**Christian Evidences: Easter 2023
Jim Putman**

**Is there a God at all?**

* Why the questions …
* I didn’t understand evil –why it is here
* I was not familiar with the realm of scientists who did believe and why
* Why is this important in this discussion – if there is no god then there can be no miracles –this forces us into a materialistic world view—there has to be a naturalistic answer

**Gerd Ludemann** Director of the Institute of early Christian studies at University of Gottingen, and professor at Vanderbilt University

If the idea of resurrection both in Hellenistic Judaism, and in early Christianity is dependent on a particular concept of God and a particular picture of the cosmos, it is credible as long as that concept of God and that picture of the world are credible. If that concept of God and that worldview lose their credibility, ideas and beliefs that are dependent upon them lose their credibility as well. And that, in fact, is what happened with the coming of modern scientific knowledge about the physical and natural world. … And thanks to Darwin and his successors, we have come to see ourselves as the offspring of a long, evolutionary process who occupy a particular and highly significant place in that process, namely the point at which the evolutionary process as become conscious of itself…. In short, the ancient worldview on which the idea of resurrection is dependent has been replaced by a modern worldview based on the finding of modern science. And with that profound change in worldview, the literal statements about the resurrection of the dead and the resurrection of Jesus have lost their literal meaning.

**Visual of some of the scientists who believe in God and why?**

##### See Anthony Flew – there is a God

##### Sir Fred Hoyle– Originator of the Steady State Theory of Evolution

(a tornado and a junkyard producing a 747)

”The likelihood of the formation of life from inanimate matter is one to a number with 40,000 noughts after it… it is big enough to bury, Darwin and the whole theory of evolution. There was no primeval soup, neither on this planet nor any other, and if the beginnings of life were not random, they must therefore have been the product of purposeful intelligence.”

#### **Sir Francis Crick** Co-discoverer of DNA

-An honest man, armed with all the knowledge—available to us now, could only state that in some sense, the origin of life—appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have—been satisfied to get it going.

Melvin Calvin, Nobel Prize winner in biochemistry, “As I try to discern the origin of that conviction, I seem to find it in a basic notion discovered 2000 or 3000 years ago, and enunciated first in the Western world by the ancient Hebrews: namely that the universe is governed by a single God, and is not the product of the whims of many gods, each governing his own province according to his own laws. This monotheistic view seems to be the historical foundation for modern science.”

Sir Ghillean Prance FRS, former director of Kew Gardens in London, “ God is nature’s great architect. Science, only confirms his faith. Naturalism admits that nature looks designed, but holds that such design is not real.”

Arno Penzias, Nobel Prize for discovering the microwave background, “The best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted, had I nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms and the Bible as a whole.”38”

 “Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide exactly the right conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say ‘supernatural’ ) plan.”42”

**Which God? Josh McDowell** and his journey influenced me

* From a historical view –
* 4 questions –
1. Do we have an actual early account from actual people who could witness it and has the story changed over time
2. Were the witnesses credible –
3. Do we have witnesses that can verify parts of the story –those not on the inside
4. Do we have any physical evidence –archeology

I began to test other religions based on this but found the evidence altogether different than that of Christianity

**Question 1: Do we have an unchanged story given by actual witnesses or has the story of Jesus grown over time? A mythology**

Many say that the Bible has been copied over and over and there is no way that we have the same story we started with. Many say that the authors of the scriptures were not eyewitnesses.

1. We have early copies of the New Testament – 24k plus
* We have letters written by believers quoting scripture
* No other historical document comes close to what we have religious or non-religious

J Harold Greenlee : Asbury Seminary

Says the quotations of the scripture in the works of the early Christian writers “are so extensive that the New Testament could virtually be reconstructed from them without the use of the New Testament manuscripts

Bruce Metzger: Professor Princeton

“Indeed so extensive are these citations that if all the other for the knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, they would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.”

# **Sir Fredrick G. Kenyon,** Chief Librarian British Museum

“The interval then between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.”

He also wrote, “The net result of this discovery-by far the most important since the discovery of the Sinaiticus is, in fact, to reduce the gap between the earlier manuscripts and the traditional dates of the New Testament books so far that it becomes negligible in any discussion of their authenticity. No other ancient book has anything like such early and plentiful to it’s text, and no unbiased scholar would deny that the text that has come to us is substantially sound.” (Kenyon, BMS, 20)

B. The people who lived at that time said the Apostles wrote it.

# **Papias**

“ The elder used to say this also Mark having been the interpreter of Peter wrote down accurately all that he mentioned whether sayings of doings of Christ not however in order for he was neither a hearer nor a companion of the Lord but after words as I said he accompanied Peter who adapted his teaching as a necessity required not as though he were making a compilation of the sayings of the Lord so them Mark make no mistake writing down in this way some things as Peter mentioned them for he paid attention to this one thing not to omit anything that he had heard not to include any false statement among them.”

“Matthew recorded the oracles in the Hebrew tongue.”

# **Irenaeus**

“So firm is the ground upon which these gospels rest that the heretics themselves bear witness to them and starting from these each one of them endeavors to establish his own particular doctrine.”

1. The early Christians died for the Witnesses’ story.

Clement of Rome (C. A.D. 95) uses Scripture as a reliable and authentic source.

**Ignatius** (A.D. 70-110) This Bishop of Antioch was martyred for his faith in Christ. He knew all the apostles and was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of the apostle John. Ignatius gave credence to the Scripture by the way he based his faith on the accuracy of the Bible. He had ample material and witnesses to support the trustworthiness of the Scriptures.

**Polycarp** (A.D. 70-156) was a disciple of John who succumbed to martyrdom at eighty-six years of age for his relentless devotion to Christ and the Scriptures. Polycarp’s death demonstrated his trust in the accuracy of the Scripture. “About 155, in the reign of Antoninus Pius, when a local persecution was taking place in Smyrna and several of his members had been martyred, he was singled out as the leader of the Church, and marked for martyrdom. When he was asked to recant and live, he is reputed to have said, ‘Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He hath done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?’ He was burned at the stake, dying a heroic martyr for his faith. (Moyer, CH, 337) Polycarp certainly had ample contacts to verify the truth.

The early enemies of Christianity say that early Christians died for the testimony of the Apostles.

# **Tacitus**

Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his Gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a guilt, which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to ferocity of a single man.

1. The Early non-Christian scholars and enemies of Christ tell us what the Christians believed

**Pliny the Younger**

They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to perform any wicked deed, never to commit any fraud, theft of adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to make it good; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food – but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. Even this practice, however, they had abandoned after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I had forbidden political associations. I therefore judged it so much the more necessary to extract the real truth, with the assistance of torture, from two female slaves, who were styled deaconesses: but I could discover nothing more than depraved and excessive superstition.

**Josephus**

Our earliest manuscripts of this document state this first rendering. Secular scholars agree with the second, as they believe that someone may have added to it. Their only historical reason for believing this is that they do not believe that Josephus was a Christian. To have made his comments, they believe he would have had to have been a Christian. like what it says.

About this time there lived Jesus a wise man if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standings among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians so called after him, has still to this day, not disappeared.

# **Question 2: Are the Witnesses credible?**

# Atheist: **Gerd Ludemann**—Vanderbilt --Author -What Really Happened to Jesus?

“It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus’ death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ…. He goes on to say that they believed they had but had not really.

**Paula Fredrikson,** Boston University

“The disciples conviction that they had seen the risen Christ is part of historical bedrock, facts known past doubting’

# Why should we believe they were telling the truth?

# They were persecuted for their faith in life

2 Corinthians 11:23–28 (NIV) — 23 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

# What was the final cost?

Tradition tells us that all but one died under persecution –we can confirm those in red.

James the Great - sons of thunder, brother of John – beheaded in 44 A.D.

Luke – hung on an olive tree by the priest of a pagan religion in Greece.

Philip – scourged, thrown into prison, then crucified in 54 A.D.

Matthew – run through with a sword in 60 A.D.

James the Less – brother of Jesus; he was beaten with a club, then stoned, then finished off by having his brains beat in with a fuller’s club.

Mathias – stoned and then beheaded.

Andrew – brother of Peter; crucified.

Mark – dragged to pieces by horse under the Alexandrian idol.

Peter – crucified upside down-some history reports his wife was killed as well.

Jude (Brother of James the Less, and half- brother of Jesus) – crucified in Edessa in 72 A.D.

Bartholomew – beaten, then crucified.

Thomas – run through with a spear.

Simon – crucified in 74 A.D.

Barnabas – killed in 73 A.D., hung.

John – banished

Paul—beheaded by Nero

1. The Embarrassment principle
* They kept facts in that did not make them look good
* They wrote things that would not have helped their case at the time – Women as the first witnesses as an example

**Question 3: Are there historical sources of unbelieving witnesses that verify parts of the story**

* These miracles and signs were seen in public not private

## The Bible is unique

Acts 2:22 (NIV) — 22 “Fellow Israelites, 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 26:25-26 (NLT)

But Paul replied, “I am not insane, Most Excellent Festus. I am speaking the sober truth. And King Agrippa knows about these things. I speak frankly, for I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in a corner!

1 Corinthians 15:3-9 (NLT)

I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me—that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peterand then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now.

Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, I saw him, too, long after the others, as though I had been born at the wrong time. For I am the least of all the apostles, and I am not worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted the church of God.

## **Justin Martyr**

Justin was burned at the stake and this is taken from his final defense. He quotes from Pilates’ report, which was written at the time of the crucifixion, which we did not have for years and we believe that we may have now. But since it is not confirmed it will not be used.

But the words, “They pierced my hands and feet,” refer to the nails which were fixed in Jesus’ hands and feet on the cross; and after He was crucified his executioners cast lots for his garments, and divided them among themselves. That these things happened you may learn from the Acts, which were recorded under Pontius Pilate.

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

Jesus was crucified. - Luke 23

Executioners cast lots for his garments. - Luke 23:32

**Tacitus 60 AD**

Christus, the founder of the name had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate.

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

Pontius Pilate as a governor. - Luke 22:66

**Mara Bar**-Serapion 70 AD

What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and Plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Sambas gain from burning Pythagorean? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king? It was just after that, that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men. ………Nor did the wise king die for no good: He lives on in the teaching, which he had given.

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

The Jews played a part in the death of Christ. - Matthew 26

Jerusalem destroyed. - Matthew 24

**Josephus** 52 AD

But to some of the Jews the destruction of Herod’s army seemed to be divine vengeance and certainly a just vengeance for his treatment of John surnamed the Baptist. For Herod had put him to death though he was a good man and had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives, to practice justice towards their fellows, and piety towards God and so doing to join in baptism. In his view this was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior. When others too joined the crowds about him because they were aroused to the highest degree by his sermons, Herod became alarmed. Eloquence that had so great an effect on mankind might lead to some form of sedition for it looked as if they would be guided by John in everything that they did. Herod decided therefore that it would be much better to strike first and be rid of him before his work led to an uprising than to wait for an upheaval,

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

The story of John the Baptist - Matthew 11 and 14

**Josephus**

Ananius convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned.

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

The death of James the brother of Jesus. - Acts 12:2

**The Talmud’s**

Written by the Pharisees.

On the eve of the Passover, they hanged Yeshu. And an announcer went out, in front of him for forty days saying He is going to be stoned because he practiced sorcery and enticed and led Israel astray. Anyone who knows anything in his favor come and plead in his behalf. But not having found anything in his favor, they hanged him on the eve of the Passover…

…(Ulla) They went on to say, “Would you believe that any defense would have been so zealously sought for him? He was a deceiver and the All merciful says, you shall not spare him neither shall you conceal him. It was different with Jesus, for he was near to the kingship.

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

They claimed Jesus’ power came from the devil. - Luke 11:15

They hanged Him on the Passover –

# **Origin**

Writing from exerts from Thallus and Phlegon who lived at the time of Christ. The documents sighted have been lost in history but we do have Origins quotes from them.

He says, “Now Phelegon in that thirteenth or fourteenth book, I think, of his Chronicles, not only ascribed to Jesus a knowledge of future events, but also testified that the result corresponded to his predictions. So that he also, by these very admissions regarding foreknowledge, as if against his will, expressed his opinion that the doctrines taught by the fathers of our system were not devoid of divine power.

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

Miracles/ Prophecy- Matthew 24- everywhere

**Justin Martyr**

“That he performed these miracles you may easily satisfy yourself,” from the Acts of Pontius Pilate.

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

Miracles & Prophecy - Matthew 24

Jesus did miracles. - Entire New Testament.

They accused Jesus of being a sorcerer (of the devil). - Luke 11:15

# Origin

Regarding the earthquakes and darkness, these we have in the preceding pages made our defense, according to our ability, adducing the testimony of Phelegon who relates that these

events took place at the time when our Savior suffered.

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

 Darkness & earth quakes - Matthew 27:45-51

**Thallus**- A Samaritan born Historian (52 AD)

One of the first Gentile writers who mention Christ is Thallus who wrote in 52 AD. However, his writings have disappeared and we only know of them in fragments sighted by other writers. One such writer is Julius Africanus, a Christian writer about 221 AD.

“Thallus in the third book of his histories, explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun - unreasonably, as it seems to me - unreasonably of course because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season at the paschal full moon that Christ died.”

Part verified. - Where do we find it?

Darkness - Matthew 27:45-51

**Tertullian**

Jurist theologian of Carthage quotes documents from exchange between Tiberius and Pontius Pilate (Documents no longer exist).

”Tiberius accordingly, in those days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from the truth of Christ’s divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favor of Christ. The senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected the proposal Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all the accusers of the Christians (Apology v.2).

**Josephus**

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Aramaic version Found later

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.

Part verified-/where do we find it

The whole gospel story

Summing up-

F.F. Bruce-Professor of Biblical Criticism at the university of Manchester

“ Some writers may toy with the fancy of a “Christ Myth” but they do not do so on the grounds of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the Christ myth stories.

Conclusion so far-

1. The Bible has the best text in ancient literature. (We know who wrote it and we have an accurate text of the scriptures)

2. The writer’s of the Bible gave up their lives for their story. (Their motivation could not have been gain.)

3. The Bible is verifiable in history.

**Question 4: Is there physical archaeological evidence for the bible?**

* What do some of the most famous archaeologists say about the Bible?

Dr. Merrill Unger (Biblical archaeologist)

Old Testament Archaeology has rediscovered whole nations, resurrected important peoples, and in a most astonishing manner, filled in historical gaps.

Dr. Fredrick Kenyon

Archaeology had not yet had it’s final word; but the results already achieved confirm what faith would suggest, that the Bible can do nothing but gain from an increase of knowledge.

Dr. Sherwin White (Roman Historian)

For Acts the confirmation of Historicity is overwhelming. Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.

Dr. Clifford Wilson (Middle East Historian)

“Archaeology is highly relevant for Bible studies, consistently demonstrating that the Bible is the world’s most accurate history text book. It is remarkable that where confirmation is possible and has come to light, the Bible stands investigation in ways that are unique in all literature. It’s superiority to attack, it’s capacity to withstand criticism, it’s amazing facility to be proved right after all, are all staggering by any standard of scholarship. Seemingly assured results disproving the Bible have a habit of backfiring. Over and over again the Bible has been vindicated.”

Nelson Glueck (The most famous Jewish Archaeologist in history)

“It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological finding have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible.”

The scriptures are unique in all of history (especially in the religious history category). When you put it all together – what makes the most sense?

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The evidence since I came to believe – a changed life

* For me and many others
* Not all who claim to be Christians are Christians –but those who are, are different. They see a difference in themselves and the testify to what Jesus has done for them. Others see a change too.
* The way a Christian lives and dies is different.
* Many of the changes on planet earth are the results of Christians
* Slavery, hospitals, feeding the poor, etc…