing devotion to God with untiring interest in the welfare of man, tender love to the sinner with uncompromising severity against sin, commanding dignity with winning humility, fearless courage with wise caution, unyielding firmness with sweet gentleness.

The great Napoleon Bonaparte expressed a stunning character reference to Christ in these very profound words:

I know men and I tell you Jesus Christ was not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and other religions the distance of infinity. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and myself founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon sheer force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men will die for him.

In every other existence but that of Christ how many imperfections! From the first day to the last he is the same; majestic and simple, infinitely firm and

infinitely gentle. He proposes to our faith a series of mysteries and commands with authority that we believe them, given no other reason than those tremendous words; *I am God*.

In his autobiographical, *The Door Wherein I Went*, a former Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, gives us a perfect description of Jesus' true personality:

The first thing we must learn about him is that we should have been absolutely entranced by his company. Jesus was irresistibly attractive as a man. What they crucified was a young man, vital, full of life and the joy of it, the Lord of life itself, and even more the Lord of laughter, someone so utterly attractive that people followed him for the sheer fun of it...

The twentieth century needs to recapture the vision of the glorious and happy man whose mere presence filled his companions with delight. No pale Galilean he, but a veritable Pied Piper of Hamelin who would have the children laughing all around him and squealing with pleasure and joy as he picked them up.

Another one of my favourite descriptions of Jesus' loving character is given by the eighteenth-century French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau, greatest in his line:

Can it be possible that the same personage whose history the Scriptures contain should be a mere man? Where is the man, where is the philosopher, who could so live and so die without weakness and without ostentation? When Plato describes his imaginary righteous man, loaded with all the punishment of guilt,

yet meriting the highest rewards of virtue, he exactly describes the character of Jesus Christ.

What an infinite disproportion between the son of Sophroniscus and the son of Mary. Socrates dies with honour, surrounded by his disciples listening to the most tender words, the easiest death that one could wish to die. Jesus dies in pain, dishonour, mockery, the object of universal cursing, the most horrible death that one could fear.

At the receipt of the cup of poison Socrates blesses him who could not give it to him without tears; Jesus, while suffering the sharpest pains, prays for his most bitter enemies. If Socrates lived and died like a philosopher, Jesus lived and died like a God.

Although these secular references to the character of Jesus are quite amazing and unprecedented in history, the biblical writers go even further and declare that although Christ *was tempted in every way as we are, He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15)*. The evidence for this comes not only from His followers and from His inner circle of friends, who followed Him closely for three years, but also from His enemies.

However, the most remarkable testimony to Jesus' sinless-ness and perfection can be found in the claims that He made about Himself. Speaking of His relationship to God, Jesus openly confessed that He always did what was pleasing to the Father.

Elsewhere in Scripture Christ claimed complete mastery over temptation and sin when He said, "*The devil has no hold over me*" (*John 14:30*). On another occasion when His critical audience was looking for a motive to accuse Him Jesus asked them, "*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?*"

In that He showed absolutely no consciousness of personal sin, Jesus presents a totally different picture from the confessions of

other great biblical characters and men of subsequent history. Our Lord never had a guilt-ridden conscience, never had to say He was sorry for anything He said, thought or did, and He never had to ask God for forgiveness.

It is no small wonder that the German critic David Strauss was forced to admit that the life of Christ, “Remains the highest model of religion within the reach of our thought.” “His beauty is eternal, and His reign shall never end,” wrote Ernest Renan, the famous nineteenth-century humanist. “Jesus is in every respect unique and nothing can compare to Him.”

Now here is this great Man, Jesus Christ, who exemplified supreme unselfishness, humility, joy, peace and love for others, and whom all admit to be a Man of great honour, truth and nobility. This being the case, it is only logical to conclude that a Man of such character and reputation could not have been mistaken concerning His own identity and therefore must be exactly who He claimed to be.

HIS FULFILMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

Another area where the New Testament writers appeal to establish Jesus' claims to deity and Messiah-ship is fulfilled prophecy. The Old Testament Scriptures, from the Book of Genesis through to Malachi, contain hundreds or more references to the coming Messiah who God was to send into the world as Saviour for all mankind. Jesus Christ fulfilled more than three hundred of these Old Testament prophecies in His short life here on Earth, including twenty-nine major prophecies in just one day, the day He died.

All these prophecies, written over a thousand-year period, describe in specific detail Jesus' virgin birth, prenatal eternal origin, childhood, ministry, sinless-ness, atoning death by crucifixion, resurrection, ascension into Heaven, and His Second Coming to judge the world, destroy death, and bring in eternal peace. These were all accurately foretold by the ancient Jewish prophets hundreds of years before our Lord was even born.

This is quite remarkable, because never once among the classical and religious literature of the ancient world has their authors ever made such accurate predictions of any great historic event to come in the future, or any detailed predictions of a saviour who would arrive in the human race many centuries later.

By contrast, when we consider the accurate predictions and precise fulfilment of so many prophecies in the life of the one Man, Jesus Christ, you will easily conclude that it would be very difficult to account for unless the Bible is true and He is the Son of God, and Israel's promised Messiah.

In fact, these prophecies were such a powerful indication to the truth of Jesus' claims that critics asserted the Hebrew Bible was altered by Christians to refer to Him. But such an assertion is absolutely

impossible; as has been verified from the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. These scrolls were copied two-hundred years before the birth of Christ from the originals and all the prophetic records are exactly the same as in our modern Bible. All the prophecies listed below were fulfilled by Jesus at His first appearance.

THE MESSIAH WOULD BE BORN OF A WOMAN

Old Testament Prophecy:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.

(Genesis 3:15)

New Testament Fulfilment:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law.

(Galatians 4:4)

God the Father made this statement to Satan when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. The Messiah's First Coming was from a mother's womb as is the case of a normal birth. However, it is interesting to note that in this passage the woman is emphasized, not the man. This is because Jesus was conceived not through the union of a man and woman, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

THE MESSIAH WOULD BE BORN OF A VIRGIN

Old Testament Prophecy:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; Behold a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel.

(Isaiah 7:14)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary...Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son and you will name him Jesus."

(Luke 1:26-28, 30-32)

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, God with us."

(Matthew 1:22-24)

When God created this physical world, He gave the first man, Adam, all authority to rule and subdue His perfect Creation. But when Adam disobeyed the command to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, sin entered the world and human beings began to use this authority against God's wishes. All the terrible disasters that have occurred throughout history were not ordained by our Creator, but are a misuse and abuse of our free will to choose.

Since the Garden of Eden all humanity has been contaminated through the original sin of Adam. The Bible says: "*Sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned*" (Romans 5:12-13).

The point the apostle Paul is making in the Scripture quoted above is that when the first man sinned, he did so as the head and representative of the entire human race. In other words, the entire

human race has been effected through the original sin of Adam and we have all inherited his sin nature.

Therefore, it was necessary for our Redeemer be totally free from that contamination in order to offer Himself as a perfect sin sacrifice on our behalf. This would not have been possible unless Jesus had been supernaturally conceived through the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. If Christ had been born in the natural way, as a direct descendant of Adam, He would have inherited the original sin nature and would have needed to be redeemed Himself.

HIS BIRTH IN BETHLEHEM

Old Testament Prophecy:

But as for you Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you one will go forth for me to be a ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.

(Micah 5:2-3)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem.

(Matthew 2:1)

HE WILL BE THE SON OF GOD

Old Testament Prophecy:

I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "you are my son; today I have begotten you."

(Psalm 2:7-8)

New Testament Fulfilment:

And a voice from heaven said: "This is my Son the beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

(Matthew 3:17)

HE WILL BE THE SEED OF ABRAHAM AND FROM THE TRIBE OF JUDAH

Old Testament Prophecy:

In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.

(Genesis 22:18)

The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the rulers staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

(Genesis 49:10)

New Testament Fulfilment:

The book of genealogy of Jesus Christ the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

(Matthew 1:1-2)

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say, "and to seeds," meaning many people, but, "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

(Galatians 3:16)

For it is evident, that our Lord arose from Judah...

(Hebrews 7:14a)

HE WILL BE OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID

Old Testament Prophecy:

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 increase 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.

(Isaiah 9:6-8)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Jesus...the son of David...

(Luke 3:23,31)

A STAR WILL ANNOUNCE THE BIRTH OF MESSIAH

Old Testament Prophecy:

I see him but not now; I behold him, but not near, a star will come forth from Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth.

(Numbers 24:17)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, wise men came from the East to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?"

For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him.”

(Matthew 2:1-3)

Many Bible commentators feel that the magi’s comments reflect a knowledge of Balaam’s prophecy concerning the star that would come forth from Jacob.

THE MESSIAH PREEXISTED

Old Testament Prophecy:

But as for you Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you one will go forth for me to be a ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.

(Micah 5:2-3)

New Testament Fulfilment:

And he is before all things, and in him all things consist.

(Colossians 1:17-18)

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I Am.”

(John 8:58-59)

HEROD WOULD KILL THE CHILDREN

Old Testament Prophecy:

Thus says the Lord, “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachael is weeping for her children, because they are no more.”

(Jeremiah 31:15-16)

New Testament Fulfilment:

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi.

(Matthew 2:16-17)

Wise men came from the East to inform Herod of a new King who was born to rule over the Jews, a title that was Herod's in that period. Politically, Herod could not afford another uprising in the lands he oversaw for Rome. So not knowing the exact identity of the new born King, he ordered that all babies two years old and younger should be slaughtered in the hope that by doing so the infant King would be killed.

THE MESSIAH WOULD BE A PROPHET

Old Testament Prophecy:

I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

(Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

New Testament Fulfilment:

And the multitudes were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

(Matthew 21:11)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE ANOINTED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Old Testament Prophecy:

The spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

(Isaiah 11:2-3)

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.

(Isaiah 61:1-a)

New Testament Fulfilment:

After being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God, descending as a dove, and coming upon him, and behold a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

(Matthew 3:16-17)

He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me.." Then he began to say to them, "This scripture today has been fulfilled in your hearing."

(Luke 4:17-18b, 21)

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.

(Acts 10:38a)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE PRECEDED BY A MESSENGER

Old Testament Prophecy:

See I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.

(Malachi 3:1a)

A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness, make smooth in the desert a highway for our God."

(Isaiah 40:3-4)

New Testament Fulfilment:

What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes I tell you and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, "See I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."

(Matthew 11:9-11)

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness; prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."

(Matthew 3:1-4)

THE MESSIAH'S MINISTRY WILL INCLUDE MIRACLES

Old Testament Prophecy:

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped, then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

(Isaiah 35:5-6b)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness.

(Matthew 9:35-36)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE CALLED IMMANUEL (GOD IS WITH US)

Old Testament Prophecy:

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign; Behold a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call his name Immanuel.

(Isaiah 7:14-15)

New Testament Fulfilment:

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet; "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, God with us."

(Matthew 1:22-24)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE A PRIEST

Old Testament Prophecy:

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

(Psalm 110:4-5)

New Testament Fulfilment:

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

(Hebrews 5:7-11)

We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

(Hebrews 6:19-20)

But he holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever.

(Hebrews 7:24)

THE MESSIAH WILL TEACH THROUGH PARABLES

Old Testament Prophecy:

I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old.

(Psalm 78:2)

New Testament Fulfilment:

All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables, and without a parable he did not speak to them, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world."

(Matthew 13:34-35)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES

Old Testament Prophecy:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.

(Isaiah 49:6b-7)

New Testament Fulfilment:

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.

(Matthew 4:16-17)

A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

(Luke 2:32-33)

THE MESSIAH WILL ENTER JERUSALEM ON A DONKEY

Old Testament Prophecy:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you;

he is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

(Zechariah 9:9-10)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Now when they drew near Jerusalem and came to Bethphage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them' and immediately he will send them." All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying; "Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold your king is coming to you, lowly and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey." So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set him on them.

(Matthew 21:1-8)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE BETRAYED BY A CLOSE FRIEND

Old Testament Prophecy:

Even my close friend, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

(Psalm 41:9)

New Testament Fulfilment:

I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that scripture might be fulfilled, "He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me." Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.

(John 13:18-20)

Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.

(Matthew 10:4)

It has been suggested that in betraying Christ Judas was seeking to precipitate a crisis out of which he expected to see Jesus emerge triumphant. Judas was ambitious and, like the other apostles, believed that our Lord would set up an earthly kingdom in which he himself might have an influential part.

He may have thought Christ would use His miraculous powers to save Himself and when in danger of death, would declare Himself king and set up His Kingdom. When Judas found that Christ intended to submit, he perceived that his scheme had failed and was overwhelmed by the catastrophe he had precipitated. This theory could be confirmed by Judas committing suicide when he discovered the consequences of his act. The suggestion, however, is pure conjecture. No one has been able to satisfactorily analyse the character of Judas.

THE MESSIAH WILL BE BETRAYED FOR THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

Old Testament Prophecy:

And I said to them, "If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!" So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages.

(Zechariah 11:12-13)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

(Matthew 26:14-17)

THE PRICE FOR BETRAYAL WILL BE GIVEN FOR A POTTER'S FIELD

Old Testament Prophecy:

So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.

(Zechariah 11:13b-14)

New Testament Fulfilment:

And they conferred together and with the money bought the potter's field as a burial place for strangers.

(Matthew 27:7-8)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE DESERTED BY HIS DISCIPLES

Old Testament Prophecy:

Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered...

(Zechariah 13:7a)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of me this night, for it is written; 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'"

(Mark 14:27-28)

All of them deserted him and fled.

(Mark 14:50-51)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE ACCUSED BY FALSE WITNESSES

Old Testament Prophecy:

By a perversion of justice he was taken away...

(Isaiah 53:8a)

Malicious witnesses rise up; they ask me of things that I do not know.

(Psalm 35:11)

New Testament Fulfilment:

For many gave false testimony against him and their testimony did not agree.

(Mark 14:56-57)

Now the chief priests and the whole council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, in order that they might put him to death, and they did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward.

(Matthew 26:59-61)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE SILENT BEFORE HIS ACCUSERS

Old Testament Prophecy:

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

(Isaiah 53:7)

New Testament Fulfilment:

And while he was being accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

(Matthew 27:12-13)

Now when Pilate heard this he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus: "Where are you from?" but Jesus gave him no answer.

(John 19:8-10)

THE MESSIAH WILL SUFFER REJECTION FROM HIS OWN PEOPLE

Old Testament Prophecy:

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we did not esteem him.

(Isaiah 53:3-4)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, "You have brought this man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed having examined him in your presence, I have found no fault in this man concerning those things of which you accuse him; neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us, and indeed nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore chastise him and release him" (for it was necessary for him to release one of them at the feast). And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas."

(Luke 23:13-19)

“For no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things show yourself to the world.” For not even his brothers believed in him.

(John 7:4-6)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE BEATEN AND SPIT UPON

Old Testament Prophecy:

I gave my back to those who struck me, my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard: I did not cover my face from shame and spitting.

(Isaiah 50:6)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Then they spat in his face and beat him with their fists; and others slapped him.

(Matthew 26:67)

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head.

(John 19:1-3)

THE MESSIAH’S FRIENDS WILL STAND FAR OFF

Old Testament Prophecy:

My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague, and my relatives stand far off.

(Psalm 38:11)

New Testament Fulfilment:

And all his acquaintances and the women who accompanied him from Galilee, were standing at a distance, seeing these things.

(Luke 23:49)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE SCOURGED AND WOUNDED

Old Testament Prophecy:

He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities, the chastening for our well-being fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed.

(Isaiah 53:5-6)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head.

(John 19:1-3)

Then he released Barabbas to them, and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

(Matthew 27:26)

Crucifixion was one of the most torturous means of death that man has ever devised. Roman crucifixion began with a whipping of the condemned. The victim was then led through the town to the place of crucifixion carrying his own cross. This was not only very difficult physically for a person who had been weakened by

beatings, but it was intended to humiliate the condemned and serve as a warning to those who observed the proceedings.

The person to be crucified would then be tied to the cross. The feet were placed one on top of the other with the knees in a bent position, and a single spike driven through them into a footrest on the cross which would give partial support.

The arms were outstretched and nailed to the crossbeam through the wrists. Once the victim was nailed to the cross, it would be hoisted up into the air and dropped into the hole with a violence that would tear the tissue and cause excruciating pain.

The worst aspect of crucifixion, despite the unbearable pain, was that of suffocation. The position of the victim on the cross, with arms raised and extended, allowed him to inhale, but restricted his ability to exhale. In an effort to breathe, the crucified person would lift himself up on his feet and gasp for air until the pain in his feet would cause him to sag, once again accentuating the pain in the wrists and stopping his breathing.

Jesus must have done this countless times during the long hours on the Cross. This torment could continue for two or three days before death came. Such was the death on a cross, such was Christ's death. For several hours He hung there before a gazing crowd, naked and bleeding from head to foot, His head pierced with thorns, His back lacerated with scourging, His hands and feet torn with nails and mocked by His enemies to the last.

THE MESSIAH WILL SUFFER THIRST AND BE GIVEN GALL AND VINEGAR TO DRINK

Old Testament Prophecy:

And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

(Psalm 69:21)

New Testament Fulfilment:

They gave him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when he had tasted it, he would not drink it.

(Matthew 27:34)

Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

(John 19:28)

In the Bible the word gall usually refers to a bitter-tasting substance made of a plant such as wormwood or myrrh. In *Mark 15:23* we learn that the bitterness in the wine offered to Jesus was due to the presence of myrrh.

Wine that was mixed with bitter herbs or myrrh created a substance that dulled the mind and sense of pain, and it was customary in ancient times to give this drink to victims about to be crucified to lessen the awareness of the agony awaiting them. Jesus refused this potion after He had tasted it and realized what it was.

With an incredible display of courage, the Son of God rejected anything that would reduce the suffering He was about to endure for our salvation. God the Father is three times holy and sin against Him required an extreme punishment. So, in order to completely fulfil His mission as our substitute, Jesus accepted nothing that would take away or reduce the effects of that punishment. The Word of God says that on the Cross Christ literally became sin for us (*2 Corinthians 5:21*).

The Gospel of John tells us it was only before Jesus died that He accepted the drink of sour wine offered to Him. One of the prominent effects of crucifixion was an incredible thirst, due to the loss of body fluids caused by open wounds and perspiration.

Being at the point of death, Christ wanted to say His last words, but His lips and throat needed moisture. In accepting the drink, our

Lord not only fulfilled Scripture, but disproved one of the great heresies that was to spread later; that Jesus was not really human. In this biblical account we see that He was fully human and fully divine.

THE MESSIAH WILL INTERCEDE FOR HIS PERSECUTORS

Old Testament Prophecy:

Yet he himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.

(Isaiah 53:12d)

New Testament Fulfilment:

When they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified him... Jesus said, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

(Luke 23:33a, 34a)

THE MESSIAH'S SIDE WILL BE PIERCED

Old Testament Prophecy:

They will look on me whom they pierced.

(Zechariah 12:10b)

New Testament Fulfilment:

One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

(John 19:34)

THE MESSIAH WILL COMMIT HIMSELF TO GOD

Old Testament Prophecy:

Into your hand I commit my spirit.

(Psalm 31:5a)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit."

(Luke 23:46a)

THE MESSIAH'S GARMENTS WILL BE PARTED AND LOTS CAST FOR THEM

Old Testament Prophecy:

They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

(Psalm 22:18)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Then the soldiers when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be," that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." Therefore the soldiers did these things.

(John 19:23-25)

THE MESSIAH WILL BE PUT TO DEATH
ALONGSIDE TRANSGRESSORS AND
BURIED IN A RICH MAN'S TOMB

Old Testament Prophecy:

Because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors.

(Isaiah 53:12c)

His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet he was with a rich man in his death.

(Isaiah 53:9a)

New Testament Fulfilment:

At that time two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

(Matthew 27:38)

There came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph...and asked for the body of Jesus...When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb.

(Matthew 27:57a, 58b, 59)

THE MESSIAH'S HANDS AND FEET WILL BE PIERCED

Old Testament Prophecy:

They pierced my hands and my feet...

(Psalm 22:16b)

New Testament Fulfilment:

And when they came to the place called the skull, there they crucified him...

(Luke 23:33a)

The Bible spares us the brutality and horrific details of Jesus' physical agony and simply states that, "*They crucified Him.*" Not uncommonly, those crucified would have birds of prey tear at them and insects light upon or burrow into their open wounds, or their eyes, ears and nose.

It is also interesting to note that this prediction of pierced hands and feet was made long before crucifixion was invented as a means of capital punishment. David wrote this prophecy over a thousand years before crucifixion was made common by the Romans. It was never practiced by the Jews.

PEOPLE WILL SHAKE THEIR HEADS AT THE MESSIAH AND MOCK HIM

Old Testament Prophecy:

I also have become a reproach to them; when they see me, they wag their head.

(Psalm 109:25)

All those who see me ridicule me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, "He trusted in the Lord, let him rescue him; let him deliver him, since he delights in him."

(Psalm 22:7-9)

New Testament Fulfilment:

And those who were passing by were hurling abuse at him, wagging their heads.

(Matthew 27:39)

Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and another on the left. And those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself!

Come down from the cross if you are the Son of God!” In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He is the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, I am the Son of God.” In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

(Matthew 27:38-45)

It is precisely because Jesus did not come down from the Cross and save Himself that He is able to save others; love kept Him up there not the nails! It is also important to remember that Jesus did not suffer as the victim of circumstances; He was in control. He said in *John 10:18* that no one takes His life from Him, but that He would lay it down at His own free will in obedience to the Father. To freely choose to suffer such a shame and torture out of love is nothing short of remarkable.

NONE OF MESSIAH’S BONES WILL BE BROKEN

Old Testament Prophecy:

All my bones are out of joint...

(Psalm 22:14a)

He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.

(Psalm 34:20)

New Testament Fulfilment:

But coming to Jesus, when they saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

(John 19:33)

While hanging on a cross by the hands and feet, it is very likely that all a man's bones would separate from their joints. The Romans used to hasten death by breaking the legs of the crucified criminals, but when they reached Jesus they saw that He was already dead.

THE MESSIAH WILL BE FORSAKEN BY GOD

Old Testament Prophecy:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

(Psalm 22:1a)

New Testament Fulfilment:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani," that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

(Matthew 27:46)

Jesus' words on the Cross imply that there was a real separation from the Father in this dreadful experience. There is a debt of mystery here before which we may well pause. When Jesus died in our place, He became as accountable for our wickedness as if He had been responsible for it Himself.

Although Christ's soul was to the last absolutely untainted by sin, He received in His own body and spirit the full fury of God's holy anger against sin and the separation from God's presence that this sin brings about. It was this horrible experience of alienation from His Father from which Jesus shrank, and from which gave rise to His agonizing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

As horrible as this was upon His lovely soul, it was the only way for God to fulfil His good and loving plan for our redemption. That is what the prophet Isaiah meant when he said concerning the Messiah, "*Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him with pain*" (*Isaiah 53:10*).

It is also important to underline that Christ's lament did not proceed from doubt or impatience, as if He were ignorant of the cause of His dreadful torment, or was not willing to bear such abandonment in His work of atonement. Such laments were only a declaration of His most bitter sufferings and prove that our Lord was not rendered impassible by a superior power, but was truly human and truly passible.

THE MESSIAH'S HEART WILL LITERALLY BREAK

Old Testament Prophecy:

My heart is like wax; it has melted within me...

(Psalm 22:14b)

You know the insults I receive, and my shame and dishonour; my foes are all known to you. Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity but there was none; and for comforters but I found none.

(Psalm 69:19-21)

New Testament Fulfilment:

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

(John 19:34)

It is the opinion of many who have written on the subject that Jesus died of a broken heart. Some medical doctors say the most probable way of accounting for the blood and water that flowed from the Lord's wound when the soldier pierced Him is that the spear pierced the pericardium, which would contain blood if the heart was ruptured.

This is all very probable! Let us not forget that Jesus suffered severe stress and anguish in the Garden the night before, the intensity of which was indicated by a sweat of blood, cruel beatings during His many trials in the hours that followed, a painful flogging and intense physical pain, sorrow and mental abuse while nailed to the Cross.

DARKNESS WOULD COVER THE LAND FROM NOON UNTIL THREE O'CLOCK

Old Testament Prophecy:

And it will come about in that day, declares the Lord God, that I shall make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight.

(Amos 8:9)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.

(Matthew 27:45)

THE MESSIAH WILL RISE FROM THE DEAD

Old Testament Prophecy:

You will not abandon me to the grave; nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

(Psalm 16:10-11)

New Testament Fulfilment:

While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

(Luke 24:4-6b)

David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, “He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.” This Jesus God raised up and of that all of us are witnesses.

(Acts 2:31-33)

THE MESSIAH WILL ASCEND TO HEAVEN

Old Testament Prophecy:

Thou hast ascended on high...

(Psalm 68:18a)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Then he led them out as far as Bethany and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.

(Luke 24:50-52)

THE MESSIAH WILL SIT DOWN AT GOD’S RIGHT HAND

Old Testament Prophecy:

The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

(Psalm 110:1-2)

New Testament Fulfilment:

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit... For David did not ascend into the heaven, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'sit at my right hand until I make thine enemies a footstool.'"

(Acts 2:33a, 34-36)

Prophecy Fulfilled on Purpose?

The prophecies listed above could not have been purposely fulfilled by Jesus Christ unless He was who He claimed to be. Bible critics have suggested that Jesus being a rabbi had knowledge of these Old Testament predictions and simply arranged the events surrounding His life to fulfil prophecy and substantiate His claims.

First, such a suggestion is completely contrary to the pure character of our Lord that we already noted earlier. Further, there is absolutely no way that Jesus could have controlled many of the events necessary for the Messiah to fulfil if He were an impostor. How could He have chosen His place of birth, the tribe He would come from, or the betrayal of a friend for a precise amount of money? And why would a self-serving false messiah want to fulfil the manner of such a horrific death?

It is interesting to note that Christ is the only individual to have ever claimed to have fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Messiah; who would come to bear the sin of His people and reign forever on the throne of David.

Moreover, the genealogies recorded in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke reveal that Jesus was the only Person who could prove by the genealogical records kept in the Temple that He was of the royal lineage of King David. Since the destruction of the Temple and its records in A.D. 70, it would be impossible for anyone else to ever

prove their claim to be the Messiah based on their genealogical descent from David, the son of Jesse.

Science Speaks: Coincidence Ruled Out!

Some critics have also suggested that the prophecies fulfilled in Jesus listed above were just sheer coincidences and that one could find some of these prophecies fulfilled in other great men of history. It is true that you might be able to find some men whose lives would agree with *a few* of these prophecies, but Jesus is the only Man who ever fulfilled all of them!

In his popular book *Science Speaks* former Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College, Peter W. Stoner, calculated the probability of one man fulfilling just eight major prophecies made concerning the coming Messiah in the Old Testament. These estimates were worked out by twelve different classes of 600 college students.

Professor Stoner took their estimates and made them much more conservative by encouraging sceptics or other scientists to make their own estimates to see if his conclusions were fair. He then submitted his figures for review to a committee of the *American Scientific Affiliation*, which verified his calculations were, “Dependable and accurate in regard to the scientific material presented.”

In the foreword to *Science Speaks* Harold Hartzler of the American Scientific Affiliation declared: “The mathematical analysis included is based upon principles of probability which are thoroughly sound and Professor Stoner has applied these principles in a proper and convincing way.”

After evaluating the biblical data using scientific principles of probability, the very conservative chance of one man fulfilling just eight prophecies was 1 in 10^{17} . That would be one in 100,000,000,000,000,000. In order to help us comprehend this

incredible probability Professor Stoner illustrates it by supposing that we:

Take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state, two feet deep. Then we mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one.

What chance would this man have of getting the right one? Exactly the same chance that the ancient biblical prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote them according to their own wisdom.

This means that these prophecies were either given by inspiration of God or the Jewish prophets just wrote them as they thought they should be. In such a case the prophets had just one chance in 10^{17} of having them come true in any man, but they all came true in Christ.

Absolutely no Chance at all

In another extraordinary calculation Professor Stoner used 48 prophecies and arrived at the extremely conservative estimate that the probability of 48 prophecies being fulfilled in one person is one in 10^{157} . Below Professor Stoner gives us a brief illustration of the immensity of the number 10^{157} and why the science of probability powerfully proves once again that we can only be dealing with the supernatural:

We find the chance that any man fulfilled all 48 prophecies to be 1 in 10^{157} . This is really a large number and it represents an extremely small chance. Let us try to visualize it. The silver dollar that we have been using is entirely too large. We must select a smaller object. The electron is about as small an object as we know of. It is so small that it will take 2.5 times 10^{15} of them laid side by side to make a line, single file, one inch long. If we were going to count the electrons in this line one inch long, and counted 250 each minute, and if we counted day and night, it would take 19,000,000 years to count just the one inch line of electrons.

If we had a cubic inch of these electrons and we tried to count them, it would take us, counting steadily 250 each minute, 19,000,000 times 19,000,000 times 19,000,000 years, or 6.9 times 10^{21} years. With this introduction, let us go back to our chance of one in 10^{157} . Let us suppose that we are taking this number of electrons, marking one, and thoroughly stirring it into the whole mass, then blindfolding a man and letting him try to find the right one. What chance has he of finding the right one? What kind of a pile will this number of electrons make?

In other words, the chance of the blindfolded man selecting the right electron would be the same as that of one man fulfilling just forty-eight of the more than 300 Messianic prophecies. The probability is absolutely zero, as also shown technically by Emile Borel in *Probabilities and Life*, and William Dembski in *The Design Inference*.

Our Faith Is Not Blind

Dear reader, faith is important to God, for without faith it is impossible to please Him (*Hebrews 11:6*). However, our faith is not blind, but greatly assured by the incredible facts we have seen so far. As one writer correctly observed: “If nobody in the world would bet their life savings on a horse race with odds of one chance in a million, how is it that so many bet their convictions about reality – with far more serious consequences if wrong – on odds much worse?”

Think also of the thousands of other prophecies in the Bible and not just the Messianic ones. This is surely proof that there is a God who supernaturally gave this information to the prophets and that He alone is the One true God.

In *Science Speaks* Professor Stoner concludes that to reject the Bible’s claims that Jesus Christ is the Messiah is to reject a fact, “Proved perhaps more absolutely than any other fact in the world.”

HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The greatest and final evidence that our Lord gave to support His claims to be the Son of God was His physical resurrection from the dead. Jesus made many extraordinary claims about Himself, and when asked by the Jews for a miraculous sign to authenticate these claims, He pointed them to His resurrection on the third day:

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But not one will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

(Matthew 12:38-41)

Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

(John 2:18-23)

Of the small number of the various world religions that are based on personalities rather than on philosophical systems, only Christianity makes the stupendous claim that its Founder rose from the dead. The bones of Buddha, Abraham and Muhammed are still here on Earth and none of their followers have ever declared their

tomb to be empty. This fact alone distinguishes Jesus from all other religious leaders and places the Christian faith in a class all by itself.

Many of these leaders have come and gone professing some revelation from God or a new way of approaching Him, but only Jesus Christ ever predicted, with great definiteness and detail, that He would be put to death in Jerusalem, and His rising from the dead on the third day would be God's seal to the truth of His claims. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate proof for the accuracy of His doctrine.

The noted scholar, writer and teacher Wilber M. Smith described how easy it would have been to disprove everything Christ had said and predicted if the resurrection had not occurred:

It was this same Jesus, the Christ, who among many other remarkable things, said and repeated something which, proceeding from any other being would have condemned Him at once as either a bloated egotist or a dangerously unbalanced person. That Jesus said He was going up to Jerusalem to die is not so remarkable, though all the details He gave about that death, weeks and months before He died, are together a prophetic phenomenon.

But when He said He Himself would rise again from the dead, the third day after He was crucified, He said something only a fool would dare say... unless He was sure He was going to rise. No founder of any world religion known to men ever dared to say anything like that.

The fact is that Jesus *did* rise from the grave on that Easter Sunday morning, and the evidence for this momentous event is simply overwhelming, even when approached from a sceptic's

perspective. Author and minister Douglas Groothuis describes how the New Testament alone “*reverberates and glistens*” with the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. In his book *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* he wrote:

The Gospels record Jesus’ teaching that He must be betrayed, killed, and rise again. Then they all testify that His tomb was empty and that He appeared to His disciples as He said. The book of Acts records the preaching of the resurrected Christ as its central fact. The various New Testament letters and the book of Revelation would melt into nothingness without a resurrected Jesus.

The resurrection is attested to by four separate Gospels, the history of the early Church (Acts), by the letters of Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude, and the letter to the Hebrews. There is a diversity of credible witnesses. Since the New Testament volumes show considerable fitness in terms of historical reliability... this is a good initial reason to accept the resurrection as an objective reality.

Famous Lawyers Prove the Case and Vote in Favour

After a close examination of the extensive evidence for the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, some of the best legal minds throughout history have accepted the New Testament documents as factual history and become firm Christians solely on the grounds of strict legal evidence. British barrister and politician Sir Edward G. Clarke said:

As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the events of the first Easter day. To me, the evidence is

conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured a verdict on evidence not merely so compelling.

In his fantastic best-seller – *Who Moved the Stone?* – lawyer Frank Morrison tells how his education gave him a very sceptical outlook which denied every possibility of miracles. He had come to the conclusion that the resurrection was nothing but a fairy tale with a happy ending that spoiled the matchless story of Jesus.

Therefore, he set out to write a non-miraculous account of the last week of Christ's life. But when Morrison had studied the facts with care, he was forced to write a completely different book. His first chapter is called *The Book that Refused to Be Written*. Morrison described it as, "The inner story of a man who originally set out to write one kind of book and found himself by the sheer force of circumstances to write quite another."

And similarly, after a close examination of the legal evidence to support the resurrection case, a former Chief Justice of England, Lord Darling, came to the following conclusion:

The evidence points unmistakably to the fact that on the third day Jesus rose... On that greatest point we are not merely asked to have faith. In its favour as living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in a verdict that the resurrection story is true.

Two eighteenth century lawyers of great repute, Gilbert West and Lord Lyttelton, set out to prove for the rationalist society of their day that Jesus Christ never rose from the dead and Saul of Tarsus never converted to Christianity.

Lyttelton and his friend both agreed to write independently and meet later to discuss their findings. To their surprise, both of them came to the same disturbing conclusion: The mystery of the disappearance of the body of Jesus can be solved only by the resurrection and ascension. Their books may still be found in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The brilliant Washington D.C lawyer Irwin H. Linton, who represented many cases before the Supreme Court, wrote a book during his career entitled *A Lawyer Examines the Bible* in which he stated:

So invariable has been my observation that he who does not accept whole-heartedly the evangelical conservative belief in Christ and the Scriptures has never read, has forgotten, or has never been able to weigh, and certainly is unable to refute the irresistible force of the cumulative evidence upon which such faith rests.

President Abraham Lincoln was an agnostic until he reached the age of forty. Then he read Dr James Smith's brilliant work entitled *The Christian's Defence*, that proved the historical reliability of the events surrounding Christ's life. The overwhelming evidence from Dr Smith's book completely convinced Lincoln with the result that he became a genuine and firm Christian for the rest of his life.

And what can we say of the other many capable and brilliant minds in every generation who were converted to Christ solely on the basis of the historical evidence for His life, death and resurrection? Augustine, John Warwick Montgomery, C.S. Lewis, Simon Greenleaf and Sir William Ramsay, to mention a few.

The Symbol of Easter - an Empty Tomb

Dear reader, the disappearance of Jesus' body from the tomb on Easter Sunday is the biggest mystery and most controversial topic

of all time. It is a problem beyond explanation unless we accept the testimony of the early disciples that God raised Him from the dead. As stated above, the New Testament constantly testifies to the fact that Jesus was seen alive after His death and appeared to more than five-hundred eye-witnesses, including His brother James, who was originally a sceptic, but was converted after he saw the risen Lord. Paul wrote:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and to the twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as one abnormally born.

(1 Corinthians 15:3-9)

In my former book Theophilus, I wrote all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit. After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

(Acts 1:1-4)

Further, and as many experts have pointed out, the New Testament reports of the resurrection come so soon after the event that they simply could not be the product of legendary development as some critics have asserted.

The ancient Creed of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians mentions specific individuals who encountered the risen Lord Jesus, and the apostle even challenged first-century opponents to

talk with these individuals in order to determine the truth for themselves. The historian Luke claimed that he had carefully investigated the evidence for the resurrection from the very beginning:

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

(Luke 1:1-5)

Concerning Luke's ability as a historian, the world-renowned archaeologist, Sir William Ramsay, concluded after thirty years of study that the New Testament writer, "Is a historian of the first rank and should be placed along with the very greatest of historians." If this is the case, we can confidently assume that Luke is also accurate in recording events that concerned the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, especially since they were of greater importance. It is very unlikely that vigilant people like doctors and historians would make such radical claims without convincing evidence to back them up.

Did Jesus Swoon on the Cross?

Despite the overwhelming evidence from eye-witness accounts to support the resurrection case, many absurd theories have been put forward to deny that Jesus ever rose from the dead. Some critics have suggested that Jesus *swooned* on the Cross and pretended to be dead, while others claim that His disciples stole the body and

began the rumour that He had risen. But when we evaluate the evidence, the *Swooned Theory* seems very unlikely.

The renowned physician Dr Alexander Metherell, who also holds a doctorate in engineering, concluded that there is no possible way that Jesus could have survived the gruesome rigors of crucifixion, much less the gaping wound that pierced His lung and heart. Even before the crucifixion He was in critical condition and probably suffering from shock from the horrific flogging He had undergone. An article in the Journal of the American Medical Association came to the same conclusion:

Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to His side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between His right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung, but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured His death... Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appeared to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.

The Roman soldiers must have been clearly convinced that Christ was dead or they would certainly not have removed His body from the Cross. Roman executioners were exceedingly efficient in such matters, knowing that they themselves would have been liable for the death penalty if they had permitted a prisoner to escape.

Interestingly, the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark and Luke all record a simultaneous event that occurred some distance from Calvary after Jesus had died. They wrote that after His death the curtain of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom (*Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45*). This miraculous event signalled the end of the Old Testament animal sacrifices for atonement and limited access to God's presence.

But not only this, it also verified the death of Jesus because it demonstrated that His sacrifice had satisfied God's just demands forever. For centuries the Jewish people were required to offer an unblemished lamb as an atonement for their sin. But now, Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, had become the new sacrifice and the veil was no longer needed because access to God had been opened to all who would believe in Christ.

Could Christ's Disciples Have Stolen the Body?

The exact site of the tomb where the body of Jesus was placed was well known to Christians, Jews and Romans alike and could have been checked by sceptics at any time. It is noteworthy that none of the authorities ever claimed that the tomb still contained Jesus' body. Instead, they were forced through a knowledge of reality to invent the story that His disciples had stolen His body, even though they had no motive or opportunity to do so.

Moreover, this theory, like all the others, is very improbable when we consider the fear and cowardliness of the apostles when their Leader was arrested and killed. Before Jesus had risen they ran away and deserted their Master, hiding behind closed doors in total fear and confusion. But after the resurrection they became mighty preachers, missionaries and courageous martyrs of the faith they proclaimed.

In addition, many of the historical records handed down from the first century reveal that almost every one of the apostles faced a cruel death without ever denying their true faith in Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Such a transformation in the lives and character of these men can only be accounted for through a personal knowledge of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

It was this knowledge that compelled them to preach the Gospel message to a hostile Jerusalem, and later throughout the entire Roman Empire. It is a message for which many other disciples

were willing to suffer and die for down through the centuries; a message that transformed and turned upside down the ancient world, and a message that is still transforming lives today!

Another Great Lawyer Examines the Evidence

Simon Greenleaf was the famous Royal Professor of Law at Harvard University in the United States. The rise of Harvard to its eminent position among the legal schools of America is greatly ascribed to this man's efforts. Professor Greenleaf produced a famous work, called *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, that is still considered the greatest authority on legal evidence in the Western World today.

In 1846, after a detailed analysis of the historical evidence for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Greenleaf wrote another volume, entitled *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*, where he examines the value of the apostles' testimony to the resurrection.

This brilliant man's observations led him to the same conclusion we just mentioned; that only the physical resurrection of Christ their Master could explain the change that came over the apostles, especially since they faced terrible opposition from the cleverest legal, political and religious authorities of their day. He wrote:

The great truths which the apostles declared were that Christ had risen from the dead and that only through repentance from sin, and faith in Him, could men hope for salvation. This doctrine they asserted with one voice, everywhere, not only under the greatest discouragements, but in the face of the most appalling errors that can be presented to the mind of man.

Their Master had recently perished as a malefactor by the sentence of a public tribunal. His religion sought to overthrow the religions of the whole world. The laws of every country were against the teachings of His disciples. The interests and passions of all the rulers and great men in the world were against them. The fashion of the world was against them.

Propagating this new faith, even in the most inoffensive and peaceful manner, they could expect nothing but contempt, opposition, reviling, bitter persecutions, stripes, imprisonments, torments, and cruel deaths. Yet this faith they zealously did propagate; and all these miseries they endured undismayed, nay rejoicing.

As one after another was put to a miserable death, the survivors only prosecuted their work with increased vigour and resolution. The annals of military warfare afford scarcely an example of the like heroic constancy, patience, and un-blenching courage. They had every possible motive to review carefully the grounds of their faith, and the evidences of the great facts and truths which they asserted; and these motives were pressed upon their attention with the most melancholy and terrific frequency.

It was therefore impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact. If it were morally possible for them to have been deceived in this matter, every human motive operated to lead them to discover and avow their error. To have persisted in so gross a falsehood, after it was known to them, was not only to encounter, for life, all

the evils which man could inflict, from without, but to endure also the pangs of inward and conscious guilt; with no hope of future peace, no testimony of a good conscience, no expectation of honour or esteem among men, no hope of happiness in this life, or in the world to come.

Such conduct in the apostles would moreover have been utterly irreconcilable with the fact that they possessed the ordinary constitution of our common nature. Yet their lives do show them to have been men like all others of our race; swayed by the same motives, animated by the same hopes, affected by the same joys, subdued by the same sorrows, agitated by the same fears, and subject to the same passions, temptations, and infirmities as ourselves. And their writings show them to have been men of vigorous understandings. If then, their testimony was not true, there was no possible motive for its fabrication.

The Final Decision Is Yours

We saw earlier that the writer C.S. Lewis left us with only three real possibilities concerning the Man, Jesus Christ. Either He was and is God, or else He was totally insane or something worse. But when we look back on the compelling evidence: the whole weight of Jesus' teaching; His beautiful and pure character; His precise fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy; and His victorious triumph over sin and death, you will agree that it does not make sense to say that Jesus Christ was anyone other than God Almighty manifested in human flesh:

Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great; He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by

angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

(1 Timothy 3:16)

PART FOUR

JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY

See how the patient Jesus stands,
Insulted in His lowest case!
Sinners have bound the Almighty's hands,
And spit in their Creator's face.

Joseph Hart

WHY CHRIST'S RESURRECTION IS SO IMPORTANT

The physical resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ greatly distinguishes the Christian faith from all other world religions in that our fellowship is with a living Person, and forgiveness of sins is not obtained by a set of principles, but by Jesus Himself. This fact alone makes our Lord's resurrection of crucial importance to each one of us, as it completes our salvation as believers.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then He could not save anyone, and the very foundation of the Christian Orthodox faith would be completely destroyed. But as the evidence powerfully reveals, Christ did indeed rise from the grave and He now lives to make intercession to the Father on our behalf:

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to make intercession for them.

(Hebrews 7:23-26)

Christ in the Believer

God sent His Son into the world to save humanity from sin and its dire consequences. But we needed more than just a payment for our past sins, we needed deliverance from the present tense power of sin in our daily lives. The resurrection of Jesus provides us with that power; for it is the risen Christ living in the believer's heart that empowers him to overcome temptation and live a victorious life for God.

As we shall demonstrate below, it is through the resurrection of Jesus that each believer has been given a new spirit and a new life. The Son of God in all His power and purity is now living in us:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

(Galatians 2:20-21)

God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

(Colossians 1:27-28)

And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So, you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

(Galatians 4:6-8)

Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you.

(1Corinthians 3:16-17)

The Believer in Christ

When Christ suffered on the Cross, He not only made it possible for our sins to be forgiven; He dealt decisively with the root cause of our sin – our sinful human nature. In the Gospel of John we read how Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus the Pharisee that in order to enter the Kingdom of God one must be “*born again*” (*John 3:1-9*). Our Lord’s reply to Nicodemus must have really shattered the Jewish idea that their racial identity – their natural birth – assured

them a place in God's Kingdom regardless of the condition of their heart.

The ancient Greek word translated *again* can also mean *from above* and this is the sense in which John uses it here. A theological term for the New Birth is regeneration; it is not simply a moral or religious reform, but the bringing of new life. To belong to the Heavenly Kingdom one must be born into it, and this is not something we can do for ourselves, but is a work of God's Spirit. God is Spirit and therefore makes direct contact with each person through his human spirit. Before the New Birth a person is spiritually dead, and consequently unable to have a right relationship with his Creator.

But when the Father sent His Son to die for humanity, and suffer the punishment that we deserved, He took not only the sin of the entire world to the Cross, but He took us, who believe, as well, that we might die in Him. God, in His mercy, literally places the repentant sinner in His Son Jesus (*1 Corinthians 1:30*).

This is what water baptism signifies; that the person you used to be is not only put to death, but has been buried with Christ. Your old sin nature is dead, buried and done away with:

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

(Romans 6:3-5)

When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

(Colossians 2:12-13)

It is important to underline that the water baptism spoken of in Scripture follows repentance and the New Birth; it is an external declaration of an inward reality and not the opposite (see *Acts 2:41-42, 8:12-14, 8:36-40; Mark 16:16*).

However, God's purpose is not to leave a believer dead and buried, but to raise him to a new life in His Son. Jesus rose from the dead and those who put their faith in what He did on the Cross are raised to new life in Him:

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be a slave to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

(Romans 6:5-8)

He then places His Spirit within believers to enable them to live that new life to its full:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.

(Ephesians 1:13-15)

I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

(John 14:25-27)

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

(1John 4:4-5)

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

(Romans 8:13-15)

So, when an individual is born again, through faith in the Gospel, a new creature immediately comes into existence, “*Everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The weak and sinful person that he was previously is automatically crucified with Christ and exists no longer.

This is quite a difficult doctrine to understand with our reason, since we are dealing with supernatural truth and our reason is natural, and consequently can only be appropriated through faith in God’s Word (*John 3:7-9*).

I like the very simple illustration the Christian writer and martyr Watchman Nee gives to aid our understanding of this very important doctrine. In his best-selling book, *The Norman Christian Life*, he wrote:

Many a time when preaching in the villages of China one has to use very simple illustrations for deep divine truth. I remember once I took up a small book and put a piece of paper into it, and I said to those very simple folk, “Now look carefully. I take a piece of paper. It has an identity of its own, quite separate from this book. Having no special purpose for it at the moment, I put it into the book.

Now I do something with the book. I mail it to Shanghai. I do not mail the paper, but the paper has been put into the book. Then where is the paper? Can the book go to Shanghai and the paper remain here? Can the paper have a separate destiny from the book? No! Where the book goes, the paper goes. If I drop the

book in the river, the paper goes too, and if I quickly take it out again, I recover the paper also. Whatever experience the book goes through, the paper goes through with it, for it is still there in the book. *‘Of him are ye in Christ Jesus.’*

The Lord God himself has put us in Christ, and in His dealing with Christ, God has dealt with the whole race. Our destiny is bound up with His. What He has gone through, we have gone through, for to be *in Christ* is to have been identified with him in both his death and resurrection.”

What a glorious truth! Did you understand it? What has happened to Christ, has happened to the believer, and what belongs to Him, belongs to us also. When Jesus died and rose again, so did we spiritually. We are forever united and joined to Him and His history is our history, His righteousness our righteousness, His victory our victory.

Therefore, as the apostle Paul pointed out, faith in the present tense ministry of Jesus is essential to true Christianity and would be futile if He is not alive. Without the resurrection, Christianity would be just another dead religion:

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

(1Corinthians 15:17-21)

Jesus Also Guarantees Our Physical Resurrection

Paul's use of the term *first-fruits* quoted above is very important to his argument for the resurrection. In the Old Testament the offering of the first-fruits brought one sheaf of grain to represent and anticipate the rest of the harvest to come (*Leviticus 23:9-14*). This was a figure of Christ and His people.

Paul is saying that Jesus was just the first among many to be raised from the dead. Unlike the other people who were miraculously raised from the dead prior to and during His earthly ministry, our Lord was raised from the dead never to die again. He was the first Person ever raised to immortal life, and therefore has become the hope and promise of the believer's own physical regeneration:

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ the first-fruits; then when he comes, those who belong to him.

(*1Corinthians 15:21-24*)

As we saw in chapter six, mankind's physical death is not voluntary, but a consequence of the original sin inherited through the first man, Adam. It is a common fact that nearly everyone fights his whole life to stave off death. Likewise, the resurrection of our bodies will happen to everyone, whether they desire it or not:

For a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

(*John 5:28-30*)

According to the Scriptures quoted above the resurrection of every person who ever lived will happen, and an eternal existence in one of two places will be the final reality. The New Testament makes

it clear that the part of us that will be resurrected is our physical bodies. When a person dies physically, his body goes through the decomposition process and returns to its original elements – dust. The soul and spirit go into heaven or into the lower parts of the earth (*Luke 16:19-24*), depending on the person's acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour:

Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

(2 Corinthian 5:8-10)

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

(Philippians 1:21-25)

However, at the moment of resurrection the material elements will be raised up, reassembled, and reunited with the departed soul and spirit, thus having the complete personality of mankind again reconstituted. At this time a judgement will be declared upon every living soul. For the believer, the sentence has already been declared:

Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.

(John 5:24)

For the unbeliever, he will be judged according to his works:

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small,

standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them and all were judged according to what they had done.

(Revelation 20:11-14)

But What Kind of Body Will We Have?

In his Epistles the apostle Paul provides us with much of our scriptural knowledge about our resurrected body. In his First Letter to the Church at Corinth he wrote:

But some will say, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

(1Corinthians 15:35-45)

The fact that a believer’s resurrected body will be spiritual does not mean that it will be intangible. In a work entitled *The Time Is at Hand*, the founder of the Jehovah’s Witnesses organization, Charles

Taze Russell, totally denies the bodily resurrection of Jesus. He stated: “Our Lord’s human body was, however, supernaturally removed from the tomb. Whether it was dissolved into gases or whether it is still preserved somewhere as a grand memorial of God’s love no one knows.”

Such a statement is totally contrary to what the New Testament documents tell us about the nature of Jesus’ resurrected body. The careful historian Luke explicitly describes the manner in which our Lord appeared to His disciples after He was raised; He had the same identical body that had been crucified, beaten and buried in a tomb for three days:

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

(Luke 24:36-40)

Moreover, our Lord’s disciples also witnessed His risen body speaking to them for hours over a forty-day period. On several occasions during this time He even ate food with them.

In the four Gospel accounts the missing body of Christ was evidential proof of a bodily resurrection. If He was raised a spirit only, as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious organizations assert, then the resurrection would have lost its value as historical proof to Jesus’ claims to deity, and the Christian faith, that elevated Christianity high above the religions of the ancient world, would not even have come into existence.

So, to answer the original question – “What type of body will we have?” – the apostle Paul goes on to teach that the believer’s resurrected body will be modelled after Jesus’ body. This means it

will be tangible, immortal, powerful, glorious and spiritual; suitable for inhabiting a renewed creation:

We eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body...

(Philippians 3:20b-21b)

And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. I declare to you brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

(1Corinthians 15:49-54)

SAVED BY GRACE OR WORKS?

As we have carefully demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Bible clearly states that it is true faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ on our behalf that grants us righteousness before God and not our good works. Yet this doctrine may seem to contradict other passages of Scripture which speak on the same subject. For example, James appears to say that salvation is based on human works, whereas the apostle Paul insists that salvation is obtained through faith in Christ alone, and not through works or human effort:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

(James 2:14-18)

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

(James 2:18-19)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

(Ephesians 2:8-10)

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law." Now

it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

(Galatians 3:10-12)

This difficulty in the Bible is more apparent than real. One of the great words that the New Testament uses to describe the Christian salvation is *justification* (*Romans 5:1, 8:30*). This is a legal term and literally means that a person trusting in the finished work of Christ is acquitted at God's Judgement Seat. Faith in Christ means that His perfect obedience in life and death is imputed to the believer at the moment we accept the Gospel truth and will stand to our credit on Judgement Day.

The apostle Paul glorified in this universal offer of salvation through faith, because it was a message of power to save the worst and most unworthy of men and women, regardless of who they were, or what they had been or done before coming to repentance. But when it came to the question of *how* that salvation could be appropriated, the apostle was unchangeable in his insistence that salvation is a gift of God's grace (please see Table A on page 120 for biblical references related to this subject).

That being the case, the biblical references which link salvation to *good works*, or *works of the law*, should not be interpreted in such a way that puts this fundamental doctrine in dispute.

Yet faith in Christ is not merely something external; it means being united to Him in such a way that our whole life is bound up in His (please see Table B). As a result of this union, there should inevitably be some moral change in our life and character. We cannot claim to be Christians walking in faith without having something of the righteous nature of our precious Saviour being manifest in the way we live and behave.

Our actions are an indication of our inner faith says James above, and can be used to determine where we stand with the Lord; or if we stand with Him at all!

To summarize what we have just said: James and Paul do not disagree in their teaching on salvation, but approach the same subject from different perspectives. Paul plainly emphasized that justification is by faith alone and James agrees with him, but puts emphasis on the fact that genuine faith in the Lord should produce actions.

Paul actually says the same thing in many of his writings. Immediately after telling us in his Letter to the Ephesians that we are saved by faith not works, he goes on to say that we were, “*Created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life*” (*Ephesians 2:10*).

However, these “*good works*” are “*works of faith,*” the direct fruits of being united with the Lord through the Holy Spirit. They do not represent any virtuous human attainments that could become the basis for our salvation, but are offered to God in gratitude for all He has already done for us in Christ Jesus (see *1Thessalonians 1:3*; *2 Thessalonians 1:11*).

When our hearts are truly converted, we see it a privilege and an honour to be even allowed to serve Jesus, or to suffer reproach and great loss for our allegiance to Him (*Luke 17:10*; *Acts 5:41*).

God designed our salvation in this way so as to totally eliminate any boasting, bragging or pride from man about his holiness or spiritual accomplishments, and so that all the praise and glory would go to Him alone, because He alone is worthy of it (see *Luke 18:9-15*; *Romans 3:27*; *1Corinthians 1:31*; *Ephesians 2:9*).

Finally, I will finish this chapter with one other important point. The Bible does not teach that a person will never sin again after he is saved. On the contrary, it is a common testimony that it is only after conversion that a believer begins to see how deeply sin is entrenched in his whole intellectual, emotional and discretionary nature.

But if he walks in obedience to Christ, he will be changed, slowly but surely, from “*One degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.*”

And when we do sin and fail our Saviour, we need never be discouraged or burdened with guilt and condemnation. Remember what we said in the previous chapter: God has placed you in Jesus and He is our *righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30)*.

Your sin does not affect your position in Christ once you have truly repented. Although your actions may have natural consequences, the Lord forgives, cleanses and restores you so that you can once again reflect the righteousness of His Son (*1 John 1:9*).

God’s plan is that through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, your performance – the way you think, behave and speak – will match your position in Christ more closely; that you will begin to resemble Jesus more and more (*Romans 8:29*). In this way, you will be more effective as witnesses for the Lord and the more He will be able to use you for His glory.

Dear friend, it is only when you are secure and confident in your knowledge of your position in Christ Jesus that you will also be able to deal successfully with the lies and accusations of the devil. He cannot undo the work that the Lord has done for you, but he will try to prevent you from living in that liberty (*2 Corinthians 4:3-5*). If that should happen to you, just simply take up the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and boldly proclaim the truth, “*Away with you, Satan! For it is written.*”

Table A

Romans 1:16-18, 3:20-29, 4:1-25, 6:14, 23, 10:9-14

Galatians 1:8-10, 2:15-21, 3:1-6, 3:10-12, 23, 5:5-7

John 3:14-19, 5:24, 6:40; Ephesians 2:4-10, 3:10-13

Acts 10:43, 13:38-40; 1 Corinthians 1:21-24

1 Peter 1:3-6; 1 John 4:13-16

2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9

Joel 2:32; Mark 16:16; Genesis 15:6

Hebrews 11:7; Titus 3:5

Table B

Romans 6:13-22; 1 John 4:13

Ephesians 1:18-20, 2:10, 3:16-20; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 13:5

1 Corinthians 2:12, 6:17; 2 Timothy 1:6; Ezekiel 36:26

THE TRUE CHURCH

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

(Matthew 16:13-20)

Throughout the history of Christianity no other words have been so much misunderstood and misapplied as those contained in the above passage of Scripture. Ignorance as to their true meaning, which should be interpreted in light of other Scripture, has led to painful differences and divisions in the Body of Christ, and in some cases have been a fertile source of bigotry, sectarianism and outright persecution.

For centuries so-called religious leaders have wrangled and contended, claiming that it was necessary to belong to *their* organisation to inherit salvation, and if one did not, then he did not belong to Christ. In all their strife and contention to obtain religious power over their subjects, they have lost sight of the one true Church, which is spiritual in nature and outside of which there is no salvation at all:

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

(1Peter 2:4-6)

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

(Galatians 3:28)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

(Ephesians 4:4-7)

As can be seen from a close examination of these and other New Testament writings, the Church which Jesus promises to build upon a rock is not the visible church of any individual nation or place, but the company of all believers, “*From every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*” and religious denominations, who have received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour; who have been washed in His blood from sin; clothed in His righteousness; renewed by His Spirit; joined to Him by faith, in His works, not ours; and who are imitators of Christ in life.

It is a Church which is one body; all who belong to it are of one heart and mind; hold the same truths and believe the same doctrines necessary for salvation. Finally, the true Christian Church has only one Head, Jesus Christ Himself:

He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church.

(Colossians 1:17-18b)

It will not matter on Judgement Day where we have worshipped, or which religious organization we have belonged to – whether we are Roman Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Methodist or other – if we are not found to be members of *this* Church, the *spiritual house* of God.

No Other Foundation

If what we have said above concerning the true identity of the Christian Church is true and in accordance with Scripture, then how are we to interpret those remarkable words of Jesus to Peter, “*You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church?*” Does this teach that Peter was the rock upon which Christ would build His Church? And does it prove that the Roman Catholic Church, which claims to be built upon Peter, is God’s true Church?

Absolutely not! First, if this was the case, our Lord would have said to Peter, “*And on you I will build my Church.*” Second, to say that an erring, fallible human being could be the foundation of God’s spiritual Temple is not only exceedingly improbable, it also contradicts and violates other plain teaching of Scripture where Jesus the Messiah and Son of God is the rock upon which the Church is built:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Christ Jesus.

(1Corinthians 3:10-12)

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; and this was the Lord’s doing and it is amazing in our eyes.’”

(Matthew 21:42)

Further, if Peter was appointed by Christ at that time as the “first pope,” and if all popes are infallible, one would never have guessed it from Peter’s performance. Just a few moments after Jesus had praised Him for his open confession of Christ as Lord and Messiah, Peter insisted that his Master should not die on the Cross; a blatant denial of the central doctrine of Christianity. “*Get behind me Satan,*” was Jesus’ reply.

The papal system was certainly off to a bad start. And if Peter did not receive “papal infallibility” from Christ at that moment, then when did he receive it?

In the very next chapter we find Peter, James and John on the mountain where Christ was transfigured before them, giving the disciples a glimpse of His coming resurrection glory. In another hasty declaration Peter put our Lord on the same level as a prophet, asking if he could build three tabernacles, for Jesus, Elijah and Moses, who appeared with them.

Immediately God’s voice from heaven rebuked this newly appointed “pope,” because by his statement Peter denied the uniqueness and deity of God’s only Begotten Son, who is greater and far above any prophet or angel or power.

On several occasions our Lord also rebuked His disciples for arguing over who was to be the greatest in His Kingdom. If Peter was to have any precedence, any of these would certainly have been the right moment to declare it, yet Jesus does no such thing.

In addition, there is not the slightest proof from Scripture, or early Church history, that the other apostles recognized Peter as superior to themselves in any way, or as having any rank or dignity above the rest of them. On the contrary, on one occasion the apostle Paul actually rebuked Peter for hypocrisy, and from the Book of Acts we learn that it was James, the brother of Jesus, who was the actual head of the early Jerusalem Church and he passed sentence in the Council even though Peter was present.

Paul also rebuked believers at Corinth for considering one apostle higher than another. He corrected them about it in his first Letter to the Corinthians:

For it has been reported to me by Cloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

(1Corinthians 1:11-14)

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

(1Corinthians 3:5-8)

Finally, let us not forget that Peter also denied his Master when He was on trial and being condemned to death at the home of the high priest. Yet Rome has excused and justified the sins of her popes, which have included some of the greatest monsters ever to have existed, by saying that, "There is a difference between infallibility and impeccability."

This means popes are infallible when they make a declaration on faith or morals to the entire Church, even when they deny biblical truths with their lives, a concept unknown in Scripture and the early Church. And all three denials of truth uttered by Peter above pertained to faith and morals. And most certainly they were also stated to the entire Church; for they are in the canon of Scripture. However, in spite of evidence to the contrary, out of that simple statement Jesus made to Peter, basically the same one He made to *all* the disciples on other occasions (see *Matthew 18:18-19; John*

20:23-24), the Roman Catholic Church has manufactured a papal office, papal infallibility, apostolic succession, a magisterium which alone can interpret Scripture, a celibate priesthood, to whom Roman Catholics must confess sins, and which alone can administer grace through seven sacraments, and much more.

Any person can examine the Scriptures a million times over and never find justification for these practices. Not only is there nothing in the Bible that warrants such an office as pope, in fact, Jesus Christ actually forbids any man from holding such a position (*Matthew 28:8-10; 1Timothy 2:5-7*).

Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

There are two different Greek words used for Peter and rock in *Matthew 16:18* quoted above. Peter's name in Greek is *Petros*, meaning a *piece of rock*. In contrast, the word translated *rock* in the same passage is *Petra*, which signifies a massive *rock*, which certainly refers to Jesus Christ the *Chief Cornerstone*. Peter had just confessed, through a revelation given him by the Holy Spirit in that moment, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and it was upon this truth that Jesus would build His Church.

It is as though Jesus had said to Peter, "You are rightly called by the name Peter, or rock, because you have confessed that powerful truth on which, as on a rock, I will build my Church." But by his faith in Jesus as the Christ and by his confession of Him as such to the world, Peter became a *piece* of the rock, and a *part* of the foundation upon which the Church is built. The apostle Paul confirms this when he wrote:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

(Ephesians 2:19-21)

Notice that in the above quotation Paul states that *all* the apostles are part of the foundation stone of Christ's Church and the same Scripture again mentions Jesus as the *Chief Cornerstone* (see also *1 Peter 2:6-8*).

This view is not a modern one. It was held by Chrysostom long ago and was taught by Ferus, a famous Roman Catholic preacher of the Franciscan order, in the sixteenth century.

The Keys to the Kingdom

Having established the true meaning of the word rock in Christ's statement to Peter, what are we to understand when we read the promise which our Lord makes to him concerning the keys to the Kingdom?

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

(Matthew 16:19-20)

Do these words mean that Jesus gave to Peter the right to admit souls into the Kingdom of Heaven, and that he was to have some kind of primacy over the rest of the apostles in this regard? Not at all. Throughout Scripture such an office is the special prerogative of Jesus Himself:

These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

(Revelation 3:7)

I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.

(Revelation 1:17c-19)

When anyone studied under a Jewish rabbi, it was the custom of the rabbi to give him a key when he had passed his examination for the high position of a doctor of the Law, meaning that he had become perfect in the doctrine and was able to unlock the secrets of the Kingdom to others. Christ's words to Peter in verse 19 of Matthew refers to this custom. Peter had proven that the Father was revealing the truth to him and Jesus foresaw the day when, filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter, and all the apostles, would be guided into all truth and so be competent to unlock the Kingdom to men:

But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

(John 16:13-14)

The true meaning, then, of the promise to Peter, is that he was to have the special privilege of being the first to open the door of the Kingdom to both Jews and Gentiles, a fact to which Peter himself seems to have been sensible to when he said:

My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers.

(Acts 15:7b)

This was fulfilled to the letter when Peter preached the Gospel to the Jews on the day of Pentecost and three thousand entered the Kingdom that day, and again in Acts 10 Peter used the keys to unlock the truth to the Gentiles and a whole household got saved. Every time anyone preaches the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit he is using the same keys that Peter and the other disciples used.

Who Can Forgive Sins?

Finally, what are we to understand by Jesus' words to Peter when He said, "*Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven?*" Does this mean that Peter was to have power to forgive sins, and absolve sinners? No. Such an idea shows contempt to Christ's special office as our High Priest as outlined in the Book of Hebrews and elsewhere in Scripture.

The power to forgive sins is a power to which we never find Peter or any of the apostles once using. They always referred men to Christ.

Binding and loosing were also common expressions in Jesus' day for forbidding something or permitting it. What a rabbi forbade, he was said to *bind*, and what he permitted, he was said to *loose*. Again, as Spirit-filled men, Peter and the other apostles would have discernment to know what God permitted and forbid and so be equipped to lay down rules and regulations for the guidance of the Church on disputed matters.

The decision of the Council at Jerusalem that the Gentiles need not be circumcised was an example of the exercise of this power (*Acts 15:19*), but it was a commission specially confined to the apostles. With them it began and with them it finished! In a spiritual sense, however, all true believers have been given authority in union with Christ to bind the evil forces coming against them and other believers; and to loose, or release, God's promises in prayer by faith (see *Matthew 18:18; Luke 10:19-20*).

Other Uses of the Word *Church*

As we underlined at the beginning of this chapter, in New Testament terminology the word *church* is used, first and foremost, to describe the whole body of believers in Jesus Christ of every age,

Jew and Gentile alike (see *Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47, 20:28, Ephesians 2:11-22, 5:24-25; 1Peter 2:4-6; Colossians 1:18, 24; Revelation 5:9-11, 7:9-11*).

Second, it is used for a local congregation meeting regularly for worship, teaching, and the breaking of bread – for example, the Church of the Thessalonians:

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace.

(1Thessalonians 1:1)

Finally, the word church is used to describe believers gathered together in any one place in Jesus' name – for example, the brothers and sisters that met in Rome in the home of Prisca and Aquila:

Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Greet also the church in their house.

(Romans 16:3-5b)

The title *catholic church*, which means the *church universal*, was originally given to the Christian Church on account of its embracement of all nations and not being confined to the Jewish people only. Before the resurrection of Christ, God's people consisted only of Jews, whose relationship to Him was defined by the Mosaic Covenant. But after Christ's crucifixion for the sins of the world, there came into existence an entirely new entity composed of both Jews and Gentiles, and a new way for both parties to approach God (see *Ephesians 2:11-20*).

The earliest use of the title was about 166 A.D. and bears no connection to the Roman Catholic Church, which did not come into

existence until centuries later, long after the time of Emperor Constantine.

The Indestructible Bride

Finally, I would like to finish this chapter with a reminder of the glorious promise that Christ made to His Church. He said, “*The gates of Hades* (Satan and his demonic cohort) *will not prevail against it.*” Many people have interpreted this statement to mean that Satan would not be able to defeat or destroy the Church before the Second Coming. They assume that the Lord pictured His people on the *defensive*.

While this is true, and all believers have been given spiritual armour to protect themselves from the enemy’s onslaught (*Ephesians 6:10-17b*), it is also true that we have been given spiritual weapons (prayer, praise, binding and loosing, and the Word of God) to attack the enemy and to be on the offensive (*2 Corinthians 10:3-6; Ephesians 6:17b-19; Matthew 16:19-20, 18:18-19*). I believe this is the true meaning of Jesus’ words quoted above.

Our Lord promised that if we obey Him and stand on His promises in the Word, we will be able to advance, break through Satan’s gates, release his captives and carry away his spoil. It is not the Church trying to keep Satan out, but the other way around.

A Closing Thought

My friend, he that brought sin and death into God’s first Creation, by tempting Eve, shall never be able to bring destruction on the new Creation by resisting or overthrowing true believers. Visible churches, like those of Ephesus and Corinth, may come to an end, but the spiritual Church of Christ, the one and only true Church, though often persecuted, afflicted, and brought low, shall never perish or come to an end, but shall continue to defeat and outlive

the hatred and wrath of emperors, dictators and popes until the coming of her Beloved Bridegroom.

In spite of the world, the flesh and the devil, every member of it shall be brought safe to glory on that day. Thank you Lord Jesus for your undying faithfulness.

11

THE SECOND COMING

The plain teaching of Scripture tells us that the generation of men and women who are alive prior to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ will experience the greatest evil ever unleashed upon humanity (*Matthew 24:21; Revelation 12:12*).

In the Book of Revelation the apostle John reveals that a large part of mankind will die in horrific judgements, wars, famines and plagues during this unprecedented seven-year period known as the *Great Tribulation*.

During this period Satan will be left to attempt his greatest rebellion against God in his relentless pursuit to establish a satanic kingdom throughout the Earth under the rule of his representative, the Antichrist. However, the same ancient Scriptures assure us that our Lord Jesus will return from heaven in great power and glory at the moment the world faces its most horrific crisis, to defeat the forces of the Antichrist gathered in rebellion against Him and to save our planet from total destruction (*Revelation 19:11-21; 2 Thessalonians 2:4-9*).

Christ will then judge the inhabitants of this Earth (*Matthew 25:32-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-11*), establish His righteous government throughout the world and reign from the throne of David in Jerusalem for a thousand years (*Revelation 20:1-7; Isaiah 2:1-5, 11:1-9*).

The Bible also tells us that the Second Coming of the Lord to establish His millennium reign will be marked by two separate resurrections (*John 5:28-30; Daniel 12:2-4; Revelation 20:5-7*). The first resurrection will include all believers who have died in Christ (*1Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1Corinthians 15:51-53; Revelation 20:4-5*). The second and final resurrection will be for everyone else for judgement at the end of Christ's thousand-year

reign on Earth, “*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.*”

Scripture refers to the final resurrection as “*the resurrection of condemnation.*” Jesus promised that none of those who believed in Him would come to this final judgement, but is reserved for all unrepentant sinners who chose to reject God’s plan for their salvation:

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

(John 3:17-19)

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them and all were judged according to what they had done.

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire, and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

(Revelation 20:11-15)

This passage of Scripture is very difficult to imagine and is totally contrary to our modern and politically correct world. It is almost impossible to believe that a loving God could cast people who have consciously rejected Him into a lake of fire for all eternity. In our humanness, and especially through our close acquaintance with the

complexities of human experience and suffering, a part of us cries out, “No God that is not fair.” However, we must remember that God’s judgements are totally fair and just and that He has done everything in His power to save people from destruction. If we as human beings feel such compassion and concern for the unrepentant, then we can be sure that our Creator feels this compassion at a much deeper level.

But as ruler and judge of the Universe, God cannot overlook wrongdoing or take it lightly, and we have witnessed this at Calvary. There we see what sin does to God, and what immense physical, spiritual, and psychological suffering He had to undergo to pardon it. Considering this, any fair-minded reader will agree that if men and women choose to cling to their sinful way of life in the face of such great love and sacrifice that God displayed for them in Christ, then it is only just that they should face the consequences of falling under His righteous judgements on Judgement Day.

12

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

The overall evidence presented in this book takes us to a place where there is a very important personal choice for each one of us to make. If the Bible is true in all that it affirms, then we are not dealing simply with academic questions here, but with the most serious question of every individual's life – his eternal destiny (see *John 3:36, 5:24, 11:25-28*).

If the Bible is true and Jesus Christ was not mistaken about the truths He declared about Himself, then we are accountable to Him who will judge each one of us at the end of this age. The Scriptures say that:

While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

(Acts 17:30-32)

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.

(Acts 4:12-13)

These declarations of the apostles Paul and Peter are in stark contrast to the natural inclination of mankind to believe that if you are a sincere and good person, God will allow you into heaven regardless of what you believe. As we have carefully pointed out in previous chapters, this is not even close to what the Bible teaches. If you have chosen to place your faith in *your own*

righteousness, false religion, or even the fact that you believe in the inspiration of Scripture, you are wrong.

God never told us to believe in the inspiration of the Bible and you will be saved. Satan and his demons believe this, but their intellectual knowledge will not save them (*James 2:19*). As we saw in chapter eight, the Gospel of John records the simple answer Jesus gave to the religious leader Nicodemus when he enquired about the true path of salvation:

I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but Spirit gives birth to spirit."

(John 3:3-7)

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a respected ruler of the Jewish people who believed in God, prayed, fasted, read the Scriptures, and tried to keep high moral standards. Yet with all of this to his credit, it was not enough. Jesus told him he must be "*born again.*" In other words, the New Birth; the death of our old sin nature when we identify with the death and resurrection of Christ on our behalf, is the key to true reconciliation with God and a prerequisite for eternal life. To summarize some very important points made in previous chapters on this topic, to be born again one must simply:

1. Acknowledge that we are all sinners and come short of the glory of God, and that our sinful rebellion prevents us from ever entering heaven unless we are forgiven by Him and cleansed by the blood of Jesus (*Romans 3:22-27*).

2. Reject any possibility of being reconciled to God on the basis of moral achievements, membership of a church, the giving to charity, or anything else that we may judge to be an acceptable moral standard of living (*Ephesians 2:8-10*).
3. Repent of our sins and place total faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus on our behalf.

To repent means much more than to simply confess our shortcomings, but it involves shame, sorrow, regret, and a total distaste for sin, together with a deep longing to lead a life that is centred on God as opposed to being centred on self.

“Now Is the Acceptable Time”

In light of the indisputable evidence we have presented you with so far, and the many other works written over the centuries that bear witness to the historic, scientific and prophetic truths contained in the Bible, we can fully trust the words of the apostles and prophets when they urge us concerning the necessity of the New Birth to inherit eternal life. It is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament and is foreshadowed in the Old Testament Law and Prophets.

Eternal life is not only living forever but knowing “*You, the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” This means a personal and intimately close relationship with God the Father *who is not ashamed to call you His child.*

Eternal life also means that your decision to follow Christ will release His supernatural power and grace into your life at this very moment; transforming it into an immense joy and peace beyond anything you have ever imagined.

If you are willing and ready to place your faith and trust in Him right now, it is as simple as just saying the following prayer with

your whole heart, and you will be instantly born again, a new creature, translated from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God's glorious Son.

Father I come to you through your Son Jesus Christ just as I am. I believe that Jesus came to Earth and died for my sins on the Cross and I now accept you as my Lord and Saviour. I repent of all my sin and rebellion and ask you to forgive and transform me so I can forgive others for what they have done against me and receive courage to live my new life in Christ and share my faith with others. Amen.

