

Jesus: Just Another Man?

Did Jesus Exist?

Did Jesus exist? Much historical evidence proves that He did:

A. The 27 different New Testament documents.

B. The writings of the Church Fathers (Polycarp, Eusebius, Irenaeus, Origen).

It is also noteworthy that Christians throughout the ages were prepared to suffer persecution and even death for His name's sake, and the entire human history has been divided into a pre- and post-Christ era.

C. Tacitus, the Roman historian.

Writing in about 115 AD, he speaks about Nero's persecution of Christians in the year 64 AD:

But all the endeavours of men, all the emperor's largesse and the propitiations of the gods, did not suffice to allay the scandal or banish the belief that the fire had been ordered. And so, to get rid of this rumour, Nero set as the culprits and punished with the utmost refinery of cruelty, a class hated for their abominations, who are commonly called Christians. Christus, from whom their name is derived, was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. Checked for the moment, this pernicious superstition again broke out, not only in Judea, the source of the evil, but even in Rome, that receptacle for everything that is sordid and degrading from every quarter of the globe, which there finds a following.ⁱ

D. Suetonius, the Roman historian.

He refers to Chrestus (which is probably a confusion of Christus, i.e. Christ) in his Life of Claudius (the emperor from 41 to 54), which was written about 120 AD. He is probably referring to quarrels between Jews and Christians about Jesus:

Since the Jews were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he (Claudius) expelled them from Rome.

E. The Talmud, a collection of Jewish traditions from the third century.

It tells the story of Christ's death:

On the eve of Passover, they hanged Yeshu of Nazareth, and the herald went before him for forty days, saying, "Yeshu of Nazareth is going forth to be stoned in that he hath practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel. Let everyone knowing aught in his defense come and plead for him." But they found naught in his defense and hanged him on the eve of Passover.

Was Jesus the Messiah?

Was Jesus an imposter, or was He the Messiah, the Son of God?

This is the vital question we all need to answer for ourselves. One thing is sure, Jesus has created more controversy than any other religious leader.

He made some astounding claims. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). The tension such a statement creates between the various religious systems cannot be readily resolved.

Either Jesus was right, or He was not; compromise seems impossible. If He was right, then this controversy will escalate to its final conclusion. It will culminate in the glorious return of Christ to this earth to reclaim His dominion and to judge the living and the dead. If He was wrong, then according to the various belief systems, the Messiah has not yet come, or he has come a number of times in the form of world teachers, or he will not come at all.

Who is right? Let us consider the evidence.

In his book [*Evidence that Demands a Verdict*](#), Josh McDowell lists 60 Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled by Christ in the New Testament. Let us single out a few here for closer examination:

1. He was born of a virgin.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14).	And Joseph...kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus (Matthew 1:24-25 NASB).

2. He was born in Bethlehem.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).	Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea (Matthew 2:1).

3. He had a ministry of miracles.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped (Isaiah 35:5).	And Jesus went about all the cities and villages...healing every sickness and every disease among the people (Matthew 9:35).

4. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9 NASB).	They brought it to Jesus, and they threw their coats on the colt and put Jesus on it. (Luke 19:35 NASB).

5. He was betrayed by a friend.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me (Psalm 41:9 NASB).	Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him (Matthew 10:4 NASB).

6. He was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, and

7. Judas threw the money into the temple, and it was given to the potter for his field.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the LORD (Zechariah 11:13 NASB).	And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed...The chief priests...with the money bought the Potter's Field (Matthew 27:5-7 NASB).

8. He made no answer under accusation.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth (Isaiah 53:7 NASB).	And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer (Matthew 27:12 NASB).

9. He was physically abused.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities...And by His scourging we are healed (Isaiah 53:5 NASB).	Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him to be crucified (Matthew 27:26 NASB).

10. His hands and feet were pierced.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
They pierced my hands and my feet (Psalm 22:16 NASB).	When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him (Luke 23:33 NASB).

11. He was crucified with thieves.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12 NASB).	At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left (Matthew 27:38 NASB).

12. Soldiers divided His garments and cast lots for them.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots (Psalm 22:18 NASB).	Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier, and also the tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, to decide whose it shall be" (John 19:23-24 NASB).

13. He was offered vinegar.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
They also gave me gall for my food And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink (Psalm 69:21 NASB).	They gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink (Matthew 27:34 NASB).

14. He had no bones broken.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken (Psalm 34:20 NASB).	but coming to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs (John 19:33 NASB).

15. He was buried in a rich man's tomb.

Prophecy	Fulfillment
And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death (Isaiah 53:9).	there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph...And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb (Matthew 27:57-60 NASB).

Some have suggested that Jesus fulfilled these coincidentally. But according to the science of probability, the chance of any one human fulfilling a selection of just eight of these prophecies (including the one on crucifixion) is one in one hundred billion.

There are at least 60 Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled by Christ in the New Testament. But there are more than 300 references to the Messiah in the Old Testament, and these were written over a 1500-year period.

Conservative scholars estimate that the last Old Testament book was written around 450 BC. Some claim a later date, but cannot possibly push that date closer than about 250 BC, because the Greek translation of the Old Testament was completed during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 BC). This fact places a span of at least 250 years between the Old Testament predictions and their fulfillment in Christ.

Is Jesus God?

Buddhism and Hinduism teach that the Christ, the world teacher, has experienced numerous reincarnations at different stages of human progression.

Islam teaches that Jesus Christ was a prophet, but that He was not the Son of God. However, it also teaches that He was born of a virgin, worked miracles, was the Messiah, lived a sinless life, went to heaven, and is coming again before the end of the world.

Judaism rejects Jesus outright. To Jews, He is an imposter.

Christians themselves are divided in their attitudes toward Jesus. Some see Him as God, Saviour, Lord, and Messiah. Others refuse to accept His divinity, choosing to see Him as a special created being.

Let us consider the claims made in the New Testament about Christ's deity:

A. Equal with God

Jesus made it clear that He was the Son of God, and had equality with God.

Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61-62 NKJV).

But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was his Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:17-18 NKJV).

"I and My Father are one." Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone you, but for [blasphemy](#), and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:30-33 NKJV).

B. Deserving of Worship

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find Jesus rebuking those that worshiped Him or directly addressed Him as God.

And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying "Truly You are the Son of God" (Matthew 14:32-33 NKJV).

Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28 NKJV).

God is the only one worthy of worship. Angels and humans have no right to claim

worship from a fellow created being. Two examples in the scriptures neatly emphasize this point:

1. When John was shown the New Jerusalem in vision, he fell at the feet of his angel-guide to worship him, but the angel reprimanded him, saying, "See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God" (Revelation 22:9).
2. When the apostle Peter visited the home of Cornelius, he was so overwhelmed that he fell at Peter's feet to worship him, but the apostle said, "Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:26).

C. Divine Lord and Creator

There are some religious groups that deny the humanity of Christ, and others than deny His divinity. The Scriptures, however, clearly confirm both His humanity and His divinity. Christ is the Creator of all things. He is the Saviour and Lord of all. The name *Jesus* literally means "the existing One," the Saviour.

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast (Psalm 33:6-9).

The New Testament confirms that Jesus Christ is the Creator and the Christ: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3).*

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him (Colossians 1:16).

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11).

Jesus emphatically claimed to be God—that He was the self-existent one who preceded all things. He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

The Greek word used here for "I am" is *eimi*, which means "to exist." It clearly emphasizes the fact that Jesus is God. This "I am" is the same "I am" that spoke to Moses in the burning bush ([Exodus 3:14](#)).

The accurate prophecies in the Bible that pertain to the Messiah are all fulfilled in Jesus. No other individual can claim His messiahship. He is the Prince of Peace, the Lamb that was slain, and "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). Jesus said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth (Matthew 28:18).

And as Moses lifted up the servant in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:14-18).

The stage is set and the claims of Jesus are clear. In spite of this, the world is watering down these truths to accommodate all religions in a final confederacy aligned against the Word. This great conflict will culminate in the climax of history, when Christ returns and the kingdom shall be given into His hand.

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power (1 Corinthians 15:24).

Why Did Jesus have to Die?

Why Did Jesus Die?

Theories abound for why Jesus died. Some believe Jesus was just a tragic figure or martyr that died to be heroic or to identify with us. Others hold to the belief that Jesus' death was like any other pagan sacrificial ritual—a victim sacrificed to appease a wrathful God.

In 2004 [several people wrote in to *TIME* magazine](#) to express their sentiments about the question, "Why did Jesus die," after the magazine itself [published an article by that name](#).

The responses show that very few truly understand the answer. One writer from Florida wrote, "Jesus' life and death were an example to us. He had to die to be resurrected. Jesus attempted to show us that death is not an end. He was trying to remove some of the fear and desperation from our lives and prove that we are more than meaningless specks of dust on this planet. We have eternal life."

Another writer wrote from Virginia, "The death and resurrection of Jesus are a revelation on a grand scale of what takes place in every life. We all go through suffering, death, and resurrection, on one level or another. The energy that keeps us going is the presence of Christ's spirit in us. Why did Jesus die? To show us how life works and to empower us to live fully now and forever."

Another wrote from Wisconsin, "Jesus stood up to the injustices of the world, and was crushed in the process. That is happening all over the world to day, and not only to Christians. People of every religion who see wrongs and try to right them lose their lives. That is what the Christian spirit is all about."

And one final writer from California wrote, "Christ died in a dramatic and painful way to demonstrate that even in the most ignominious death, there is a spectacular resolution. Thus death is not the end of hope or life. Christ's death was necessary so he could rise again, the ultimate proof that he was no longer a son of man, but the Son of God."ⁱ

Are These People Right?

Was Christ's death a spectacular display of heroic martyrdom? Did He die just to show us what the Christian spirit is all about? Was His death just to emphasize that He empathizes with us about suffering and death?

Or to tell us that we don't have to worry—we are all immortal and death is nothing but a door to a wonderful new existence? Is the Florida writer correct—did Jesus have to die in order to be resurrected? Did He really die just to show us how life works?

Unfortunately, none of the above-expressed sentiments accurately explain why Jesus died. In fact, they show an appalling lack of understanding of what really happened not just 2000 years ago, but at the very beginning of time.

In the search for truth, we need to trust more than opinions. Let us take a look at the Bible itself to find an answer for the purpose of Jesus' death, life, and resurrection. Although Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies regarding a [Messiah](#), we must realize that Jesus did not come only to fulfill prophecies. The reasons behind His life, death, and resurrection are much more glorious than that.

The True Story

Almost everyone knows the story of Adam and Eve—how they were forbidden to eat of a particular tree in the Garden upon pain of death, how Eve ate the forbidden fruit, offered it to Adam who also ate, and how they then were cast out of the Garden ([Genesis 3](#)), and became the parents of every person who has ever lived on this planet. But the story begins even before Adam and Eve.

The Bible shows Jesus or God as the Creator of all things both on Earth and in heaven ([John 1:1-3](#), [Colossians 1:16](#)). God is also eternal ([Deuteronomy 33:27](#), [1 Timothy 1:17](#)), having always existed. He certainly had to have existed before Creation. The Bible even mentions the “morning stars,” or angels, singing at the Creation of our world ([Revelation 1:16,20; 12:4,7-9; Job 38:7](#)), showing that angels existed before Creation.

One of these angels was [Lucifer](#), an anointed cherub that served as one of the covering angels over God's throne ([Ezekiel 28:14](#)). Although Lucifer was created perfect, he became proud and was not satisfied with his position beside the throne of God. He wanted more. He wanted to be on the throne of God.

Lucifer campaigned against God and managed to sway one-third of the angels over to his side ([Revelation 12:4](#)). He and these angels were cast out of heaven ([Luke 10:18](#), [Revelation 12:9](#)). Sometime after Lucifer's defection, he met Eve at the tree in the Garden of Eden deceiving her into believing that God could not be trusted. From that point on, [sin](#) marred the world. Jesus' death accomplished a number of things, including taking our punishment for sin:

1) Jesus' death fulfilled part of the plan to atone for the sin of the human race, to pay the price of our sin so we don't have to ([Isaiah 53:5](#)).

Jesus' death on the cross was the beginning of a great procedure to eradicate sin from this world and from our hearts. As a result of His death and resurrection, Jesus could enter into the heavenly sanctuary to begin making atonement for our sins.

Jesus' resurrection was only possible because of His life, not His death. So many talk about His birth, and some talk about His death, but what about the years in between? The entire time He was on Earth, Jesus lived a sinless life. He lived it as a human, not as God. If we are truly connected to God, we can do the same miracles He

did while on Earth ([John 14:12](#)).

Jesus spent hours in prayer with His Father and nothing He did was on His own ([Luke 6:12, 9:28, 11:20, 22:39-45](#)). He lived a life consecrated to God, and so can we. His life was an example of how to live a sinless life with God's power.

If Jesus had sinned even once during His entire life, if He had given in to one wrong thought or the smallest temptation, He could not have been resurrected. Jesus did not die to show us what we all have to go through, or that death is "not an end," as [one letter to TIME magazine](#) suggests. In fact, death was very much an end for us all.

And it would have been for Him too, if He had not lived a sinless life. Jesus was constantly under severe attack by Satan, dogged at every step by harassment and temptation. In [the wilderness](#), through [reviling Pharisees](#), through [ungrateful lepers](#), through [angry mobs](#), even through Jesus' own [mother and brothers](#), Satan constantly tried to cause Jesus to sin.

During the [last hours of Christ's life](#), Satan tried the hardest. Every inhuman cruelty that Satan could conceive was hurled against Jesus. His demons worked overtime to cause Jesus to disbelieve in His Father, to give up, to speak one word of anger or hatred towards those that so cruelly mistreated Him, to sin in any small tangible way. But, thank God, Satan was unsuccessful.

God truly put everything on the line to save us. If Jesus had sinned in any respect, He, who was God, would not only have failed in securing our salvation, but also would have put the entire universe in jeopardy.

Think about what would have happened if God, in human flesh as Jesus, had sinned. Satan would have had complete victory. No wonder the attack upon Jesus was so fierce. No other human, no matter how much they have suffered on this earth, had such a heavy responsibility as Jesus. The weight of the universe was on His shoulders. And as Jesus hung on the cross, Satan dared Him to not love. Jesus could have come down off that cross at any time.

"He could have sent ten-thousand angels," says the song. And so he could. But He didn't. It was His love that held Him there. His love for you.

The truth is Jesus didn't have to die. He chose to because that was the only way you or I could have been guaranteed a chance at eternal life. His perfect life is a free gift to all who accept to be covered by it.

Sadly, although Jesus died for everyone, not everyone will be saved by His death. We must each accept His death and life in our stead. Even though we have sinned, God accepts the perfect life of His Son in our place, and we are considered righteous, even though we knew no righteousness ([1 Peter 2:24](#)).

[Romans 7:18](#) says that nothing good dwells in us. We are all sinners and guilty of

death ([Romans 3:23; 6:23](#)). This may not be a popular thought, but it is true nonetheless.

Television preacher Robert Schuller teaches that, "What we need is to positivise the words that have only had a negative connotation. There is no greater damage that can be done than to refer to the lost sinful condition of man. I don't think anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality and, hence, counterproductive to the evangelism enterprise than the often crude, uncouth, and unchristian strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition."ⁱ

But Robert Schuller is wrong. We may not feel comfortable admitting our sinfulness, but the Bible tells the truth about our condition, and offers real solutions. If we aren't lost or sinful, then we don't need Jesus and He came in vain.

Jesus' life and death are ours if we choose to accept them. Then as we walk in the newness of life that He offers, we are empowered to live as He did. Slowly but surely, as we submit daily to His Holy Spirit, our characters are changed into His image.

2) Jesus' life helped us understand and re-establish our relationship with God. His life on Earth was a manifestation of what God is like ([John 14:9](#)).

Because of sin, people are separated from God ([Isaiah 59:2](#)). No longer could they and God talk together as Adam and Eve had done face to face. Through the centuries since Adam and Eve's time, Satan has made desperate attempts to blind the human race.

He presents God as being severe and unforgiving—just waiting and watching for every wrong move we make so that He can condemn us to eternal death. This picture of God was especially prevalent during the Middle Ages when Catholicism was the dominant religion.

But Jesus states that He came for the exact opposite reason:

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly ([John 10:10](#)).

Jesus came to show us God's love, and the lengths to which God will go to save us ([John 3:16](#)). His life of loving kindness and patience served to reestablish the character of God as one of goodness and mercy ([Exodus 34:6](#)). Satan hasn't quit trying to get people to fear God and think Him evil and vengeful.

Every time [something bad happens](#) on Earth, we tend to blame God for it. Satan has managed to get us to make God responsible for Satan's own evil fruit. Satan has many deceitful ways to attack God's character and this is just one of them.

Another way is to make us think Jesus is just a nice figure from the past that died

tragically and taught us a few good things about the “Christian spirit.” Satan doesn’t care how we misunderstand who Jesus is. He only cares that it happens.

3) Jesus' life, death, and resurrection reconciled us to God ([Colossians 1:21-22](#)).

It was because God's law could not change that Christ had to come down to die for us. If the law could be changed, God could have done just that in the Garden of Eden, and life could have gone on. But it could not be.

Once the law was broken, there was an impassable rift between humanity and God, and we would continue to break the law from that day on. If God could modify that law to correct the situation, He would have. But the only way to reconcile us to God was to present Himself as a sacrifice to atone for our sin. Jesus’ death allowed us to be officially reconciled with God ([2 Corinthians 5:19](#)).

Before the cross, those that believed in the Messiah looked forward to His coming, in faith that He would make the atonement for them and win their eternal life.

[Abraham](#) had faith that God would accomplish this very thing. We are privileged to live after the cross, because our salvation is an established fact of history. We have more information than Abraham and all the Old Testament people had. But still we fail to understand.

4) Jesus' life, death, and resurrection brought hope to sinful humanity.

Because of Christ, we can have victory over sin and death both in our present lives and the eternal life to come ([1 John 3:3](#); [4:4](#)). We no longer have to be in bondage to sin.

If Jesus' death on the cross does not change our lives and our behavior, then He died in vain. We must not just acknowledge His death; we must accept it and all its implications for us. It requires of us a change of life:

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life...Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin ([Romans 6:4, 6](#)).

When we accept Christ's sacrifice in our stead, we are given a new lease on life. Old habits and the thoughts and attitudes that held us in bondage can be removed if we permit the grace of Christ to effect a change in our life. God desires to give us a better life—a life of joy, peace, and freedom from sin ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

Christ did not make the infinite sacrifice to secure for us the privilege of continuing to break the commandments of God. Sin is the transgression of the law, and the wages of sin is death ([1 John 3:4](#); [Romans 6:23](#)).

The law is not meant to be a burden of heavy rules. It is the way of happiness. God does not say “[thou shalt not...](#)” because He wants to restrict our happiness and make

life a drudgery. He tells us these rules because without them, we would truly be in misery.

The endless pain and sorrow on this planet is a result of broken rules. When a child is hit by a drunk driver, or abducted and killed by someone bent on murder, we suffer the pain and sorrow of broken rules. If we learned to see God's guidelines as the door to happiness, we would be able to experience more joy and contentment.

To those who desire release from the bondage of sin, Jesus is the answer. Because He conquered death and sin in His life, death, and resurrection, we have hope and confidence that He can do the same in us.

5) Jesus lived as a man on Earth to identify with us and to help us trust Him with our problems.

Jesus took on the form of humanity so that no one can say that Jesus doesn't understand. If God thought that we could get out from under the devil's torture in our own strength, He would not have sent His Son the way He did. If the Gospel is: "we sin, we die, we do right, we live," then we could solve everything by our own good behavior.

Instead, He was born to unmarried parents so He could relate to everyone conceived out of wedlock, born in a barn so He knows what it feels like to be poor, went to Egypt so He knows what culture shock and living as a refugee is like, and lived in Nazareth so that He experienced the ghettos.

He hung nailed to a cross unable to move so He can tell what it feels like to be in agony, trapped and helpless.

He knows what rejection is ([Matthew 27:46](#)). He felt the burden of the sin of our lives so we never have to wonder if there is anyone who knows how we feel. He made a choice to feel our pain, so we would be safe to share our pain with Him—so we can trust Him and know He cares.

6) Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were part of the great controversy or war with Satan.

Jesus' death seemed like Satan's final victory blow, but Jesus' resurrection was the triumphal display of victory over Satan.

When Adam and Eve sinned, Satan won dominion of this world and his government reigned. As long as the Messiah had not yet come, Satan was an undefeated foe. Satan had hurled every possible cruelty upon Jesus, after which Jesus cried "it is finished," and died. But because Jesus resurrected from the dead, Satan became a defeated foe. The world that Satan once claimed as his has been reclaimed by Jesus.

Jesus is the only one that could redeem us from sin. [Jesus is God](#). Before He lived on Earth, He had lived and worked with the Father in heaven and He loved us ([John](#)

[1:1-3](#)). When Jesus lived here on Earth, He linked Himself to the human race with ties that will never be broken.

Because of all this, we now can God's sons and daughters ([Ephesians 1:5-6](#)). That doesn't mean we are mini-gods. It does mean, though, that we are privileged to be "adopted" into the family of God and to be viewed by God as though we had never sinned ([1 John 3:1](#)).

The most important thing to remember, however, is that Christ's work is not finished! Just because He died on the cross to accomplish our redemption does not mean that He leaves us on our own.

There are perhaps some that would prefer to keep Him as a tragic figure, a good example, or a hero that did a great deed, but that isn't how it is. We need Him as much now as we ever did. He does not—He cannot—leave us just because He has gained the victory over Satan's hold on Earth and its inhabitants.

Satan, after all, is not gone yet. God promises to strengthen us in all our difficulties ([Isaiah 41:10](#)). He promises to be with us in the deep waters and fiery trails of life ([Isaiah 43:1-2](#)). And He promises to finish the work He started and bring us to a new place where there is no more sin ([Philippians 1:6; Revelation 21:4](#)).

Christ's job of atoning for our sin is not yet complete. We have not yet been reconciled with God to the point of Adam and Eve before sin. We don't yet enjoy the company of God face-to-face in a world of peace with no death, pain, or sorrow. That is still to come. Today Jesus ministers for us in heavenly places, and His work in heaven is as important as His death on the cross.

Have you accepted Jesus as your Saviour and Lord? If you haven't given your life over to Him, don't waste another moment.

Want to know more? Call us at 1-866-572-9457 to speak to someone about how you can accept the free gift of God's atoning life, death, and resurrection.

What Day Did Jesus Die?

There is controversy among some Christians about the true day of Jesus' death. Most people believe that Jesus died on a Friday, but some (Wednesday Crucifixionists) believe that Jesus actually died on a Wednesday.

Part of the reason for this belief is that Jesus mentions that, "as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt 12:40 NKJV). This could mean that Jesus would have died on Wednesday, in order to be entombed for three literal days and three literal nights (Thursday, Friday, and Saturday), and rise on Sunday. Other variations of this belief also exist.

But what does the Bible say? Can we discern from the Scriptures on which day Jesus really died? To do so, we take a look at the book of Mark.

Day #1:

In Mark 10:32-34, Jesus is on His way up to Jerusalem. He tells His disciples, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again."

On the same day, He talks to James and John about sitting on His right hand and left hand, and then restores Bartimaeus' sight. In Mark 11:1, He is approaching Jerusalem "unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives."

Let us call this Day #1. We don't know which day it is yet, but we shall count it as the first day. [Mark 11:2-11](#) describes what Jesus does for the rest of that day. He rides on the colt into Jerusalem and goes into the temple. In verse 11, it was evening, the end of this day, and He goes to Bethany to stay with the twelve disciples perhaps at Martha and Mary's house.

Day #2:

In [verse 12](#) of Mark 11, we see that it is the next day "on the morrow," and Jesus is hungry for breakfast as they are coming from Bethany. As they pass a barren fig tree, Jesus curses the tree, and goes down to Jerusalem, where He cleanses the temple for the second time in His ministry, and teaches the people. This was Day #2. Verse 19 states that "when even was come, he went out of the city" and stayed somewhere for the night.

Day #3:

Mark 11:20 tells us that, "in the morning," meaning the beginning of Day #3, Jesus goes again to the city of Jerusalem, and the day is a busy one. First the disciples notice that the fig tree Jesus had cursed has shrivelled.

The priests, scribes, and elders question Him about what authority He uses to do His

miracles. He tells a parable, the Pharisees try "to catch him in his words" (Mark 12:13) using various questions and arguments.

Then Jesus goes to the treasury and watches people cast in their money and He comments on the widow's mite. He then gives the disciples a list of signs to watch for that will transpire before His Second Coming. All the things He discusses with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes is found in [Mark chapter 12](#).

In Mark 13, He goes to the Mount of Olives after the altercation with the Pharisees, probably to rest and get away from the harassment. There he talks to Peter, James, John, and Andrew privately about the signs of His Second Coming. The [rest of the chapter](#) records what He said.

Day #4:

[Mark 14:1](#) is the next day (Day #4), and the Bible tells us that the Passover is two days away. On this day, Mary anoints Jesus with her "alabaster box of ointment of spikenard" (Mark 14:3) at a special dinner made in Jesus' honor, and Judas Iscariot makes a pact with the chief priests to betray Jesus.

Day #5:

In [verse 12](#) of Mark 14, we find Day #5, which is the first day of unleavened bread when the Jews kill the Passover lamb.

On this day, the disciples rent an upper room, and there they hold the last supper Jesus has with His disciples before His death. On that same night, Jesus goes to Gethsemane and spends agonizing hours in prayer while His disciples sleep.

Then Judas comes with a "great multitude with swords and staves" (Mark 14:43), and kisses Him. The mob then arrests Jesus, and His disciples all forsake Him ([verse 50](#)). Then follows Jesus' night trial before the chief priests at which they condemn Him to death. It is during this trial that Peter denies Jesus three times. Jesus is then lowered into the pit for the night.

Day #6:

Day 6 begins in Mark 15:1. "Straightway in the morning" Jesus is taken to Pilate, then to Herod, then to Pilate again until finally Pilate agrees to sign the death sentence, and orders that Jesus be crucified.

At the sixth hour darkness covers the whole land until the ninth hour, and at the ninth hour, Jesus cries "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?"

Shortly thereafter, Jesus dies ([verses 33-37](#)). When the evening comes, it is the "preparation day," that is, "the day before the sabbath" (verse 42). Jesus is taken down and quickly wrapped and placed in Joseph of Arimathaea's new tomb, so that He does not hang on the cross over the Sabbath.

The word used in Mark 15:42 for "the preparation day" is the word used only for the

day before the seventh-day Sabbath (or Saturday). The preparation day therefore is Friday—the day that Jesus died.

Day #7:

The day in between Mark 15:47 and Mark 16:1 is the seventh-day Sabbath. Nothing is written about this day, but Mark 16:1-2 tells us that, "when the Sabbath was past... very early in the morning the first day of the week...at the rising of the sun," three women go back to the tomb to anoint Jesus with spices (because they hadn't been able to finish that work when He died on Friday since the Sabbath was approaching, and they wanted to keep the [Sabbath](#) holy).

Day #8:

The missing day we label as Day #7, and "the first day of the week," which would have been a Sunday, we label as Day #8, the day that Jesus rose from the grave.

If we calculate backwards then, Day #1 was the Sunday before the crucifixion when Jesus entered triumphantly into Jerusalem. This entire week was [Passover](#) and Jesus, the Passover Lamb, died as per the Jewish customs and to fulfill prophecy.

Jesus and the 70-Week Prophecy

May the bones of the hands and the bones of the fingers decay and decompose, of him who turns the pages of the book of Daniel, to find out the time of Daniel 9:24-27, and may his memory rot from off the face of the earth forever.ⁱ

An ancient [Rabbinic curse](#) in the Talmud forbids people to read [Daniel 9:24-27](#). Why? What are they trying to hide?

The 70-week prophecy, the greatest proof of Jesus as the Messiah, is found in these verses. They predict the time of the Messiah's anointing, putting the issue beyond doubt.

Let us unravel the prophecy by allowing Scripture to be its own expositor.

The Day-Year Principle

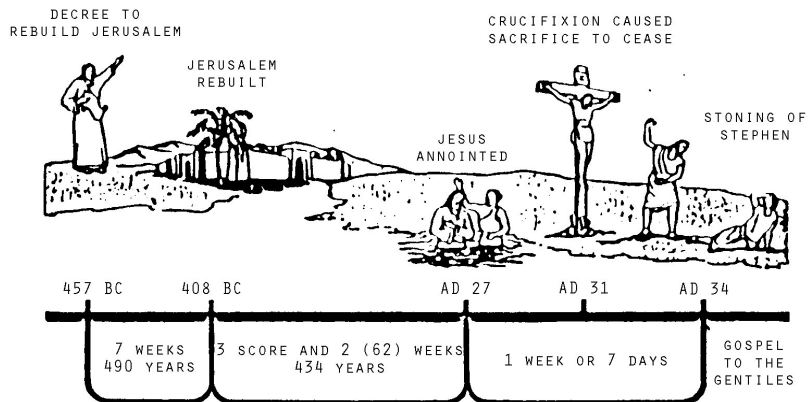
Prophecies are couched in symbolic language that needs to be unraveled before the meaning of the words can be understood. Prophetic time is used as a symbol to be interpreted in the light of Scripture.

According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years (Numbers 14:34 NKJV).

“SEVENTY WEEKS ARE DETERMINED UPON THY PEOPLE”
490 YEARS

I have appointed thee each day for a year (Ezekiel 4:6).

These two texts provide the key—the day-year principle. This principle takes prophetic days and converts them to actual years. Applying this principle to the 70-week prophecy will show that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah.



Six Messianic Tasks

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy (Daniel 9:24).

“Thy people” were God’s chosen people Israel. Seventy weeks resolves into 490 days. Applying the day-year principle, 490 days become 490 years.

The 490 years were appointed to the Jewish nation for these six reasons found in Daniel 9:24:

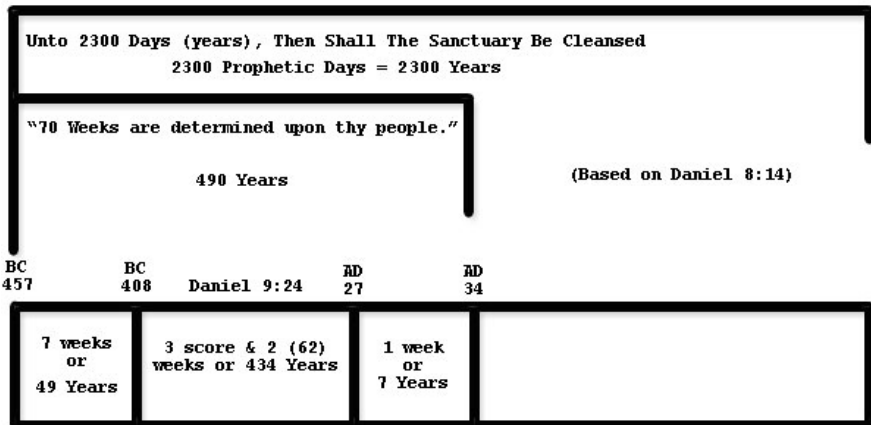
1. to finish the transgression
2. to make an end of sins
3. to make reconciliation for iniquity
4. to bring in everlasting righteousness
5. to seal up vision and prophecy
6. to anoint the most Holy

These six issues could only be fulfilled in and through the Messiah. Who else could make reconciliation for iniquity or bring in everlasting righteousness?

Jesus Fulfills the Prophecy

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.



And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate (Daniel 9:25-27).

The angel gives a breakdown of the 70 weeks as follows:

7 weeks of years for rebuilding of Jerusalem (verse 25)

62 weeks of years to the Messiah (verses 25-26)

1 week of years to the close of the period (verse 27)

The 2300-day prophecy, of which the 70-week prophecy is a small part, was to begin at the command that effected the restoration of Jerusalem.

This command went forth under King Artaxerxes Longimanus in the year 457 BC ([Ezra 7:12-13](#)).ⁱⁱ

From this starting point, we can determine all the other time markers of the prophecy. Seven weeks were allotted for the restoration of Jerusalem. True to the prophecy, Jerusalem was rebuilt 49 years after 457 BC, which was 408 BC.

Seven weeks (49 day-years) for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and another threescore and two weeks (62 weeks or 434 day-years) brings us to "the Messiah the Prince."

Beginning in 457 BC and applying the day-year principle, we can determine the passing of 483 years from 457 BC which brings us to 27 AD (allowing for the conversion from BC to AD being one extra year).

In 27 AD, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit on the occasion of His baptism which marked the beginning of His ministry ([Luke 3:21-23](#)). This baptism marked the event in Daniel's prophecy "unto the Messiah the Prince." When Christ proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled" ([Mark 1:15](#)), He was referring to this part of the prophecy.ⁱⁱⁱ

The end of the prophecy is 34 AD, 7 day-years after the baptism:
And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease (Daniel 9:27).

Christ would confirm the covenant made with Israel for one prophetic week (7 years), but oblation (offerings) would cease in the middle of the week (3 ½ years after 27 AD).

This mid-point brings us to 31 AD—the year Christ was crucified. It was at His death that he put an end to the system of offerings practiced by Israel for so many years.

Chiastic Structure

Some modern interpretations confuse the 70-week prophecy by applying it to the Antichrist, who (according to this interpretation) would arrive at the end of the Christian dispensation some time in the future.

However, the prophecy in Daniel 9:26-27 has a chiastic structure, and if this is taken into account, the apparent confusion in its literary style is eliminated:

And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the

consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

The chiastic structure is as follows:

- * a. Messiah destroyed
- * b. Sanctuary destroyed
- * b1. Sacrifice terminated
- * a1. Ruler destroyed

Verse 27 has an additional chiasm: “he—week—week—he,” again emphasizing the role of the Messiah. It can thus be said that the destruction of the Messiah caused “the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.” The Messiah would also confirm His covenant with God’s people by His sacrificial death “in the midst of the week.”

John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, and Isaac Newton all connect the 70th week with the Messiah. When Christ cried “[It is finished](#),” the priests were officiating in the temple. It was the hour of the evening sacrifice, and as the Passover lamb representing Christ was about to be slain, “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake and the rocks rent” (Matthew 27:51).

After Christ died, rose again, and ascended to heaven, there were still 3 ½ day-years remaining in the prophecy. These ended in 34 AD with the stoning of Stephen ([Acts 7:59-8:4](#)).

At that time the Gospel was given to the Gentiles by individual ambassadors from every nation. Paul, the very one who consented to the stoning of Stephen, became the apostle to the Gentile world. Israel ceased to be the recipient and channel of God’s truth.

Jesus, the Recycled Redeemer

There is a reason the ancient historical accounts of the life of Jesus of Nazareth do not start with the phrase, “Once upon a time...” On the face of it, the authors did not appear to be writing fairytales for future generations, but rather detailed accounts of the extraordinary events in the life of a particular Jewish carpenter who actually changed the course of history.

The opening words of Luke’s account of Jesus’ life are especially clear on this point:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. In the days of Herod, king of Judea....

In John’s account we find two striking claims that bookend his record, the first found in Chapter 1 and the last in Chapter 20:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. Many other [miraculous] signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

Each of these ancient “biographies” of Jesus—along with the only other accounts that give any breadth of detail about the Nazarene (Matthew and Mark)—proceed in the same fashion.

First, the authors are clearly aware they are relating a remarkable story about a remarkable man who did remarkable things. Second, it is just as clear they were convinced the events in their accounts really happened. These were not sacred stories of netherworld gods and ethereal, supernatural heroes, but reports of actual historical events involving flesh and blood people with their feet firmly planted on *terra firma*.

The Gospel writers intended to report history, not mythology. Their accounts include the vivid detail of an observer who had witnessed the events personally, or a chronicler who had obtained the information from people who were actually there. Yet they are not merely reports, but arguments meant to persuade, citing evidence to prove their claims.

These facts on their own don’t make the accounts true, of course. But they do seem to place these writings in a class of ancient literature that doesn’t allow them to be

dismissed for frivolous reasons. Yet this is exactly what has been happening.

“ONCE UPON A TIME...”

The internet is littered with allegations that the historical records of the life of Jesus of Nazareth are examples of a kind of religious plagiarism, a mere rehashing of dying-and-rising-god fictions of ancient mythology, a recycling of common details found in dozens of mystery religions in the ancient world around the time of Christ.

Simply Google Mithras, Dionysus, Osiris, Adonis, or Isis and you will be buried in an avalanche of “evidence” linking the divine teacher from Galilee with a host of characters allegedly manufactured from the same mythic material. The most well-known attempt is a flashy “documentary” called *Zeitgeist — The Greatest Story Ever Sold* that has gone viral on the web.

According to *Zeitgeist*, ancient hieroglyphics tell us this about the anthropomorphized Egyptian sun God, Horus:

Horus was born on December 25th of the virgin Isis, Mary. His birth was accompanied by a star in the east which, in turn, three kings followed to locate and adore the newborn savior. At the age of 12 he was a prodigal child teacher. At the age of 30 was baptized by a figure known as Adep, and thus began his ministry. Horus had 12 disciples who he traveled about with performing miracles such as healing the sick and walking on water. Horus was known by many gestural names such as “The Truth,” “The Light,” “God’s Anointed Son,” “The Good Shepherd,” “The Lamb of God,” and many others. After being betrayed by Typhon, Horus was crucified, buried for three days, and thus resurrected.

“Many other gods,” *Zeitgeist* claims, “are found to have the same mythological structure”:

- Attis (1200 B.C.) — Born of a virgin on December 25th, was crucified, was dead for three days and resurrected
- Krishna (900 B.C.) — Born of a virgin with a star in the east to signal his birth, performed miracles, died, and was resurrected
- Dionysus (500 B.C.) — Born of a virgin on December 25, performed miracles like turning water into wine, was referred to as “the King of Kings” and “God’s only begotten son,” died, and was resurrected
- [Mithras](#) (1200 B.C.) — Born of a virgin on December 25, had 12 disciples, performed miracles, was dead for three days and resurrected, was known as “the Truth” and “The Life,” and was worshipped on Sunday

Osiris, the husband of Isis in the Egyptian pantheon, is another popular contender for a dying and resurrected god. The broad claim, simply put in the words of Sir Leigh Teabing in Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*, is, “Nothing in Christianity is

original.” This is a taxing topic because of the sheer volume of alleged comparisons advanced by skeptics. The process is complicated by the many variations of these ancient myths generated in their retelling. Books like Ronald Nash’s scholarly *The Gospel and the Greeks* or Lee Strobel’s popular work *The Case for the Real Jesus* spend time answering the particulars. In the interest of space, I want to advance a general response to this broad challenge to the reliability of the canonical accounts of Jesus’ life.

In general, the dispute entails a factual claim — certain mythical accounts that predate the Gospels contain elements matching the details of Jesus’ life — and a logical/literary claim — the existence of the older accounts proves that the account of Jesus is myth as well, being cobbled together with bits and pieces of these old stories.

There are at least three significant problems with this argument that should be enough to silence it forever. The first two speak to the factual claims. The last — and most decisive — addresses the logical assertion.

FAILED “FACTS”

First, the fact is that the “facts” listed above are almost all false, nearly to the point of embarrassment. Here are a few examples:

- There is no record Osiris rose bodily from the dead. Instead, he became a god of the netherworld. As one put it, Osiris is not a dying god, but a dead god, always depicted as a deceased, mummified king. He may be “alive” in the spirit realm, but this would be true of anyone passing into the next life who’s physical body lies decaying in a tomb. Indeed, Egyptian religion had no concept of resurrection, only of immortality beyond the grave. These are two entirely different concepts.^{iv}
- Horus was not born of a virgin, but was the son of Osiris and Isis (not Mary). Horus never dies, so he could have no resurrection, though in his union with Rah, the sun God, one could say he “dies” every night and is “resurrected” every morning. Clearly, though, this is no help to the copycat messiah crowd.
- Neither the Bible nor Christianity claim Jesus was born on December 25th, so any parallels with ancient myths are completely inconsequential. The date was chosen by emperor Aurelian in the third century.
- Mithras was not born of a virgin, but emerged from a rock, and there is no textual evidence of his death, so there could be no resurrection.^v Mithras was a god, not a teacher, so he had no disciples.^{vi}
- There is no evidence of an account of a bodily resurrection of Attis, the Phrygian god of vegetation.^{vii}
- There is no evidence for a virgin birth of Dionysus.^{viii}

- Krishna was his mother's eighth son, so his virgin birth is unlikely.^{ix}

The dating of many of the dying-and-resurrecting-god myths is the second obstacle. Here's the problem. It is axiomatic that the recycled version must appear in history after the one it allegedly came from, not before. However, many mythical accounts of dying and rising gods actually postdate the time of Christ:

- There is no evidence of the influence of Mithraism in the Roman Empire until the end of the first century A.D.^x
- The sacrifice of a bull by some Mithraists allegedly mimicking the substitutionary atonement of Christ first shows up in the second century A.D.^{xi}
- The four texts that cite the resurrection of Adonis date from the second to fourth centuries A.D.^{xii}
- The account of the miraculous birth of Zoroaster dates to the ninth century A.D.^{xiii}

The most academically exhaustive work, a ponderous study entitled *The Riddle of Resurrection* by Tryggve Mettinger, concludes that even though some myths of dying and rising gods may predate the Christian era, the claims made regarding Jesus of Nazareth are distinct from them in three critical ways.

First, Jesus was a flesh-and-blood human whose resurrection happened in history at a precise topographical location on earth. Second, the mythical "resurrected" deities were invariably tied to the seasons of the agricultural cycle, "dying" and "rising" repeatedly every calendar year, while Jesus' resurrection was a one-time event unrelated to seasonal changes. Third, Jesus died as a vicarious sacrifice for sins. There is no evidence of such an atonement in any other accounts.^{xiv}

Mettinger sums up the evidence this way:

There is, as far as I am aware, no prima facie evidence that the death and resurrection of Jesus is a mythological construct, drawing on the myths and rites of the dying and rising gods of the surrounding world. While studied with profit against the background of Jewish resurrection belief, the faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus retains its unique character in the history of religions.^{xv}

A SKUNK IN THE WOODPILE

In his work, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, Ronald Nash offers a handful of suggestions to protect the novice from being misled by dubious factual claims.^{xvi}

Check the evidence in the primary sources. Don't settle for a website citing a website that cites a website. Web postings often run in a circle, with each site quoting others without ever citing a primary source document (an original rendering of the ancient myth itself). Try to get as close to the original source as you can to reduce the chance that "facts" got distorted in the retelling. Make sure your evidence comes

from an established authority in the field who has access to the original material.

Check the dates. Be sure the original records (not the original myth) predate the accounts that allegedly borrowed from them. Even ancient tales get amended over time.

Determine if the parallels are really parallel and significant. Similarities are frequently overstated or oversimplified. Many are inconsequential, like the claim ancient gods were born on December 25th. Some accounts trade on the kinship of phrases like “birth of the sun” vs. “birth of the son.” This word play only works, though, when rendered in English, a language that developed millennia after these events.

Beware of Christian language and terms being read back into the ancient account. Some refer to the death of Osiris as his “passion,” employing Christian terminology to imply a similarity that doesn’t exist. Any death can be called a passion, even when the passions themselves are wildly dissimilar. Also, no one should be impressed when Egyptian sun gods are called “The Light.”

As it turns out regarding the factual claims, once the primary sources of the ancient myths are consulted, a host of alleged similarities turn out to be fictions. The parallels remaining are usually far too general to be significant.

Further, the dating of many of the ancient records completely undermines the argument because the stories appear too late in history to have any influence on the Gospels.

But that’s not the worst of it. Even if the characterizations of the myths were accurate — that Mithras was born of a virgin, and Osiris was resurrected from the dead, and Horus had a dozen disciples, and Dionysus turned water into wine, and Attis was crucified — there is something else fundamentally wrong with the *Zeitgeist* challenge. Even if the facts were accurate, it proves nothing. Here’s why.

A TITANIC COINCIDENCE

In 1898, Morgan Robertson published a novel entitled *Futility*. The story was a fictional account of a transatlantic voyage of the cruise ship *Titan* traveling between England and New York. The largest vessel afloat displacing 45,000 tons, the *Titan* was considered virtually unsinkable. Yet in the middle of the night in April, with three massive propellers driving the ship forward at the excessive speed of 25 knots, it collided with an iceberg and sunk.

Since the number of lifeboats was the minimum the law required (though twice that was needed for its 3,000 capacity), more than half of its passengers perished.

Fourteen years later in April, the world’s largest luxury liner with a displacement of 45,000 tons — the indestructible *Titanic* — departed from England on a transatlantic voyage to New York. In the middle of the night, the *Titanic*’s triple

screws drove the ship at the excessive speed of nearly 25 knots into an iceberg and sunk. Since the *Titanic* was fitted with less than half the number of lifeboats needed for its 3,000 capacity (the minimum the law required), more than half of its passengers were lost.

This real-life coincidence makes a crucial point. Regardless of the similarity between two accounts of different events, the second cannot be summarily dismissed as an invention simply because the first turns out to be fiction. Whether or not the details of the *Titanic*'s disaster are accurate is determined by its own body of evidence, unrelated to the fictional story of the ill-fated *Titan* that came before.

This is a critical procedural point, one best described by C.S. Lewis:

*Suppose I think, after doing my accounts, that I have a large balance at the bank. And suppose you want to find out whether this belief of mine is "wishful thinking."...Your only chance of finding out is to sit down and work through the sum yourself...If you find my arithmetic wrong, then it may be relevant to explain...how I came to be so bad at arithmetic...but only **after** you have yourself done the sum and discovered me to be wrong on purely mathematical grounds...In other words, you must show **that** a man is wrong before you start explaining **why** he is wrong [emphasis in the original].^{xvii}*

Lewis's insight applies to our challenge. Remember the claim in question: Ancient myths explain the origin of the Jesus myth. The second false account was inspired by the first ones. Do you see the misstep? The New Testament account is presumed false; then the ancient accounts are invoked to explain the fiction. The argument of *Zeitgeist* turns out to be circular, assuming what it intends to prove. Imagine introducing yourself to a stranger and sharing bits of autobiography only to be labeled a liar and an imposter. His evidence? In the past three months, 12 other phonies tried to pawn off the same story on him. When you offer identification, he ignores it. He's already assumed you're a fraud like the rest, no matter what *bona fides* you produce.

In addition to being offended, you'd probably be mystified. Clearly, he can't prove you are lying about your identity by citing others who lied about theirs. No imposter of the past could logically foreclose on the possibility that you might be the genuine article. That must be decided on separate grounds. To paraphrase Lewis, one has to show that a person is lying before it makes any sense to speculate on where the lie came from.

In the same way, one first has to show that Jesus is a fiction before he starts explaining how the fiction came to be. Even if someone produced a thousand parallels with Jesus from the writings of antiquity, that alone would not prove He was just another phony. If the similarities were remarkable, it might raise eyebrows ("Not another one") and invite a closer look. But it would do nothing on its own to disqualify Christ. Only shortcomings with the specific historical evidence for Jesus can do that.

The *Zeitgeist* approach is an evasion, not an argument. It is not good enough to assume Jesus is a myth and then speculate on the genesis of the error. The primary source historical documents about Him — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — must be dealt with first, not dismissed with misleading talk about alleged literary relationships with ancient dying and resurrecting gods.

JESUS, MAN OF HISTORY

Professional historians do not believe the New Testament account is merely a retelling of an ancient myth. Though not endorsing every detail of the Gospel records (most academics reject the supernatural elements for philosophic reasons), scholars, both liberal and conservative, overwhelmingly agree that Jesus of Nazareth was a man of history.

Will Durant, the Pulitzer Prize winning historian, co-authored with his wife the most successful work of history in history, the 11 volume *The Story of Civilization*. In “Caesar and Christ,” in spite of the “many suspicious resemblances to the legends of pagan gods,” Durant concludes:

Despite the prejudices and theological preconceptions of the evangelists, they record many incidents that many inventors would have concealed. No one reading these scenes can doubt the reality of the figure behind them. That a few simple men should in one generation have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic, and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels. After two centuries of higher criticism, the outlines of the life, character and teachings of Christ remain reasonably clear and constitute the most fascinating feature in the history of Western man.^{xviii}

The challenge in *Zeitgeist* is why we should consider the stories of Mithras, Horus, Attis, and the other pagan mystery saviors as fables, yet treat as factual a similar story told of a Jewish carpenter.

The answer is simple: There is no good evidence for the authenticity of any ancient mythological characters and their deeds, but there is an abundance of such evidence for Jesus. And if the historical documentation for the man from Nazareth is compelling, then it doesn't matter how many ancient myths share similarities.

The Apostle Paul readily acknowledged that if Jesus' resurrection was a myth and the witnesses were trading in lies, then Christians were a pitiful lot (1 Corinthians 15:19). And fools too, I might add, because it cost many of them their lives. Nothing in the *Zeitgeist* recycled redeemer theory, however, suggests Christians have misplaced their confidence. The skeptics' facts are unreliable and their thinking is unsound, so their challenge is doubly dead.

According to their own testimony, the New Testament writers were not following “cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our

Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16). They were testifying not to myths, but to “sober truth” about events that had “not been done in a corner” (Acts 26:25-26):

What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life – and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also (1 John 1:-3).

“Jesus, The Recycled Redeemer” used with permission. Greg Koukl, "Jesus, the Recycled Redeemer," *Solid Ground* (Stand to Reason, September/October 2009): 1-5. [Visit Stand to Reason's website](#)

i *Talmudic Law*, p.978, Section 2, Line 28. We have, as yet, been unable locate this specific source for the reader. We have however found other sources with similar sentiments. [See These Rabbinic Curse Examples](#).

ii. Rev. Stanley Leathes, *Old Testament Prophecy—Its Witness as a Record of Divine Foreknowledge* (1880).

iii. Rev. Joseph Tanner, *Daniel and the Revelation*.

iv Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 2007): 163, 177-8.

v Ronald Nash, *The Gospel and the Greeks – Did the New Testament Borrow from Pagan Thought?* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2003): 134, 137.

vi Strobel, 172.

vii Nash, 129.

viii Strobel, 180.

ix Ibid., 182.

x Nash, 138.

xi Strobel, 172.

xii Ibid., 177.

xiii Ibid., 182.

xiv Tryggve Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection – “Dying and Rising Gods” in the Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International: 2001): 221.

xv Ibid.

xvi Nash, 249-51.

xvii C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 272-3.

xviii Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, vol. 3 of *The Story of Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 557.