

Christianity – A Unique Book

John 20:30–31 “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

That passage has an impact on me but not on so many others. Why? Because they don't believe John. “That's what he claims, but I don't know if I can trust the Bible. The thing is so old. How do we even know if 'John' wrote that 2,000 years ago? The Old Testament is even older. Plus, I've heard there are hundreds of thousands of errors. So, no . . . that passage doesn't resonate with me.”

Here's what I'd like to do over the 3 weeks. Share with you (especially those who haven't been exposed to this kind of study) that Christianity has a unique book, prophecies, and message. The book points to and centers on Jesus. The most significant prophecies center on Jesus, and so does its message. Today, I'd like to answer some questions you may have. Or perhaps I'll answer some accusations you have encountered yet. I hope you'll see that the Bible cannot be quickly dismissed. Whether its message is true or not, it stands out.

1 Peter 3:15 “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,” Today, we make a defense (apologia).

THE OLD TESTAMENT:

- The Talmudists (scribes during A.D. 100-500)
- The Massoretes (scribes A.D. 500-900) Most Bibles use this text for the O.T.
 - Went to *incredible* lengths to make accurate copies.
 - Copies were either buried, burned, or banished to schools to be used as reading books. Synagogues had lumber cupboards that would house defective manuscripts. We have recovered scrolls from these receptacles. Most copies are gone due to naturally perishing, burial, or being burned if the receptacle became overcrowded. This is why we don't have as many O.T. copies. They preferred new copies over the old.
 - Dead Sea Scrolls were an incredible find. The oldest Isaiah copy was around 900 A.D. (which was based on a text from 100 A.D.) Found in a cave in 1947. In this cave were clay jars containing thousands of leather scrolls. One was a 20-foot long, 10-inch high copy of Isaiah. It was dated about 100-125 B.C. Thus making it 1,000 years older than the oldest copy of that time. What did they find after comparing the texts? It “proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95% of the text. The 5% of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.” Gleason Archer
- The Septuagint (meaning 70). Actually 6 Jews from each tribe to translate. Apparently completed the translation in 72 days.
 - Name given to the Greek translation of the Hebrew text. “LXX” in literature.
 - Very close to the Massoretic Text (A.D. 916) we have today.

THE NEW TESTAMENT:

- 5,800 manuscripts in Greek * 10,000 manuscripts in Latin * 25,000 total manuscripts
- We have more manuscripts of the New Testament than of every other ancient document combined! Most ancient literature is accounted for by, on average, about 20 copies; they are virtually non-existent when compared to the copies of the New Testament
- While it is true that most of the manuscripts we have come from many centuries after the 1st century (most from the middle ages and on), we still have a sizeable number of copies from the early centuries:
 - 1 from 1st century * 18 from 2nd century * 64 from 3rd century * 48 from 4th century
 - Within just a couple hundred years of the 1st century we can piece together most of the New Testament.
 - "Late" copies only add ~2% of material, which shows that our late copies are almost as reliable as our early copies.
- There are probably close to 400,000 variants among our 25,000 manuscripts. But do the math – that's only 16 variants per manuscript, on average. That's pretty insignificant.
 - The quality of the variants is more important than the quantity of the variants:
 - 75% spelling mistakes 20% word order/substitution 4% harmonization <1% are somewhat meaningful
- Most popular critic of the New Testament, Dr. Bart Ehrman, said this in his New York Times best-selling book *Misquoting Jesus*: "Essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript traditions of the New Testament."

(The illustration below is taken from Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* - Page 55).

EARLY PATRISTIC QUOTATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT *

WRITER	GOSPELS	ACTS	PAULINE EPISTLES	GENERAL EPISTLES	REVELATION	TOTAL
Justin Martyr	268	10	43	6	3	330
Irenaeus	1,038	194	499	23	65	1,819
Clement Alex.	1,017	44	1,127	207	11	2,406
Origen	9,231	349	7,778	399	165	17,922
Tertullian	3,822	502	2,609	120	205	7,258
Hippolytus	734	42	387	27	188	1,378
Eusebius	3,258	211	1,592	88	27	5,176
Totals	19,368	1,352	14,035	870	664	36,289

(The illustration below is taken from Josh McDowell's *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Page 48)).

AUTHOR	WHEN WRITTEN	EARLIEST COPY	TIME SPAN	NO. OF COPIES
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,000 yrs.	10
Livy	59 B.C.-A.D. 17			20
Plato (<i>Tetralogies</i>)	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200 yrs.	7
Tacitus (<i>Annals</i>)	100 A.D.	1,100 A.D.	1,000 yrs.	20 (-)
also minor works	100 A.D.	1,000 A.D.	900 yrs.	1
Pliny the Younger (History)	61-113 A.D.	850 A.D.	750 yrs.	7
Thucydides (History)	460-400 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 yrs.	8
Suetonius (<i>De Vita Caesarum</i>)	75-160 A.D.	950 A.D.	800 yrs.	8
Herodotus (<i>History</i>)	480-425 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,300 yrs.	8
Horace			900 yrs.	
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	1,000 A.D.	1,400 yrs.	100
Lucretius	Died 55 or 53 B.C.		1,100 yrs.	2
Catullus	54 B.C.	1,550 A.D.	1,600 yrs.	3
Euripedes	480-406 B.C.	1,100 A.D.	1,500 yrs.	9
Demosthenes	383-322 B.C.	1,100 A.D.	1,300 yrs.	200 *
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1,100 A.D.	1,400 yrs.	5
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	900 A.D.	1,200 yrs.	10
* All from one copy. + Of any work.				

Secular writers and their testimony concerning Jesus and His followers

(Taken from Evidence That Demands A Verdict by Josh McDowell).

What about secular writers? What about Jesus? Did He really exist?

- **F.F. Bruce**, professor of Biblical criticism and exegesis rightly said: "Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth,' but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories." (Page 83).
- **Otto Betz** (What Do We Know About Jesus? Used by permission SCM Press) concludes that, "no serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus." (Page 83).
- **Josh McDowell**: Recently in a debate sponsored by the Associate Students of a midwestern university, my opponent, a congressional candidate for the Progressive Labor Party (Marxist) in New York, said in her opening remarks: "Historians today have fairly well dismissed Jesus as being historical . . . "I couldn't believe my ears (but I was thankful she said it because the 2,500 students were soon aware that historical homework was missing in her preparation). It just so happened that I had the following notes and documentation with me to use in my rebuttal. It is certainly not the historians (maybe a few economists) who propagate a Christ-myth theory of Jesus. (Page 83).
- **Cornelius Tacitus** – (born A.D. 52-54). A Roman historian, in 112 A.D., Governor of Asia, son-in-law of Julius Agricola who was Governor of Britain A.D. 80-84. Writing of the reign of Nero, Tacitus alludes to the death of Christ and to the existence of Christians at Rome.
 - "But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, 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: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.”

- Tacitus has a further reference to Christianity in a fragment of his *Histories*, dealing with the burning of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70, preserved by Sulpicius Servus. (Page 84).
- **Lucian** – A satirist of the second century, who spoke scornfully of Christ and the Christians. He connected them with the synagogues of Palestine and alluded to Christ as: “. . . the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world. . . Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.” (Page 84).
- **Flavius Josephus** - (born A.D. 37). A Jewish Historian, became a Pharisee at age 19; in A.D. 66 he was the commander of Jewish forces in Galilee. After being captured, he was attached to the Roman headquarters. He says in a hotly-contested quotation: (following quotation is the Arabic text which seems more reasonable to me)
 - “At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and (He) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned Him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that He had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that He was alive; accordingly, He was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”
 - We also find from Josephus a reference to James the brother of Jesus. In Antiquities XX 9:1 he describes the actions of the high priest Ananus:
 - “But the younger Ananus who, as we said, received the high priesthood, was a bold disposition and exceptionally daring; he followed the party of the Sadducees, who are severe in judgment

above all the Jews, as we have already shown. As therefore Ananus was of such a disposition, he thought he had now a good opportunity, as Festus was now dead, and Albinus was still on the road; so he assembled a council of judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James, together with some others, and having accused them as law-breakers, he delivered them over to be stoned." (Page 84-85).

- **Plinius Secundus, Pliny the Younger** - Governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor (A.D. 112) was writing the emperor Trajan seeking counsel as to how to treat the Christians. He explained that he had been killing both men and women, boys and girls. There were so many being put to death that he wondered if he should continue killing anyone who was discovered to be a Christian, or if he should kill only certain ones. He explained that he had made the Christians bow down to the statues of Trajan. He goes on to say that he also "made them curse Christ, which a genuine Christian cannot be induced to do." In the same letter he says of the people who were being tried that:
 - "They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word, not to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up." (Page 85-86).
- **Thallus, The Samaritan-Born Historian** – One of the first Gentile writers who mentions Christ is Thallus, who wrote in 52 A.D. However, his writings have disappeared and we only know of them from fragments cited by other writers. One such writer is Julius Africanus, a Christian writer about 221 A.D. One very interesting passage relates to a comment from Thallus. Julius Africanus writes:
 - " 'Thallus, in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun – unreasonably, as it seems to me' (unreasonably, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take

place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Paschal full moon that Christ died)."

- Thus, from this reference we see that the gospel account of the darkness which fell upon the land during Christ's crucifixion was well known and required a naturalistic explanation from those non-believers who witnessed it. (Page 86).
- **Justin Martyr** – About A.D. 150, Justin Martyr, addressing his *Defense of Christianity* to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, referred him to Pilate's report, which Justin supposed must be preserved in the imperial archives. But the words, "They pierced my hands and my feet," he says, "are a description of the nails that were fixed in His hands and His feet on the cross; and after He was crucified, those who crucified Him cast lots for His garments, and divided them among themselves; and that these things were so, you may learn from the 'Acts' which were recorded under Pontius Pilate."
- Later he says: 'That He performed these miracles you may easily be satisfied from the 'Acts' of Pontius Pilate.'

Want a recap?

- Jesus was good and virtuous.
- Both Jews and Gentiles believed in Him.
- Condemned to the cross by Pilate.
- Those who loved Him did not at first forsake Him.
- He was killed on the eve of Passover.
- His hands and feet were pierced.
- His garments were divided among the people.
- There was darkness (eclipse of the sun).
- He "perhaps" fulfilled the many prophecies concerning the Messiah.
- Many continued to follow Christ, and they called themselves "Christians."
- They were persecuted along with Jesus' brother, James.
- Christians worshipped on a fixed day to sing praises and keep themselves from sin.
- They still existed during these writings.
- Jesus appeared to His disciples alive again on the third day.