

WHY TRUST THE BIBLE?
PART 2 – FULL TEXT
BECAUSE HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD (ie HE IS RISEN!)

SOURCES

Matt Perman: Contributor to [desiringgod.org](https://www.desiringgod.org)
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/historical-evidence-for-the-resurrection>

Tim Keller: *The Reason for God*

SUMMARY OF PART 1 – Good case for the historical Jesus, but this doesn't prove he is God.

Please keep these points from Part 1 in mind when viewing the evidence for the resurrection. Especially the earliness of the Scriptures and the fact they are written by eyewitnesses who would have seen it.

In Part 1 we discuss historical evidence for the existence of Christ, his deeds while on earth, and established the existence of his followers. While this makes a compelling case for the historical existence of Jesus, it doesn't necessarily prove his claims to be the Son of God.

BEFORE WE BEGIN - A BRIEF WORD ON BIAS

Although there are non Christian sources that back up the reliability of the New Testaments claims, to exclude the testimony of the Gospels themselves simply because they come from a Christian viewpoint would be a mistake historically.

Bias exists in all forms of historical text, whether religious or secular. It is natural for any author writing on even the most basic historical information to be speaking from a certain standpoint.

You would get a completely different historical summary of events of the last 20 years in North Korea from a writer outside of North Korea than you would from one inside.

The job of an historian is not to ignore those texts altogether, but to take into account the author's viewpoint and assess the information in light of that.

John Dixon states that it is not the case the historians view the Gospels in a special basket called 'religious texts', but instead view them as they are, "the earliest, most plentiful sources for the life of the historical Jesus."

THE CRITERION OF EMBARRASMENT – TOO COUNTER PRODUCTIVE

A popular theory in recent time is that the Gospels were written later by the leaders of the early church in an attempt to consolidate their power. Even if you ignore all the evidence for the early dating of the Gospels, the oral traditions and the non-Christian sources confirming the beliefs of the early church, the Gospels still don't paint an accurate picture of this theory.

The reason is that they contain too many details that if they were being made up, were far too counter productive and embarrassing for the church. There are a number of examples of this, below are just a few.

- If the Gospels were made up years later by the church you would expect to see Jesus speaking authoritatively on matters that were of debate within the church at the time. This is exactly what you would expect in regards to the claim of the church trying to consolidate its power.
- A great example is whether Gentile believers were required to be circumcised. We see so much on this topic in Paul's letters which are dated earlier than the Gospels. Paul tells of the persecution he endured for holding to the claim that the cross of Christ alone was enough to save Gentile believers. "And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution?. (Galatians 5:11)
- If they were writing the Gospels at a date later than Paul, surely they would have taken a position on this and injected words affirming that position into Jesus' mouth.

Another extremely confusing admission for the church leaders to make, if they were trying to concoct the perfect story, is that of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking the Father if he could get out of going to the cross. 'Can this cup pass from me?'; even more so is the inclusion of Jesus on the cross saying 'Why have you forsaken me' to God.

As Tim Keller states, "These things would have only offended or deeply confused first century potential converts. They would have concluded Jesus was weak and was failing his God'.

These passages are very confusing even for us as modern day believers. If you were trying to paint a picture of a savior of the world who had conquered death and was vindicated by God, there is no way in the world you would put a line in there where he asks the Father why he has forsaken him.

Finally we have the fact that the Gospel narratives paint the leaders of the early church in a very bad light in many cases.

Tim Keller, sees them depicted as “petty and jealous, almost impossibly slow witted, and in the end as cowards who either actively or passively failed their master?”

René Breuel states, “We see the future leaders of the church, for example, doing immature things like discussing among themselves who was the greatest one, or running away with fear when Jesus was imprisoned. Or if someone wanted to give credibility to Peter, one of the main leaders of the early church, he would have certainly left out the story where Peter denies Jesus three times, or when Jesus says to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!”

This is particularly evident in the story of Peter’s denial of Jesus. Why anyone would concoct this story of the most prominent leader of the early church makes no sense. Richard Bauckham has reasoned that no one but Peter himself would have dared to recount it unless Peter himself was the source and had authorized its preservation.

What is the most logical reason for their inclusion? René Breuel writes, “Only biographies which try to portray the events as faithfully as possible would include such stories. Fantastic accounts would retell the events in a more advantageous, rosier way. They would certainly leave out the embarrassing details. The most probable reason these counter-productive events are narrated in the Gospels is that the writers were committed to reporting the facts as they really happened – as embarrassing as they may have been

THE RESURRECTION

Of all the arguments or topics to debate, this is by far the most important. It is what Christianity hinges on. If a lie, all the evidence we just discussed, however compelling, is worthless. If he was not raised from the dead he is merely an historical figure who was crucified. If true, then it vindicates Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God and opens up everything he said to be the very word of God.

As Christian apologist Dr. Theodore Cabal states, “If he is not raised from the dead, then Christianity is silly. There’s no forgiveness for our sins”. The apostle Paul himself said “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” (1 Corinthians 15:14)

Tim Keller in his book *The Reason for God* states, “Sometimes people approach me and say ‘I really struggle with this aspect of Christian teaching’. I like this part, but I can’t accept this part’. I usually respond: ‘If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all of what he said. If he didn’t, then why worry about any of what he said? This issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like his teaching but whether or not he rose from the dead. That is how the first hearers felt who heard reports of the resurrection. They knew that if it was true we can’t live our lives any

way we want. It also meant we don't have to be afraid of anything. Not Roman swords, not cancer, nothing. If Jesus rose from the dead, it changes everything." When it comes to the question of Why trust the Bible, if we believe Jesus rose from the dead then he is therefore vindicated as the son of God. And if he is vindicated then we must take everything he says as truth.

Looking at the evidence

When I first began looking into this and was presented with the term 'historical evidence for the resurrection', despite being a Christian and believing in it myself, I still thought that it was crazy. The other stuff I could understand, you can prove he lived, you can prove he was crucified and so on. But how could you possibly prove in a logical way he was raised to life?

To my encouragement, I found that not only is proving this rationally achievable, but that the argument for the resurrection is perhaps the strongest of all the areas.

Matt Perman, writing on desiringgod.org, "A method commonly used today to determine the historicity of an event is 'inference to the best explanation' William Lane Craig describes this as an approach where we "begin with the evidence available to us and then infer what would, if true, provide the best explanation of that evidence." In other words, we ought to accept an event as historical if it gives the best explanation for the evidence surrounding it.

In the same way as we did in Part 1, we can look at this evidence in a clear and sober way, not assuming that the New Testament is inspired by God but seeing what is there and trying to account for it with the explanation that fits all the evidence the best.

There are three truths that are accepted by virtually all scholars regardless of their school of thought. These are:

- The tomb in which Jesus was buried was discovered empty by a group of women on the Sunday following the crucifixion.
- Jesus' disciples had real experiences with one whom they believed was the risen Christ.
- As a result of the preaching of these disciples, which had the resurrection at its center, the Christian church was established and grew.

DID THEY EVEN CLAIM THAT HE WAS RISEN?

A popular theory is that the resurrection story was invented by the church years later and injected into Scripture and the legend of Christ.

The three things that we look at to refute this are Paul's testimony about the disciples, oral tradition and the written works of the early church.

Paul reports knowing some of the disciples personally and says in 1 Corinthians 15:11, referring to the resurrection– ‘Whether it was I or they, this is what we preach,’ Paul, writing very early (around 55AD) is saying here that between himself and the other disciples who were witnesses to the events, they testify to their belief that Christ was raised.

Scholars identify several places in the New Testament that include passages of oral tradition. This is significant because it indicates that these oral traditions were around before the writing of the New Testament for the writers to include it in their texts.

The best example of this oral tradition is Paul - quoting an early church creed in 1st Corinthians, this is proof that the resurrection story was circulating from the start. Viz:

1 Corinthians 15: 3-10

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

Scholars date Paul’s letter to AD55 (25 years after Jesus death), the time that he ‘passed on’ this creed to the Corinthian church as 5 years earlier, and the creed itself to within years or months of Jesus death.

Matt Perman - It is generally agreed by critical scholars that Paul received this creed from Peter and James between 3-5 years after the crucifixion. Now, Peter and James are listed in this creed as having seen the risen Christ. Since they are the ones who gave this creed to Paul, this is therefore a statement of their own testimony. As the Jewish Scholar Pinchahs Lapide has said, this creed "may be considered the statement of eyewitnesses".

John Dixon - The significance of this creed is obvious because it establishes beyond doubt that the core of the Jesus story – his status as ‘Christ’, his death, burial, claimed resurrection and appearances and founding of a famous twelve – was not part of a slowly developing legend".

On top of this we have the New Testament documents themselves, all clearly stating the belief that Christ was raised and all written very close to the events themselves as discussed in Part 1.

There is no doubt the claim to his resurrection was being made from the beginning.

As stated in Part 1, a legend like this takes years to slowly develop over a period of time and relies heavily on the people involved being long gone from the scene to refute any error in the claims.

POINTERS TO THE PROOF OF THE RESURRECTION

The Five Minimal Facts

Similar to my points in Part 1, there are five 'minimal facts' concerning the resurrection that most scholars, including liberals, accept as sound historically regardless of whether they believe the resurrection itself to be true.

1. The tomb was empty.
2. Jesus disciples' belief that he appeared to them after his death.
3. Jesus was killed by crucifixion
4. The conversion of skeptics James and Paul
5. The spread of the early church.

1. THE EMPTY TOMB

It is taken as historically sound that the tomb was empty, his body was not there. The reasons for this are as follows.

- a. Jewish admission of not being able to find his body.

Firstly, it is documented not only in Scripture but also in early Jewish writings, that the Jews did not deny the empty tomb. These references address the fact that the Jews instead made the claim that his disciples had stolen his body. This is attested to in Matthew 28:11-15 along with The Toledoth Jesu, a compilation of early Jewish writings, and a record of a second century debate between a Christian and a Jew, in which a reference is made to the fact that the Jews claim the body was stolen.

The obvious thing that is being conceded by this stolen body theory is that the tomb was empty.

Matt Perman – writing on desiringgod.org says: “Why is this important? Remember that the Jewish leaders were opposed to Christianity. They were hostile witnesses. In acknowledging the empty tomb, they were admitting the reality of a fact that was certainly not in their favor. So why would they admit that the tomb was empty unless the evidence was too strong to be denied? Dr. Paul Maier calls this “positive evidence from a hostile source. In essence, if a source admits a fact that is decidedly not in its favor, the fact is genuine.”

- b. Why didn't they parade his body through the town?

The most obvious point to make in regards to the tomb is that if the body were still there, anyone in opposition to this movement had the ability to go look for themselves. Further to that the simplest thing to do to refute these claims of Christ having risen would be to retrieve that body and parade it through the city for all to see.

Say this happened in your town, and the claim started to gain momentum and attract a large number of followers. If you were deeply opposed to the teaching of someone and then heard his disciples claiming resurrection, it seems obvious to me the grave would be the first place you would go. And if you found a body the first thing you would want to do would be to show it to everybody. If Jesus' body remained in the tomb, there can be no doubt this would have happened. It would have delivered a knockout blow and stopped the growth of the church then and there.

- c. The disciples immediately began preaching Christ's resurrection in the very city where he was crucified and buried.

Matt Perman states, "Jesus' disciples did not go to some obscure place where no one had heard of Jesus to begin preaching about the resurrection, but instead began preaching in Jerusalem, the very city where Jesus had died and been buried. They could not have done this if Jesus was still in his tomb--no one would have believed them. No one would be foolish enough to believe a man had raised from the dead when his body lay dead in the tomb for all to see".

Imagine if I decided to do this with someone in the fellowship. Take Don for example. Don dies and I decide to say that he was the Son of God. If I wanted to get away with this as a lie I would take it far away from people who saw his life, furthermore I would take it as far away as possible from the place where he was currently buried. If I went out into Creswick and started telling people this, there is not a chance that it would take off as a belief among people who saw him live, saw him die and could clearly see the place where his body lay.

- d. The first eyewitnesses of the empty tomb were women.

The Gospels list women as the first to discover the tomb empty. This is important because the testimony of women in 1st century Jewish culture was considered questionable. In Roman and Jewish culture, a woman's testimony was not admissible in court. It would be counterproductive to include women as the first witnesses if you were making this up.

Jewish Historian Joesphus writes, But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex."

As William Lane Craig says, "if the empty tomb story were a legend, then it is most likely that the male disciples (probably the early church leaders such as Peter) would have been made the first to discover the empty tomb. The fact that despised women, whose testimony was deemed worthless, were the chief witnesses to the fact of the empty tomb can only be plausibly explained if, like it or not, they actually were the discoverers of the empty tomb.

N.T Wright adds that there must have been enormous pressure on the early proclaimers of the Christian message to remove the women from the accounts.

The only reason to include women as the initial eyewitnesses to the empty tomb is that this was simply the truth and the writers were committed to reporting the events as they happened, as damaging to their testimony they may have been.

Matt Perman summaries things - Because of the strong evidence for the empty tomb, most recent scholars do not deny it. D.H. Van Daalen has said, "It is extremely difficult to object to the empty tomb on historical grounds; those who deny it do so on the basis of theological or philosophical assumptions."

As Paul Althaus writes, the resurrection proclamation "could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned."

2 JESUS DISCIPLES BELIEF THAT HE APPEARED TO THEM AND THE WAY IN WHICH THEY DIED FOR THAT BELIEF

Regardless of whether you think they were literally seeing the risen Jesus in bodily form, it can be taken as certain that the disciples certainly believed that is what they were seeing.

The wealth of references in Scripture, non-Christian documents and writings of the early church fathers confirms the disciples belief they had seen the risen Jesus.

The most important point that backs up this claim is that they were all prepared to be severely persecuted and die for their faith.

These deaths are attested to in numerous places in Scripture along with the non-Christian references. It can be taken as certain that early believers of Jesus were persecuted and in some cases died for their faith. Josephus references the deaths of James and John the Baptist. While Tacitus talks of the 'exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.'

Now this willingness to die certainly doesn't prove he did appear to them. But it absolutely confirms they believed that he had.

There are two alternative theories here which are put forward to explain the appearances.

1. They were lying.
2. They were hallucinating the appearances.

'Liars make poor martyrs'

Tim Keller writes "As Pascal put it, 'I believe those witnesses that get their throats cut'. Virtually all the apostles and early Christian leaders died for their faith, and it is hard to believe that this kind of powerful self sacrifice would be done to support a hoax."

It is staggering to me that if this were a lie, that they would all willingly go to what were mostly horrific, agonizing deaths and not one of them would give up and admit that it was all a lie.

Yes people have died in the past for a lie, but they always thought it to be the truth. No-one would die for something they know to be a lie. It has been said 'liars make poor martyrs'.

Further to this, the early apostles are exactly the people who would know if it were true or not. They were directly involved in the time and events that had taken place, so they were not dying years later for their faith in the resurrection, much like a twentieth century person of any religion would now, but for the reality of the resurrection they had witnessed.

Matt Perman writes "If Jesus did not rise, the disciples knew it. Thus, they wouldn't have just been dying for a lie that they mistakenly believed was true. They would have been dying for a lie that they knew was a lie."

Hallucinations

The other theory to dismiss the claim of a risen Christ is that the disciples were being honest in reporting what they saw, but what they had seen was in fact the result of hallucinations. There are several problems with this.

- Firstly, this theory could be valid if the resurrection claim was being made by a single person only. The sources we have indicate that not only are there multiple sightings of the risen Christ, but three separate instances of group appearances, one to a group of 500. It is obvious that a group of people would not hallucinate the same thing at the same time.
- Psychologist Gary Collins states, "Hallucinations are individual occurrences. By their very nature only one person can see a given hallucination at a time. They certainly aren't something that can be seen by a group of people. Neither is it possible that one person could somehow induce a hallucination in someone else. Since a hallucination only exists in the subjective, personal sense, it is obvious that others cannot witness it.
- Secondly, it is untenable because it does not account for the physical nature of the appearances. The authors go to great lengths to stress the physicality of the Jesus they saw. Speaking of his invitation to touch his body and see, the wounds on his body and perhaps most importantly his eating and drinking.
- Luke 24: 37-42 records this. They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.
- This inclusion of the physical nature also refutes the common claim that the resurrection story isn't meant to be taken literally, but refers more to the disciples belief they could still feel his presence with them. The verse about Jesus eating a piece of fish is Luke's attempt to make it abundantly clear that he was there physically.
- It is also reliant on the assumption that the hallucinations came as a result of wishful thinking. That the disciples would be open to the idea that Jesus even could be raised from the dead. We will touch more on this later but in the Jewish culture of the time it was absolutely not the case they would have believed a physical person could be raised to life. Jews certainly believed in resurrection, but only in the sense of all rising together at the end of time. The idea of a single individual rising in the middle of history was completely foreign to them.

Atheist New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdermann concludes, "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."

Paula Fredriksen of Boston University, a very liberal scholar and not an evangelical comments, "I know in their own terms what they saw was the raised Jesus. That's what they say and then all the historical evidence we have afterwards attest to their conviction that that's what they saw. I'm not saying that they really did see the raised Jesus. I wasn't there. I don't know what they saw. But I do know that as a historian that they must have seen something."

3. JESUS WAS KILLED BY CRUCIFIXION

It may seem an obvious point to make, but there is no doubt among scholars that Jesus was truly dead when he was crucified.

John Dominic Crossan says, "'That he was crucified is as sure as anything historical can ever be. Skeptic James Tabor says, 'I think we need have no doubt that given Jesus execution by Roman crucifixion he was truly dead'."

The need to address this rises from theories that he was only made to appear that he had died. The Quran states they did not kill him but "it was made to appear to them". This leads to claims that the authorities either substituted a body that looked like Jesus onto the cross, secretly brought him down early so that he would recover, or as the Quran states 'Allah raised him up unto himself'.

Both of these claims are extremely hard to believe for obvious reasons. For starters no Jewish or Roman authorities had any good reason to keep him alive, in fact quite the opposite. The substituted body could never have worked due to the public nature of the execution, with many witnesses present who clearly knew what Jesus looked like.

The claim of surviving the crucifixion is even more far fetched when you take into account the severity of Roman crucifixion. Designed to produce a slow death with maximum pain and suffering, Tacitus refers to it as 'the extreme penalty'. Cicero called it 'cruel and disgusting' and said that the very word cross should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears'.

I will avoid going into too much detail here, but would say that the process is absolutely horrific. Even before the actual hanging upon the cross it was common for victims to be severely whipped. This scourging was intended to bring a victim to a state just short of death.

Alexander Metherell, MD, PhD states “We know that many people would die from this kind of beating even before they could be crucified. At the least, the victim would experience tremendous pain and go into shock.”

This is the account we have in Jesus’ case. All three Gospels report him being beaten, scourged and unable to carry his cross, instead having Simon of Cyrene carry it for him.

As far as the question of whether one could survive a crucifixion, we do have an interesting passage in Josephus in which he mentions seeing some friends of his crucified. “I saw many captives crucified, and remembered three of them as my former acquaintance. I was very sorry at this in my mind, and went with tears in my eyes to Titus, and told him of them; so he immediately commanded them to be taken down, and to have the greatest care taken of them, in order to their recovery; yet two of them died under the physician’s hands, while the third recovered.”

Josephus mentions that despite being taken down and given ‘the greatest care’, two of the men still died.

It is hard to imagine given the state that Jesus’ body would have been in after the severe flogging he received prior to the cross, even if he were brought down and somehow survived, that this state would somehow inspire his followers to believe he had defeated sin and death and was the savior of the world.

Lastly we have the account of the Quran that Allah raised him up and he ascended to heaven. If you are a Christian and believe he was eventually raised to heaven after his resurrection appearances, it is entirely probable to believe this could have been the case once he was laid in the tomb.

However this view would only account for the empty tomb and could not explain the disciples belief of his bodily appearances afterwards, their willingness to die for it and the rapid spread of the church based on this belief.

The consensus that Jesus was crucified and dead as a result is absolutely overwhelming. As one NT Scholar puts it ‘to deny it would be to take a marginal position that would get you laughed out of the academic world.’

4. THE CONVERSION OF JAMES AND PAUL

James was the half brother of Jesus.

There is evidence in the Gospels of Mark and John that James along with Jesus other half brothers did not believe in Jesus as Lord during his life. Marks passage suggests his brothers heard about his alleged miracles but didn’t believe they were true. They were in a sense daring him to perform them in front of crowds.

Mike Licona in an interview with Lee Strobel states that despite James disbelief being found in Christian Scripture, there is good reason to believe it to be true due to the criterion of embarrassment. "People are not going to invent a story that is embarrassing or potentially discrediting to them, and it would be particularly humiliating for a first-century Rabbi not to have his own family as followers'. Further to this, 'At the crucifixion, to whom does Jesus entrust the care of his mother? Not to one of his half-brothers, who would be the natural choice, but to John, who was a believer. Why on earth would he do this? I think the inference is very strong. If James or any of his brothers had been believers, they would have gotten the nod instead. So it's reasonable to conclude that none of them was a believer, and Jesus was more concerned with his mother being entrusted into the hands of a spiritual brother. "

James' reluctance to believe is perfectly understandable when you think of a human brotherly relationship. If someone had a brother who was gathering that much of a following among people, with thousands building him up as a fantastic teacher, let alone the Messiah, the natural human reaction would be to feel at the very least jealous, and at the most even hostile towards him.

Add to this the claim that Jesus was making to forgive sins and to be the son of God, and this may even have been hugely embarrassing to James. I can't imagine him being comfortable with what was going on in Jesus life let alone worshipping his own brother as Lord and God.

But then we see James making a complete turnaround. The creed mentioned by Paul in 1st Corinthians 15 lists James as having encountered the risen Jesus. Scholars also think that Paul may have received this creed from James himself when Paul first met him after his conversion.

This is detailed in Paul's letter to the Galatians where he states that after his conversion and commission from Christ to go and preach to the Gentiles he 'did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)

If this case and Paul did receive this creed at this time, James himself could have personally endorsed what the creed says about him at his meeting with Paul.

We also have the non-Christian reference to James in Josephus, detailing in 62AD that James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ was brought to be stoned. This not only confirms James' existence as his brother, but also his martyrdom.

James also goes on from his conversion to become the leader of the Jerusalem church, as detailed in Acts and Galatians. So we have him transforming from being unconvinced of his brother's claims, to having such a belief that he became the leader of the church in Jerusalem and was willing to die for that belief.

Critical scholar Reginald Fuller says that even if we didn't have the 1 Corinthians account, 'we should have to invent' such a resurrection appearance to account for James conversion and elevation to the pastorate of the Jerusalem church, which was the center of ancient Christianity.

As scholar William Lane Craig puts it, 'What would it take to convince you that your brother was the Lord? Really the only thing that could account for that is what is reported in the early creed: that the crucified Jesus appeared to James.'

From Saul to Paul

The conversion of Paul from persecutor of the early Christian movement to arguably the biggest ever champion of the faith is a staggering thing to comprehend. Then known as Saul of Tarsus, he was a militant Jew who was self described as 'advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. (Galatians 1:14).

Saul saw this movement as a dangerous sect that needed to be stopped, and did all he could to quash it. In Galatians 1:13 he says "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it". Then on his way to Damascus he claims he encountered the risen Christ. From this moment on his life is completely transformed as he goes from persecuting the church, to doing everything he can to spread the message of the Gospel.

It cannot be said that Paul had any logical reason to make this transformation in his life. For starters, as a Jew he would have been deeply offended by the idea that a mere human man could be called God and should be worshipped as risen.

Secondly, the Messiah was accepted by Jews to be blessed by God. Paul states In Galatians 3:13 "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. This is referring to Deuteronomy 21:23 that states the Jewish belief that anyone who was hung on a tree is cursed by God. There is no way Paul would have been convinced that a man hung on a tree, who died and was placed in a tomb could be the coming Messiah.

More importantly he had absolutely nothing to gain from this turnaround in his view. For Paul to admit and preach this among his peers as a Jew resulted in only loss for him personally. At the very least he was mocked and excluded by his own people, and at the worst he suffered physically for the rest of his life. He endured

beatings, floggings, shipwrecks, a stoning and finally was beheaded under Emperor Nero.

All you have to do is read some of Paul's letters and you get an overwhelming idea of the hardships he faced coupled with his unwavering belief in Jesus.

1st Corinthians 4:11-13, "To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment."

2nd Corinthians 4:8-9, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. "

In 2nd Timothy 3:11, Paul speaks of "persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra -- what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me."

Acts 14:19. Luke, writing in Acts details just one account of this. The context is after healing a man in Lystra, the crowds began worshipping Paul and Barnabas as Gods. "Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city."

1 Corinthians 15:19, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."

He certainly was to be pitied if the resurrection were not true. Paul lived a long life full of hardship because he was certain of the resurrection of Jesus.

Why would Paul make this significant life change when he had so much to lose as a result? How could he describe himself as "having nothing, and yet possessing all things." (2nd Corinthians 6:10)

We find the answer from his own words in **Philippians 3:7-8**, "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ."

People don't go through this kind of hardship unless they are thoroughly convinced of something. If there was even a hint of doubt in his mind about Christ being risen as Lord, he could not have continued this fight for so long and 'run his race' so passionately.

The best explanation to my mind was that Paul did indeed encounter the risen Jesus. That despite all that he had previously believed, all that he despised about Christ and his followers, he was presented with this uncomfortable fact and had no choice but to worship him as Lord, enduring the suffering for the sake of the gospel.

5. THE SPREAD OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Perhaps the biggest indication that something extraordinary did indeed happen surrounding Christ is the sudden explosion of the early church. Even under intense persecution that would have given potential believers every reason to avoid coming to Christianity, the church thrived immediately after the disciples went public with the incredible claim of forgiveness of sins through Jesus death and resurrection as its central teaching.

Again I refer to the earlier argument for this being preached in the same city where he lived and died. Not only does this make it very easy for enemies to refute the claim by producing the body, it also makes it extremely difficult for potential believers to be convinced of the resurrection due to the fact that they saw him die.

Keep in mind they were claiming this about a public figure who had taught in the area. It is well established through Christian and non Christian sources that he was known as a teacher who was very public in his ministry and engaged in debate with Jewish authorities.

If there was nothing extraordinary about his earthly activities, not to mention if his body was still in the tomb, it is ludicrous to think people outside of his circle of disciples could be convinced he was God.

The public nature of the events would make it nearly impossible for this mass conversion of believers to be accounted for if you take away the possibility of the supernatural.

Instead we see the rapid spread of this new gospel. Beginning with an account from Luke in Acts 2 when Peter addresses a large crowd of Jews gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. He lays out the gospel to them and “those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”

This accounts for how the Gospel could spread so quickly over such a vast area. These Jews were from “every nation under heaven”, and after Pentecost would have travelled back to where they lived with the new message of Christ.

The picture we get of the disciples immediately after his death further strengthens this argument. The boldness and courage we see in the spread of the gospel is nowhere to be found. All Gospels give us a picture that despite their claims to stay

with Jesus until death, they were dispersed at his arrest and hid for fear of the authorities.

Even after his death we see them hiding in this way. This all has to do with their expectation of the Messiah coming in glory and redeeming Israel in a physical sense. As far as we can see from the text, in their minds this was a failed mission. Their savior had died and there was nowhere else to go with that.

As spoken about earlier, the criterion of embarrassment lends credibility to this Gospel account as it paints the early church leaders in a horrible light. If you were making this up to solidify your own power, why on earth would you include details of such unbelief?

It isn't until their claims of seeing Christ alive that we see this incredible change in their attitude. All the records show how slow they were to believe he had risen from the dead. Even the claims of the first to see him weren't enough for some of them. It took a physical appearance of the risen Christ to set the Christian movement alight and start the rapid spread of the gospel.

MINOR ARGUMENTS

NOT DONE IN A CORNER

The gospel of Luke records the story of Jesus appearing to two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. As they are walking Jesus appears to them and asks (Luke 24:17-18) "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

Furthermore, Luke details an account in the book of Acts where Paul is on trial before Festus, procurator of Judea and King Agrippa. Paul is telling them the story of his experience on the Damascus road and his subsequent conversion. Speaking to Festus he says "The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner." (Acts 26:26).

As Paul says, these things were certainly not done in a corner. This is what makes Christianity remarkable. It centers around the actions of a bodily man, who claimed to be God, who lived and taught in a particular place and time. Because of the public nature of his ministry, people of the time would have been aware of his life and death. This is attested to by the non-Christian writings about his actions and execution. Not only this but the very fact he was crucified suggests that his actions were so public and caused such a stir that the authorities had to resort to killing him to silence his claims.

It can be taken as sound that these things were certainly 'not done in a corner'. And if that is the case, then the argument for the accuracy of what he is reported to have said and done is strengthened greatly due to the amount of people alive to refute it.

This is true not only of his life and death but also his resurrection. The fact the apostles claim group appearances and one to 500 at a time provide weight to the quick spread of the gospel.

I would imagine it would be a nearly impossible challenge for a small group of only 12 people who were close to the events to convince others that a person had been raised from the dead. The more people there were making this claim they had seen him alive, the more others must have been drawn into it.

CIRCUMSTANCIAL EVIDENCE

This relates to the practice of the early church in observing baptism, the Lords Supper and worshipping on a Sunday. These three things on their own do not prove the resurrection, but certainly indicate that they early church held the belief in it.

The ideas of baptism and the Lords supper would have been completely foreign to Jews. Baptism is based on the analogy of Jesus's death, burial and resurrection. It is completely unique and original to Christianity and assumes a resurrection for it to have any meaning.

The Lords Supper is a symbol of Christ's sacrificial death to take away sins. In particular the notion of 'drinking the blood and eating the flesh' of their Savior would have been totally offensive to Jews at the time. John 6:53 records Jesus saying to a group of Jews "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you".

This would be a shocking claim to make in a culture that prohibited the eating of any meat containing blood. Leviticus 7:27 states that, "Anyone who eats blood must be cut off from their people."

The disciples respond to this command in verse 60 saying "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" The term 'hard' here does not mean difficult to understand, but 'unacceptable' or 'offensive'. Craig Keener describes it as expressing 'harshness or difficulty in following rather than merely difficulty in understanding.'

This makes a great deal of sense when we skip ahead to verse 66. "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

This desertion by many of his followers is an understandable reaction within this Jewish setting. The idea of this eating and drinking becoming a ritual of the early

church within this culture is a staggering one if it were not referring to a belief in Christ as being crucified to take away the sin of the world.

Finally it is strange for the church to have broken with tradition and moved their worship day to a Sunday. Douglas Groothuis writes about this, “Very quickly after the death of Jesus the early church began meeting on Sunday, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). This went against the religious grain of Jewish observance that honored Saturday, the seventh day, as the Sabbath ordained by God (Genesis 2:1-3).

The Gospels do not record Jesus advocating a new holy day for Sunday, yet the church began to meet on Sunday in honor of the risen Lord. In this, the early church challenged a core doctrine of their original Jewish faith and the faith of those unconverted Jews around them. Such a transformation would not occur for frivolous reasons. This deep change in spiritual observance is best explained by their belief in the resurrection of Jesus on Sunday.”

THE MISSING MOTIVE

In the same way as Paul, the apostles had absolutely nothing to gain by a false claim of a resurrection. The belief they held that Christ was risen and the forgiveness of sin was made available through his death only lead to exclusion from their people and severe persecution.

Brian Chilton, writing in an article addressing the historical proof of the resurrection writes “J. Warner Wallace has noted in his lectures and books that when a conspiracy is formed, three motivating factors are behinds such a move—power, greed, and/or lust. The disciples would hold no power behind claiming the resurrection as history. They were running around while often being threatened by the Jewish and Roman authorities. As far as greed, they taught that one should not desire earthly possessions, but spiritual ones. Lust was not a factor, either. They taught celibacy before marriage and marital fidelity after marriage.”

There is no logical reason to think the disciples would have made this story up as there was absolutely no earthly gain for them in it.

TOO EARLY TO BE LEGEND

To revisit a point made in Part 1, like the Gospels themselves, the accounts of the resurrection are far too early to be the result of legend. Most claims like this take decades or sometimes centuries to develop. We know the claim he rose was made from the very start, the creed from 1st Corinth 15 1-3 confirms that.

Tim Keller states, For a highly altered, fictionalized account of an event to take hold in the public imagination it is necessary that the eyewitness (and their children and grandchildren) all be long dead. They must be off the scene so they cannot

contradict or debunk the embellishments and falsehoods of the story. The Gospels were written far too soon for this to occur”

WHY TAKE IT TO THE GENTILES?

Paul’s commission from Christ to take the gospel to the Gentiles is another factor that would have been confusing in context of first century Judaism. Not only in a broader sense of the Jewish culture, but also for Paul individually given his background as a zealous Jew.

This is attested to by the fact that Scripture records debate about whether or not the gospel should be shared with the Gentiles. Although the apostles are convinced of the validity of preaching to Gentiles, the very fact that there was discussion about it at all shows that it certainly would not have been a natural assumption for Paul to make.

WHY MAKE IT SO HARD TO BELIEVE?

“This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

Further to the criterion of embarrassment, I can see no logical reason as to why the gospel writers would make Christianity such a difficult belief to follow if it were being invented from nothing.

It is a very popular thing these days to make the claim that Christianity, like all religions, was invented by people of a more primitive age to give people hope. That no one likes the idea that one day they will die and be buried in the ground, and people are willing to believe anything they can that saves them from that thought.

If you read through the Bible with this in mind, there are so many things that just don’t make sense to include if you are trying to entice people into Christianity. As a Christian, I can certainly attest to the hope that it gives; it is a hope beyond belief or explanation. But I can also say that without the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the resurrection Christ, it would be an intolerable burden.

If you were starting something from scratch, the most logical thing to do would be to make it as soft as possible. Acknowledging the faults of humans are common to all, but that’s okay because we are just human. In the end, just be a good person and you can go to heaven. This is the view that is held by most people. It is easy to believe as most people while realizing their shortcomings still believe they are trying their best and being a good person.

This would be all you need to say to convince people to believe in something.

Why would the writers depict Christ saying so many things that are so hard for us to accept unless they are accurate descriptions of what he said?

To borrow from the disciples response in John 6:60 to Jesus claim that whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood shall live, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

The New Testament is full of these 'hard teachings'. If Jesus didn't really die and rise to take away the sin of the world, then not only is being a Christian not a fun way to live, it is an impossible task.

Who in their own strength could not only forgive their enemies 'seventy times seven', but also love and pray for them. Who could never look at another woman with lust in his eye, never be angry with or curse someone, and 'turn the other cheek' to those that hurt you.

And these commands are only the rosier ones that we still largely think are great ideas to aspire to. On top of these there are even more passages that don't sound like very nice ideas to us.

Jesus tells us 'whoever loves their father or mother more than him is not worthy of him'. He tells us to take up our cross and follow him, denying ourselves and our own interests and being prepared to die for our witness of him. He tells us we will be persecuted for following him, but to rejoice in our suffering and pray for our persecutors. This kind of thinking is completely backwards to the way the world works and is totally counterproductive when trying to entice people into a religion.

Finally, the inclusion of the Holy Spirit is a baffling thing to invent if it were not true. It is in one sense a mystery and another sense our answer to all of this. As a Christian, the Holy Spirit is the only thing that makes achieving any of this possible.

Why would you firstly ask things of people that no human can give, and then make the only way to achieve these things by the power of a holy spirit that you know does not exist?

Jesus told his disciples to 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' (Matthew 5:48). Why in the world would you place such an unachievable burden on potential followers unless there was a way of achieving this? Why would you fill Scripture with commands that are not only unachievable, but completely undesirable also?

You must be aware that by making these demands and the claim of the spirit, all it would take for people to reject it would be to try it out, then turn around and say, "No good, its way too hard and this spirit thing doesn't work at all".

Christianity makes no sense to follow as a religion if untrue.

1 Corinthians 15:19, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied."

DIFFERENT THEORIES

The body was stolen Authorities had no motivation to steal it as it only helps the case of the Christians. The case of the disciples stealing it breaks down when you take into account their extreme willingness to suffer and die for what they would have known to be a lie.

They lied 'Liars make poor martyrs'. There is no logical reason why a group of people would all willingly endure horrific suffering and death without a single one of them admitting that it was all a hoax.

They hallucinated the appearances Hallucinations are always individual occurrences. The accounts record multiple appearances to groups, no two people could see the same thing at the same time. Further to this, the theory assumes that the disciples as Jews would have been open to the idea of a resurrection which when related to an individual in the middle of history would not have been the case. The conversion of skeptics James and Paul also refutes this further.

Maybe he wasn't really dead No historian still holds onto this theory. The Non-Christian evidence referring to his crucifixion is too strong. Our knowledge of Roman crucifixion clearly shows that even if somehow he was taken down early, despite there being no historical record of that, there would be little chance of survival. And in the hypothetical case of his survival it is extremely unlikely to think his physical state would have inspired his disciples belief in him as having conquered death and being vindicated as the savior of the world.

There are two other highly unlikely things that would have needed to happen for this to be the case. Firstly, the general public would have had to be convinced that he had died. The only way this could happen is through the substitution of a body, a highly unlikely theory. Secondly the disciples could have only moved forward with this by lying that Jesus had been killed, which brings up back to the 'liars make poor martyrs' argument. On top of this Jesus himself would have had to disappear from the scene to be certain no-one outside the lie would see him alive.

It's only a spiritual resurrection, one in which the disciples believe they can still feel his presence Three things go against this. The establishment of the empty tomb, the disciples' willingness to die for their belief in the resurrection, and the Gospels emphasis on the physical nature of the appearances.

Invented years later by church All the scholarship on the New Testament combined with the non Christian references points to the claim being made very early after Jesus' death. Furthermore the inclusion of so much material in the

Gospels is totally counterproductive to the theory of the church concocting the details at a later date.

PUTTING ALL THE EVIDENCE TOGETHER

Now if you take each of these points individually, there are easy answers that can dismiss them all. It is when you combine them all together, the case becomes much harder to refute.

Tim Keller states, “The empty tomb and the accounts of personal meetings with Jesus are even more historically certain when you realize they must be taken together. If there had been only an empty tomb and no sightings, no one would have concluded it was a resurrection. They would have assumed that the body had been stolen. Yet if there had been only eyewitness sightings of Jesus and no empty tomb, no one would have concluded it was a resurrection, because peoples accounts of seeing departed loved ones happen all the time. Only if the two factors were both true together would anyone have concluded that Jesus rose from the dead.”

The problem with debunking either of the strands of evidence is that as soon as you take a stand to refute one, you open yourself up to admission of another. If they hallucinated, you can account for the willingness to die. But that couldn't explain the empty tomb, the body would still have been there. They couldn't have taken the appearances as literal if they knew his body was still there.

If they lied, that could account for the tomb because you could then assume they stole the body. But it couldn't account for their willingness to die for what they knew was a lie.

When you add to this the conversion of Paul and James and the enemy attestation that provides, it becomes even harder to explain away.

If you believe in a hallucination for Paul, then how do you explain the appearances to the others, the group appearances? If you then go a step further and say 'well I don't believe in the appearances at all', then you have to say that they lied, and we are back where we started with trying to account for the suffering and martyrdom they endured for that lie.

Ravi Zacharias summarizes the situation well by saying, “One can only really doubt something if one has something more solid to believe in.”

As far-fetched as the resurrection sounds, the problems with the alternative theories make all of them far too weak for any to emerge as the logical explanation.

No matter which way you come at it, to disbelieve all these different elements is to ignore evidence. It is perfectly sound and logical to disbelieve each one individually,

but you must be willing to take a leap of faith to dismiss them all together that is in my view more of a stretch than to believe in the resurrection.

If we are to ask whether natural circumstances can raise a dead person to life, then of course the answer would be no. But if you can believe there is a God who created all things, the entire universe in all its staggering complexity, it is really not a stretch to imagine that he could send his son to earth, and furthermore it is not a stretch to imagine that he could raise him to life.

If God exists then all things are possible with him, so of course this would be possible.

Matt Perman – “I'm sure you've heard of the various theories used to explain away the empty tomb, such as that the body was stolen. But those theories are laughed at today by all serious scholars. In fact, they have been considered dead and refuted for almost a hundred years. For example, the Jews or Romans had no motive to steal the body--they wanted to suppress Christianity, not encourage it by providing it with an empty tomb. The disciples would have had no motive, either. Because of their preaching on the resurrection, they were beaten, killed, and persecuted. Why would they go through all of this for a deliberate lie? No serious scholars hold to any of these theories today. What explanation, then, do the critics offer, you may ask? William Lane Craig tells us "they are self-confessedly without any explanation to offer. There is simply no plausible natural explanation today to account for Jesus' tomb being empty. If we deny the resurrection of Jesus, we are left with an inexplicable mystery."

LIAR, LUNATIC, LORD

The final thing to note is the classic argument of CS Lewis, known as Lewis' Trilemma, or simply 'Liar, Lunatic, Lord.'

Lewis put forward this theory in opposition to popular claims that do concede Jesus' existence, but resign his status to that of simply a 'good moral teacher'. He wasn't the Son of God, he was simply a good man.

On the surface this seems like a decent argument. The problem with it is that once you start reading Scripture you realize that if Jesus were not in fact who he claimed to be, then he certainly could not be called a good teacher.

Lewis states, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice.

Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God."

Bruce M. Metzger summarises this well "Jesus' claim to be the only Son of God is either true or false. If it is false, he either knew the claim was false or he did not know that it was false. In the former case he was a liar; in the latter case, he was a lunatic. No other conclusion beside these three is possible

If Jesus made this claim with deception, there all multiple things he said and did that would make him far from good. Most notable is the fact that he encouraged his disciples to give up everything for him, even to the point of persecution and death. No teacher that leads his followers to their deaths for a lie would ever be labeled as 'good'.

He claimed to have authority to forgive other peoples sins — in circumstances where he was not even the direct victim of an act, behaving as if he really was "the person chiefly offended in all offences". He also claimed to have always existed, and to intend to come back to judge the world at the end of time. If these are not the words of the son of God, they are most certainly the words of a madman.

Irish rockstar Bono borrows from Lewis when he says – "The idea that the entire course of civilization for over half of the globe could have its fate changed and turned upside-down by a nutcase, for me, *that's* farfetched."

APOLOGETICS SUMMARY

Apologetics is defined as – 'Reasoned arguments or writings in justification of something, typically a theory or religious doctrine'

It is very important to remember that apologetics can't save anyone. Only Jesus himself can. All it can do is to help address doubts in a believer, and help remove obstacles that may be in the way for an unbeliever to come to Christ.

Beware of relying too heavily on this as opposed to the saving grace of God. That is where Gods power really lies, not in reasonable arguments.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:4 – 'My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power'.

Be wary of being proud that by this wealth of evidence you can believe in him. I would venture to say that the vast majority of Christians over time have not needed this kind of material to believe and submit themselves to God.

James 2:19 says “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder:”

If these arguments help you then that is great. But let it strengthen your faith, then look immediately back to the cross of Christ, knowing that is all you need for your salvation

1 Corinthians 2:2. “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

NOW TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Now we have focused exclusively on the New Testament. You would be right to ask what about the Old Testament?

That is an area I am yet to fully delve into. What we must confess is that we are much further removed from the Old Testament to be able to study it in the same way historically. The same solid historical arguments are much harder to make so far from the events.

The way that I can trust it personally is through Christ. If I can believe in him, I must take what he says about the Old Testament seriously.

That is not to say the historicity of the Old Testament is without its advocates.

Kenneth A. Kitchen, British Bible scholar, Ancient Near Eastern historian, and Personal and Brunner Professor Emeritus of Egyptology and Honorary Research Fellow at the School of Archaeology says, “The historicity of the OT should be taken seriously. As for the OT text itself, the Dead Sea Scrolls (ca 150 b.c.- a.d. 70) provide good evidence of a carefully transmitted core-text tradition through almost a thousand years down to the Masoretic scribes (ca eighth-tenth centuries a.d.) Thus, the basic text of OT Scripture can be established as essentially soundly transmitted, and the evidence shows that the form and content of the OT fit with known literary and cultural realities of the Ancient Near East.”

I would add that when reading particular passages of the Bible that don't seem to make sense to us, whether Old or New Testament, it is good to keep in mind the following.

When you have the thought, ‘this is weird’, you are going on the assumption that every single thought that enters your head is correct. We see this in a massive way in our world now. Social media is overwhelmed with opinions. If you read through

most of them, you can see that the writer is generally completely convinced what they are saying is absolutely correct and anything to the contrary is false.

This cannot possibly be true of humans. Every single person cannot possibly be right about every single thing. Therefore, you must take this view when it comes to your own thoughts. Some of them must be wrong.

It may seem a very dogmatic thing to do, but when you are confronted with a passage you do not understand or agree with, the best thing you can possibly do is assume that God is right and you are wrong.

Isaiah 55: 8-9 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, *declares the Lord*. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Again this seems so regressive to most people. But if there really is a God who created the entire universe, wouldn't it be completely reasonable to think that his ways are higher than ours, and therefore he would know more than you do.

If we can take this view, the next step is to ask God to change what is wrong with your thought and help you understand it through his eyes. I have had God change my opinions and heart on a few issues in this way, and it is incredible how well it works.

SUMMARY OF HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

As good a case as all this makes, it still doesn't prove that Jesus is the Son of God.

It all comes down to your worldview. If you are willing to accept that Jesus could be the Son of God, then you may see that in these arguments. If you are not, then it does not matter what arguments are put forward.

I often think what it would be like if Jesus came to earth in this era instead. If there were video footage of his miracles, of his death on the cross, surely that would prove it beyond a doubt right? Sadly I think the answer would still be a no for millions of people. In the same way that your worldview and what you are prepared to accept will sway your opinion based on the historical accounts, it would ultimately do the same nowadays.

All sorts of theories and rebuttals could be made in the exact same way they are made about the historical Jesus.

It seems crazy to talk of a 'rational' belief in a man who lived 2000 years ago being raised from the dead and saving mankind as a result. But I really do think that if it were true, this is exactly the sort of evidence it would leave behind.

To close by quoting John Dixon - "We have exactly the kind of evidence you would accept if the account of Jesus life as told by the Gospels was true. And much more evidence pointing in that direction than if it were made up."

THE BIBLE IS SELF AUTHENTICATING

1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

If we are asking the question 'why trust the Bible', as great as these arguments are, they are utterly worthless when compared to the proof of the incredible power and love of God himself.

Speaking through the Scripture and revealing himself in the heart of a believer, there is no wise argument in the world that can compare to the assurance we receive from his presence.

Greater than any feeling the world can offer. It is knowing you are forgiven. Knowing you are loved greater than any human could ever love you. It is seeing God do incredible things in your life. Seeing him answer prayers in ways that are far beyond any coincidence. Taking burdens from you that you have tried and tried and tried in your own strength to discard.

To the Christian, the way God works through even the Scripture itself is proof that the Bible can be trusted. It is truly self-authenticating.

The two disciples to whom Jesus appeared to on the road to Emmaus commented in Luke 24:32 - "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us."

This is the effect that the word of God has on the Christian. You start to believe it, it starts to work in your life to the point where a passage can make you feel renewed and made right simply by the reading of it.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

John Piper summaries this perfectly, "The whole Bible authenticates itself by shining with the glory of the one who inspired it. The Scriptures reveal themselves to be the *word* of God the way nature reveals itself to be the *world* of God — God's glory shines out from the meaning of these words, and authenticates their divine origin the way God's glory shines out from the creation and authenticates its divine origin"

Luther said with resounding forcefulness in 1545, the year before he died, "Let the man who would hear God speak, read Holy Scripture."

To finish, I must give the final word to John Piper, 'The word does shine with the glory of God.'

John Piper Video – Can we trust the 66 books of the Bible?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DagGWxq_S4A