

JESUS CHRIST—UNIQUE SAVIOR OR AVERAGE FRAUD? [PART II]

Kyle Butt, M.A. and Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Part I of this two-part series appeared in the February issue. Part II follows below and continues, without introductory comments, where the first article ended.]

JESUS—UNIQUE SAVIOR OF MANKIND

One important fact that cannot be ignored is that Jesus is the only **historical** figure Who fulfills the criteria necessary to justify, sanctify, and redeem mankind. No human's creative mind concocted the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth. Human eyes saw Him, and human ears heard Him. He walked and talked—lived and loved—on the streets of real cities and in the houses of real people. His life is the only life of any "savior-god" that can be (and has been) thoroughly documented. As Stephen Franklin remarked: "[T]he specific character of Biblical religion and, thus, of Christianity stems from the priority given to the historical-factual dimension of the Bible's basic teachings and doctrines" (1993, 17[1]:40).

Therefore, the story of Jesus Christ does not occupy a place amidst the pages of Greek mythology or ancient religious legend. But oh, how the skeptics wish that it did! As Freke and Gandy observed in *The Jesus Mysteries*:

Early Literalist Christians mistakenly believed that the Jesus story was different from other stories of Osiris-Dionysus because Jesus alone had been a **historical** rather than a mythical figure. This has left Christians feeling that their faith is in opposition to all others, which it is not (1999, p. 13, emp. added).

Indeed, skeptics would delight in being able to place the story of Jesus on the same playing field as the stories of other legendary savior-gods, because then the parallel stories easily could be relegated to myth, due to the fact that the stories cannot be verified historically. Trench wrote of such skeptics:

Proving, as it is not hard to prove, those parallels to be groundless and mythical, to rest on no true historic basis, they hope that the great facts of the Christian's belief will be concluded to be as weak, will be involved in a common discredit (n.d., p. 135).

If infidels were able to create a straw man that could not stand up to the test of historical verifiability (like, for example, pagan legends and myths), and if they could place the story of Jesus in the same category as their tenuous straw man, then both supposedly would fall together. However, the story of Jesus of Nazareth refuses to fall. The stories of other savior-gods are admitted to be—even by those who invented them—nothing but fables (e.g., the Greeks realized that their fictitious stories were merely untrue legends that were totally unverifiable; see McCabe, 1993, p. 59). But the story of Jesus demands its rightful place in the annals of human history. Osiris, Krishna, Hercules, Dionysus, and the other mythological savior-gods stumble back into the shadows of fiction when compared to the documented life of Jesus of Nazareth. If the skeptic wishes to challenge the uniqueness of Jesus by comparing Him with other alleged savior-gods, he first

must produce evidence that one of these savior-gods truly walked on the Earth, commingled with humanity, and impacted people's lives via both a sinless existence and incomparable teachings. Humanity always has desired a real-life savior-god; but can any of the alleged savior-gods that have been invented boast of a historical existence any more thoroughly documented than that of Christ?

In addition, Jesus has a monopoly on being perfectly flawless. He lived life by the same moral rules that govern all humans, yet He never once made a mistake. The writer of Hebrews recorded: "For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (4:15; cf. also 1 Peter 2:21-22). Renowned religious historian Philip Schaff wrote:

In vain do we look through the entire biography of Jesus for a single stain or the slightest shadow of his moral character. There never lived a more harmless being on earth. He injured nobody, he took advantage of nobody. He never wrote an improper word. He never committed a wrong action (1913, pp. 32-33).

Bernard Ramm commented in a similar vein when he stated of Christ:

There He stands, **sinless**. Whatever men may claim for being great, this is one thing they cannot. They may be brilliant or strong, fast or clever, creative or inspired, but not sinless. Sinless perfection and perfect sinlessness is what we would expect of God incarnate. The hypothesis and the facts concur (1953, p. 169, emp. in orig.).

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

- Jesus Christ—Unique Savior
Or Average Fraud? [Part II]*
Kyle Butt and Bert Thompson 17

DEPARTMENTS

- Speaking Schedules 21

Note from the Editor

- Announcing: The New A.P. Christian
Evidences Correspondence Course*
Bert Thompson 24

Reason & Revelation is published monthly by Apologetics Press, Inc., a non-profit, tax-exempt work dedicated to the defense of New Testament Christianity. Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

Editor:

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.*
(*Microbiology, Texas A&M University)

Annual Subscription Rates:

\$8.00 Domestic
\$13.00 Canada & Overseas Airmail

Mailing Address:

Apologetics Press, Inc.
230 Landmark Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117-2752

General inquiries, changes of address, or international callers:

Phone: (334) 272-8558
Fax: (334) 270-2002

Orders:

Phone: (800) 234-8558
Fax: (800) 234-2882

On-line Web store/catalog, subscription order/renewal form, current issues, archives, and other information (all orders processed on a secure server):

URL: www.ApologeticsPress.org
E-mail: mail@ApologeticsPress.org

Discovery—Scripture & Science for Kids

is a sister publication for children. For more information, please contact our offices or visit the Discovery Web site at:

URL: www.DiscoveryMagazine.com

Examine the stories of other savior-gods. See if they subjected themselves to the same rules as humans. See if they learned human nature and suffered unjustly, all the while never sinning with either their lips or their hearts. Try to find a savior like Christ who lived 30+ years on the Earth and yet never committed one shameful act. Norman Geisler summarized the situation as follows: "All men are sinners; God knows it and so do we. If a man lives an impeccable life and offers as the truth about himself that he is God incarnate we must take his claim seriously" (1976, p. 344). Jesus did "offer as the truth about himself that he is God incarnate." As John Stott noted:

The most striking feature of the teaching of Jesus is that He was constantly talking about Himself... This self-centeredness of the teaching of Jesus immediately sets Him apart from the other great religious teachers of the world. They were self-effacing. He was self-advancing. They pointed men away from themselves, saying, "That is the truth, so far as I perceive it; follow that." Jesus said, "I am the truth; follow me." The founders of the ethnic religions never dared say such a thing (1971, p. 23).

There is another important point to be considered, however. Who better to deny the fact that Jesus was perfect than those who spent the most time with Him? There is a grain of truth to the adage that "familiarity often breeds contempt." Surely His closest friends would have observed some small demerit. Yet when we read the comments of His closest followers, we find that even they lauded Him as the only sinless man. The apostle Peter, who was rebuked publicly by Jesus, nevertheless called Him "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19). One chapter later in the same epistle, Peter said that Jesus "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (2:22). Indeed, Christ even went so far as to invite anyone who dared, to convict Him of sin when He said: "Which of you convicteth me of sin" (John 8:46). No one alive in His day could convict the Lord of sin; neither can anyone today. However, when one begins to examine the lives of the other alleged savior-gods, it soon becomes evident that these "heroes" committed fornication with humans, allowed their sinful tempers to flare, and raged with overt jealousy. Every supposed savior of mankind besides Jesus

had an Achilles heal. If any such "savior" existed (other than Jesus) who did not have a vice or a sin, his life certainly cannot be documented historically. And if any savior-god besides Jesus could be documented historically, his life easily could be proven to be laden with sin.

Christ Was Unique in His Teachings

Not only have the specific details of Christ's life come under allegations of plagiarism, but His teachings also have undergone intense scrutiny. Some have complained, for example, that Jesus' teachings were little more than warmed over Old Testament concepts. In the feature article he authored on Christ for the March 29, 1999 issue of *Newsweek* (the cover of which was titled "2000 Years of Jesus"), Kenneth Woodward suggested: "As scholars have long realized, there was little in the teachings of Jesus that cannot be found in the Hebrew Scriptures he expounded" (135[13]:54). The non-Christian Jew and the skeptic frequently view Jesus as an ancient teacher Who borrowed much of His material from the Hebrew text that had been in existence hundreds of years before He entered the global picture, since many of His sayings can be traced back centuries to the Jewish psalmist David, the prophet Isaiah, and a host of other ancient Hebrew writers. Others have complained that Christ's teachings had their origin in ancient pagan lore. Freke and Gandy suggested:

...[W]e discovered that even Jesus' teachings were not original, but had been anticipated by the Pagan sages... Pagan critics of Christianity, such as the satirist Celsus, complained that this recent religion was nothing more than a pale reflection of their own ancient teachings (1999, pp. 6,5).

Thus, if it is to be argued successfully that Jesus truly is unique in His teachings, the incontrovertible fact that He used a considerable amount of ancient Hebrew literature must be explained, and certain important dissimilarities must be made manifest (between either Old Testament material or that from previous pagan sources). Otherwise, we have merely another Jewish rabbi who knew both heathen sources and the Scriptures well—just as a host of other Jewish rabbis did.

In order to explain why Jesus employed so much Hebrew literature, we must understand His relationship with that literature.



A statement from Peter's first epistle is quite helpful in this regard:

Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the **Spirit of Christ** which was in them did point unto (1 Peter 1:10-11, emp. added).

Peter's point of emphasis was that Christ was not just an interested **reader** of ancient Hebrew scripture; rather, He was its **Author**. He wrote the Jewish Old Testament through His Spirit that worked through the prophets. When He quoted Isaiah or Jeremiah, He neither copied their material nor plagiarized their truths. Quite the contrary, in fact. He simply quoted the texts that He personally had inspired and published through the ancient holy men. As the famous "church father" Tertullian wrote in his *Apology*, "There is nothing so old as the truth" (chapter 47). To suggest that Christ's teachings were not unique because He quoted passages from the Old Testament would be like saying that the author of a particular book could not quote from that book in later lectures or publications, lest he be charged with plagiarism of his own material.

There are those, of course, who will discount the above argument by claiming that the New Testament has no authority to answer such questions. Thus, they will continue to claim that Jesus "borrowed" His ideas from the pages of Israel's texts. If they wish to defend such a viewpoint, then let them find in the Old Testament any description of eternal punishment comparable to the one Jesus provided in Mark 9:42. Where in the Old Testament Scriptures do we find that it is more difficult for a rich person to enter heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle? Where in the Old Testament is the idea of loving one's neighbor developed to the extent that Christ described in the parable of the Good Samaritan? Jesus of Nazareth did not merely regurgitate Old Testament passages, adding jots and tittles as He went along. Instead, He came to fulfill the Old Law, and to instigate a New Law with distinctive concepts and commands—a point the writer of Hebrews made quite clear when he stated: "In that he saith, 'a new covenant,' he hath made the first old. But that which waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away" (8:13).

Even though it can be proven that Jesus did not plagiarize the Old Testament, the battle for the uniqueness of His teachings does not end there. Traces of concepts that predate Christ's earthly existence also can be found in His teachings. Earlier, we quoted from Augustine, who noted that Plato's followers claimed Christ had copied their philosophical hero (except, they opined, that Christ was not nearly as eloquent). Further, rabbi Hillel, who lived approximately fifty years before Jesus, taught: "What thou wouldst not have done to thee, do not that to others" (see Bales, n.d., p. 7). Confucius (and a host of other ancient writers) taught things that Jesus also taught. From China to Egypt, a steady stream of pagans uttered things that Christ, centuries later, likewise would say. How, then, can the teachings of Christ be considered unique if they had been surfacing in different cultures and civilizations for hundreds of years before His visit to Earth? Perhaps this would be a good place to ask: What is the alternative? As Bales noted:

If Christ had been **completely original**, He would have had to omit every truth which had been revealed in the Old Testament, or which had been discerned by the reason of man. If He had done this, His teaching would have been inadequate, for it would have omitted many moral and spiritual truths (n.d., p. 21, emp. added).

Jesus came not to reiterate ancient truths, but rather to synthesize those truths into a complete unit. He embodied every spiritual truth the world had ever seen or ever would see. As Bales commented: "Christ embodies all the moral good which is found in other religions, and He omits their errors" (p. 7). In his letter to the Christians in Colossae, Paul described Christ as the one "in whom are **all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge** hidden" (2:3, emp. added). Christ's teachings are like gold; tiny amounts can be found in almost every area of the world—from ocean water to the human body. However, in order for that gold to be usable, it must be collected into a mass large enough to refine. Christ is the "refining pot" of all knowledge and wisdom, wherein the dross of error is purged from the precious metal of divine truth. While tiny specks of His teachings emerge from practically every religion, they can be refined only when collected as a whole in the essence of Jesus the Nazarene. Stephen Franklin put it like this:

By providing echoes of Christian themes in every culture and in every religion, he [God—KB/BT] has given the entire human race some "handle" that allows them at least a preliminary understanding of the gospel when it is preached (1993, p. 51).

Furthermore, consider both the power and the authority evident in Christ's teachings. Even His enemies were unable to refute what He taught. When the Jewish Sanhedrin decided to take action against Him and dispatched its security force to seize Him, those officers returned empty handed and admitted: "No man **ever** spoke like this Man!" (John 7:46, NKJV, emp. added). When He was only twelve years old and His parents accidentally left Him behind in Jerusalem, they returned to find Him in a discussion of religious matters with the learned scribes, "and all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:47).

The Jews had long yearned for a Messiah ("Christ") Who would save and deliver them. The Samaritan woman Christ met at the well spoke of this very fact, to which He replied: "I that speak unto thee am he" (John 4:26). When Jesus was on trial before the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas the high priest asked: "Are you the Christ?" His reply was firm: "It is as you said" (Matthew 26:63-64). He spoke with authority regarding the pre-human **past**, because He was there (John 1:1ff.). In the **present**, "there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13). And He knows the **future**, as is evident from even a cursory reading of His prophecies about the building of His church (Matthew 16:18), the sending of the Holy Spirit to the apostles (John 14:26), and His many descriptions of His ultimate return and the Day of Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46, et al.). All of this, and more, explains why Paul referred to Him as "King of King, and Lord of Lords" (1 Timothy 6:15). No one ever possessed, or spoke with, the kind of authority with which Christ was endowed, which is why He taught: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). Fraudulent saviors never claimed such, nor had their own enemies confirm such. Perhaps this is one reason why, in the feature article from *Time* magazine's December 6, 1999 cover story ("Jesus at 2000"), author Reynolds Price wrote:

It would require much exotic calculation, however, to deny that the single most powerful figure—not merely in these two millennia but in all human history—has been Jesus of Nazareth.... [A] serious argument can be made that no one else's life has proved remotely as powerful and enduring as that of Jesus. It's an astonishing conclusion in light of the fact that Jesus was a man who lived a short life in a rural backwater of the Roman Empire [and] who died in agony as a convicted criminal... (154[23]:86).

Mythical saviors never had such an assessment made of their lives.

Christ Was Unique in His Fulfillment of Prophecy

Surely, one of the most undeniable traits of Christ's uniqueness was His fulfillment of prophecy. In his book, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell discussed the fact that "the Old Testament contains over three hundred references to the Messiah that were fulfilled in Jesus" (1999, p. 168). Hugo McCord observed: "Testimony about Jesus was the chief purpose of prophecy. To him all the prophets gave witness (Acts 10:43)" [1979, p. 332]. Every prophecy in the Old Testament had to have been written at least 250 years before Christ appeared on the earthly scene. Why?

[The] Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures—was initiated in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.). It is sure that if you have a Greek translation initiated in 250 B.C., then you had to have the Hebrew text from which it was written (McDowell, p. 168).

Indeed, the Old Testament—which had been written hundreds of years before Christ actually lived—foretold the minutest details of His life. The Prophesied One would be born of a woman (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 4:4) who was a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22), from the family of Abraham (Genesis 22:18; Luke 3:34), of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10; Hebrews 7:14), of the royal line of David (2 Samuel 7:12; Luke 1:32), in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), in order to bruise the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 2:12).

The prophets had foretold His Galilean ministry (Isaiah 9:1-2), as well as the fact that a precursor would proclaim His arrival (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:1-3). He would appear

during the time of the Roman Empire (Daniel 2:44; Luke 2:1), while Judah still possessed her own king (Genesis 49:10; Matthew 2:22). He would be murdered about 490 years after the command to restore Jerusalem at the end of the Babylonian captivity (457 B.C.), i.e., A.D. 30 (Daniel 9:24ff.). He was to be both human and divine; though born, He was eternal (Micah 5:2; John 1:1,14); though a man, He was Jehovah's "fellow" (Zechariah 13:7; John 10:30; Philippians 2:6). He was to be kind and sympathetic in His dealings with mankind (Isaiah 42:1-4; Matthew 12:15-21).

He would submit willingly to His heavenly Father (Psalm 40:8; Isaiah 53:11; John 8:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22). He would be abandoned and know grief (Isaiah 53:3), and be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9) for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12). He was so betrayed (John 13:18; Matthew 26:15). He would be spit upon and beaten (Isaiah 50:6; 53:5), and in death both His hands and His feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16). This is precisely what occurred (Matthew 27:30; Luke 24:39). The Scriptures foretold that He would be numbered among criminals (Isaiah 53:12), which He was (Matthew 27:38). He would be mocked, not only with scornful words (Psalm 22:7-8), but with bitter wine (Psalm 69:21). And so He was (Matthew 27:48). Although He would die and be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9; Matthew 27:57), His bones would not be broken (Psalm 34:20; John 19:33) and His flesh would not see corruption, because He was to be raised from the dead (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:22ff.) and then ascend into heaven (Psalm 110:1-3; 45:6; Acts 1:9-10).

The previous paragraphs present an overview of just a fraction of the numerous predictions fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Time and again biblical prophecies are presented, and fulfilled, with exacting detail. Jeremiah wrote: "When the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that Jehovah hath truly sent him" (28:9). Thomas Horne was correct when he said:

The book which contains these predictions is stamped with the seal of heaven: a rich vein of evidence runs through the volume of the Old Testament; the Bible is true; infidelity is confounded forever; and we may address its patrons in the language of Saint Paul, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish!" (1970, 1:291).

On Tuesday, prior to Christ's crucifixion the following Friday, Jesus engaged in a discussion with the Pharisees, who made no secret of their hatred for Him. When Matthew recorded the scene in his Gospel, he first commented on an earlier skirmish the Lord had with the Sadducees: "But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, gathered themselves together" (22:34). Jesus—with penetrating logic and an incomparable knowledge of Old Testament Scripture—had routed the Sadducees completely. No doubt the Pharisees thought they could do better. Yet they were about to endure the same embarrassing treatment. In the midst of His discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus asked: "What think ye of the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42). They were unable to answer the questions satisfactorily because their hypocrisy prevented them from comprehending both Jesus' nature and His mission. The questions the Lord asked on that day, however, are ones that every rational, sane person must answer eventually.

Both questions were intended to **raise** the matter of Christ's deity. The answers—had the Pharisees' spiritual myopia not prevented them from responding correctly—were intended to **confirm** it. Today, these questions still raise the issue of Christ's identity. Who is Jesus? Is He, as He claimed to be, the Son of God? Was He, as many who knew Him claimed, God incarnate? Is He, as the word "deity" implies, of divine nature and rank?

The series of events that would lead to Jesus' becoming the world's best-known historical figure began in first-century Palestine. There are four primary indicators of this fact. First, when Daniel was asked by king Nebuchadnezzar to interpret his wildly imaginative dream, the prophet revealed that God would establish the Messianic kingdom during the time of the Roman Empire (viz., the fourth kingdom represented in the king's dream; see Daniel 2:24-45). Roman domination of Palestine began in 63 B.C., and continued until A.D. 476.

Second, the Messiah was to appear before "the scepter" departed from Judah (Genesis 49:10). Bible students recognize that this prophecy has reference to the Messiah ("Shiloh" of Old Testament fame) arriving before the Jews lost their national sovereignty and judicial power (the "scepter" of Genesis 49). Thus, Christ had to have come prior to the

Jews' losing their power to execute capital punishment (John 18:31). When Rome deposed Archelaus in A.D. 6, Coponius was installed as Judea's first procurator. Interestingly, "the...procurator held the power of jurisdiction with regard to capital punishment" (Solomon, 1972, 13:117). Hence, Christ was predicted to come sometime prior to A.D. 6 (see also McDowell, 1999, pp. 195-202).

Third, Daniel predicted that the Messiah would bring an end to "sacrifice and offering" before the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70; cf. Daniel 9:24-27 and Matthew 24:15). When the Lord died, the Mosaical Law was "nailed to the cross" (Colossians 2:14).

Fourth, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2). It is a matter of record that Jesus was born in Bethlehem while Palestine was under Roman rule, before Judah lost her judicial power, and before the destruction of Jerusalem (see also Matthew 2:3-6; Luke 2:2-6).

The Old and New Testaments paint a portrait of Christ that offers valuable evidence for the person desiring to answer the questions, "What think ye of the Christ?," and "Whose son is he?" In Isaiah 7:14, for example, the prophet declared that a virgin would conceive, bear a son, and name him "Immanuel," which means "God with us" (a prophecy that was fulfilled in the birth of Christ; Matthew 1:22-23). Later, Isaiah referred to this son as "Mighty God" (9:6). In fact, in the year that king Uzziah died, Isaiah said he saw "the Lord" sitting upon a throne (see Isaiah

6:1ff.). Overpowered by the scene, God's servant exclaimed: "Woe is me,...for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts" (6:5). In the New Testament, John wrote: "These things said Isaiah, because he saw His [Christ's] glory; and he spake of him" (John 12:41).

Isaiah urged God's people to sanctify "Jehovah of hosts" (8:12-14), a command later applied to Jesus by Peter (1 Peter 3:14-15). Furthermore, Isaiah's "Jehovah" was to become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (8:14), a description that New Testament writers applied to Christ (cf. Romans 9:33, 1 Peter 2:8). Isaiah foretold that John the Baptist would prepare the way for the coming of **Jehovah** (40:3). It is well known that John was the forerunner of **Christ** (cf. Matthew 3:3, John 1:23). Isaiah pictured Christ not only as a silent "lamb" (53:7), but as a man Who "a bruised reed will he not break, and a dimly burning wick will he not quench" (42:3; cf. Matthew 12:20). Various biblical scholars have suggested that this imagery was intended to portray a leader Who,

wherever he finds men wounded and bruised by the harshness of life's experience, or wherever he finds wounded and bruised consciences, whether among the Gentiles or in Israel, there he is most tender and delicate in the gentle handling of these souls (Leupold, 1971, 2:62; see also Oswalt, 1998, p. 111-112; McGarvey, 1875, p. 106).

Other Old Testament writers illuminated Christ in their writings as well. The psalmist suggested He would be known as zealous

for righteousness (Psalm 69:9), that He would be hated without cause (Psalm 22), and that He would triumph over death (Psalm 16:8-11). Daniel referred to His coming kingdom as one that would "stand forever" (2:44). The prophets' portrait of Christ was intended not only to foreshadow His coming, but to make Him all the more visible to people in New Testament times as well (see Bromling, 1991).

The prophets had said that He would be raised from the dead so that He could sit upon the throne of David (Isaiah 9:7). This occurred, as Peter attested in his sermon on Pentecost following the resurrection (Acts 2:30). He would rule, not Judah, but the most powerful kingdom ever known. As King, Christ was to rule (from heaven) the kingdom that "shall never be destroyed" and "shall break in pieces and consume all these [earthly] kingdoms, and...shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44). The New Testament establishes the legitimacy of His kingdom (Colossians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25). The subjects of this royal realm were to be from every nation on Earth (Isaiah 2:2), and were prophesied to enjoy a life of peace and harmony that ignores any and all human distinctions, prejudices, or biases (cf. Isaiah 2:4 and Galatians 3:28). This King would be arrayed, not in the regal purple of a carnal king, but in the reverential garments of a holy priest (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 5:6). Like Melchizedek, the Messiah was to be both Priest and King (Genesis 14:18), guaranteeing that His subjects could approach God without the interference of a clergy class. Instead, as the New Testament affirms, Christians offer their petitions directly to God through their King—Who mediates on their behalf (cf. Matthew 6:9; John 14:13-14; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 10:12, 19-22). It would be impossible for the New Testament writers to provide any clearer answers than they did to the questions that Christ asked the Pharisees. Furthermore, no similar "savior" from mythology ever had his entire life prophesied, or personally fulfilled predictive prophecy (in whole or in part), like Jesus.

WHAT WOULD YOU EXPECT?

In his fascinating book, *What If Christ Had Never Been Born?*, D. James Kennedy discussed at length both the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and His singular impact on the Earth's inhabitants. In assessing that impact, Dr. Kennedy wrote:



Dr. Bert Thompson

April 6-8	Jasper, AL	(205) 384-6330
April 20-22	Tallahassee, FL	(850) 893-6469
April 27-29	Somerville, AL	(256) 778-8935
May 4-6	Sterling, IL	(815) 625-2251

Kyle Butt

May 23	Duluth, GA	(770) 476-2159
--------	------------	----------------

Eric Lyons

May 18-20	Sycamore, IL	(815) 895-9148
May 23	Duluth, GA	(770) 476-2159

...Jesus Christ has had an enormous impact—more than anybody else—on history. Had He never come, the hole would be a canyon about the size of a continent. Christ’s influence on the world is immeasurable.... Whatever Jesus touched or whatever He did transformed that aspect of human life. Many people will read about the innumerable small incidents in the life of Christ while never dreaming that those casually mentioned “little” things were to transform the history of mankind (1994, p. 4).

Philip Schaff discussed Christ’s influence when he wrote in his book, *The Person of Christ: The Miracle of History*:

This Jesus of Nazareth, without money or arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise, than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times (1913, p. 33).

It has been said that Christ changed the course of the River of History and lifted the centuries off their hinges—a stirring verbal tribute that is quite apropos, considering the evidence. When unbelievers write books to challenge His deity, even they (albeit inadvertently) acknowledge not only His existence, but His uniqueness, when they place the copyright date in the frontispiece of their tomes, admitting that the volume was published in, say, A.D. 2001. That “A.D.” stands for *Anno Domini*—in the year of the Lord. No one dates time from Osiris, Dionysus, Hillel, or Confucius. But the entire inhabited world recognizes the designations of “B.C.” (before Christ) and “A.D.”

In *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell listed seven things that people could (and should!) expect from the Savior of the world: (1) an utterly unique entrance into human history (prophecy and virgin birth); (2) the ability to live a sinless life—none of the Jewish heroes was presented

as perfect, nor were the mythological heroes presented as viceless; (3) control over all the forces of nature—“Who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him” (Mark 4:41); (4) the capability to speak the greatest words ever uttered by human lips; (5) a lasting and universal influence on humanity; (6) the power to satisfy the spiritual hunger of mankind (see Matthew 5:6, John 7:37, 4: 14, 6:35, 10:10); and (7) the ability to defeat both death and sin.

The simple fact is, Jehovah left no stone unturned in preparing the world for the coming of the One Who would save mankind. Through a variety of avenues, He alerted the inhabitants of planet Earth regarding the singular nature of the One Who was yet to come, as well as the importance of believing in and obeying Him. Humanity’s sins can be forgiven only by a sinless Savior. A mythological sacrifice can forgive only mythological sins, but Jesus truly is the Lamb of God “that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). As Norman Geisler put it:

It is one thing to claim deity and quite another to have the credentials to support that claim. Christ did both. He offered three unique and miraculous facts as evidence of his claim: the fulfillment of prophecy, a uniquely miraculous life, and the resurrection from the dead. All of these are historically provable and unique to Jesus of Nazareth. We argue, therefore, that Jesus alone claims to be and proves to be God (1976, p. 339).

CONCLUSION

Who, then, is Jesus Christ? Is He a unique Savior, or an average fraud? The choices actually are quite limited—a fact reiterated by Josh McDowell when he titled one of the chapters in his *New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*: “Significance of Deity: The Trilemma—Lord, Liar, or Lunatic?” His purpose was to point out that, considering the grandiose nature of Christ’s claims, He had to be one of the three. As McDowell began his discussion, he presented for the reader’s consideration a quotation from the famous British apologist of Cambridge University, C.S. Lewis, who wrote:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.”

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to (1952, pp. 40-41).

Lewis’ point needs to be explored. Consider, for example, the cover story of the March 27, 2000 issue of *Newsweek*, “Visions of Jesus.” In that issue, staff writer Kenneth Woodward penned the feature article, “The Other Jesus,” in which he defended the idea that the Jesus of the Gospels may not be the “real” Jesus. In fact, Woodward said, “the lack of extra-Biblical evidence for the existence of Jesus has led more than one critic to conclude that he is a Christian fiction created by the early church” (2000, 135[13]:53). But, Woodward admitted, “the Christ of the Gospels is certainly the best-known Jesus in the world. For Christians, he is utterly unique—the only Son of God” (p. 52).

One month later, in its April 17, 2000 issue, *Newsweek*’s editors ran in the “Letters” section a sampling of responses from readers. One letter was from a young lady by the name of Jennifer Rawlings of Gaithersburg, Maryland, who wrote:

I am a 17-year-old student, and I was disappointed by your cover story “Visions of Jesus.” It seems that *Newsweek* attempted to find a middle ground in presenting a view of Jesus as a character who could appeal to all people. But that is impossible. Either Jesus was in fact the son of God, as he claimed, or he was a lunatic. No one who claims to be the Son of God is simply a “good teacher”! Other great religions will never accept Jesus to be who he said he was. If they do, then they are not Jewish, Muslim or Buddhist. They are Christian (2000, 135[16]:17).

Apparently one does not have to be a distinguished Cambridge University professor (like C.S. Lewis) to understand what 17-year-old Miss Rawlings so eloquently stated in her simple-but-accurate reply to *Newsweek*’s

“scholarly” approach. Jesus not only existed as a historical character, but also claimed to be God incarnate (John 5:17-18; 8:42; 10:30; 12:45; 14:7,10-11; 17:21-23; 19:7). He therefore cannot be viewed merely as a “good teacher” since, if His claim were false, He would have been either a liar or a lunatic. In Mark 10, the account is recorded concerning a rich young ruler who, in speaking to Christ, addressed Him as “good teacher.” Upon hearing this reference, Jesus asked: “Why callest thou me good? None is good, save one, even God” (Mark 10:18). So, is Christ God?

Was Christ a Liar?

Was Christ a liar? A charlatan? A “messianic manipulator”? In his book, *The Passover Plot*, Hugh J. Schonfield claimed that He was all three. Schonfield suggested that Jesus manipulated His life in such a way as to counterfeit the events portrayed in the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. At times, this necessitated “contriving those events...contending with friends and foes to ensure that the predictions would be fulfilled” (1965, p. 7). Schonfield charged that Jesus planned to fake His own death on the cross, but had not counted on a spear being thrust through His side. Thus, rather than recovering from His stupor, Jesus died unexpectedly. On Saturday evening, His body was moved to a secret place so that His tomb would be empty on the next day, thus leaving the impression of His resurrection and, simultaneously, His deity (pp. 161ff.).

In considering the possibility that Christ was little more than an accomplished liar, biblical historian Philip Schaff asked:

How in the name of logic, common sense, and experience, could an impostor—that is a deceitful, selfish, depraved man—have invented, and consistently maintained from beginning to end, the purest and noblest character known in history with the most perfect air of truth and reality? How could he have conceived and successfully carried out a plan of unparalleled beneficence, moral magnitude, and sublimity, and sacrificed his own life for it, in the face of the strongest prejudices of his people and ages? (1913, pp. 94-95).

Furthermore, what sane man would die for what he knows to be a lie? As McDowell summarized the matter: “Someone who lived as Jesus lived, taught as Jesus taught, and died as Jesus died could not have been a liar” (1999, p. 160).

Was Christ a Lunatic?

Was Jesus merely a psychotic lunatic Who sincerely (albeit mistakenly) viewed Himself as God incarnate? Such a view rarely has been entertained by anyone cognizant of Christ’s life and teachings. Schaff inquired:

Is such an intellect—clear as the sky, bracing as the mountain air, sharp and penetrating as a sword, thoroughly healthy and vigorous, always ready and always self-possessed—liable to a radical and most serious delusion concerning His own character and mission? Preposterous imagination! (1913, pp. 97-98).

Would a raving lunatic teach that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us? Would a lunatic teach that we should pray for our enemies? Would a lunatic teach that we should “turn the other cheek,” and then set an example of exactly how to do that—even unto death? Would a lunatic present an ethical/moral code like the one in the Sermon on the Mount? No. Lunacy of the sort ascribed to Christ by His detractors does not produce such genius. Schaff continued:

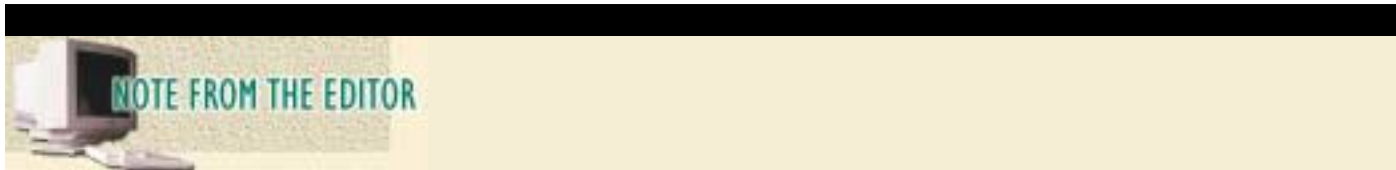
Self-deception in a matter so momentous, and with an intellect in all respects so clear and so sound, is equally out of the question. How could He be an enthusiast or a madman who never lost the even balance of His mind, who sailed serenely over all the troubles and persecutions, as the sun above the clouds, who always returned the wisest answer to tempting questions, who calmly and deliberately predicted His death on the cross, His resurrection on the third day, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the founding of His Church, the destruction of Jerusalem—predictions which have been literally fulfilled? A character so original, so completely, so uniformly consistent, so perfect, so human and yet so high above all human greatness, can be neither a fraud nor a fiction (1910, p. 109).

Was Christ Deity?

If Jesus was neither a liar nor a lunatic, then the question He asked the Pharisees still remains: “What think ye of the Christ?” Is Jesus, in fact, Who He claimed to be? Was He God incarnate? The evidence presented here suggests that the answer to both questions is “Yes.” Could anyone, taking into account all the evidence, really suggest—and expect to be taken seriously—that He was merely an “average fraud”? We think not.

REFERENCES

- Bales, James D. (no date), *The Originality of Christ* (Searcy, AR: Privately published by author).
- Bromling, Brad T. (1991), “The Prophets’ Portrait of Christ,” *Reason & Revelation*, 11:45-47, December.
- Franklin, Stephen T. (1993), “Theological Foundations for the Uniqueness of Christ as Hope and Judge,” *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 17 [1]:29-53, January.
- Freke, Timothy and Peter Gandy (1999), *The Jesus Mysteries* (New York: Harmony Books).
- Geisler (1976), *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House).
- Horne, Thomas H. (1970 edition), *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker).
- Kennedy, D. James and Jerry Newcombe (1994), *What If Christ Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville, TN: Nelson).
- Leupold, H.C. (1971), *Exposition of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), one-volume edition.
- Lewis, C.S. (1952), *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan).
- McCabe, Joseph (1993), *The Myth of the Resurrection and Other Essays* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, reprint of 1926 edition).
- McCord, Hugo (1979), “Internal Evidences of the Bible’s Inspiration,” *The Holy Scriptures*, ed. Wendell Winkler (Fort Worth, TX: Winkler Publications).
- McDowell, Josh (1999), *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville, TN: Nelson).
- McGarvey, J.W. (1875), *The New Testament Commentary: Matthew and Mark* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light).
- Oswalt, John N. (1998) *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66* [New International Commentary on the Old Testament] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Price, Reynolds (1999), “Jesus of Nazareth—Then and Now,” *Time*, 154[23]:84-94, December 6.
- Ramm, Bernard (1953), *Protestant Christian Evidences* (Chicago, IL: Moody).
- Rawlings, Jennifer, (2000), “Letter to the Editor,” *Newsweek*, 135[16]:17, April 17.
- Schaff, Philip (1910), *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Schaff, Philip (1913), *The Person of Christ: The Miracle of History* (New York: American Tract Society).
- Schonfield, Hugh J. (1965), *The Passover Plot* (New York: Bantam).
- Solomon, David (1972), “Procurator,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth (Jerusalem: Keter).
- Stott, John (1971), *Basic Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).
- Trench, R.C. (no date), *Christ the Desire of All Nations; or the Unconscious Prophecies of Heathendom*, (Searcy, AR: Bales Publications).
- Woodward, Kenneth L. (1999), “2000 Years of Jesus,” *Newsweek*, 133[13]:52-63, March 29.
- Woodward, Kenneth L. (2000), “The Other Jesus,” *Newsweek*, 135[13]:50-60, March 27.



ANNOUNCING: THE NEW A.P. CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Through the years, one of the things that we at Apologetics Press have worked hard to do is to “keep our ear to the ground,” so to speak, in order to discern exactly what products and services we might be able to offer that would do the most good for the most people. And, truth be told, some of the best ideas have come from folks who were not the least bit shy about offering their opinions on what they believed those products and services should be, or do—which brings me to my point for this month’s “Note from the Editor.”

Over the past year or so, several of our readers have mentioned to us their need for apologetics-based instructional material aimed specifically at men and women who are incarcerated in jails and prisons—something that could be sent into that environment to help people build a rock-solid, obedient faith in God, His Word, and His Son, and simultaneously teach them the Gospel plan of salvation so that they, too, could become a member of Christ’s singular, heaven-sent, blood-bought church. The material, they explained, needed to be attractively presented, brief, and written with a non-technical vocabulary that would be appropriate for all ages and cultural backgrounds.

Ironically (or maybe not!), about the same time, we began to receive requests for a correspondence-course type study in apologetics that could be used to teach young people these same principles. We were informed that it needed to be attractively presented, brief, and written in a non-technical vocabulary that would be appropriate for several ages and cultural backgrounds. “Hmm,” we thought, “two pretty tall orders.” Then, suddenly, **CLICK!**—we experienced the “light bulb above the head” syndrome. Why not produce a Christian

evidences correspondence course that could be used by **both** groups? And so that is exactly what we set out to do—and **exactly what we have done!**

Our new *Christian Evidences Correspondence Course* has 10, 8-page lessons, each of which is printed in full color on enameled paper in a large, easy-to-read typestyle, and contains professionally drawn artwork (see samples below). Lessons are written in an everyday vocabulary that will be appealing to young people, as well as to those who are incarcerated. Each lesson stands on its own, and contains written exercises on a perforated sheet so that students may hand (or mail) them in for grading. Sets are shrink-wrapped, and contain a separate answer sheet for the teacher’s use. The 10 lessons cover the following topics: the faces of unbelief; the existence of God (3 lessons dealing with cause and effect, design, and morality); creation vs. evolution (2 lessons); a general introduction to the Bible; the inspiration of the Bible; what God expects of me (i.e., the Gospel plan of salvation); and the uniqueness and singularity of Christ’s church. Currently, we are working on a second, intermediate course (to be released later this year), and we have a third, advanced course planned as well (for release early in 2002).



As with all of our products, we have done everything possible to make them as professional, yet as affordable, as possible. Cost for a set of 10 lessons is only \$4.00 (\$3.50 each in quantities of 26 or more). Individual lessons are available for 40¢ each in quantities of 25 or less (35¢ each in quantities of 26 or more). To order, call us toll free at 800/234-8558.

Bert Thompson