THE RESURRECTION

Christianity’s Core Belief

Volume 2

By

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We are one week away from celebrating Easter 2019. That’s remarkable in itself realizing that Christians have celebrated the Day of Resurrection since the early days of Christianity.

Today is known as **Palm Sunday** because of what occurred when Jesus entered Jerusalem just days away from sacrificing Himself on a Roman cross.

“The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: ‘Hosanna! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ The King of Israel!’ Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, Sitting on a donkey’s colt.’ His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and that they had done these things to Him. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, ‘You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!’” John 12:12-19
This event was one of many that connected directly to Old Testament prophecies.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be ‘from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.” Zechariah 9:9-10

Core Belief

Why do Christians “celebrate” Easter? Because the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the core belief of Christianity. Without the Resurrection there would be no celebration.

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen
asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

The reason we celebrate is revealed in Paul’s next words –

“But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.” 1 Corinthians 15:20-21

God planned the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth before time began, before the creation of the world (e.g. 2 Timothy 1:8-10; Titus 1:1-3; 1 Peter 1:18-21; Ephesians 1:3-4). That means there should be a historical connection between what God revealed in the Old Testament and what we read about Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament.

Historical Connection

My early investigation as an atheist into the New Testament introduced me to two people who connected back to the Old Testament: John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. They are both mentioned in the first verses of Mark’s Gospel account –

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’ ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’” Mark 1:1-3
Mark quoted from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3.

All four Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) were consistent in their reporting about what John the Baptist did and said.

Two Messengers

John the Baptist claimed to be the promised “messenger” who would “prepare the way of the Lord” –

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.” Isaiah 40:3

It’s interesting to note that the Isaiah reference speaks of the voice of the one in the wilderness preparing the way of the “Lord” and making straight in the desert a highway for “our God.”

Here’s the Malachi reference Mark used –

“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,’ Says the Lord of hosts.” Malachi 3:1
The Gospel writers referred to John the Baptist as being the “messenger” of God who would prepare the way before God and someone else called “the Messenger of the covenant.”

Malachi, believed to be the last of the Old Testament prophets, prophesied that God would send two messengers to Israel at a future time. One would prepare the way for the other.

The Gospel writers claimed that John the Baptist was the first messenger who prepared the way for the second Messenger, Jesus of Nazareth.

**Broad View**

Investigative reporting looks at a story from both broad and narrow views. Here are some examples of what I saw as I looked at reports about the two messengers –

**First messenger, Old Testament** – “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me.”

**First messenger, New Testament** – “As it is written in the Prophets: ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You.’ The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’ John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem,
went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.”

**Second Messenger, Old Testament** – “And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, ‘Says the Lord of hosts.”

**Second Messenger, New Testament** – “It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

**Narrow View**

**Second Messenger, Old Testament** – “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He *is* like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness.” Malachi 3:2-3

**Second Messenger, New Testament** – “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out
His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Both views, broad and narrow, are seen in the Old Testament prophecies concerning the first and second messengers.

**Messenger Exchange**

John the Baptist appears prominently at the beginning of all four Gospel accounts, but soon disappears from view. Why? As John the Baptist said – “It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”

John the Baptist was arrested and placed in prison sometime after baptizing Jesus and said these words concerning his relationship with Him –

“You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from heaven is above all. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the
words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” John 3:28-36

The Messiah

John the Baptist said that he was not “the Christ.” What or who was “the Christ”?

That question became prominent in my investigation of the New Testament. The word “Christ” is used hundreds of times in the New Testament. The English word “Christ” comes from the Greek word Christós (Χριστός), meaning “anointed”. The Greek word was the translation of the Hebrew word mashìach (מְשַׁח), also meaning “anointed”. The English version of the Hebrew word is “Messiah.”

The Hebrew word is found almost 40 times in the Old Testament and several of them are well known as prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah (Christ) to Israel. One of the most prominent is found in the prophecy of Daniel –

“Seventy weeks are determined For your people and for your holy city, To finish the transgression, To make an end of sins, To make reconciliation for iniquity, To bring in everlasting righteousness, To seal up vision and prophecy, And to anoint the Most Holy. Know
therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command  
To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall  
be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again,  
and the wall, Even in troublesome times. ‘And after the sixty-two  
weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of  
the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.  
The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war  
desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with  
many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an  
end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall  
be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is  
determined, Is poured out on the desolate.” Daniel 9:24-27

The first Old Testament verse that seemed to point to an “anointed one” of  
God is Genesis 3:15 where God said these words to the serpent (Satan) –  
“And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed  
and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

Other Old Testament references that I looked at as possibly referring to a  
Messiah include –

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from  
between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the  
obedience of the people.” Genesis 49:10
“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, And batter the brow of Moab, And destroy all the sons of tumult.” Numbers 24:17

“The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” Deuteronomy 18:15

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another.” Job 19:25-27

“Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: ‘Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion.’ ‘I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.” Psalm 2

“They shall fear You As long as the sun and moon endure, Throughout all generations. He shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, Like showers that water the earth. In His days the righteous shall flourish, And abundance of peace, Until the moon is no more. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him, And His enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles Will bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba Will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; All nations shall serve Him. For He will deliver the needy when he cries, The poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, And will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; And precious shall be their blood in His sight. And He shall live; And the gold of Sheba will be given to Him; Prayer also will be made for Him continually, And daily He shall be praised. There will be an abundance of grain in the earth, On the top of the mountains; Its fruit shall wave like Lebanon; And those of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure forever; His name shall continue as long as the sun. And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory.” Psalm 72:5-19
“The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. The Lord has sworn And will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.’ The Lord is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries. He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head.” Psalm 110

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.” Isaiah 2:2-4

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil
and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father’s house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.” Isaiah 7:14-17

“Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, In Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy; They rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian. For every warrior’s sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” Isaiah 9:1-7
“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. His delight is in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist.” Isaiah 11:1-5

“Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men; So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see, And what they had not heard they shall consider.” Isaiah 52:13-15

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by
God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.” Isaiah 53
Other Old Testament chapters you can check include: Jeremiah 23, Jeremiah 30, Ezekiel 17, Ezekiel 21, Hosea 1, Hosea 6, Joel 3, Amos 9, Micah 2, Micah 4, Micah 5, Zephaniah 3, Haggai 2, Zechariah 2, Zechariah 3, Zechariah 6, Zechariah 8, Zechariah 9, Zechariah 11, Zechariah 12, Zechariah 13, and Zechariah 14.

**Jesus the Christ**

The New Testament refers to Jesus of Nazareth as “the Christ” hundreds of times. Here are several examples from the Gospels –

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 1:18

“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11

“Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Matthew 16:16

“Then they said to the woman, ‘Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” John 4:42
“And many of the people believed in Him, and said, ‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?’” John 7:31

“She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.’” John 11:27

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John 17:3

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

**Claims of ‘the Christ’**

Did Jesus of Nazareth believe He was the Messiah of Israel? Did He make that claim or was it only others who thought that?

The Gospel of Luke records this interesting exchange between Jesus and two men after He rose from the dead –

“Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at
Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:25-27

Jesus said these words to His disciples a short time before He ascended back to Heaven –

“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” Luke 24:44-49

This next portion of the New Testament may be the most telling of all. Jesus of Nazareth prayed these words to God the Father and claimed in that prayer to be the Christ –

“Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: ‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus
Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.” John 17:1-5

The earliest preaching and teaching of Jesus’ apostles was that Jesus is the Christ.

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2:38

“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” Acts 5:42

“Then all who heard were amazed, and said, ‘Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?’ But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.” Acts 9:21-23

“So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Acts 16:31
“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.” Romans 1:1-6

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:9

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Peter 1:3-5
“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your[a] joy may be full.” 1 John 1:1-4

“I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 1:9

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Revelation 22:20-21

Jesus of Nazareth prayed to God that He was the Christ and claimed to His followers that the Old Testament writings (Law, Prophets, Psalms) were about ‘Him.’ Jesus said He was the Christ – the Messiah of Israel. Either He was lying or telling the truth – or was deluded.

That was something I noted during the investigation into the New Testament. Jesus of Nazareth believed He was Israel’s promised Messiah, His disciples believed He was the promised Messiah, and many of the people who heard Him speak believed He was the promised Messiah. So,
was He? Was Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah written about in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms?

**Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled?**

Christians claim that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. So what? Claims are easy to make, but hard to prove. How do we know that Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah? Before I list some of the prophetic claims Christians made to me when I was an atheist, let me share something about how atheists view these claims.

First, many atheists don’t believe Jesus even existed. For those who will accept that someone named Jesus lived in Israel in the early 1st century, atheists don’t believe He was anyone special who did anything special. Second, atheists believe it would have been easy for Jesus and/or His followers to make up stories about His life that would fit with Old Testament prophecies.

It’s easy for atheists to dismiss the claims of prophetic Messianic fulfillment, so that’s what they do.
As for our Jewish friends, they don’t believe Jesus fulfilled ALL of the Messianic prophecies, so He couldn’t be the Messiah.

“More than 1,000 years after Jesus’ crucifixion, the medieval sage Maimonides (also known as Rambam) laid out in his Mishneh Torah specific things Jews believe the messiah must accomplish in order to confirm his identity — among them restoring the kingdom of David to its former glory, achieving victory in battle against Israel’s enemies, rebuilding the temple (which the Romans destroyed in 70 CE) and ingathering the exiles to the land of Israel. ‘And if he’s not successful with this, or if he is killed, it’s known that he is not the one that was promised by the Torah,’ Maimonides wrote.” MyJewishLearning.com

Interestingly enough, our Muslim friends do believe Jesus was the promised Messiah, though not in the same way Christians understand it. The term *al-Masih* (the Messiah) occurs in the Qur’an 11 times. Here are two examples –

“When the angels said: “O Mary! Allah gives you the good news of a Word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, who is illustrious in this world and the hereafter, and who is one of those brought near [to Allah].” Surah 3.45

“O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion or utter anything concerning Allah but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, His Word that He sent to Mary, and a Spirit from Him [that He sent]. So believe in Allah and His
messengers, and do not say ‘Three.’ Desist, it is better for you! Allah is one God. Far exalted is He above having offspring. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth. Allah is sufficient a disposer of affairs. The Messiah would never scorn to be a servant to Allah, nor would the angels who are nearest to Allah. As for those who scorn His service and are arrogantly proud, He shall gather them all to Himself to answer.” Surah 4.171-722

Investigating Messiah

As I looked at the evidence through the worldview lens of atheism, I believed several things about Jesus of Nazareth –

1. Jesus was a myth/legend invented by early Christians who wanted to have their own religion for personal power and prestige
2. The New Testament was not credible as an historical document .. it could not be trusted or verified
3. Even if someone named Jesus did live in Israel during the 1st century AD and had a following, anyone could have made up stories about His life to match Old Testament prophecies

So, with all of that in mind – we’ll look at some of the prophecies I found difficult to dismiss “if” Jesus was not a myth/legend and really did exist.
The easy thing for an atheist to do is dismiss the claims of Christianity. The hard thing is investigate those claims with an open mind. That was my challenge as an atheist – to look at the evidence without putting it through my atheist lens.

How do you do that? Through some objective investigative process that can research evidence logically and reasonably. I used the process that I had been taught in college and experienced in the laboratory of real-life journalism to look at the various evidences that Christian scholars presented to me.

I discovered that some Christians claimed the Bible contains about 400 Messianic prophecies. Some said less than 400. Many of the prophecies were restated one or more times in the Old Testament, so the number of different prophecies was even smaller.

What I was interested in finding were those prophecies that, if Jesus of Nazareth was a real person, could not be manipulated by a human being. I viewed Messianic prophecies as falling into two basic categories –

1. Prophecies that could be manipulated by a human being
2. Prophecies that could not be manipulated by a human being
Here are some that fell into the first group –

1. Claim to be the Messiah
2. Claim to fulfill Old Testament prophecies
3. Person crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord;
4. Make His paths straight”
5. Display character qualities of the Messiah (went about doing good, faithful, meek and lowly, not deceitful, teaching, preaching righteousness, taught in parables, confounded wise people, a leader of men, minister to poor, etc)
6. Use magic, slight of hand, misdirection or helpers in group of people to give the appearance that a miracle had occurred
7. Royal greeting by followers in Jerusalem while Jesus of Nazareth sat on donkey
8. Appearance at the 2nd Temple
9. Hold final supper to replicate OT prophecy
10. Silent before accusers (hard to do, but possible for a man to do that)
11. Buried in rich man’s tomb (might have set that up with someone in advance)
Here are some that fell into the second group –

1. Where Messiah would be born (Bethlehem)
2. To whom He would be born (e.g. virgin)
3. Being firstborn into a poor family
4. Born into a family with Messianic lineage (line of David)
5. What Messiah’s parents would name him (Yeshua-Joshua-Jesus)
6. Parents fleeing to Egypt while child is a toddler
7. Working miracles that were really miracles (water to wine, sight to the blind, healing sick, raising dead, walking on water, stopping storms)
8. Where Messiah would die (e.g. outside Jerusalem city gates)
9. The method of death (e.g. national rulers counseled together to arrest and kill, false accusations, betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver, arrest, friends fled, hated without cause, trial, scourging, violent death/crucifixion/lifted up, not a bone broken, side pierced, hands feet pierced, crucified with transgressors/thieves, humiliated/ridiculed/rejected publicly, garments divided by lot, given vinegar for thirst)
10. Death of betrayer
11. Darkness at time of death (during the daytime)
12. Buried in rich man’s tomb (seems unlikely that a rich member of the ruling Sanhedrin would have agreed to be part of a plot to fool people into thinking Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah)
13. The supernatural resurrection of Messiah (body would not see corruption/decay)
14. The supernatural ascension from earth to Heaven to sit at the right hand of God (exalted publicly)
15. Name remembered in all generations
I didn’t believe in anything supernatural when I was an atheist, so I did not believe miracles were possible. However, for the sake of an honest, objective investigation I made note of what witnesses said they saw and heard firsthand even if I did not believe them. Though I noted it just to be fair, eyewitness testimony became powerful evidence as I concluded the investigation.

If anyone could fulfill the prophecies listed in my second group, that would be something to seriously consider because a human being could not make those things happen.

So, how did I interpret the lists? I didn’t – at least not for awhile. Interpretation follows observing and asking questions for interpretation. To try to interpret evidence before following a proven investigative process is to set oneself up for failure.

**Investigating Gospel Texts**

The four narratives of the life of Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were the basis for Christian claims that Jesus fulfilled Messianic prophecies. So, the next step for my investigation was to look at the credibility of those texts.

The study of ancient texts is known as *paleography* (from the Greek – “old writing”). That was not my educational or occupational background, so I learned as much I could to understand about verifying the texts of the New Testament.
[Keep in mind that I am sharing what information was available for research in the early part of 1971. Much more about New Testament texts has been learned since that time, but I will only refer to the information available during my investigation.]

The process included learning about how texts were written at different time periods in history. Paper, as we know it, did not exist in the ancient world. Most ancient texts were written on papyrus, which was made from the papyrus plant. While very popular in the ancient world, papyrus writing had a limited lifespan unless kept in very dry storage. Important documents were copied as originals or old copies were impacted by mold destruction.

Other writing materials of the ancient world included clay tablets, stone, bone, wood, leather, metals, potsherds, and parchments (vellum). Papyrus was used in ancient Egypt and adopted by the Greeks and was a popular writing surface during the 1st century AD.

The inks used on papyrus in ancient times included burning organic materials like oil or wood and pulverizing the ash (charcoal) before mixing with water. Brushes made from reeds were often used to apply the material mix on the papyrus.

Knowing how ancient texts were written helped with dating the manuscript along with why they were copied. Another copying purpose was to share an important text with other people (like multiple churches) so that the information was spread widely.
The texts of the New Testament were written primarily in Koine Greek, so that became an important focus just as understanding Hebrew and Aramaic were for texts of the Old Testament. Christians believed that Jesus of Nazareth lived, died and rose from the grave in the early part of the 1st century AD, so I was interested to see how close to that time the New Testament texts had been written.

It was my understanding as an atheist that the authors of the New Testament wrote at least one to two hundred years after the time Jesus was supposed to have lived in Israel. That would rule out eyewitnesses being the real authors. Even though some of the texts were supposedly written by disciples of Jesus, that couldn’t be true if the texts were written centuries after the supposed events occurred. The textual information, I believed, was based on myth and legend with no way of verifying it was true. Everyone who might have known what really happened would have died long before people started writing texts that eventually became part of the New Testament.

I also thought that the pool of available ancient textual evidence was shallow. So, you might imagine my surprise when I learned that the “pool” of evidence was much deeper than I could have ever imagined.

Thousands – not dozens, not scores, not even hundreds – thousands of ancient manuscripts and fragments of New Testament writings in Koine Greek had been found, some of them dating from early-to-mid second century AD.
That’s impressive, but still not convincing. Anything written in the second century would still be too late for people alive and following Jesus in the early part of the first century to write anything in the second century.

The only problem with that was the discovery of Christian writings prior to the dating of earliest New Testament texts that quoted from those texts.

What? How can someone quote from something that hasn’t been written yet?

I discovered that there were three important areas to look at when testing the New Testament texts –

1. Greek manuscripts
2. Translations into other languages
3. Quotes from early Christian writers

**Clement of Rome** wrote a letter to Christians in Corinth. The letter is dated toward the end of the first century AD. Clement quoted or referred to almost half of New Testament texts (13 out of 27) in his letter to the Corinthians. Clement was believed to have known both the apostles Paul and Peter and have become the bishop of Rome

**Ignatius of Antioch** wrote in the early part of the 2nd century AD and would have been contemporary with Clement of Rome. Ignatius, believed to have been a disciple of the Apostle John, quoted from several New
Testament texts (8 out of 27). Ignatius wrote many letters during his ministry including one to fellow bishop Polycarp of Smyrna.

**Polycarp of Smyrna** also wrote in the early part of the 2nd century AD and would have been contemporary with Ignatius and Clement (though younger than both). Polycarp, also believed to have been a disciple of the Apostle John, quoted from many New Testament texts (17 out of 27).

**Papias of Hierapolis** was also a contemporary with Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp. He is believed to have been a disciple of the Apostle John and may have known others who said they saw Jesus Christ. Papias wrote *Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord* in five books, but most of that material has been lost. Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp and 2nd century bishop, and early Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea (early 4th century bishop), quoted from Papias’ books in their writings. They wrote that Papias included notes about who wrote the Gospels of Matthew and Mark and said that Mark interpreted for the Apostle Peter.

The number of Greek manuscripts which contained all or part of the New Testament was about five thousand when I was investigating in 1971. Some of the most interesting papyri were in museum collections. I found that important because the papyri could be viewed and tested. One of the collections was in the Beatty Museum in Dublin, Ireland.

The **Chester Beatty New Testament** papyri, made public in 1931, was important to textual study because it predated other texts by at least a hundred years. The manuscripts included the earliest surviving codex that
contained all four Gospels and the Book of Acts in one book. It also contained the earliest copy of the collection of Paul’s epistles and the Book of Revelation. The discovery had opened up the investigation into New Testament texts all the way back to the end of the 2nd century AD.

Another important collection is the **Bodmer New Testament** papyri. Though smaller in number than the Beatty collection, the Bodmer Papyri were significant in dating some of the New Testament texts to the 2nd century AD.

The Bodmer Papryi were found near Dishna, Egypt, in 1952. The manuscripts were taken from Egypt to Switzerland and purchased by Martin Bodmer. The papyri, made public in 1854, are currently housed in the Bibliotheca Bodmeriana near Geneva.

I also found the **St. John’s Fragment** at **Rylands Library** interesting. It is a small piece of papyrus (P52) from John’s Gospel dated to the early part of the 2nd century AD.

Investigating anything in the early 70s would eventually take you to books, films, slides, photo albums, and microfilm. The Internet didn’t exist yet, so libraries were a great place to go during an investigation.
Here are some of the papyri of New Testament texts from various collections:

P32 – Pauline
P46 – Pauline
P52 – Gospels
P66 – Gospels
P77 – Gospels
P90 – Gospels
P98 – Revelation
P103 – Gospels
P104 – Gospels
GA189 – Acts and General Epistles
Part 16

We are now in what Christians have called “Holy Week” for many centuries. It is the week leading up to Easter, beginning with Palm Sunday. We looked at that in yesterday’s article.

The 11th Chapter of the Gospel of Mark begins with the triumphant entry of Jesus of Nazareth into Jerusalem and ends with Jewish leaders questioning His authority to do what He was doing.

“They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you authority to do this?’ Jesus replied, ‘I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—was it from heaven, or from men? Tell me!’ They discussed it among themselves and said, ‘If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’….’ (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) So they answered Jesus, ‘We don’t know.’ Jesus said, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.’ 

Mark 11:27-33

The relationship between Jesus and the leaders of Israel was strained – to say the least. The Pharisees and Sadducees agreed on very little, but they did agree about Jesus. They hated Him and wanted Him dead. The Lord’s teachings were making them look bad to the people – and they were afraid
He would lead the people to take away their cushy jobs. The leaders of Israel had tried for three years to trip up Jesus with their questions and accusations so He would look bad to the people. Didn’t happen. Jesus was way ahead of them on every count. He always knew what to say.

Jesus knew His disciples were going to face the same opposition to their ministry as He had to His. So, as Jesus made His way toward the Cross, He taught them more lessons about opposition. Watch how Jesus dealt with an attack covered in the honey of flattery.

“Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words. When they had come, they said to Him, ‘Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?’ But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, ‘Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it.’ So they brought it. And He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ And they marveled at Him.” Mark 12:13-17

Jesus was now under a full-court press. The leaders of Israel came at Him from every side to find a way to make Him look bad to the people. They believed that if the people rejected Jesus, it would be easy to arrest Jesus and kill Him. The Sadducees came right behind the Pharisees and Herodians with their own brand of deception.
“Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying: ‘Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man’s brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring. And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife.’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken.” Mark 12:18-27

This response from Jesus hit the Sadducees hard. They were proud of their “knowledge” of the Scriptures. They didn’t believe in the resurrection of the dead and were using that to trip up Jesus in another way. They believed that their interpretation of God’s Word was the only right one, but here was Jesus telling them that they were greatly mistaken and did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. God would raise the dead – He was the God of the living!
The Pharisees came back with a volley of their own right behind the Sadducees. It’s so obvious to see the game they were playing with Jesus – a game with deadly intent. This would be a game the Pharisees and Sadducees would play with the disciples soon enough, so Jesus taught the disciples how to deal with the constant barrage of verbal attacks and mind games religious people play.

“But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.’ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘The Son of David.’ He said to them, ‘How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand Till I make Your enemies Your footstool’? If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?’ And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.”

Matthew 22:34-46
The verbal attacks finally ended. Jesus had responded wisely to the opposition and they were quiet. The Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees didn’t give up their opposition to Christ, but they no longer tried to trip Him up before the people. That tactic had failed miserably. They would move from trickery to brute force.

So, what did Jesus do with that momentary victory over the religious leaders? He took full advantage of the moment and taught his disciples and the people more about the wickedness of the opposition. We know this as the Lord’s “Message of Woes.” It is one of the most stunning and courageous things anyone has ever said or done in the face of opposition.

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. ‘But woe to you, scribes and
Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like
whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” Matthew 23:1-36

Remember that the Lord’s disciples were always close to Him – they heard everything He said to the leaders of Israel. They saw how He handled their opposition and tough questioning. They saw how He was relentless in opposing sin on the part of those who were supposed to care for the spiritual needs of God’s people. This was an important lesson for them to learn because they would face fierce opposition to their Gospel message after Jesus returned to His Throne in Heaven and would need boldness in
opposing sin on every side and at every turn. It is also an important lesson for us.
Part 17

As we approach the annual remembrance of Jesus crucifixion and resurrection in just a few days, let’s look at one of the most obvious questions from what we’ve been learning about Christianity’s Core Belief.

Why don’t Jews believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah of Israel? Jesus was Jewish and lived in Israel in the early part of the 1st century AD when the Jerusalem Temple was still standing. His early followers were Jewish. The writers of the New Testament were Jewish.

Most Jews and Christians agree that after a long time of trouble, God will establish Israel as the foremost nation in the world and will bring about universal peace. That’s where the Messiah comes into the picture. Some Jews believe the Messiah will be a man from the lineage of King David, with impeccable spiritual credentials, who will lead Israel to defeat the great armies of the world and bring in a time of universal peace. Some Jews believe the people of Israel will rise up with the help of God and bring in a time of lasting peace through the principles of messiah. Christians believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah of Israel and will come back to earth a second time to defeat the armies of the world and establish great peace in Israel. So, who’s right?
Common Ground?

First, let’s look for common ground. Christians and Jews have much to agree upon because both view the Hebrew Bible as the Word of God. Jews would agree with Christians that many passages in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament to Christians) refer to God’s Messiah. They include Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:1-10; 42:1-4; 59:20; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Hosea 3; Zechariah 14; and Ezekiel 37:24-27.

“David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.” Ezekiel 37:24-27

The Messiah of Israel will be “David My servant.” How can that be since King David died almost 3,000 years ago? Will God raise David from the dead and place him on his throne in Jerusalem again? No, Jews and Christians believe the future king will be from the lineage of David. Notice what happens when the Messiah is king over all the people.
Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah God promised to Israel, but that the leaders of Israel rejected Him when He presented Himself to them in Jerusalem. Christians point to all of the Messianic verses in the Hebrew Bible and say that Jesus fulfilled or will fulfill all of the promises God made to Israel. So, why don’t Jews believe that?
Jews have had about 2,000 years to respond to Christian claims that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, so the list is pretty long. Here are six of the reasons I’ve heard most often from Jewish friends through the years.

1. Jesus was not a descendant of King David and King Solomon, so He couldn’t be the Messiah.
2. Jesus did not rule Israel from David’s throne while He was on earth, so He couldn’t be the Messiah.
3. The Temple in Jerusalem was standing when Jesus was on earth, so there was no need to rebuild it. The Romans destroyed the Temple within a generation after Jesus was crucified and has never been rebuilt, so Jesus couldn’t be the Messiah.
4. There has been no universal time of peace since Jesus was on earth, so He couldn’t be the Messiah.
5. The nations of the earth have not come together to know God and worship Him, so Jesus couldn’t be the Messiah.
6. All of the Jewish exiles have not returned to their homeland, so Jesus couldn’t be the Messiah.

Christians respond to these and other reasons from Jews that Jesus could not be the Messiah by explaining that while many of the people of Israel and Samaria responded to Jesus as the promised Messiah, the religious leaders of Judaism (e.g. Pharisees, Sadducees, Sanhedrin) rejected Jesus and convinced the Roman governor to crucify Him. Christians say that God raised Jesus from the grave and received Him back into Heaven, where He waits for the Day He will return to Israel to establish the Messianic Kingdom.
Jews respond to Christians that the Hebrew Bible does not mention anything about the Messiah coming to earth twice, so they won’t accept this answer about a “Second Coming.” While some Jews through history have viewed Jesus in a positive light, most believe Jesus was a false messiah. One of the reasons Jews claim is that Jesus contradicted the Torah while He was on earth and taught people that the commandments of Moses were no longer to be obeyed.

Christians respond that Jesus made it abundantly clear during His earthly ministry that He supported every part of the Law and Prophets.

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 5:17-20

Jews respond to this by supporting the words of the Pharisees and Sadducees quoted in the Gospels about how Jesus disobeyed the Law by healing on the Sabbath (e.g. John 9:13-16 – “Therefore some of the Pharisees said, ‘This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.’”). It is a common tactic when rebutting evidence to use an
opponent’s own evidence against them. However, Jews who quote John 9:16 as evidence against Jesus should be careful to quote the entire verse – “Therefore some of the Pharisees said, ‘This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.’ Others said, ‘How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?’ And there was a division among them.”

It’s important to note that some religious leaders in Israel took Jesus seriously and were opposed to opposing Him. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews, visited Jesus by night to question Him (John 3). Nicodemus later spoke in defense of Jesus (though in a weak manner) and was called down by his fellow rulers (John 7). By the time the religious rulers convinced the Roman governor to kill Jesus, Nicodemus had become a true believer in Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and helped prepare Jesus’ body for burial (John 19). After Jesus’ resurrection and return to Heaven, one of the leading members of the ruling council of Israel (Sanhedrin) recommended that the council not oppose Jesus’ apostles in case they might be found to fight against God.

“Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them: ‘Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished,
and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.” Acts 5:34-39

Jewish Objections

One of the biggest objections Jews have to Jesus Christ being Israel’s promised Messiah is the fact He has not fulfilled the Hebrew prophecies about defeating Israel’s enemies and establishing the Davidic rule of the world from a rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. However, the Apostle Peter spoke to that objection almost 2,000 years ago.

“But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Acts 3:18-26

Jesus did fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies about Messiah’s suffering and would have fulfilled all of the other prophecies “if” Israel had repented and been converted. God would have forgiven their sins and sent Jesus Christ from Heaven back to Israel to establish the long-promised Messianic
Kingdom. As we know, Israel rejected the offer and killed many of Christ's followers in a futile attempt to destroy those “who were of the Way.” (Acts 9:2)

It's important to note that all of the people who believed Jesus was Israel's Messiah during the time Jesus was on earth and immediately following His return to Heaven were Jews. Thousands of Jews believed and endured brutal persecution after Pentecost. The first blood of martyrs for the Kingdom of God was Jewish blood. So, why haven't more Jews embraced Jesus as their Messiah during all the centuries since God made His offer to Israel through the Apostles?

**A Jewish Christian’s Response**

The answer to the question is best answered by a Pharisaic Jew of the 1st century AD who helped spill the first Jewish blood.

“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” Romans 9:30-33
Saul of Tarsus, better known as the Apostle Paul, continued in his letter to Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome that Israel needs the Gospel.

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Romans 10:1-4

Jews do not embrace their Messiah today in large numbers because Israel has rejected Jesus since the 1st century AD. It broke Paul’s heart as a Jew who had met the Messiah personally and was able to speak to the truth of Jesus from the perspective of his deep knowledge of Judaism and personal experience with Jesus Christ.

We learn from Paul that **Israel’s rejection is not total.**

“I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, ‘Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life’? But what does the divine response say to him? ‘I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to
Baal.’ Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: ‘God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day.’ And David says: ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always.” Romans 10:1-10

Paul also taught that Israel’s rejection is not final.

“I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!” Romans 11:11-12

Paul taught that Israel’s future is tied to that of the Gentiles. He called it “the fullness of the Gentiles.”

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer
will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.’ Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.” Romans 11:25-32

Remember the baby Messiah? Jews believe their Messiah will begin life as a baby. They believe he will grow up to fight for Israel and lead Israel to a bright future of great peace and prosperity. Christians believe the Messiah already came to Israel to fight for them and lead them to a bright future of great peace and prosperity. Jesus began the battle for Israel by defeating Satan and sin on the Cross. Jesus will end the battle when He returns and destroys Israel’s enemies (Revelation 19:11-21). What a wonderful blessing we all have from God.

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?’ ‘Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?’ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” Romans 11:33-36
One last Messianic note for Jews and Gentiles alike comes from the prophet Isaiah. He wrote this during one of Israel’s truly dark times. What we read is a word of hope and encouragement for Israel, for Christians, and for the world.

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” Isaiah 9:6-7
Part 18

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

One of the strongest arguments for the credibility of the truth claims about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are the many witnesses we find in the New Testament. These are people who witnessed both the private and public life of Christ.

As we approach the memorial of Jesus’ death on a Roman cross almost 2,000 years ago, let’s look at some of the witnesses to His life on earth.
Witnesses To The Deity of Jesus Christ

Though Jesus Christ was the eternal God, He humbled Himself and became a Man so He would be the Heavenly sacrifice for the sins of the world (Philippians 2:5-8). Many people witnessed this from the beginning of His life.

Mary and Elizabeth

God chose a young Jewish girl named Mary to become the earthly mother of Jesus. The angel Gabriel told Mary that the Holy Spirit of God would come upon her, and the Power of the Highest would overshadow her, and she would conceive and give birth to “that Holy One” Who would be called “the Son of God.” God did as He said He would do and Mary supernaturally became pregnant with Jesus.

Mary went to visit an elderly relative named Elizabeth. Elizabeth, the wife of the priest Zacharias, was already pregnant with the baby boy who would grow up to become the prophet John the Baptist. As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby inside Elizabeth leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Here’s what Elizabeth said about Mary:

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for
joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.” Luke 1:42-45

Notice that Elizabeth called Mary “the mother of my Lord.” That’s another term for God. Elizabeth prophesied and said that what God had told Mary would be fulfilled.

Mary was also filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied after Elizabeth:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him From generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, In remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and to his seed forever.” Luke 1:46-55

Mary knew that what God was doing in her was something so great that all generations that followed would call her **blessed** because of it. The Greek word used here is *makarizo* and means “to pronounce happy, fully satisfied.”
Mary had a front row seat to what God was going to do for Israel and the world. She witnessed the visits of shepherds and wise men who came to visit her Child. She saw the wise men bow before Jesus and worship Him. Mary witnessed Simeon take the baby Jesus in his arms and speak as the Holy Spirit came upon him:

“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.” Luke 2:29-32

Mary watched as the elderly prophetess Anna told everyone looking for redemption in Israel about Jesus as she gave thanks to the Lord. (Luke 2:36-38) Mary was also witness to the 12-year-old Jesus astounding teachers in the Temple in Jerusalem with His knowledge and understanding of the Law of God. When Mary asked Jesus why He left them to go to the Temple, He answered: “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49) It might seem strange for Jesus to talk about teaching in the Temple as His Father’s “business” since Joseph, Mary’s husband, was a carpenter, but it demonstrates that Jesus had come for one Holy Purpose.

Mary was a witness to her Son’s earthly ministry, including His Death, Resurrection and Ascension. She knew for certain when she saw Him alive after His Death on the Cross that her Son was everything the angel had told her He would be – God in Flesh.
Joseph

Though Joseph, Mary’s husband, helped raise Jesus and acted as His human father, Joseph died before Jesus began His earthly ministry. We do know that Joseph was witness to the angel’s message about Mary and the Baby she carried in her womb. “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:20-21) Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took Mary as his wife and did not have sexual union with her until after she gave birth to her Son. Joseph called His Name Jesus.

Joseph was also a witness to the visit of the shepherds and wise men. He heard what Simeon and Anna said about Jesus. An angel of the Lord appeared again to Joseph to warn him to take Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. After Herod died, the angel told Joseph to return to Israel from Egypt. Joseph was afraid to return when he learned that Archelaus had become King of Judea, so God told Joseph in a dream to go instead to the region of Galilee and live in Nazareth (Matthew 2:13-23). Joseph was witness to the time when Jesus as a 12-year-old Child confounded teachers of the Law in the Temple with His Knowledge. Joseph also had the amazing privilege of teaching Jesus the carpenter trade. They worked side by side for many years. Joseph did not live long enough to share with Mary in her experience of watching Jesus teach, preach, heal, forgive, raise the dead, be Crucified and Resurrected. Joseph
was not a witness to those events, but he knew Jesus would accomplish great things in His Life. He had seen the evidence.

**Jesus’ Brothers and Sisters**

We know that Mary and Joseph had several children of their own because of what the Gospel writers mentioned about Jesus (Matthew 12:46-47; 13:55-56). Here’s an interesting exchange between Jesus and people in His own synagogue at Nazareth. They had a hard time understanding Jesus’ Message because they were so familiar with Him as a person who grew up in their village.

“Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?” So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.” Matthew 13:55-57

We learn that Jesus had at least four half-brothers and two or more half-sisters. The brothers were named James, Joses, Simon, and Judas. Here’s what we know about them and their relationship to Jesus as their Lord and Savior.
James

James was the Lord’s younger half-brother. He knew Jesus well, but didn’t understand His Deity until after the Lord’s Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). James became a powerful leader of believers in Jerusalem, especially after the death of James the brother of John (Acts 12:2, 17). James was a direct and powerful connection to Jesus Christ because he was a member of the Lord’s earthly family and because of the power of God’s Hand on his ministry.

James may be best known for the Letter he wrote to believers – we know it as the Book of James. It is obvious from his writing that James believed Jesus is God. James called Jesus the “Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1) and “our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory” (James 2:1).

Judas

Judas, also called Jude, was another of the Lord’s earthly half-brothers. He wrote a short letter to believers that is included in the New Testament as the Book of Jude. In it, Jude writes that he is a “bondservant of Jesus Christ.” He wrote that believers are “sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ.” Jude wrote about the Father and Son in similar phrasing – “Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” He spoke of the “Lord” saving His people out of the land of Egypt. He told them to “remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jude placed Jesus alongside of the other Members of the Trinity.
“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Jude 20-21

As powerful as that statement is, it is just a prelude to one of the strongest verses in the New Testament attesting to the Deity of Jesus Christ, the Savior of His people.

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.” Jude 24-25

**Joses and Simon**

Joses and Simon are not mentioned in the New Testament as followers of Jesus, but some early Christian writings identify Simon as bishop of Jerusalem following the death of his brother James in about A.D. 62. Joses is also mentioned by early Christian writers as being a believer and leader in Jerusalem.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ had a profound effect on the Lord’s earthly family. They realized He is God and served Him as Lord for the rest of their lives.
We move next to people closest to Jesus during His earthly Ministry.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist was the man God used to prepare the way for “the Lord.” John preached a baptism for the remission of sins and the coming wrath of God. He also preached – “There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:7-8) John was preparing the way for the Messiah of Israel – Who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire – Who would thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, gather His wheat into the barn, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. The Old Testament Scriptures attributed this same Power to God alone.

Jesus came to John for baptism – not for remission of sins, but to fulfill righteousness and for special anointing as God’s Priest, Prophet, and King of Israel. John immediately knew who Jesus was and said – “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” (John 1:29-30) There was no doubt that John knew that Jesus was the One about Whom he preached. He also knew that Jesus existed “before” him even though John was several months older by his earthly birthday.

The exchange between Jesus and John is very telling of what John knew about Him:
“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?” But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:13-17)

John the Baptist was arrested sometime after baptizing Jesus. He heard about the works of Christ and sent two of his disciples to ask Christ an important question:

“Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”

John’s question is surprising on the surface because God had shown him that Jesus was His Anointed One, but we need to understand what Jews believed about the Messiah. The Old Testament prophets presented Messiah as a Conquering King. They also presented Messiah as the Suffering Savior, but so many Jews missed the significance of what God
was going to do for them by suffering for them. Even though it was in their Scriptures, they didn’t comprehend the significance of Messiah dying for their sins and being raised from the dead for their justification. What Jesus did in answering John’s questions was to point him to the “evidences” of the Messiah – the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers being cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead rising to life, and the poor having the Gospel preached to them. Those were prophetic evidences John the Baptist would recognize. He went to his death knowing that Jesus is the Promised Messiah of Israel.

The Apostles

Jesus selected 12 men who would become His closest disciples – men we know as the Twelve Apostles of Christ. They spent 3+ years traveling the country with Jesus. They witnessed His Miracles and Teachings. They saw Jesus heal the suffering multitudes and cast thousands of demons out of oppressed people. 11 of the Apostles were witnesses to His Death, Resurrection and Ascension. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and experienced His Great Power in their own lives and ministries as they preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Did these men who knew Jesus best believe He is God? Let’s see what the Gospels shows us about the beliefs of the Apostles about the Deity of Jesus Christ.

“Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away … Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God.’” Matthew 14:22, 33
These Jewish men would have only worshiped God. They really believed that Jesus is God.

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 16:15-17

The Apostle Peter understood from what he had witnessed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” John 1:1-4

The Apostle John made it clear in his account of the Gospel that Jesus is the Word of God and that the Word of God is God. John believed that Jesus was in the beginning with God and that every created thing was Created by Jesus.

“Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”
The Apostle Nathanael (also called Bartholomew) recognized Jesus as the Son of God, the King of Israel. This was on their first meeting when Jesus told Nathanael He had seen him standing under a fig tree before Philip called him to meet Jesus. Nathanael knew that Jesus had not been near him and immediately saw that Jesus is the Son of God.

“And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

When Thomas saw Jesus after His Death and Resurrection, he recognized that Jesus is God and testified to his belief.

It is clear from reading the Gospel accounts that while Jesus was with them on earth the Apostles believed Jesus is God, but what did they believe after He Ascended into Heaven? What about the early years of their ministries? Did their experiences change their minds about the Deity of Christ? What do we learn from the letters they wrote to other believers decades after Christ’s Resurrection and Ascension? Did they still believe He is God?

**The Apostles in the Book of Acts**

Jesus ascended into Heaven in full view of His followers. As they were watching Jesus, two angels appeared to them and said – “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11) The apostles witnessed the Son of God do something that is humanly impossible and heard angels say that He would come again in the same way. They left the mount called Olivet and
returned to Jerusalem to the “upper room.” All of the Apostles were there, except for Judas who had hanged himself. Mary, the mother of Jesus, along with the Lord’s earthly brothers and other disciples continued with one accord with the Apostles in prayer and supplication.

Peter stood before them and said it was time to choose someone to take Judas’ place. The Lord had chosen 12 Apostles to take the message of the Kingdom of God to Israel, so Peter gave them the requirements for making their selection – “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” The group proposed two men – Joseph called Barsabas (surnamed Justus) and Matthias – then prayed for God’s leading in choosing the 12th Apostle – “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.” After they prayed, they cast their lots and the lot fell on Matthias, so he was numbered with the 11 Apostles. (Acts 1:21-26)

The stage is now set – Jesus ascended to Heaven to take His Place with God the Father – the Lord’s followers chose a replacement for Judas – the only thing left was to wait for what Jesus promised them – “… you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) They didn’t wait long –
“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Acts 2:1-4

The Apostles had already received the Spirit of God on the day Jesus Rose from the grave when the Lord breathed on them and gave them His Spirit (John 20:22). On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus sent His Spirit to them as a group of believers in great Power and they began to preach. What they preached that day tells us a lot about what they believed concerning the Deity of Jesus Christ.

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. For David says concerning Him: ‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of
life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’ Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.’ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:22-39)

Peter presented Jesus as being “exalted to the right hand of God.” No human could ever attain to that level because to be at God’s Right Hand was to be God Himself. Peter also presented Jesus as the “Lord” and “Holy One” of King David’s prophecy. Peter told the crowds of Jews in Jerusalem
that day that God had made Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ. This message from the Apostle Peter about the Deity and Supremacy of Christ was so powerful that thousands were cut to the heart, repented and were baptized in the Name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins – and they all received the Gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Peter called Jesus Christ “the Holy One and the Just” and told Jews in Jerusalem that they had “killed the Prince of life.” Peter claimed that “faith in His name” was what healed people (Acts 3:14-16). Peter also reminded the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel and the Prophet Moses had promised centuries before (Acts 3:18-26). Peter was as bold in his proclamations about Jesus with the chief priests, scribes, elders, and rulers of Israel as he was with the people on the streets of Jerusalem. Peter stood up to them after he was arrested and told them they had “murdered” Jesus by hanging him on a tree, but “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 5:31) That statement greatly angered the chief priests and rulers and they plotted how to kill Peter and the other Apostles.

Other Jews Who Believed In Jesus

The rulers of Israel had more to be concerned about than just the Apostles. The Jews who were believing the Apostles’ teaching were also becoming a problem. Their faith and knowledge was growing stronger every day. A powerful example of that was a man named Stephen. He was described as a man “full of faith, power and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5, 8). Stephen’s teaching and wisdom was so powerful that a group of men secretly induced
men to lie about Stephen and say that he spoke blasphemous words against Moses and God. The group stirred up the people, elders and scribes to seize Stephen and bring him to the ruling council. False witnesses came before the council and lied about what Stephen was teaching.

The council looked at Stephen and his face was like that of an angel (Acts 6:15). The high priest asked Stephen if the things being said against him were true. That question gave Stephen the opportunity to proclaim one of the most powerful messages in the Book of Acts. He began with God calling Abram out of Mesopotamia and continued to rehearse the history of Israel through the days of Moses. Then, Stephen aimed his message directly at the priests and elders of Israel.

“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” Acts 7:51-53

That enraged the rulers and they gnashed at him with their teeth, but Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into Heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. That’s when Stephen said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56) When the rulers heard Stephen call Jesus the “Son of Man” and place Him standing at the right hand of God, they
cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord. That’s because Stephen was equating Jesus with God Himself. They dragged Stephen outside of the city and stoned him to death. Even as Stephen was dying, he asked God not to charge the sin against the men who were killing him (Acts 7:57-60).

We see evidence of what people believed about Jesus from the teaching of the Apostles. For instance, Philip had been chosen along with Stephen to help the Apostles with the daily feeding of the widows in Jerusalem. Many of the disciples were scattered after Stephen’s death, including Philip who went to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to the people there. Acts 8 tells us that Philip worked miracles before the people – casting out demons and healing the sick – and the people believed Philip’s message and there was great joy in the city (Acts 8:6-8). What was Philip’s message and what did people believe about Jesus?

“And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with
him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Acts 8:26-37

Philip preached what he had been taught by the Apostles – he preached Jesus. What does that mean? According to what we see in Acts 8, it means Philip preached that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Keep in mind that the eunuch did not have time to attend seminary and learn what to say when people asked him theological questions. He said what he believed at the earliest moment of his faith – “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” That was the Apostolic teaching.

As we read through the early chapters in Acts, we see the Apostles’ primary message was that Jesus Christ was Israel’s Messiah – “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42). The number of believers in Jerusalem continued to grow and the Apostles needed help so they could continue in prayer and preaching. That led to the selection of seven godly men to help
in the daily distribution of food to the Grecian widows. One of those men was named Stephen. Stephen was “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). Stephen was full of faith and power and did great wonders and signs among the people. Some Jews from the Synagogue of the Freedmen tried to dispute Stephen’s claims about Jesus being the Messiah, but they were not able to resist his wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Those Jews induced men to lie about Stephen, saying he spoke blasphemous words against Moses and God. They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes to seize Stephen and drag him before the Sanhedrin Council. They set up false witnesses who continued to say that Stephen spoke blasphemy against the Law of Moses and the Temple of God.

The Council gave Stephen the opportunity to answer the charges against him and he did so with great power. Stephen rehearsed the history of Israel and things seemed to be going along alright until he said these words:

“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” Acts 7:51-53

Those words cut so deep into the minds and hearts of Stephen’s enemies that they gnashed at him with their teeth. Then, Stephen did something that brought everything crashing in on him. Being full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen
gazed into Heaven and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” The leaders of Israel instantly understood that Stephen was identifying Jesus with God and ran at him with one accord. They pushed Stephen outside the city and stoned him to death.

Before we move on, let’s look at the term Son of Man. Jesus referred to Himself as the “Son of Man” more than 80 times during His Ministry. It was a term the Jews of that time knew well because it was part of a famous prophecy in the Old Testament concerning the promised Messiah.

“I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13-14

Jesus often called Himself the Son of Man while describing activities ascribed only to God. Here are some examples from Matthew’s Gospel.

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’”—then He said to the paralytic, ‘Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Matthew 9:6
“For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Matthew 12:8

“The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” Matthew 13:41-42

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 16:13-17

“So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Matthew 19:28

“Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Matthew 24:30
“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.” Matthew 25:31

“Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Matthew 26:64

No wonder that the leaders of Israel attacked Stephen with such rage. He was accusing them of murdering Jesus and saying that Jesus was alive in Heaven and standing at the Right Hand of God Himself!

Saul of Tarsus

“And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul … Now Saul was consenting to his death.” Acts 7:58; 8:1a

This was the beginning of a great attack on those who followed Jesus. Saul of Tarsus was a young law student who was determined to destroy the sect of the Way in Jerusalem.

“At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” Acts 8:1b-3
We learn from Acts 8 that a great persecution arose from the believers assembled at Jerusalem. It was so great that it scattered all of them throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the apostles who remained in Jerusalem. Saul became a leading persecutor of believers and “made havoc” with them, “entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” (Acts 8:3)

This persecution did not deter the disciples of Christ from preaching about Jesus. What it did was spread God’s Message throughout the land. So, Saul went looking for followers of the Way.

“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.” Acts 9:1-2

Jesus had other plans for Saul and revealed Himself to the chief persecutor in a unique way.

“As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to
Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' Acts 9:3-6

Saul had a heart for God, but it was misguided. Nothing Saul had seen so far had influenced him to change his mind about Jesus – not the faith of the believers, not their testimony of believing that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel, not even their personal sacrifice. Jesus had a plan for Saul’s life and knew how to reach him. Saul immediately recognized that he was in the presence of a superior power – “Who are You, Lord?” – Saul said. Jesus revealed Himself in the clearest terms Saul would understand – “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

A quick note about “the goads.” A goad was a long rod with a pointed end (often a sharp piece of metal attached to a wooden rod) used to control oxen. The sharp end of the goad was placed on the flesh of the oxen to control and guide them. If the oxen didn’t go where they were supposed to go, the farmer would push a little harder on the goad to move the oxen in the right direction. Oxen would often kick against the goad because of the pain, but the farmer would just push harder until the oxen finally submitted to the farmer’s will. Jesus used that terminology in showing Saul that what he was doing was misguided and he needed to submit to God’s Will.

God’s Will for Saul was something the Lord determined for him before Creation. That’s an amazing thing to consider, but it was Paul (Saul) who said -“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” (Ephesians 1:4) Paul included himself in that
“us.” God chose Paul and other believers in the sphere of Christ before He Created the world to be “holy and blameless in his sight.” The Lord’s calling to Saul on the road to Damascus had been determined long before – thousands of years before. Here’s what happened next:

“The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered. The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.’ ‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.’ But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and
he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.” Acts 9:7-19

Did you see that? Jesus told Ananias that Saul was His “chosen instrument” to carry His Name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. Fascinating! Saul was a “chosen instrument.” The Greek words are *skeuos ekloges* – “a vessel of choice.” The word *skeuos* was used for *vessels* or *implements* of various kinds – often used to carry out household duties. As we will see later, God was going to change the way He managed His household and would use Saul (Paul) as His vessel for that change. The word was also a common Greek metaphor for the human body because people in the 1st Century viewed souls as living temporarily in the body. Paul was a vessel of God’s *choice*. The word *ekloges* means “to pick out, choose for ones self.”

The Book of Acts was written by a Gentile (Luke). That’s a powerful statement in itself. Why would the Holy Spirit inspire a Gentile to write what was first a story about God’s offer of the Messiah to Israel? What happened to change that? As we read through Acts, we quickly see the reason. Israel’s leaders rejected God’s gracious offer. They killed the Messiah and refused to bow to Him even after Jesus Rose from the grave and ascended to the Throne of God. The message of the 12 Apostles was clear that Jesus was ready to return and establish His Messianic Kingdom if they would repent (Acts 3:19-23). How did Israel’s leaders respond to the call of the Apostles to repentance? The leaders killed many of the Lord’s followers in an attempt to snuff out what God was doing in Israel. So, what did Jesus do? He appeared to the chief persecutor of His followers and changed him
into the leader of God’s new way of managing His household (Ephesians 3:1-11).

Jesus personally called Saul (Paul) to follow Him and carry His Name before the Gentiles, their kings, and before the people of Israel. So what did Saul tell people about Jesus?

“Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, ‘Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?’ Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.” Acts 9:19-22

How does someone go from arresting people who believed that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, to preaching that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God? Simple. Saul personally met Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That first meeting had a profound impact on Saul’s heart and mind and on the plans he had for his life. That life-changing event was Saul’s testimony and he often told the story when he spoke with people about the change in his spiritual life.

“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote
against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’ Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” Acts 26:9-20

Paul discovered that he had been fighting against God, but instead of God destroying him Jesus said He would make Paul a minister and a witness of the things which he had seen and the things Jesus would reveal to him in the future. The purpose? “… to open their eyes, in order to turn them from
darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.”

Paul did receive many revelations directly from Christ. He made it clear throughout his ministry that the Gospel message he preached came through the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:3) and not from the teachings of any man. Paul told the Corinthians that Jesus had given him many visions and revelations and that he had even been caught up into Paradise.

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

This was a remarkable experience for Paul and one that would strengthen him throughout his life. Jesus showed Paul Paradise and allowed him to hear “inexpressible words” which he was not allowed to repeat. The Greek is arrhetos rhema and carries the idea of words that are too sacred to be spoken.
When Paul taught, preached and wrote, he spoke as a man who had been with God – similar to how Moses spoke with God face to face. Paul met Jesus Christ face to face and was well qualified to speak about the Lord's Crucifixion and Resurrection.
Part 19

We continue our special series about Christianity’s Core Belief – the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

It’s the day before Jesus will die on the Cross. He’s spending one more evening with His disciples – a very important evening. It’s time for the Passover Feast and Jesus is going to teach His disciples lessons that will serve them well in their lives and ministries. These lessons are for us as well.

Lesson of Commitment

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” John 13:1

The Lord’s disciples were not recent converts – they were not on the fence about following Jesus – they had made a serious commitment to Christ. 11 of them (minus Judas Iscariot) had given up everything to follow the Lord. They had been with Him for more than 3 years and experienced all kinds of ministry. They were committed to Jesus and He loved them for it – He was going to love them to the end. What’s most important about this is that Jesus was committed to them. He was so committed that He died on the Cross to save His disciples from sin.
“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

Lesson of Being Clean

“And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, are You washing my feet?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.’ Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet!’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’ Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.’ For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, ‘You are not all clean.’ John 13:3-11

Jesus used this opportunity to teach His disciples that they were clean before God – all of them except one. Jesus was cleaning them on the outside by washing their feet, but what He would accomplish on the Cross the next day would clean them forever on the inside. He would make them spiritually clean and set them apart for their service to God.
“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” Ephesians 5:25-27

Lesson of Connecting

“So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” John 13:3-17

Jesus taught His disciples about the powerful connection He had made with them – and the connection they would need to have with each other and those they served. What a stunning example of a servant’s heart. We will experience our most powerful ministry in the lives of others as we “connect” with them through humility and service. That service begins with other believers – then will spread with great power throughout our community and nation. We are first “connected” to God the Father through God the Son – then we connect with each other in mutual love and works of service.
“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:35

Lesson of Comfort

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” John 14:1-3

Jesus had been a great comfort to His disciples. He loved them and spoke words of encouragement to them continually. He was about to leave them, but for a good reason. He was doing what He needed to do to prepare an eternal home for them – and He would be back!

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” John 14:16-18

Jesus was not going to leave the disciples without continual comfort – He was going to send them another Helper. The Holy Spirit would live with them and be in them. And again the promise that Jesus would return for them. Very comforting.
Lesson of Communion

“Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” John 14:8-14

The heart of discipleship is **continual communion with God**. Jesus taught that lesson to the disciples many times before and used Philip’s question to remind them about the special relationship they had with God through Jesus. Philip should have understood by now – “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?” The disciples still had more to learn for the ministry Jesus was going to give them after His Death, Resurrection and Ascension to Heaven. They needed to grasp the concept of being “in” Christ and Christ being “in” the Father and the Father being “in” Christ. The disciples were “in” God because they were “in” Christ. God was going to do great things through the disciples – greater
even than what Jesus did – and that because Jesus was returning to be with His Father in Heaven. Jesus would give the disciples anything they asked in His Name, “so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” That’s the key – whatever brings glory to the Father. How could it be any other way?

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:31

Lesson To Continue

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” John 15:1-8
Jesus reminded the disciples that He had made them clean through the Word He had spoken to them. Then Jesus told the disciples what they needed to do in their relationship to Him – continue. That’s the meaning of the word “abide” (Greek – meinate). Jesus used an example that was clear to the disciples. They were all familiar with vines and those who dressed the vines. They understood that the fruit of the vine was grown on branches attached to the vine. The fruit took nourishment from the branches that received nourishment from the vine. The disciples knew that the vinedresser pruned the branches of the vine so the branches would continually bring forth maximum numbers of fruit from season to season. They knew that branches that withered on the vine had to be cut and destroyed for the health of the vine and the production of maximum fruit.

What an amazing visual lesson Jesus gave His disciples that night! They would have the privilege of bringing glory to God by “bearing much fruit.”

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23

Jesus knew that the only thing that could take His disciples – then and now – through all the challenges of serving God was continuing in the special love relationship God designed for His children.
“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.” John 15:9-17

Love is the key to everything in the Christian life. We gain our life, our strength, our purpose, our hope – through love. We must abide in it – continue in it – every moment. With love we will have great success – without it great defeat.

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and
is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Lesson of Conviction

The Helper Jesus promised His disciples – the Holy Spirit – would be a great comfort to the disciples in their ministry. He would also be the One to do the work of convicting people about their sin and their need for the Savior.

“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” John 16:8-11

Another vital part of the Holy Spirit’s work in the lives of the disciples would be guiding them into all Truth.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and
declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.” John 16:12-15

Jesus was just hours from His arrest, beating, humiliation and death – but what was on His Mind that evening was providing for His disciples. Yes, He was leaving them – but they would not be alone. You and I are not alone. Jesus is thinking of us right now – providing for us right now. We are united in Christ – united with each other – prepared for service to our Lord and Savior.

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” John 17:20-23
Today, all around the world, Christians are remembering the cruel death of Jesus of Nazareth on a Roman cross almost 2,000 years ago. It’s known as Good Friday.

What’s “good” about it? The Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth is an integral part of what is called the “Gospel” of Christ. Without the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, we cannot be saved from our sins.

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

If you are not a Christian, you may wonder what all the fuss is about. Why should the death of man 2,000 years ago in a small country far away have anything to do with your life? Think about this, please.
Every person on earth has the same basic needs: food, water, safety, clothing, lodging, and a purpose for living. Enter any culture and you’ll find men and women, boys and girls trying to find enough of each basic need to survive. But none of these is their greatest need.

The greatest need of every human being is to have a personal relationship with God. God created human beings for the purpose of having a close, loving relationship with Him. Adam and Eve, the first human beings, had that kind of relationship with God at the beginning of their lives, but it ended suddenly when they disobeyed God (Genesis 2 & 3). Their sin placed a barrier between God and humanity. Human beings would die in their sins and be separated from God forever, unless God did something to reverse the effect of sin. God had a plan to do just that and revealed it through His Word.

God’s Offer

God makes it clear that all of us are in the same position –

“As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one’ … for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10-12, 23
God’s solution to humanity’s need is **change**: a real change of heart and mind. God calls it by various names in the Bible: salvation, redemption, forgiveness, the gift of eternal life. It begins with true repentance –

“Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:14-15

“Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: ‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” John 17:1-3

“… testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house.” Acts 20:20-21

“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation.” 2 Corinthians 7:10

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9
The good news is that God **wants** to forgive and save a large number of those made in His image and likeness. All we have to do is follow God’s directions and we will be saved.

Hundreds of years ago when a man asked Paul how he could be saved, Paul answered – “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31) The word **believe** had a stronger meaning then than it does today. It meant to “completely trust in and rely upon” something or someone. The life-and-death question brought forth an urgent reply: salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ!

Paul wrote the Ephesian Christians – “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; **it is** the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Salvation comes by way of God’s **grace**. That’s His unmerited favor – meaning we can’t earn or deserve it. God gives it to us as an amazingly generous gift. God wants us to admit that we are sinners in need of His forgiveness and then place our faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Why faith in Christ? What did Jesus do that was such a big deal to God? Jesus died in **our** place. He took our sins, our shame and guilt, in His body on the Cross. Paul wrote that God demonstrates Christ’s great love for us by the fact that Jesus left His eternal home in Heaven to come to earth in the form of a human being for the purpose of paying the penalty for our sins
“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:6-8)

The righteousness of Jesus becomes our righteousness (right standing before God) –

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” Romans 3:21-26

Notice that our faith (trust) is in the shed BLOOD of Jesus Christ. That’s what makes the Cross so important, so vital to salvation. Paul wrote – “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.” (Ephesians 1:7-8)
Sinners are the bad people, the vermin of life, right? Wrong! Paul included himself as one for whom Christ died. Paul was one of the most law-abiding Jews in Israel before Jesus faced Paul with his guilt and need. Here’s how Paul viewed Christ’s sacrificial death for him –

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.” 1 Timothy 1:15-16

Jesus not only died for us, He also rose for us. Jesus died on the Cross and was buried in a tomb guarded by Roman soldiers. Three days after dying, Jesus rose from the grave and showed Himself to more than 500 witnesses; proof of God’s power to give life after death. Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth about this truth –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-8
Christ’s resurrection from the dead is a central truth to God’s promise of our eternal salvation.

Someone has said that people are saved by grace through faith plus nothing. What they are saying is that no one can add anything to the finished work of Christ’s death on the Cross and His resurrection from the grave. Remember Paul’s words to the Ephesians – “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Salvation does not and cannot come from people’s works. God will give it as a gift only. We don’t get any of the credit. It is God’s grace, love and longsuffering. Paul wrote to his friend Titus – “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:4-5)

Your Decision

The truth of the matter is that you and I are sinners. We are in desperate need of forgiveness and salvation. God is the only one who can forgive and save. He tells us that He will give us eternal life when we place our faith and trust in His Son Jesus Christ. Will you do that right now? Ask God to forgive you. Receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Trust Jesus to save you. Just talk with God. He’s listening. He will hear and give you His gift of eternal life – “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be
saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Romans 10:9-10)

Tell God about your guilt. Tell Him about your trials and struggles. He understands and cares for you. He’s waiting to forgive you, right now.

This is an example of what you might say to God –

“God, I need your forgiveness. Now I understand why. Like all human beings, I’ve sinned against you. God, thank you for sending Jesus Christ to die in my place. Thank you for making it possible for me to be forgiven. Lord Jesus, right now I place my faith and trust in you. I believe that you died on the Cross, shed your blood, and rose from the grave so I could have forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. I trust you now and forever. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Congratulations! If you just asked God to forgive you and placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you have become a member of the greatest group of people in the world, the **Body of Christ**! Here are some truths to help you as you learn how to be a follower of Jesus Christ –

1) Your salvation is **secure**! God will never leave you or forsake you. God gives you His Holy Spirit as a promise that He will come for you at some future time to take you to Heaven to be with Him forever.
“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13-14

2) God’s Word, the Bible, is your guide to spiritual truth and wisdom now and for the rest of your life on earth.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

3) Spend time with other people who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It’s as Christians get together and share their love for God and for each other and what God is teaching them through the Bible that all of us grow in spiritual knowledge.

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not
have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” Romans 12:3-18

Find a church that believes strongly in God’s Word rightly divided (2 Timothy 3:15). You’ll know them by their commitment to truth and grace and their love for each other.
4) Pray alone and with other Christians. Prayer is a demonstration of our commitment to God and our dependence on Him as the One who gives us all good things. Types of prayer include praise, thanksgiving and petition. We **praise** God for who He is. We **thank** God for what He has done for us and others. We **petition** God for what He can do in our lives and the lives of others to fulfill His will and bring glory to His name.

God wants us to bring our prayers to Him before things get too rough to handle.

> “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

How often should a Christian pray? It’s not so much how often we physically bow our heads and pray to God as it is to be in a constant attitude of dependence on Him and enjoy Him.

> “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
5) Serve God with your mind, heart, time, talents, gifts and possessions. That includes telling others about what God has done for you.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.’” Matthew 28:18-20

“A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” Luke 6:40

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Romans 12:1-2
“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

6) Don’t let anyone change your thinking about how God’s salvation is a **free gift**. Hold tightly to the truth that salvation is by grace through faith. Changing your thinking will move you from freedom to bondage.

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:8

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Galatians 5:1

Our fervent prayer is that God will build you up in your is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:15-21
Part 21

As we continue our special series about Christianity’s Core Belief, I want to ask you a question. Have you ever wondered what the disciples of Christ did on the day after His death on the Cross? The Bible tells us very little about the time between the Crucifixion and Resurrection. It’s the silent time of personal pain for the Lord’s closest friends on earth.

Many of the Lord’s followers felt intense personal pain on the day Jesus died. The disciples had fled when Jesus was arrested. Peter had denied knowing the Lord three times. Most of the disciples were in hiding, except for John.

“Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother!’ And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.” John 19:25-27

I can only imagine what John and Mary said to each other after Jesus was carried away to be buried. They had personally witnessed the most horrible event in history – the murder of God’s Son. I don’t know that they would have been able to get any sleep that night – and the next day was probably no better. The leaders of Israel had convinced the Roman government to kill Jesus. Would they be next?
And there were others who felt deep pain about what had happened – including leaders of Israel.

“But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.” Luke 23:49-56

“After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So
there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the
tomb was nearby.” John 19:38-42

Joseph and Nicodemus were opposed to the killing of Jesus, so it must
have broken their hearts to see the Lord mistreated and murdered. They
did what they could to give Jesus an honorable burial. Joseph and
Nicodemus had both been secret disciples of Christ – “for fear of the Jews”
– so the Lord’s death may have weighed even heavier on their hearts
wondering if there was anything they could have done to stop the killing
frenzy. It would have certainly been on their minds during Sabbath worship.
Notice also the women who followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the Lord’s
burial tomb. They saw where Jesus’ body was laid, then returned to their
homes to prepare spices and fragrant oils to take back to the tomb on the
morning after the Sabbath. What pain they must have felt that night and the
next day. They loved the Lord and had such hope for what He was going to
do accomplish for Israel in the Kingdom He preached.

This was the first Sabbath in years that the disciples had not spent with
Jesus. He was always there to teach, comfort and guide them. The Lord
always knew what to do in a tough situation. He knew how to handle
problems and opposition. But what happened yesterday threw all the
disciples for a loop. Even though Jesus had been telling them for a long
time that He was going to Jerusalem to die, they didn’t understand. Now
they did. They probably remembered some of what Jesus told them the
night before He died.
“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father. But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘They hated Me without a cause’ . . . ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.’ Then some of His disciples said among themselves, ‘What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’? They said therefore, ‘What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.’ Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, ‘Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to
the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.” John 15:18-25 & 16:17-22

Jesus was right – the disciples were filled with sorrow – they did weep and lament. They understood that part because they were experiencing it just as Jesus said – but what about their sorrow being turned into joy? They didn’t yet understand what was coming next – what they would see with their own eyes the next morning. All they knew at that moment was great sorrow and fear. The disciples may have also remembered these words that Jesus spoke at the Passover Feast –

“These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me. But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.” John 16:1-4

The disciples probably thought they were next in line for arrest, beatings and death. Jesus said it would happen to them – was now the time? Their Messiah was dead. The future of His promised Kingdom was in great doubt. What would be next for them?
The disciples may have also remembered what Jesus had said about His leaving and sending the Holy Spirit to help them in their service to God. Those words may have been some comfort on that Sabbath day after the Lord’s Crucifixion.

“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning” . . . Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you. John 15:26-27 & 16:7-15
The Lord’s disciples had seen so much in their time with Jesus. Even though He was dead and their future was in question, they may talked with each other about the great promises the Lord had given them. They believed He was God’s Anointed One – the Promised Messiah. They believed God would do all that He said He would do. They didn’t understand why things had happened as they did, but they may have had some hope that God would do as He promised.

Tomorrow – they will see how God keeps His Promises!
Part 22

We’ve been saying for the past three weeks that the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is **Christianity’s Core Belief**. Today, Easter Sunday, is the day we celebrate that truth. And I do mean CELEBRATE!!

“Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.’ And they remembered His words.” Luke 24:1-7

How quickly things can change for the better. Tears of sorrow became tears of joy – “So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.” (Matthew 28:8) How many emotions these women must have felt – fear and joy at the same time. **“He is not here, but is risen!”** Those words of the two angels must have seemed like a dream to the women who came to the tomb to attend to the body of Jesus. The stone was rolled away from the tomb. The soldiers were gone. The
body of Jesus was also gone. The Lord was ready to teach His disciples the greatest lesson of all – **The Lesson of Life!** You see, Jesus has the Power – the Power of Life over death. Nothing can destroy Him – nothing can delay Him – nothing can dissuade Him. Jesus has the Power of Life because He is Life.

**Resurrection Day had come!** Within minutes of discovering the empty tomb, Jesus began the amazing process of teaching His disciples the Lesson of Life. Watch as the Lord displays His extraordinary Grace and Mercy in the method and terms He used to teach this Lesson.

“Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.” Mark 16:9

What a precious Savior we serve! He appeared first to a woman whose life He had turned inside out and upside down – casting out seven demons. Imagine what she had experienced in her life – possessed by seven awful demons. Jesus had changed her life and she was forever grateful to Him for her deliverance. Now, Jesus was going to teach her another lesson – He had power over demons **AND death. Hallelujah!**
Next, Jesus appeared “in another form” to two disciples as they walked in the country. Mark’s Gospel gives us a quick glimpse at that life-changing meeting. Luke the historian gives us more detail.

“Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’ Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, ‘Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?’ And He said to them, What things? So they said to Him, ‘The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.’ Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to
have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.’ And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’ Luke 24:13-32

Isn’t that an amazing act by our Lord? Here He is – risen from the dead – the most monumental evidence of God’s Love and Power since Creation – and Jesus takes time out to talk personally with Mary Magdalene, then appear to two disciples miles away and spend time with them to teach them from the Law and Prophets that He was to suffer and to enter into His glory. Their lesson that day was that everything in the Holy Scriptures pointed to Jesus!
Here’s another wonderful display of God’s Grace. It’s found in Mark 16 –

“But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.’ So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” Mark 16:6-8

Do you see what Jesus did? He gave the angels specific instructions to mention Peter by name – “But go, tell His disciples—and Peter.” How wonderful is that? Jesus knew the great pain Peter had suffered – his denial of the Lord – the humiliation – the guilt Peter must have felt. Jesus wanted Peter to know that he was forgiven. Jesus loved him and had a wonderful purpose for his life. He pointed Peter to that purpose days later after breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to
him, ‘Feed My sheep. Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.’ This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, ‘Follow Me.” John 21:15-19

Mary Magdalene told Peter and the disciples what Jesus had said to her. The two disciples Jesus walked with in the country told Peter and the others what Jesus had said to them. But the disciples were still having difficulty believing what they were saying – that is – until Jesus appeared to them as well.

“The same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” John 20:19-23
What a lesson Jesus taught them that moment! Everything He had ever said to them was true. Everything He told them was going to happen was happening in front of their eyes. Jesus promised to give them the Holy Spirit and He did. Can you imagine what the Lord’s disciples – his students – learned that day? They learned that they served the Living God! Jesus had Supreme Power over life and death and He was giving them His Authority to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God!

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20

Ah, the many lessons Jesus taught them that day and for more than a month before He ascended to Heaven. But the greatest lesson of all – Jesus loved them with an eternal love and would never leave them, never forsake them. They belonged to Him – forever!

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are fundamental and central to our Faith as Christians. These are not just words to a believer – they are life and hope.
“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:5-11

As you worship God today – this Resurrection Day – remember these words from the Apostle Paul – “reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” That is our joy – our hope – on this Easter Sunday.
Conclusion

We are coming to the end of our special series about Christianity’s Core Belief – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We’ve spent the past three weeks digging into the evidence that supports the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Our hope is this series has been helpful to you.

Easter is a great day for Christians around the world to rejoice at the Power and Victory of our Faith. The grave could not hold our Savior and it cannot hold us. Death had no power over our Lord and Master and it has no power over us.

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

We are a FREE people. We are FREE from the fear of death. It has no power over us because it has no power over our Lord. Why? Because He died for our sins and rose for our right to live forever with Him in Paradise. We don’t waste away after our physical death. We go to be with Christ in His Glorious Kingdom and reign with Him forever. Our bodies will be raised up one day and become like His Glorious Body.
“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Corinthians 15:53-54

We will not disappear into a dark void after death. We will appear in glorious light with Christ!

This Spiritual Truth has a practical side. It means that what we do in this physical lifetime on earth has meaning. It has purpose. We are not aimlessly wandering from thing to thing waiting for the clock to strike “death and it’s over.” We are not spinning away the years in fruitless ventures. Our life has great meaning and purpose.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 15:58

What we do every day, every hour, every minute, has purpose. God saved us to do great things for Him. What He deems great may not be great in the eyes of puny earthlings, but He knows what matters for eternity. I have heard Christians say that what they think and do is of little importance in the grand scheme of God’s Plans. That’s nonsense. Every Christian has foreordained positions of opportunity and responsibility that are vital in the Work of God.
“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10

Every Christian is important. It doesn’t matter who they are, how old or young they are, what position they have in life or where they live. God says all of us are important, and I believe Him! Whether you pastor a church or support your pastor, you play an important role in God’s Plan. Whether you work inside the home or outside the home, you play an important role in God’s Plan. Whether you preach, teach, listen or pray, you play an important role in God’s Plan. Whether you head up a large missionary organization, serve in a foreign land, or send $5 a month to support a missionary, you play an important role in God’s Plan. Whether you hold revival crusades across the country or pray for revival in your home and community, you play an important role in God’s Plan.

Many Christians are caught up in the way “the world” sees things. We think BIG is best. We think FAST is best. Is that what God thinks? Is He concerned only with the Big and Fast things of this world? I don’t think so. Who did Christ call as His disciples? The Biggest, Fastest, Baddest Dudes in town? Who did Jesus minister to while He was on earth? The Rich? The Religious? The Best Educated? No. Jesus called His followers from among the masses of the weakest, weariest, poorest, and most unimportant people. Jesus doesn’t need anything from us. He is Everything. What He wants are sinners saved by His Grace through Faith. He wants to enjoy us and He wants us to enjoy Him. He wants us to live life to the full on earth, because that’s what we’re going to do in Heaven. Our eternal life begins
now. We don’t have to wait for things to become something else after we die. Life is now! Excitement is now! Joy is now! Love is Now! Grace is Now! God knows we will do our best work from positions of Freedom and Cooperation. Paul said it so well in his letters to our older brothers and sisters in Galatia, Rome, and Ephesus:

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Galatians 5:1

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.” Romans 6:14

“… but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:15-16

Christians, every one of the millions of Christians alive today, awake from sleep every day in a position of Spiritual Power. They move through the day from a position of Spiritual Power. They speak to people from a position of Spiritual Power. They minister to the needs of others from a position of Spiritual Power. They cooperate with other Christians in ministry from a position of Spiritual Power. As we work together, our Power is multiplied; not because the combination of our individual strength, but because we Combine with the Plan of God. God is the One with the Power. Our Power
comes from Him. Our Power emanates from the Spirit of God Who lives in us. It is His Plan that we work together. It is His Promise that He will bless our ministries. We don’t have to work up a sweat to create spiritual blessing. We have it already. Every person who comes to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ gets it. All any of us need to do is “open our spiritual eyes” and see what we have. WE HAVE EVERYTHING IN CHRIST!

Rejoice! Jesus is Risen!!

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