

**Faith**  
**is not**  
**Important...**  
**it is**  
*Everything!*

Common sense reasons for nonbelievers  
to reconsider Christianity

**Mike Gilles**



Bladensburg, MD

**Faith  
is not  
Important...  
it is  
*Everything!***

**Published by  
Inscript Books  
A division of Dove Christian Publishers  
P.O. Box 611  
Bladensburg, MD 20710-0611  
[www.dovechristianpublishers.com](http://www.dovechristianpublishers.com)**

Copyright © 2020 by Mike Gilles

Cover Design by Mark Yearnings

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used or reproduced without permission of the publisher, except for brief quotes for scholarly use, reviews or articles.

Scriptures are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

ISBN: 9781734303230

First Edition

Printed in the United States of America

# CHAPTER 1

## Is There a God?

Since this book is about Christianity and shows that Jesus Christ existed and not only just existed, but that He is the Son of God, it seems appropriate that we would first have to deal with the existence of God before we can deal with His Son.

I know I cannot assume everyone reading this book is an atheist, but if you call yourself an atheist or are not sure what you believe, this chapter is for you. I will, however, assume that maybe you do believe in God or at least a god of some kind, someone above our 'pay grade,' someone who at the very least sort of controls things. There seem to be several levels of belief; there are those convinced there is no god; those who believe there probably is some sort of a god, and those who do not doubt God but may not be sure about Jesus.

To start with, I'm going to ask you once again to keep an open mind as we travel through this book and to forget any of your preconceived ideas or things you may have heard or believed in the past. I'm asking you to let a clear head, logic, and common sense take the place of those preconceptions. This is not a mind game or a trick; I just want you to take a good look at the evidence and think for yourself when it comes to drawing any conclusions.

Think about this: if Christopher Columbus believed all he had been taught, he certainly would never have set sail to the west to find a route to the far east, since the accepted belief at the time was the world was flat and if one traveled too far to the west or any

direction, for that matter, they would fall off the end of the earth into the abyss.

We could never have traveled to the moon or sent unmanned probes to other planets if we had continued to believe the science that existed up and through the middle ages: that all the planets revolved around the earth. The early church excommunicated, kicked out, those who taught such heresy, that the sun, not the earth, was the center of the universe.

Over time, man has disproved so many things we once believed to be facts. If scientific research continued to assume there just are things that cannot be accomplished, new discoveries most certainly would be few and far between. Thankfully, we are no longer guided by the concept that it can't be done. We would never have tried to find cures for cancer, and we would not be routinely transplanting organs, because I am sure at some point in our history, we just 'knew' this was not possible. I am asking you to proceed with the same kind of open-mindedness and allow yourself to accept that what you may have heard or believed about God and Jesus Christ just may not be true. You are going to read, in this and the following chapters, things that may go against what you may currently believe, but I ask you to decide on your own what is and is not truth. The earth is not flat!

In today's world, probably more than at any time in our history, it seems like we want to deny the existence of God. It's as though we have gotten 'too big for our britches'; this is somewhat of an outdated term maybe, but it seems to apply here. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have become so 'enlightened' and so arrogant, we think we no longer need God. We tend to look to ourselves as the 'end-all.'

A Wall Street Journal/NBC News survey conducted between August 10-14, 2019, found that millennials no longer view patriotism, faith or families as important as Americans once did.<sup>1</sup> So, what does this mean? What is important to millennials? It seems to indicate that millennials have become more self-absorbed than in past generations. It appears that they are becoming a generation that puts self at the center of their universe. The survey shows a 9% drop in patriotism, a 12% drop in faith and 9% in having families. These changes have all happened in just the past 21 years; if this trend continues, and there is no reason to assume it will not,

what will the priorities be 21 years from now? What will the society of the future look like if future generations continue to become more concerned with self than God, family or country?

Getting back to the God topic, a theory among some atheists is that belief in a god may have been something primitive man used to explain things they didn't understand. However, in this era of such 'intelligence,' we don't really need anything or anyone other than ourselves, certainly not a god. Can't science explain away any need for a god?

If you classify yourself as an atheist, you need to be honest with yourself and ask yourself the hard questions. Do you refuse to believe because you are angry at a God who can allow evil in the world and allow bad things to happen? I've certainly heard that one before. In this case, how can you be angry at someone who doesn't exist? Only you can honestly confirm why you choose not to believe. I am not going to tell you that you are wrong to feel the way you do. There is never any wrong feeling. You feel what you feel. I may not agree with the reasoning behind your feeling and I am merely asking your indulgence as you continue reading. Keep your mind open to possibilities.

In the preface, I asked you to rely on common sense and logic as well as your ability to examine facts, then use reasoning to draw conclusions. Look at the magnificence and complexity of the human being as well as everything around us and in the universe and beyond. Can all this just be the result of a big bang, evolution, or anything other than intelligent design?

Let's start with man; think about how intricate we are, how every part of us functions. What is truly unique is what we are capable of accomplishing. We have emotions, feelings; we feel love, and most importantly, we are capable of choice. We make these choices based on reasoning, our ability to think, analyze and draw conclusions. Some animals, at least to some degree, can experience some sort of feelings, but man alone is unique in the ability to appreciate and enjoy such things as art, music, and intimacy. Not only can man appreciate all these things, but we are also capable of creating the very things that we appreciate. Is this all just random chance, evolving from pond scum and developing into who we are? Not only can we enjoy and appreciate everything around

us but we are capable of reason, capable of invention, capable of solving problems, and capable of creating beauty in the form of things like art and music. We don't just have feelings, but we think, we enjoy, we feel anger, sadness, happiness, and find joy in people and things around us.

Some animals have learned to use 'tools.' For example, some apes can pick up a stick, poke it into an anthill and draw out the stick full of ants to eat. Certainly, this is a basic use of a tool, and there is evidence of others in the animal kingdom using 'tools' to dig or perform other tasks. Can we assume that this is a part of their evolutionary process? Can we reasonably assume, maybe a billion years from now, an ape will be capable of reasoning and thinking similar to humans? If apes were doing these things thousands of years ago, why haven't they come any further in their evolutionary process in all this time? Why haven't we seen mankind continue to evolve over all of our known history? Our knowledge-base certainly has grown, but is there any evidence that we as a species have evolved?

If we evolved or grew out of single cells growing in a swamp, explain why humanity seems to have grown out of a single area, maybe even a particular swamp, then populated the globe. Wouldn't some form of evolution have happened, possibly occurring simultaneously, in all kinds of locations on the planet? Might we not then expect to see a variety of advanced beings inhabiting the planet? If single cells combined and started the process in, for the sake of argument, a swamp, wouldn't it be logical to assume that cells would also have combined and continued to evolve from other swamps? Would it then not also be logical that the evolutionary process would have brought forth a variety of humanoids, or at least creatures with quite possibly our abilities or maybe more advanced? It seems that it would be highly unlikely that the process from different swamps would all evolve at the same pace and end up with the same result. Think about it; for example, if cells came together in a swamp on one of the American continents, and the same thing occurred on the European continent, would not the humans that evolved from these different swamps, in different parts of the world, be far more different than just different hair, eye or skin color? When we think of the possibility of life on other

planets, we seldom assume they would be like us. We imagine little green 'men,' very different from us, yet beings growing out of different swamps tend to all end up the same.

The alternative to evolution is a single man and a single woman being created in a single location and a population then growing and spreading across the planet. Doesn't logic and reason point more toward the theory of a single pair of humans starting in a single location, than evolution or non-intelligent design?

Are you ready to accept that scientists could take a variety of single living cells, place them into a petri dish, and give them a billion years or so and *presto*, we would eventually have human beings or at least some rational, thinking being? To me, and I may be oversimplifying the concept, isn't it like taking all kinds of electronic components, placing them in a box, shaking them up, then just letting them be. Let's give them a billion years or so and over time, they might come together to become a computer. Computers may be pretty complex, yet nowhere near the complexity of human life, so can we explain human beings with this same oversimplified theory? We are expected to believe we grew from one single cell that just decided to divide into multiple cells and eventually evolve into us. Think about it. Can you really believe this to be a reasonable explanation?

We have all seen pictures of the chart showing the evolution of man from an ape-type creature on up to modern man. Simply looking at the chart, it almost makes sense, yet it begs the question: if we have evidence of thousands of ancient apes, and billions of 'modern' men, why do we find only one or two of these between stages, these so-called 'missing links'? This evolution process would have evolved so slowly over billions of years, and there would have to be tens of thousands, if not millions, of these various evolutionary stages. Where are they? Scientists who promote the theory of evolution get so excited when they find the one skeleton they want us to believe is evidence of a missing link in this evolutionary process. We have evidence of a vast number of ancient lives, such as all kinds of varieties of dinosaurs, and yet we find a single example of a missing link in the evolution of man. Does this make any kind of sense?

Do you find it believable that evolving from a single cell, over

time, no matter how long that time may be, eventually evolved into a body, separating out cells to become muscle, bone, blood, as well as cells that would form organs, eyes that can see, ears that can hear, a brain that is capable of probably far more than we have yet to figure out? There clearly are scientists who find it easier to believe that scenario than to believe an intelligent being created us. Let your logic and reasoning prevail, then tell yourself which scenario is the most credible.

The universe is designed around specific laws of science, generally referred to as the laws of nature. Sound travels at a very precise speed, light travel at a precise speed, the human body functions at 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. The list of specific laws that govern all of 'creation' cannot be random and would not have evolved by random chance. If it did, would there not be much more randomness to the 'laws of nature'?

Our bodies and certainly our brains are quite amazing, and it seems more so as we grow in knowledge and understanding of ourselves. It wasn't very long ago we discovered genes, DNA, and building blocks smaller than atoms. These unique bodies of ours have so many parts that all work together to function as the amazing creatures we are. The entire universe, the planets all work in a specific order and rotate in very specific patterns. Are you willing to accept all this as merely random chance?

One of the many mysteries of nature is the migration of the monarch butterfly. These butterflies begin heading south in September and October and travel from Canada and the United States to central Mexico, where they spend the winter months then begin to travel north again in March. No big deal, right? However, not a single butterfly that leaves the north to head to Mexico has ever been there before, and there are actually four generations between the time they start to migrate south and a year later when they do it all over again. Not a single butterfly has ever made the trek before, nor their parents or their parent's parents. So how can we account for the fact that they know exactly when and where to go and when and where to return to? This is not totally unique; nature is full of these kinds of occurrences, making chance or random evolution a hard sell when it comes to explaining these types of phenomena.



Over time, we came to understand that the planets do not revolve around the Earth and that the Earth is not flat; we can transplant human organs, and maybe we are just scratching the surface of what else we will be able to do one day. Is it possible that one day we might, in our wisdom, also conclude that as smart as we may be, we may not be the smartest of all beings, that maybe—just maybe—there is a God who put this all in motion and continues to watch over all of His creation?

Albert Einstein once said, “the more I study science, the more I believe in God.” Charles Hard Townes, the 1964 Nobel Prize winner in physics and the founder of laser science, said, “I strongly believe in the existence of God, based on intuition, observation, logic and scientific knowledge.” I could fill a chapter with quotes from some of the most brilliant minds throughout our history who feel that the only explanation of science is God. I ask you to continue to examine the facts rather than relying on the reasoning of others. The wisdom of those scientists may be compelling, but in the end, it has to be your logical conclusions that matter.

Pick up a Bible, read Genesis’ description of creation; God spoke everything into existence. Doesn’t the Big Bang theory sound a lot like creation as described in Genesis, everything coming into existence in a single instant by the will of an intelligent designer? Does it really make more sense to say it was all created by itself from nothing? How can we explain something from nothing and anything having a beginning if there was no one to create the first particle, the first building blocks of the universe?

I cannot prove beyond a reasonable doubt that God exists any more than anyone else can prove beyond a reasonable doubt that God *does not* exist, but looking at all the evidence, it certainly seems that logic and reasoning would lead us toward intelligent design over random evolution. I hear nature screaming intelligent design, God!

## CHAPTER 2

### Why Jesus?

Why should you accept that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Why should you believe that the only path to salvation, and ultimately heaven, is by faith in Jesus Christ?

First of all, because He said so. In the Gospel of John, Jesus, speaking to a man named Nicodemus, told him no one could enter the kingdom unless he was 'born again.' On another occasion, Jesus said, "no one comes to the Father except through me." Over and over again, Jesus made it clear that He was the ONLY path to heaven. He never said the road to heaven has many paths and following me just *might* be one of them. He could not have made that point any clearer.

Before we get too far, I have to assume that you have not yet accepted that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that you have to follow Him and only Him if you are not going to end up in hell. You may be 'sort of' leaning toward believing, yet you still have doubts. You may be asking yourself, "If I'm not sure He is who he says He is, how can I assume what He says is also true and that the Bible is reliable?" I will address the reliability of the Bible in the next chapter.

You may not believe all that you have read so far, but bear with me, at least for now, and be willing to consider that all of it just might be true. If you continue reading through the following chapters, you may have gathered enough evidence to come to some conclusions. But, once again, for now, just keep an open mind.

I know that believing Jesus and certainly believing there is no way to heaven except by faith in Him flies in the face of the secular world view. The world propagates a lot of untruths. The world would have you accept that if you choose to believe there is a God, there has to be more than one path that leads to Him, and you can decide to choose your own path. After all, don't all paths—Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, or any of the other religions— all lead to God? So why choose to believe in this Jesus? What makes Him so special?

Did Jesus really exist? Is His existence only verified in the Bible, a book that you are not sure you can trust? The answer to the first question is yes, the second is no. There is a lot of non-biblical evidence regarding Jesus. Literally, billions of people around the globe believe Jesus was one of the most important figures in world history, yet at the same time, there are certainly large numbers of people that don't believe He existed at all. The reality is that it is not about the numbers. I am not telling you to believe because a lot of other people do. I am asking you to hear me out, hear the evidence, examine the evidence, then make your own decision.

A survey conducted by the Church of England in 2015 revealed 22 percent of adults in England did not believe Jesus was a real person.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Mykytiuk, an associate professor of library science at Purdue University and author of a 2015 *Biblical Archaeology Review* article on the extra-biblical evidence of Jesus, notes there was no debate about the issue in ancient times. He said, “Jewish rabbis who did not like Jesus or His followers accused Him of being a magician and leading people astray, but they never said He didn't exist.”<sup>3</sup>

Archeologically, there is very little, if any, real evidence that can irrefutably verify His existence, but the same can be said about the majority of people living at the time, at least peasant people. A king or someone of worldly significance might leave an archaeological trail, but like most of us common ‘folk,’ two thousand years from now, archaeological evidence of our existence will probably be nonexistent as well.

There are items like the crown of thorns, believed by many to be the ‘crown of thorns’ worn by Jesus, housed in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris (and actually survived the devastating fire of

2019), but there is nothing that can verify that it was worn to the cross by Jesus. There is the Shroud of Turin, which is believed by many to be the burial cloth of Jesus. Carbon dating done on the shroud tends to disprove its authenticity, yet many Christians still choose to believe these items are indeed actual artifacts attributable to Jesus. But clearly, since Jesus did not live in a palace or have worldly riches, there is little or no real physical evidence left behind. The largest body of evidence is the lack of anyone disputing His existence at the time His followers were preaching His death and resurrection. There were those who did not witness the risen Jesus who may have questioned the resurrection, but no one denied His existence, and there were thousands who witnessed His life.

There is a significant amount of non-biblical documentation regarding the existence of Jesus. The first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus is probably our best source of information about first-century Palestine. Josephus twice mentions Jesus in his 20-volume history of the Jewish people written around 93 A.D.

Josephus was believed to have been born around 37 A.D., a few years after the crucifixion of Jesus. He was a well-connected aristocrat and military leader in Palestine who served as a commander in Galilee during the First Jewish Revolt against Rome between 66 and 70 A.D. Josephus was not a follower of Jesus, but he was around when the early church was getting started, so he knew people who had seen and heard Jesus.

In one passage of Josephus' history, he writes about an unlawful execution and identifies the victim as James, the brother of Jesus, who is called Messiah. Few scholars doubt the authenticity of the account.

Another account of Jesus appears in *Annals of Imperial Rome*, a first-century history of the Roman Empire written around 116 A.D. by the Roman senator and historian Tacitus. In chronicling the burning of Rome in 64 A.D., Tacitus mentions that Emperor Nero falsely blamed "the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius."<sup>4</sup>

As a Roman historian, Tacitus did not have any Christian biases

in his discussion of the persecution of Christians by Nero. Nearly everything Tacitus says coincides with what the New Testament itself says: Jesus was executed by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, for crimes against the state, and a religious movement of his followers sprang up in His wake.

When Tacitus wrote history, anytime he considered the information not entirely reliable, he generally wrote some indication of that for his readers, but there is no such indication of potential error in the passage that mentions Jesus. Shortly before Tacitus wrote his account of Jesus, Roman governor Pliny the Younger wrote to Emperor Trajan that early Christians would “sing hymns to Christ as to a god.” Some scholars also believe Roman historian Suetonius references Jesus in noting that Emperor Claudius had expelled Jews from Rome who “were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus.”

We don't find a lot of information about Jesus in any of these historical writings, but it is certainly clear that Jesus was known by historians who had reason to look into the matter. No one ever thought or suggested He was made up or didn't really exist. We don't have to accept Jesus' existence strictly on faith or just because the Bible says so. There is adequate evidence in history to support His existence and His death by crucifixion.

I have shared a lot regarding the existence of Jesus, but we need to look at the *why* of Jesus as well. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the concept of salvation, but I need to at least touch on it here since the *why* is all about salvation. We are taught that God became man for one reason: to substitute Himself on the cross to atone for the sins of mankind, absolutely true. However, I believe there were other reasons as well. At least one of the reasons was to help us to better connect with Him. Until God became man, taking on human flesh as Jesus Christ, we had never seen God. Throughout history, God communicated with us in various ways, but since God is not a physical being and had no earthly, human body, we never saw Him. For thousands of years, we only heard from this God through prophets, visits by angels (messengers) and verbally as He spoke to men like Adam, Noah and Moses, to name just a few. (The English word *angel* comes from the Greek word *angelos* and means *messenger*.)

When I think of God, I picture Jesus based on what He looked like in the mind of all the artist renditions of what they believed He may have looked like. So, by becoming man, Jesus gave us a real-life visual, someone that looked like us, someone that we could begin to understand and relate to and even have a relationship with.

I believe it was important for God to become man for another reason. We now had a face, maybe just an artist's rendition of the face of the real Jesus, but a face just the same. We could no longer come to Him and say, "but God, you don't understand what it's like to be me; you can't really understand what I'm going through. You just don't know what it's like to be a human." He chose to arrive in the world at a time in human history when day-to-day living was not easy. It was a time when there were no conveniences at all; no running water, no paved streets, and homes that, by today's standards, we might not consider habitable. He experienced all of the things that each of us experience: sadness, joy, hunger, and pain. He got tired, even exhausted just like any of us and then He suffered more pain than we could ever imagine. So, mankind can never again come before God to tell Him He just doesn't understand; believe me, He does!

As Jesus breathed his last breath on the cross with the words, "it is finished," His purpose on earth had been completed, the work that His Father sent Him to do was done. The relationship between God and man was forever changed; He had paid the price for our salvation in full and opened the door for all of mankind to have a personal relationship with their Creator.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Can We Trust the Bible?**

I have covered the historical evidence of the existence of Jesus as a person, but since all support for the divinity of Jesus is entirely based on Biblical accounts, we have to take a good look to determine if we can rely on the authenticity of these Biblical accounts.

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and that Almighty God inspired each of the ‘authors’ to write all 66 books contained in the Bible. There will always be those who argue or attempt to prove errors and inconsistencies in the Bible; there are none. However, it is necessary to define the term errors when we are speaking of the Bible. The Bible is not the work of divine dictation; God did not dictate the Bible word-for-word to its authors. If He had, we would have to conclude that there would be absolutely no error, as each word would be His word. This is not the case, and there is a distinct difference between dictation and inspiration. I had said earlier there were no errors in the Bible, and I am sure there are theologians who will cringe at what I am about to say. Loosely stated, and I do mean loosely defined, one could argue that there are errors. This may sound like I am talking in circles and actually contradicting myself. Let me explain. As I said, the Bible is not the work of dictation, but instead, it was inspired by God. God inspired each author to document events and teachings and did not provide the authors with a word-for-word dictation.

The result is that certain events, such as two occasions where Jesus multiplied a few fish and loaves to feed thousands of follow-

ers, may contain ‘minor’ inaccuracies that have no effect on the essence of the events described. One occasion places the number at 4,000, and on another occasion, there were 5,000. These were two distinctly separate occasions. Were there exactly 4,000 on one of those occasions and 5,000 at the other? Probably not, but the fact that Jesus fed a large multitude numbering in the thousands on both of these occasions with only a small amount of fish and loaves of bread is factual and is clearly a real event that God inspired the writer to document. The description of the miracle of multiplying fish and loaves to feed thousands is no less factual nor is it inaccurate or in error even though the number of loaves may not be exact nor the headcount of the followers who were fed. The fact remains that though the numbers may or may not be absolutely accurate does not mean the Bible is riddled with errors and thereby is incapable of being the Word of God. If God had determined that the exact numbers had any real significance, He certainly would have assured an accurate accounting of the people as well as the fish and loaves. The point is: the numbers are totally irrelevant.

Jesus often taught using parables. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, Jesus tells a story of the ten virgins, five having enough oil for their lamps, and five not having enough. Was this an actual event? Most likely not; it was a teaching regarding being prepared for Christ’s return. Another Gospel mentions a miracle where two men were healed by Jesus, while another Gospel account of what appears to be the same event mentions only one. Once again, the miracle and the event happened, and it is described in two of the Gospels by two separate writers. Whether the healing was of two men or one doesn’t make the Gospels in conflict with each other, as the event is what matters, not the number of men whose sight was restored. These are the types of ‘inconsistencies’ that have been pointed out as ‘errors’ by those who would like to delegitimize scripture. To be absolutely clear, the Bible does not contain errors or conflicts when it comes to documenting actual events nor in Jesus’ teachings.

The Bible, as we know it, of course, did not always exist in its current format. The Bible contains 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. The Old Testament of the Christian Bible contains the 39 books known as the Jewish Tanakh;



the name stands for the original promise of God to the descendants of Abraham. It covers the period from creation up to about 433 years before the birth of Christ. The New Testament starts at the birth of Christ, or a period immediately preceding His birth in some of the Gospels. Somewhere near the end of the fourth century, the current 27 books of the New Testament were painstakingly studied and reviewed by a large group of Biblical scholars, who determined that these Gospel accounts and letters were deemed to be God-inspired and to be considered the entirety of the New Testament.

Many other works had been reviewed for consideration but were not included. Some will contend that they were eliminated because they didn't 'fit' the 'story,' or contradicted the narrative the church wanted to present. Actually, they were eliminated from inclusion because they clearly did contradict documents that were irrefutably determined to be God's inspired word. The large number of examiners involved and the diversity of those doing the review did so without any agenda other than seeking truth. Many of these disallowed texts have been looked at over the centuries, and no evidence was ever found to suggest they were inspired or should have been included. If we are to accept the Bible as being God-inspired, it would be foolish to think the process of elimination and inclusion would not also be inspired by God. God certainly would have guided the process of weeding out the documents that He had not inspired.

The New Testament consists of the four Gospels documenting the life of Jesus along with the 23 letters written to various early Christian individuals or congregations by authors such as Paul, John, James, Peter, and others, as well as some whose authorship is uncertain. The Gospels are attributed to have been written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Everything in these accounts of the life of Jesus was written by those who either saw the events with their own eyes or recorded other first-hand accounts of the life and teachings of and actual words spoken by Jesus. The book of James, as well as the book of Jude in the New Testament, were written by two men who just happened to be Jesus' half-brothers, who certainly qualify as having first-hand knowledge of Jesus. Still, how do we know they are factual accounts to be trusted, and should

we believe Jesus did indeed rise from the dead? Acceptance that Jesus was raised from the dead is central to Christianity. Without it, Christianity fails to be anything but a fairy tale.

Let's start with Jesus' apostles, a ragtag bunch of guys Jesus called to follow him along His three-year journey of preaching and teaching, a journey eventually leading to His death and, most importantly, His resurrection. To add a little perspective, in the Jewish culture of the day, most young Jewish boys dreamed of being called by a rabbi to be a disciple. The rabbis called those who were thought to be the best and brightest to be their disciples, and they eventually would become rabbis themselves. Those who were not called had to seek other ways of making a living. For young Jewish men, this often-meant manual labor like fishing, carpentry, or some other trade. When Jesus started to call His disciples, He was calling those who had not been chosen by any of the other rabbis, and many had been fishermen.

The word disciple means follower or pupil, and the literal Hebrew meaning was 'to walk in one's dust,' meaning they were expected to follow so closely they actually were walking in the dust of the rabbis' footsteps. Jesus' disciples were no different; these men followed Him virtually day and night throughout His three-year ministry. They were with Him when He drew thousands to hear Him speak; they saw Him raise people from the dead; they were there when He healed the sick by the thousands, changed water to wine, and fed thousands with a few loaves of bread and a few fish. They saw Him walk on water, calm the seas, and truly came to believe that He was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Although Jesus had warned them of what was coming, it certainly seemed as if they never fully understood it until after the resurrection. During their time with Him, they heard His words, they saw the miracles, and yet, they believed at least somewhat like the rest of the Jewish nation—that the promised Messiah would be different. They still believed He would rise up and start His kingdom here on earth, overthrowing the Roman domination of their people. There is speculation that Judas, the disciple who sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, did so to force His hand, believing that if He was arrested, He would then have no choice but to use His divinity to rise up against the Romans, freeing Israel and be-

come King. We will never really know Judas' motives, but needless to say, whatever they were, they were clearly evil and self-serving.

Some 750 years before Jesus' birth, it was prophesied that a Messiah would be sent to the nation of Israel. They believed this promised Messiah would be like Moses, who led them out of Egyptian bondage. Most Jews failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah since He did not fit the image of the Messiah they believed was to come, someone who would free His people from Roman bondage. They never understood that the bondage the Messiah was coming to save them from was the bondage of sin.

When Jesus was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death, the apostles, His closest friends and followers, went into panic mode, and as they watched Jesus actually die on the cross, they really began to panic. How could this man, whom they believed was the Son of God, die? How could He create a kingdom if He was dead? They were scared and confused, but what they did know for sure was that they could be the next to die. Certainly, if the Romans killed their leader, they would come after His followers next. They immediately went into hiding. On the night Jesus was arrested, Peter, who was Jesus' 'right-hand man,' denied, not once, but three times that he knew Jesus.

One thing is certain, there is no way these terrified men would think about preaching the teachings of Jesus to the world. At this point, all they wanted to do was to hide, maybe go back to their old jobs, blend in, and get on with their lives. They were in shock and were totally demoralized. Yet all of a sudden, they began to preach, not only Jesus' teachings, but the good news of a risen Lord, and no matter what threats came their way, they could not and would not be silenced.

Sometime after seeing the risen Christ, Peter, the man who denied knowing Jesus, had been thrown into prison along with some of the other apostles for proclaiming the resurrection. When they were released, they were told to stop their proclamation. Peter said he could not, and if he remained silent, the very stones would shout out. These previously terrified men had now seen the risen Christ, and they would never remain silent again.

So, what changed? Upon seeing Jesus after He had risen from the dead, their faith had been fully restored, and it would nev-

er again be shaken. They knew that no matter how badly their faith may have been shaken in the past, all doubt was gone; Jesus had died and rose again, and there could no longer be any doubt that He was the Son of God. They were now willing to be beaten, threatened, imprisoned, and eventually die for what they knew to be the truth.

I found the following account of how some of the apostles/disciples died, but I cannot verify the absolute accuracy of this account as there are some other minor variations in other accounts, but it is known they did die brutal deaths for proclaiming their faith in the risen Christ.

- Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.
- Mark was dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.
- Luke was hanged in Greece.
- John faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. He was then sentenced to the mines on the prison Island of Patmos. He died an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.
- Peter was crucified upside down on an X-shaped cross.
- James, Jesus' half-brother, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. He survived the fall and then was beaten to death with a club.
- James, the Son of Zebedee, was beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. The officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.
- Bartholomew, also known as Nathaniel, was flayed to death by a whip.
- Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers, they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his ag-

ony. He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he finally died.

- Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India.
- Jude was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.
- Matthias, the apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded.
- Paul was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in 67 A.D. He endured a lengthy imprisonment, which allowed him to write his many letters to the churches he had formed throughout the Roman Empire. These letters, which taught many of the foundations and doctrines of Christianity, form a large portion of the New Testament.

Do you believe for a second these men would have been willing to die for Jesus had He not proved to them that He had actually risen from the dead? Do you think they would have been willing to die for a hoax? What could they possibly have gained by it? Put yourself in their shoes; can you imagine dying for a lie? Making a choice to die for the truth is not a choice any of us would find easy to make, let alone a lie. Most of us will never have to face that kind of choice, and fortunately, Jesus only asks us to live for Him, not to die for Him. But that doesn't mean that Christians are not facing death for their faith in Jesus Christ virtually every day in places like China, North Korea, Sudan, Iran and in much of the Middle East.

Think about this: when the teachings of Jesus and His resurrection was being preached by his followers and documented in writing, there were literally tens of thousands still alive who had witnessed many of the events. Would there not have been a huge backlash from those who witnessed these events if what was being preached wasn't true? There is no record anywhere, dating back to the time of the gospels, that contradicts a single event. To me, that speaks volumes as to the accuracy of the gospels. Jesus also said to His disciples before He left to return to Heaven, "I will send you the Holy Spirit who will teach you and remind you of what I have said."

I believe the accuracy and authenticity of the New Testament for all the reasons I have just described. My support for the authenticity of the Old Testament is based on the thousands of years

that the Jewish people have unequivocally accepted it to be the Word of their God and the fact that Jesus Himself often quoted from it.

Charles Colson, a principal character in the Watergate scandal of the Nixon era, is quoted as saying, “I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because twelve men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for forty years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren’t true. Watergate embroiled twelve of the most powerful men in the world and they couldn’t keep a lie for three weeks. You’re telling me twelve apostles could keep a lie for forty years? Absolutely impossible.”<sup>5</sup>

Best-selling author Lee Strobel said, “I went to a psychologist friend and said if 500 people claimed to see Jesus after he died, it was just a hallucination. He said hallucinations are an individual event. If 500 people have the same hallucination, that’s a bigger miracle than the resurrection.”<sup>6</sup>

We so often hear about archaeological findings that verify the existence of sites described in the Bible that had never been known to exist except in Biblical references. Over time, archeology has verified many Biblical sites, yet not a single discovery has ever disproved a single line of scripture. In 2019, archeologists believe they had located what they believe to be the town of Emmaus mentioned in the New Testament. Maybe not a major event, but these kinds of discoveries have occurred many times over the past century. Just more evidence of authenticity when it comes to Biblical references.

At this point, if you are still not ready to accept the Bible as absolute truth, you have to at least give serious consideration to the fact that there certainly is a lot of evidence pointing to its truth.

The Bible is not an à la carte document, you cannot pick and choose which books or chapters or verses you want to accept as truth and ignore the rest. The Bible is the Word of God, or it is not. It is that simple. You can choose to devalue it to the word of man, or you can accept it as God’s Word. That is the beauty of choice, of free will; you get to decide, but you need to decide based on reason and logic, not preconceived notions or ideas.