

Study Guide

Historical Christian Evidences

Expanded Edition

By Edward C. Wharton



SUNSET
International Bible Institute



HISTORICAL
CHRISTIAN
EVIDENCES
(REVISED 2013)
Second Edition



**INTRODUCTORY
NEW TESTAMENT
STUDIES**

Arranged for study by
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DISCLAIMER

The textbooks used in this course were selected because we consider them some of the best available and because of their readability. Ed Wharton's book, "***The Case For Historic Christianity***" was written to be used with this course in the classroom. F.F. Bruce's book, "***The New Testament Documents***", is an excellent book written to show the reliability of the New Testament documents. You will gain much knowledge as you read both these books. As with all books written by men, there may be some things with which you and I would not agree. The principle, "use what is good and discard what is not good" applies to all textbooks used with our courses. Please be wise enough to discard any and all teaching in any of these books that is not biblical.

Instructions and Requirements for Certificate of Basic Biblical Studies

Each lesson is built around the instruction on either the DVDs or the CDs. Listen to or view the lecture as you follow along in the course Study Guide.

Tests: There will be two major tests to complete for this course. The mid-term test is to be done at the end of lesson six (6) and the final will at the end of the study, after lesson twelve (14). All assignments must be finished by the time of your final test. Each test has to be passed with a 70% or better to pass the course. **(This will be 90% of your grade).** **(Suggested Reading: The Supreme Scientist by Gerald Wright)**

Memory Work: Memory work will be done on the honor system. You are asked to write your verses from memory on your test in the presence of the administrator or you may quote them to the administrator during the course and he will keep track of the verses completed and report them to us. Please be diligent in doing your memory work. All memory work must be completed to pass this course. You will have eleven (11) verses to memorize. **(This will be 10% of your grade).**

Due by the Mid-term test: (5 verses)

Proverbs 28:26, 14:12; Jeremiah 10:23; Romans 10:17; John 19:35.

Due by the Final: (6 verses)

John 20:30-31; Acts 2:32, 10:39-41.

Assignments

- ▶ The Self Exam for each lesson is to be read previous to listening or viewing the material on the CDs or DVDs.
- ▶ All Self Exams are to be completed at the end of each lesson.
- ▶ All assignments **must be completed and turned in** at the time of the final exam to pass this course.

Grading Scale:	Memory Work	10%
	Two Tests	90%
		<hr/> 100%

Instruction and Requirements for Bachelor Degree and Certificate of Advanced Bible Studies

The following assignments must be completed and turned in by the final test. Failure to meet all requirements could result in not passing the course or being dropped to a Level II student. Courses completed satisfactorily will apply toward a Bachelor Degree in Bible.

Reading:

Two books are required. *The Case For Historic Christianity*, by: Ed Wharton, and *The New Testament Documents - Are They Reliable?*, by: F.F. Bruce. Both of these books must be read in their entirety. A one page evaluation is required on *The New Testament Documents -Are They Reliable?*, and must be sent in with your final test. (**Reading and evaluation paper is 5% of your grade).** (**Suggested Reading: "The Supreme Scientist" by Gerald Wright**) Receive 5 extra points for reading this book.

Research Paper:

Write a 6-10 page theme at the close of the study giving all the arguments for the historicity of Jesus and the reliability of the New Testament as contained in this study. Use the textbooks, the study guide, your Bible and any other material you want to use. Turn it in with your final test. (**This will be 20% of your Grade).**

Memory work:

Memory work will be done on the honor system. You are asked to write your verses from memory on your test, or you may quote them to the administrator during the course. He will keep track of the verses completed and report them to us. Please be diligent in doing your memory work. All memory work must be completed to pass this course. You will have thirty-one (31) verses to memorize. (**This will be 10% of your grade).**

Due by the mid-term test: (15 verses)

Acts 2:32, 10:39-41; Jeremiah 10:23; John 19:35, 20:30-31; Luke 1:1-4; Proverbs 14:12, 28:26; Romans 10:17.

Due with your final test: (16 verses)

Acts 2:22-24, 4:18-20, John 10:17-18; 15:26-27, 17:20, I Corinthians 15:15-19.

Test:

There will be two major tests to complete for this course. The mid-term test is to be done at the end of lesson six (6) and the final will at the end of the study, after lesson twelve (14). All assignments must be finished by the time of your final test. Each test must be passed with a 70 or better to pass this course. (**This will be 65% of your grade).**

Grade value Percentage:

Readings and evaluation paper	5%
Memory Verses	10%
Research Paper	20%
Two Tests	<u>65%</u>
	100%

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LESSON ONE

Introduction to Historical Christianity Proposition and Methodology The Objective Nature of Christianity

INTRODUCTION

Christianity is an historical religion. It began in an historical space and time with real people, like Jesus and the apostles and tens of thousands of Christians that constituted the church in the first Century. Geographically Christianity began in the Palestinian region of the Roman Empire in the early part of the first Century.

How do we know that Jesus is the Son of God? How do we know that Jesus walked on water, if He did? How do we know that He was raised from the dead, if He was? How do we know anything happened in the past? The answer is testimony. The kind that has been written down in ancient works and has been preserved until today. You can read that and draw conclusions in relation to the claim.

Your Bible is history. It's testimony. It is not just doctrines and principles but it is filled with history, and because it is, we are able to check it out for its accuracy. The study will begin with a propositional statement.

LESSON AIM: To expose the student to the historical reality of Christianity and the document evidence that support this claim.

LESSON OBJECTIVES: You will. . .

1. Learn and be able to reproduce the Propositional Statement and Methodology.
 2. Be able to define the term “subjectivism” and list its two dangers.
 3. Illustrate the historical context in the New Testament.
-

THE PROPOSITIONAL STATEMENT AND METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

A. Propositional Statement (The thing to be proven): A two-fold claim:

1. Jesus is the Son of God.
2. The Bible is the word of God.

“There is abundant evidence from historical sources which is adequate to prove that Jesus is the Son of God and the Bible is the word of God.”

B. The Methodology (How to prove the proposition):

A Two-fold methodology.

- a. **“To establish the historical reliability of the New Testament documents** – to prove to you that the New Testament is a history book.”
- b. **“To reason those historical evidences which the New Testament contains, and by a systematic argumentation of those facts to the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God and the Bible is the word of God.”**

C. The Bible Is a Historical Book

1. Christianity comes from historical eyewitness testimony. We know that things happened in the past because it is recorded in reliable historical documents.
2. If the New Testament is a reliable historical document:
 - a. Then there was a Nazarene named Jesus and He claimed to be the Son of God.
 - b. Then when it says Jesus walked on water, He did!
 - c. When it says that He fed 5,000 with two fish and five loaves of bread, He did!
 - d. When it says that He raised the dead and was raised from the dead, He did and He was!

SUBJECTIVISM – DEFINED AND EXPLAINED

A. Defined: An Appeal to One’s Feelings

1. **Its danger** – It can make a person believe something is true when in fact it isn’t.
2. **Its latitude** – It could also prove other religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Muhammadan, etc.

B. God’s Word Is to Be the Standard (Numbers 15:37-40)

“...and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of Jehovah, and do them; and that ye follow not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to play the harlot . . .”

Remember the word of God:

1. Keep the commandments of God.
2. Don’t operate on what you see.
2. Don’t trust in your heart.

C. Feelings Are Not to Determine Truth (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25)

“There is a way which seemeth right unto man but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 16:25).

What “seems” right is not the way we determine the validity of the Christian religion.

D. Man's Heart Is Not a Source of Reliable Facts (Proverbs 28:26)

The heart, whether it be emotions or intellect is not to be trusted. “*The man that trusts in his heart is a fool.*”

E. The Heart Is Corrupted by Sin – Not to Be Trusted (Jeremiah 17:9)

God’s evaluation of the corrupted heart: “*The heart is deceitful above all things. It is exceedingly corrupt. Who can know it?*”

F. Man's Way Is Not in Himself (Jeremiah 10:23)

“*Oh, Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man that walks to direct his steps.*”

1. There is not a man that tries to go the right way, do the right thing, but that he will fail to do it without God’s word as his counselor and guide.
2. Jeremiah knew this because God revealed it to him. This was not Jeremiah’s wisdom, but the wisdom of God.

CONCLUSION:

The Bible, then, is very clear. There is a danger in religious subjectivism. It can lead people to think things are true when they are not. It can lead people to accept false religion when they should not. The Bible position is: You are not to follow after what you feel. Subjectivism is no proof that Christianity is true.

THE OBJECTIVE NATURE OF HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN RELIGION

“The nature of Christianity is historical and redemptive, not simply moral. Morality is certainly inherent in its nature, but its great thrust is redemption from the death penalty. Its promise is eternal life. No social gospel or moralistic doctrine can make good on promises like that. Only Christ’s own sinless life, substitutionary death, and resurrection has power to bring that about. It is essential, therefore that a truly sinless life, a real death by crucifixion, and a resurrection back to life in His own body be experienced by a genuinely historic Jesus in order to give power to Christianity’s claim to a future life without end.” (**Christianity, A Clear Case Of History**, Ed Wharton)

A. An Example of Historical Context (Luke 1:1-4)

Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed.

1. The book of Luke was written to Theophilus an official in the imperial network of the Roman empire. “*Most excellent Theophilus . . .*”

2. Three times in the book of Acts (also written by Luke) the phrase “most excellent” is used of Roman governors.
 - a. This man had access to the police files.
 - b. He had access to records.
 - c. He would be able to check things out to know whether or not they were so.
3. He had been instructed in the way of Christ.
 - a. Luke opens his account to Theophilus by assuring him that the material he was about to read had been carefully researched, secured from eyewitnesses (the apostles), that the material was accurate, and that the events were to be presented “**in order**” of their occurrence.
 - b. Then he states the reason for such precision of research and accuracy of writing: “*. . . that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed*” (Luke 1:4).
4. Theophilus upon receiving and believing what Luke had written **would then preserve the books for the benefit of the whole church.**

NOTE: What Luke claims is that his book is reliable historical testimony, that it contains the facts as they literally and really happened.

The New Testament records the events that eyewitnesses like Matthew, John, Peter, Paul and careful researchers like Luke and others, the authors, the writers of the New Testament were able to record.

B. The Eyewitness Statements in the Gospel of John

The ground, the foundation of our faith is the testimony of eyewitnesses.

1. The testimony of the apostle John. “*He that hath seen hath born witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe*” (John 19:35). John said:
 - a. What I am writing is **what I saw.**
 - b. I was **a participant** in what I saw.
 - c. I know it is true, and I am writing **that you might believe.**
2. The testimony of the apostle Thomas (John 20:24-29). “*My Lord and my God.*”

THE HISTORICAL FACT OF JESUS’ CLAIMS

We can know that the claims of Jesus were backed up by historical evidence. Notice nine (9) claims made by Jesus.

A. **Jesus *Claimed* to have been sent from God (John 5:30)**

B. **Jesus *Claimed* to Have Come down from Heaven (John 6:38)**

C. **Jesus *Claimed* That His Teaching Came from God (John 7:16)**

D. **Jesus *Claimed* to Be the Light of the World (John 8:12)**

E. Jesus *Claimed* to Be from above (John 8:23f)

He claimed to be God-man, Immanuel – God in the flesh.

F. Jesus *Claimed* to Be God (John 10:30-33, 36)

G. Jesus *Claimed* to Be Able to Raise the Dead (John 11:25)

H. Jesus *Claimed* That His Word Was the Word of God (John 12:48-49)

His word would be the standard for man's judgment.

I. Jesus *Claimed* to Be the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14:6)

NOTE: Whether you believe the New Testament is the word of God or not, one thing is for sure, **The New Testament is a history book.** It is reliable and when it records those deeds, then those deeds took place.

The New Testament documents are certainly not myths. They were written in the sane and sober appearance of history, the authors ask us to believe their accounts are true (e.g. John 19:35; 20:30-31), and they come up reliable upon investigation.

THE HISTORICAL FACTS OF THE DEEDS THAT HE DID

Here is evidence of an historical nature that the claims of Jesus are reliable.

A. The Miracles of Jesus

1. Definition of a miracle – “a supernatural happening that defies naturalistic explanation.”
2. Literally miracles are works of God.
 - a. John the Baptist a great witness.
 - b. Miracles are a greater witness than John (John 5:36).

NOTE: John says in the twentieth chapter verses 30 and 31, “*Many other signs, therefore, did Jesus in the presence of the disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written,*” and he had reference to the seven recorded in his gospel, “*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and that believing you may have life in his name.*” John has recorded for us a history book as he saw it take place, as he participated in it, and his propositional statement is, “I have recorded these deeds for you which obviously are works only God could do in order to cause you to believe.”

B. Seven Signs Present by John to Prove the Deity of Jesus

1. The water turned into wine (John 2:1-12).
2. The healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:46).
3. The healing of the lame man (John 5:1-9).
4. The feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:5-13).
5. Jesus walked on water (John 6:16-21).

6. Jesus healed the man born blind (John 9:1-7).
7. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44).

C. Jesus Claimed the Works He Performed Testified of His Deity

1. Jesus claimed that He and the Father was one (John 10:30).
2. Jesus presented His works as proof that what He claimed was true.

CONCLUSION:

There was a Nazarene that made claims and backed up the claims with marvelous deeds and with the resurrection of His own body from the grave. Reason tells us that Jesus is what He claimed to be. The function of reason is to set in judgment on the evidence and to objectively draw a conclusion in relation to the claim.

Here is the beginning place for an investigation into the genuineness of Christianity. It must begin with a real historic space-time Jesus for, apart from His own historical existence neither redemption nor resurrection could amount to any more than pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by.

Belief is the result of an honest evaluation of reliable, convincing evidence. An unwavering faith in God, Christ as the Son of God and the Bible as God's Word must be grounded on actual documented evidence rather than being inherited from our family or derived from our feelings. Neither is the case for belief to be found in either science or philosophy.

Christian Evidences seek to confirm the Deity of Christ and the inspiration of the Bible by presenting various evidences to substantiate this. The historical approach of Christian Evidences seeks to confirm that the Christian faith rests upon a reliable foundation of historical facts. These facts of history form the basis of the evidences for belief. It is this kind of evidence, its historical reliability and its weight in relation to the biblical claim, which we shall investigate during this course.

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON ONE

1. Define the term “Subjectivism” and give at least two dangers involved.

2. What is the Bible position concerning our approach to Christianity?

3. Concerning the “objective” nature of Christianity:

1) It is not grounded upon _____
2) It is grounded upon _____

4. The Nature of Christianity if _____ and _____
not simply _____.

5. There is only one way for people to know what has happened in the past when
they weren’t there to observe it. What is that way?

6. Complete the two following statements.

Christianity is an _____

The Bible is a _____

7. Who was “Theophilus” and what is significant about the books of Luke and
Acts being written to him?

8. Give the Propositional Statement and Methodology of our study.

1) Proposition _____

2) Methodology _____

LESSON TWO

Jesus, an Historical Person Non-biblical Writers

INTRODUCTION

If it could ever be proven beyond doubt that Confucius never lived, Confucianism would probably survive anyway. That is due to the fact that Confucianism as a philosophy was not built on the man, but rather it was built on his teachings. And this is the case with all the so-called world's great religions with the exception of Judaism and Christianity.

Christianity is built on the person of Christ and His work in history. If it could ever be proven that Jesus was never alive in history Christianity would collapse like a stack of cards. So then before we begin to develop our methodology and show that the New Testament is a book that is reliable as a history book, we want to investigate first of all the historical factuality of Jesus as a real person in history.

Christianity is far more than a philosophy and it is not merely an ethical system. Christianity is a **redemptive system**. Christianity is belief in Jesus, that real person of history, as the Son of God who died upon the cross, carried our sins with Him, and paid the price for our transgressions, then was buried and on the third day, was resurrected from the dead, and in that resurrection proved Himself to be the Son of God, and that one day He is coming again and will bring the entire world to an eternal judgment. So any investigation into the genuineness of the claims of Christianity has to begin with an investigation of the historical factuality of Jesus as a real person in history. Apart from a historical Jesus there would be no redemption of the human race from its plight. (The Course Guide Ed refers to his book entitled "*The Case For Historic Christianity*")

LESSON AIM: To show that there is sufficient evidence from first and second century non-Christian writers, both pagan and Jewish, to establish the historical reality of the existence of Jesus of Nazareth.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Learn of five pagan (Gentile) writers of the first and second centuries who recorded facts about the existence of Jesus.
 2. Discover that there are at least two early Jewish sources which help to prove that there really was a Nazarene called Jesus.
 3. Learn that the New Testament must be accorded the same consideration as other writings of antiquity as to its authenticity in recording history.
-

EVIDENCE FROM FIRST AND SECOND CENTURY NON-CHRISTIAN WRITERS

Five witnesses from antiquity which give proof in and of themselves that there was a real Nazarene man named Jesus.

A. Five Early Pagan (Gentile) Writers

1. **Thallus.** In about 52 A.D. Thallus takes for granted the existence of Jesus when he mentions the darkness which occurred at the Lord's crucifixion.

Will Durant¹ says about the middle of the first century, a pagan named Thallus, in a fragment preserved by Julius Africanus, argued that the abnormal darkness alleged to have accompanied the death of Christ was a purely natural phenomenon and coincidence. Will Durant says the argument took **the existence of Christ for granted**. Thallus never denied that Jesus existed. He took the historical existence of Christ for granted.²

NOTE: There was a **common knowledge** in the city of Rome about the circumstances accompanying the death of the Nazarene named Jesus.

2. **Mara Bar-Serapion.** A manuscript in the British Museum preserves the text of a letter **written some time after 73 A.D.** It was sent by a Syrian named Mara Bar-Serapion to his son, Serapion. In prison at the time of the writing the father pleads for his son to be wise by illustrating the folly of persecuting such wise men as Socrates, Pythagoras, and Christ.

“What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? . . . What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? . . . What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? . . . 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 which He had given.” (**The Case For Historic Christianity**, Ed Wharton)

NOTE: He refers to Pythagoras, to Socrates, and to Jesus, although he does not refer to Jesus by name.

The point is, that by sometime after 73 A.D., by the time that Serapion was writing to his son, **Jesus Christ had already gained fame** and stature equal with that of men like Socrates and Pythagoras showing that Jesus was a real person of history!

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, Eerdmans, p. 113

² Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, Simon and Schuster, p. 555

3. ***Cornelius Tacitus.*** Usually rated as the greatest historian of Rome, Tacitus (born c. **52-54 A.D.**) at about the age of sixty, while writing of the reign of Nero (54-68 A.D.), told how the Christians were made scapegoats for the Great Fire of 64 A.D. It had been rumored that Nero himself started the fire in order to gain glory by rebuilding the city. Tacitus says,

“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 . . .”³

NOTE: To the pagan Tacitus, the name “Christus” was more than likely a proper name. Tacitus was in a good position to learn of Christianity being governor of Asia in 112 A.D.

4. ***C. Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Younger).*** Pliny, governor of Bithynia, often wrote to the Emperor Trajan asking his imperial advice on how best to deal with the sect of the Christians which, according to him, were troubling his province. One letter about 112 A.D., reveals information he extracted from some Christians by torture:

“They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they **sang an anthem to Christ as God**, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed . . . after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”⁴

The innocence of the matter seemed to perplex the governor sufficiently to write to the emperor about it.

NOTE: So we have yet another testimony from an Imperial appointee in the network of the Roman empire that there was a historical Jesus.

5. ***Suetonius.*** An annalist and court official of the Imperial House of Hadrian in about 120 A.D. wrote his “Life of Claudius,” from which is taken his most often quoted reference:

³ *The Annals and Histories*, 15:44. From Britannica Great Books, Vol. 15, p. 168.

⁴ Epistles, 10:96.

"As the Jews were making constant disturbances **at the instigation of Chrestus**, he expelled them from Rome."⁵

So many Jews had become Christians at Rome, Claudius probably equated the Jews with Christians and thus expelled them from the city of Rome by an imperial decree. The historian Luke records this same event much earlier in Acts 18:1-2. "*There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.*"

This evidence, especially in company with such an historian as Tacitus and Roman officials of the stature of Pliny and Suetonius, make the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth as certain as that of any outstanding figure of antiquity.

NOTE: Here we have five witnesses from pagan sources that tell us of a real historical Jesus. Men of the stature of Tacitus, Pliny and Suetonius makes the historicity of Jesus an undeniable fact!

B. Two Early Jewish Sources

Two Jewish sources which mention Jesus, gives us information which helps to establish the fact of Jesus' existence.

1. ***The Talmud*** (70 A.D. to 200 A.D.). – A huge collection of doctrines and laws compiled and written before the 8th Century, A.D., by ancient Jewish teachers.
 - a. The Talmud contain many references to Christ. All of these references are hostile to the cause of Christ, but they do help to establish the existence of Jesus. **Some 80 times the historical Jesus is taken for granted in these writings.**
 - b. According to these writings, Jesus of Nazareth was a transgressor in Israel who practiced magic, scorned the words of the wise, led the people astray, and said He had not come to destroy the law but to add to it. (See Matthew 5:17ff)
2. ***Flavius Josephus*** (Sometime after 70 A.D.).
The most important references to Jesus from a Jewish source are from a former Jewish general turned historian by the name of Flavius Josephus. In his writings he tells us who Jesus was, what He did, and gives his own evaluation as an historian. He writes of many of the outstanding persons we read of in the New Testament: **Pilate, Quirinius of Syria, the Caesars, the Herods, the Pharisees and Sadducees, Annas, Caiaphas, Felix, and Festus.** He also writes of Jesus' brother James, and of the death of John the Baptist. Most significant is his reference to Jesus:

⁵ Life of Claudius, 25:4

"And there arose about this time Jesus, a wise man, *if indeed we should call him a man*; for He was a doer of marvelous deeds, a teacher of men who receive the truth with pleasure. He led away many Jews, and also many Greeks. **This man was the Messiah.** And when Pilate had condemned Him to the cross at the **instigation of our own leaders**, those who had loved Him from the first did not cease. For **He appeared to them on the third day** alive again, as the holy prophets had predicted and said many other wonderful things about him. And even now the race of Christians, so named after him, has not yet died out."⁶

- a. First of all, he spoke of Jesus as the *so-called* Christ.
- b. He tells us about the arrest and the trial of James, and speaks of him as the brother of Jesus.
- c. He speaks of Jesus as the doer of wonderful deeds, a man, he says, if indeed He can be called a man.
- d. He states that this man was the founder of the tribe called the Christians.
- e. Josephus speaks twice of Jesus Christ.

NOTE: Here we have two Jewish references. We have five pagan references. And F.F. Bruce makes this observation as he shuts down his book. "Having gone over both pagan and Jewish sources, whatever else may be thought of the evidence from early Jewish and Gentile writers..., it does, at least for those who refuse the witness of Christian writings, establish the historical character of Jesus himself." And he observes, "Some writers may toy with the fancy of the Christ-myth, but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence." As far as these people were concerned, there was a real Jesus of history.

C. The New Testament Writers

The New Testament would be totally adequate to prove that Jesus was a real person in history.

1. Whatever reasons may be given for receiving the testimony of Josephus or Tacitus or of any other writer from antiquity as reliable history must be equally applied to the New Testament writers.
2. All of the New Testament writers were contemporaries of Jesus.
3. Four were eyewitnesses, three accompanied Jesus throughout His ministry, and all of their writings are in remarkable agreement, and continue to stand the tests of genuineness and historicity.

NOTE: If the New Testament documents were the only single source from antiquity which presented to us the life of Christ that would be more than sufficient proof of His historical reality.

⁶ Antiquities, 18, 3. 3

CONCLUSION:

All together, from pagan sources, Jewish sources, and the New Testament itself, we conclude there was a real Jesus, a real Nazarene. Christianity bases the whole of its teaching upon the reality of that Jesus of history.

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON TWO

1. Name five Gentile (pagan) historians or writers who give evidence of the historicity of Jesus. **Also give their dates.**

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____
4) _____
5) _____

2. Give a small segment of the content of each one's writing which would indicate the historicity of Jesus.

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____
4) _____
5) _____

3. Name two Jewish historical sources that verify that Jesus was a real person of history.

1) _____
2) _____

4. Give the dates of the two Jewish sources and a brief explanation of what each said that would verify the historical Jesus.

1) _____

2) _____

5. What other source/s do we have to prove that Jesus was a real person of history and why should we even consider this third source?

LESSON THREE

The Historical Reliability of The New Testament (1)

INTRODUCTION

 In this lesson we begin our consideration of the historical reliability of the New Testament. I want you to keep two things in mind as we begin this portion of our investigation.

1. First of all, remember the propositional statement - There is abundant evidence from historical sources which is adequate to prove that Jesus is the Son of God and that the Bible is the word of God.
2. Secondly, remember the logic of the methodology - We will take the historical facts the New Testament gives us and by systematic argumentation we will reason them to the conclusion that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and conclusively then that the Bible is the word of God.

You know now that those historical sources are the New Testament documents. If we can prove that the New Testament is historically reliable to report the events that took place in the past, then we can develop our methodology. We will take the historical facts the New Testament gives us and by systematic argumentation we will reason them to the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God and conclusively then that the Bible is the word of God.

LESSON AIM: To consider evidence that the New Testament documents are historically reliable in every way.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Discover that we are totally dependent upon the New Testament for any information on the life and teachings of Christ.
 2. See that archeology verifies the statements of the Bible where the two speak on the same things.
 3. Learn that contemporary writers and New Testament writers are in agreement when they both speak on the same people and events of history.
- Read the related material in Ed Wharton's book *The Case For Historic Christianity*.
-

OUR DEPENDENCE ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

We are totally dependent upon the New Testament for a **personality portrait of Jesus Christ**. Non-Christian sources do not tell us about Jesus.

A. We Have Limited Knowledge about Jesus from Non-Christian Sources

All we can know apart from the New Testament is that Jesus was crucified by Pilate on the charge of sedition outside the city of Jerusalem. **Beyond that we can know very little.**

B. Without the New Testament We Don't Know Anything about the Teachings of Christ

1. We know nothing about the *life* of Christ – what He did or said.
2. We don't know anything about the *burial* of Christ.
3. We know nothing about the evidences for the *resurrection* of Christ.

NOTE: There is neither a historian nor a theologian nor a gospel preacher that can say **with any authority** whatever that Jesus did anything or that Jesus said anything or that anything happened to Him **without an appeal to the New Testament** as the historical source book of that statement.

C. Our Knowledge and Faith Comes from the New Testament (John 17:20)

1. What is the ground of our faith in Jesus?
 - a. It isn't the history sources that were pagan.
 - b. It isn't the Jewish sources.
 - c. It certainly isn't any kind of an existential experience or a subjective feeling.
2. The ground of our faith is the testimony of the apostles. "*Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17).
3. John said that what he saw is what he is writing. "*And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe*" (John 19:35).
4. John appeals to the signs Jesus did to prove Jesus was who He said He was (**John 20:30-31**). John offers seven specific signs as evidence of the deity of Jesus.
5. The testimony of the apostle Thomas following the resurrection of Jesus (**John 20:24-29**). "*My Lord and my God.*"
 - a. Thomas asked for physical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.
 - b. The power of the evidence presented produced this response – "*My Lord and my God.*"

D. Only the New Testament Presents the True Portrait of the Historical Jesus

1. We are totally dependent upon the New Testament for a personality portrait of Jesus Christ.
 - a. It is impossible to reproduce the life and teachings of Christ from the total amount of information that comes down to us from first century

Greek, Roman, and Jewish writers.

- b. From these writings outside the New Testament we can learn precious little about Jesus beyond the fact that he lived and was crucified at Jerusalem by Pontius Pilate.
- 3. What this implies to us today.
 - Neither historian nor theologian can say with any authority whatsoever that Jesus said or did anything without an appeal to the New Testament.

CONCLUSION:

When we can show that the New Testament is historically reliable, then whether one believes Jesus is the Son of God or not, whether one believes the Bible is the word of God or not, one thing is for sure, if it is a history book, when it says Jesus made certain claims, then He made those claims. When it says Jesus did certain deeds, then He did those deeds.

If those deeds are sufficient to confirm His claims, then reason has to sit in judgment on the evidence and draw a conclusion in regard to just who Jesus Christ was and what the New Testament really is. Since then, our total source material for Christ is the New Testament documents, it must be considered historically reliable.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A. Christianity Is A Historical Religion

1. Christianity is a space-time religion.
 - a. Christianity is not grounded upon teachings.
 - b. Christianity is grounded upon events that took place in history.
 - c. Apart from the New Testament we cannot know what happened.
2. How do we know that Christianity's events occurred?
How do we know...
 - a. There was a man named Jesus?
 - b. Jesus Christ fed 5,000 people with two fish and five small loaves?
 - c. Jesus raised the dead or that He was raised from the dead?
3. How do we know anything happened in the past?
How do we know...
 - a. That Napoleon Bonaparte was soundly defeated by Wellington at a place called Waterloo?
 - b. That George Washington was the first president of the USA?
4. There is only one way for people to know what has happened in the past when they weren't there to observe it – by historical testimony. That is exactly what the New Testament is – a history book.

NOTE: While ancient Oriental cults linked the annual cycle of winter and summer to the death and resurrection of the mythical Adonis, Christianity deals with no such mythology. It offers to us a real historical founder, plus accounts of his remarkable death, burial and resurrection in well written documents which have

passed the most severe tests known to us today for historical accuracy and authenticity. Christianity exists now because of what happened to the historical Jesus. It is not the result of doctrines and principles, but of events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

ARCHEOLOGY VERIFIES THE BIBLE

The contribution that archeology has made in showing the New Testament's historical reliability.

A. There Is No Contradiction Between an Archeological Discovery and a Biblical Statement

1. We have two hundred years or more of archeological research, digging up artifacts out of the ancient dirt, reflecting on biblical statements.
2. There is not a single contradiction between an archeological discovery and a biblical statement.

B. Archeology Confirms Many of the Bible's Statements

Archeology cannot **prove** any of the statements of the Bible – it can only **confirm** biblical truths.

WRITTEN CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTATION

A. Writers Contemporary with New Testament Writers

At the time the New Testament writers were writing, there were contemporary men writing also.

1. Men like Tacitus and Josephus were also writing their histories.
2. When these men wrote their histories, they dropped them into the historical context.
3. Historical check points:
 - a. Certain *persons*,
 - b. Involved in certain *events*,
 - c. At certain *times*,
 - d. In certain *places*.
 - e. They told about the *morals* of the time.
 - f. They wrote in the *linguistics* of the time.
 - g. They wrote of *politics, climate, customs, and culture*.

NOTE: If a person receives Tacitus, or Josephus, or some classical historian from antiquity as reliable, and if the New Testament says substantively the very same thing that these men are saying, and they agree with him about the events and the times and the places, then if we accept these classical historians as reliable, we are obligated to accept the New Testament as reliable on the same ground.

B. Historical People and Dates Recorded by Both Biblical Writers and Pagan Writers

1. **Luke** introduces the ministry of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-2). In doing so he mentions:
 - a. *Tiberius Caesar*
 - b. *Pontius Pilate*
 - c. *Herod*, tetrarch of Galilee
 - d. *Philip*, tetrarch of Ituraea and Trachonitis
 - e. *Lysanias*, tetrarch of Abilene
 - f. *Annas*
 - g. *Caiaphas*
 - h. *John the Baptist*

NOTE: Every one of these men can be found outside the Bible text, in extra-biblical statements in classical histories. What you are reading in Luke is history of a reliable sort.

2. **Mark** records the darkness that took place during the crucifixion of Jesus (Mark 15:33).

Thallus, a pagan historian, also mentions this same darkness in his trying to give an explanation for it.
3. A famine is prophesied by Agabus to come to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:27-28).

Josephus makes the observation that the famine came to pass during the time of **Claudius**— about the year A.D. 45.
4. **Sergius Paulus** converted by Paul and later writes a letter encouraging his sister to become a Christian (Acts 13).
5. **Claudius** commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome (Acts 18:1-2). In his life of Claudius written about the year 120 A.D., **Suetonius** refers to this same event, some 50 or 55 years later.

CONCLUSION:

Sometimes in our statements we admit to things that we don't know we are admitting to. For an illustration. When a person says that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, he is admitting that there is a God. And so it is in regard to the historical reliability of the New Testament. With all the information that we have that comes down to us from the ancient sources, you could expect an atheist to admit Jesus was a real person of history. But, of course, those people don't believe He is the Son of God. However, when you ask these people who Jesus is, what their evaluation of Christ Jesus really is, they all answer that "Jesus was a great man of history." How do they know??

THE ACID TEST

They were written in the same generation in which the events took place.

A. The New Testament Was Written in the Very Generation in Which the Events Took Place

(Read F.F. Bruce's comments on this in his book "*The New Testament Documents*")

What we have in the writings of the New Testament are eyewitness accounts.

1. Men who saw what was going on – men who participated in the events that took place.
2. Very careful researchers like Luke who researched it from eyewitnesses, or Mark, who, tradition says, wrote down what Peter preached.
3. The New Testament documents are actually eyewitness accounts.
4. They were written in the generation in which the events took place.

B. They Were Circulated among the People Who Were Alive When Those Events Took Place

NOTE: Hundreds of thousands of people in the first century became Christians, and they suffered persecution and discrimination precisely because of what was written in those books.

THE WRITINGS OF THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

There is a collection of documents written from about 90-160 A.D. referred to as the writings of the Apostolic Fathers.

A. A Corpus (body) of Writings from about 90 to 160 A.D.

1. These were NOT the apostles.
2. These were men who came after the apostles.
They were men who either sat at the feet of the apostles or at the feet of those who did. Men like:
 - a. Ignatius, Barnabas (not the Barnabas of the Bible), Clement of Rome, and other writers.
 - b. Men who wrote between 90 and 160 A.D.

B. Written to Churches and Christians

1. To encourage people to be faithful in the face of persecution.
2. They quoted from nearly every book of the New Testament.

C. They Prove That the New Testament Was Completed Before 100 A.D.

1. The early date of these writings makes it clear that the New Testament books were already in circulation among the churches of Christ before the end of the first century.
2. In three works written about 100 A.D. – the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Didache* (the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles), and a letter written by

Clement of Rome to the Corinthian church about 96 A.D. – we find quotations from Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, I Corinthians, Ephesians, Titus, Hebrews, I Peter, and possibly other books.

D. The Value of the Writings of These Early Fathers

1. They clearly indicate the reliability the church attributed to the New Testament writings at that time.
2. The church was persecuted at this time for believing and propagating the message of the New Testament.

CONCLUSION:

The inestimable respect the early church had for the absolute reliability and authority of the New Testament cannot be doubted.

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON THREE

1. The **greatness of Jesus' character and works** can be learned about in what historical documents?

2. What is the ground of our faith? Give a scripture reference.

3. List at least seven historical check points contained in both the New Testament and contemporary writings.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____

4. Name seven people mentioned in Luke 3:1-2 which are also found in secular histories.

1) _____ 5) _____

2) _____ 6) _____

3) _____ 7) _____

4) _____

5. Give the events recorded by the writers below that are also recorded in secular writings.

Mark 15:33 _____

Acts 11:27-28 _____

Acts 13 _____

Acts 18:1-2 _____

LESSON FOUR

Historical Reliability of the New Testament (2) Manuscript Attestation

INTRODUCTION

hat you are reading in your New Testament is just what was written originally by inspired men. This is a legitimate area of inquiry inasmuch as it has been centuries since Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the Gospels and Peter, Paul, James and Jude wrote the New Testament epistle documents. People have a very legitimate question that needs to be answered. Is it possible that there have been corruptions that found their way into the text of Scripture? Is it possible that the copyist, after all the Bible has been copied and recopied and yet copied again, that a copyist's error could have gotten into the text?

The answer is yes, there have been errors of transmission made by copyists and uninspired statements have even found their way into the text of Scripture. This is dealt with by the science of textual criticism. These men, scholars, detect the error and then seek to restore the original text.

In this lesson we will compare the manuscript value of the New Testament documents with the manuscript value of some of the classics from history. Then we will be able to see what F.F. Bruce meant when he stated that the evidence for the New Testament is ever so much greater than the evidence for the classical histories.

LESSON AIM: To see that the manuscript evidence for the reliability of the New Testament is far greater than that for classical histories and is strong evidence that the Bible we have now is the same as that written by the authors.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Discover that we do not have the original *signature* copies of the New Testament documents.
 2. Find out how many copies of the Greek New Testament are now in existence in whole or in part.
 3. Compare the manuscript attestation of the New Testament to that of the classical histories.
-

THE VALUE OF MANUSCRIPTS

A. We Don't Have the Originals

1. None have survived – either of the *New Testament* or of the *Classics*.
2. They are lost to us – we don't have that copy called the *signatures*. All we have are manuscript copies of the original writings of both the classics and the New Testament.

B. Not Speaking About Translations

C. Manuscripts Are *Copies of the Originals*

1. Copies that are image reproductions of the New Testament documents.
2. Not simply word for word, but letter for letter.

NOTE: An evaluation of the reliability of the New Testament can be made by comparing the manuscript value of other ancient histories, which are generally received as authentic, to the quality of the New Testament manuscripts. It is only fair that the New Testament receive at least the same consideration as other writings from the same period.

MANUSCRIPT COPIES OF THE CLASSICAL HISTORIES

A. Caesar's *Gallic Wars* – written between about **58 to 50 B.C.** Of this ancient writing we have nine or ten good manuscripts (**there are no originals**) in existence. The oldest manuscript we have of this work is from the ninth century A.D. That leaves a gap of some **800 years** between the original writing and the best copy in our possession. (**See the chart on page 26**)

B. The Roman History of Livy – written between **59 B.C. to 17 A.D.** Of the 147 books originally written, there are 35 manuscripts of this work now in existence. Only 29 of these manuscripts are as old as the fourth century. They are removed at least **300 years** from the originals.

C. Histories of Tacitus – written around **100 to 115 A.D.** Only 14 ½ books have come down to us in our century; and from only two manuscripts. One manuscript of the histories reaches down to about the ninth century, a gap of about **800 years**.

D. The Annals of Tacitus – written about **100 A.D.** Only ten manuscripts of this work now exist in full and two exist in part. The best copy in our hand is from the eleventh century, a gap of some **900 to 1,000 years**.

E. The History of Thucydides – written about **460 to 400 B.C.** These writings are known to us from only eight manuscripts. The earliest of these is dated around 900 A.D. That is at least **1,300 years** removed from the originals.

- F. ***The History of Herodotus*** – written about **480 to 425 B.C.** Eight manuscripts of this work are known to us. The earliest of these is dated around 900 A.D. This is also at least **1,300 years** removed from the originals.

NOTE: In no case can the copies of these histories be compared with the originals so as to determine absolutely the accuracy of the copies in our possession. Bruce observes from this point of view, “Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest MSS of their works which are of any use to us are 1,300 years later than the originals.”⁷

MANUSCRIPT ATTESTATION FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT

Manuscript evidence for the New Testament is far greater than that for classical histories. There are presently in existence about **5,000 copies** of the Greek New Testament in whole or in part. The most valuable are:

- A. ***Codex Sinaiticus*** – dating from about **350 A.D.** This codex has the entire Bible as well as many other books. It is removed from the originals by only about **250 years**.
- B. ***Codex Viticanus*** – copied about **350 A.D.** This copy is removed from the originals by only about **250 years**.
- C. ***Codex Alexandrinus*** – copied about the middle of the **fifth century A.D.** It is removed from the originals by only about **350 years**.
- D. ***Codex Ephremiac*** – dating from the middle of the **fifth century A.D.** Removed from the originals by some **350 to 400 years**.
- E. ***Codex Bezae*** – dating from the **fifth or sixth century A.D.** Removed from the originals written by the apostles by some **400 years**.
- F. ***Codex Washingtonius*** – dating from about the **fourth or fifth century**. It contains the Gospels and portions of the Pauline epistles with Hebrews following Thessalonians. It is preserved in the Smithsonian Institute.

NOTE: Besides these ancient manuscripts of the Bible, there are some very important fragments from papyrus codices of the Bible which have been dated from around **130 to 250 A.D.**

1. ***Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri.*** These fragments contain portions of eleven papyrus codices of the Bible. Three of these contain most of the New Testament writings. One fragment containing the Gospels and Acts is dated

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, p. 11.

- between 200 and 250 A.D.
2. **Ryland's Fragment.** This fragment contains John 18:31-33, and verses 37 and following. It has been dated around 130 A.D. It shows that John, which was written between 90 and 100 A.D., was circulating in Egypt only 40 years after it was written (Bruce). To date, **this is the earliest existing fragment of the New Testament.**
 3. **Papyrus Bodmer II.** This fragment contains the first 14 chapters of John, less 22 verses, and considerable portions of the last 7 chapters. It has been dated around 200 A.D.

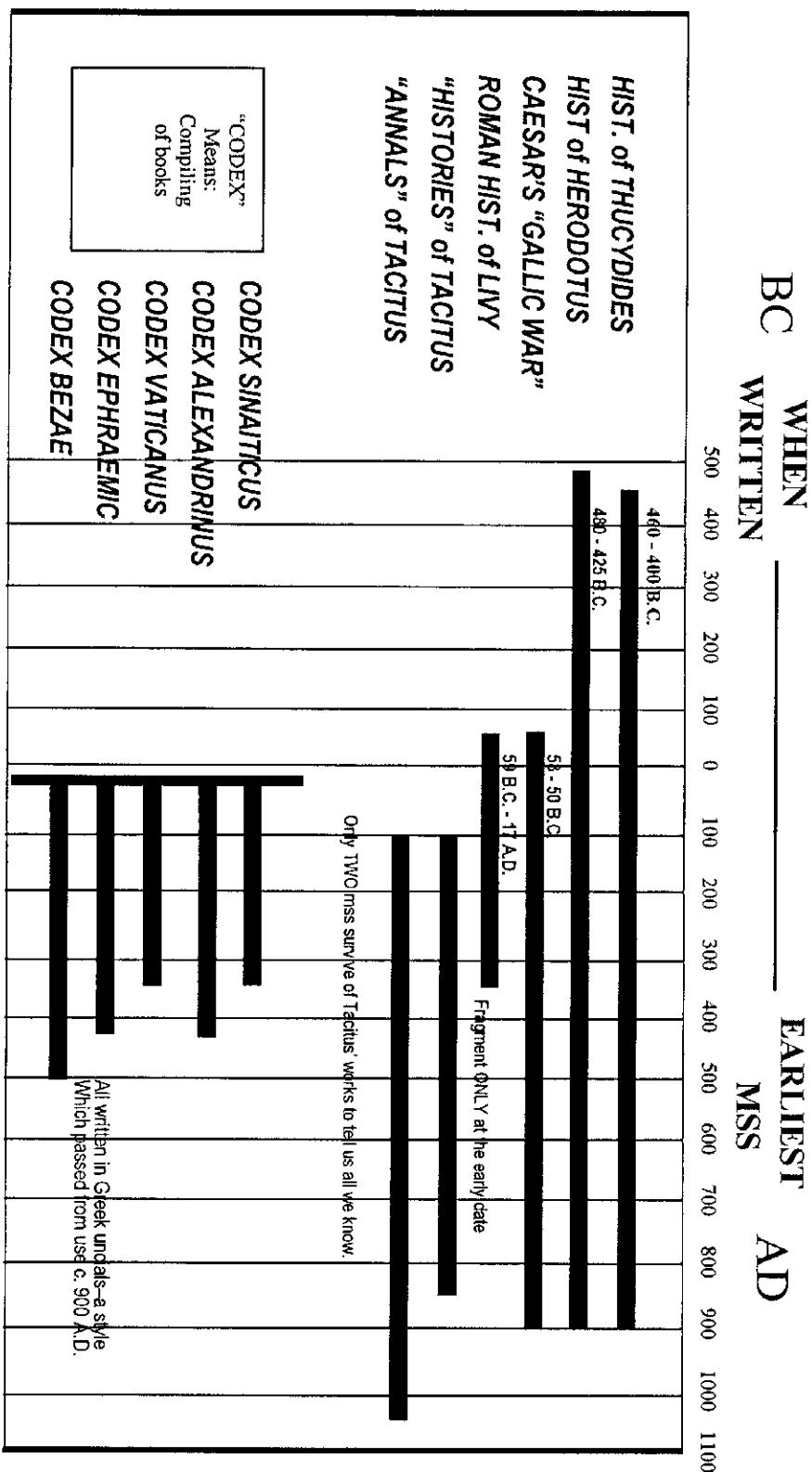
CONCLUSION:

Our New Testament comes from a manuscript attestation that is far superior to the classical histories. We can be grateful to God in His providence for having provided these copies for us. You can rest assured that what you are reading in your New Testament is an authentic representation of what was originally penned.

In view of the evidence for the classical writings, how much more should we receive the New Testament as authentic in view of the evidence for its reliability. Bruce states with tongue-in-cheek, “If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt. (Bruce, F.F., *The New Testament Documents*, p. 15)

A Comparison of New Testament MSS With MSS of Classical Histories

26



SELF EXAM FOR LESSON FOUR

1. What is meant by the term “manuscript copy”?

2. Give a list of six unquestioned ancient and classical histories with their approximate dates and the earliest known manuscript for each one.

1)	_____	_____
2)	_____	_____
3)	_____	_____
4)	_____	_____
5)	_____	_____
6)	_____	_____

3. How many Greek manuscripts of the New Testament (in whole or part) are in existence today? _____

4. List the five best of these and give their copy dates.

1)	_____	_____
2)	_____	_____
3)	_____	_____
4)	_____	_____
5)	_____	_____

5. List three other important fragments from papyrus codices of the Bible which have been dated from around 130 to 250 A.D.

1)	_____
2)	_____
3)	_____

LESSON FIVE

Historical Reliability of the New Testament (3) The Historical Context

INTRODUCTION:

The New Testament tells us about Jesus and tells us about Christianity, the workings of the apostles, and the establishment of the church. It is a history book. Christianity comes from historical eyewitness testimony. We know that things happened in the past because it is recorded in reliable historical documents. Whether a person believes Jesus is the Son of God or not, if the New Testament can be proven to be a reliable document to report the events that took place in the past, then when the Bible says Jesus made claims, we can trust that He made those claims.

He said, “I am the Son of God,” whether you believe that He is the Son of God or not, the important thing is that if the New Testament is reliable as a history book, then there was a Nazarene named Jesus and he **claimed** to be the Son of God. Furthermore, if the New Testament is reliable history, then when it says Jesus walked on the water, that He fed 5,000 with two fish and five loaves of bread, that He raised the dead, that He was raised from the dead then He did and He was!

Ten of Paul’s letters had been written and circulated before the traditional date of Mark’s gospel (c. 60-62 AD). His letters abound in historical references which are inextricably bound up with his doctrine.

LESSON AIM: To provide the student with proof that the New Testament documents were written in a historical context and preserved by the early church because of that fact.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Discover that the writings of Paul contain numerous historical references which can be readily checked out.
 2. Study and examine the many historical references in the Gospels and book of Acts which help to prove the authenticity of these books.
-

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A. The Historical Context in the Letters of the Apostle Paul

1. Galatians chapters 1 and 2 presents some of the major events in Paul's life.
 - a. From before his conversion to seventeen years after his conversion.
 - b. These events are laid out in chronological sequence and provide historical proof of his claim to have received the gospel directly from Jesus and that he was therefore an apostle.
2. References to over 500 persons who saw Jesus alive after the crucifixion whom Paul affirmed were, for the most part, still alive and readily available for confirmation, was offered by Paul as an evidence of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:5-6).
3. References to persons obviously known by his readers (Romans 16:1-23; 1 Corinthians 1:14; 16:17, 19; Ephesians 6:21; Philippians 4:2-3; Colossians 1:7; 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 1:5, 15-16; 4:9-15, etc.).
4. References to sister churches engaged in relief activities among the disciples (Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-6).
5. His attempt to motivate the Corinthian church to give liberally by pointing out the liberality and poverty of the Macedonian churches (2 Corinthians 8:1-7).
6. His statements of intimate friendship and deep yearning for the personal fellowship of Timothy (Philippians 2:19-20; 2 Timothy 1:2-5; 2:1; 4:9-13).

NOTE: Such statements as these lift the context of Paul's letters completely out of the realm of invention. In addition to this, his references to geography, contemporary cultural procedures, the moral, religious, and political conditions of the day combine to produce a context which must be considered factual.

B. The Gospels and Acts

1. Luke opens his account to Theophilus, the Roman official:
 - a. By assuring him that the material he is about to read had been carefully researched.
 - b. Secured from eyewitnesses and that the material was presented accurately.
 - c. He then states the reason for such precision of research and accuracy of writing: "...that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou was instructed" (Luke 1:4).
2. The birth of Jesus is set squarely in the context of first century Palestine (Luke 2:1-7).
3. The ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1ff; Mark. 6:14-20; Luke 3:1-2; John 1:19-37).
 - a. Recorded is the content of his preaching, his diet, his clothing, his boldness toward the Jews and Herod who knew him.

- b. His preaching and baptizing activities are located from the city of Jerusalem to along the Jordan River.
- c. Herod the tetrarch knew John and held a certain fearful respect for him.

NOTE: Such wide spread activity and fame would have a lasting effect upon the residents of Palestine and would make it well nigh impossible to believe that any one of the gospel accounts could have been circulated as reliable reports among so many persons in Palestine if the things concerning John the Baptist were not true.

Every political and religious figure mentioned in Luke 3:1-2 has been mentioned in other writings from the same period. No half-smart inventor would tie his tale to so many known persons and places with any serious intent to deceive. It would be a futile effort.

- 4. The life and ministry of Christ in a historical environment:
 - a. The things He did and said not take place in an historical vacuum.
 - b. It embraced the great masses of the people in Palestine from Galilee to Judaea during the time of the Roman occupation of Palestine.
 - c. Many persons, places, events, weddings, temples, valleys, mountains, rivers, feasts, and cities define the historical setting. Jesus' ministry is dated during the governorship of Pontius Pilate at Judaea.
 - d. The accuracy of the geography and intimacy of knowledge of the culture of the land, the language, the religious and political peculiarities of both Jews and Gentiles – all confirmed in other documents from the same period of history – should be sufficient for any inquirer into the historical reliability of the New Testament.
- 5. The historical beginning and spread of the church of Christ is traced from Jerusalem to Rome.
 - a. It was opposed by the Jewish hierarchy and involves **Roman proconsuls** like **Sergius Paulus** (Acts 13:4-12), and **Gallio** (Acts 18:12-17),, **Roman governors like Felix** (Acts 23:24 – 24:27), and **Festus** (Acts 24:27 – 26:32).
 - b. It involved **Imperial decrees** (Cf Acts 18:12), rioting over Christianity's threat to idolatry in Greece (Acts 19) and the establishment of a new religion which was referred to as a sect everywhere spoken against (Acts 28:22) as presented in the history book called Acts.
 - c. This could not possibly have been invented in one generation and then passed off on the people of that same generation who would have known better.

CONCLUSION:

It would have been as impossible to have fabricated an account of Christianity and to have successfully pawned it off on the same generation of people who know better

as for a present day writer to fabricate a story of a Japanese invasion of California in the early months of World War II, to have located the invasion landing at Long Beach in June of 1942, and then further to have invented certain events and speeches which were supposed to have taken place among the people who actually lived in Long Beach at the time. Many would still be alive today to deny the truth of the invasion story. The New Testament writings would have had no better chance of survival than this if their contents were mere figments of the imagination.

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON FIVE

1. List three (3) circumstances/events offered by Paul in his epistles as proof of the resurrection of Jesus.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

2. Who is Theophilus and what is the significance of Luke addressing his writings to him?

- 3) What is meant by “historical context?” List some things that identify the historical context.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

LESSON SIX

The Final Transition

INTRODUCTION:

A final transition in the body must take place before one can live in heaven. Anyone expecting to enter into the eternal kingdom of God must undergo a three-fold transition: 1) he is going to have to experience salvation, 2) a transition into the image of Christ 3) the third transition is death and the resurrection of the physical body. What you will see and study in this lesson are the various aspects which surround that resurrection. Resurrection will be defined, described and application made to our own circumstances. And then we will see the encouragement this can be for those whose bodies are not normal.

LESSON AIM: To expose the student to the various aspects of the resurrection and some of the implications.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will. . .

1. Learn the definition of “Resurrection.”
 2. Learn something about the condition of the resurrected body.
 3. Understand that resurrection involves the redemption of the body.
-

DISCOVER THE MEANING OF “RESURRECTION”

A. Resurrection Is A Dead Body Coming Back to Life

1. Not a spiritualized event.
2. **The resurrection of Lazarus** – Discovering the meaning from John 11:43-4
 - a. “Lazarus come forth” means he was brought back to life.
 - b. Loose him... means “remove the grave clothes.”
 - c. “Resurrection” is a dead body coming back to life!
3. **The resurrected bodies of the saints** who were dead. Discovering the meaning from Matthew 27:52.
4. **The resurrected body of Jesus.** Discovering the meaning from Luke 24:39 – Flesh and bones showing that His body had been raised from the dead.
5. Discovering the meaning from John 20:19-28 – Jesus appears to the disciples, except Thomas, in bodily form. Showing His body had been made alive again. When He appeared to Thomas his response was: “My Lord and my God.”

B. Our Resurrection – Exactly the Same as Jesus’ Resurrection

1. All accounts whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament are the same: A dead body coming back to life.
 - a. John 5:28-29 – “*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*”
 - b. Dead bodies go into a tomb/grave, and that is just what comes out of the tomb/grave.
2. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16 – “*...with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.*”
3. 1 Corinthians 15:12-22: Our resurrection will be just like the ones described in Thessalonians.
 - a. The Corinthians believed that Jesus was raised.
 - b. They didn’t believe their own resurrection will take place.
 - c. Paul’s argument is that if Christ was raised so will they be raised.
 - d. Paul gives the consequences of not believing in the resurrection.
 - e. Paul affirms that Christ did indeed die on the cross, was buried and rose from the dead.

THE CONDITION OF THE RESURRECTED BODY

A. The Condition of the Dead Body – Decayed and Turned Back to Dust

1. The concept of the Corinthians along with the Thessalonians seems to be that they expected Christ to return soon.
2. Their question was when the body decayed into dissolution then how could it be raised back to life?
 - a. Since there is no body left after decaying what kind of body will be raised.
 - b. They are challenging the power of God to raise the dead body.
3. 1 Thessalonians 5:23: “*...and I pray God your **whole spirit** and soul and **body** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”
4. Revelation 20:13: “*And the sea gave up the dead which were in it...*”

B. The Redemption of the Body

1. 1 Corinthians 15:29: Paul’s final argument. If there is no resurrection why were people being baptized in view of the dead body being raised
2. Romans 8:9: At the point of baptism people receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. If one does not have the indwelling of the Spirit he/she does not belong to God.
 - b. “*But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth (lives) in you*” (Romans 8:11).
 - c. Waiting for the redemption of the body (Romans 8:23).

THE FINAL TRANSITION

A. The Question of How the Body Can Be Raised and What Manner of Body Will it be

1. Paul's response: "*Thou foolish one...*"
 - a. God will determine the kind of body that is raised.
 - b. He illustrates this truth by referencing the planting of seed and the growing of the plant.
2. The bodies of each one will be different and apparently unique.
 - a. A natural body will enter the grave but a spiritual body (not a spirit) will be raised.
 - b. Although it will be a spiritual body, it will still be a body!

B. The resurrected body will be a heavenly body

1. "*As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthly: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*" (15:48-49).
2. Each person will have an identifiable body.
 - a. Individuality will not be lost.
 - b. The resurrected body will have a distinct identity throughout all eternity.

C. The Value of this News for Those Who Are Terribly Afflicted

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON SIX

1. Define the term, "resurrection" and give three textual illustrations.

1) _____
 2) _____
 3) _____
 4) _____

2. How does Paul answer the question: "how can the body be raised and what manner of body will it be."

3. Complete the following sentences.

- 1) A _____ body will enter the grave but a _____ body will be raised.
- 2) Although it will be a _____ body, it will still be a _____.
- 3) The resurrected _____ will have a _____ throughout all eternity.

LESSON SEVEN

The Resurrection And Its Implications

INTRODUCTION

We always want to keep in our minds while we are studying historical Christian evidences what the proposition of our course is. It is stated that: “there is an abundance of evidence from historical sources which is adequate to prove that Jesus is the Son of God and the Bible is the word of God.” There is an abundance of evidence in our hand coming from the historical New Testament that Jesus is everything that He claimed to be. We have already seen that Jesus walked on the water, changed water to wine, healed the sick, raised the dead.

But there is another event that took place, the supreme sign of Jesus Christ raised from the dead. I will argue with you about that event. If I can show you that Christ was resurrected, and we can, that's a fact of history, then the implications of that resurrection are that you can put your left hand upon the book of Genesis and you can put your right hand upon the book of Revelation and say, “I believe everything in this book.” That is because the resurrection is the supreme sign of the divine nature of Jesus. In a lesson or two beyond this, we are going to begin to see the arguments for the resurrection. Now let's consider the implications of the resurrection regarding the trustworthiness of your Bible, the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.

LESSON AIM: To see that if Jesus was raised from the dead there are certain implications that naturally follow.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Examine certain implications that are evident if Jesus was really raised from the dead.
 2. Learn that the resurrection of Jesus proves that He is the Son of God.
 3. Gain the knowledge that the resurrection of Jesus proves the Bible to be the word of God.
-

IMPLICATIONS IF JESUS WAS NOT RAISED FROM THE DEAD

If Christ was not raised from the dead, there are implications that would drastically affect Christianity. These implications must be considered.

A. He Would Not Be Alive to Raise Us from the Grave

B. Christianity Would Collapse (1 Corinthians 15:15-19)

Paul's expansion of this truth.

1. *Gospel preaching is vain* (v. 25).
What would there be to preach? "Gospel" means good news; good news about justification from sin and salvation from the death penalty would be meaningless.
2. *Our faith is vain*. It is impractical to conceive of the Christian faith apart from a personal faith in the resurrection of Jesus since the object of our belief in eternal life is the Lord Jesus Himself.
3. *The apostles are false witnesses*. If the stories they told of Christ and His resurrection were not true, it would be ludicrous to regard the apostles as sincere and honest men.
4. *People are still in their sins*. Inasmuch as redemption from sin is certified by the resurrection, then without it there can be no redemption from sin.
5. *Believers have perished at death*. That is the only logical conclusion apart from the resurrection. Like the dog Rover, when he's dead it's over. Death would be our destiny, nothing more.
6. *Christians are of all men most pitiable*. How Christians of Paul's day could appreciate that statement. Persecuted, discriminated against, looked upon as fools by a world of unbelievers, and all for nothing!

IMPLICATIONS IF CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD

A. The Proposition of Scripture – the Plain Statement

1. **He is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30-31).**
 - a. "Christ" is the Greek word for the Hebrew term "Messiah" – the "Anointed One."
 - b. The Old Testament prophesied of a Messiah – a deliverer of Israel. Jesus claimed to be the Christ (the Messiah) – the fulfiller of all Old Testament messianic prophecy.
2. Christ claimed to be the "Son of God" – deity, equal to the Father in His nature – His essence.
3. Paul claimed the same thing for Him (Philippians 2:5-11)

NOTE: These two claims constitute the claims of the New Testament regarding the historical Jesus.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus would obviously **imply His Godhood** (Romans 1:4). This in turn guarantees His total **integrity** and His consequent **ability to make good on all His claims**.

B. His Resurrection Proves that Jesus is the Son of God

Resurrection is obviously a sign of deity; mere men cannot raise themselves from the dead. Jesus pointed to this event as the divine sign.

1. The cleansing of the temple in John 2:18-22 is a sign of His deity.
2. Speaking to His apostles He says that the Messiah would be identified by

His death, burial and resurrection (Luke 24:44-48).

3. Paul says that the resurrection would be the identifying sign of the Christ (Romans 1:4).
4. If Christ was therefore raised from the dead He is totally trustworthy and all of His claims have been sustained.

C. The Resurrection Proves the Bible Is the Word of God

1. The argument from the resurrection to the Bible's total reliability is as follows:
 - a. If Christ was raised from the dead He is divine and what He claimed is therefore true.
 - b. Jesus claimed the Scriptures are the word of God (**John 10:35**).
 - c. Since Jesus was raised from the dead He is the Son of God and His claim for the Scriptures is therefore true.
2. The Son of God is reliable.
 - a. You can trust Him to tell you the truth.
 - b. He endorses the Old Testament as the word of God.
3. The deity of Jesus verifies the Old Testament. If Christ was raised from the dead that **proves Him to be God and He authenticates the Old Testament to be God's word**. Two illustrations:
 - a. **Matthew 22:31-32** – “*As touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’*” Jesus quoted Moses in Exodus 3:16 and said, “God said.”

NOTE: If Christ was raised, He is God. He is totally trustworthy, and He quoted the book of Exodus that Moses wrote and said that God said it.

- b. **Matthew 24:37-39** – “*As it was in the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man. Whereas in those days which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage and knew not until the day that Noah entered into the ark and the flood came and took them all away.*”
 - 1) Jesus Christ speaks of Noah as a real person of history.
 - 2) He speaks of the days of the flood as a literal historical event.
 - 3) He speaks of the ark as a literal seagoing vessel.

NOTE: What we are seeing is that Jesus endorsed the statement of Moses in Genesis 6 through 9 as a record of what literally took place in historical space and time.

D. Jesus Authenticates the History in the First Eleven Chapters of Genesis

1. In the first three chapters several things are recorded.
 - a. the origin of the universe
 - b. the origin of mankind
 - c. the origin of the home

- d. the beginning of sin and the origin of death
- e. the origin of religion – meaning binding back
- g. the origin of redemption – it begins to tell us about the coming seed of woman who would bruise the serpent’s head .
- 2. Other things recorded in the next few chapters.
 - a. the beginning of the nations
 - b. the origin of the languages of the earth
 - c. and finally they tell us about the flood of Noah.

NOTE: Liberals today deny these first 11 chapters being history – they believe them simply to be Hebrew myth but Jesus endorsed them as God’s revealed word.

- 3. **Matthew 19:3-6** – Jesus quotes Genesis to answer the question by the Pharisees.
 - a. Question: “*Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?*”
 - b. Answer: “*Have you not read . . . ? For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.*”
 - c. A two-fold conclusion:
 - a) “*So that they are no more two but one flesh.*”
 - b) “*What God hath therefore joined together let not man put asunder.*”

NOTE: Notice here that Jesus says, “*Have ye not read that He who made them*” Who was the “He who made them” “*male and female?*” That was God. Moses wrote Genesis chapter 1, but Jesus said that it was God who made the statement.

Where did Jesus get the right to bind the permanency of marriage upon the human race? Right out of the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. He goes back to creation as God intended it to be. Jesus thus has endorsed the historical reliability of these chapters in the book of Genesis. This then shows how that the entire Old Testament has been authenticated by Christ as the word of God

- 4. **Matthew 12:38-40** – “*As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*”
- a. Jesus said Jonah’s events literally took place.
- b. The prophecy of Jonah was an historical prophecy of His own historical death, burial and resurrection.
- c. This was not a spiritual point to be made. It is a literal point to be made.

NOTE: If Christ was raised from the dead, and He was, then as God He is reliable, and when He said, “Jonah was,” then Jonah was.

NOTE: This reliable Jesus said that what Moses wrote about the creation of man and about the origin of the home was a literal statement of what happened in historical space and time.

CONCLUSION:

Is Christ resurrected from the dead? That is a fact of history. Is He trustworthy? That goes without saying. If Christ was raised then not only is He trustworthy, but inasmuch as He quoted the Old Testament as the word of God and drew arguments from it that are bound upon members of the church of Christ, on Christians, involving ourselves even to the extent of the marriage relationship, then we can totally rely upon what He had to say. These are some of the implications of the resurrection.

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON SEVEN

1. What are two implications that would drastically affect Christianity if Christ was not raised from the dead?

1) _____

2) _____

2. In 1 Corinthians 15:15-19 Paul gives six results that would be true if Jesus was not resurrected from the dead. List these.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

3. What two truths does Jesus' resurrection emphatically prove?

1) _____

2) _____

4. Give two examples of Jesus' use of Scripture which verify the Old Testament to be the word of God. (Give Scripture references)

1) _____

2) _____

LESSON EIGHT

The Resurrection of Jesus (1) The Empty Tomb

INTRODUCTION

We come now to the study for which our former lessons have prepared us: to present the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nothing is to be assumed. All of our evidence comes from the New Testament. Remember, they are totally reliable to report the events as they surrounded Jesus Christ.

John chapter 19 records the crucifixion of Christ and the preparation that was made for His burial. John makes a marvelous statement in chapter 19 verse 35. He says, “*He that hath seen hath born witness and his witness is true. And he knoweth that he saith true that ye may also believe.*” John affirms that what he is writing for us is the testimony of an eyewitness. And so what we are reading is reliable history. Now Christ has been crucified, Christ has been buried, and in the twentieth chapter John offers for us the evidence from history for His resurrection.

The facts as we have them from John are four in number: (1) the stone had been rolled back and the tomb was standing open, (2) the tomb itself was empty of the body of Jesus, (3) the grave cloths in which Jesus was buried were lying in the tomb, and (4) it was Sunday, the first day of the week – a fact not at all to be slighted. We will consider the evidence in this order, combining the first two facts into a single unit of study to avoid repeating the same line of argumentation.

LESSON AIM: To understand that the scene at the tomb offers extensive proof that Jesus was raised from the dead and thus is deity.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Examine the evidence at the open, empty tomb and answer the question, what happened to the body of Jesus?
 2. Look at all the evidence of the grave clothes and arrive at the conclusion that Jesus arose from the dead.
 3. Discover that there is great significance in the fact that Jesus rose on the third day (the first day of the week).
-

THE TOMB WAS OPEN AND EMPTY

The body of Jesus is gone. The only reasonable conclusion about the empty tomb is that Christ was raised from the dead.

Reasoning from the facts to the cause makes us ask who opened the door and removed the body of Jesus. It was necessarily either a human act or a supernatural act. Two possibilities – Christ was raised from the dead or He was taken away from the tomb by human ingenuity. Now if we can satisfy a line of inquiry which eliminates the human element as the cause of the removal of Jesus' body from the tomb this will leave us with the conclusion that the cause was supernatural, and the resurrection claim will be sustained.

Who, then, opened and emptied the tomb of Christ? Friends or enemies? Who had the capability and opportunity and desire to remove the body of Jesus?

A. Was it the Disciples of Christ? (Matthew 27:62-66).

This was prevented by the guards at the tomb. Notice the check points in this passage:

1. Permission asked by the Pharisees and scribes.
2. The stone closing the tomb was sealed. It would be a violation of Roman law to disturb the seal.
3. Roman guards were stationed at the tomb to guard against disturbance. (There were 16 of these guards)
3. These same guards went to the Jews. They were afraid to go to the Roman authorities – afraid of punishment.
4. The Jews gave them money as surety. (They were “bribed”)
5. The Jews assured the guards they would not let the Roman governor punish them.

B. The Response and Actions of Peter and John at the News of Mary

C. Was it the Enemies of Christ?

Did the Jews take the body of Jesus out of the tomb and put it in a different place? If so, why? The desire and intent of the ruling Jews was to keep the body of Jesus in the tomb until the third day had passed. Why? Matthew gives us at least two reasons in Matthew 27:62-66.

1. Jesus' prediction that He would rise again the third day was common knowledge by this time.
2. They knew that if the disciples stole the body of Jesus that an empty tomb could feed the matter they were attempting to end.

CONCLUSION:

In answer to who opened and emptied the tomb of Christ, we must conclude on the basis of the documentary evidence that the disciples of Jesus *could not* have done the deed, and the Jews certainly *would not* have done it.

C. Was It Grave Robbers?

On the outside chance that someone would suggest that a grave robber took away the body of Christ, it must be remembered that the same guards would have posed as much a problem for a grave robber as for any one else. Also, in ancient times graves were robbed for the valuables that were buried with the deceased. In this case the only thing of value was the one hundred pounds of spices which were poured into the folds of the burial cloths which were **left behind** in the tomb when Jesus vacated the premises (John 19:39-40; 20:5-7).

The logical implication from the facts as they come to us in the Gospels is that Jesus was indeed raised from the dead.

THE GRAVE CLOTHS THAT WERE LEFT IN THE TOMB

Christ's burial garments left behind in the tomb form one of the most interesting aspects of the evidence for the resurrection.

A. The Significance of the Position of the Grave Cloths

1. They were *lying there*.

Verse 6 says, “*Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb; and he beholde the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, that was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself.*”

2. The linen cloths may have been lying in a little cocoon-type shell that probably had just collapsed in the middle.

B. The Burial Custom of the Jews

1. The account of the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:43-44).

Notice the facts of the burial of Jesus as presented in the historical account. Jesus was bound in linen wrappings with one hundred pounds of spices, myrrh, and aloes, according to “*the burial custom of the Jews.*”

2. Lazarus was all bound up in grave clothes and there was a napkin upon his head. That is the burial custom of the Jews.

C. Jesus Was Buried According to Jewish Custom (John 19:39-40)

1. Aloes and myrrh were used – poured into the folds (about 100 pounds – see 2 Chronicles 16:14). “*And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had hewn out for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odors and divers kinds of spices prepared by the perfumers' art: and they made a very great burning for him.*”
2. He was wrapped with linen from toe to shoulder.
3. The arms were placed at the side of the body, and these were also bound to the body with more windings of material.
4. A napkin was tied around the face of the body to complete the covering.

NOTE: “The Balsamodendron myrrha, which produces the myrrh of commerce, has a wood and bark which emit a strong odor; the gum which exudes from the bark is at first oily, but becomes hard by exposure to the air.”

Plueoberts Bible Dictionary, P. 428

CONCLUSION:

Who was the artificer that got behind these Roman guards? It couldn’t be done! And then rolled away the stone without the guards ever noticing him. It couldn’t be done! And then goes inside the tomb and unwraps the body of Jesus Christ and then sets the body aside and then rewraps the grave clothes to make it look like they have never been tampered with and then spirits away the dead body of Jesus to some unknown place for a hoax? Who would take his life in his hands for such a foolish thing as that? There is only one conclusion we can come to, and that is Jesus was raised from the dead.

OTHER POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

A. He Simply Swooned on the Cross

1. The testimony of eyewitnesses says He died.
2. All first century people were satisfied that He died.
3. The chief Priests and Pharisees believed He was dead! (Matthew 27:63-64).
4. The soldiers at the cross testified to Pilate that Jesus was dead.

B. The Women Really Went to the Wrong Tomb

1. There is no evidence that this occurred.
2. What do they find at the tomb they come to?
 - a. They find the grave clothes inside.
 - b. It looked like somebody was resurrected from the dead.

NOTE: Reason asks, “What happened to the body of Christ if He was not raised from the dead?” There is no answer. We have for the facts of history as we receive them.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THIRD DAY

Jesus prophesied that He would rise and the Old Testament prophecies predicted that the Messiah would rise.

A. The Disciples Did Not Believe at First He Was Raised (Luke 24:21-25)

1. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:21ff).
2. The disciples didn’t believe the women’s report (Mark 16:9-14).
3. Jesus appears to them and upbraids them all for their unbelief (Luke 24:14).
4. The apostles were not theologically biased by some Old Testament prophecy.

B. No Jew Understood the Old Testament Prophecy Concerning the Resurrection of the Messiah from the Dead

CONCLUSION:

What John is saying is, “Here’s the reason for believing: the tomb was empty; the grave clothes were lying; the napkin rolled up in a place by itself.” Such evidence as that is completely incontrovertible. And so John concludes they saw and they believed. What is the function of reason? It’s to sit in judgment on the evidence, the facts in the case, and to draw a reasonable conclusion that agrees with the claim. Christ claimed to be the Son of God, and eyewitnesses claimed to see Him for forty days after the resurrection. What does the evidence say? What does your reason conclude? That Christ was raised is a logical deduction.

SUPPLEMENTAL STUDY NOTES

A. Jesus Prophesied He Would Rise on the Third Day after Crucifixion

Resurrection obviously implies a death. But Jesus specified death by crucifixion (Matthew 20:19; John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-33). The absence of Jesus’ body from the tomb on the third day becomes extremely significant when we understand that the Jews made a number of attempts to kill Christ by different means throughout His ministry (e.g. Luke 4:28-30; John 5:18; 7:1, 25, etc.) while Jesus steadfastly maintained that His would be a death by crucifixion. Thus the fact of the empty tomb on the third day following the crucifixion lends a great deal of credibility to the resurrection claim inasmuch as both the means of death and the time of the resurrection were foretold throughout His ministry and were fulfilled in the face of physical opposition.

B. The Prophecy Was Foretold Early in His Ministry

1. After the first temple cleansing at the outset of His ministry (John 2:13-22).
2. He appealed to Jonah’s experience in the fish for three days and three nights as a sign of His death, burial and resurrection (Matthew 12:38-40).

C. It Became Common Knowledge

1. **The Jewish rulers knew of the prophecy** (Matthew 27:62-66).
2. They did not expect a resurrection and wanted to present the lifeless body of Jesus on that third day as an absolute refutation of His messianic claims.

D. There Was an Empty Tomb on the Third Day

Had either the Roman or Jewish rulers removed the body it would have been no problem for either of them to have presented the corpse and to have stopped the new movement cold.

E. Christianity and the First Day of the Week

1. From the day of Pentecost following the crucifixion, the first day of the week has been special to Christians.
2. The Church was established on the first day of the week (Acts 2:1-47).
3. The Corinthian church was instructed to take up a special collection on the

first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

4. The churches observed the Lord's supper on that day (Acts 20:7).

CONCLUSION:

The transfer of emphasis from the Sabbath day to the first day of the week is a very impressive testimony to the significance of this particular day, and more especially when we remember that devout Sabbath keeping Jews who became Christians never questioned the correctness of this emphasis. The question is raised: What great event happened to produce such an emphasis if not the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON EIGHT

1. What are the two alternatives to the disappearance of the body of Jesus from the tomb.

1) _____
2) _____

2. Describe the way that the Jews made sure that the body of Jesus would not be stolen.

3. List some reasons why the disciples could not have stolen the body of Jesus.

4. Reason to the end that the enemies of Jesus would not remove the body of Jesus.

5. Explain the significance of the grave clothes “lying” there in John 20:5-6.

6. Explain the burial customs of the Jews.

7. Give an argument refuting the “swoon” theory.

8. Jesus predicted that He would be raised on the third day following His crucifixion. Reason from this that He was raised from the dead.

LESSON NINE

The Resurrection of Jesus (2) The Change at Pentecost

INTRODUCTION

Jn this lesson on the resurrection we are going to consider a change that took place in the apostles on the day of Pentecost, a change of such extreme proportions that natural processes are totally inadequate to answer to the cause for that change. Then due to the nature of the case we are going to see that it is reasonable to conclude that this change was produced by the Holy Spirit Himself. That in turn is going to reflect the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

THE CLAIM of the New Testament is that on the day of Pentecost a change was wrought within the apostles which was the result of the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit.

THE PROPOSITION is that this change was accomplished by the Holy Spirit and is an evidence of the resurrection of Jesus.

Remember that our evidence comes from historically reliable documents, the New Testament. And it offers to us the facts from history. In developing this argument for the resurrection called “the change at Pentecost,” there are five facts to be developed.

LESSON AIM: To understand that the drastic change in the disciples on the day of Pentecost offers important evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Learn of five facts concerning the apostles change at Pentecost which will provide evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead.
 2. Discover that there was a drastic change in these same men and the reason for this change.
 3. Be able to reason from this evidence that Jesus Christ was indeed raised from the dead as was promised.
-

THE PROMISE OF JESUS CONCERNING THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE APOSTLES

There are five facts to be considered in the systematic development of this evidence.

A. Fact Number One: The Mission of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles as Promised by Jesus

Jesus promised that the apostles would receive the Holy Spirit and that He would endow them with a knowledge of the gospel they did not have (John 14:26; 16:12-13).

1. The Holy Spirit was to super-impose upon the apostles a remembrance of the things that Jesus had said to them during His ministry.
2. The Holy Spirit would teach them all gospel things that they had not known up to that time.
3. The Holy Spirit would declare to the apostles things that were going to come in the future.

B. Fact Number Two: The Coming of the Holy Spirit Was Conditional

1. Jesus imposed upon Himself the condition of returning to the Father before the Spirit would be permitted (or enabled) to come to the apostles (John 16:5, 7, 10).
2. He had to go back to the Father in Heaven.

C. Fact Number Three: Jesus Died at Calvary

1. His death was carefully documented by eyewitnesses (Matthew 27:50; John 19:30).
2. Any suggestion that Jesus survived the ordeal of crucifixion to live out His life in another place is totally without historical basis and in flagrant contradiction of the only historical documents recording His life and death.
 - a. The gospel writers were convinced He died.
 - b. The whole church of Christ in the first century was convinced He died.
 - c. Pilate was convinced He died.
 - d. The Centurion was convinced He died.
 - e. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were persuaded He was dead.
 - f. The Jewish leaders were convinced He was dead.

NOTE: The facts thus far have brought Jesus to His death. Jesus promised to return to heaven before He could send the Spirit, but He died before returning to His Father (John 20:17). Therefore, to ascend to the Father and dispatch the Holy Spirit He would have to have been raised from the dead. It is thus essential to prove that the Holy Spirit came to the apostles in order to prove that Jesus was raised.

D. Fact Number Four: The Jewish (Apostles') Concept of Messiah and His Kingdom Before Pentecost

1. The apostles' condition **theologically – militant nationalists**.
 - a. The kingdom of God was a nationalistic thing confined to the Jews.
 - b. They sought a position of authority in the kingdom of God (Mark 10:35-38).
 - c. They were told not to tell anyone who He was (Matthew 16:13-23). They didn't understand the nature of the kingdom.

- d. See also John 18:36; Matthew 16:21f. – Their concept of the kingdom of God was political, nationalistic.
- e. Matthew 20:20-28 – The concept of James and John and their mother.
- f. John 6:14, 15 – The feeding of the 5,000 prompts the multitude to try to take Jesus by force and make Him king.

NOTE: The Jewish hope was that the nation would be restored to the regal and economic splendors of a past era according to their nationalistic interpretation of Old Testament prophesy (cf. Acts 26:6-7). The apostles' theology seems to have been no different from the view the Jewish people held generally at that time.

2. The apostles' condition **intellectually** – *dull of perception*. They didn't have the keenness of insight that Jesus even expected them to have from time to time. (See Matthew 16:5-12)
 - a. Matthew 16:5-12 – where they misunderstood the Lord's warning about the teaching of the Pharisees.
 - b. Luke 18:31-34 – where the plain statements of Jesus' death and resurrection were not perceived. They did not grasp the meaning of Jesus' statement about His death.
3. The apostles' condition **relationally** – *state of tension*.
 - a. There was division among them (Mark 10:41).
 - b. They were vying with one another as to who is the greatest in God's kingdom (Luke 22:24).
4. The apostles' condition **emotionally** – *they are fearful*.
 - a. After the crucifixion these men, for fear of the Jews, were hiding themselves behind locked doors (John 20:19).
 - b. Peter would deny him three times (Matthew 26:31-34).
 - c. They all fled at his arrest (Matthew 26:35-56).
 - d. Even as he appeared to them after the resurrection they were terrified and confused with questions they could not answer (Luke 24:36-38).
5. The apostles' condition **educationally** – *they are unlearned*.
 - a. It is clear that the apostles were not trained for public service prior to Pentecost (Acts 4:13).
 - b. Nor could they have been expected to engage their opposition polemically. (A similar incident left the Jews wondering about the source of Christ's training and ability, John 7:14-15).

CONCLUSION:

And so here's the condition, the state of the apostles prior to the day of Pentecost. They were *theologically militant nationalists* interpreting Old Testament prophecy as a zealot would. They were ready to take their spears and their bows and arrows and follow this Nazarene and throw off the Roman yoke from their neck. *Intellectually* they were *dull in perception*. *Positionally* they were *divided* and *emotionally* these men simply were *fearful*. Now that is the condition as it existed.

E. Fact Number Five: The Apostles' Concept Changed on Pentecost

The extremity of the change.

1. They changed in **theology**.
 - a. These men immediately began to preach Christ crucified, buried, and resurrected.
 - b. They began to preach that the church of Christ is the answer to the Old Testament prophesies regarding the kingdom.
2. They changed in **doctrine**. Now they are not only united in brotherhood, but they are united in doctrine.
3. They changed **psychologically** and **emotionally**. They were no longer **fearful** but bold and courageous.
4. Their **disunity** and **divisiveness** changed to complete unity of thought and purpose.
5. They changed from men of **weakness** to men of **power** (Acts 4:13).
6. They are no longer confused and fearful, but knowledgeable and bold. With newly acquired **linguistic abilities** (Acts 2:5-11) they publicly and fearlessly proclaim the resurrection and its messianic implications through ensuing persecution (Acts 4:1-20).

NOTE: Here was a change of such proportions that the mind is staggered to think of it happening, as it were, in a moment of time. Yet it happened. It is one of the facts of history. The apostles were drastically changed on the day of Pentecost.

THE REASON FOR THE CHANGE

Was the cause natural or supernatural?

- A. **The Bible Claims it Was the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1ff)**
- B. **Paul Claims it Was the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2 and Ephesians 3)**
- C. **Peter Claims it Was the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1 and 2 Peter 1)**

NOTE: If that change was produced by the Holy Spirit, then Jesus had to have been resurrected from the dead. Inasmuch as Jesus said that in order for the Spirit to come, it would be conditioned upon His ascending back to the Father or the Spirit could not come. But Jesus was dead. Now, how was He able to go back to the Father and send the Spirit unless He was resurrected from the grave? The change at Pentecost is because of the resurrection of Christ, His ascension back to heaven, and His sending the Holy Spirit.

WAS THE CAUSE NATURAL OR SUPERNATURAL?

This is a fact of history which must be explained. The question is, what forces combined to produce this phenomenon? Luke claimed it was the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). So did the apostles (1 Corinthians 2:10-13; Ephesians 3:3-5; 2 Peter 1:3-4). But inasmuch as the

Holy Spirit could not come until Jesus had ascended back to the Father, and since Jesus died, it follows that for the Spirit to have come Jesus had to have been raised from the dead.

The only alternative explanation to the change in the apostles is that it was affected by natural processes. But such a radical change as this would demand both *time* and *education*. These are the essential ingredients required to produce a thorough-going change in both concept and life-style as it did in these convicted, persecuted-unto-death, apostles. *But the fact is that the time required to produce this change was simply not available.* And who was their teacher? Who would have been able to unify the apostles in both doctrine and martyr-life? Echo answers, Who?

There is only one reasonable answer to the apostles' change. **JESUS WAS RAISED!**

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON NINE

1. What is the claim of the New Testament concerning the concept the apostles had before and after Pentecost?
-

2. State the proposition concerning the change in the apostles on Pentecost.
-

3. List the five facts concerning the apostles' change which provide evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

4. There are five things which reflect the concept of the disciples concerning the Kingdom. List these five things.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

5. List five areas which show the extremity of the change in the apostle after Pentecost.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

6. Give a brief argument from the material in this lesson that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

LESSON TEN

The Resurrection of Jesus (3) The Apostles' Testimony

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson we want to study the testimony of the apostles as a proof of the resurrection of Jesus. In Luke the 24th chapter after the account of the death, the burial, and the resurrection, we have Jesus addressing the apostles at the time of the ascension. In Luke 24:44, “*He said unto them, ‘These are my words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you. That all things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms concerning me.’ Then opened he their minds that they might understand the scriptures and he said unto them, ‘Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer, rise again from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all nations beginning from Jerusalem.’”* And then He says to the apostles, “*And ye are witnesses of these things.*” Although they didn’t understand it at the moment, they had been witnesses to what was prophesied in the Old Testament that would happen to the Messiah. He would die and be in the tomb, and He would rise on the third day. The apostles obviously as witnesses to these had seen the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

LESSON AIM: We’ll see the fruit of the apostles’ teaching reveals their testimony about the resurrection to be one of the grand proofs for the resurrection of Jesus.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Learn that the biblical idea of witnessing is different than the prevalent concept of witnessing for Jesus in the world today.
 2. See that the task of giving witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ was reserved for the inspired apostles only.
 3. Discover that the power of the apostles’ testimony is seen in three areas, (1) their number, (2) their unity, and, (3) their lives.
-

On the day of Pentecost, these men began to testify that Jesus Christ was indeed the Christ of prophecy. They preached to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah, and they proved it satisfactorily with their own testimony. And 3,000 people at the end of their preaching stepped forward for baptism for salvation and entrance into the church, the kingdom of God. The church and Christianity began. It began on the ground of the

apostles' testimony. The apostolic testimony is one of the grand proofs for the resurrection of Jesus, and these men took their testimony from Pentecost and went throughout the whole world and carried the resurrection message. And it was believed by Jews and Gentiles alike. What is the force for the resurrection that comes from the apostles' testimony?

THE DENOMINATIONAL CONCEPT OF WITNESSING

There is a great distinction between apostolic testimony, the kind of witnessing we read about in the Bible, the biblical idea of witnessing and this so-called witnessing that people appeal to today.

A. Witnessing People Appeal to Today

Personal testimony of what they think God or Christ has done for them in their life.

B. A Changed Life is No Proof of the Deity of Christ

A changed life could just as well prove the reality of any other religion/false religion.

THE BIBLICAL IDEA OF WITNESSING

Jesus said that the apostles were to bear witness of Him (John 15:27). To bear witness means to testify in behalf of, with a view toward confirming a truth. The apostles' witness, then was to confirm the deity of Christ to the world.

A. It Is Confined to a Select Group of Men

1. Confined to men who have seen something. Specially chosen men (Acts 1:1-3, 8). You cannot bear witness to what you have not seen or heard.
2. The apostles were appointed to be witnesses for Christ.
John 15:26-27 – “When the Spirit comes he will bear witness of me . . . And you also shall bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning.”

John 17:20 – In verse 20 He prays for all of those who have faith in Him. He says, “Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word;” Now here Jesus is telling us that the ground of our belief in Christ is the word of the apostles. They were eyewitnesses. They were with Jesus three and a half years. They saw Him dead. Then three days later they saw Him alive. They handled Him. They talked with Him. They ate with Him. They lived with Him, and then they watched Him go to heaven. Now could they testify that He was resurrected?

B. This Testimony Is Confined to the Apostles

1. John 15:26-27 – Jesus is preparing the apostles for the great work that the Spirit would cause them to do. He said, *“When the Spirit comes, he will bear witness of me.”* But then He says in verse 27, *“And ye also shall bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning.”* Now two things are seen there:
 - a. First, they were to be empowered by the Holy Spirit – when the Spirit

comes, the apostles would bear witness.

- b. Second, they were with Jesus from the beginning.
- 2. John 17:20 – “*Father, not for these only (the apostles) do I pray, but for all them that believe on me through their word.*”
- a. He makes it clear that the apostles’ testimony is the ground of our faith. Why? They were eyewitnesses. They had been with Jesus from the beginning, throughout His entire ministry. They saw Him dead. They saw Him alive after three days. They handled Him. They walked with Him. They lived with Him, and watched as He ascended back to heaven.
- b. Luke 24:44-48 – “*...These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, ...Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.*”

THE THREE-FOLD PURPOSE OF THE APOSTLES’ TESTIMONY

A. To Produce Belief Through the Word of Their Testimony

- 1. John 17:20 – Jesus prayed, “*Neither for these (apostles) only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word*” (John 17:20).
 - a. The ground of faith for all succeeding generations would be the word of his apostles.
 - b. This is precisely because they were eyewitnesses.
- 2. Belief among modern men who have not seen Christ is the result of the historical testimony of the apostles who were eyewitnesses. That eyewitness account is preserved in the New Testament.
- 3. This eyewitness testimony is back of Peter’s statement to those who had heard the gospel and believed on Christ, but had not seen him: “*... whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (1 Peter 1:8). Our faith today, like theirs, is the result of the apostles’ testimony.

B. To Testify That Jesus Is the Messiah

- 1. Luke 24:44-48 – In his final words to the apostles Jesus explained:
“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And Ye are witnesses of these things.”
- 2. In his crucifixion and resurrection Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies that the messiah would die and rise again on the third day.
 - a. The apostles accompanied Jesus throughout his ministry to the time of his death, and walked with him after the resurrection to the time of his ascension.
 - b. Because of this objective eyewitness experience they were able to testify that Jesus answered to those messianic prophecies.

C. To Testify to the Resurrection of Jesus

1. Acts 1:21-22 – The resurrection is the ground of the Christian faith (cf. John 11:25; Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 1 Peter 1:3).
2. The grand purpose of the apostles' testimony is to offer evidence for the historical fact of Jesus' resurrection, and by this to confirm his claims to be the Christ, the Son of God.
 - a. The testimony of the apostles is that they were with Jesus throughout his ministry, that they saw him alive after the crucifixion, and that they ate and drank with him after his resurrection.
 - b. They further testify that they had the opportunity to observe him closely, to the point of examining the marks of the crucifixion in his flesh, and so to satisfy themselves that this was indeed the same Jesus of Nazareth with whom they had lived and walked for some three years prior to the cross.

TESTIMONY TO JESUS' RESURRECTION CONFINED TO THE APOSTLES

A. Modern Belief in Christ Is Dependent on Apostles' Eyewitness Testimony

1. Luke's claim: Acts 1:1-3 – Those who were chosen before. Luke opens his second volume to Theophilus and says, "*The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach until the day in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen.*" Not all the people were witnesses, only those whom He had chosen before to be witnesses. Those who were with Him from the beginning.
2. Peter's claim: Acts 10:39-41 – "*We are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem whom also they slew hanging him on a tree. Him God raised up the third day and gave him to be manifest*
 - a. *not to all the people but*
 - b. *unto witnesses who were chosen before of God.*"
 - c. *Even us who also ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.*"
3. Paul's claim: Acts 13:30-31 – "*And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses unto the people.*"
4. John's claim: 1 John 1:1-3 – "*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*"

B. Apostles Specially Qualified to Be Christ's Witnesses

There are at least two qualifications.

1. They were to be empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 15:26-27).
2. They had been with Jesus since the beginning (Acts 1:21-22). The beginning from the days of the baptism of John.
 - a. They had to see Him dead.
 - b. They had to see Him alive again.

NOTE: The purpose for which the apostles bore witness was to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, to show that He was more than a mere man. Christ claimed to be the Son of God. He claimed that He is going to judge us, that His words are the standard of judgment, that He one day will take us off to heaven for eternity in a wonderful world over yonder. What's the proof of that? The resurrection is certainly a proof of that. If we can show that Jesus was raised, that is a confirmation that He is everything He claimed to be. And that was the work of the apostles.

THE CREDIBILITY OF THE APOSTLES' TESTIMONY

They were to give their eyewitness testimony. The force of the eyewitness testimony is three-fold:

A. The Number of Witnesses – Twelve in Number

1. There had to be several in order to corroborate their testimony. We have this testimony from twelve men.
2. Here are twelve men who on the day of Pentecost stood up, all of them together, and they testified they had seen Christ.
3. When twelve men give the same testimony, that lends veracity to their testimony.

B. The Unity or the Unanimity of Their Teaching

1. They were in perfect agreement with each other. They all taught the same thing in every place.
2. Their eyewitness observations were extended over a pre-crucifixion period of some three and a half years, and a post crucifixion period of another forty days to determine that this was the same Jesus in both ministries.
 - a. Their testimony to the life of Christ are in agreement.
 - b. Their testimony as to His death and resurrection are in agreement.
 - c. Their testimony concerning His post-resurrection appearances are all in agreement.

C. These Men Suffered Persecution for What They Believed

1. They witnessed though persecuted and killed.
 - a. These men suffered discrimination.
 - b. Every one of these men lived the lives of martyrs until they all, with the exception of John, died the death of martyrs, dying for the gospel.
2. Bible examples of their witnessing:
 - a. Acts 2:22-24, 32 – “*Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: . . . This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses.*” The apostles stand, as it were, arm in arm all twelve saying, “God raised Jesus from the dead.”

- b. Acts 3:14-15 – “*You denied the holy and the righteous one and asked for a murderer to be granted unto you and killed the prince of life whom God raised from the dead.*” And what do they offer as a proof that God raised Him? They stated, “Whereof we are witnesses.” And so they offered their own eyewitness testimony as a proof He was raised.
- c. Acts 4:18-19 – “*But Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.’*” Again they appealed to the resurrection and their own eyewitness testimony as a proof He was raised from the dead. (See also Acts 5:20-28; I John 1:1-3)

NOTE: Our faith today is dependent upon the apostles’ testimony just like Jesus prayed for in John 17:20. And the apostles insist that we are saved by faith in Jesus. But we can have no faith apart from the word of the apostles. Even as Paul said, “*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God*” (Romans 10:17).

SUMMARY

According to the New Testament, the biblical witness of the sort we read about in Acts was confined to those Spirit-guided apostles whose testimony of what they had seen and heard was preserved from error. The purpose of their testimony was to confirm to lost men that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. This could only be done by convincing men that Jesus was raised from the dead. No one since the apostles has had that eyewitness experience, and no one shall.

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON TEN

1. Explain the general concept of “witnessing” about Christ in the denominational world.

2. Who are the only ones who could be witnesses for Christ biblically?

3. List at least two qualifications required for a person to be a witness of the resurrection of Christ.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

4. List three things that show the force of the eyewitness testimony of the apostles.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

5. What was the three-fold purpose of the apostles' testimony?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

6. Reason from the material presented in this lesson that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

LESSON ELEVEN

The Resurrection of Jesus (4) Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

INTRODUCTION

 Our final argument for the resurrection of Christ lies in an appeal to the facts surrounding the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. The force of this argument lies in his manner of life in time past before he became a Christian, when he was a persecutor of Christianity. Saul's furious zeal, the severity of his persecution of the church, and the sincere conviction that what he was doing was right, all combine to produce a personality that could not be reached by any combination of human efforts. And yet this man was reached.

The abruptness of this change from self-appointed exterminator of the Christian religion to being a gospel preacher reveals a contrast of such extreme proportions that natural processes are totally inadequate to explain the change that took place.

Will Durant in his book, *Caesar and Christ*, makes this very observation. He admits there was a Saul of Tarsus in history. He admits that he persecuted the church. And he admits that he converted to Christ. But he makes this observation. He says, "No one can say what natural processes underlay this pivotal experience." That is because "natural processes" are totally inadequate to answer to the cause for the change that took place in this man.

LESSON AIM: To offer evidence surrounding the conversion of a Jew named Saul from the city of Tarsus as undeniable proof that Jesus was raised from the dead.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Investigate Paul's manner of life before his conversion in contrast to his life after conversion.
 2. Learn of a four-fold claim made by Paul to prove to the Galatians that his gospel was from Christ.
 3. Discover Paul's three-pronged argument that Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.
-

Preview of the Lesson:

We have some facts here that we need to investigate.

1. First, there was a Nazarene who was crucified upon the cross, Jesus Christ.
2. Saul of Tarsus was a persecutor of the church of Christ.
3. This Saul of Tarsus converted to Christianity.
4. He said that he saw Jesus on the road to Damascus.

PAUL'S MANNER OF LIFE IN TIME PAST

A. Paul's Four-fold Claim (Galatians 1:11-13). His Gospel:

1. Was not after man (not man-made). *"For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the gospel which was preached by me. It is not after man."* (1:11-12)
2. He didn't receive it from man.
3. He was not taught it by man – not even Ananias.
4. He received it by divine revelation of Jesus Christ.

NOTE: Jesus was crucified before Saul's conversion. If we can prove to you that Jesus appeared to Saul and gave him that gospel as he claimed, then we are going to have to believe that the crucified Christ was resurrected from the grave in order to make that post-resurrection appearance.

B. Paul's Three-pronged Argument That Jesus Appeared to Him

After laying claim to Christ's personal revelation of the gospel to him, Paul then begins to present the evidence in the form of a logical three-pronged argument from his past manner of life. Paul's unique manner of life should be convincing proof that only Christ Himself could have approached the fiery persecutor with the gospel and convert him.

"For you have heard of my manner of life in time past in the Jews' religion how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and made havoc of it. And I advanced in the Jews' religion beyond many of mine own age among my countrymen, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (1:13-14).

1. He persecuted the church **beyond measure. HE WAS A FANATIC!**

The evidence that Paul received the gospel from Jesus lies in the fierceness of that persecution. That phrase "beyond measure" shows the severe measure of the persecution. This description of his former life was apparently well known to the Galatians. It seems he had only to mention the three particulars in the case for them to fully appreciate what he meant. Luke's account of this persecuting Jew.

- a. Acts 7:58 – 8:1 – *"And Saul was consenting unto his (Stephen's) death."*
 - 1) The men stoning Stephen laid their garments down at the feet of Saul.
 - 2) He was the acknowledged leader of the persecution of the church.
- b. Acts 8:1-3 – *"But Saul laid waste the church, entering into ever house, dragging men and women out, and committed them to prison."*
Even women did not escape the fury of this man's persecution.

- c. Acts 9:1-2 – “*Saul yet breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord . . .*”
 - 1) He gets official documents giving him authority to go to other towns to arrest and bring Christians bound to Jerusalem.
 - 2) He had the power of extradition.
- d. Acts 22:4 – “*I persecuted the way unto death.*”
- e. Acts 26:9 – Paul describes the anti-Christian hatred that caused him to persecute the church. “*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*”

NOTE: In his defense to King Agrippa, Paul, now a veteran of Christ for many years, recounts how he, with complete consent of conscience, shut up many of the saints in prisons, voted for their deaths, punished them even in their worship assemblies, and even strove to make them blaspheme the name of Christ (Acts 26:9-12). He capped off his description of the extreme measure to which he went in persecution when he related that his persecutions were carried on with such intensity that he pushed on toward Damascus in the heat of the eastern midday (v. 13). While others rested from the heat at this time of day Saul pressed on toward his self-assigned task in Damascus.

CONCLUSION:

How do you deal with a fanatic like Saul? Of course, you cannot. This is the very point that Paul was intending to make; *that no one could have converted him*. Yet he was converted. Who then converted him? Christians *could not* have done it, and Jews certainly *would not* have done it. Paul affirmed stoutly that it was Christ. But Christ was crucified. Therefore, if Christ appeared to Saul, He must have been raised from the dead!

2. He advanced in the *Jew's religion. HE WAS PROMINENT!*

There are at least five areas of Paul’s advancement during his pre-Christian life which can be specified from Scripture.

- a. He advanced in society among the Jewish elite. He was born a Pharisee and was outstanding as a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5).
- b. He advanced as a scholar having sat at the feet of Gamaliel, whom some think was the greatest rabbi of the time (Acts 22:3).
- c. He advanced in power. This is seen in his exercise of his persecution against the church (Acts 9:1-2; 26:12).
- d. He was advanced educationally.
- e. He advanced financially. He was able to support the police force which had to accompany his efforts. He had, at least, the ancient equivalent of a modern day expense account.

NOTE: Saul of Tarsus was what some would call a success. Beyond a doubt he was a prominent person among the Jews. His reputation even preceded him to the Gentiles from time to time (cf. Acts 26:24). His *prominence* was outstanding.

What ulterior motive could brilliant young Saul of Tarsus possibly have had for becoming a Christian? What could Christians have offered him? Christianity would mean that he would be severed from all such standing and accomplishments as well as reversal of his religious convictions. Only Jesus Christ could have provided the dynamic sufficient to have converted him. But He was dead., Crucified! How could Jesus have converted him unless He had been raised from the dead as Paul affirmed?

3. He was exceedingly zealous for the *traditions of his fathers.* **HE WAS PREJUDICED.**

- a. His fathers were the Pharisaical fathers.
- b. The traditions were their interpretations of the Law of Moses. The Pharisees were famed for their conflict with Christ. It was their particular interpretation of the law which blinded them to Christ's claims and doctrine.
- c. As a Pharisee (Philippians 3:5) Saul of Tarsus would be as *prejudiced against Christ as his fathers.*"
- d. Prejudice does not always preclude honesty. It is often the product of a *lack of knowledge* (1 Timothy 1:13).

NOTE: Here is a man who believed with all genuine sincerity that what he was doing was right. He was doing it in the name of his God, Jehovah. But the man had already prejudged Christianity. He was a **prejudiced, prominent, fanatic.**

How does one convert a prejudiced, prominent, fanatic? If human beings cannot, that leaves God. Saul became a Christian. And it is a matter of history, not fantasy. This did really happen. But who did it? If it was Jesus who appeared to Saul and effected his conversion then He had to have been resurrected from the dead. This is what Paul affirmed. If it was not Christ, then what alternative, *in keeping with the historical facts*, can satisfy the fact of the radical reversal of Saul's life?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING SAUL'S CONVERSION

A. Was There an Ulterior Motive Back of Saul's Conversion?

What motivates men to change and then to lie about it?

- 1. *Wealth?* He had that with the Jews and left it for the poverty of Christianity (cf. Acts 20:33-34; 1 Corinthians 4:11-12).
- 2. *Reputation?* He had a reputation which was heard among kings (Acts 26:24) and renounced it to become "a fool for Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:10, 13).
- 3. *Passion?* Was there some immoral reason? Look at his character!
 - a. His moral integrity was above reproach among Jews as well as Christians.
 - b. Paul had many enemies after espousing the Christian religion who attacked him mercilessly, but none tried to cast reflection from this vantage point.(cf. 2 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 2:10).
- 4. *Power?* He had this with the Jews and left it for Christ (See Acts 26:1-12).

NOTE: There is no ulterior motive which can be discovered against Paul. We must conclude that when Saul of Tarsus made his “about face” he was absolutely sincere.

B. Was He deceived?

Could this have been the case? Many are sincere but deceived. The question at this point is, who deceived him? Friends or enemies? His friends would not. Saul was their champion. Christians could not, for he would have been intolerant of them.

C. Was He Mad?

1. This was the indictment of Festus in Acts 26:24. Others also have attempted to explain this phenomenon in psychological terms.
2. Paul is accused of being so intense in his efforts, yet conscience stricken for his terrible deeds to Christians that he became depressed, that while on the road to Damascus he experienced too much heat; and that such combination of forces working on his fevered imagination caused him to merely think that he saw Jesus!
3. This is contrary to the whole historical record of the account of the life of Saul and his encounter with Christ. Paul was not depressed while engaged in the persecution of the saints. As a matter of fact he was quite sincere, he states, doing what he “thought he ought” to be doing in his service to God (Acts 26:9).

CONCLUSION:

The only conclusion that we have is that this man who was unreachable was reached by Jesus. But Jesus was crucified upon the cross. How was it possible for Him to appear to Saul on the road to Damascus unless indeed He was resurrected from the grave?

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON ELEVEN

1. Give Paul's four-fold claim in Galatians 1:11-12 concerning the source of his gospel.

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____
4) _____

2. Present the three-pronged argument that Paul gives to prove that Jesus appeared to him.

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____

3. Give five (5) things which indicate Paul's advancement in the Jew's religion.

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____
4) _____
5) _____

4. Give three possible ulterior motives that could possibly have caused Paul to change from being a persecutor to being a preacher of the gospel.

1) _____
2) _____
3) _____

5. Prove that the claim that he was deceived must be false.

6. Prove with Scripture and reasoning that Paul's change of life was not a result of "madness."

LESSON TWELVE

The Testimony of “Signs” – Jesus’ Miracles

INTRODUCTION

The claim of the New Testament for Christ and the gospel is that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world and that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. A part of the evidence to sustain those claims is the miraculous element which both Jesus and the apostles engaged; they worked miracles to prove those claims. Now we know that those miracles happened, just as surely as anything we know that anything in the past could happen, it’s a matter of historical testimony. We have already proven that the New Testament has passed all the criteria for being historically reliable so that all the miracles recorded in the New Testament are just as real as Christ and the apostles themselves.

Some reject the Gospel miracles attributed to Jesus as “incredible additions” (H.G. Wells, *Outline of History, Vol. I*, p. 420) to the actual facts of the life of Christ. F.F. Bruce has observed that “it is precisely these miracle stories which are the chief difficulty in the way of accepting the New Testament Documents as reliable” (F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents – Are They Reliable?* p. 62). It is the purpose of this lesson to show that the miracles of Christ are:

1. Credible on the grounds of historical evidence.
 2. Generally in character with the rest of the life of Christ.
 3. The miracles attributed to Jesus are no more outstanding in the general picture of the life of Christ than any other area of reference.
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LESSON AIM: To build faith in the student as the evidence from the miracles of Jesus is presented as historically reliable.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Learn the definition of the word miracle
 2. Discover the purpose of miracles by studying the illustrations in Matthew, Mark and Luke.
 3. Learn the seven signs presented in John as proof of the deity of Jesus and the significance of each of the seven.
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THE PURPOSE OF JESUS' MIRACLES

A. The Definition of the Word “Miracle”

1. “An extraordinary event that took place in the natural world but cannot be explained naturally or scientifically” – it can only be explained as a supernatural act of God himself.
2. There have been no miracles like that since the close of the apostolic age – because they have served their purpose.

B. The Purpose for Miracles from the New Testament

1. Matthew chapter nine and Mark chapter two and Luke chapter five reveals the purpose of miracles.
2. All three gospels record the same miracle of healing that Jesus performed.
 - a. To show who Jesus was. Consider the story of the paralytic.
 - b. A man sick with palsy brought to Jesus for healing.
 - c. Jesus wanted them to know that he can forgive this man’s sin.
3. A miracle was performed in their presence and that confirmed that Jesus could forgive sin.
 - a. What they saw confirmed what they couldn’t see.
 - b. Jesus was the Son of God and that He can forgive sins.
4. Mark 16:15-20: Miracles confirmed the preaching of the apostles.
 - a. The disciples “... went everywhere preaching the word, the Lord working with them and confirming the word by the signs which followed.”
5. Hebrews 2:3-4: Speaks of the words that were spoken by Christ, “...confirmed unto us by them that heard it, God also working bearing witness with them both by signs and wonders and manifold powers and gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

C. The Classical Illustration by John

1. John 20:30-31: “...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the son of God and believing may have life in his name.”
 - a. To prove Jesus is who he claimed to be, the Christ of prophecy the Son of God.
 - b. With power to save us from sin.
2. The meaning of the Greek word: **Simeon**.
 - a. Sometimes translated, “miracle.”
 - b. Better translated, “sign.”
 - c. Significant proof of the claims made by Jesus.
 - d. These are signs that Jesus is the Son of God.

THE SEVEN SIGNS PRESENTED BY JOHN

A. Miracles and Signs of Jesus in the Gospel of John

1. The water turned into wine (John 2:1-12).
 - a. **Moral Significance** – Christ is a master and has mastery over **quality**.
2. The healing of the nobleman’s son (John 4:46).

- a. **Moral Significance** – Jesus is master over distance – **space**.
- 3. The healing of the lame man (John 5:1-9).
 - a. **Moral Significance** – Jesus is master over **time**.
- 4. The feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:5-13).
 - a. **Moral Significance** – Jesus is master over **quantity**.
- 5. Jesus walked on water (John 6:16-21).
 - a. **Moral Significance** – Jesus is master of **gravity**.
- 6. Jesus healed the blind man (John 9:1-7).
 - a. **Moral Significance** – Jesus is master of **misfortune**.
- 7. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-44).
 - a. **Moral Significance** – Jesus is master of **death**.

NOTE: These miracles happened in historical space and time and they are offered by John as a proof that Jesus is the Christ of Old Testament prophecy, the Son of God with power to save us from sin. Is that not enough to convince people he's the Son of God?

B. The Claim of Jesus

- 1. He claimed to be God – (John 10:30-38). "*I and my Father are one.*"
- 2. Jesus pointed to the signs and the purpose of those signs as confirmation that he is everything he claimed to be.

CONCLUSION:

Nobody in the first century denied that Jesus did the signs recorded in the Gospels. People who deny the signs today might as well deny any other thing that they can talk about from antiquity. We know those signs took place as surely as we know anything happened in antiquity. It's a matter of historical testimony. It's a matter of history. Jesus worked these miracles and showed his mastery over natural law. He is not hindered. He can handle all of our needs. The function of reason is to sit in judgment on the evidence and to draw a conclusion in relation to the claim. The claim of the New Testament is that Jesus is the Son of God and the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes. What does the evidence say to you?

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON TWELVE:

1. Define the term “Miracle” as given in this study guide.

2. Give two (2) purposes for miracles given in this lesson.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

3. What reason/s did John give for the miracles of Jesus in John 20:30-31?

4. List the seven (7) signs presented by John to prove the deity of Jesus. List also their moral significance.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____

LESSON THIRTEEN

The Canonicity Factor

INTRODUCTION

uestions often asked are, Who decided which books would constitute the New Testament? Are there not other books that bear the title of gospel, e.g., the gospel of Thomas, the gospel of Peter? Why are they not a part of the New Testament? And how do we know the 27 books traditionally received are the only ones that should constitute the New Testament? Such questions are quite legitimate and require some investigation into the subject of the canon of the New Testament, its formation, and the process by which the early church received the 27 New Testament books as invested with divine authority.

LESSON AIM: To familiarize the student with the process of the canonization of the New Testament.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Learn how the term “canon” developed and came into use.
 2. See that there is but one rule for any book to be in the canon.
 3. Learn the process by which the early church received the New Testament books as inspired.
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THE SUBJECT OF CANONICITY

A. Development of the Term “Canon”

1. From *kanon*, a semitic term meaning “reed.” The word came to mean a measuring rod or ruler.
2. The term eventually took on the meaning of a norm or standard and came to be used in the sense of a “list” or “table.”
3. Finally at the end of the 4th century the word was used of the canonization of the 27 books of the New Testament as inspired by the Holy Spirit.
4. “Canon” implies two important concepts regarding our present New Testament:
 - a. It implies the New Testament books met such standards as the early church assumed was required of a Christian writing to have been invested with divine authority.
 - b. It implies and carries the idea of completed revelation.
5. The canonization of our 27 New Testament books assumes that divine revelation was at last completed and finalized.

B. The Rule for Canonization: Authority Precedes Canonicity.

1. The canonization of a New Testament book.
 - a. Did not endow that book with any authority.
 - b. Canonization was the recognition by the Church that divine authority had already been invested in the book.
2. In the case of the New Testament writings, their authority preceded their canonization.

BEGINNINGS OF THE FORMATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

A. Formative Beginnings of New Testament Canonization in the First Century Church

It was probably born in upon the thinking of the early church that with the passing of the apostles the need of the church for authentic Christian instruction would survive only in the writings of the apostles and prophets.

1. The early church gathered and preserved the apostles' writings.
 - a. Paul's letters gathered into a corpus (2 Peter 3:15-16).
 - b. The Ephesian church was familiar with Luke's writings (1 Timothy 5:17-18).
 - c. Paul reasons for the scriptural right of the church to support elders by quoting the words of Christ from Luke's gospel that "the laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7), calling the account "scripture."
2. Writings of the apostolic fathers, 90-160 AD.
 - a. Early Christian men who sat at the feet of the apostles, or at the feet of those who did, quote from almost every New Testament book reproducing nearly the entire New Testament.
 - b. Here we have historical proof that by this time the New Testament:
 - 1) had already been written,
 - 2) was already being recopied and gathered together by the churches,
 - 3) was already being circulated throughout the church,
 - 4) was accepted by the church as the word of God.

B. 2nd & 3rd Century Church Lists of New Testament Books Received by the Church as the Word of God

1. The first century church was duly warned of false teachers who would distort the truth of the gospel (e.g., 2 Peter 3:1-2; 1 John 4:1-6).
2. Such false teaching was mentioned by Paul as a present threat (2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 13-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:7).
3. It appears that some false teachers were writing epistles in the name of an apostle and unsettling the apostolic mind-set of some in the church (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3).
4. There was a need for reliable lists of those writings which could be accepted by the church as Spirit-inspired.

THE PROCESS BY WHICH THE EARLY CHURCH RECEIVED THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS AS INSPIRED

A. The Reason for the 27 Books of the New Testament

1. The reason we have these particular books is that the church kept them.
2. Had the church not kept them as the very word of God and recopied them we simply would not have them.
3. But why did the church keep the ones they kept?
 - a. Why did the church keep only the four gospel accounts we have when Luke tells us there were many who took in hand to write such accounts? (Luke 1:1).
 - b. On what ground did the church determine our 27 New Testament books to be the inspired word of God as distinct from other writings.

B. Supernatural Confirmation of Christ to the Apostles

1. Confirmation of Jesus by John the Baptist (John 1:29, 35-36).
John, revered as a prophet, authenticated Jesus as “the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:37-45).
2. Confirmation of Jesus by miraculous signs.
 - a. Jesus claimed that his works, the miraculous signs he performed, were a greater testimony to his deity than even that of John (John 5:36. Cf 10:25; 10:30-38).
 - b. Miraculous demonstration of Jesus’ divine authority.
 - 1) Nicodemus recognized the divine authority of Christ’s words by the signs he performed in Jerusalem (John 2:23-3:2).
 - 2) Such signs manifested his deity to his disciples (John 20:30- 31) and therefore his authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12).
3. Peter’s appeal to Christ’s miracles on Pentecost (Acts 2:22).
Thus miracles invested Christ’s spoken words with divine authority.

C. Supernatural Confirmation of Apostles to the Church

The miraculous confirmation of Christ to the apostles is now extended to the church.

1. At Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff).
God knew how to get the attention of the multitudes in Jerusalem on Pentecost to listen to the apostles preach Christ.
2. After Pentecost.
Luke records that “many wonders and signs were done through the apostles” (Acts 2:43). Such supernatural demonstrations confirmed their official representation of Christ as his apostles and divinely inspired spokesmen.
 - a. The logical reason for the churches having preserved the apostles’ writings is that their signs and wonders confirmed their written word even as their spoken word (2 Thessalonians 2:15).
 - b. It would be next to impossible to rationally explain why the churches kept the apostles’ letters as the word of God if such references to the

“signs and wonders and mighty works,” which were offered as proof of apostolicity, were not in fact patiently worked in the church’s presence for confirmation (2 Corinthians 12:12; 1 Corinthians 9:1-3).

D. Apostolic Confirmation of New Testament Writing Prophets

1. Paul endorsed the New Testament ministry of prophets as spokesmen for the Lord (Ephesians 3:3-5), e.g., Mark, Luke, James and Jude. Some like Judas and Silas are named (Acts 15:32).
2. Luke’s correspondence is endorsed as “scripture” (1 Timothy 5:17-18 quoting Luke 10:7).
3. While the author of Hebrews is not known to us, those to whom the letter was written obviously knew the author and it was kept from the beginning as the word of God.

CONCLUSION:

Only those writings that were endorsed by the early church as apostolic could become candidates for canonization. The supernatural confirmation of apostles and prophets by which the Church accepted their writings as “scripture” is back of the process leading to canonization. Thus no man, nor group of men, determined which books would constitute the New Testament. The determining factor for the canonization of the New Testament books was the supernatural force that was evident in their production, and which was but acknowledged by the Church. Thus the rule for canonization is sustained: authority precedes canonicity.

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON THIRTEEN

1. The term “canon” implies two important concepts regarding our present New Testament. What are these?

1) _____
2) _____

2. Give the definition of the term or the rule of “canonization” as it applies to the New Testament books.

3. What was the process of preserving the New Testament books?

4. What is the significance of the writings of the Apostolic fathers in relation to the canonization of the New Testament?

5. Why do we have the 27 books of the New Testament only?

LESSON FOURTEEN

The Mythology of Liberalism

INTRODUCTION

For some years there has been a certain liberalism which seeks to discredit the historical reliability of our New Testament. This liberalism affirms that the portrait of Jesus that we find in our gospels of a virgin born, miracle working, bodily resurrected Son of God, is in fact a myth, a myth that was invented by the church. And what the liberal says he wants to do is to demythologize the Bible, that is, he wants to get rid of all the supernaturalism and get back to the real portrait of Jesus.

In 1980 when I was in Sydney, Australia, I ran into this when John A. T. Robinson, who had just written his book, *Re-dating the New Testament*, had come to McQuarry University to lecture on the book. When his lecture was finished, it was thrown open for questions, and I had the opportunity of asking one of the questions of the evening. My question was this: “On the ground of the historical fact that the church of Christ was established in the city of Jerusalem only 53 days after the death of Christ on the belief that Jesus was the resurrected Son of God, does this not refute liberals’ claim that it took another thirty years for the church to invent the supernatural Jesus?” Now, if you are perceptive, you see the answer is in the question. Dr. Robinson’s answer to this was, “I will not accept such a simplistic answer to such a complicated subject.”

You are going to have to be the judge as to whether or not I had a simplistic answer or whether it was simply a refutation of liberalism. There are two very good reasons for investigating the nature of criticism. First, in order to see that the critical view has no real genuine value as a means of determining biblical truth, and second, to enable the Christian to distinguish between true Bible exposition and plain unbelief in the guise of religious scholarship.

LESSON AIM: To investigate the liberal view of Jesus Christ and the Bible and offer proof that their view is contrary to all reason and evidence.

LESSON PREVIEW: You will . . .

1. Learn why and how liberalism believes the New Testament should be demythologized.
 2. Discover five reasons why the church could not have invented a supernatural Christ.
-

PREVIEW

Christianity is an historical religion. It is not to be viewed as merely ethical or moral, consisting simply of rules and regulations. Jesus came to provide redemption from sin and death by the means of His life, death, and resurrection. That redemption is only as real as those events. It is necessary, then, to view the New Testament as a record of the genuine historicity of those events if Christianity is to become a dynamic sufficient to change lives and to create a genuine hope for a future life.

THE CLAIMS OF LIBERALISM

A. The Jesus of History Is Not Really the Jesus That We Read about in the Gospel Records

1. The church is the culprit in this matter – they “supernaturalized” Jesus Christ.
2. The gospel was being invented by the church during the years from 33 to 62 A.D.
3. Liberals deny that Jesus made claims of deity. But notice Jesus’ claims:
 - a. John 6:38 – *I am come down from heaven.*
 - b. John 10:36 – *I am the son of God.*
 - c. John 11:25 – *I am the resurrection and the life.*
 - d. John 12:48 – His own words would be the standard of judgment.
 - e. John 14:6 – *I am the way and the truth and the life.*

B. Liberalism Recommends a Demythologizing of the Gospels

What they say is that we want to get rid of all the supernaturalism that is in the New Testament and get back to the real picture of Jesus.

1. The lack of evidence for the church-myth theory.
 - a. There is not one shred of evidence in existence, historical, material, or otherwise, that the church invented the supernatural Christ.
 - b. The supernatural Christ was in the mind of the church from the beginning of its history.
 - c. The church did not **GROW** into a concept of Jesus as supernatural.
2. The origination of the church-myth theory.
 - a. It came from the liberals.
 - 1) They believe that we are the chance product of an evolutionary process.
 - 2) They don’t believe God created the world.
 - 3) They don’t believe that Christ being God intruded into our history.
 - 4) They don’t believe in supernaturalism.
 - b. They hold to the doctrine of uniformity.
 - 1) The doctrine of uniformity affirms or asserts that the very causes that have always caused events to happen in the past are the same causes that cause all events to happen today.
 - 2) Since you don’t see miracles today, therefore miracles never took place.

CONCLUSION:

It is amazing that any Bible student would seriously consider the modern view based as it is on mere conjecture without evidence, and in total disregard for the historical evidence available to us.

THE CHURCH WAS BUILT ON A SUPERNATURAL CHRIST**A. The Church Began on the Belief That Jesus Christ Was Resurrected from the Dead**

1. Peter's proposition concerning the resurrection (Acts 2:22).
"Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay: whom God raised up . . ."
2. Peter's proof of the resurrection.
 - a. He appeals to the miracles that Jesus did which should have confirmed to them that God endorsed Him.
 - b. Their eyewitness testimony. "*And we are witness of these things.*"

CONCLUSION:

The church had its beginning on the belief of a supernatural Christ. The church would never have begun without belief from the beginning that Jesus was the Son of God. The church is people who believe Christ was crucified, buried, and resurrected from the dead. There would have been no church had Christ not been raised, had these people who constituted the church not believed that Jesus was the resurrected Son of God who would raise them from the dead.

B. The Church Was Persecuted for Her Beliefs

1. Reasons the church was persecuted (Acts 4:1).
 - a. The church was persecuted because they taught in the name of Jesus, the resurrection from the dead.
 - b. They were persecuted for already believing in a supernatural Christ. It didn't take thirty years to invent the supernatural Jesus.
2. Persecution began early in the life of the church (Acts 4:13-22).

C. The Church Endured the Persecution

1. They endured the persecution precisely because they believed that Jesus was the Son of God.
2. They endured persecution rather than give up their New Testament documents.

D. The Resurrection of Christ Was Taught Before the Church Began

1. Acts 2 when the church began, the apostle Peter stated in verse 32, "*This*

Jesus did God raise up whereof we are all witnesses."

2. John says that he was a participant in what took place (John 19:35). He said, "*He that hath seen hath born witness. And his witness is true, and he knoweth that he sayeth true that you may believe.*"
3. John's propositional statement (John 20:31-32). "*Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples that are not written in this book. But these are written that ye may believe.*" John says he was recording what he saw.
 - a. John said he saw Christ change water into wine (John 2).
 - b. John says he saw Jesus heal a man that was lame in his legs thirty-eight years (John 5).
 - c. John says he saw Jesus walk on water (John 6).
 - d. John says he saw Lazarus resurrected from the dead (John 11).

CONCLUSION:

These are eyewitness accounts. John, Matthew, the apostolic writers, these men who wrote the gospel either were eyewitness or like Mark and Luke were careful researchers of what they said they got from eyewitnesses. These are eyewitness accounts of what they said they participated in and saw with their own eyes. So rather than the church-myth theory that says the church invented it and the gospel writers wrote down what the church invented, the apostles say that what we are writing in the gospels is what we saw, what we participated in. We were eyewitnesses.

E. Paul's Epistles Reveal a Resurrected Christ

1. Paul began to write his epistles about 42 or 43 A.D. Paul makes it very clear that the churches to whom he is writing these epistles had already believed that Jesus was the Son of God and they were baptized into Christ by their faith that He was the miracle working, virgin born, bodily resurrected Son of God.
2. You can reproduce in Paul's epistles the supernatural Christ.

F. Consider on What Grounds the Churches Were Established

1. The book of Galatians.
 - a. Written very early after the cross.
 - b. May be the very first letter that was ever written in the New Testament.
 - c. It says in Galatians 1:1 that God raised Jesus from the dead. Some 8 to 12 years after the cross we find that the Galatian churches have already been established on the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead.
2. The book of Ephesians.
 - a. In Ephesians 1:20 Paul says that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.
 - b. The Ephesian church was established on the belief that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.
 - c. Paul was preaching the resurrection many years before the thirty-year period of time had passed.
3. The book of Philippians.

- a. Paul says in Philippians 2:5-9 that Jesus existed in the nature of God – it attributes to him deity and this church believed.
 - b. Paul is not educating these Philippians to Jesus' divine nature he is reminding them of what they believed when they came out of paganism into Christ
4. The book of Colossians.
 - a. In Colossians 1:13 Paul simply refers to Jesus as the Son of God and then in verses 15-17 Paul says that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation.
 - b. Paul says that the church at Colossae has been established upon the belief that Jesus existed before anything was created that he is the creator.

I think that from all of this we can draw a conclusion that liberalism's church-myth theory lacks any substance at all. What we need to understand is that the New Testament is totally historically reliable to report the events that have taken place in the past. You can believe your Bible. You can believe it because it is historically the testimony of eyewitnesses, and it reports to us that Jesus Christ lived, worked miracles, was resurrected from the dead, and ascended into heaven.

SELF EXAM FOR LESSON FOURTEEN

1. What does liberalism claim concerning the factuality of the Christ of history?

2. What do they mean when liberals say they want to demythologize the New Testament?

3. Give three or four arguments which prove that the church did not invent a supernatural Christ.

4. Give two proofs from Paul's epistles that a supernatural Jesus was not invented by the church.

Study Guide

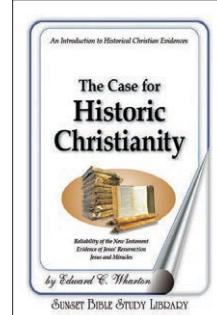


ED WHARTON has an ongoing commitment to training gospel preachers, having spent more than 50 years on the faculty of Sunset International Bible Institute in Lubbock, Texas. His work as author, gospel preacher, and teacher has carried him all over the world in his efforts to take the gospel to the lost. His passion for the Lord and His Word demonstrates his desire for the Lord's church to grow stronger in Bible knowledge and closer to God. His wife, Martha, is a close co-worker with Ed in all his endeavors.

In this study Ed Wharton establishes the historicity of Jesus through extra-biblical writings as well as the pages of Scripture. The study is a clear presentation of the actual historical evidence for the divine nature of Jesus Christ and modern verification of the Christian religion. Thousands have been strengthened in their faith through his teaching of this material.

Ed Wharton has written other books, including *Christ and the Church*, *The Case for Historic Christianity*, *The Church of Christ*, *Freed for Freedom*, *God Among the Nations*, and *Redemption Is*. Working with SIBI External Studies, Ed has produced video courses on *The Distinctive Nature of the Church*, *Historical Christian Evidences*, *Galatians*, *Scheme of Redemption*, *Homiletics I*, and *Baptism*.

The Case for Historic Christianity is a companion book for this study. It is available from Sunset Institute Press at www.extensionschool.com.



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