

CHAPTER 3: JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD

For unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.

- Jesus in John 8:24 (ESV)

He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

- John 1:11-12 (ESV)

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes through the Father except through me.

- Jesus in John 14:6 (ESV)

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

- Acts 4:12 (ESV)

For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

- 1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)

We'll begin with a thought experiment. Let me invite you to don your "skeptical hat" for just a moment. Do your best to think like an educated non-Christian. You find yourself considering the following question: Why does anyone today even know who Jesus of Nazareth is?

In a purely secular sense, Jesus' "resume" (so to speak) was entirely unimpressive, even disgraceful and embarrassing. He was conceived out of wedlock to a couple of poor Jewish teenagers. His father was the epitome of a common, blue-collar worker and died while Jesus was a teenager or young man. Jesus received no formal education, either religious or secular. He was trained in neither the rabbinical system nor according to the elite, classical systems developed by the Romans and Greeks.

Jesus' only claim to fame was as an itinerant preacher and miracle worker who was commonly accused of performing feats using some form of sorcery or "dark magic". At age 33, after only three short years of ministry, the authorities of his own religious system, Second Temple Judaism, had him arrested, put him on trial for blasphemy, and sentenced him to death. Since the Jews were subjugated to Roman rule, they weren't even authorized to execute Jesus. They had to "sell" the idea of crucifixion (in order to retain law and order) to the Roman prefect (governor) of that region named Pontius Pilate. He dies a death reserved for the worst of criminals—a horrific and tortuous death before the eyes of the public that was designed by the Romans to absolutely crush any opposition. Crucifixion was done to stamp out all traces of any movement that threatened Roman rule and order, and it was enormously effective at achieving that end.

Yet, here you (the skeptic) find yourself, probably several thousands of miles away from where Jesus lived and died, two-thousand years after the fact. You are separated from these events by an ocean and two millennia. Nevertheless, you know the basics of the story of Jesus. He was born in Bethlehem in a manger. He traveled and preached. He healed the sick. He walked on water. He was arrested, beaten, and crucified. He was without sin, but died for the sins of others. He was buried in a tomb that was later discovered to be empty. His disciples (followers) claim to have seen him alive on several different occasions after his death by crucifixion and to witness him ascend into heaven. These followers then took this message of the one they claimed is the Son of God into all of the world, suffering great persecution to the point of martyrdom in the process.

Half a world away and two-thousand years later, the majority of humanity knows the basic story of Jesus. The question before us is "Is it true?" What are we to make of the most influential story ever told in the history of humanity? Are there

compelling reasons to believe that the events recorded in the gospels and preached and taught by the 1st generation of Jesus' disciples really happened?

Fellow former atheist C.S. Lewis once put it like this: "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." I couldn't agree more. If it's true, there's nothing more important to be living for. However, if it's just another superstitious or religious story (like skeptics since the first century have claimed as we noticed in the previous chapter), then whatever its message of self-sacrificial love or devotion to a higher cause might convey, it's of no ultimate significance. It's merely one of thousands of poignant stories passed down through the years, and there is no rhyme or reason why this one "took" more than all of the others. That's a mere coincidence of history.

In Acts chapter 17, the Apostle Paul makes his way to the Aeropagus ("Mars Hill") in first-century Athens, Greece. There, he reasons with the Greek philosophers and preaches Christ. In closing his message, Paul makes a direct and bold proclamation—one that demands a response of every person who will ever hear the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed: "God is now proclaiming to mankind that all people everywhere are to repent, because He has set a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all people by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31, NASB). Did you catch that? Paul plainly states that God has furnished *proof* of Christianity, and that proof is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ! Unlike all of the other religious claims made by humankind down through the millennia, Christianity alone has physical *proof* to back up God's work and His promises. In opening his letter to the church in Rome, this same Paul writes that Jesus "was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4, BSB).

In the previous chapter, we discussed the powerful evidence of Old Testament prophecy, especially prophecies about the Messiah who God promised to send into the world. I mentioned that there are literally hundreds of "messianic prophecies" in the pages of the Old Testament. We gave particular attention to Isaiah's account of the "suffering servant" (found in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12). So vividly do these verses, written 700 years before Jesus was born, describe his

suffering, his substitutionary death, and the prophecy that God would restore him to life that the passage has been removed from the Scriptures of many orthodox Jews!

Of course, we could turn to many other passages that point to the coming, the suffering, and the triumph of the One to come, from Genesis 3:15 through Malachi 3:1. I strongly encourage you to spend some time studying the prophecies of the Old Testament that find their fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. A good source to get started can be found on the Jews for Jesus website at: <https://jewsforjesus.org/answers/top-40-most-helpful-messianic-prophecies>.

The rest of this chapter will focus on the case for the physical (i.e., bodily) resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth after his death by crucifixion. I will be taking an approach known as the “minimum facts method” which has been popularized by evidential and historical apologists like Gary Habermas, William Lane Craig, and Michael Licona. This method considers a small set of historical facts (typically four) surrounding the events of Jesus’ death, his purported resurrection, and the birth of the Christian faith in Jerusalem.

The minimum facts approach considers only facts that well-established and agreed upon by the majority of both Christian and non-Christian historians. This method does not require any assumptions to be made about the inspiration, inerrancy, or infallibility of the gospel accounts. The goal is simply to consider the set of historical facts together and to make an “inference to the best explanation”.

The minimum facts method is similar to the method used by police detectives as they compare the available evidence to various “theories” that have been proposed to account for those facts. If only one explanation (“theory”) can account for all of the evidence, does so parsimoniously (i.e., it doesn’t require additional assumptions to be made), and every alternate theory is riddled with inconsistencies and leads to absurd conclusions, we can determine “beyond a reasonable doubt” what took place.

Before building our minimum facts case for the bodily resurrection of Jesus, I want to be clear about the objective—the “grand project” if you will. My line of reasoning is as follows. First, C.S. Lewis was right to claim that, if true, Christianity is of infinite importance. Second, if Jesus physically resurrected, then we have

every reason to believe that Christianity is true and no good reason to doubt it. Therefore, if Christianity is true and if Christianity is of infinite importance, then it only makes sense to turn to Christ in faith and become one of his followers. This is anything but “blind faith”. It is a rational step *from* a faith that is founded on solid, historical evidences.

Question to Consider:

I contend that, had Jesus not died and rose again, you and I almost certainly would never have heard of him. Do you agree or disagree with my contention? Why or why not?

Four Facts About Jesus and the Origin of Christianity

First, I'll briefly describe four facts about the life and death of Jesus and about the origin of the Christian faith and message. I will outline each of these then turn your attention to common objections/pushback at each point and discuss how to respond to these criticisms. Then we'll look at how the inference to the best explanation overwhelmingly supports the “resurrection hypothesis” and consider the response that is required of every intellectually honest and responsible person who receives this message.

Jesus' Death by Crucifixion

The first fact that virtually all historians agree on regardless of whether or not they are Christians is that Jesus of Nazareth died by Roman crucifixion. More specifically, we know from Biblical and secular history that this event took place on the eve of the Jewish Passover just outside of Jerusalem. This fact is clearly attested to in each of the four gospels. It is all witnessed by religious Jewish literature (the Talmud) as well as by several secular Jewish and Roman sources as described above. Atheistic New Testament scholar Gerd Ludemann says, “The fact of the death of Jesus as a consequence of crucifixion is indisputable” (Gerd Ludemann, *What Really Happened to Jesus?* p. 17). Agnostic New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman stated, “One of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on the orders of Roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate” (Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p. 162).

While it is true that a vanishingly small number of “Jesus Mythicists” exist—people who attempt to make the case that Jesus of Nazareth was likely not a real historical figure but instead represents something of a legend—these views are regarded as very “fringe” even by non-Christian historians of the ancient Near East. Notable here is the historian Richard Carrier who, in my opinion, was soundly refuted in a debate on the subject of the historical existence of Jesus by agnostic Bart Ehrman. Carrier also struggled severely in a debate on the topic “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” against Christian philosopher William Lane Craig. These debates can be easily located and enjoyed on YouTube. I suggest listening to them yourself and seeing just how weak the case Carrier attempts to make is.

The Empty Tomb

The gospels record that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-51; John 19:38-42). Joseph himself and Nicodemus (the “teacher of Israel” who came to Jesus by night as reported in John 3:1-21) buried Jesus in Joseph’s tomb near the site of the Crucifixion. Scripture clearly indicates that the tomb had never before been used. Mary, the mother of Joseph, and Mary Magdalene followed Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to the tomb. A few mornings later, when the women went to the tomb to perform formal burial preparations of the body, they discovered the tomb to be empty. This detail is recorded in all four gospel accounts.

There’s much we could discuss here, but let’s take a quick look at four reasons to regard the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ empty tomb to be factual.

First, the account of the empty tomb is related in all four gospels as well as by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:4. These gospel witnesses constitute multiple, independent, early testimonies to this historical claim. Let us again invoke Aristotle’s Dictum: “The benefit of the doubt is to be given to the document itself, not to be assigned by the critic to himself”. Unless a reasonable and evidence-based case can be leveled against such robust testimony, it should be accepted as historically accurate.

Second, all four gospels list women as the primary witnesses to the empty tomb (and even as the first eyewitnesses of the resurrected Jesus). Given that women were seldom permitted to give legal testimony in that culture and never about claims such as this one, any author seeking to fabricate a believable story to be

circulated among a first-century Jewish audience would certainly have listed men as the primary eyewitnesses, not women. The best and most parsimonious explanation for all four gospel witnesses listing women as the first witnesses is that they are recording it the way it actually happened, even if those facts might be understood by some at the time to weaken that testimony.

Third, the inclusion of Joseph of Arimathea in the narrative powerfully attests to the factual nature of these accounts. Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin—the same Jewish judicial body that had authorized Jesus’ initial arrest and brought him to trial before Caiaphas, the high priest (Matthew 26:57-68). The early disciples would have considered the Sanhedrin to be their enemies and even those responsible for murdering Jesus (see Acts 2:22-23). As in the case of the women eyewitnesses, the only reasonable explanation for the inclusion of a member of the Sanhedrin at such a crucial place in the narrative (and doing such a noble thing) is that this is truly what happened. Also worth mentioning here is the fact that, as a Sanhedrist, Joseph of Arimathea would have been well-known and very influential in Jerusalem at the time of Christ. There would have been no mistake about where his property was located. This functionally shuts down any claim that people went to the wrong tomb. Moreover, this Joseph is recorded in all four gospel accounts. It’s extraordinarily rare to find a detail like this recorded across the board in the gospels. Together, these reasons make it vanishingly unlikely that Joseph was a fabrication.

Lastly, the empty tomb is attested to by the fact that the gospel of the physically resurrected Jesus was first preached publicly, in Jerusalem, just seven weeks later. Clearly, this would not have been a possibility had the corpse of Jesus been available just a few hundred feet away. The movement that became Christianity would have been dead in the water and the disciples laughed to scorn before their likely public execution. It would have been possible to try to launch this message in Damascus or Alexandria or Rome, but Jerusalem would have been entirely out of the question!

On this point, it’s extremely revealing that Peter preached the Pentecost sermon in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 2. This is the same guy who denied Jesus three times on the night of Jesus’ arrest. Peter even called down curses in order to escape the consequences of discipleship. Then, just 50 days later, Peter is boldly

standing in public, before the same men who had Jesus arrested and put to death, and proclaiming Jesus as the resurrected Christ. What explains this? Well, Peter witnessed much more than an empty tomb; he met with the resurrected Christ!

The Post-Crucifixion Appearances

Peter's life was absolutely revolutionized and his resolve to proclaim Christ galvanized by his first-hand experiences with the resurrected Jesus. In 2 Peter 1:16, the then-aging apostle writes, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty". In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul appeals to a creed of the early, early church that even non-Christian scholars date to within two years of Jesus' crucifixion. Here is the creed that Paul reiterates to the Corinthians: "That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the Twelve [the apostles]" Paul continues, relating more appearances, writing, "Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me" (1 Corinthians 15:6-8).

In an excellently-written article titled "The Minimal Facts of the Resurrection", Aaron Brake, writing for the apologetics ministry Cross Examined, gives four compelling reasons to accept the early creedal nature of the 1 Corinthians 15 passage. First, the excerpt has the parallel structure common in creedal composition (but not in the writing of epistles). Second, Paul's note that he "delivered that which [he] received" reveals a passing on of carefully-memorized "rabbinic heritage". Third, specific wording like "the Twelve", "third day", and "He was raised" are notably non-Pauline. Lastly, the Aramaic name for Peter—"Cephas"—was used, which supports something written very early in the post-crucifixion timeline.

Gerd Lüdemann is a German historian and New Testament scholar. He is also an atheist. With respect to the creed repeated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, Lüdemann writes, "the elements in the tradition are to be dated to the first two years after the crucifixion of Jesus...the formation of the appearance traditions mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 falls into the time between 30 and 33 C.E." Regarding the post-crucifixion appearances, Ludemann states, "It may be taken as historically

certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ". Wow! That's pretty amazing, isn't it? An atheist historian and New Testament scholar admits that the disciples weren't making it up; they really did have experiences with the risen Jesus!

Moreover, the radically changed lives of the disciples attests to the truthfulness of their testimony about the risen Christ. As described in the classic *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, each of the original Twelve (i.e., the apostles, minus Judas Iscariot, plus Matthias who replaced him) eventually died martyrs' deaths, with the lone exception of John. It wasn't like they were all rounded up right away and executed. Over the course of the ensuing decades, as they set off in different directions with the message of the gospel, they were persecuted and ultimately faced martyrdom, one by one. Even John was targeted for execution, but he miraculously survived and was exiled to the Greek prison island called Patmos instead.

Fact is, history does not record a single example of any eyewitness of the resurrected Jesus ever recanting his or her testimony under any condition. Skeptics will often push back by saying, "So what? People die for all sorts of things that aren't true". Of course, that's right. Many have died for lies over the course of human history, thinking those lies were true. They were sincere in their beliefs but were sincerely mistaken. However, what the skeptics are asking us to believe in this instance is that the apostles and disciples died for a concocted story *knowing* that it was all a bunch of lies, because they are the ones who made it up. People make up lies to get themselves out of trouble, not to get themselves executed! It strains credulity to think that Jesus' followers invented the story then all stuck with it, without exception, even to the bitter end, when all that would have been required to save their lives was to say, "Wait a minute, I think maybe we got some of the details wrong". That never happened. The disciples knew exactly what they were dying for, and they were more than willing to pay the ultimate price.

The Rapid Rise of First Century Christianity

It is historically certain that Christianity began in Judea with a small but extraordinarily influential group of Jews around AD 33. No one doubts this, and it can be easily confirmed with a basic internet search. Prior to Jesus' crucifixion, the

movement had remained confined to pockets of believers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. This is a land area roughly the size of New Jersey. Within 30 years of the crucifixion, the message of Jesus had made massive inroads into three separate continents. To the west, the gospel had made it at least to Italy and possibly as far as Spain. To the east, it had made it to India. To the south, the gospel took hold from Alexandria, Egypt well into Ethiopia.

Think about it. That's quite a remarkable 30-year trajectory for the legacy of an often-homeless itinerant Jewish preacher who was rejected by his own people and executed as an enemy of the state. Roman crucifixion was designed to stamp out any movement that had the potential for disrupting the sovereignty of the Empire. It didn't just put an end to the leader; it completely obliterated any movement of his residual adherents. Crucifixion was extraordinarily effective in accomplishing this sociopolitical goal.

Perhaps you've heard a skeptic claim something like, "Don't you know that there were many self-professing messiahs around the time of Jesus? Some were even crucified by the Romans like Jesus was!" Well, those claims are probably at least somewhat accurate, but they actually serve to prove our point here. The next time a skeptic makes that observation, ask him or her, "I'm sure there were, but can you give me the name of just one of them? Which other one has people half way around the world still following him today?" So, the question the skeptic must answer is why the story of Jesus not only survived but thrived. Why did Jesus' followers number in the hundreds at the time of his crucifixion, the thousands a couple months later, and quite possible into the millions (quite an astonishing feat in the ancient world) a hundred years later? The legacies of the other would-be messiahs were all extinguished before the end of the first century. How do we best account for the historical anomaly of the rise of Christianity?

Inference to the Best Explanation

Let's put it all together. History firmly establishes that: (1) Jesus of Nazareth died by crucifixion at the hands of Roman authorities in Jerusalem around AD 33; (2) He was buried in the never-before-used tomb of an influential Jew in Jerusalem named Joseph of Arimathea, and that tomb was discovered empty a few days later; (3) Hundreds of people, mostly those who had been disciples of Jesus,

claimed to have seen him, touched him, eaten with him, and to have been taught by him on several different occasions after they had witnessed him die on the cross, culminating in their report of his ascension into heaven; and (4) Based on their eyewitness testimony of Jesus of Nazareth as the crucified, buried, and resurrected Christ (Messiah), the movement that would become known as Christianity exploded onto the scene and made significant inroads into three continents within the first generation of believers. These historical data points are so well-established that the burden of proof rests squarely on the one who would argue against them.

The open-minded, rational person who is willing to go wherever the evidence leads must now ask himself or herself a question: What best explains these four incontrovertible historical data points? The Scriptures plainly teach and the martyrs witnessed to their deaths that the bodily resurrection of Jesus is the reason. Clearly, not everyone agrees. So, we need to examine some alternatives that have been suggested over the years and see how well they match the data. Bear in mind, any adequate explanation must account not just for one or two of this set of four “minimum facts”; it must sufficiently address all of them—and to win the day, it must do a better job than the “theory” that God raised Jesus from the dead.

The Impossibility of Other “Possibilities”

The first (and oldest) rival explanation to the resurrection is the story that the disciples stole the body of Jesus. In fact, it’s so old that it is found in Scripture (see Matthew 28:12-14). There’s no two ways about it; this scenario paints Jesus’ disciples as deliberate deceivers. As such, it may well account for minimum facts #1 and #2, but can it realistically explain #3 and #4? As pointed out above, it is simply unbelievable that the people who lied and invented the story of Jesus’ resurrection would suddenly, radically, and permanently be transformed into relentless witnesses who devote the remainder of their lives to spreading this story and ultimately end up being killed for it. Another problem with the alternate theory is that it has the disciples somehow making it past the dispatch of soldiers who were sent to guard the tomb. These men were trained killers who could themselves be put to death if they failed in their guard duties.

Interestingly, the concocted story the chief priests and elders paid the soldiers to tell—that the disciples came while they were sleeping and stole the body—doesn't even make sense on the surface. After all, if they were asleep, how would they know that it was Jesus' disciples who came to steal the body. This false account has the soldiers recognizing people in their sleep! (Perhaps they all suffered from sleep paralysis?)

A second alternative scenario suggests that Jesus did not, in fact, die on the cross. Rather, he merely "swooned". That is, due to trauma and blood loss, Jesus appeared to have died, but in reality his body entered a comatose state. Later, when he was placed in the cool, dark environment of the tomb, he spontaneously resuscitated. Still in critical condition, he then (presumably) rolled away the two-ton stone covering the entrance to the tomb, sneaked past the soldiers guarding the tomb undetected, and made his way back into the city. Once there, he finds his disciples and lies to them, telling them that he has conquered death. He persuades them, not that he desperately needs immediate medical attention, but that he is the triumphant Lord. Over the next few weeks, he revisits them a number of times (and even manages to magically disappear at the end of a few of those encounters), then somehow tricks them into believing they witnessed him ascend into heaven. In reality, he absconded (in many versions of this story with a wife), moved out of the region, and settled down to live a relatively normal life, complete with family, kids, and presumably a regular 9-5 job in a neighboring country. You can just think of it as the former-messiah witness protection program if you'd like.

A third alternative narrative is that wild animals ate the body of Jesus. This scenario imagines these animals somehow managed to sneak past the detail of soldiers, work together to roll away a stone weighing two tons, and then dragged the body off to consume it. Despite their ravenous appetites, these animals were evidently very well-mannered. After all, according to John 20:7, they neatly folded the burial head cloth and left it in the tomb. Of course, this account only addresses minimum facts #1 and #2. It doesn't explain the post-resurrection appearances, the night-and-day changes in the lives of the disciples, or the explosion of the Christian message across three continents within the lifetimes of the apostles.

A fourth story designed to excuse away the empty tomb is that the disciples went to the wrong tomb, saw it empty, assumed that Jesus was risen from the dead, then invented a story to back that up. Let's play along with this (false) narrative for just a moment. We'll suppose that the women, being in grief, went to what they thought was the tomb of Jesus on Sunday morning but, in fact, they had the wrong tomb. They find the tomb empty and go back and report this to the others. These too (all of them) return to the wrong tomb. At some point, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who buried Jesus' body on Joseph's property, get involved. They too go to the wrong tomb in search of Jesus. Even the enemies of Jesus and the disciples, when they hear the story, fail to go to the right tomb and produce the body. (In fact, they sent soldiers to guard the wrong tomb, since they later admitted that the tomb was empty.) Literally everybody just keeps going back to the same wrong tomb. This, of course, is an unbelievable scenario. And, again, it does nothing to address the post-crucifixion appearances of Jesus, the testimonies of the disciples, and the rise of early Christianity.

A fifth alternative narrative imagines that Jesus was buried in a common grave. As such, it makes the Biblical witnesses out to be liars. Often, skeptics make the claim that Romans threw the bodies of crucified criminals in common graves, often leaving the bodies to be devoured by dogs. While that practice was common, it doesn't apply to the case of Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus was crucified, not as a common criminal, but as an insurrectionist. Moreover, while the Romans had no qualms about leaving bodies to be consumed by wild animals or even to rot on crosses, the Jews were very insistent on giving bodies proper burials, even the bodies of those who were executed. The idea that the Romans would have honored Joseph's request to remove Jesus' body from the cross and bury it temporarily during the Jewish Passover is entirely consistent with what is known of the relations between the Romans and Jews in early first century Palestine. Thus, the alternative narrative about burial in a common grave is merely ad hoc and devoid of any evidence to back it up (and significant evidence to negate it).

A sixth alternative (and the final one we'll consider here) is that the disciples hallucinated the post-crucifixion appearances of Jesus. This explanation has gained strong popular support recently among unbelievers on college and university campuses in my experiences. It has the benefit of making the concession that the disciples may have been telling the truth. They were reporting

what they saw and heard; however, these “appearances” were really just hallucinations induced by either severe duress and bereavement or a combination of that with unintentional ingestion of some type of hallucinogenic substance. One particularly fanciful version of the hallucination theory imagines that the communion bread consumed by the disciples after Jesus’ crucifixion was contaminated with a type of spore that was capable of inducing hypnogogic and hallucinogenic effects. Accordingly, the disciples hallucinated the appearances of Jesus, believed them to be real, and began spreading spurious reports about Jesus being risen from the dead.

As a former psychopharmacology professor, the hallucinogenic effects of drugs (natural and synthetic) are something I have studied in detail. Also, while studying toward a Ph.D. in psychology with an emphasis in neuroscience, I learned a great deal about how hallucinations occur. Hallucinations, especially those induced by drugs, are highly idiosyncratic events, meaning that one person’s hallucination is unique to that person and unlikely to be shared by another “tripping” at the same time. One person might hallucinate a dragon, while another sees giant butterflies, and yet another experiences an brilliantly-colored exploding sun. The disciples all “hallucinated” exactly the same thing—Jesus (and not a dragon, giant butterflies or an exploding sun or anything like that). They allegedly “hallucinated” a person that many of them had just spent every day of the past three years with. This is not how hallucinations occur.

Moreover, the gospels report at least ten different occasions (different places at different times) across a period of 40 days that the disciples encounter Jesus. During one appearance alone, over 500 people witness him at the same time. Now, it is possible to have “mass hallucinations”, but these depend on highly suggestible people being “primed” to interpret a very vague stimulus in a particular way. Again, this is nothing like the eyewitness testimonies of those who reportedly encountered Jesus alive again after his crucifixion. Nor does hallucination theory explain the dramatic, instantaneous conversion of Saul of Tarsus (i.e., the Apostle Paul) on the road to Damascus.

Notice also that we didn’t even touch on how Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection fulfill numerous Old Testament prophecies, like the ones we examined earlier from Isaiah 52 and 53. When we put all of this together, it’s clear

that only the gospel storyline makes good sense out of the events surrounding Jesus' life, ministry, death, resurrection, and the rise of Christianity in the mid first century. For two thousand years skeptics have had time to work on their alternative storylines, and these are the best they've come up with. All of them fail miserably. Each of them requires more faith to believe than is required to accept that Jesus is who he claimed to be and did what the Word of God says he did.

As we close this section, let's revisit this recurring theme of humans "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18). I am convinced that this is the driving force behind the rejection of the clear and persuasive evidence God has provided for the resurrection. I can attest to this even from personal experiences. During my sojourn into atheism, I was aware of at least some of these evidences, having reviewed them carefully during my teenage years in a youth group of a Bible-believing church. Additionally, during my undergraduate days at West Virginia University, I spent at least some time in Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ) and other Christian groups. I distinctly recall being impressed by the evidence for the resurrection I read about in Josh McDowell's *More Than a Carpenter* and other books. Nevertheless, about half way through graduate school, I checked out of Christianity for several years. I even became a hostile "counter-apologist" of the Christian faith for a while. How did that happen?

Well, I can tell you how it *didn't* happen. I *didn't* experience some challenging questions to my Christian faith and respond to them like a rational, objective thinker interested only in distinguishing fact from fiction would do. I *didn't* go and deliberately and intensely study both sides of the controversies about the existence of God, the validity and reliability of the Bible, and so forth. I *didn't* set aside time and space for careful, detached reflection on the truthfulness of Christianity, with a humble, teachable mind, willing to go wherever the evidence leads. That's not how it happened. Truth be told, I ended up swapping the Biblical worldview I grew up with for secular humanism primarily for social reasons. During my graduate school years in a psychology department at the University of Georgia, I was socialized into secular humanism, which eventually opened the door for atheism when the opportunity presented itself. I distinctly remember feeling empowered and enlightened as I "liberated myself" from the (imaginary) oppressive chains of the Christian faith and Biblical worldview I grew up believing.

Interestingly, there remained something particularly intriguing about the person of Jesus Christ throughout this journey into pointed skepticism. I quickly discovered that I could disparage at will things like Biblical creationism, the flood of Noah, obscure ceremonial and civil laws of the ancient Hebrews, and so forth. However, when it came to the person of Jesus, there remained a powerful reluctance. I was never able to put my finger on it, but I just never felt comfortable disparaging or dismissing Jesus in his entirety.

As a committed “naturalist” at the time, I reasoned that the story of the resurrection *must* be false, but I never spent much time in critical thought on how it was false or what else might explain the history of the Christian faith. I just knew that I had become committed to God’s non-existence (although, like most professing atheists, I would have denied that at the time), and I knew I liked living *my* life on *my* terms, not on God’s. I was aware that evidence for Jesus and his resurrection existed and that it deserved to be reexamined and reconsidered as objectively as possible. Yet, I never brought myself to doing that. Instead, I suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. How very...Biblical.

Truth is, the Apostle Paul was spot on when he announced before the Athenian philosophers that God “has furnished proof to all people by raising him [Christ] from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Realistically, if the resurrection never happened, you and I would never have heard of Jesus of Nazareth. There is no good reason to think otherwise. The central claim of the Christian faith—the one on which it rises or falls—is that Christ died and rose again. An honest examination of the evidence should lead any humble and teachable person to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be and did what the gospels say he did.

Why then do so many people still deny Jesus’ resurrection? For many who deny it, it is their precommitment to naturalism/materialism that obligates this denial. For *all* who deny it, it is their penchant for and affinity towards unrighteousness. God is the great Revealer of Truth, but fallen humans are experts in truth suppression and truth denial.

Questions to Consider:

What objections do you think you are most likely to face when you assert that there is great historical evidence to support the bodily resurrection of Jesus? How will you respond to those? Which of the alternative hypotheses discussed above

do you think is most believable and why? Why does that explanation fail? Is it reasonable to think that all of the disciples faced martyrdom for something they knew was a lie because they were the ones who invented the story? Why or why not?

Is It Narrowminded to Say There's Only One Way to God?

Here's another objection we face nearly every day in public evangelism. See if something like this sounds familiar to you: "You Christians are so narrowminded! Do you mean to tell me that you think your way is the only way? I mean, there are so many different paths to truth and paths to God. Out of all of the different religions, yours is the only one that got it right? How arrogant is that?"

The hidden assumption here is that, if there is a God, all that he should ultimately care about is people's sincerity. If it turns out that someone was wrong about what they believed, God should overlook it if that person was sincere, just sincerely mistaken. But notice here: This amounts to projecting human ideas, judgments, attitudes, and expectations onto God. We're essentially saying that God should do X because we think we would do X. This is another example of humans expecting God to be like us. It's also expecting God, who is the very paragon of truth, to compromise truth in order to accommodate sinful humans.

These assumptions are fatally flawed. The first flaw is to assume good things about the unregenerate human heart. Contrary to popular opinion, the Bible does not teach that "most people have good and sincere hearts and want to do the right thing". That's an assumption of secular humanism, not Biblical Christianity. To the contrary, Scripture teaches that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick (Jeremiah 17:9). How can an instrument that is "desperately sick" and "deceitful above all things" be relied upon to evaluate the commandments and judgments of a perfectly holy, righteous, just and true Creator?

The second problem is that Scripture clearly attests that God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). Thus, it constitutes a "category error" (a type of logical fallacy) to assume God's perfect just and true nature should align with our limited, finite, contaminated, corrupt, and

degenerate human intuitions about what is “fair” or what “I would do if I were God”.

Jesus plainly taught that he is the only way to God (John 14:6). Scripture is clear and unequivocal that “there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). The New Testament unambiguously affirms that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Because only Jesus is the Son of God (and, by his very nature, God himself), and because only Jesus perfectly obeyed the law of God, only Jesus is qualified to represent us before God. Only Jesus could be authorized to die in our place. Only Jesus could voluntarily take upon himself the curse that you and I earned through our disobedience. Only Jesus could freely pour out his blood as a ransom for many. And only Jesus, being the perfect sacrifice that was completely pleasing to the Father, could be “declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:5).

On the campuses and streets, we often get confronted with something like this: “You mean to tell me that my Hindu (or Muslim, Buddhist, etc.) friend is going to hell just for being a Muslim?” Well, yes and no. It certainly is a sin to reject the One, true, living God and worship a false god. All of these religions do this in one way or another. But the problem is not just that.

The problem is that there is that none of these false gods or false prophets (Vishnu, Brahma, Shiva, Krishna, Siddhartha Gautama, Muhammad, et cetera) can do anything to take away even one sin. None of them is capable of providing them with the righteousness they need to enter the presence of a perfectly Holy God who, as “a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29) and who, due to His perfect righteousness, “cannot countenance evil” (Habakkuk 1:13). No “religion” can do what needs to be done—not Hinduism, not Buddhism, not Islam, not Roman Catholicism, not even “Baptist-ism” or “Pentecostalism”!

So, how do we respond to the charge that Biblical Christianity is “narrowminded”? Well, truth, by its very nature, is exclusive. You’ve probably never heard a reasonable and rational person bemoan the fact that, because $2 + 2 = 4$, then the sums “3” and “5” and “8” and “17” are excluded. It would sound strange for someone to refer to the fact that $2 + 2 = 4$ as “narrowminded”,

although in a sense, it is! It is “narrow” in the sense that it’s the only solution that works. It’s the only sum that gets it right. Think about it this way: If it’s true that God is holy, righteous, and just, and it’s true that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), what other “solution” to the human predicament can there be than that God Himself comes and does for us what we cannot possibly do for ourselves?

Similarly, it is clear from Scripture that the way is narrow (Matthew 7:14), because only Jesus could do the perfect work of salvation required by God. Rather than criticize truth for being too restrictive, we should thank God that He has made a way, through Jesus Christ and him alone, for us to be saved. We should also rejoice that God has furnished clear and irrefutable proof of the truth of Christianity by raising Jesus from the dead (Acts 17:31)! Christians have good news to share, indeed! Let us not back down from lovingly but boldly proclaiming that repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone is capable of making any person right with God.

Questions to Consider:

If there could be another way, besides Jesus, for sinful humans to be made right with a perfectly righteous and just God, what might that look like?

How would it work?

What would that “path” reveal about the nature and character of God?