

# Evidence for the Historical Jesus

Jesus and Miracles, Reliability of  
Resurrection Reports

# Are Miracles Possible?

- One particular attitude to the negative was presented by David Hume, an 18<sup>th</sup> century skeptic
- He believed in the uniformity and consistency of nature. He held:
  - We are right in *believing* experiences that are “normal” to ordinary human experience
  - Anything that is unique so far as “normal” human experience is concerned – such as a miracle – should be *rejected*.

- But the flaw of the uniform or common experience argument is that it discounts new, novel or never-before-seen events
  - Naturalists returning from Australia reporting the sighting of a mammal that laid eggs, had webbed feet, a broad flat tail and snout that resembled a duck's bill – under Hume's criteria – would have been rejected as impossible because no such creature had been witnessed prior to that time from that group of explorers.

- *“No one has infallible knowledge of ‘natural laws,’ so that he can exclude from the outset the very possibility of unique events. Science can tell us what has happened, but it cannot tell us what may or may not happen. It observes events; it does not create them. The historian does not dictate what history can contain; he is open to whatever the witnesses report. An appeal to Hume bespeaks ignorance of history.”*

Pinnock, Clark. “The Tombstone That

Trembled” *Christianity Today* (Apr 1968)

- *“Since Einstein, no modern has had the right to rule out the possibility of events because of prior knowledge of ‘natural law.’ The only way we can know whether an event can occur is to see whether in fact it has occurred. The problem of miracles, then must be solved in the realm of historical investigation, not in the realm of philosophical speculation.”*

Montgomery, John Warwick. *Where is History Going?*, 1967

# Attempts to Explain Miracles

- Ian Wilson, in his book *Jesus: The Evidence*, claims that the miracles reported by Jesus were accomplished through hypnotism and that Jesus was a master hypnotist.
- Regarding healing, Wilson claims that hysteria caused “disfiguring skin conditions, blindness, apparent inability to hear or speak and all manner of symptoms of mental illness.”

- Of course, if hysteria was the cause of all the illnesses cured by Jesus, the healings from afar (the Centurion's servant, the Syrophoenician woman's daughter) are difficult to explain by hypnotism.

And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, <sup>6</sup>And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. <sup>7</sup>And Jesus saith unto him, **I will come and heal him.** <sup>8</sup>The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. Matt 8:5-7 (KJV)

*In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. <sup>26</sup>The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.* Mark 7:25-36 (NIV)

- The early Christians did not need to prove Jesus performed miracles. They simply appealed to the knowledge of their listeners.  
*“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”* Acts 2:22 (NIV)
  - That he wasn’t contradicted or immediately shouted down implies that the *“miracles, wonders and signs”* performed by Jesus were well known.
  - For the most part, his miracles were not done in private. A great many of his miracles were done while unbelievers were present

- How can one believe in the historicity of Jesus if the gospel accounts of his life contain such an incredible story of his literal, bodily resurrection from the dead?
- The writers of the resurrection account were either:
  1. deceptive (and since they enticed others to believe this story, even to the death, they would also be vicious)
  2. deceived
  3. honest

# Did Jesus Die on the Cross?

- Romans were professional executioners
  - <sup>34</sup> But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.” John 19:34 (NKJV)
  - Some scholars have hypothesized the 'water' as [pericardial effusion](#) (fluid around the heart) and [pleural effusion](#) (fluid around the lungs).
  - This flow of water suggests fatal heart trauma required to release pericardial fluid.
  - Roman soldiers were trained with such diligence that it is not logical to assume that someone could have survived a piercing in this region of the body.

# Did he return to life?

- Matthew 28:8–20
- Mark 16:9–20
- Luke 24:13–49
- John 20:11–21:25
- Acts 1:1–11
- 1 Corinthians 15:3–9
- *“When Pilate, upon the accusation of the first men amongst us, condemned [Jesus] to be crucified, those who had formerly loved him did not cease [to follow him], for he appeared to them on the third day, living again, as the divine prophets foretold, along with a myriad of other marvelous things concerning him.”*

Flavius Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews*

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# Understanding Myth

- As discussed earlier, legends and myths occur when a story is repeated, and the repeated story is repeated, and so on
  - Each repetition has the chance to introduce error
  - After centuries (and after any witnesses are dead who could clarify any errors), your original story could be corrupted
  - So how old were the early resurrection accounts?

- *“Paul, an apostle - sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead...”* Galatians 1:1 (NIV)
  - Written A.D. 48 – 49 from Syrian Antioch
- *“and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”* !  
Thessalonians 1:10 (NIV)
  - Written A.D. 50 – 51 from Corinth
- Paul is writing with *15 to 21* years of the resurrection and *within the lifetimes* of eyewitnesses of the event who could contradict his testimony

- *“After that, he appeared to more than **five hundred** of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.”* 1 Cor 15:6
- 500 witnesses!
  - If Paul were making the resurrection story up, making reference to this many witnesses would be easily disproved by his critics

- *“Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body.”* Mark 15:43 (NIV)
- Joseph of Arimathea is specifically mentioned by name. Since as a member of the Sanhedrin, his name would have been well known, someone inventing the story would probably not have used it.
  - No one could have invented a person and said he was on the Sanhedrin if he wasn’t.
  - Since he *was* mentioned by name, anyone in Jerusalem could have walked over to his house to check out the story first hand

- The naming of specific women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb was highly embarrassing for the first-century Jews. A woman's testimony was considered as practically worthless in the court of law and was hardly ever allowed.
  - No invented account would have named any woman as the first witness if it wanted to gain credibility
  - Mary Magdalene, as one of the first witnesses, would have further eroded credibility of the story
    - *“and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out...”* Luke 8:2 (NIV)
    - Some might have asked “was she in her right mind?”

# Disciples Failures

- If the disciples made up the resurrection account, they sure didn't make themselves look good
  - *“But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.”* Luke 24:11 (NIV)
  - *“When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.”* Mark 16:11 (NIV)
  - *“These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.”* Mark 16:13 (NIV)
  - *“He said to them, **“Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? <sup>39</sup>Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see;\* a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”*** Luke 24:38-39 (NIV)
  - *“So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.’”* John 20:25 (NIV)

# Other Evidence

- There is no mention of Jesus' tomb being venerated as those of at least 50 other prophets.
  - An explanation is that Jesus' bones were not there
- Matthew reports the Pharisee's response to the resurrection reports was the accusation the disciples stole the body.
  - Implicit acknowledgement of an empty tomb

- The dramatically changed lives of the disciples
  - A scared, scattered band transformed into a confident mission society

“Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. <sup>70</sup>But he denied before *them* all, saying, I know not what thou sayest... <sup>75</sup>And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, **Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.** And he went out, and wept bitterly.” Matt 26:69-70, 75 (KJV)

– Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ... <sup>40</sup>With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”\* <sup>41</sup>Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number\* that day. Acts 2:14, 40-41 (NIV)

- Transformation of Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee and persecutor of Christians, into the foremost evangelist of the gospel of Christ six months after the resurrection of Jesus

*“And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered\* throughout Judea and Samaria. <sup>2</sup>Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. <sup>3</sup>But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.”* Act 8:1-2 (NIV)

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“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup>Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” Acts 28:31 (NIV)

- All four gospels refer to Jesus as “Christ” (Χριστός **Christos**; *the Anointed One, Messiah, Christ:—Christ*), the Greek translation for the Hebrew “Messiah”
- The apostles were all Jews.
- The thought that a Jew would ascribe deity to a man was unthinkable
- Some writers claim that the gospels don’t say that Jesus was deity  
*“... no gospel regarded Jesus as God, and not even Paul had done so”*  
Wilson, Ian *Jesus: The Evidence*, 1984

- According to Wilson, the deifying of Jesus was primarily a product of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Council of Nicea, not the belief of early Christians.
- What *did* the early Christians believe?
- What *did* Jesus say about he being God?
- To answer these questions, we first must understand what people *expected* the Messiah to be like.

# Did Jesus Think He Was The Messiah?

- Even as early as age twelve, Jesus refers to God as "My Father" (Luke 2:49). He continues to use the term throughout the Gospel accounts ... a total of forty times!  
*"Synagogue prayers contain the expression, "**Our** Father [Avinu] who is in heaven," many times, and Jesus taught His disciples to pray a prayer which also begins, "**Our** Father who is in heaven." The expression, "**My** Father [avi]," however, almost certainly must have seemed improper to the Jews of that period. Only once in the Hebrew Scripture is God referred to as "**my** Father," and that is in Psalm 89, which speaks of the coming Messiah. Verse 26 reads, "He will call to me, 'Avi ata'-'You are **my** Father! The Messiah has the right to call God "my Father." I am quite sure that the rabbis of Jesus' day taught the people to say "**Our** Father who is in heaven," because they say "**my** Father" was reserved for the Messiah alone."*

- Jesus also declared Himself Messiah by the things He did.

- Through his followers, John The Baptist sends a question to Jesus “are you the one?”

- Jesus replies:

*Go and report to John the things which you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them*

Matthew 11:5 (NASB)

- But Isaiah records that such things are done by God:

*<sup>2</sup>...they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God... <sup>5</sup>Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. <sup>6</sup>Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy...”*

Isaiah 35:2b, 5 (NIV)

- Jesus stops to talk with the Samaritan woman at the well:

*The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.”* John 4:25 (NASB)

- Jesus answers her:

*<sup>26</sup>Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He. ”*

John 4:26 (NASB)

- Can't get much clearer than that...

- Jesus also tells the High Priest he is the Christ:  
*...The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: **Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.**”*  
*<sup>64</sup>“**Yes, it is as you say,**” Jesus replied. “**But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One\* and coming on the clouds of heaven.**”* *<sup>65</sup>Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. Matt 26:63-65*

# Son of Man

- By the way, the term "Son of Man" was the way Jesus usually referred to Himself. Son of Man occurs 81 times in the Gospel accounts. Jesus clearly identified Himself as the one about whom Daniel prophesied when He wrote:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. <sup>14</sup>He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” Daniel 7:13-14 (NIV)

- Daniel 9:25,26 indicates that the Messiah had to come before the second Temple was destroyed (A.D. 70).
- Micah 5:2 speaks of the Messiah's birthplace as Bethlehem Ephrathah, the town where Jesus was born.
- Isaiah 35:5,6 speaks of the blind, deaf, lame and dumb being healed.
- Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 speak of the Messiah as a light to the Gentiles.
- Zechariah 9:9 predicts that the Messiah would come humbly, "mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."
- Psalm 22 provides a graphic description of one undergoing crucifixion (even though crucifixion was unknown to the psalmist), and Jesus quoted its opening verse as He hung on the cross.

- *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ...* Psalm 22:1a (NIV)

*<sup>16</sup>Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, **they have pierced my hands and my feet.** <sup>17</sup>I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. <sup>18</sup>**They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.*** Psalm 22:1a, 17-18 (NIV)

- 700 years later, this came to pass:

*And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.* Mark 15:24 (NIV)

- *At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. <sup>2</sup>When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.” <sup>3</sup>He answered, “Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? <sup>4</sup>He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. <sup>5</sup>Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? <sup>6</sup>**I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.** <sup>7</sup>If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. <sup>8</sup>**For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”** Matt 12:1-8 (NIV)*
- How can anyone be Lord of the Sabbath except God who instituted it? This is a direct claim to deity.

- *When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “**Son, your sins are forgiven.**”* <sup>6</sup>*Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, <sup>7</sup>“Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! **Who can forgive sins but God alone?**” ...*

*<sup>10</sup>But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....” He said to the paralytic, <sup>11</sup>“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”* Mark 2:5-7,10-11 (NIV)

- *“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I **am!**”* John 8:58 (NIV)
- This is a reference to God telling Moses how he should be called:  
*Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”* <sup>14</sup>*God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘**I AM** has sent me to you.’”* Exodus 3:13-14 (NIV)
- In all, Jesus uses the term **I am** (Greek: εἰμί Ego eimi) **more than nineteen times** in reference to Himself in the Gospel according to John.

- Jesus also claimed at one time to be the giver of eternal life  
*Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.* John 3:15 (NIV)
- At another time he was one with the Father.  
*My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.<sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."* John 10:29-30 (NIV)
  - On both those occasions, the Jewish crowds picked up stones to stone Him because, as they put it, "You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (John 10:33; cf. 5:18).
- In John 14:6, Jesus did not just claim to be teaching mankind the truth; He claimed that He **was** the truth. In John 14:9, Jesus admonished Philip, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." In Isaiah 42:8, God said, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another." But in John 17:5, Jesus prayed, "And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I ever had with Thee before the world was."

- But then there is Paul. He was a Jew par *excellence*. He was trained in Judaism by none other than Rabbi Gamaliel. He was so zealous for his monotheistic faith that he began persecuting the Christians. His goal in life was to help bring to pass Isaiah 45:22,23 where God says through the prophet, "I am God, and there is no other ... to ***me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance***".
- Later he applies this same verse to Jesus:  
*He existed in the form of God ... but emptied Himself... being made in the likeness of men ... He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross ... that at the name of Jesus **every knee should bow ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**.* Philippians 2:6-11 (NASB)
- That Paul meant "God" by the term Lord is clear from Romans 10:13 where he quotes Joel 2:32: "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered." In Joel 2:32, the LORD is clearly God.