

APOLOGETICS

IN ONE LESSON

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almost

LUKE MURPHEY

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Introduction

“It is a very silly idea that in reading a book you must never ‘skip’. All sensible people skip freely when they come to a chapter which they find is going to be no use to them.”

— C.S. LEWIS, *Mere Christianity*, Chapter 3

This curriculum will focus on a defense of the New Testament. The main focus will be the resurrection since Paul says that the entire religion of Christianity rests upon it. Additionally, my hope is that a focus on the New Testament will cause you to understand and appreciate the Gospel is a deeper way so that you will be excited to share it with others.

Part of this study will involve answering objections from non-believers. The chapters that are in quotes are those in which we will attempt to answer an objection (e.g. “The Bible is full of contradictions”). I have not filtered these objections in order to find the weakest ones but rather sought to give non-believers a chance to offer some of the arguments that they find most convincing. This is intentional. I strongly believe that it is far better to encounter these objections when you can work through them with your fellow Christians than to encounter them first with an unbeliever.

People can sometimes find working through objections overwhelming. I have frequently encountered objections that gave me a start (until I worked through them). I am convinced that all of the objections presented in this book have reasonable answers, but some of the objections can sound persuasive at first.

My advice is to skip any section that you find unhelpful or overwhelming. The same applies to questions; if you cannot come up with an answer, just move on. These will be discussed in class and you will come to see reasonable answers do exist; the objections can sound persuasive until thoroughly examined. As Proverbs 18:17 says, “The first to state his case seems right, until his opponent begins to cross-examine him.”

One more thing:

The study of apologetics can cause Christian's to focus excessively upon the *arguments* in support of God's word as opposed to on God's *word* itself. As C.S. Lewis once said:

I have found that nothing is more dangerous to one's own faith than the work of an apologist. No doctrine of that faith seems to me so spectral, so unreal as the one that I have just successfully defended in a public debate. For a moment, you see, it has seemed to rest on oneself: as a result when you go away from the debate, it seems no stronger than that weak pillar. That is why we apologists take our lives in our hands and can be saved only by falling back continually from the web of our own arguments, as from our intellectual counters, into the reality—from Christian apologetics into Christ Himself. That also is why we need one another's continual help—*oremus pro invicem*. (Let us pray for each other.)

— C.S. LEWIS, *Christian Apologetics*

Part I

A Game Plan

1. The Art of Asking Questions

“Can it be that questioning is a kind of teaching, Ischomachus? The fact is, I have just discovered the plan of your series of questions! You lead me by paths of knowledge familiar to me, point out things like what I know, and bring me to think that I really know things that I thought I had no knowledge of.”

— SOCRATES, *Economics*, 19.15 ¹

Read the following passages in which Jesus used questions at key points as part of his dialog. For each of these passages, explain why you think Jesus used questions. Make sure to read the context in order to best understand why he asked the question he did.

Luke 24:17

John 4:7

Luke 10:26, 36

¹ <https://textcritical.net/work/works-on-socrates-english/Ec./19/15>

Mark 11:29

For further study:

*Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your
Christian Convictions*

GREG KOUKL

This book offers several techniques to make it easier to engage others in a conversation and work through objections. I strongly recommend reading this.

2. Gardening and Harvesting

“Other types of fruits have other ways of signaling when they are ripe, but to taste their best, they must also be harvested at just the right moment. Many people mistakenly believe that any fruit can be picked underripe, then ripened on a kitchen counter.”

— LEE REICH, *Recognizing When Fruit Is Ripe for the Picking*²

The New Testament indicates that there are stages in the process of becoming a disciple of Christ. This is important because non-Christians often need help before they are even ready to accept the Gospel message.

What are some topics that it generally does not make sense to focus on when talking to a non-Christian about the Gospel? Consider 1 Corinthians 5:12.

Alternatively, what are some topics that it likely does make sense to focus on when talking to a non-Christian about the Gospel? Consider the sermon summaries in Acts to see what they focused on.

² <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/09/27/style/cuttings-recognizing-when-fruit-is-ripe-for-the-picking.html>

1 Corinthians 3:6 says that Paul planted, and Apollos watered. What does this mean? In what ways did Paul's work and Apollos' differ?

Jesus offers a distinction between the sower and the reaper in John 4:35-39. Explain what this means in the larger context of John chapter 4.

Describe the Gospel to someone who doesn't know what it is. Keep it short enough that you could give the description in an elevator ride.

3. Ambassadors for Christ

“I’m an ambassador 24 hours a day.”

— JAMES COSTOS, United States Ambassador to Spain

Paul says that disciples are ambassadors for Christ. He makes it clear that being an ambassador means far more than just having good answers, it means modeling an artful and attractive approach.

2 Corinthians 5:20 refers to the Apostles as “ambassadors for Christ”. Explain the significance of him referring to the Apostles in this way.

Consider examples of Paul’s method of communication in Acts and his epistles that are good examples of being an ambassador.

1 Peter 3:15 notes the responsibility of Christians to be prepared to share their reasons for their faith. Read the rest of 1 Peter 3 and make some notes about what you notice that relates to verse 15.

Consider examples from Jesus' life that illustrate him being an ambassador.

What are some other examples of people in the New Testament that built bridges to others?

What are some things that Christians can do that get in the way of others becoming disciples of Jesus?

For further study:

<i>Dear Friend: Letters to Christian Ambassadors</i> GREG KOUKL	This small book includes a series of short essays related to how Christians can learn to be the “only Bible some people ever read.”
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4. A-Paul-agetics

“But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess. Yet do it with courtesy and respect”

— PETER, *1 Peter* 3:15-16a

Paul exemplifies his ambassadorial approach in Acts 17 when he speaks to the people of Athens. Read Acts 17 and answer the following questions regarding his approach.

In what ways did Paul act in a gracious way towards those in Athens?

Describe the knowledge that Paul offers and the argument he makes in verses 24-27. Explain why this is significant.

List out ways in which Paul adjusted his approach according to the people in Athens. What can we learn from this?

What is the argument that Paul uses against idolatry? Why would this argument be persuasive?

Courage is a necessary aspect of a good disciple. List out ways in which Paul showed courage and the willingness to tell the truth even when it was difficult.

Describe the responses to Paul's sermon (there is more than one). Why do you think Luke thought it was worthwhile to record negative reactions to the Gospel (in addition to the positive ones)? What can we learn from this?

Was there anything else that stood out to you?

Part II

The Origin of the New Testament

5. Is the New Testament from Eyewitnesses?

“This is the sort of truth that is hard to explain because it is a fact; but it is a fact to which we can call witnesses.”

— G. K. CHESTERTON, *The Everlasting Man*, Chapter 5

Non-believers sometimes claim that the New Testament accounts were formed as legends and were far removed from the original eyewitnesses. However, recent scholarship has shown that the New Testament was likely closely linked to the original eyewitness sources. Some skeptics have even admitted that the accounts may come within just a few years of Jesus' death.

Read the requirements for the 12 Apostles as outlined in Acts 1:21–26. Explain why you think each of them was considered important or any other thoughts you have.

Read Luke 1:1-4 and write the claims that Luke makes in regard to the sources for his account of the Gospel.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 and write the claims that Paul makes in regard to the sources for the resurrection account.

Read Acts 2:14-36, Acts 3:11-26, Acts 10:34-43 and document anything you notice in terms of the Twelve defending the resurrection using eyewitness support.

For further study:

<i>Jesus and the Eyewitnesses</i> RICHARD BAUCKHAM	This book shows that the Gospel accounts are best understood as eyewitness testimony from people who personally knew Jesus. This book covers many areas and is a little technical.
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6. Eyewitness Memory

“Human memory is a remarkable facility, and the traditions found in the Synoptic Gospels may be considered to be a product of its effectiveness.”

— ROBERT MCIVER, *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels*, p. 187

The prior lesson established that the Gospel accounts came from eyewitnesses. This lesson will take up the question of whether those eyewitnesses could be expected to have remembered the events accurately.

Scholars indicate that events are more likely to be memorable when one or more of the following are true:

1. Is a unique or unusual event
2. Is an important or consequential event
3. Is an event in which the person is emotionally involved
4. It includes vivid imagery
5. Are frequently repeated or rehearsed

We can apply these attributes to the Gospel accounts and show they would likely be remembered.

Write down some memories that you have a clear recollection of despite being some time ago. To find examples, think back to disasters (war, natural calamities), major life events (marriage proposal, birth of your child), very positive events (purchase your first house, coming back from war) or stories that you have retold.

Pick a memory or two from the list above and write down the details (including minute details). The best examples are those that took place a while ago but in which you still remember many details.

Look at the list of the five reasons events are more likely to be remembered (on page 22) and identify the ones that you think made you remember the events you listed above. More than one of the attributes will likely apply.

Go through at least one Gospel account of Jesus’ death and resurrection and make a list of the events that you should think are both important and highly memorable (according to the list on page 22). Check the boxes to indicate which of the attributes apply to each memory.

Event	Unusual	Important	Emotional	Vivid

For further study:

<i>Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels</i> ROBERT MCIVER	McIver draws on research regarding memory and applies the concepts to the Synoptic Gospels in order to show that the eyewitnesses would have likely remembered the accounts. This book is somewhat technical.
<i>Christobiography</i> CRAIG KEENER	Keener builds a thorough argument that the Gospel accounts are reliable, ancient biographies. This book is fairly long but covers many aspects that would require you to read several books to cover. This book is a little technical at parts.

7. The Primacy of the Primary Sources

“Eyewitness sources are primary sources. However, if no eyewitness sources have survived, a second-hand source (not to be confused with a secondary source) writing close to the event can be a primary source. So, all eyewitness sources are primary sources, but not all primary sources are eyewitnesses.”

— MICHAEL LICONA,
*What are the Primary Sources for Jesus' Resurrection?*³

The New Testament documents are the primary sources for information on Jesus and his teaching. In this lesson, we are going to look at why the early church recognized these works as authoritative.

Write down some observations regarding the following verses regarding Jesus' authority: Hebrews 1:1-2, John 12:49, Matthew 28:18, John 20:21, Acts 10:39-43

Write down some observations regarding the following verses regarding the Apostles' authority: 2 Peter 3:2, Hebrews 2:2-3, 2 Thess. 3:6, 1 Thess. 2:13-15, Eph. 2:20, Jude 1:3, 1 Cor. 3:10-11

³ <https://hbu.edu/news-and-events/2016/06/03/primary-sources-jesus-resurrection/>

Write down some observations regarding the authority of the Apostles' writing: Mark 1:1, John 20:31, 2 Thess. 2:15, 1 Cor. 14:37-38, 2 Peter 3:16, Gal. 1:8-9.

8. Jesus the Rabbi (Ancient Teaching Methods)

“Since it says: 'Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them' (Lev. 1:2), I know only that he was to tell them once. How do we know that he was to repeat it to them a second, a third and a fourth time until they learned it? Scripture says: 'And teach thou it the children of Israel' (Deut. 31:19).

This might mean that they need only learn it but not repeat it. But scripture says: 'Put it in their mouths' (ibid).

Still this might mean that they need only repeat it but need not understand it. There it says 'And these are the ordinances which thou shalt set before them.' Arrange them in proper order before them like a set table, hast as it is said: 'Unto thee it was shown that thou mightest know'"

— BIRGER GERHARDSSON (quoting Rabbi Aqiba),
Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity, p. 135

Jesus and the apostles used sophisticated teaching methods to enable people to readily recall what they had been taught. These Rabbinical methods were far more intensive than often assumed by non-Christians and they made accurate recollection of Jesus' teachings more likely. This lesson will expose the evidence of these techniques in the New Testament.

Paul commended Christians for keeping traditions in 1 Corinthians 11:2, 23 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6. However, Jesus criticized traditions in Mark 7:4-7, 13. How could both be true?

Ancient teachers often used chiastic structures to make their messages easier to remember. A chiastic structure occurs when someone uses repetition with a structure of something like ABBA.

Consider the following simple example from John F Kennedy:

"ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country"⁴

This can be broken down into a structure like this:

"ask not what your country	YOUR COUNTRY	A
can do	CAN DO	B
for you	YOU	C
ask what you	YOU	C'
can do	CAN DO	B'
for your country"	YOUR COUNTRY	A'

These can follow other similar structures like ABA, ABCBA, etc.

Here is a simple example used by Jesus in Matthew 23:12:

"Whoever exalts	EXALTATION	A
himself	HIMSELF	B
will be humbled	HUMILITY	C
whoever humbles	HUMILITY	C'
himself	HIMSELF	B'
will be exalted"	EXALTATION	A'

The next few pages will have you identify several more examples of this sort of structure within Jesus' teaching.

Here are some considerations that can help you when looking for chiastic structures:

1. Look for repeated themes before trying to identify how the themes form a structure.
2. When trying to find the main themes, look for repeated statements (often word-for-word) or similar ideas that appear more than once.
3. They are easier to find in some translations. If you are having difficulties, consider trying other translations such as the ESV, NASB, NKJV.

⁴ Kennedy, John. Inaugural Address given on January 20, 1961

For the following, mark out the chiastic structure. The first example has already been done for you as an example.

Luke 19:1-10 (already done as an example)

Mark out the chiastic structure in this passage that includes the following themes (not necessarily in this order):

1. Crowd
2. Tree
3. Zacchaeus
4. Jesus' coming
5. Jesus' acceptance

A. Jesus' presence

And he entered and was passing through Jericho. And behold, a man called by name

B. Zacchaeus (implied selfishness)

C. Crowd

Zacchaeus; and he was a chief publican, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who

he was; and could not for the crowd, because he was little of stature. And he ran on before,

D. Tree (going up)

and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when

E. Jesus' acceptance

Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come

D'. Tree (coming down)

down; for to-day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and

C'. Crowd

received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, He is gone in to

B'. Zacchaeus (implied selflessness)

lodge with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold,

Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any

A'. Jesus' presence

man, I restore fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, Today is salvation come to this house,

forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man came to seek and to save

that which was lost.

Matthew 6:24 (you cannot serve two masters)

Mark out the chiastic structure in this passage that includes the following themes (not necessarily in this order):

1. Hate / despising
2. Serving two masters
3. Love / devotion

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

Matthew 5:29-30 (discarding a cause of sin)

Mark out the chiastic structure in this passage that includes the following themes (not necessarily in this order):

1. Better to lose a part of the body
2. Body causing sin
3. Discarding cause of sin
4. Whole body thrown in hell

This one is different than the prior examples and follows this structure:

A
 B
 C
 D
A'
 B'
 C'
 D'

“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into hell.”

Matthew 7:24-27 (house on a rock)

Mark out the chiasmic structure in this passage. I won't tell you the themes nor the type of structure, I think it will be obvious once you look over the passage a couple of times.

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, but it did not collapse because it had been founded on rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed; it was utterly destroyed!”

Matthew 13:15 (quotation of Isaiah 6)

Mark out the chiasmic structure in this passage. I won't give you the themes as I think they are fairly obvious.

“For the heart of this people has become dull;
they are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes,
so that they would not see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.”

Luke 14:15-24 (The Great Banquet)

Mark out the chiastic structure in this passage that includes the following themes (not necessarily in this order):

1. Banquet
2. Room for guests / invitation (first)
3. Room for guests / invitation (second)
4. Room for guests / invitation (third)

When one of those at the meal with Jesus heard this, he said to him, “Blessed is everyone who will feast in the kingdom of God!” But Jesus said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time for the banquet he sent his slave to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, because everything is now ready.’ But one after another they all began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going out to examine them. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I just got married, and I cannot come.’ So the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the master of the household was furious and said to his slave, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ Then the slave said, ‘Sir, what you instructed has been done, and there is still room.’ So the master said to his slave, ‘Go out to the highways and country roads and urge people to come in, so that my house will be filled. For I tell you, not one of those individuals who were invited will taste my banquet!’ ”

It is often claimed that the Gospel was spread like the “telephone game” and thus cannot be trusted. This page will consider how the telephone game works in order to determine if it is a good analogy to the transmission of the New Testament.

Consider the mechanics of the “telephone game” and note anything that may make it likely that the message is corrupted in transmission. Consult the description of the telephone game in the appendix on page 113.

Is the telephone game a good analogy of the transmission of the New Testament? Consider how the Gospel was communicated and taught versus how the telephone game works.

9. How Not to Start a Religion

“Crucifixion was a ‘status degradation ritual’ designed to humiliate in every way, including the symbolic pinioning of hands and legs signifying a loss of power, and loss of ability to control the body in various ways, including befouling one's self with excrement.

The process was so offensive that the Gospels turn out to be our most detailed description of a crucifixion from ancient times - the pagan authors were too revolted by the subject to give equally comprehensive descriptions - in spite of the fact that thousands of crucifixions were done at a time on some occasions."

— JAMES PATRICK HOLDING,
*The Impossible Faith: A Defense of the Resurrection*⁵

Those who don't believe that the Gospel is true need to grapple with the question of how the early church came to exist. It is not enough to claim that the Gospel story is wrong, they also need to derive a reasonable story for how the early church came to exist.

As we will see, the Gospel message was not an easy one to accept and thus cannot be reasonably explained without the evidence of the resurrection of Jesus.

Review the following passages and detail how crucifixion was viewed by Jews and Gentiles in the first century: Gal. 3:13, Heb. 12:2; Deut. 21:23; 1 Cor. 1:18; 1 Cor. 15:12-19

⁵ <http://www.tektonics.org/lp/nowayjose.php>

In what ways did the Gospel differ from the expectations and traditions within the first century?

In what ways did Jesus' view of morality differ than those of the people of his time? Focus on those that would be difficult for people to accept.

Review the following passages: Acts 12:11-17, Luke 24:1-12, Luke 24:13-25. What do these say about how women were viewed in the first century?

Historians consider embarrassing facts more likely to be historical since people are unlikely to admit them unless they are true. What facts of the Gospel would have been embarrassing in the first century (to the early Christians, Jesus, the apostles, etc.)?

List out anything else that you think would have made the Gospel story difficult to accept for people at the time.

10. “Christians believe by ‘faith’, not facts”

“Biblical faith isn’t believing against the evidence. Instead, faith is a kind of knowing that results in action”

— GREG KOUKL, *Faith and Facts?*⁶

People sometimes believe that the New Testament teaches believers to accept the truth of the Gospel uncritically by taking a “leap of faith” (without supporting facts).

Read the following description from a skeptic of what he believes faith is.

“Sometimes I say that faith is an assertion of unreasonable conviction which is assumed without reason and defended against all reason. By that I always clarify that evidence is the only reason anyone should believe anything. I cite apologetics as the practice of systematically making up excuses to dismiss any and all counter arguments in order to rationalize how one could still hold an unsupported and thus unwarranted position, and I cite the ‘statement of faith’ posted by so many fundamentalist organizations to demonstrate how faith is assumed independent of evidence and regardless of it.”

— ARON RA, *What is Faith?*⁷

Answer the questions below regarding Aron’s viewpoint.

Summarize Aron’s viewpoint such that he would say “that’s right”.

⁶ <https://www.bethinking.org/can-we-know-anything/faith-and-facts>

⁷ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/reasonadvocates/2016/08/15/what-is-faith/>

List out the individual claims that Aron is making.

What questions would you ask this person or someone who holds similar beliefs?

Below are several verses that are often used to support the idea that the New Testament teaches belief without reason. Read each verse and its context and describe what it really means.

Hebrews 11:1

John 20:29

2 Corinthians 4:18 & 2 Corinthians 5:7

List other verses that indicate that the New Testament does not define faith as an irrational act.

List out examples of Christians in the New Testament that had been skeptical but came to believe that Jesus resurrected.

11. Evidence for God that Everyone Has (Romans 1:18-23)

“There is the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.
Therefore there must be a God.

You either see this one or you don’t.”

— PETER KREEFT, *20 Arguments for God’s Existence*⁸

A belief that God doesn’t exist is a major stumbling block that prevents people from believing the Gospel since it assumes the existence of God.

Paul makes an argument for God’s existence in Romans 1:18-23 that is based on things everyone can see. We will build an argument in this lesson that follows a similar theme. Please focus on trying to make an argument that is intuitive to most people (doesn’t require arcane technical knowledge but relies on facts most people accept).

Summarize Romans 1:18-23 and write down anything you thought was noteworthy.

Give examples of the “invisible attributes” that Paul says point to God.

⁸ <https://strangenotions.com/god-exists/>

[illegible]

<i>The Atheist Delusion</i> http://bit.ly/Ai1LAtheistDelusion	Ray Comfort talks to several people about the appearance of design in the Universe.
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Part III

The Content of the New Testament

12. Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels

“Both direct and circumstantial evidence are acceptable types of evidence to prove or disprove the elements of a charge, including intent and mental state and acts necessary to a conviction, and neither is necessarily more reliable than the other. Neither is entitled to any greater weight than the other.”

— JUDICIAL COUNCIL OF CALIFORNIA CRIMINAL JURY INSTRUCTIONS,
*CALCRIM No. 223 Direct and Circumstantial Evidence: Defined*⁹

Good eyewitness testimony typically includes irrelevant details that can be corroborated with other witnesses in order to validate the truthfulness of the testimony. These corroborating details are very difficult to fake. The Gospels include many such details. This lesson will expose these undersigned coincidences in order to show that the Gospel accounts appear to contain witness testimony.

For each of the questions below, read the question and the account where the question exists. Then read the other account listed in order to fill in the details that make the first account make more sense.

Why did Jesus wash the disciples' feet (read John 13:1-15)? Read Luke 22:24-27 and explain.

⁹ <https://www.justia.com/criminal/docs/calcrim/200/223/>

What “cup” is Jesus talking about in John 18:10-11? Read Matthew 26:39-42.

Jesus says that his servants will not fight (John 18:36). However, John also records that Jesus’ disciples fought with those that came to arrest him (John 18:10-11). How could this be? Read Luke 22:47-53.

Why would Jesus repeatedly ask Peter “do you love me more than these” in John 21:15-17? Read Matthew 26:31-35.

Why were “many coming and going” in Mark 6:30-31? Read John 6:1-4.

Jesus makes a point in Luke 22:25-27 that the one who serves is greater than the one who “reclines at the table.” Read John 13:3-17 and explain the connection.

Pilate asks Jesus if he is the “king of the Jews” to which Jesus says “yes” in Luke 23:1-3. Why would Pilate want to let him go given that looks like an act of sedition? Read John 18:36.

Mark says that Joseph of Arimathea “took courage” to ask Pilate for the body (Mark 15:42-45). Why was this considered courageous? Read John 18:38-39.

Mark 6:7 says that Jesus sent out his disciples “two by two”. Read Matthew 10:2-4 and see what it says about Jesus pairing the disciples.

Matthew 14:1-2 says that Herod spoke to his servants about Jesus. Read Luke 8:1-3 in order to determine how Luke might have found out about this conversation.

John 19:41-42 mentions that they use a nearby unused tomb to bury Jesus. How did they just so happen to have access to a nearby tomb? Read Matthew 27:57-60.

Why did Jesus ask Philip where to find food in John 6:1-5. Read John 1:43-44 and Luke 9:10 to figure out why.

For further study:

<i>Undesigned Coincidences in the Writings of the Old and New Testament</i> JAMES JOHN BLUNT	Most of the content for this lesson was came from this book. Available for free at https://Ai1L.net?Undesigned
<i>Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts</i> LYDIA MCGREW	This book is an updated version of James Blunt's book above. It is fairly easy read; I highly recommend it.

13. Undesigned Coincidences in Paul's Letters and Acts

“A single story written by one author would not afford us the same opportunities of cross examination, since someone could always retort that the author had tidied up the parts of the story so that they agreed with one another. And two books that relate the same story in much the same words also would not carry much weight, as it could always be objected (and sometimes very reasonably) that one of them had simply been copied from the other. But in numerous places the various books of the New Testament are manifestly not ‘tidied up’ to square with one another. And that fact allows us to use their interlocking narratives as evidence of truth.”

— TIM MCGREW ¹⁰

The book of Acts and many of Paul's letters cover the same time period. Thus, we should be able to corroborate details between them. This lesson will look at undesigned coincidences between Paul's letters and Acts much like we did for the Gospel accounts in the prior lesson.

Why does Paul mention he “returned *again* to Damascus” in Galatians 1:11-18 (he never mentions being in Damascus in the first place in Galatians). Read Acts 9:3-8.

Why might Paul have been originally named “Saul”? Read Philippians 3:4-6 and compare it with 1 Samuel 9:1.

¹⁰ <http://christianapologeticsalliance.com/2013/09/01/undesigned-coincidences/>

Paul is uncharacteristically angry at the Jews in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16. Read Acts 17:1-13 to figure out why.

Paul uses a metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3:3-7 saying that “I planted and Apollos watered”. Read Acts 18 and use it to explain why Paul uses this metaphor.

Why did Barnabas want to take Mark despite Paul’s objections in Acts 15:36-40? See also Colossians 4:10-11.

Read Acts 16:1-3 and 2 Timothy 3:14-15 and explain how this describes Timothy’s family background that would explain why he needed to be circumcised.

How did Timothy already know of Paul's persecutions per 2 Timothy 3:10-11? Read Acts 16:1-2.

Read Acts 27:1-2 and Philemon 23-24 and put them together to explain Aristarchus' history with Paul.

For further study:

<i>Horae Paulinae</i> WILLIAM PALEY	Paley's book contains a thorough analysis of Paul's letters in order to show that they represent the truth. This book was first published in 1790 but is an easy read. Available for free at: https://Ai1L.net?Paulinae
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14. “The Bible is full of contradictions”

“It is impossible that the same thing belong and not belong
to the same thing,
at the same time,
and in the same respect.”

— ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, 1005b19-20

People who don’t believe the Bible often claim that the Bible is full of contradictions. The following list of contradictions comes from infidels.org (a well-known Atheist website). Review each alleged contradiction and try to come up some possible ways to understand the passages in a way that is not contradictory. Feel free to skip the question if you cannot think of any solutions. Each of these will be discussed in class.

Did Jesus answer his accusers or not? Compare Matthew 27:11-14 and John 18:33-34.

What color was Jesus’ robe, scarlet or purple? Compare Matthew 27:28 and Mark 15:17/John 19:2.

Who carried the cross, Jesus or Simon of Cyrene? Compare Matthew 27:32 and John 19:16-17.

How long was Jesus in the tomb? Matthew 12:40 says three days and three nights but Luke 18:33 and Matthew 28:1 seem to say three days and two nights.

What was written on the cross? Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38 and John 19:19 all have different wording.

**Where were the women, far off or close enough to hear Jesus' words
(Matthew 27:55 versus John 19:25-26)?**

**When did they visit the tomb (Matthew 28:1 versus Luke 24:1 versus John
20:1)?**

**What did the tomb visitors do next, tell no one or tell the disciples
(Matthew 28:8-9 versus Mark 16:8)?**

Could Jesus be touched or not (Matthew 28:9 versus John 20:17 versus John 20:27)?

Did they believe the report of Christ's resurrection or not (Matthew 28:7,11,16 versus Luke 24:11)?

Come up with some general guidance about how we should think about alleged contradictions.

15. “You cannot trust the Gospel authors since they were Christians”

“For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

— PAUL, *1 Corinthians*, 15:9

Some question the reliability of the New Testament since they expect that the only valid sources are “unbiased observers.” This lesson will consider non-Christian sources for information about Jesus and the early church.

Consider the claim that “you cannot trust the Gospel authors since they were Christians and thus biased to believe the Gospel.” Write down some questions you would have for people who make this claim.

Consider the following letter and highlight the parts that can tell you about early Christians or anything you found noteworthy.

“For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread because of these proceedings, as usually happens, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and also cursed Christ — none of which those who are really Christians can, it is said, be forced to do — these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ. They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to do some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food — but ordinary and innocent food.

Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition. I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it.

It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found.”

— PLINY THE YOUNGER, *Letter to Trajan*, (circa 111 AD)

Consider the following excerpt from Flavius Josephus and highlight the parts that can tell you about early Christians or anything you found noteworthy.

“And now Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea, as procurator. But the king deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus. Now the report goes that this eldest Ananus proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and who had himself enjoyed that dignity a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests.

But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified.”

— JOSEPHUS, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:9:1

Match up the descriptions you noted in the above letter to passages in the New Testament.

How could non-Christians sources be used to help make the case for the New Testament?

What are some limitations that these sources have? Consider some way in which Christians may use these sources in ways that are not valid. Furthermore, consider how skeptics might respond to these arguments.

16. With the Gospel, I See the World as It Is

“If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motion of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true. They may be sound chemically, but that does not make them sound logically. And hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms.”

— J.B.S. HALDANE, *Possible Worlds*, 1928, page 220

David Wood was an atheist who attempted to kill his father but later became a Christian. Today, David works as an apologist who works to show that an Atheistic worldview cannot explain the world that exists.

Watch the following video about his story and answer the questions below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DakEcY7Z5GU>

List out some ways in which David Wood lived out his Atheism. Also, include anything else you observed from the video.

C.S. Lewis said, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”¹¹
In what ways can a Biblical viewpoint explain the way that the world is (morality, justice, love, etc.)?

C.S. Lewis said, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." What do you think about this? List some examples where this appears to be true.

¹¹ <https://Ai1L.net/TheologyPoetry>

C.S. Lewis once said that "All that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—[is] the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy." Explain what Biblical messages fit this (specific stories and themes).

For further study:

<i>Mere Christianity</i> C.S. LEWIS	This book was adapted from a series of talks that C.S. Lewis gave on the BBC from 1941-1944. It's a fairly easy read and is well worth reading.
<i>Is Theology Poetry?</i> C.S. LEWIS	This essay discusses how the Christian faith can answers many of life's questions). Available for free at: https://Ai1L.net/TheologyPoetry
<i>A Confession</i> LEO TOLSTOY	Tolstoy records his own descent into depression after realizing he has no basis for the meaning of life and his later realization that a belief in God restores a life of meaning.
<i>The Dream of a Ridiculous Man</i> FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY	This fictional story tells of a man who contemplates suicide due to his belief that life has no meaning. He is then taken to a version of the world unaffected by sin and he concludes that the meaning of life is as simple as to love your neighbor as yourself.

17. The Gospel According to God (Isaiah 53)

“He [Isaiah] was more of an Evangelist than a Prophet, because he described all of the Mysteries of the Church of Christ so vividly that you would assume he was not prophesying about the future, but rather was composing a history of past events.”

— JEROME, *Commentary on Isaiah*, preface

Isaiah predicted the Gospel 700 years before Jesus. The message of Isaiah 53 actually starts in Isaiah 52:13 (the chapter divisions were not in the original text). For this lesson, assume that references to “Isaiah 53” actually refer to the text from Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Read Isaiah 53 and make some notes for each of the sections of the text below. For each of the sections, consider the following:

1. How did Jesus fulfill this? Cite examples if necessary.
2. How could I build a case for this matching Jesus and the Gospel story?

52:13-15: Astonishment

53:1-3: Rejection

53:4-6: Substitution

53:7-9: Silence

53:10-12: Triumph

For further study:

The Gospel According to God

JOHN MACARTHUR

This book reviews Isaiah 53 in light of the Gospel and points out the connections to Jesus. It is an easy read.

18. “Isaiah 53 is not a good example of fulfilled prophecy”

“Then the eunuch said to Philip, ‘Please tell me, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or someone else?’”

— LUKE, *Acts of the Apostles*, 8:34

Isaiah 53 has been used heavily from the time of the early church to today to show that Jesus is the predicated Messiah. As such, it has become a target for unbelievers. Below are some common objections. Review each objection and attempt to come up with some answers. Feel free to skip the objection if you cannot come up with an answer.

Many Jews argue that Isaiah 53 is not about the Messiah at all but about the remnant of Israel coming back from exile. Reread Isaiah 52:13-53:12 as if the servant is referring to the remnant of Israel and write some observations about whether this understanding fits the text.

The context of the passages around Isaiah 53 relate to the return of the Jewish people from the Babylonian exile. Read Isaiah 52 and 54 to get the context and explain how the Isaiah 53 and the Gospel story fit.

Isaiah 53 says that the Messiah will be rejected, and that people will not be interested in him. Yet the New Testament says that crowds followed him. How do we make sense of this?

Isaiah 53 says that the Messiah will be sickly and die of a disease. How would you answer this? Consider looking for other examples of sickness in Isaiah.

Isaiah 53 doesn't *explicitly* say that the servant will rise from the dead. Thus, some will claim that Jesus' resurrection doesn't fit this passage. How would you answer this?

Isaiah 53 says the servant did no violence. Some will say that this is in conflict with the Gospels since they record that Jesus cleansed the Temple using a whip. How would you answer this?

Isaiah 53 says that the servant would see his seed. Some argue that this expression always refers to physical descendants and thus cannot refer to figurative descendants. How would you answer this?

For further study:

<i>Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Volume 3: Messianic Prophecy Objections</i> MICHAEL BROWN	Michael Brown (a Messianic Jew) wrote this book to answer Jewish objections to Messianic prophecies. This is part of a larger series on Jewish objections. This is a fairly easy read.
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19. Out of Context I Called My Prophecy?

“This points to the divine, God inspired origin of the Old Testament. You cannot make any of these statements about any other book on planet Earth.”

— MIKE WINGER,

Prophecies that Jesus fulfilled: Evidence for the Bible, 0:55

People sometimes claim that Matthew misuses Old Testament passages as support for prophecies of Jesus. I think it can be shown that Matthew uses the Old Testament passages in ways that may be different than what we may expect. Matthew’s use of the passage is not out of context but requires reading *more* context to gain the insight necessary to understand the connection.

Review each of the 12 fulfillments in Matthew and the corresponding Old Testament passage. Then, document why you think Matthew believes this is a fulfillment. Make sure to consider the following:

1. What is the context of the Old Testament passage (the events surrounding the cited text)? New Testament references to the Old Testament often refer to the entire story that includes the cited passage, not just the part that is quoted.
2. What is the context of the New Testament passage? There are likely other clues in Matthew’s Gospel that indicate why he thinks the context matches the Old Testament story.
3. There is more than one way in which an Old Testament passage is “fulfilled”. Sometimes the Old Testament passage is specifically Messianic but in other cases the fulfillment is a typological foreshadowing (similar to the Old Testament references in Hebrews).

Matthew 1:22-23 / Isaiah 7:14

Matthew 2:15 / Hosea 11:1

Matthew 2:17-18 / Jeremiah 31:15 (and Genesis 35:16-19)

Matthew 2:23 (as a possible fulfillment of Isaiah 11:1 or generally of the concept that Jesus would come from a no-name town)

Matthew 4:14-15 / Isaiah 9:1-2

Matthew 8:17 / Isaiah 53:4

Matthew 12:17-18 / Isaiah 42:1 and following

Matthew 13:14 / Isaiah 6:9-10

Matthew 13:35 / Psalm 78:2

Matthew 21:4 / Zechariah 9:9

Matthew 26:54, 56 (does not include a specific text that this is a fulfillment of)

Matthew 27:9-10 / Zechariah 11:12-13 and Jeremiah 19:1-13

How might the perspective of shadows and types (like in Hebrews) help us to understand Matthew's use of the Old Testament passages?

What are some things that you may suggest to someone who is confused by Matthew's claim of prophetic fulfillments?

20. “Jesus didn't claim to be God”

“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand my sheep from their hand. I will no longer let them be shepherds; the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, so that they will no longer be food for them.

For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Look, *I myself* will search for my sheep and seek them out.”

— EZEKIEL, 34:10-11 (emphasis mine)

Some suggest that the early Jewish Christians understood Jesus to be a Rabbi but not God. They claim that Gentiles assigned Jesus the attributes of God after the Apostles died and without their approval. This lesson will show that Jesus was considered to be God by the apostles.

We will build an argument based on five attributes which can be remembered with the acronym H.A.N.D.S.:

1. Jesus shares the *honors* due to God.
2. Jesus shares the *attributes* of God.
3. Jesus shares the *names* of God.
4. Jesus shares in the *deeds* that God does.
5. Jesus shares the *seat* of God's throne.

Make an argument that Jesus accepted the *honor* due to God. See Matt. 14:33; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:17.

Make an argument that Jesus shared the *attributes* of God. See John 1:1-3; 8:58, Matt. 28:18, John 21:17, Romans 8:35-39.

Make an argument that Jesus shares the *names* of God. See Phil. 2:9-11, John 20:28, Luke 2:11.

Make an argument that Jesus shares in the *deeds* that God does. See John 1:3, Heb. 1:2-3, Matt. 8:23-27, Matt. 9:1-8, John 1:4; 5:21.

Make an argument that Jesus shares the *seat* of God's throne. See Rev. 3:21, Rev. 5:13, John 10:27-33.

For further study:

<i>Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ</i> ROBERT BOWMAN, J. ED KOMOSZEWSKI	This book makes are argument for the deity of Christ. This book is a fairly easy read.
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21. Regarding Miracles

“Do not attempt to water Christianity down. There must be no pretense that you can have it with the supernatural left out. So far as I can see, Christianity is precisely the one religion from which the miraculous cannot be separated. You must frankly argue for supernaturalism from the very outset.”

— C.S LEWIS, *Christian Apologetics*

Miracles are a major stumbling block for those coming from a naturalistic worldview. This lesson will consider some of the assumptions that prevent people from accepting miracles.

What do you think is a good definition of a miracle?

What are some barriers that may cause people to struggle to accept miracles (preconceptions, external influences, etc.)?

Carl Sagan once said that “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” To what extent do you think this is true? Are there limits to it?

What are some considerations and thoughts that may be useful for defending miracles?

Part IV

The Transmission of the New Testament

22. “The copies of the New Testament have been corrupted beyond recovery”

“Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament”

— BART EHRMAN, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 252-3 ¹²

Critics of the New Testament claim that the Gospel accounts are littered with errors that ought to cause us to doubt the reliability of their message. These claims are usually made without a detailed discussion of what these claimed errors actually look like and thus make them look far worse than they are.

Read the following description from a skeptic of how he believes the Bible developed and answer the questions below.

“The Bible is the most widely read book in the history of the world, far outselling any other book, with 3.9 billion copies sold over the last 50 years. Many believe it contains the actual word of God.

But many people don’t realize that over the past 2,000 years, this sacred text has changed a great deal. No “first edition” exists. What we have are copies, the first of which were made hundreds of years after the events supposedly took place.

For the first 100 to 200 years, copies of the Bible were made by hand ... and not by professionals. This led to many errors, omissions, and — most importantly — changes.”

— JOE AVELLA ¹³

Summarize the critics' viewpoint such that they would say “that’s right”.

¹² This quote appears in the 2005 printing of *Misquoting Jesus* (in the Q&A section). This section did not exist in the earlier versions and this quote does not appear in later printings.

¹³ <https://www.businessinsider.com/bible-changes-altered-jesus-testament-dead-sea-scrolls-gospel-2015-11>

List out the individual claims that the person is making.

What questions would you ask this person?

For further study:

<i>The Basics of New Testament Textual Criticism</i> (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Doi8JxJOtgE) DANIEL WALLACE	This free video provides an excellent introduction to textual criticism from the perspective of one of the leading experts.
<i>Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism</i> ELIJAH HIXSON, PETER J. GURRY	This book provides a good description of textual criticism that avoids extremes of excessive skepticism on one hand or a overly simplistic approach sometimes offered by apologists.
<i>Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction</i> ELLIS R. BROTZMAN, ERIC J. TULLY	This book is focused on textual criticism of the Old Testament. We didn't cover the Old Testament specifically in in this lesson but many of the concepts that apply to the New Testament apply to the Old Testament too. This book is a little technical in parts.

Bart Ehrman claims that textual variants make the original New Testament unrecoverable in his book “Misquoting Jesus.” At the end of the book, he includes a table of the “Top Ten Verses That Were Not Originally in the New Testament.”¹⁴

Read each of these passages and write down other passages the express a similar concept (if available). Note that three of them exist in other Gospel accounts nearly verbatim and have been footnoted accordingly.

1 John 5:7	
John 8:7	
John 8:11	
Luke 22:44	
Luke 22:20 ¹⁵	
Mark 16:17	
Mark 16:18	
John 5:4	
Luke 24:12 ¹⁶	
Luke 24:51 ¹⁷	

¹⁴ Ehrman, Bart D. *Misquoting Jesus: the Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. HarperOne, 2007. p. 265-266

¹⁵ This is questionable whether it is in Luke but it unquestionably in Matthew 26:28

¹⁶ This is questionable whether it is in Luke but it unquestionably in Mark 14:24

¹⁷ This is questionable whether it is in Luke but it unquestionably in John 20:3-7

23. Has the Bible Been Mistranslated?

“Yet for all that, as nothing is begun and perfected at the same time, and the later thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so, if we building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labours, do endeavour to make that better which they left so good, no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we persuade ourselves, if they were alive, would thank us.”

— KING JAMES VERSION, *Preface* 12.6

English readers have access to large number of excellent Bible translations. The translation process can be a bit mysterious to many who wonder if the translations they use can be trusted.

What Bible translation do you usually use and why do you use this translation?

What questions do you have about Bible translations?

Read the following description from a skeptic of how he believes the Bible's message was lost in translation and answer the questions below.

“Because you know when the Bible was written, then re-written, and then edited, and then re-edited, and then translated from dead languages, and then re-translated and then re-edited, and then re-re-edited, and then given to kings for them to take their favorite parts out, and then re-edited, and then retranslated, and then re-edited, and then given to the pope for him to approve, and re-re-translated, and then re-rewritten, and then rewritten, re-edited, retranslated again all based on stories that were told orally 30-90 years after they happened to people who didn't know how to write I guess what I'm saying is that the Bible is literally the world's oldest game of telephone.”

— DAVID CROSS¹⁸

Summarize the critics' viewpoint such that they would say “that’s right”.

List out the individual claims that the person is making.

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8EAoA3bZcQ>

What questions would you ask this person?

Part V

The One Lesson: Jesus' Resurrection

24. Facts 1 & 2: Jesus Died by Crucifixion and His Disciples Believed He Resurrected

“Thus the testimony of Acts, written of course many years after the event, is explicit that the fisherman, Peter, who was then the dominating figure of the movement, taught the resurrection of Jesus in what, having regard to the context, can only be regarded as a resurrection in the full physical sense. In this he was apparently supported and upheld by the united party for which he spoke.”

— FRANK MORRISON, *Who Moved the Stone?*, page 121

Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15:13-19 that the resurrection is so critical that the truth of the Gospel entirely rests upon it. A strong argument can be made for the resurrection based upon on only four facts:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion
2. Jesus’ disciples believed that Jesus appeared to them
3. Paul (an enemy of the church) and James (a skeptic), changed their minds after Jesus appeared to them
4. The tomb was empty (a fact accepted even by enemies of the early church)

The first three facts are generally accepted even by the large majority of scholars including skeptical ones (90% or more agree). The fourth fact (the empty tomb) is accepted by about 75% of scholars. We will consider the first two facts in this lesson (Jesus died by crucifixion, and that his disciples believed he resurrected).

Read the non-Christian accounts of Jesus’ death by crucifixion. These are available at the end of the book in the appendix on page 89. Write down anything that you found noteworthy about them.

Read the Gospels accounts of Jesus' death by crucifixion (Mark 15, Matthew 27, Luke 23, John 19). Write down anything that you found that would be useful in defending the crucifixion of Jesus' as a historical event.

Read through the book of Acts and document the claims of the early witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. Pay close attention to the sermon summaries (2:14-41, 3:12-4:21, 5:27-42, 10:34-48, 13:16-51, 17:1-32).

25. Facts 3 & 4: Early Skeptics (Paul and James) Became Believers; the Tomb was Empty

“I thought the Conversion and the Apostleship of St Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine Revelation.”

— GEORGE LORD LYTTTELTON,
Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul, page 5

In this lesson, we will consider facts 3 and 4 in the case for the resurrection of Jesus:

3. Paul and James (former skeptics) became believers after seeing Jesus resurrected
4. The tomb was empty

Read the following passages regarding James (Jesus’ half-brother): John 7:1-9, Mark 3:20-22, 1 Corinthians 15:7, Acts 12:17, Acts 15:13–21, Acts 21:17–18. Write down a profile about him (his beliefs, actions, roles, etc.) and document how he changes and what appears to have driven the change.

Read the historical accounts of James’ death in the appendix on page 108. Write down anything you find noteworthy.

Read Paul's description of his history in Acts 26. Write down anything that is noteworthy about his past that may be useful in making a case for the resurrection of Jesus.

Read the historical accounts of Paul's death in the appendix on page 111. Write down anything you find noteworthy.

Explain why the testimony from former skeptics (James and Paul) would be particularly useful in making a case for the resurrection.

26. Response to the Minimal Facts for the Resurrection

“Now if Christ is being preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?”

— PAUL, *1 Corinthians*, 15:12

Listen to the following discussion between Gary Habermas and James Crossley regarding the resurrection: <https://bit.ly/Ai1LMinFacts>

Both James and Gary are New Testament scholars and recognized experts in their fields. Gary is a Christian who believes in the historicity of the resurrection and is the scholar who pioneered the minimal facts argument for the resurrection. James is also a New Testament scholar, but he doesn't believe in Jesus resurrection.

The prior two lessons presented a version of the minimal facts based on Gary's work but simplified the argument a bit in order to make them easier to remember. In video above Gary will use the following six minimal facts¹⁹:

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion
2. The disciples had experiences of the risen Jesus
3. The disciples were thoroughly transformed, even willing to die for this belief
4. The apostles taught the resurrection very early
5. James, a former skeptic, became a Christian due to an experience of the risen Jesus
6. Paul, a former enemy of the church, became a Christian due to having an experience of the risen Jesus

Write down anything in this conversation that stood out to you or anything that surprised you.

¹⁹ Gary uses these six facts in his scholarly work “The Risen Jesus & Future Hope” but uses a simpler argument based on 5 facts in his works intended for a populate audience.

Write down a summary of James' opinion.

What is the main point where James and Gary disagree?

What questions would you ask someone who holds James' view?

What questions did you have? Is there anything that you have questions on or would want more information? Consider which of Habermas' minimal facts do you personally find the weakest and would like more information on.

Part VI

Miscellaneous Topics

27. Dealing with Doubt

“Christianity, it turned out, looked nothing like the caricature I once held. I found the story of Jacob wrestling with God especially compelling: God wants anything *but* the unthinking faith I had once assumed characterized Christianity. God wants us to wrestle with Him; to struggle through doubt and faith, sorrow and hope. Moreover, God wants broken people, not self-righteous ones.”

— SARAH IRVING-STONEBRAKER,
How Oxford and Peter Singer drove me from atheism to Jesus ²⁰

Christian’s often face times of serious doubt. I am convinced that doubt is surprisingly common and discussed far too rarely. This lesson will determine what the New Testament says about doubt, identify the sources of it, and point to some solutions.

Doubt can mean several things such as:

- 1. To be uncertain or lack confidence**
- 2. To lack conviction**
- 3. An inclination not to believe**

Review the book of James to see what kind of doubt James is talking about and make a list of observations that support your claim.

²⁰ <http://www.veritas.org/oxford-atheism-to-jesus/>

Make a list of things that may cause someone to doubt.

Some make a distinction between emotional doubt and intellectual doubt. Consider how these two types of doubt may be different (such as what causes them, how they should be dealt with, etc.).

Create a list of some things you could do that would help someone who has doubts.

What passages do you think would be relevant or helpful to this discussion?

How might doubt be helpful? Why would God allow people to doubt?

What other thoughts do you have about doubts? Consider your own spiritual walk or that of others that might be useful for consideration.

For further study:

<i>The Thomas Factor</i> GARY HABERMAS	Gary offers a thorough analysis of what doubt is, what causes it, and offers some solutions. Available for free at: https://Ai1L.net/ThomasFactor
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Appendix

A. Historical Non-Christian Accounts of Jesus' Death and Early Christian Beliefs

The following is a list of non-Christian sources for information about Jesus' death. These accounts should not be assumed to be completely accurate, but they provide valuable insight into the basic facts surrounding Jesus and early Christianity.

Tacitus

Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman historian and politician who lived from AD 56 to 120. He is considered to be one of the greatest Roman historians.

Tacitus records that Nero tried to blame Christians for a fire that ravaged the city of Rome in order to rid himself of the suspicion that he himself had been the one that started the fire:

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

Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.”

— TACITUS, *Annals*, 15:44

Josephus

Flavius Josephus is a Jewish historian from the first century who wrote extensively about events during the time of the early church. As such, he includes several references to early Christians.

The following is a reference by Josephus to Jesus. There is a question regarding whether this account has been amended by over-zealous Christians. I italicized the parts that scholars think may have been altered²¹. Some believe that Josephus' account comes from the same source as Luke's source for the Emmaus narrative in Luke 24:19-21, 25-27²².

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

— JOSEPHUS, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:3

²¹ I think that the most likely case is that the first alteration (“If it be lawful to call him a man”) is a later addition and that second alteration (“He was the Christ”) was intended to be what Christians were reporting. The Arabic translation of this account is missing the first alteration and says that “it was reported that he was the Christ” for the second alteration.

²² Goldberg, Gary J. “The Coincidences of the Emmaus Narrative of Luke and the Testimonium of Josephus.” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 7, no. 13, 1995, pp. 59–77., doi:10.1177/095182079500001304.

Mara Bar-Serapion

Mara Bar-Serapion wrote letter that is preserved in a 6th or 7th century manuscript that makes a passing reference to Jesus:

“What else can we say, when the wise are forcibly dragged off by tyrants, their wisdom is captured by insults, and their minds are oppressed and without defense? What advantage did the Athenians gain from murdering Socrates? Famine and plague came upon them as a punishment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea and the Jews, desolate and driven from their own kingdom, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates is not dead, because of Plato; neither is Pythagoras, because of the statue of Juno; nor is the wise king, because of the ‘new law’ he laid down.”

— MARA BAR-SERAPION, British Museum, Syriac MS, Additional 14,658

The Talmud

The Talmud is the main text of Rabbinic Judaism and it provides significant thoughts regarding Jewish thought. The following excerpt describes Jesus' trial and follows with a description of the martyrdom of early Christians:

“The mishna teaches that a crier goes out before the condemned man. This indicates that it is only before him, i.e., while he is being led to his execution, that yes, the crier goes out, but from the outset, before the accused is convicted, he does not go out. The Gemara raises a difficulty: But isn't it taught in a baraita: On Passover Eve they hung the corpse of Jesus the Nazarene after they killed him by way of stoning. And a crier went out before him for forty days, publicly proclaiming: Jesus the Nazarene is going out to be stoned because he practiced sorcery, incited people to idol worship, and led the Jewish people astray. Anyone who knows of a reason to acquit him should come forward and teach it on his behalf. And the court did not find a reason to acquit him, and so they stoned him and hung his corpse on Passover eve.

Ulla said: And how can you understand this proof? Was Jesus the Nazarene worthy of conducting a search for a reason to acquit him? He was an inciter to idol worship, and the Merciful One states with regard to an inciter to idol worship: ‘Neither shall you spare, neither shall you conceal him’ (Deuteronomy 13:9). Rather, Jesus was different, as he had close ties with the government, and the gentile authorities were interested in his acquittal. Consequently, the court gave him every opportunity to clear himself, so that it could not be claimed that he was falsely convicted.

Apropos the trial of Jesus, the Gemara cites another baraita, where the Sages taught: Jesus the Nazarene had five disciples: Mattai, Nakai, Netzer, Buni, and Toda. They brought Mattai in to stand trial. Mattai said to the judges: Shall Mattai be executed? But isn't it written: ‘When [matai] shall I come and appear before God?’ (Psalms 42:3). Mattai claimed that this verse alludes to the fact he is righteous. They said to him: Yes, Mattai shall be executed, as it is written: ‘When [matai] shall he die, and his name perish?’ (Psalms 41:6).

Then they brought Nakai in to stand trial. Nakai said to the judges: Shall Nakai be executed? But isn't it written: ‘And the innocent [naki] and righteous you shall not slay’ (Exodus 23:7)? They said to him: Yes, Nakai shall be executed, as it is written: ‘In secret places he kills the innocent [naki]’ (Psalms 10:8).

Then they brought Netzer in to stand trial. He said to the judges: Shall Netzer be executed? But isn't it written: ‘And a branch [netzer] shall grow out of his roots’ (Isaiah 11:1)? They said to him: Yes, Netzer shall be executed, as it is written: ‘But you are cast out of your grave like an abhorred branch [netzer]’ (Isaiah 14:19).

Then they brought Buni in to stand trial. Buni said to the judges: Shall Buni be executed? But isn't it written: 'My firstborn son [beni] is Israel' (Exodus 4:22)? They said to him: Yes, Buni shall be executed, as it is written: 'Behold, I shall kill your firstborn son [binkha]' (Exodus 4:23).

Then they brought Toda in to stand trial. Toda said to the judges: Shall Toda be executed? But isn't it written: 'A psalm of thanksgiving [toda]' (Psalms 100:1)? They said to him: Yes, Toda shall be executed, as it is written: 'Whoever slaughters a thanks-offering [toda] honors Me' (Psalms 50:23)."

— TALMUD, *Sanhedrin*, 43a:18-22

Lucian of Samosata

The Death of Peregrine is a satirical story of a man named Peregrine who takes advantage of the kindness of Christians. The text is historically significant because it contains one of the earliest evaluations of early Christianity by a non-Christian author:

“It was now that he came across the priests and scribes of the Christians, in Palestine, and picked up their queer creed. I can tell you, he pretty soon convinced them of his superiority; prophet, elder, ruler of the Synagogue—he was everything at once; expounded their books, commented on them, wrote books himself. They took him for a God, accepted his laws, and declared him their president. The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day, —the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. Well, the end of it was that Proteus was arrested and thrown into prison. This was the very thing to lend an air to his favorite arts of clap-trap and wonder-working; he was now a made man. The Christians took it all very seriously: he was no sooner in prison, than they began trying every means to get him out again, —but without success. Everything else that could be done for him they most devoutly did. They thought of nothing else. Orphans and ancient widows might be seen hanging about the prison from break of day. Their officials bribed the jailers to let them sleep inside with him. Elegant dinners were conveyed in; their sacred writings were read; and our old friend Peregrine (as he was still called in those days) became for them "the modern Socrates."

In some of the Asiatic cities, too, the Christian communities put themselves to the expense of sending deputations, with offers of sympathy, assistance, and legal advice. The activity of these people, in dealing with any matter that affects their community, is something extraordinary; they spare no trouble, no expense. Peregrine, all this time, was making quite an income on the strength of his bondage; money came pouring in. You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. Now an adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who has seen the world, has only to get among these simple souls, and his fortune is pretty soon made; he plays with them."

— LUCIAN, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13

Pliny the Younger

Pliny was a governor of Pontus from 111-113 AD. He wrote letter to the Emperor Trajan asking what to do with Christians:

“They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found.”

— PLINY THE YOUNGER, *Letters*, 10.96-97

B. Historical Accounts of James' Death

The following is a list of sources for information about the death of James' (the brother of Jesus).

Josephus

Josephus records the death of James in his history of the Jews:

“And now Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea, as procurator. But the king deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus. Now the report goes that this eldest Ananus proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and who had himself enjoyed that dignity a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests. But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrim without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest.”

— JOSEPHUS, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:9

Eusebius

Eusebius was an early Christian historian. Eusebius' quotes from someone else named Hegesippus²³ who relates details regarding James' death.

“James, the brother of the Lord, succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles. He has been called the Just by all from the time of our Saviour to the present day; for there were many that bore the name of James.

He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath.

He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place; for he wore not woollen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people.

Because of his exceeding great justice he was called the Just, and Oblias, which signifies in Greek, 'Bulwark of the people' and 'Justice,' in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him.

Now some of the seven sects, which existed among the people and which have been mentioned by me in the Memoirs, asked him, 'What is the gate of Jesus?' and he replied that he was the Saviour.

On account of these words some believed that Jesus is the Christ. But the sects mentioned above did not believe either in a resurrection or in one's coming to give to every man according to his works. But as many as believed did so on account of James.

Therefore when many even of the rulers believed, there was a commotion among the Jews and Scribes and Pharisees, who said that there was danger that the whole people would be looking for Jesus as the Christ. Coming therefore in a body to James they said, 'We entreat you, restrain the people; for they are gone astray in regard to Jesus, as if he were the Christ. We entreat you to persuade all that have come to the feast of the Passover concerning Jesus; for we all have confidence in

²³ Hegesippus' account may have some embellishments but it has a historical core. F.F. Bruce noted that “when the embellishments are stripped of, the story amounts to this: the high priest and his colleagues, alarmed at the growth of militant messianism, which threatened to embroil the nation with the Roman power, demanded that James should disown his Nazarene claim that Jesus was the Messiah. His refusal to do so led to his death”. See F.F. Bruce, *Peter, Stephen, James and John: Studies in Non-Pauline Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 116.

you. For we bear you witness, as do all the people, that you are just, and do not respect persons. Matthew 22:16

Therefore, persuade the multitude not to be led astray concerning Jesus. For the whole people, and all of us also, have confidence in you. Stand therefore upon the pinnacle of the temple, that from that high position you may be clearly seen, and that your words may be readily heard by all the people. For all the tribes, with the Gentiles also, have come together on account of the Passover.'

The aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees therefore placed James upon the pinnacle of the temple, and cried out to him and said: 'You just one, in whom we ought all to have confidence, forasmuch as the people are led astray after Jesus, the crucified one, declare to us, what is the gate of Jesus.'

And he answered with a loud voice, 'Why do you ask me concerning Jesus, the Son of Man? He himself sits in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and is about to come upon the clouds of heaven.'

And when many were fully convinced and gloried in the testimony of James, and said, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' these same Scribes and Pharisees said again to one another, 'We have done badly in supplying such testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, in order that they may be afraid to believe him.'

And they cried out, saying, 'Oh! Oh! The just man is also in error.' And they fulfilled the Scripture written in Isaiah, 'Let us take away the just man, because he is troublesome to us: therefore they shall eat the fruit of their doings.'

So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to each other, 'Let us stone James the Just.' And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, 'I entreat you, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Luke 23:34

And while they were thus stoning him one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of the Rechabites, who are mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out, saying, 'Stop. What are you doing? The just one prays for you.'

And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom. And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that Jesus is the Christ. And immediately Vespasian besieged them."

— EUSEBIUS, *Church History II*, 23:4-18

C. Historical Accounts of Paul's Death

The following is a list of sources for information about the death of Paul.

Clement of Rome

Clement was an elder of the church in Rome around the end of the first century. He reportedly knew Paul and might be mentioned in scripture itself (Philippians 4:3). Clement wrote a letter to the church in Corinth and referred to the death of both Peter and Paul:

“But not to dwell upon ancient examples, let us come to the most recent spiritual heroes. Let us take the noble examples furnished in our own generation. Through envy and jealousy the greatest and most righteous pillars [of the church] have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles. Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours; and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him. Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects. Thus was he removed from the world, and went into the holy place, having proved himself a striking example of patience.”

— CLEMENT OF ROME,
The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, pages 230-231

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius was an elder in the church in Antioch in the very early part of the second century. Ignatius himself also gave his life around 107 A.D. He likely knew John personally. Ignatius wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus and referred to the Paul's death:

"I know both who I am, and to whom I write. I am a condemned man, you have been the objects of mercy; I am subject to danger, you are established in safety. You are the persons through whom those pass that are cut off for the sake of God. You are initiated into the mysteries of the Gospel with Paul, the holy, the martyred, the deservedly most happy, at whose feet may I be found, when I shall attain to God; who in all his Epistles makes mention of you in Christ Jesus.

I know both who I am, and to whom I write. I am the very insignificant Ignatius, who have my lot with those who are exposed to danger and condemnation. But you have been the objects of mercy, and are established in Christ. I am one delivered over [to death], but the least of all those that have been cut off for the sake of Christ, 'from the blood of righteous Abel' to the blood of Ignatius. You are initiated into the mysteries of the Gospel with Paul, the holy, the martyred, inasmuch as he was 'a chosen vessel;' at whose feet may I be found, and at the feet of the rest of the saints, when I shall attain to Jesus Christ, who is always mindful of you in His prayers."

— IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Letter to the Ephesians*, chapter 12

Dionysius of Corinth

Dionysius was an elder in the church in Corinth in the second century. There are some fragments of Dionysius letters preserved in Eusebius' writings. Dionysius wrote a letter in 171 A.D. to the church in Rome and referred to the deaths of Peter and Paul:

"Therefore you also have by such admonition joined in close union the churches that were planted by Peter and Paul, that of the Romans and that of the Corinthians: for both of them went to our Corinth, and taught us in the same way as they taught you when they went to Italy; and having taught you, they suffered martyrdom at the same time."

— DIONYSIUS OF CORINTH, *Letter to the Roman Church*

D. Wikihow Article “How to Play the Telephone Game”

The following is a copy of the Wikihow article on how to play the telephone game. This was copied from <https://www.wikihow.com/Play-the-Telephone-Game> and is used with permission²⁴.

The game of telephone is a classic ice breaker and party game. It's easy to set up and a lot of fun to play. You and your friends will try to pick a word or phrase, “pass it on” by whispering it to someone next to you, and have fun seeing how much it changed during the game. All you will need to play is a couple of friends, a word or phrase, and a quiet whisper.

Part 1: Playing the Telephone Game

1. Get everyone in place. Although the game of telephone is simple to play, you will need to arrange the players in a way that supports the game. Have everyone stand in either a line or a circle. Players should be spaced far enough apart that they won't overhear the word when it isn't their turn.[1]

Proper position is important when playing telephone. If people aren't in some sort of order, they won't know when it's their turn.

2. Start the game. Choose a person to start the game. This person will think of a word and whisper it to the person next to them. The word should be an uncommon one as the idea is to see how much it changes by the game's end. Once the word has been told to the next person, they will whisper it to the person next to them.[2]

Alternatively, choose a word with three or more syllables, such as: extraterrestrial, planetarium, or encyclopedia.

Base the difficulty of the word on the age of the audience. What might seem difficult for a 5 year old would be easy for a 12 year old.

If this is for school, consider using one of the vocabulary words that you are studying. You can also use a term from a science class.

3. Continue whispering the word. Players continue listening to the word and repeating what they think they heard to the person next to them. This is done until the last person in the line or circle is told the word.

4. By the end of the game, every person should have heard the word or phrase.

²⁴ <https://www.wikihow.com/wikiHow:Terms-of-Use> (per the Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 License)

5. See how much the word changed. Once the last person hears the word or phrase, they will say what they think they heard out-loud. This is compared to the original word that the game started with. This is the moment when all the players get to learn just how much the word or phrase changed through their “telephone line”.

Part 2: Playing The Telephone Game Well

1. Say a word or phrase only once. An important rule for the game of telephone, is that you can only say a word or phrase one time. Repeating the phrase will only help to clarify it, going against the point of the game. Only allow those playing one chance to whisper the word or phrase on their turn.

This will force the players not only to speak clearly, but to also listen carefully.

2. Pick a unique word or phrase. The fun of telephone is to see how much a word changes throughout the game. Picking a simple or familiar word will make the game too easy, allowing the word to be heard clearly. Instead, it's a good idea to pick a difficult, long, or unique word to use when playing telephone.

Choosing the word "dog" is probably a poor choice, even for young children.

Something like "bayou" might be a better choice.

Using the word "misanthropic" could be a challenging choice, and suitable for older children.

3. Let only one person know the word. It's important that no one but the person starting the round of telephone knows the word being used. If other players know the word, they will be able to repeat it with ease.

Always keep the word a secret to ensure that it ends up being changed by the game's end.

Sometimes, the word does not get changed at all by the last person. This means that the players are really good at listening (and honest about not changing the word).

4. Always whisper. You will need to whisper a word or phrase to a person during the game of telephone. Whispering helps in two ways; keeping the word a secret and making it hard to interpret correctly.

Keeping the word quiet can make it more likely that it will end up being misheard and wildly different from the starting phrase.