Tenets of the Faith

Week 6 Resurrection and Ascension

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What is it? (definition; summary of the doctrine)

**The Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

**What Worldview are You Starting From?**

**Biblical Worldview: God’s Inspired and infallible Word Determines Truth and What is False**

It is important to recognize assumptions when they surface.  A red flag may go up where we ask, “Is this true?”  We then need to follow the approach of the believers in Berea: *Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness,* *examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so* (Acts 17:11).  John the apostle told his readers to “*test the spirits* to see if they are from God” (1 John 4:1).  Jesus said, “Sanctify them by the truth, *your word is truth*” (John 17:17).  The bottom line is God’s inspired and infallible Word determines truth and therefore what is not in keeping with truth — what is false.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Charles Taylor traces these epistemological changes over three distinct time periods, pivoting around the Enlightenment: before the Enlightenment, people found it impossible not to believe the Christian worldview; starting with the Enlightenment, it became possible not to believe in the basic truths of Christianity; three hundred years after the Enlightenment and with the rise of postmodern pluralism, most people find it impossible to believe in the objective truths and ultimate concerns of the Christian worldview.[[2]](#endnote-2)

**Biblical Worldview vs. Knowledge Apart from God’s Word**

Why is historical knowledge — let alone *any* knowledge — uncertain apart from God’s Word? The answer is that we are not sufficient unto ourselves but were made to be dependent on our Maker. It is impossible for us to be self-sufficient in knowledge, for only God — by definition — can be self-sufficient; this is why we are commanded to live by every word that proceeds from the Father’s mouth (Deut. 8.3). Man as a creature is **rationally limited** and thus needs to be programmed with basic information about the nature of the universe in order to increase in knowledge and establish dominion over all things; only his Creator — God — who exists outside the created order can furnish this necessary intellectual framework by which man can then make sense of the world around him. It was the Creator who equipped humankind with a set of assumptions about how the world is organized; this is the creature’sstarting point for acquiring knowledge. Without this basic worldview, we could not arrive at any knowledge whatsoever.[[3]](#endnote-3)

**Measuring Through the Lens of God’s Word**

The divine mandate to subdue the creation obligates us to order the facts of our experiences in *grateful acknowledgement of our Creator and His revealed will*. We do not do justice to God’s works of creation and providence if we fail to attach scriptural meaning to it. For this reason, Christians must be critically discerning of secular thought, measuring all things by the yardstick of spiritual revelation. Given the Lord’s providential governance of the universe at every level — past, present, and future — the historian must examine these facts **through the lens of God’s Word, authored by the Sacred Historian who orchestrates all things. Only from Scripture can we know that there is no endless repetition or random sequence of events..**.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Answer to the Skeptics**

How can we give an answer for our faith in the Bible’s trustworthiness? The best way to evaluate claims to the contrary is to consider the worldview behind each detraction. What underlying presuppositions cause people to read the Bible with an unreceptive bent toward disbelief? When we understand the basic outlook on life, reality, truth, or believability that underlies these criticisms, it is easy to see how such conclusions about the Bible are reached—how A leads to B and therefore C.[[5]](#endnote-5)

**Not Seeking Historical Accuracy, but Seeking to Dismantle the Bible’s Worldview**

*What is at the heart of these attacks?* Why do the critics want us to accept a **historically remixed** Jesus as opposed to the Jesus of the Bible? Is it simply an honest scholarly inquiry attempting to discover the true historical facts about Jesus and His teachings? Or is something more sinister at work behind this quest for archaeological proof and historical accuracy? *These attacks are not aimed at a better, more historically accurate, understanding of the Bible, but at dismantling the Bible’s worldview*.[[6]](#endnote-6)

**What Presuppositions Commonly Held in our Culture Allow Such Attacks Against a Biblical Worldview?**

We need to address the underlying systems that cause such attacks to be *so readily received*. We need to become more adept at engaging in *worldview apologetics—defending biblical faith in a manner that cuts through the individual attacks and asks what causes them*? **What presuppositions are commonly held within our culture that allow such attacks to gain traction?**

A worldview is an all-encompassing approach to answering the big questions of life: why are we here, where is the world going, what should we be doing (or not doing), what is true or false, etc. Our worldview provides a framework or starting point from which we interpret all of life (e.g., history, culture, science, politics, religion, economics, ethics, etc.)—really, everything is interpreted through the lens of our worldview. And whether people are aware of it or not, we all have a worldview.

It is possible to divide up intellectual history into three basic eras: premodern, modern, and postmodern. A brief overview of these eras will allow us to make a few observations about the Bible and history.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Worldviews in Perspective[[7]](#endnote-7)** | | |
| **Pre-Modern**  Ancient Times – 1500’s | **Modern[[8]](#endnote-8)**  1500’s – 1900’s | **Post-Modern[[9]](#endnote-9)**  Late 1900’s - Present |
| Theism / Faith | Enlightenment (1601-1800) /  Reason – Secularized knowledge and subjected all knowledge to standard of reason. | Spirituality / Mysticism |
| Belief in Miracles | No miracles | No Answer for the Miraculous |
| Paganism / Animism[[10]](#endnote-10) | Anti-supernaturalism | Neo-Paganism |
| Religious / No atheism | Questioning Religion | Self-styled Religion |
| Greek Philosophy | Rationalism / Pragmatism[[11]](#endnote-11) | Extreme Skepticism |
| Limited Technologies[[12]](#endnote-12) | Scientific Revolution | Cautious of Technologies |
| East Moves West | Spread of Western Culture | Globalism / Pluralism / Diversity |
| Oral / Illiterate populations | Historical Criticism | Deconstruction |
| Truth = from God (Revelation) | Scientific Truth (Realism) | Personal Truth (Relativism) |
|  | Reformation (1517-1600) – Truth came from Scripture and individuals encouraged to read Bible themselves. Against Catholic Church thought that only they had the right to interpret Scripture. |  |

**Who is Jesus?**

It is a fairly well-established fact that Jesus Christ was publicly executed in Judea in the 1st Century A.D., under Pontius Pilate, by means of crucifixion, at the behest of the Jewish Sanhedrin. The non-Christian historical accounts of Flavius Josephus[[13]](#endnote-13), Cornelius Tacitus[[14]](#endnote-14), Lucian of Samosata[[15]](#endnote-15), Maimonides and even the Jewish Sanhedrin[[16]](#endnote-16) corroborate the early Christian eyewitness accounts of these important historical aspects of the death of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Christ is an established central point in history.[[17]](#endnote-17) Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western culture for almost twenty centuries.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Trying to define Jesus as a good teacher is unsound because a good teacher cannot make the claims He did. As John posted out when studying the Deity of Christ, you need to affirm Christ as Lord, or all the claims of such make Him a Lunatic or an outright Liar. Who is Jesus?[[19]](#endnote-19) You need to know. Your eternal life depends on it.[[20]](#endnote-20)

**The Blunt Question Put by Jesus to His Followers—‘Who do People say I am?’ (Mark 8:27)—Must be Confronted**

*And this great task becomes even more urgent today because the church is living and thinking amid much Christological confusion created by the misidentification of Christ. Similar to the first century (although for different reasons), our own day has seen the rise of a rampant philosophical and religious pluralism. There are many beliefs that distinguish Christianity from other worldviews, but none as important as the identity of Christ. The claim that Jesus Christ is both divine and human and the only Lord and Savior is viewed with suspicion, doubt, and even outright anger. Regardless of the response, however, the discussion always centers on the question of Jesus’s identity. “No serious discussion of the relation of Christianity to other faiths can proceed very far without coming to grips with the towering figure of Jesus.* ***Sooner or later, the blunt question put by Jesus to his followers—‘Who do people say I am?’ (Mark 8:27)—must be confronted.”*** *The Jesus of the Bible is unique to Christianity, and this Jesus demands and deserves all of our commitment, obedience, and trust.[[21]](#endnote-21)* Even if you try to describe Jesus dispassionately, the result would be an *impossibility:* a ...non theological Jesus could never have inspired the devotion of millions and founded the world’s greatest religion. Those who try to be objective about Jesus have missed the point. For Jesus does not allow objectivity. **He demands decision**.[[22]](#endnote-22)

**Absence of Evidence is Not Evidence of Absence**

Historicity, as it is commonly understood (complete historical accuracy, chronological order, etc.), is a modern post-enlightenment Western notion. Strictly speaking, historicity can only be evaluated when there are multiple attestations to the same event. Historicity is not exactly the same as historical **reliability**. If the Bible provides the *only* account of an historical event, that biblical account must be understood in light of the overall framework of history *provided by our worldview*. The denial of the Bible’s historicity due to its inclusion of the miraculous or of otherwise-unattested **accounts is based on one’s *predisposition* *against*** the Bible’s truth claims—***not evidence to the contrary***. The Bible refers to real people and events in a manner that truthfully conveys the divine Author’s message. Our reading of the Bible’s historical literature is *based upon the presupposition that there is a God*, *and He has spoken truthfully in Scripture.* Those with presuppositions to the contrary must acknowledge the oft-cited dictum: “**Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence**.” In other words, it is unscientific and irrational to claim that the Bible is historically inaccurate if evidence cannot **disprove** the Bible’s historical claims—and hard data disproving biblical history is simply not available. *If one claims that the Bible is historically unreliable on the basis of their anti-supernatural worldview, this should be admitted.*

Such a *critical* approach stands *opposite* *of a confessional Christology that commits to the full accuracy and authority of Scripture*. The *Jesus of history* is *not* the same as *the Jesus of the Bibl*e, let alone the veracity of Scripture established about *Christ of Chalcedon. [[23]](#endnote-23) [[24]](#endnote-24) [[25]](#endnote-25)*

**The Reasonableness of Faith in the Bible as an Historical Document**

Where both the Bible and extra-biblical sources provide attestations to the same event, the Bible’s historicity is confirmed. **However, we need not wait for archaeologists to recover the next cache of texts that corroborate biblical history before we believe in the Bible’s historical reliability.** Where it can be tested, the Bible stands the test. **But the larger issue of our willingness to believe that which we cannot prove *is determined by our worldview***. Evidences can encourage our faith, but **they are no replacement for faith**. We must admit that we cannot “prove” the historicity of the entire Bible, but we can defend the reasonableness of faith in the Bible as an historical document—especially when compared to other worldview options.[[26]](#endnote-26)

**Methodological Naturalism**

The secular community’s response to the same evidence has been predictably apathetic in accordance with their steadfast commitment to methodological naturalism. ***Methodological naturalism*** is the human endeavor of explaining everything in terms of natural causes and natural causes only. If an alleged historical event defies natural explanation (e.g., a miraculous resurrection), secular scholars generally treat it with overwhelming skepticism, **regardless of the evidence**, no matter how favorable and compelling it may be.

**Slanted Predispositions**

**In our view, such an unwavering allegiance to natural causes *regardless of substantive evidence to the contrary* is not conducive to an impartial (and therefore adequate) investigation of the evidence**. We agree with Dr. Wernher von Braun and numerous others who still believe that forcing a popular philosophical predisposition upon the evidence hinders objectivity. Or in the words of Dr. von Braun, *To be forced to believe only one conclusion… would violate the very objectivity of science itself.*

**Premodern Views of Reality**

European or Western civilization drew its intellectual history more from the East—the cradle of civilization—than most of us realize. Rather than starting in Athens and Rome, the West has deeper roots further east in intellectual centers such as Babylon, Egypt, Jerusalem, Istanbul (Constantinople). Greek Philosophy, which provided the guiding principles of Western thought, *was steeped in polytheistic pagan mythology just as was the East*. There were no atheists in ancient times—the concept of life apart from religious belief simply did not fit with their worldviews. Some developed superstitious practices around the belief that non-humans and natural objects have souls (a belief known as animism), yet every society worshipped and believed in the divine. Because of this focus on religion, polytheism thrived, and gods of various virtues (love goddesses) or forces (storm gods) were given names. The quantity of gods people believed in had to be reduced to a memorable number.[[27]](#endnote-27)

**Modernism’s Enlightened Age of Reason**

Rationalism lies at the foundation of our modern educational system. We are all affected by the scientific age of reason. After the Italian Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the spread of Enlightenment ideals throughout Europe, ***reason*** became the foundation of modern society. Educated people could no longer be kept in the dark by those who would manipulate them politically or religiously—they were “enlightened.” No longer would illiterate populations simply believe what they were told by their philosophers, governments, and religious leaders. Many who were victimized by abusive religious powers throughout Europe were prepared to adopt a new approach to truth. The empirical model suggested that knowledge is obtained through the senses. One can only believe the things he can touch, taste, see, etc.

**Scientific skepticism** provided security against intellectual scam artists who thrived on naive people. Rationalism’s scientific revolution prevailed throughout the West (in Europe and America), and **philosophers began to question the notion of religious faith altogether**. Perhaps there is no God. If there is no God, prophecies can’t happen. If prophecies don’t happen, then claims to prophecy must be false claims intended to look like prophecy. Of course, this leaves no room for the Bible’s claim of divine inspiration.

**Skepticism Produces More Questions than Evidence Can Answer**

For those who attempted to merge their religious commitments with post-Enlightenment rationalism, biblical archaeology—it was hoped—would settle the issue of the Bible’s historical reliability. If archaeology can prove that events occurred as the Bible said they happened, then we can know the Bible is true. *But archaeology is not an exact science*. The finds must be interpreted. Further, it does not provide a complete record. Many sites have never been excavated, and one cannot predict what the next amazing discovery might be. **Despite these scientific limitations of archaeological inquiry, modernism’s historical-critical approach assumes that biblical texts are guilty until proven innocent**. It is not that archaeology has *disproved* the Bible, but the *false notion of the historical-critical approach* that says historical texts like the Bible do not deserve our trust until they are deemed worthy by the hard evidence and higher authority of scientific rationalism. Archaeology can never meet the demands of rationalism, and skepticism can always produce more questions than the evidence can answer.

**Postmodernism—the World in which We Live: No Place for Truth/No One is Wrong**

Postmodernism’s social concern for the marginalized voices of the oppressed is a much-appreciated fact of our age. But beneath its gentle and caring exterior lies a fierce political agenda fueled by the theory of **deconstruction**: marginalized people (minority populations) need to replace societal power structures by questioning authorities and displacing those in positions of power and privilege. **Written texts have power, and they too must be deconstructed**. If texts such as the Constitution, the writings of Mark Twain, or the Bible are used by the powerful to “marginalize the oppressed,” then these texts must be questioned and reinterpreted to show their inner incompatibility. These once-powerful, culture-creating texts are dismantled by political activists, writers, educators, religionists, law makers, media personalities and others involved in social criticism who collaborate to move the agenda of **deconstruction** forward.

***Postmodernism has no place for true truth. It is ethically neutral.*** No one is wrong, unless they claim that others are wrong. Postmodern bumper stickers sum up the prevailing mentality of our day: “I hate intolerant people,” “My karma ran over your dogma,” “Fairies are real,” and “All generalizations are untrue, including this one.” *Since the scientific methods of modernists could not answer the unsolvable mysteries of the supernatural world, postmodernism has opened the door to mysticism and neo-paganism: a belief in spiritual energies in nature, feng shui, self-actualizing meditation, time travel, horoscopes, fortune-telling spiritual guides, etc.*

**Postmodernism appreciates the spiritual and the supernatural, but it cannot appreciate anyone claiming to know the truth about such issues**. God is in, but Jesus is clearly out! You can be spiritual, but don’t bother people with the Bible and its claims to infallible truth. ***This extreme skepticism allows for personal truth, but not absolute truth: “It may be true for you, but it’s not true for me.”***

**So Which One is Right? They All Fall Short of Providing a Biblical Worldview**

Although each era of intellectual history had positive qualities, none of them had everything right. Rather, they all fall short of providing a biblical worldview—a view that evaluates everything through the lens of what God has revealed in Scripture. **A biblical worldview implies that God has spoken truthfully in Scripture.** *But the skepticism of modernism asks, “Who really wrote those biblical texts?” And the uber-skepticism of postmodernism asks, “What propaganda were they trying to get people to believe?”*

**The Bible’s Historicity is Determined in Advance by a Person’s Worldview**

The issue of the Bible’s possible historicity is determined in advance by a person’s worldview.

*If we conclude that modernism (with its denial of the supernatural and its demand that scientific proof must precede belief) provides the appropriate lens through which we interpret all of life, then of course the Bible’s historical accounts cannot be true.* *The Bible’s supernatural events must be reinterpreted to fit the presuppositions of scientific rationalism—which has no room for the divine or the miraculous.*

And if we take the extreme skepticism of postmodernism as our starting point, the Bible will fail our tests for *ethical neutrality* and be reduced to a useful human text that can be manipulated to suit our agendas when we deem it expedient to cite it in attempting to liberate the oppressed.[[28]](#endnote-28)

Only from Scripture can we know that there is no endless repetition or random sequence of events; rather, history is **eschatological** — advancing toward a prescribed and glorious conclusion: “So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55.11). Given the role of Christ in completing this mission, the Incarnation remains the singular event of the cosmos; it was the end of ancient history *— its fulfillment now is the template for all events thereafter.* This biblical fact must structure our historical understanding as we piece together the experiences of the past. The only way for history to have objective meaning and lasting moral significance is to strive to situate even trivial occurrences in our world with the backdrop of... God and His Word out of obedience to Christ.[[29]](#endnote-29)

As for His resurrection, there are several lines of evidence which make for a compelling case. The late jurisprudential prodigy and international statesman Sir Lionel Luckhoo[[30]](#endnote-30) (of The Guinness Book of World Records fame for his unprecedented 245 consecutive defense murder trial acquittals) epitomized Christian enthusiasm and confidence in the strength of the case for the resurrection when he wrote, *I have spent more than 42 years as a defense trial lawyer appearing in many parts of the world and am still in active practice. I have been fortunate to secure a number of successes in jury trials and I say unequivocally the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.*

Having said that, let us now examine several lines of evidence for Christ’s resurrection.  
  
**The First Line of Evidence for Christ’s Resurrection**

**To begin with, we have demonstrably sincere eyewitness testimony.** Early Christian apologists cited hundreds of eyewitnesses, some of whom documented their own alleged experiences. Many of these eyewitnesses willfully and resolutely endured prolonged torture and death rather than repudiate their testimony. This fact attests to their sincerity, ruling out deception on their part. According to the historical record (The Book of Acts 4.1-17; Pliny’s Letters to Trajan X, 97, etc.) *most Christians could end their suffering simply by renouncing the faith.* *Instead, it seems that most opted to endure the suffering and proclaim Christ’s resurrection unto death.[[31]](#endnote-31)*  
  
Granted, while martyrdom is remarkable, it is not necessarily compelling. It does not validate a belief so much as it authenticates a believer (by demonstrating his or her sincerity in a tangible way). *What makes the earliest Christian martyrs remarkable is that they knew whether or not what they were professing was true*. They either saw Jesus Christ alive-and-well after His death or they did not. This is extraordinary. If it was all just a lie, why would so many perpetuate it given their circumstances*? Why would they all knowingly cling to such an unprofitable lie in the face of persecution, imprisonment, torture, and death?* The early Christian martyrs were the first generation. Either they saw what they claimed to see, or they did not.

Among the most illustrious of the professed eyewitnesses were the Apostles. They collectively underwent an undeniable change following the post-resurrection appearances of Christ. Immediately following His crucifixion, they hid in fear for their lives. Following the resurrection they took to the streets, boldly proclaiming the resurrection despite intensifying persecution. What accounts for their sudden and dramatic change? It certainly was not financial gain. *The Apostles gave up everything they had to preach the resurrection, including their lives.*

**The Second Line of Evidence for Christ’s Resurrection**

**A second line of evidence concerns the conversion of the apostles and certain key skeptics, most notably Paul and James**. What else could account for such a transformation? Before the resurrection, the disciples were a small band of defeated, cowardly followers of Jesus. But after the resurrection they could not be silenced by persecution, the threat of martyrdom, or death itself. Something happened—the Resurrection—to change their lives forever.

Paul was of his own admission a violent persecutor of the early Church. After what he described as an encounter with the resurrected Christ, Paul underwent an immediate and drastic change from a vicious persecutor of the Church to one of its most prolific and selfless defenders. Like many early Christians, Paul suffered impoverishment, persecution, beatings, imprisonment, and execution for his steadfast commitment to Christ’s resurrection.

James was skeptical, though not as hostile as Paul. A purported post-resurrection encounter with Christ turned him into an inimitable believer, a leader of the Church in Jerusalem. Like Paul, James willingly suffered and died for his testimony, a fact which attests to the sincerity of his belief (see The Book of Acts and Josephus’ Antiquities of the Jews XX, ix, 1).

**The Third and Fourth Lines of Evidence for Christ’s Resurrection**

**A third line and fourth line of evidence concern enemy attestation to the empty tomb and the fact that faith in the resurrection took root in Jerusalem**. Jesus was publicly executed and buried in Jerusalem. It would have been impossible for faith in His resurrection to take root in Jerusalem while His body was still in the tomb where the Sanhedrin could exhume it, put it on public display, and thereby expose the hoax. Instead, the Sanhedrin accused the disciples of stealing the body, apparently in an effort to explain its disappearance (and therefore an empty tomb). How do we explain the fact of the empty tomb? Even the most common explanations lack substantiation.[[32]](#endnote-32)  
  
**The Fifth Line of Evidence for Christ’s Resurrection**

**Finally, a fifth line of evidence concerns a peculiarity of the eyewitness testimony.** In all of the major resurrection narratives, women are credited as the first and primary eyewitnesses. This would be an odd accreditation if instigated, since in both the ancient Jewish and Roman cultures women were severely disesteemed. Their testimony was regarded as insubstantial and dismissible. *Given this fact, it is highly unlikely that any perpetrators of a hoax in 1st Century Judea would elect women to be their primary witnesses.* Of all the male disciples who claimed to see Jesus resurrected, if they all were lying and the resurrection was a scam, why did they pick the most ill-perceived, distrusted witnesses they could find?[[33]](#endnote-33)

**In Summary**

These lines of evidence: the demonstrable sincerity of the eyewitnesses (and in the Apostles’ case, compelling, inexplicable change), the conversion and demonstrable sincerity of key antagonists- and skeptics-turned-martyrs, the fact of the empty tomb, enemy attestation to the empty tomb, the fact that all of this took place in Jerusalem where faith in the resurrection began and thrived, the testimony of the women, the significance of such testimony given the historical context; all of these strongly attest to the historicity of the resurrection. We encourage our readers to thoughtfully consider these evidences. What do they suggest to you? Having pondered them ourselves, we resolutely affirm Sir Lionel’s declaration:

“*The evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.*”

*The earliest converts came to Christ after a single historical fact, the Resurrection, and a single historical doctrine, Redemption.* (C. S. Lewis)

**Is there more evidence for Jesus’ actual bodily resurrection?**

Are there more facts related to the resurrection that can be shown to be true beyond reasonable doubt—even when placed under the microscope of historical and critical scrutiny?

Here are four:

**1. Jesus was crucified by the Romans around AD 30**

No credible scholar denies that Jesus existed and that he was crucified under orders from Pontius Pilate. There’s a wealth of New Testament and extra-biblical evidence that attests to this. The two most telling examples are from Tacitus and Josephus.[[34]](#endnote-34)

**2. Jesus Was Buried in the Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea**

There’s no reason for the church to create an incidental detail as this. Arimathea has no symbolic meaning. What’s more, Joseph of Arimathea was a member of the Sanhedrin—the very council that condemned Jesus. It wouldn’t have made sense for the church to invent a story where a member of the council which condemned Jesus would have given him a noble burial.

**3. The Tomb Was Discovered Empty on the Third Day**

All four Gospels testify that women discovered the empty tomb. This minor detail is important.

In first-century Judaism, women were not considered reliable witnesses. They would have never been allowed to testify in a court of law. Think about this: the church would never have created stories about women discovering the empty tomb in a context where women were not considered credible witnesses.

**4. Many Credible Witnesses Saw Jesus Alive**

Paul, a primary first-century source confirms that more than 500 people saw Jesus alive, many of whom were still living at the time of writing: 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 buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters 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 to one abnormally born. (1 Corinthians 15:3–8) (Also see Handout 6\_2.)

A close up of a book

Description automatically generated

(from *Know Why You Believe,* Paul E. Little)

**The Ascension of Jesus Christ**

Forty days after the resurrection, Jesus and His disciples went to Mount Olivet, near Jerusalem. There, Jesus promised His followers that they would soon receive the Holy Spirit, and He instructed them to remain in Jerusalem until the Spirit had come. Then Jesus blessed them, and as He gave the blessing, He began to ascend into heaven. The account of Jesus’ ascension is found in Luke 24.50-51 and Acts 1.9-11.

It is plain from Scripture that Jesus’ ascension was a literal, bodily return to heaven. He rose from the ground gradually and visibly, observed by many intent onlookers. As the disciples strained to catch a last glimpse of Jesus, a cloud hid Him from their view, and two angels appeared and promised Christ’s return *in just the same way that you have watched Him go* (Acts 1.11).

**Frequently asked questions about the Ascension**

**What is the ascension?**

Jesus’ transition from earth to heaven after his ministry, death, and resurrection. (*Lexham Bible Dictionary*)

**Why is it called the ascension?**

The Bible refers to Jesus’ transition as a passive action—like a “taking-up” or an “assumption”—instead of using the actual word “ascension.”[[35]](#endnote-35) However, “ascension of Christ” has become the traditional way of referring to this event. (*Lexham Bible Dictionary*)

**Who witnessed the ascension of Jesus?**

The eleven disciples witnessed the ascension of Jesus. Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, *Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.* *So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.* (Mark 16.1–19)

**What were Jesus’ last words before he ascended?**

*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* (Acts 1.8) *And when He had said this, even as they were looking [at Him], He was caught up, and a cloud received and carried Him away out of their sight.* (Acts 1.9 Amp)

**Why is the ascension important?**

Forty days after the resurrection, Jesus and His disciples went to Mount Olivet, near Jerusalem. There, Jesus promised His followers that they would soon receive the Holy Spirit, and He instructed them to remain in Jerusalem until the Spirit had come. Then Jesus blessed them, and as He gave the blessing, He began to ascend into heaven. The account of Jesus’ ascension is found in Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:9-11.

It is plain from Scripture that Jesus’ ascension was a *literal, bodily return to heaven*. He rose from the ground gradually and visibly, observed by many intent onlookers. As the disciples strained to catch a last glimpse of Jesus, a cloud hid Him from their view, and two angels appeared and promised Christ’s return, saying, *Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing into heaven? This same Jesus, Who was caught away and lifted up from among you into heaven, will return in [just] the same way in which you saw Him go into heaven.* (Acts 1:11 AMP)

The Ascension of Jesus Christ is meaningful for several reasons:

1) It signaled the end of His earthly ministry. God the Father had lovingly sent His Son into the world at Bethlehem, and now the Son was returning to the Father. The period of human limitation was at an end.

2) It signified success in His earthly work. All that He had come to do, He had accomplished.  
  
3) It marked the return of His heavenly glory. Jesus’ glory had been veiled during His sojourn on earth, with one brief exception at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17.1-9).

4) It demonstrated tangibly His exaltation by the Father (Ephesians 1.20-23). The One with whom the Father is well pleased (Matthew 17.5) was received up in honor and given a name above all names (Philippians 2.9).

5) It allowed Him to prepare a place for us (John 14.2).

6) It indicated the beginning of His new work as High Priest (Hebrews 4.14-16) and Mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 9.15).

7) It set the pattern for His return. When Jesus comes to set up the Kingdom, He will return just as He left-literally, bodily, and visibly in the clouds (Acts 1.11; Daniel 7.13-14; Matthew 24.30; Revelation 1.7).

Currently, the Lord Jesus is in heaven. The Scriptures frequently picture Him at the right hand of the Father-a position of honor and authority (Psalm 110.1; Ephesians 1.20; Hebrews 8.1). Christ is the Head of the Church (Colossians 1.18), the giver of spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4.7-8), and the One who fills all in all (Ephesians 4.9-10).[[36]](#endnote-36)

Many aspects of New Testament theology, such as Christ’s heavenly intercession and return to Earth, are unsustainable apart from the ascension account. Moreover, the Jesus that is worshiped by the church is precisely the ascended Christ. (*Lexham Bible Dictionary*, included in the free Logos Bible app.)

These paragraphs from an article by A. W. Argyle explain more:

*“The resurrection requires an ascension to be completed.” To put this another way, we cannot equate the resurrection with Christ’s full glorification... We cannot have the tendency to cut off what is implicit in the apostles’ presentation and* ***only*** *speak of the resurrection.*

*Andrew Murray understands the ascension to be one of four pillars on which the church is built. “Faith has in its foundation four great cornerstones on which the building rests—the Divinity of Christ, the Incarnation, the Atonement on the Cross, the Ascension to the Throne. The last is the most wonderful, the crown of all the rest, the perfect revelation of what God has made Christ for us. And so in the Christian life, it is the most important, the glorious fruit of all that goes before.”*The biblical authors viewed Christ’s act of rising as incomplete until Christ sat on his glorious throne.[[37]](#endnote-37)

**What does the Bible say about the ascension?**

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. (Mark 16.19)

And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen. (Luke 24.50–53)

*When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.* (Acts 1.6–11)

1. Taught in the Old Testament
2. Taught in the New Testament

Four times in the course of His life, Jesus specifically predicted He was going to die (see Mark 8.31; Mark 10.32-34; Matthew 16.21; Matthew 17.22-23; Luke 9.22). He described in detail His crucifixion and told how three days later He would rise from the dead and come back....[[38]](#endnote-38)

The writers of the four Gospels labored to impress upon us the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth, and they persist in pressing the point of his identity: Who is this Jesus? Who is he who is born the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1.1)? Who is he who announces the dawning of the kingdom (Matthew 4.12–17)? Who is he who resists every temptation of the Devil (Luke 4.1–13)? Who is he who commands wind and water and turns water into wine (Luke 8.22–25; John 2.6–11)? Who is he who pronounces the forgiveness of sins (Mark 2.1–12)? Who is he who raises the dead and rises from the grave (John 11.38–44; 20.1–18)? [[39]](#endnote-39)

1. Historical Progression
2. Heretical Counterfeits (impact of false doctrine, what truths it changes; how it affects

the Gospel, sources of the counterfeits)

The Reformation rightly rejected the authority of the Pope and church tradition and returned to *scripture alone*. This was a return to the true foundation of the church, the *Biblical* apostles and prophets who speak to us through the Scripture. This means that the decrees of men in church history are not binding on any believer unless those decrees are valid implications and applications of Scripture. This brings up an important point mentioned in the previous issue of *Critical Issues Commentary*: **God only binds us to what is inerrant and infallible. Words from men that contain mixture and error and lack the qualities of inspired Scripture cannot be binding on the lives of believers. This truth was at the crux of the Reformation.** The words of the Popes do not have this quality nor do those of latter-day professing apostles and prophets.

Both friends and enemies of Christianity have recognized the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be the foundation stone of the faith. In the early church at Corinth some were questioning, even denying, the possibility of the resurrection of the dead. Hearing this, the apostle Paul gave the astute summary statement ***If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith***(1 Corinthians 15.14). With these few words Paul soundly rested his whole case om the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Either Jesus did or did not rise from the dead. If he did, it was the most sensational event in all of history and gives us conclusive answers to the most profound questions of our existence:

* Where have we come from?
* Why are we here?
* What is our future destiny?

If Christ rose, we know with certainty that God exists, what He is like and that He cares for each of us individually. The universe, then, takes on meaning and purpose and we can experience the living God in contemporary life. These and many other life-expanding things are true if Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead.

On the other hand, if Christ did not rise from the dead, Christianity is an interesting museum piece and nothing more. It has no objective validity or reality... Attacks on Christianity by dissenters have most often concentrated on the resurrection. It has been correctly seen as the keynote to the entire Christian faith.

It is a matter of eternal life and death to know the veracity of the testimonies of Scripture and throughout history that verify: *This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.* (1 John 4.9)[[40]](#endnote-40)

***Who do you say that Christ is?***

1. Application Today (why it matters so much where it puts Jesus, the body of believers, Israel, truth, etc.)

7. Supporting Scripture and references

1. We can also ask some basic and helpful questions while holding to the right answers — questions and answers that can solidify in our minds Christian truth and thereby help us recognize false worldviews and their assumptions. Here are several examples of such questions (with the Christian answers summarized in parentheses):

   Is the natural world all that exists or all that can be known? Are there supernatural beings? (There is one true God, and only one — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — creator of all things, visible and invisible, who has made Himself known along with many things of His creation.)

   Are there absolute truths and real knowledge that can be grasped by human beings? (God has given us our reason, senses, and conscience by which we can come to know many facts and certain truths about the world, ourselves, and even God, but the ultimate and final authority is the inspired and inerrant Word, the Bible. It is this Word that declares what is true and false regarding beliefs, religion, worldviews, history, science, teachings, morality, behavior, and lifestyles.  This source alone gives us the needed knowledge about ourselves and God in order to be saved.)

   Who is man? (He is the most unique of all created beings, who alone was made in God’s image. He has a soul and a sense of destiny beyond this life.  He is a rational, creative, aesthetic, moral being; he is of infinite value.)

   What is man’s real problem? (We have all inherited the original sin of Adam — an innate, desperate sinfulness and displayed whenever we violate the Ten Commandments in deeds, words, and thoughts, resulting in separation from God and death.)

   What is the solution for man’s problem? (Jesus Christ, whose perfect life, substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection fully acquired forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all, which is received freely and only by faith in Jesus alone and for whom believers now live.)

   Who is Jesus Christ? (True God and true man, who never sinned, performed real miracles, was killed by crucifixion, rose bodily from the dead, ascended to his Father’s right hand where he now reigns, and will return on the last day to judge the living and the dead.)

   Is the Bible merely a “religious” book? (Though it is religious in that it is *the* authority for the Christian religion, it *also* contains records of major events in history, records that are shown to be reliable and trustworthy. For example, the separate records and numerous eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ, something these witnesses were willing to die for.  No other religion has such reliable historical support.)

   Are there any institutions in this life that help us and should be regarded as sacred? (God — and not man — has created for this life the institutions of marriage, government, and the holy Christian church.)

   Is there anything beyond life? (All people upon natural death will enter either eternal life or eternal damnation.)

   Though some worldviews do not deal with all these questions, every worldview deals with some of them. One can apply these questions (and others) to assumptions and ways of thinking that are found in the world today.  If those assumptions offer contrary answers, one is dealing with a false worldview and a lie.

   To put this in perspective, imagine someone (like our child or grandchild) placed in an environment where assumptions are openly or subtly promoted but never explained to be a part of a worldview — where assumptions are never challenged, where no alternative answers are provided, where one is not asked to think critically whether they might be right or wrong.  For example, think of being in a class where only evolution is allowed or in a setting where transgenderism is affirmed and contrary (biblical) beliefs are condemned.  What could happen?

   The fact is deceptive worldviews are promoted more often than we realize. And what happens is truth and the message of the Savior never get a fair hearing — faith in Christ is not an option, or faith in Christ can be lost. This is why St. Paul said, *See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ* (Colossians 2.8). And why Peter wrote, *In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect* (1 Peter 3.15).

   And most importantly, we hold to *the powerful Truth* of our worldview — the gospel — that, amid all these threatening worldviews, pierces like a sword into our hearts to strengthen and preserve us in our faith in Christ. (<https://lutheransentinel.els.org/2021/05/18/critiquing-worldviews-opposed-to-christianity/>) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ (Foundations of Evangelical Theology)*, Stephen J. Wellum, Kindle p. 802 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1167&context=history_and_government_publications> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. After wading through such a list o sf faith-challenging attacks against the historical reliability of the Bible, many believers will feel the need to take a cleansing moment to bathe their minds in the Scriptures, pray, sing, and worship the God of the Bible who is very different from the one portrayed by these scholars and critics. After we’ve collected ourselves, and reminded ourselves of the fact that lies have been told about God and His Word since the beginning of time, our hearts are turned toward the skeptics themselves and those whom their attacks have led astray. Is there an answer for the skeptics? [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Could it be that the Bible’s message of an all-powerful God who sits in judgment upon the affairs of men—and to whom all will one day give an account—is simply no longer acceptable to contemporary sensibilities? Perhaps the exclusive claims of Jesus (“No one comes to the Father except through Me”—John 14:6) are no longer welcome in the culturally and religiously diverse public arena of postmodernism. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Parts of this chart were taken from Tim M. Sigler, Ph.D. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. The Enlightenment and postmodern ways of thinking and reading the Bible do not merely disagree with the way the church has understood the identity of Christ. The epistemological and hermeneutical turns characterizing the Enlightenment and postmodernism fundamentally reject orthodoxy as implausible and incoherent. (Kindle p 966)

   The Enlightenment serves as the hinge that swung the medieval-Reformation era into the modern era, opening the door to what is now called “modernism.” (Kindle p 973)

   Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s

   understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! [dare to know] “Have courage to use your own understanding!”—that is the motto of enlightenment. (Kindle p 980)

   The Enlightenment was the “Age of Reason,” not because reason was inoperative in the Reformation and prior to it, but because reason was elevated from a ministerial instrument to a magisterial rule, especially over Scripture and tradition. (Kindle p 984)

   many Enlightenment thinkers came to believe that human rationality was the only way to solve problems… (Kindle p 1,032)

   Instead of starting with God as the ground for his philosophy, Descartes stripped away all of his beliefs about God, the world, and the self. He was left with only one truth that he could not doubt: he existed as a thinking subject. From that starting point, then, Descartes’ famous cogito ergo sum (“I think, therefore I am”) served as the foundation for building all knowledge in every field of inquiry. (Kindle p 1,045)

   “Cartesian rationalism effectively inaugurated the ‘modern self’ or the ‘subjective turn,’ a shift from knowledge as objectively rooted in biblical revelation (both general and special) to knowledge as authenticated and demonstrated by human reason.” (Kindle p 1,045)

   Descartes’ use of the cogito, on the other hand, launched the whole project of modernity. Self-authenticating, rational self-sufficiency was the basis of Cartesian foundationalism. No matter what form epistemology took in the ensuing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discussions, its formulators used assumptions that furthered Descartes’ break from the past. Descartes’ radically new method—dubito, cogito ergo sum—provided a subjective, rational starting point—the intellectual fulcrum of human autonomy—that set the agenda for all future philosophical discussion. Although Cartesianism was but the first of many systems that occupied European thought, it placed the debate on new ground—a human centered, secular perspective. (Kindle p 1,056)

   According to its major forms of philosophical thought, then, the Enlightenment constrained knowledge in the modern world to our experience of the modern world. As John Feinberg has noted, many moderns functioned in the world as if the only beliefs truly capable of being justified are the beliefs of science and not theology. (Kindle p 1,087)

   Theology became a sub-rational discipline open to critical assessment and subject to the canons of science. (Kindle p 1,090)

   The Enlightenment, however, brought a particular combination of beliefs that set science over theology. (Kindle p 1,098)

   And the result was that the scientific method was applied to all disciplines of knowledge, including the human sciences—even ethics, metaphysics, and theology: “if this way of obtaining knowledge about the universe was so successful, why not apply the same method to knowledge about God?”70 In this regard, Isaac Newton (1642–1727) looms large in the Enlightenment and beyond. Newton was interested in both theological and scientific questions. It was his view of the physical universe, however, that transformed the thinking of the age. (Kindle p 1,100) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The post-Reformation changes in epistemology and method are largely responsible for the divergent views that persist in Christology today. (Kindle p 714)

   Revelation from God is the only way we can know anything about God. And this requires a certain attitude toward his word in Scripture and a particular method for reading it. (Kindle p 716)

   systematic theology, rather, is best understood as the application of Scripture to all areas of life. (Kindle p 785)

   The nature of systematic theology necessitates that we understand our present-day situation and the particular challenges it poses. (Kindle p 788)

   The current conditions of belief also challenge us to think through anew how best to do Christology in order to present Christ faithfully to a skeptical, pluralistic world. (Kindle p 813)

   instruction to stand for the truth precisely at the point where it is being undermined and attacked: (Kindle p 816)

   Exhorted by Luther and obliged by the nature of systematic theology, we need to probe the plausibility structures that operate today, shaping the way people think. (Kindle p 822)

   The present conditions of belief do not determine the identity of Christ that comes to us in Scripture. (Kindle p 823)

   But where the dominant ways of thinking and knowing would make it difficult or impossible to know Christ from Scripture, we need to do some demolition work and construct the Bible’s own structure of belief in an open and

   coherent manner. In short, we need to lay the foundation of epistemological warrant to build an argument for an orthodox Christology for today. (Kindle p 824)

   Reformers to emphasize sola Scriptura, which entailed that all beliefs, creeds, and dogmas, including church tradition,

   must be tested by Scripture. And this commitment to Scripture meant that the Reformers constructed their Christology from a theological framework that was founded on the centrality and sovereignty of the triune God of Scripture. As a result, they had no problem affirming the Son’s preexistence, virgin conception, bodily resurrection, and the uniqueness of his identity and work. (Kindle p 993)

   we come to know truth by reasoning from divine revelation (both general and special). The Reformers, then, emphasized a revelational epistemology in which the ministerial use of reason served theology under the authority

   of Scripture. The Bible is the lens by which we rightly interpret God, the self, and the world: the word of God gives us a true (even if not exhaustive) “God’s-eye point-of-view.” Without this revelation, human subjectivity blinds us to the truth, and the objectivity of truth becomes questionable as the basis for theology. For the Reformers, the human creature is never autonomous, neither metaphysically nor methodologically… (Kindle p 1,008)

   Yet, while Newton was a committed theist, his… (Kindle p 1,106)

   Belief in “God” remained; but belief in the triune God of Scripture who creates, upholds, and acts in the world to accomplish his plan of redemption was rejected. According to the deistic view, if God acts at all in the world, it is only by upholding the natural processes, the laws of nature that he established in the first place; God does not act extraordinarily in the world. James… Some highlights have been hidden or truncated due to export limits. (Kindle p 1,113)

   Committed to explaining all reality by means of the scientific method, the Enlightenment reduced all reality to naturalism, empiricism, and rationalism. Committed to naturalism as the sum of reality, the Enlightenment could not admit the possibility of a God (if there was one) who would “violate the laws of nature” by breaking into the natural order. Things that could not be explained by the scientific… (Kindle p 1,117)

   Most deists affirmed at least four basic points contrary to orthodox theology and Christology. First, a transcendent God created the universe, but he is not now providentially active in the world: “God is thus not immanent, not fully personal, not sovereign over human affairs, not providential.” Second, because this transcendent God created it, the universe is rational, orderly, and law-governed, but it is best viewed as a closed system with no expectation that God acts in it. In fact, as Sire comments, “any tampering or apparent tampering [by God] with the machinery of the universe would suggest that God had made a mistake in the original plan, and that would be beneath the dignity of an all-competent deity.” Even stopping here, it… (Kindle p 1,130)

   Third, humans, though personal, are part of the closed system of the universe such that, morally speaking, they are not fallen or abnormal but basically good. As McGrath notes, “Voltaire (1694–1778) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) criticized the doctrine [of original sin] as encouraging pessimism in regard to human abilities, thus… (Kindle p 1,139)

   religion in the Enlightenment era really underwent a devolution. After creating the universe, a transcendent God transferred his power to the immanent natural laws he established, thereby surrendering cosmic control to the local authority of physics, chemistry, biology, and the like. Rather than caused by or merely coordinated with the epistemological revolution, this religious devolution likely came about through an interplay of religious thought and the massive shifts in philosophy and science. (Kindle p 1,148)

   For good or for ill, the prevailing intellectual conditions will influence theological construction, beginning with how we understand the nature and function of the Bible. (Kindle p 1,153)

   Presuppositions matter to the way we think, and the way we think affects how we read and what we think about what we read. (Kindle p 1,157)

   For the first time since Constantine, Christian doctrine was derided openly during the Enlightenment. Not just philosophers and committed deists but also those in biblical studies scorned orthodox Christianity. (Kindle p 1,161)

   With the epistemological revolution well under way in the Enlightenment, however, many abandoned an attitude of trust and confidence toward the Bible as God’s word and viewed Scripture with suspicion. These “enlightened” hermeneuts began to criticize the reliability of the Gospels, focusing on difficulties with the miracle stories and questioning the fulfillment of prophecies, how the New Testament authors used the Old Testament, and discrepancies in the Gospel narratives. (Kindle p 1,165)

   As C. Stephen Evans argues, Reimarus advanced biblical criticism through two assumptions about the Bible: first, he treated the Gospels “as ordinary historical documents, with no presumption of divine inspiration or even

   reliability”;83 second, he approached the text with suspicion, assuming that “to learn what really happened one must look through the texts and not take them at face value.” (Kindle p 1,172)

   And with that distinction came an entire approach to Scripture that treats it “like any other book,”85 not as what it

   claims to be: the God-given, reliable interpretation of the historical Jesus. (Kindle p 1,177)

   Prior to the Enlightenment, the church argued that the identity and significance of Jesus was based upon specific historical events, like his virgin conception, miracles, death and resurrection, and his second coming. All of these events bear witness to the uniqueness of who Jesus is. In fact, the church argued that it was precisely these historical events that not only establish his unique identity, they also demonstrate Jesus’s universal significance for all people.

   Both the uniqueness and the universality of the historical Jesus, however, came under scrutiny in the Enlightenment through interpreters like Lessing. (Kindle p 1,180)

   The Enlightenment allowed only reason to provide the basis for establishing necessary and universal truths; the “accidental truths of history can never become the proof of the necessary truths of reason.” (Kindle p 1,191)

   historical accuracy of these accounts. Lessing argued that human testimony cannot make a past event credible, unless we have a present experience of the exact same kind of event. So, not having firsthand experience of resurrection, we should not believe the New Testament’s clear affirmation that Jesus rose from the dead, because it “rests upon the authority of others, rather than the authority of our own experience and rational reflection upon it.” (Kindle p 1,195)

   Moreover, Lessing argued that the same testimony that imports the facts cannot reliably interpret the facts. The Gospel accounts, then, cannot prove that Jesus is unique or universally significant because historical facts are accidental and contingent, open to a variety of interpretations that must ultimately be evaluated by reason alone as conceived by the Enlightenment. We simply have no warrant to draw metaphysical conclusions from historical facts alone. (Kindle p 1,199)

   Still today, the starting point for all biblical studies is that the Bible is untrustworthy and thus subject to critical evaluation. Evans puts it “bluntly and simply, . . . we have become unsure whether the events happened, and uncertain about whether we can know that they happened, even if they did.” (Kindle p 1,208)

   The rise of a general biblical criticism led to the rule and rules of a particular historical-critical method (as it has come to be called). Scholars developed and used various tools (e.g., source, form, and redaction criticism) to subject the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, to historical-critical analysis. (Kindle p 1,211)

   The principle of methodological doubt states that all historical judgments (including biblical ones) are only statements of probability and, as such, are always open to doubt, criticism, and revision. (Kindle p 1,222) [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Animism (from Latin: anima meaning 'breath, spirit, life') is the belief that objects, places, and creatures all possess a distinct spiritual essence. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. school of philosophy, dominant in the United States, based on the principle that the usefulness, workability, and practicality of ideas, policies, and proposals are the criteria of their merit [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes or applications [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Josephus writes this fascinating passage in *Antiquities* 18.3.3:

    *Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him 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 many Jews, and also many of the Greeks. This man was the Christ. And when Pilate had condemned him to the cross, upon his impeachment by the principal man among us, those who had loved him from the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive on the third day, the divine prophets having spoken these and thousands of other wonderful things about him. And even now, the race of Christians, so named from him, has not died out.\**

    This passage is particularly amazing when considering the fact that Josephus was a Jew writing to please the Romans late in the first century. This story would not have pleased them in the slightest. It’s hard to imagine that he would have written it if it were not true.

    [\*Quote cited in Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. p. 213] [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Tacitus writes in Book 15 of *The Annals*:

    *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 Judaea, 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.* [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Lucian of Samosata lived A.D. 120-180. He was a satirist who was scornful of Christians. He wrote several books: *The Passing Peregrinus*and *Alexander the False Prophet*.

    *The Christians. . . worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced this new cult, 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 their contempt for death and self devotion . . . their lawgiver [taught] they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take on faith . . .* –*The Passing Peregrinus*

    Lucian of Samosata reveals several key things:

    Christians worshipped Jesus.

    Jesus was crucified for what he taught.

    Jesus started Christianity.

    Jesus’ disciples believed Jesus’ teachings.

    Early Christians taught that when one was converted, he or she had eternal life.

    They lived by faith – they believed Jesus. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. See https://www.kesherjournal.com/article/the-resurrection-of-jesus-another-jewish-perspective/ for further study on this. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Paul E. Little, *Know What You Believe: Connecting Faith and Truth,* Cook Communications Ministries

    A black and white paper with text and images

    Description automatically generated [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ (Foundations of Evangelical Theology)*, Stephen J. Wellum [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. *Jesus [. . .] told people that their sins were forgiven. [. . .] This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. [. . .] I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m 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 Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*

    - *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. *In light of Scripture, the church has confessed consistently that to identify Jesus correctly we must affirm that he is the divine Son who has become incarnate, that to know him is life eternal, and that to know him not is judgment unto death. Biblically speaking, getting Christ right is a matter of life and death. God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ (Foundations of Evangelical Theology),* Stephen J. Wellum, Kindle p. 781 [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid, Kindle pp. 619-624 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Page 8, *I Came to Set the World on Fire, a Portrait of Jesus,* by R. T. France [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. The Council of Chalcedon anathematized (cursed) those who taught that Christ had only a single, divine nature and those who taught a “mixture” of His two natures. The Council produced the “Chalcedonian Definition,” which affirms that Christ is “the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man.” He is “consubstantial [*homoousios*] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood.” Jesus Christ is “to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably” (quoted from www.carm.org). The divine and human natures of Christ are distinct yet united in one Person. This co-existence of Christ’s two natures is called the hypostatic union.

    By affirming that Jesus Christ is one Person who is both divine and human, the Council of Chalcedon made it easier to identify error. The Chalcedonian Definition affirms the truth that Jesus Christ is fully divine and, at the same time, fully human. He is both the Son of God (1 John 5:10) and the Son of Man (Mark 14:21). Jesus, the Word incarnate, assumed perfect humanity in order to save fallen humanity. He could not have saved us unless he was fully God and fully man.

    The Council of Chalcedon was also significant because it ratified the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople. And it condemned the false doctrines of Nestorius and Eutyches. The council affirmed the single personality of Christ and the authenticity and perfection of both His natures, human and divine. https://www.gotquestions.org/council-of-Chalcedon.html [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ (Foundations of Evangelical Theology)*, Stephen J. Wellum, Kindle pp. 866 and 848 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. This commitment to the reliability of the Bible’s presentation of Jesus includes a rejection of any attempt to reconstruct the “real” Jesus—he has been revealed by God himself in God’s own word written to man. But because the historical Jesus research paradigm operates with different theological beliefs, convictions, and worldview structures, it rejects confessional Christology as no longer credible. (Kindle p 867)

    First, the [postulated] *real, historical Jesu*s, was not the Jesus of the Bible, but was a mere man approved by God for a special role; second, the orthodox conception of Jesus as God the Son incarnate is [portended to be] a mythological way of expressing his ultimate value for us. (Kindle p 878)

    More significantly for our purposes here, the participants drew upon the noncanonical and apocryphal Gospel of Thomas and their own historical reconstructions to conclude that Jesus was primarily a preacher viewed by the authorities of his day as a political subversive, which eventually led to his death. *Simply put, they demythologized Jesus, denying his deity, virginal conception, miracles, and bodily resurrection. All of these teachings are simply the result of the church’s ideological construction of Jesus according to a worldview that is no longer acceptable to modern and postmodern people*. (Kindle p 891)

    A basic distrust of the Bible’s reliability and a dismissal of the Bible’s universal authority directly effect a fundamental shift in theological convictions. (Kindle p 946)

    The epistemological changes in the Enlightenment and in postmodernity have grown throughout the areas of philosophy, science, religion, and hermeneutics to produce a skepticism toward the Bible and a rejection of its ability to identify Jesus accurately. Christology today, then, must address how we can know Jesus

    before we can say who he is. (Kindle p 829)

    The church has argued that we can grasp Jesus’s identity correctly only when he is viewed in light of the entire biblical storyline, and that any attempt to do otherwise only leads to a Jesus of our own imagination. (Kindle p 892)

    *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ (Foundations of Evangelical Theology)*, Stephen J. Wellum, Kindle [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. <https://shepherds.edu/top-ten-attacks-against-the-bibles-historical-reliability/> [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Even with the spread of the three monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), many European communities retained local superstitions. As Roman Christianity grew in power, it often produced a mixture of biblical orthodoxy and paganism that kept European populations victims of deceit for centuries. Corruption in the papacy, the building of great cathedrals on the backs of heavily taxed citizens, forced conversions under the Crusaders, the selling of indulgences, and other problematic practices were forced upon a largely illiterate population who did not have the ability to read the Bible for themselves—and certainly not in their own languages. Such problems created a climate in which many were happy to consider the claims of the Protestant Reformers and learn to read the Bible in their mother tongues. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. https://shepherds.edu/top-ten-attacks-against-the-bibles-historical-reliability/ [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lionel\_Luckhoo [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. HOW THE 12 APOSTLES AND OTHER FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST DIED

    1. Matthew. Suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, Killed by a sword wound.

    2. John. Faced martyrdom when he was boiled in huge Basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution In Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered From death.  
    John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison Island of Patmos. He wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation on Patmos . The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve As Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey . He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully

    3. Peter. He was crucified upside down on an x shaped cross. According to church tradition it was because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die In the same way that Jesus Christ had died. (See John 21.18)

    4. James. The son of Alphaeus. (Sometimes called James the Less because he was younger.) James ‘ zeal for Jesus resulted in his being the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred. He was killed with the sword on order of King Herod Agrippa I of Judea, about 44 A.D., in a general persecution of the early church. (https://stbartsestes.org/questions-and-interesting-facts/faq-how-did-the-apostle-james-the-lesser-die.html)

    This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the Temptation.

    5. James the Son of Zebedee was a fisherman by trade when Jesus Called him to a lifetime of ministry.

    As a strong leader of the church, James was beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer Walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and Knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian. (See Acts 12.2 – James death was the only one recorded in Scripture.)

    6. Bartholomew. Also known as Nathaniel. He Was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed for our Lord in present day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia where he was flayed to death by a whip.

    7. Andrew. He Was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony.

    His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words, "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it". He continued to preach to his tormentors For two days until he expired.

    8. Thomas. He Was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the Subcontinent.

    9. Jude. (Thaddeus) He Was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.

    10. Judas Iscariot Hung himself (Matthew 27.5) before Jesus Christ died by crucifixion (AD 33). His death is the second one recorded in the Bible.

    11. Philip Died by hanging in Hierapolis, Turkey (AD 80).

    12. Simon the Zealot died a martyr’s death, tradition saying he was crucified. It is believed he ministered together with Thaddeus.

    Mark. Died in Alexandria, Egypt , after being dragged by Horses through the streets until he was dead.

    Luke. Was hanged in Greece as a result of his tremendous Preaching to the lost.

    James the brother of Jesus. He was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ, and when they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a fuller's club.

    Matthias. The apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot. He was stoned and then beheaded.

    Paul. He Was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in A.D. 67. Paul endured a lengthy imprisonment, which allowed him to write his many epistles to the churches he had formed throughout the Roman Empire. These letters, which taught many of the foundational Doctrines of Christianity, form a large portion of the New Testament.

    It is not so important how the apostles died. What is important is the fact that they were all willing to die for their faith. If Jesus had not been resurrected, the disciples would have known it. People will not die for something they know to be a lie. The fact that all of the apostles were willing to die horrible deaths, refusing to renounce their faith in Christ, is tremendous evidence that they had truly witnessed the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (https://www.gotquestions.org/apostles-die.html)

    See also https://www.neverthirsty.org/bible-qa/qa-archives/question/how-did-the-apostles-die/. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. First, the disciples stole the body. If this were the case, they would have known the resurrection was a hoax. They would not therefore have been so willing to suffer and die for it. All of the professed eyewitnesses would have known that they hadn’t really seen Christ and were therefore lying. With so many conspirators, surely someone would have confessed, if not to end his own suffering, then at least to end the suffering of his friends and family. The first

    generation of Christians were absolutely brutalized, especially following the conflagration in Rome in A.D. 64 (a fire which Nero allegedly ordered to make room for the expansion of his palace, but which he blamed on the Christians in Rome in an effort to exculpate himself). As the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus recounted in his Annals of Imperial Rome (published just a generation after the fire):

    “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 Judaea, 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. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.” (Annals, XV, 44)

    Nero illuminated his garden parties with Christians whom he burnt alive. Surely someone would have confessed the truth under the threat of such terrible pain. The fact is, however, we have no record of any early Christian denouncing the faith to end his suffering. Instead, we have multiple accounts of post-resurrection appearances and hundreds of eyewitnesses willing to suffer and die for it.

    If the disciples didn’t steal the body, how else do we explain the empty tomb? Some have suggested that Christ faked His death and later escaped from the tomb. This is patently absurd. According to the eyewitness testimony, Christ was beaten, tortured, lacerated, and stabbed. He suffered internal damage, massive blood loss, asphyxiation, and a spear through His heart. There is no good reason to believe that Jesus Christ (or any other man for that matter) could survive such an ordeal, fake His death, sit in a tomb for three days and nights without medical attention, food or water, remove the massive stone which sealed His tomb, escape undetected (without leaving behind a trail of blood), convince hundreds of eyewitnesses that He was resurrected from the death and in good health, and then disappear without a trace. Such a notion is ridiculous. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Dr. William Lane Craig explains, “When you understand the role of women in first-century Jewish society, what’s really extraordinary is that this empty tomb story should feature women as the discoverers of the empty tomb in the first place. Women were on a very low rung of the social ladder in first-century Israel. There are old rabbinical sayings that said, 'Let the words of Law be burned rather than delivered to women' and 'blessed is he whose children are male, but woe to him whose children are female.' Women’s testimony was regarded as so worthless that they weren’t

    even allowed to serve as legal witnesses in a Jewish court of Law. In light of this, it’s absolutely remarkable that the chief witnesses to the empty tomb are these women... Any later legendary account would have certainly portrayed male disciples as discovering the tomb - Peter or John, for example. The fact that women are the first witnesses to the empty tomb is most plausibly explained by the reality that - like it or not - they were the discoverers of the empty tomb! This shows that the Gospel writers faithfully recorded what happened, even if it was embarrassing. This bespeaks the historicity of this tradition rather than its legendary status." (Dr. William Lane Craig, quoted by Lee Strobel, The Case For Christ, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, p. 293) [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Tacitus writes in Book 15 of *The Annals*:

    “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 Judaea, 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.”

    Josephus wrote in AD 93 in his *Antiquities of the Jews*:

    “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 amongst us, had condemned him to the cross,[9] those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day;[10] 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.”

    From these sources we know that Jesus was crucified, and it’s inconceivable that Jesus did not die on the cross. The Romans were very efficient and thorough in their execution. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. A. W. Argyle, “The Ascension,” *Expository Times* 66.8 (May 1955): 241. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. https://www.gotquestions.org/ascension-Jesus-Christ.html [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. A. W. Argyle, “Ascension,” 242. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Paul E. Little, *Know Who You Believe: Connecting Faith and Truth,* Cook Communications Ministries, 5th edition, p. 48 [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. *The writers of the four Gospels labored to impress upon us the revelation of Jesus of Nazareth, and they persist in pressing the point of his identity: Who is this Jesus? Who is he who is born the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1)? Who is he who announces the dawning of the kingdom (Matt. 4:12–17)? Who is he who resists every temptation of the Devil (Luke 4:1–13)? Who is he who commands wind and water and turns water into wine (Luke 8:22–25; John 2:6–11)? Who is he who pronounces the forgiveness of sins (Mark 2:1–12)? Who is he who raises the dead and rises from the grave (John 11:38–44; 20:1–18)? God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ (Foundations of Evangelical Theology),* Stephen J. Wellum, Kindle p. 755

    *The question of Jesus’s identity could not be fully answered until all of the great events of redemptive history were fully aligned with Jesus’s own life, death, and resurrection.* Ibid, Kindle p. 768 [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. See, most importantly, the Bible. Use a good translation and not an ***interpretation*** *and* consider all that is written from Genesis to Revelation. Also see, *Who Moved the Stone* by Frank Morison, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter* by Josh McDowell, *The Empty Cross of Christ* by Michael Green, *Monotheism and Christianity in the New Testament* by Paul Wegner, *Know Why You Believe, Know Who You Believe* and *Know What You Believe* by Paul E. Little. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)