

WHAT I BELIEVE AND WHY I BELIEVE IT

I frequently think about the miraculous healing (detailed later) that I experienced as a child and recently realized that I didn't have a thorough and ready explanation as to why I believe what I do about spiritual matters. Without that how could I expect to share information with anyone? I realized that the origin of my beliefs came from being raised in a church-going family, having grown up attending church quite frequently, but I know that not everyone grew up in a church environment. That led me to review what I believe as well as the reasons I believe it. So, I wrote it down in order that I can share it with others in my life.

Much of my explanation will be based on Biblical eyewitness accounts so I will start by explaining why I believe those accounts about Jesus to be accurate. I have read and studied much about early Christian writings, both those that became a part of our modern Bible and those that didn't as well as the process of selection over the centuries. Even though I was raised in a Bible-believing family it has taken a great deal of effort on my part as an adult to come to believe in the teachings and historical accuracy of the biblical account of Jesus. I guess that is because I am such a questioning and skeptical person.

One of the best modern books written about the Bible's factual and historical accuracy and therefore the claims about Jesus is called "The Case for Christ" by Lee Strobel. He has a law degree and is an investigative reporter and is accustomed to performing vigorous investigation to prove his stories before he believes and prints them. He was also an atheist and after his wife became a Christian he set out to thoroughly investigate the case for Christ so as to prove to his wife that she had made the wrong decision in becoming a Christian.

So, as I write this, rather than just say I believe because of such and such, I will frequently quote the research used in his book. He did a tremendous amount of work to disprove the Bible and Jesus and what he learned expresses many of the reasons I believe. All of the references and footnotes are in his book if you should decide to buy and read it which I would recommend for any of you who are skeptics. As I said he was an atheist when he started his quest to disprove the Bible and Christ and became a Christian afterward due to his thorough investigation.

THE ACCURACY OF THE BIBLE

*** The Eyewitness Accounts.**

I believe that the writers of the New Testament were living witnesses to Jesus and his life. Much emphasis is placed on eyewitness testimony in a court of law today and accurate eyewitness testimony is as important historically.

When Strobel was interviewing the New Testament scholar, Craig L. Blomberg, PH. D., he said at one point, "If we can have confidence (previously proven) that the gospels were written by the disciples Matthew and John, by Mark, the companion of the disciple Peter, and by Luke, the historian, companion of Paul, and sort of a first century journalist, we can be assured that the events they record are based on either direct or indirect eyewitness testimony." "We see them reporting the words and actions of a man who called them to as exacting a level of integrity as any religion has ever known.

They were willing to live out their beliefs even to the point of ten of the eleven remaining disciples being put to grisly deaths, which shows great character.” Again, I am able to believe what they wrote is true because as eye witnesses they would not have made up a story then be tortured and die for the make-believe story.

Considering that the first biographies of Alexander the Great, for example, were not written until 500 years after his death but are considered historically accurate the fact that the Gospels were written within 30 years of Jesus’ death are very close to the actual time line. Dr. Blomberg says in the same interview, “If you allow maybe a year for each of those, you end up with Mark written no later than about A.D. 60, maybe even the late 50’s. If Jesus was put to death in A.D. 30 or 33, we’re talking about a maximum gap of thirty years or so.” “Historically speaking especially compared to Alexander the Great, that’s like a news flash.”

*** How can you believe the Bible when you can't prove that it is true?**

From Strobel’s book, “Well, how could you prove that there was a great fire in London in 1666? Or that Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo? Or that it was Michelangelo who painted the Sistine Chapel?

How can you even prove that what you read in today's newspaper or heard on the radio is true? The fact is, we can't prove that events down through history happened at all. Maybe the person who told us about the events was mistaken. Maybe he or she was inaccurate, or was hallucinating, or didn't have all the facts, or was simply a liar. We take most things on faith because we believe the words of those who were there — eyewitnesses. Or we take the word of people who say they obtained the information from eyewitnesses.

No one doubts the existence of Julius Caesar, yet there is less evidence for his existence than for the historical authenticity of the New Testament. There are probably 5000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in Greek, and at least 15,000 more in other languages. Nothing like this abundance exists for any other historical writing.

It should be noted too that many of the early Christian writers quoted profusely from the New Testament. Some of these writers lived very close to the time that the books of the New Testament were written, and would surely have refuted them if there was doubt about their authenticity.”

***Historical accuracy.**

I believe the historical accuracy of the New Testament with the book of Acts being a good representation of the historical detail. From Lee Strobel’s book, “This confirms the accuracy of the Bible regarding the many historical details in the Bible's Book of Acts. Specific places, people, and events are mentioned throughout this amazing historical account of the early church, and yet there is no record of anyone refuting anything in the book. The eyewitnesses seem totally reliable. One prominent archeologist carefully examined Luke’s references to thirty two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands, finding not a single mistake.

Even more interestingly, not one major fact mentioned in the Bible has been indisputably proved to be untrue. There are many thousands of highly qualified scientists who believe that the Bible's account of creation is more in harmony with true science than is the theory of evolution.

And there have been countless scholars — historians, archaeologists, theologians, and others — who have come to believe that those who wrote the Bible were truly writing the Word of God. And that the Word of God is true.”

***The character of the writers of the New Testament.**

I believe the writers of the New Testament were writing the truth and gave their lives as a result of what they knew to be true. Unlike many martyrs of other religions today, the Christian writers wrote about and died for the things they were eyewitness to, not just what someone else told them to be true. If it was a hoax, they not only made up the hoax but then died to perpetuate it. It seems unlikely to me that 10 of the remaining 11 would die to perpetuate a hoax started by them.

My belief in the Bible is because there is every reason to believe it to be accurate, more so than many if not most other historical writings. I have used many quotes from Strobel's book because his research and writing speaks about my beliefs more clearly and concisely than I ever could.

THE FACTS OF JESUS IN THE BIBLE

***Coincidence doesn't work for prophecy fulfillment.**

The prophecies that Jesus fulfilled were not fulfilled by accident. The probability of eight prophecies being fulfilled was calculated at one chance in one hundred million billion. Yet Jesus fulfilled 48 prophecies. That has been calculated like this, that if you took as many silver dollars as those odds figure out to they would cover the state of Texas to a depth of 2 feet. If you marked one silver dollar among them and then had a blindfolded person wander the whole state and bend down and pick up one coin, what would be the odds he would choose the one that had been marked? That is how great the odds are against any one person fulfilling 48 prophecies as Jesus did.

***To die for?**

Would the New Testament eyewitness writers have fabricated Jesus' life and then spent the rest of their lives spreading their fabrications about Jesus and then dying for the false Messiah they made up? I don't think so. (more on this later)

***Jesus' burial and the empty tomb!**

Jesus burial is one of the earliest and best attested facts that we have about the historical Jesus. When you read the New Testament there is no doubt that the disciples sincerely believed the truth of the His death and Resurrection, which they proclaimed till their deaths. The idea that the empty tomb is the

result of some hoax, conspiracy or theft is simply dismissed today. ...the site of Jesus tomb was known to Christian and Jew alike. So if it weren't empty, it would be impossible for a movement founded on belief in the Resurrection to have come into existence in the same city where this same man had been publicly executed and buried.the earliest Jewish records presupposes the historical authenticity of the empty tomb. In other words, there was nobody claiming that the tomb still contained Jesus body, the question always was, what happened to the body? Obviously, the disciples had no motive to steal the body and then die for a lie, and certainly the Jewish authorities wouldn't have removed the body.

***Appearances after death!**

The appearances of Jesus after death and burial add to the proof of his resurrection in addition to the empty tomb. From Strobel's book, "While I knew that this (the empty tomb) was important and necessary evidence for his resurrection, I was also aware that a missing body is not conclusive proof by itself. More facts would be needed to establish that Jesus really did return from the dead." The numerous interactions with Jesus after his death were instrumental in the growth and spread of Christianity. The following quote from Strobel's book speaks to this, "...the Resurrection was undoubtedly the central proclamation of the early church from the beginning. The earliest Christians didn't just endorse Jesus' teachings. They were convinced they had seen him alive after his crucifixion. *That's* what changed their lives and started the church. Certainly since this was the centermost conviction, they would have made absolutely sure it was true."

***Circumstantial evidence.**

I think the circumstantial evidence regarding Jesus is very powerful and contributes in a major way to my beliefs. Lee Strobel, in his quest to disprove Jesus, interrogated J. P. Moreland, Ph. D. and he lays out the circumstantial evidence in a clear fashion.

"At first, after Jesus' death and burial, the disciples were discouraged and feeling defeated upon the death of Jesus who they believed was the Messiah. They began to return home and to their previous occupations. Then after a short period of time, we see them abandoning their occupations, re-gathering, and committing themselves to spreading a very specific message- that Jesus Christ was the Messiah of God that died on a cross, returned to life, and was seen alive by them. And they were willing to spend the rest of their lives proclaiming this, without any payoff from a human point of view. It is not as though there was a mansion awaiting them on the Mediterranean. They faced a life of hardship. They often went without food, slept exposed to the elements, were ridiculed, beaten, imprisoned. And finally, most of them were executed in torturous ways."

"For what? For good intentions? No, because they were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they had seen Jesus alive from the dead." I know many people are willing to die for their beliefs even though those beliefs may be wrong. We have all seen evidence of that in the past few years with suicide bombers and suicide pilots. Dr. Moreland states the following, "Muslims might be willing to die for their beliefs that Allah revealed himself to Mohammad, but this revelation was not done in a publicly observable way. So they could be wrong about it. They may sincerely think it is true, but they can't know it for a fact, because they didn't witness it themselves."

“However, the Apostles were willing to die for something they had seen with their own eyes and touched with their own hands. They were in an unusual position not to just believe Jesus rose from the dead but to know for sure. And when you’ve got eleven credible people with no ulterior motives, with nothing to gain and a lot to lose, who all agreed they observed something with their own eyes – now you’ve got some difficulty explaining that away.”

***The conversion of skeptics.**

“Another piece of circumstantial evidence is that there were hardened skeptics who didn’t believe in Jesus before his crucifixion – and to some degree dead-set against Christianity – who turned around and adopted the Christian faith after Jesus’ death. There’s no good reason for this apart from them having experienced the resurrected Christ.” Jesus’ brother James and Paul are two good examples of this type of conversion. In fact, Paul was a devout Jew who persecuted and killed Christians to try to stamp out Christianity prior to his encounter with Jesus after his resurrection. After they met the resurrected Christ they became devout followers.

***Conclusion.**

I like and agree with the way Strobel summed it up in his book. In his quest to disprove Christ, in addition to all of the circumstantial evidence he outlines the following; “Jesus was killed on the cross – Alexander Metherall – has made that graphically clear. His tomb was empty on Easter morning – William Lane Craig left no doubt about that. His disciples and others saw him, touched him and ate with him after the resurrection – Gary Habermas has built that case with abundant evidence. As prominent British theologian Michael Green said, the appearances of Jesus are as well authenticated as anything in antiquity.....there can be no rational doubt that they occurred, and that the main reason why Christians became sure of the resurrection in the earliest days was just this. They could say with assurance, we have seen the Lord. They knew it was he.”

GENERAL HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

***Jesus was the turning point in time and history.**

BC for Before Christ which starts with year 1 and AD for Anno Domini, the year of Our Lord referring to the year of Christ’s birth.

It is interesting to note that the purpose of the BC dating system was to make the birth of Jesus Christ the dividing point of world history. The birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ are the "turning points" in world history. It is fitting, therefore, that Jesus Christ be the separation of "old" and "new." BC was "before Christ" and since His birth, we have been living "in the year of our Lord

***Creation is easier to believe than Evolution.**

Over the years I have studied some about the Evolution vs. Creation debate. About 20 years ago or so I attended a debate between a Creation and an Evolutionist Scientist. The debate consisted of 3 meetings

over three days, each were about 2-3 hours long. It seemed very clear to me that the Creationist Scientist won the debate. There was simply more proof for creation than there was for evolution.

I think each of us have a choice of what to believe if we ever think about the “beginning” of how we all came about. We can either believe that God created everything or there was a big bang. To believe in Creationism you have to believe in God. To believe in Evolution you have to believe that in the beginning there was nothing, the nothing exploded and over time the nothing became galaxies, planets, water, land, air, worms, fish, dogs, cats, grass, trees and you and I. I cannot believe that “nothing” could explode and become all of those things.

*My miraculous healing.

When I was 4 years old I had rheumatic fever, a very dangerous disease which affects the heart and often damages it to the point that a normal life cannot be led. I had to lie still in bed for a year and not undergo any physical stress. I could not even walk to the bathroom. I had to be carried by Mom or Dad. My parents were told by our family doctor, Eugene Newby, of Sheridan, Indiana that I would probably not be able to go to school the first few years, would never be able to live a normal physical life of sports and other rigorous activities. I had to be taken to the Doctor monthly for checkups and evaluations.

My parents became Christians around that time in my life. A minister at a small local country church in Big Springs asked my parents if they would like to have a healing service for me and they did. The minister came to our home, anointed my head with oil and prayed over me for my complete healing.

At my next scheduled monthly doctor’s checkup Dr. Newby apparently examined me and listened to my heart with great surprise and finally said that he had no idea what happened or how it happened but that the disease was dramatically improved. He said that some miracle had happened that was not related to his doctoring and if I remained as I was then I would not need to continue with the monthly checkups for long. As it turned out I was able to attend first grade (and all grades), I participated in basketball and track, went through the rigorous training as an infantryman in the Army, and spent a very physically challenging year in Viet Nam and the next 15 years in the construction trades, all with no issue whatsoever with my heart. A miraculous cure had taken place – there can be no doubt!

Following is the transcript of a tape recording of my father, Dallas W. Viehe, telling the story of my healing on a small local television show in 1971.

“There were some good church people around Big Springs that when my youngster was sick they invited us to come to church and they even offered to stay with the youngster while we went to church or maybe they would tell us one of us could go and one of us stay. And through the preaching of the Word of God we came to realize that we were lost, that we had this need. When Brother Parker brought forth the gospel and proclaimed the gospel or good news to us we realized we had this need and went to the altar and prayed and accepted Jesus.....” The moderator said, “You were telling us about your boy being sick. Was this a small boy?” My Dad said, “yes Bob, he was about 3 or 3 ½ years old and had rheumatic fever – very very puny I think would be the way to express it. He had no desire, no ambition, no energy to get off the couch. He just layed on the couch. He wasn’t even allowed to go to the kitchen to eat. He wasn’t allowed to walk upstairs to bed.

Shortly after we were saved our minister asked us if we would like for him to pray for him the prayer of healing. Of course we were young converts hungry for everything God had for us and we didn't know what he meant even. We said well yes I guess, what do you mean? He said well, it says in the bible if any of you are sick call the elders and have them anoint them with oil and pray for them. And we were eager and anxious to have all that God had for us. So it was in the Bible and we believed it.

So I said what shall we do? Shall we bring him down to the church or have the church up to the house? He suggested that he come by after the service. He said you don't need a big crowd so long as you believe and we pray the prayer of faith. This is all we need. So, he came by the next Sunday and we knelt there beside the couch and he anointed him with oil and prayed a very very simple prayer. It was very impressive to me. I previously thought you had to have a big show or a lot of this or that but this was a very very simple prayer. We arose and felt that it was done. God said he would do it and we believed it.

The proof of it was two weeks later when Eva carried him to the Doctor's office. He went to examine the boy and he listened all around all over and then began to frown. And he said there is something that has happened to this boy. And she said yes Doctor, I don't know what you think about it, but she said definitely some higher power has had a hand in this because the boy is different. He is much better. He said I can't believe it.

Previously the Doctor had told us in calling at the home and bearing him into the Doctor's office that he would probably have to have a tutor for the first two or three years of his life (school.) He would probably not live a normal life but after two or three years he would probably be well enough and outgrow it enough that he would be able to go to school. But this was just two weeks later, after the minister had prayed for him, 10 days to two weeks. He definitely said something has happened to him. There is a higher power here a work has been done that I, uh, just can't explain. I can only credit it to a higher power.

So, instead of coming back every month as she had been, he extended the time to two months. And she took him back two months later, he listened,, he smiled and said this boy is on the road to recovery! He said instead of bringing him back in two months, bring him in four. In the meantime he said your job at home is going to get a lot harder. She said it already is because he is putting on weight, getting energy and strength and he wants to get up and play. Now she has to hold him down or hold him back and this was quite a job. For several months in there it was that way. She took him back again after four months and he said well uh, he said well bring him back when he gets sick! So that was the Doctor releasing him in a period of something like seven months and told him to go ahead!

The thing is, the boy got up, he played, he went to school, he had a normal life. We lived on a farm and he helped farm, he swam in the creek,, he rode horses, he rode bicycles, he played basketball in high school. He went clear through his high school life. This never recurred, never came back from that time through today. He just a couple of months ago got out of the Army. He has been in the Army three years and nine months. Has a wife and a beautiful little baby. He is living a normal life. Went through the service basic training and went through a tour in Viet Nam and everything else. There is no doubt but what God laid his hand on the boy. There is no question about God being real or God being able to heal or to save.”

WHAT I BELIEVE

I have spent all of this time telling you why I believe and now I will tell you what I believe.

I believe that God created the earth and all that is on it including mankind. We were planned to have a relationship with God but due to our own intelligence and self will we turned away from the relationship. We now live in sin – a broken relationship with God. I believe God cares enough for us that he sent Jesus to provide for our reconciliation to Him. Jesus made the way for us to have a repaired relationship with God by his death, burial and resurrection. He overcame death so that we might also be able to.

If you and I choose to have eternal life in relationship with God we can achieve that this way:

1. We must hear about God and his word and his plan for our repaired relationship with Him. Romans 10:14
2. After hearing, we must develop faith in Jesus as the way to that repaired relationship and eternal life with God. Mark 16:16
3. As our faith in Jesus takes root we must turn away from (repent) our own willful way and turn to Him. Acts 3: 19
4. As a result of our faith in him we must confess Jesus as our savior. Matthew 10: 32
5. We then must be baptized into Christ and have our sins washed away and receive the eternal relationship with God, starting now and continuing after our death. Acts 2:38

If you think I can be of any help to you with any spiritual questions or concerns you might have please feel free to contact me.

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