

DID JESUS REALLY...?

**ANSWERING THE 5 MOST COMMON
QUESTIONS ABOUT JESUS**

C A M E R O N G R A N T

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*To my darling wife, Katelyn.
Thankyou for always encouraging me to share
and defend the truth of Christianity.*

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**DID
JESUS
REALLY...?**

INTRODUCTION

Jesus of Nazareth is arguably the most well-known and influential figure in history - certainly in the Western World. However, throughout the centuries many people have espoused a number of different versions and understandings of Him.

For example, some believe that Jesus didn't even exist. They contend He is a myth, nothing more than a legend that was created by men; much like the mythological gods of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome.

Others concede that Jesus probably existed but maintain that He was simply a wise, moral teacher who never actually claimed to be God. They speculate that Jesus's disciples and other followers misunderstood His message and wrongly believed that Jesus was claiming to be God in human form and the saviour of the world.

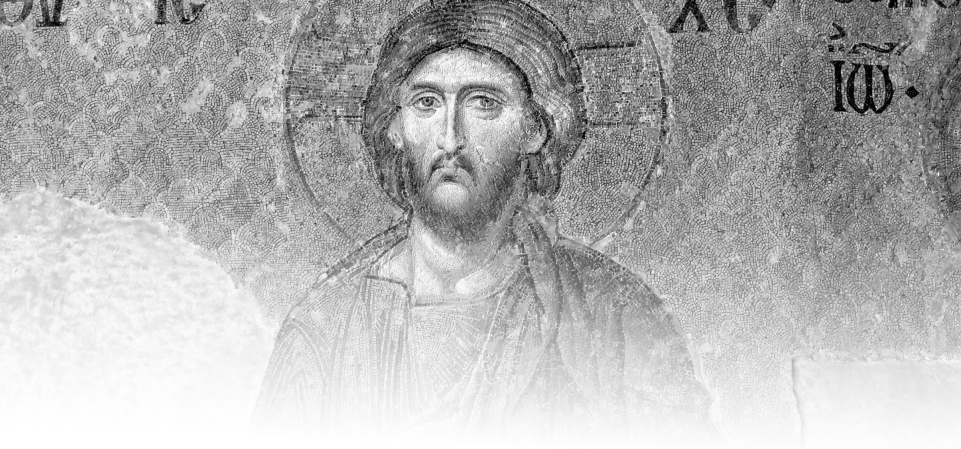
Others accept that Jesus existed and claimed to be God but argue that He wasn't actually divine or the saviour of the world. They contend that Jesus was either a liar (a type of con man who performed miracles by means of sorcery, for example) or a lunatic (a crazy madman who thought He was God but clearly wasn't). They

simply deny that Jesus performed miracles or rose again after His crucifixion.

So, who is Jesus...really? did He really exist? claim to be God? perform miracles? fulfil prophecies? and rise from the dead?

Answering these commonly asked questions about Jesus is of the utmost importance, because if the gospel accounts contained in the New Testament regarding Jesus's life, death, and resurrection are true, the person of Jesus, along with His teachings, have profound implications for each and every one of us. If Jesus truly is the Son of God and the saviour of the world, it totally revolutionises our understanding of who God is, what His plans and purposes are, what it means to be human, what is right and wrong, and what the meaning and purpose of life is.

This book is a concise introductory guide, for both Christians and skeptics alike, to use when answering the question, who is Jesus?



QUESTION 1: DID JESUS REALLY...EXIST?

Many people today and throughout history have denied that Jesus of Nazareth is a historical figure who actually existed. For example, Bertrand Russell, one of the most famous atheists of the 20th century once said,
"Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ existed at all, and if he did we do not know anything about him, so I am not concerned with the historical question which is a very difficult one."

Is this a fair and reasonable position? Is it truly '*quite doubtful*' whether Jesus actually existed? To answer this first question we need to look at the historical record and investigate the evidence for the existence of Jesus.

The historical writings about Jesus - or that reference Him - can be grouped into three main categories:

opposition sources, neutral sources, and affiliated sources.

Opposition sources

Opposition sources are historical writings authored by opponents or enemies of Jesus.

Tacitus (56AD - 120AD)

Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus was a senator and historian of the Roman Empire. Tacitus was born perhaps in northern Italy (Cisalpine Gaul) or more probably, southern Gaul (Gallia Narbonensis, or present-day southeastern France).

Nothing is known of his parentage but it appears he was born into comfortable circumstances. As a younger man, he studied rhetoric in Rome in preparation for a public career in law and politics. Among his works are the *Germania*, describing the Germanic tribes, the *Historiae* (Histories), concerning the Roman Empire from A.D. 69 – 96, and the later *Annals*, covering the history of the Roman Empire from A.D. 14 – 70.

In *Annals*, Tacitus refers to the existence of Jesus, His execution under Pontius Pilate, and the presence of Christians living in Rome.

Tacitus writes that...

“Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abomination, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition (this is most likely a reference to the resurrection of Jesus), thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.”

Galen (129AD - 210AD)

Aelius Galenus or Claudius Galenus was a Greek physician, surgeon and philosopher in the Roman Empire. Galen was born in Pergamon, Asia (present-day Bergama, Turkey) in the Roman Empire. He received a comprehensive education that prepared him for a successful career as a physician and philosopher. Galen travelled extensively before settling in Rome, where he served prominent members of roman society and was eventually given the position of personal physician to several emperors.

Galen in various writings implicitly refers to the existence of Jesus Christ, when making derogatory remarks about Jews and Christians. Galen also records that Jesus was a teacher like Moses who taught in parables.

Talmud

The Talmud is central to rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and Jewish theology. The Talmud is comprised of the 'Mishnah' and the 'Gemara'. The Mishnah is an authoritative collection of exegetical material embodying the oral tradition of Jewish law, while the Gemara is a rabbinical commentary on the Mishnah.

There are two versions of the Talmud: the Babylonian Talmud (which dates from the 5th Century A.D.) and the earlier Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud. The Talmud contains the teachings and opinions of thousands of rabbis on a variety of subjects, including theology, philosophy, ethics, history, folklore and many more.

Rabbinic writers in the Talmud implicitly acknowledge the existence of Jesus when they record the fact that He was from the town of Nazareth and was executed publicly.

Celsus (2nd Century AD)

Celsus was a 2nd Century Greek philosopher and opponent of early Christianity. Our knowledge of Celsus and his criticism of Christianity have been preserved in the writings of early church father, Origen of Alexandria. In approximately 250 A.D, Origen wrote an 8-volume refutation entitled *Contra Celsum*, in which he quotes Celsus extensively.

Celsus, in his work '*True Doctrine*' implicitly acknowledged the existence of Jesus when he recorded that some Jews believed Jesus' father was a Roman soldier named Pantera, who reportedly seduced Mary.

Celsus also addressed the miracles of Jesus, contending that He performed them by means of sorcery.

Neutral sources

Neutral sources are historical writings that are neither for nor against Jesus but record His existence for the purpose of documenting historical figures and events.

Josephus (37AD - 100AD)

Titus Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historian who lived in the first century. His most important works are ‘*The Jewish War*’ (written in 75 A.D.) and ‘*Antiquities of the Jews*’ (written in 94 A.D.). The Jewish War recounts the Jewish revolt against Roman occupation. The Antiquities of the Jews recounts the history of the world from a Jewish perspective for a Greek and Roman audience. Josephus records the existence of Jesus along with a number of other facts in his work, Antiquities of the Jews. Josephus writes that, “...*He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those who loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again on the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him;*

and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.” (Antiquities of the Jews, XVIII, III).

Phlegon (2nd Century AD)

Phlegon of Tralles was a Greek writer and freedman of the Emperor Hadrian. His most notable work is the ‘*Olympiads*’, which was a historical compendium in sixteen books, from the 1st to the 229th Olympiad (776 B.C. – 137 A.D.).

Phlegon, records the existence of Jesus in his work, *Chronicles*. Phlegon also records that Jesus had disciples and predicted the future.

Suetonius (69AD - 122AD)

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus was a Roman historian belonging to the Equestrian Order who wrote during the early imperial era of the Roman Empire. His most important work is a set of biographies of twelve successive Roman rulers, from Julius Caesar to Domitian, entitled ‘*De Vita Caesarium*’. Suetonius, records the existence of Jesus in his work, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*. Suetonius notes that Jesus was called Christ and had followers in Rome.

Mara Bar Serapion (1st Century AD)

Mara Bar Serapion was a stoic philosopher from the Roman province of Syria. He is known for a letter he wrote to his son, in which he refers to the crucifixion of Jesus. Most scholars date the letter to the first century. It was most likely written shortly after 73 A.D.

Serapion, implicitly records the existence of Jesus when referring to the wise king of the Jews who was executed unjustly.

Affiliated sources

Affiliated sources are historical writings authored by the personal friends and other followers of Jesus. The central affiliated sources are the 27 books of the New Testament. Most importantly for our investigation are the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These writings are historical records containing eyewitness testimony of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Other key affiliated sources include: Paul in 13 Biblical writings; John in 5 Biblical writings; Peter in 3 Biblical writings; and Luke in 2 Biblical writings.

Paul (5AD - 67AD)

In regards to the affiliated sources, the apostle Paul is of particular significance given that he was initially Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee who persecuted Christians. However, Paul writes that after an encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, he became a Christian and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

We have looked at the historical record and briefly examined some of the evidence for the existence of Jesus. While these various historical writings don't unanimously agree on everything in regards to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, there is at least one fact they all have in common – Jesus existed.

Christian apologist, Josh McDowell notes that, *“We know more about the life of Jesus than just about any other figure in the ancient world. His birth, life and death are revealed in much more detail than most ancient figures whose existence is taken for granted by historians.”*

It is clear that Jesus existed. Let's now consider who He claimed to be...



QUESTION 2:

DID JESUS REALLY...*CLAIM TO BE GOD?*

Many skeptics today contend that Jesus of Nazareth was simply a wise, moral teacher, who never claimed to be God. They speculate that Jesus was misunderstood by His disciples and other followers, who wrongly believed that their' leader was claiming to be the saviour of the world and God in human form.

Is this an accurate understanding of who Jesus was and who he claimed to be? Were the disciples truly mistaken about the identity of Jesus? To answer this second question we need to look at the historical evidence of the claims of Jesus.

The primary historical writings that record the words and deeds of Jesus are the four gospels and other New

Testament writings. However, before we can trust their reports about Jesus we first need to ensure they're historically reliable. We need to ensure that the New Testament we read today is the same as the original written approximately 2,000 years ago.

Is the New Testament historically reliable?

The New Testament is comprised of 27 documents written by Jesus' apostles and earliest followers approximately 2,000 years ago. Their original writings, called autographs, no longer exist. Today we read copies of copies translated from Greek to English and other modern languages.

For approx. 1,500 years until the invention of the printing press all copies were made by hand. The skeptic contends that surely throughout the centuries the copyists made many mistakes. How then can we be confident that the New Testament we read today is trustworthy?

For example, New Testament critic, Bart Ehrman asks, *"What good is it to say that the original writings of the New Testament were inspired? We don't have the originals! We only have error-ridden copies! And the vast majority of these are centuries removed from the*

originals and different from them, evidently, in thousands of ways.”

In short, if we can't trust the New Testament, we can't trust anything it says about Jesus.

The New Testament, along with all significant literature from the ancient world, is reconstructed into its original form by comparing manuscript copies that have survived.

To determine the reliability of a reconstruction historians ask three questions: 1. How many copies exist? 2. How large is the time gap between when the original was written and when the earliest surviving copy was made? 3. Are there any significant differences between the surviving copies?

Historians are more confident in the reliability of a reconstruction when there are a large number of copies, the time gap is short, and the differences are relatively insignificant. As an example, historians are confident they have accurately reconstructed some of the works of Greek philosopher Plato and Greek writer Homer.

Let's examine how the New Testament compares to these ancient writings.

1. How many copies exist?

We have 219 copies of Plato, and 2,300 copies of Homer. But when it comes to the New Testament we have over 5,500 Greek manuscripts alone. Not only do the New Testament documents have more manuscript evidence, but they were also translated into several other languages at an early date. Translation of a document into another language was rare in the ancient world; this is another plus for the New Testament. Christian apologist Josh McDowell notes that, "*The number of copies of the versions is in excess of 18,000, with possibly as many as 25,000.*" This is further evidence that helps establish the reliability of the New Testament.

2. How large is the time gap?

1,300 years passed before the first surviving manuscript of Plato was written. For Homer, the time gap is down to 400 years. But for the New Testament, it's only 35 years.

By examining that many manuscript copies that are so close to the autographs, scholars and historians, can

reconstruct the original documents with amazing precision.

3. How significant are the variations?

The thousands of manuscript copies of the New Testament are not identical. In fact, there are approximately 400,000 differences.

But how significant are these variations? The majority of these variations are differences in spelling. Almost all of the remaining differences are made up of minor variations, such as the use of synonyms, and errors scholars have been able to determine were not in the original text. Most importantly, less than one per cent of all the variations have any real significance for the meaning of the original text. However, it has been established that none of these, not a single one, affects a core doctrine of the Christian faith.

Furthermore, even if we did not possess the 5,500 Greek manuscripts or the 18,000 copies of the various translations, we could still reconstruct the text of the New Testament within 250 years from its composition. How? By examining the writings of the early church fathers. Early Christian writers, such as Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, quote the Biblical text in

commentaries and letters, thus providing us with another witness to the text of the New Testament. John Burgon, a 19th century Anglican divine, catalogued more than 86,000 citations of the New Testament in the writings of the early church fathers who lived before 325 A.D.

Bruce Metzger, Biblical scholar, translator and textual critic, states that, *“So extensive are these citations that if all the other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.”*

On the reliability of the New Testament F.F. Bruce observed that, *“The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning.”*

It is clear that we can be confident that the New Testament we have today is the same as the original written 2,000 years ago. Let's now return to the question, did Jesus really claim to be God?

In the gospel of John, Jesus makes the following statements about Himself: ‘...*anyone who has seen me (Jesus), has seen the Father.*’(John 14:9); “...*before Abraham was born, I am.*” (John 8:58)(NASB); that He was equal with the Father (John 5:17-18); and “...*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30)(ESV).

In Mark 2:5-7, Jesus claimed the ability to forgive sins (something that the Bible teaches only God can do). In Matthew 16:13-20 and Mark 8:27-31, Jesus asked his disciples, “*Who do you say I am?*” Peter responded, “...*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”(NKJV) Jesus implicitly affirms Peter’s answer. In John 1, Jesus is equated with the Creator of the universe. The Apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:17, said that Jesus is the one who holds everything together, and in 1 Timothy 3:16, that in Jesus, God is manifest in the flesh.

It wasn’t just Jesus’s disciples and followers who noticed He claimed to be God, His enemies and opponents did too. Today, skeptics may doubt whether Jesus was in fact claiming to be God by His words and deeds, but there was no doubt on the part of the Jewish authorities of Jesus’s day. In John 10:33, when Jesus asked them why they wanted to stone Him, they

replied, *“For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make yourself out to be God.”* (NASB).

In Mark 14:61-62, Jesus is on trial before the Jewish high council. The Jewish high priest asked Jesus, *“Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?”* Jesus replied, *“I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God’s right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven”*. The council was enraged by Jesus’ response and declared him guilty of blasphemy (in other words, claiming to be God).

Based on the claims of Jesus and the way His followers and enemies reacted to Him, it is clear Jesus claimed to be God and did not view Himself as merely a man. However, why should anyone believe Jesus’s claims? Haven’t many religious leaders throughout history said similar things? What sets Jesus apart? What makes His claims true and worth believing? The truth is Jesus is totally unique in His claim to be God in human flesh. Buddha never claimed to be God; Moses never said that he was Yahweh; and Mohammad certainly did not identify himself as Allah.

Furthermore, Jesus is totally unique in His claim to be the one and only way to Heaven. In John 14:6, Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

So, what evidence is there that Jesus is God? What reasons are there to believe that the claims of Jesus are true? Briefly, the many miracles that Jesus performed and the myriad of Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus serve as evidence that Jesus is God. However, the sign that Jesus Himself said would ultimately prove that He was the Son of God and the saviour of the world, was His resurrection from the dead.

Given the impact Jesus has had on history, He is worthy of being taken seriously and His claims thoroughly investigated. Christian apologist Frank Turek notes that, *“Whatever you currently believe about Jesus of Nazareth, you owe it to yourself to investigate Him thoroughly. It makes little sense to ignore the one solitary life that continues to impact you in eternity if His claims are true.”*



QUESTION 3:

DID JESUS REALLY...*PERFORM MIRACLES*?

Before we investigate the works of Jesus, we first need to ask the question, ‘Are miracles even possible?’ In the 21st century, when scientists have mapped the human genome, dissected the atom, and peered through the Hubble telescope into the distant reaches of the universe, many people believe that the rationality of science should chase away naïve belief in God and the possibility of miracles. However, throughout the 20th century a number of scientific discoveries were made which, rather than disprove God’s existence, point towards such a conclusion.

For example, the discovery that the cosmos is incredibly (almost impossibly) fine-tuned, in just the right way to make it possible for the universe to exist

and operate; or the fact that the universe is finite and had a beginning. If God does not exist, the universe simply popped into existence out of absolutely nothing billions of years ago. That would be an even bigger miracle than God raising Jesus from the dead, or Jesus healing the sick. Christian apologist Norman Geisler once observed that, *“the only way to show that miracles are impossible...is to disprove the existence of God.”* Something no one has been able to do.

With that in mind here are six points to start you off in your investigation of whether or not Jesus actually performed miracles.

1. The reliability of the New Testament

The writings of the New Testament that record Jesus' miracles have been traced back to honest, eyewitness testimony. And these accounts have been faithfully and reliably passed down to us through history. In other words, we can be confident that the writings of the New Testament were truly written by Jesus' earliest followers, who were honest and accurate in their accounts of Jesus' life and works. We can also be confident that the New Testament we read today is an accurate and reliable reconstruction of the original written in the 1st century A.D. Just like a jury in a court

of law can trust the testimony of an honest and reliable eyewitness, we can trust the New Testament and its accounts of Jesus performing miracles.

2. The inclusion of historical details in the miracle accounts

Christian apologist Lee Strobel notes that some of the miracle accounts include historical elements as incidental details that add to their credibility. For example, specific names, occupations, and locations are recorded. First century skeptics would've been able to investigate these claims and prove them false, if they were fabrications. The disciples and other followers of Jesus must have been extremely confident that their accounts were true if they were happy to open themselves up to investigation and scrutiny.

The nature of the gospels is another important consideration. They're sober and simple accounts, almost journalistic in style, unlike the fanciful supernatural occurrences described in later apocryphal gospels, which are not included in the Bible.

The inclusion of embarrassing details in some of the miracle accounts further demonstrates their truthfulness and reliability. For example, in the account of Jesus

turning water into wine, details are included that are seemingly counterproductive to Jesus. Like the apparently harsh way He spoke to His mother. Even reporting this story at all could fuel charges that Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard. Thus, it would be unlikely that the church would later invent such a story. The disciples appear to be truthful and accurate in their accounts, simply recording what they witnessed.

3. Opponents of Jesus admitted He performed miracles

In the gospel of John, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was a Jewish religious leader, came to Jesus in secret and said, *“Rabbi, we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you”* (John 3:2). This is confirmation that Jesus was known for performing miracles not only by his friends and followers but by his opponents too.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul records that both he, who had been a Pharisee and persecutor of Christians, and James, Jesus’ skeptical half-brother, encountered the miraculously resurrected Jesus and became convinced of his divinity. Paul’s radical claims are supported by the men’s fully transformed lives.

4. Opposition sources outside of the Bible confirm Jesus' miracles

Ancient Jewish writings known as the Talmud confirm several historical facts about Jesus. Such as his existence, his crucifixion, and most relevantly that he dealt in the supernatural. The Talmud attributes Jesus' power to sorcery.

Ancient Greek philosopher and early critic of Christianity, Celsus also implicitly confirms that Jesus performed miraculous signs. Celsus sought to explain away Jesus' miracles by alleging that he was a sorcerer trained by Egyptian magicians. Such an allegation has no historical basis or supporting evidence and is hopelessly incompatible with the rest of our knowledge of Jesus.

Another interesting piece of history to consider is a report by ancient Christian apologist Justin Martyr. Around 150 A.D. he reported that the "*Acts of Pilate*", an official document that had purportedly been sent to Rome, attested to the crucifixion of Jesus as well as several healing miracles that Jesus had performed. It's fascinating to note that Justin Martyr encouraged his readers to check out this official Roman document to confirm what he was saying about Jesus. Why would he

do such a thing unless he was absolutely certain that Pilate's writings would support his claims?

5. The miraculous resurrection is one of the best-attested events in the ancient world

Jesus' climactic miracle was his return from the dead after the Romans crucified him. There is compelling historical evidence to conclude that Jesus truly rose from the dead (more on the resurrection in question 5).

6. Alternative explanations fall short

Many skeptics and opponents of Jesus have tried to explain away the miracles He performed. However, all alternate theories and explanations crumble under scrutiny. They fail to adequately account for the range, type, and circumstances of Jesus' miracles. Given all that we know about Jesus' life and ministry, His miracles cannot be explained away by baseless allegations like he was a sorcerer or healed by the power of suggestion, for example. Neither can the accounts of Jesus' miracles be dismissed as legends that developed over the centuries following his life. We have too much historical evidence that supports the conclusion that the gospel accounts were written early and by honest and reliable eyewitnesses. In addition, as we have seen opposition sources from the first two

centuries implicitly admit that Jesus was a miracle-worker.

Furthermore, allegations that Jesus' miracles are myths inspired by prior stories of Egyptian gods, Hellenistic divine men or ancient Jewish holy men cannot withstand scrutiny. After studying the differences and similarities between those stories and the gospels, scholar Gary Habermas concluded that, *"it cannot be proven that ancient parallels account for the gospel reports."*

For the reasons discussed, it is fair to conclude that not only are miracles possible but also that Jesus truly performed miracles as recorded in the New Testament. Keep these 6 points in mind as you investigate this matter further.



QUESTION 4:

DID JESUS REALLY...*FULFIL PROPHECIES?*

The Old Testament contains scores of prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. Some have cited up to 400. Not only is there a large number of prophecies, many are extremely specific and were undoubtedly written hundreds of years before the time of Jesus.

One passage alone, Isaiah 53:2-12, foretells twelve aspects of Christ's passion, all of which were fulfilled in Jesus – he would be rejected, be a man of sorrow, live a life of suffering, be despised by others, carry our sorrow, be smitten and afflicted by God, be pierced for our transgressions, be wounded for our sins, would suffer like a lamb, would die with the wicked, would be sinless, and would pray for others.

Here are some of the other major predictions about the Messiah, all of which were fulfilled in Jesus; he would be born of a woman who would be a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), of the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18), of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), of the house of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16), in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); he would be heralded by the Lord's messenger (Isaiah 40:3); he would cleanse the temple (Malachi 3:1); he would be cut off 483 years after the declaration to reconstruct Jerusalem in 444 B.C. (Daniel 9:24-27); he would be rejected (Psalm 118:22); he would have his hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:16); he would be pierced in his side (Zechariah 12:10); he would rise from the dead (Psalm 16:10); and he would ascend into Heaven (Psalm 68:18).

Christians point to the myriad of Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus as reason for believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the saviour of the world.

The exact fulfilment of so many specific predictions is so persuasive that many skeptics and critics of Christianity have repeatedly raised objections to try to negate them. We're going to look at 4 common

objections to the claim that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies.

1. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies by accident

Some critics contend that Jesus just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Interestingly, mathematicians have crunched the numbers to figure out that possibility. Christian apologist Lee Strobel reports that, Professor Peter Stoner, who was the chairman of Westmont College's science division in the mid 1950's, worked with six hundred students to come up with their best estimate of the mathematical probability of just eight prophecies being fulfilled in any one person living down to the present time. The odds came out at one chance in a hundred million billion. It is not reasonable to hold that Jesus fulfilled hundreds of prophecies by accident.

2. Jesus intentionally fulfilled the prophecies

Although Jesus could have manoeuvred his life to fulfil certain prophecies, many were completely outside of his control, such as, being born of a virgin, his ancestry, his place of birth, his betrayal for 30 pieces of silver, his method of execution, his legs remaining unbroken on the cross, soldiers gambling for his clothes, and his resurrection.

3. The prophecies were written after Jesus' time

The average skeptic of Christianity may contend that the prophecies were written after Jesus' time. However, in terms of professionals, Christian apologist Norman Geisler notes that, *"even the most liberal critics admit that the prophetic books were completed some 400 years before Christ, and the Book of Daniel by about 167 B.C."* Furthermore, there's good evidence for dating most of the books considerably earlier than that, with some of the psalms and earlier prophets dating from the eighth and ninth centuries before Jesus.

4. Christians misinterpret the prophecies

Some skeptics contend that Christians misinterpret Old Testament passages to make them point to Christ. The New Testament sometimes does apply parts of the Old Testament to Christ, which were not written directly about Him. But that misses the point – a myriad of Old Testament prophecies point unmistakably to Christ. For a skeptic to use this argument, they must show that no Old Testament prophecies were predictive of Christ and fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus' miraculous fulfilment of the myriad of ancient Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah remains

one of the most potent arguments in confirming his identity. Those who carefully scrutinise the record find that these predictions and their fulfilment in Jesus cannot be explained away or dismissed.



QUESTION 5:

DID JESUS REALLY...*RISE FROM THE DEAD?*

To answer this question we need to examine the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. As we do this, two further questions will guide our investigation. Firstly, what are the historical facts that require an explanation? Secondly, which explanation best accounts for these facts? Answering the question of Jesus' resurrection is of vital importance for both the believer and skeptic alike. Jesus made outrageous claims about Himself. He claimed to be the Son of God and the saviour of the world. He even predicted His own physical resurrection from the dead. If Jesus truly rose again after death His claims of being God incarnate, the saviour of the world and the one and only way to Heaven are surely validated. This has massive implications for each and every one of us. However, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, we can dismiss Him as

just another interesting but tragic figure from history. The truth of Christianity really does stand or fall on the question of the resurrection of Jesus.

Part 1: The Historical Facts

Let's first consider the historical facts that require an explanation. The vast majority of first-century historians accept the following four facts, regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus, as virtually indisputable.

Fact #1: The crucifixion and burial of Jesus

Many skeptics contend that Jesus did not die on the cross. For example, many Muslims believe that someone else (such as Judas) was crucified in Jesus' place (Sura 4:157). Other skeptics argue that Jesus merely fainted while on the cross and was later revived. However, we can be confident that Jesus really was crucified and buried as recorded in the New Testament.

The crucifixion of Jesus is recorded in a number of ancient historical writings, both Christian and non-Christian. The execution of Jesus is reported in the four Gospels, in a number of first-century letters contained in the New Testament, and by several non-Christian sources, such as Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, and Mara

Bar Serapion. Even the Jewish Talmud records the public execution of Jesus.

In regards to the burial of Jesus, it was common for those crucified as criminals by the Romans to be buried in a common graveyard. However, the Bible records that Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus in a private tomb. This is a highly significant detail: Firstly, given the hostility between the Jewish authorities and Christians, the claim that Joseph of Arimathea, who was a member of the Jewish high court that condemned Jesus, petitioned Pilate for permission to bury Jesus' body, is unlikely to be a Christian invention. The Jewish authorities could've easily exposed such a fabrication if it was a lie. Secondly, the location of Jesus' tomb was therefore known in Jerusalem to Jews and Christians alike.

Furthermore, the burial story is simple and lacks any sign of legendary development. In fact the earliest records have been dated to within just a few years of Jesus' crucifixion and burial, and no competing burial story exists.

For these reasons we can be confident that Jesus was crucified and buried in a tomb.

Fact #2: The empty tomb

The New Testament records that on Sunday after the crucifixion, Mary and the other women went to anoint the body of Jesus. However, when they arrived at the tomb, they found it open and Jesus' body gone (Matt. 28:5-8; Mark 16:2-8; Luke 24:1-8).

The empty tomb is recorded in 6 independent sources (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-8; Acts 2:29-32; and 1 Cor. 15:3-5). Given the number of sources and the time at which they were written, the vast majority of historians are confident that this detail of the empty tomb is true and not a product of legendary development from centuries after the event.

Furthermore, the fact women discovered the empty tomb is highly significant. In first-century Palestine, women had low status as citizens and legal witnesses. Their testimony was considered next to worthless. Except in rare circumstances, Jewish law precluded women from providing direct evidence in a court of law. If the empty tomb story were a lie or a product of legendary development written centuries later, it would've stated that men, not women, had discovered Jesus' empty tomb. Christian apologists Josh and Sean

McDowell note that, *“The fact that the disciples include women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb points to one thing – they were reporting the truth.”*

Our confidence in the empty tomb is further increased by the response of the Jewish authorities. Upon hearing that Jesus’ tomb was empty, they accused Jesus’ followers of stealing the body; implicitly admitting that the tomb was in fact empty.

Fact #3: The disciples sincerely believed they saw the risen Jesus

To verify Jesus’ resurrection, evidence must demonstrate that He was seen alive again after His death. In Acts 1:3 Luke records that the disciples repeatedly saw Jesus over a forty-day period after His crucifixion and burial.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, one of the oldest passages of the New Testament, Paul provides a list of witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection appearances. The passage states that, *“He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of who are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the*

apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him.”

Christian apologist, William Lane Craig notes that on the basis of Paul’s testimony alone virtually all historical scholars agree that various individuals and groups experienced appearances of Jesus alive after His death.

Furthermore, various resurrection appearances of Jesus are independently confirmed in the four gospels.

Fact #4: The transformed lives of the disciples

Following the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, the response of the disciples was to scatter. Like cowards they hid from the Roman and Jewish authorities, in fear that they would suffer the same fate as Jesus. At this time the disciples were devastated and demoralised. As Jews they had no understanding of a Messiah that would be executed by their enemies, much less come back to life. Jews believed no one would be resurrected until the end of the world. However, despite all this, the disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead. Completely transformed, the disciples fearlessly began to publicly

proclaim Jesus as God, the resurrected Messiah, and the saviour of the world.

The disciples faced arrest, torture and death for believing in and preaching about the resurrection of Jesus. All but one of the disciples was executed for their faith, and not one ever recanted. This is a significant historical fact. Some may endure torture and even death for a lie if they believe it's true. But no one willingly accepts pain and suffering and death for what they know is a lie and which will yield no benefit of any sort for their family and friends they leave behind. The disciples were in a position to know if the resurrection of Jesus was a lie. They knew it was true, and it totally transformed their lives.

Take for example the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus, who hated Christians and everything they stood for. He saw them as a threat to his Judaism. Saul persecuted Christians, but then suddenly became a Christian, then changed his name to Paul. What happened? Paul writes that he had an encounter with the risen Jesus and was totally transformed.

Consider James, Jesus' skeptical half-brother. Before the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, James did not

believe His brother's claims; in fact, the gospel of Mark records that James thought his older brother was 'out of his mind.' However, after the resurrection James became the leader of the Jerusalem church and was stoned to death for his belief that Jesus was God. Something transformed him. Paul writes that James had an encounter with Jesus alive after He died.

Furthermore, if Jesus did not rise from the dead how do we account for the origin and rapid growth of the Christian movement? The book of Acts records the fact that within a few weeks following the resurrection of Jesus, thousands in the same city were converted through the preaching of His resurrection. Also, within a short time in the same city, a great number of Jewish priests were converted to Christ. Despite severe persecution, the Christian movement spread so far and so fast that within a few years it covered the Roman Empire including Caesar's own household. Even the enemies of early Christianity confessed that it turned the world upside down. What could account for this growth if Jesus were still dead? New Testament scholar N.T. Wright states that, *"As an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind Him."*

These four historical facts surrounding the resurrection of Jesus cry out for an adequate explanation. How do you explain them?

Part 2: The Explanations

Throughout history many explanations have been put forward to explain away the resurrection of Jesus.

However, every naturalistic explanation fails to adequately account for the historical facts surrounding the resurrection. The four most popular naturalistic explanations are: the stolen body theory, the swoon theory, the displaced body theory, and the hallucination theory.

Explanation #1: The stolen body theory

This theory suggests that Jesus did not rise from the dead but rather his body was stolen and the resurrection story was a lie. There were three groups that could've possibly stolen the body: the Romans, the Jewish religious leaders, and the disciples.

Maybe the Romans stole the body to cause division amongst the Jewish population, between the new Christian movement and the Jewish religious leaders. Maybe it was part of a political strategy; if the Jews were divided fighting amongst themselves they

couldn't unite and overthrow their Roman oppressors. This theory is extremely unreasonable. The Roman authorities were charged with keeping the peace in Palestine, not stir up conflicts. In terms of the Roman Empire, the city of Jerusalem and the region of Judea were rather insignificant. It would've been the motivation of the Roman authorities to keep the area peaceful thus warranting a promotion back to Rome or to a city much closer to the heart of the Roman Empire.

Maybe the Jewish religious leaders stole the body. This theory makes little sense. The Jewish leaders had no motive to steal the body. They wanted Jesus dead and buried and for it to stay that way. Furthermore, even if they had, when the Christians began preaching 'Jesus is risen' the Jewish authorities could've dragged Jesus' body out to squash, in their eyes, the blasphemous Christian movement.

Maybe the disciples stole the body, lied about seeing Jesus resurrected and fabricated the entire story. This theory is extremely unlikely for a number of reasons. Firstly, following the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples were in hiding, fearing for their lives. It is extremely implausible to contend that a small group of fearful and demoralised Jewish men managed to steal the body by

defeating several heavily armed and well-trained Roman soldiers who were guarding the tomb of Jesus. Secondly, this theory fails to account for the fact that all but one of the disciples was executed for their belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Some of the disciples were crucified, stabbed, hung and beheaded. Others were whipped, clubbed and stoned. One disciple was dragged around the city until his body lay in pieces. No one dies for a lie they know is a lie, when speaking the truth will save them, especially when their death doesn't even secure some benefit or safety for loved ones they leave behind. The stolen body theory fails to account for the historical facts. It is unreasonable to believe any version of this theory.

Explanation #2: The swoon theory

This theory suggests that Jesus didn't actually die on the cross but merely fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood but then later revived and the disciples thought it to be a resurrection. Such a theory is wildly implausible. Roman executioners were professionals, they knew what they were doing, and made sure their victims were dead before being taken down after crucifixion. Their very lives depended on it. If a condemned person managed to avoid death, the

executioners would pay for their mistake with their own lives.

Furthermore, before Jesus was crucified, He was whipped and brutally beaten. Some victims died from such torture before even being nailed to a cross. Mark 15:44 records that Pilate asked a Roman centurion to double-check that Jesus had actually died. John 19:34 records that eyewitnesses saw a release of blood and water when a soldier speared Jesus in the side, piercing his rib cage, lung and heart. This is exactly what medical science expects when a person dies under these conditions. Severe shock from loss of blood would've accelerated His heart rate leading to a massive heart attack, depositing fluid in the membrane around the heart and lungs. First-century eyewitnesses would've naturally described this substance as water.

Even if Jesus somehow survived the cross, He would've had to endure an impossible ordeal to fake His own resurrection: survive three days in a tomb without medical care; survive despite being unable to breathe due to the mummy-like burial wrappings that also prevented Him from unwrapping Himself; single-handedly roll back the 2 ton stone from inside the tomb; fight off the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb;

walk for miles on wounded feet; and then convince the disciples and other followers that He had risen from the dead.

Explanation #3: The displaced body theory

This theory suggests that perhaps Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus' body in his private tomb temporarily, out of convenience, but later moved it to a criminal's common graveyard. Then when the disciples arrived at the first tomb and found it empty they wrongly concluded that Jesus must have risen from the dead. This relocation hypothesis is supported by the historical fact that reburial was common in ancient Palestine. However, Jewish tradition differed. In fact, Jewish law would have prohibited the relocation of Jesus' body in this way. The Jewish tradition was to bury a body for one year and then after the flesh had deteriorated and only the bones remained they would then be placed in an ossuary.

The main problem for the displaced body theory is the complete lack of historical support, either in Biblical or non-biblical sources. Also, it is important to remember that it was not the empty tomb alone that convinced the disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead. It was His resurrection appearances. Furthermore, once

the disciples began to proclaim Jesus' resurrection. Joseph or whoever relocated the body would have corrected the disciples' mistake, proving the resurrection of Jesus false. Christianity would have never gotten off the ground.

Explanation #4: The hallucination theory

This theory suggests that the disciples and all the other witnesses who claimed to see Jesus alive again after His death were hallucinating; that they simply imagined seeing the risen Jesus. Perhaps the disciples, so overcome by shock, grief and distress following the crucifixion of their beloved leader, hallucinated and mistakenly believed Jesus had risen from the dead. This theory faces significant challenges. Jesus didn't appear just one time, He appeared many times. He didn't just appear in one place, He appeared in many different places. He didn't appear just to one person, He appeared to many different people. He didn't appear just to individuals, He appeared to groups as well. He didn't appear just to Christians, He appeared to non-Christians too. He didn't appear just to men, He appeared to women also.

The contention that these appearances were the result of hallucinations has been convincingly dismissed by

psychology. Hallucinations are subjective, individual occurrences that are not shared by groups of people and are usually induced by drugs or bodily deprivation. In regards to the resurrection appearances of Jesus, Christian apologist, Lee Strobel notes that, *“it’s certainly unlikely that over a course of many weeks, people from all sorts of backgrounds, all kinds of temperaments, and in various places all experienced similar hallucinations.”*

Moreover, in the ancient world visions of the deceased was not evidence that the person was alive, but rather that the person was dead and had moved on to the afterlife. Also, first century Jews, such as the disciples, would’ve interpreted a vision of Jesus as confirmation that he had transcended into Heaven not that he had risen from the dead. Furthermore, this theory does not explain the empty tomb. If the disciples were simply hallucinating, Jesus’ body would’ve still been in the grave. Once the disciples began preaching about the resurrection, the Jewish and Roman authorities could’ve easily produced Jesus’ body to silence the disciples.

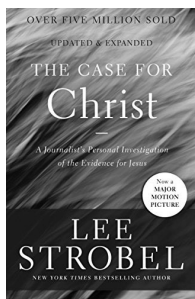
We’ve looked at the four most popular alternate explanations. We’ve found that all four theories fail to

adequately account for the historical facts. So, how do we explain them? One remaining explanation is that of the original eyewitnesses, who claimed God raised Jesus from the dead. Unlike the other theories, this explanation makes sense of the historical facts. But is this belief reasonable? After all it would take a supernatural act of God to raise Jesus from the dead. But if it's even possible that God exists, this explanation cannot be ruled out. Peter Slezak, Professor of Philosophy of Science at the University of New South Wales acknowledges that, *"For a God who is able to create the entire universe, the odd resurrection would be child's play."*

So, how do you explain the resurrection?

RECOMMENDATIONS

‘The Case For Christ’ by Lee Strobel

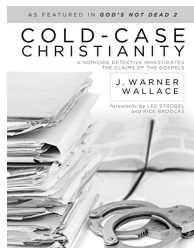


In this book Lee Strobel retraces his journey from atheism to faith. Strobel cross-examines a dozen experts who are recognised authorities in their own fields. Strobel’s tough, point-blank questions make this Gold

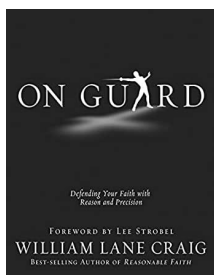
Medallion-winning book read like a captivating, fast-paced novel. But it’s not fiction; it’s a riveting quest for the truth about history’s most compelling figure.

‘Cold-Case Christianity’ by J. Warner Wallace

In this book J. Warner Wallace applies his skills as an expert homicide detective to the assertions of the gospels. For the first thirty-five years of his life Wallace was a devout atheist. However, after investigating the New Testament he came to a startling conclusion: the case for Christianity was as convincing as any case he’d ever worked as a detective.



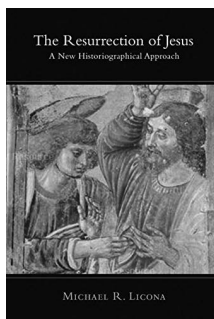
‘On Guard’ by William Lane Craig



This book is a concise training manual teaching Christians to defend their faith with reason and precision. It's filled with helpful learning aids like illustrations, sidebars, and memorisable steps.

Dr Craig outlines four arguments for God's existence, defends the historicity of Jesus' personal claims and resurrection, tackles the problem of suffering, and demonstrates why religious relativism doesn't work.

‘The Resurrection of Jesus’ by Michael Licona



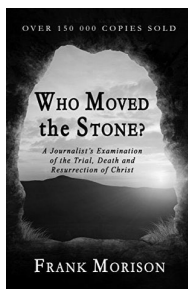
In this book Michael Licona offers a new approach to answering the question of Jesus' resurrection.

Working from the most reliable sources and bedrock historical evidence, Licona applies his new approach to this important

question, also providing a thorough treatment of all other prominent theories and hypotheses.

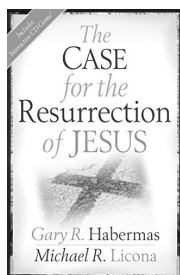
‘Who Moved the Stone’ by Frank Morison

This book is considered by many a classic apologetic on the subject of the resurrection of Jesus. Morison presents a vivid and poignant account of Christ’s betrayal and trial. For the reader those dark scenes will live again with a vividness that is hard to find in other accounts.



A brilliant book that is fascinating in its lucid appeal to the reason. This work accurately sets forth the truth of the resurrection.

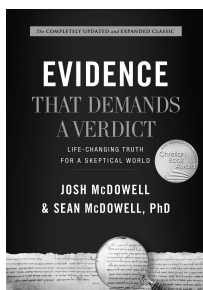
‘The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus’ by Gary Habermas & Michael Licona



This book is a comprehensive resource for anyone looking for detailed historical evidence of the physical resurrection of Jesus. Many consider this work the most accessible and comprehensive defence of Jesus’ resurrection available.

‘Evidence That Demands a Verdict’

by Josh & Sean McDowell

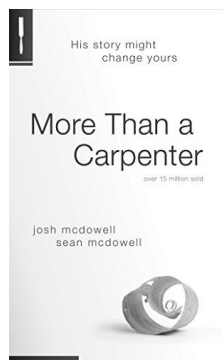


This book has proven to be an apologetics powerhouse for over 25 years. Keeping up with the most recent attacks on biblical truth, this new edition has been thoroughly updated with 80% fresh content.

Josh and Sean McDowell address in detail the toughest objections to Christianity, including of course, questions about the resurrection of Jesus.

‘More Than a Carpenter’ by Josh & Sean McDowell

This book is a timeless examination of the true nature of Jesus Christ and his impact on our lives. Former skeptic Josh McDowell is joined by his son Sean as they examine the evidence about Jesus. Is He really the Lord as He claimed to be? How can we know for sure? This book offers arguments for faith from a skeptic turned believer.



STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1: Did Jesus really exist?

What are opposition sources?

List 3 examples of opposition sources:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are neutral sources?

List 3 examples of neutral sources:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What are affiliated sources?

List 5 examples of affiliated sources:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Chapter 2: Did Jesus really claim to be God?

List 5 examples of Jesus claiming to be God?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

List 3 reasons for believing Jesus is God:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How is Jesus different to other religious figures, like Moses, Buddha, and Mohammad?

How does the response of the Jewish authorities prove that Jesus claimed to be God?

Chapter 3: Did Jesus really perform miracles?

List two scientific discoveries about the beginning of the universe that point us towards the existence of God.

List the six factors to keep in mind when investigating whether Jesus performed miracles:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Chapter 4: Did Jesus really fulfil prophecies?

Why is it impossible that Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies by accident?

Why is it unreasonable to believe that Jesus intentionally fulfilled the prophecies?

List ten of the major prophecies about the Messiah, all fulfilled in Jesus.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Chapter 5: Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

When answering the question, 'did Jesus really rise from the dead?' what two further questions should you keep in mind?

1. _____
2. _____

List the four historical facts surrounding the resurrection of Jesus:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

List five Christian sources that record the crucifixion of Jesus:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

List five non-Christian sources that record the crucifixion of Jesus:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Why can we be confident that the empty tomb of Jesus is a historical fact?

List the witnesses to Jesus's resurrection appearances recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

Why can we be confident that the disciples truly witnessed resurrection appearances of Jesus?

What is the stolen body theory?

Why is it unreasonable to believe that Jesus's body was stolen from the tomb?

What is the swoon theory?

Why is it unreasonable to believe that Jesus didn't actually die on the cross?

What is the displaced body theory?

Why is it unreasonable to believe that Jesus's body was moved after burial?

What is the hallucination theory?

Why is it unreasonable to believe that the disciples and other followers of Jesus who witnessed resurrection appearances of Jesus were hallucinating?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Cameron Grant

Cameron Grant, and his wife Katelyn, are the founders of *Confident Faith*, a Christian apologetics ministry located in Melbourne, Australia. Confident Faith seeks to share and defend the truth of Christianity by providing clear and concise answers to the most complex and challenging questions raised against the Christian faith. Cameron holds a Bachelor of Laws from Deakin University, and a Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice from Leo Cussen Centre for Law. He was admitted as an Australian Lawyer by the Supreme Court of Victoria in 2020.

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To find out more about Confident Faith, please visit www.confidentfaith.com.au

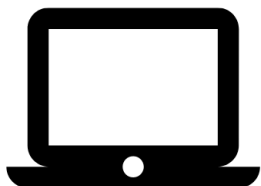


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