

## Introduction

Imagine living as a Christian only to discover that there is no such person and there is no such thing as eternal life. Very little will have been lost and quite a few advantages gained in this life. On the other hand, if a disbeliever dies and discovers that Jesus exists, then they will have lost their only hope for eternal life. This line of thought has been used as a justification for belief, but the Apostle Paul frames the issue in a much more definite manner:

**If there is no resurrection** of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, **our preaching is useless and so is your faith**. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, **we are to be pitied more than all men**.

*1 Corinthians 15:13-19, NIV*

Paul's words make it plain that the Christian faith must be based on a strong belief that Jesus existed and that he rose from death after crucifixion.

The objective of this article is to provide you with a reason to believe that this is actually the case, and if this can be done, to encourage you to accept Jesus' offer of eternal life. It covers such aspects as the existence of Jesus as a person, considering references to him from sources other than the Bible. Old Testament prophecies relating to Jesus are drawn upon to show that the life of Jesus was accurately predicted many hundreds of years before he existed. Arguments are presented to demonstrate that it would be impossible to add these prophecies to the Old Testament after the event. Separate accounts from various New Testament authors that coincidentally support each other are highlighted. The life of Joseph (of coloured coat fame) is paralleled to Jesus to show the close alignment between the events in their lives. Finally, the accounts of those who claim to have seen Jesus alive after his crucifixion are quoted, and their motives for making such a claim are considered.

## Did Jesus Exist?

If people are to believe that Jesus is alive now, they must believe that he actually existed. There are various sources that can be drawn upon to show that Jesus Christ is not a fictitious character. The examples quoted below are of particular interest because they are the writings of Non-Christians. This first quote is taken from the work of Josephus (as translated by William Whiston).

Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, -- a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was (the) Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

*Antiquities of the Jews, Book XVIII, Ch. 3.3*

Michael Smith provides the following insight into Josephus:

Josephus, the Jewish historian, was born in A.D. 37 of a priestly family. He was well educated, and followed the Pharisaic form of Judaism. In A.D. 64 he visited Rome as a member of a Jewish embassy... After the end of the Jewish revolt (A.D. 66-70), he went to Rome with Titus, and lived there until his death about A.D. 100. Josephus became a close friend of the Emperors Vespasian and Titus, and took their family name, Flavius. Josephus did all his writing at Rome. His works include "The Jewish Wars" and "The Antiquities of the Jews".

Based on Smith's report, Josephus was born about three years after the crucifixion of Jesus. His proximity in time to the events leading up to Jesus' death is similar to the proximity to World War 2 for a person who was born in 1948. There is ample evidence that the life and times of Jesus Christ was a hot topic in Jerusalem well after he departed from the Earth.

Josephus would no doubt have heard many stories about Jesus. As a Pharisee, it would be expected that he would be an opponent of Christ. It was the Pharisees who organised the execution of Jesus because he spoke against them. Jesus spoke against the Pharisees because of their tendency to promote technicalities at the expense of care for people:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

*Matthew 23:23, NIV*

Ross Clifford in his book "*Leading Lawyers look at the resurrection*" notes that the Jewish

Talmud (civil and ceremonial law) mentions Jesus...

The Jewish Talmud notes Jesus' execution, that he was not accepted by Jewish authorities, that he hung on a tree on Passover eve and that he did 'miracles'.

*Sanhedrin 43a and Yeb. IV 3:49a.*

Clifford believes that the recognition of Jesus in the writings of the Talmud is the most significant because it's writers were bent on discrediting Jesus.

Clifford also notes that a Roman historian's reports acknowledges Jesus' existence...

Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman historian, in A.D. 112, stated Jesus was put to death by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.

*Cornelius Tacitus, Annals XV 44.2-8.*

This is an overview of the external evidence of Jesus' existence. The book *"Leading Lawyers look at the resurrection"* (by Ross Clifford) provides further information for those who are interested.

This evidence is put forward to demonstrate that Jesus actually existed. To accept that he existed is not to accept that he is the son of God and that he rose from death on the third day. The following evidence is provided to support these claims.

## Prophetic Evidence

There is a solid link between the authenticity of the Bible as a whole and the reality of Jesus and his resurrection. If the Bible is fiction, most of the evidence supporting Jesus is wiped out. If Jesus is proven to be an impostor, the credibility of the Bible is destroyed. If Bible prophecy supports Bible credibility, then this is another reason to believe what it says about Jesus. Bible Prophecy is unique in that it contains very specific predictions that leave no room for "adjusting" the interpretation to suit later history as it unfolds. The following is an example:

### God's prophetic warning to Israel

Deuteronomy 28 details a list of blessings and curses that would fall upon Israel, blessings for obedience, and curses for disobedience. In considering the following Bible predictions, bear in mind that they are part of God's warning to Israel of the punishment for disobedience. The prophet Jeremiah explains (32:35) that one of the sins that prompted God to punish Israel was their practice of burning their children in sacrificial fires to the pagan god "Molech".

Prophecy	Fulfillment
<p>However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commandments ... all these curses will come upon you ... "You will be uprooted from the land which you are entering to possess. The Lord will <b>scatter you among all the peoples</b>, from one end of the earth to the other."</p> <p><i>Deuteronomy 28:15,63</i></p>	<p>"Jews (from Judah)... the term later came to designate the followers of the religion Judaism. Before World War 2 the Jewish population <b>scattered over the world</b> amounted to 16 million; it is estimated that some 6 million Jews perished in massacres during the war. There were about 14 million Jews in the world in the early 1970's with 7 million in the Americas, 4 million in Europe and 3 million in Africa and Asia." "In 1290 the Jews were expelled from England, in 1392 from France, in 1492 from Spain under Torquemada; in 1497 from Portugal.</p> <p><i>Columbia Encyclopedia (Vol 12, Pg. 3530)</i></p>
<p><b>Among those nations you shall have no ease</b>, nor shall you find a resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you a trembling heart, homesick eyes and a languishing spirit; you will sense danger night and day, your life will be in suspense, having no security whatever."</p> <p><i>Deuteronomy 28:63-66</i></p>	<p>Many exiles perished; others found asylum in the Netherlands and in the Turkish possessions. The German Jews fled to Poland but there too they were subjected to persecution. <b>When a country suffered economically or in war its Jews were likely to be the scapegoat.</b>"</p> <p><i>Columbia Encyclopedia (Vol 12, Pg. 3531)</i></p>

The Bible accurately predicted Israel's scattering throughout the world and their persecuted by their host nations. How was it able to do this? Most significantly, the Bible predicts that Israel would survive, enabling people to be regathered and placed in their traditional land. This happened in 1948. Ezekiel 38 speaks of this regathering from the nations of the world, and a time of turmoil that has not yet appeared (this turmoil precedes the type of peace that the world is currently yearning for -- read Ezekiel 38 - 48).

## King David predicts the events in Jesus' life

The Bible (as Christians know it) comprises the Old and New Testaments. There is a four hundred year gap between the end of the Old Testament and the time of Christ, so any Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the time of Christ are remarkable. The Old Testament makes many prophecies about Christ, the following table compares Psalm 22 (accepted as prophetic of Jesus) with events in Jesus' life...

Old Testament	New Testament
<p>My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?</p> <p><i>Psalm 22:1</i></p>	<p>My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?</p> <p><i>Matthew 27:46</i></p>
<p>"He trusts in the Lord; Let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."</p> <p><i>Psalm 22:8</i></p>	<p>He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"</p> <p><i>Matthew 27:43</i></p>
<p>A band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.</p> <p><i>Psalm 22:16</i></p>	<p>And they crucified him... Look at my hands and my feet (Jesus to the apostles after his crucifixion)</p> <p><i>Matthew 27:35, Luke 24:39</i></p>
<p>They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.</p> <p><i>Psalm 22:18</i></p>	<p>They divided up his clothes by casting lots</p> <p><i>Matthew 27:35</i></p>

King David predicted that the Messiah would have his hands and feet pierced. Why would David envisage such a punishment? It was not a method of punishment used by Israel; it was a Roman practice. It would be impossible for Christ to manipulate the system of government to ensure that the method of capital punishment would involve the piercing of his hands and feet. Similar prophecies in the Old Testament add further weight to Jesus' claim to be the son of God:

### Isaiah predicts Jesus' suffering

The prophet Isaiah predicted the events of Jesus' life 700 years before he existed. The table below makes a comparison between Isaiah's prophecy and the New Testament account of events. As you compare the Old Testament prophecies, bear in mind that they are contained in the Holy Book of the Jews who do not accept that Jesus is the Messiah -- this means that there is no opportunity for tampering with Old Testament texts.

Prophecy -- Isaiah 53	New Testament Fulfillment
<p><b>He was despised and rejected by men</b>, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.</p> <p><i>Isaiah 53:3</i></p>	<p>"What shall I do with ... the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. "Crucify him!" they shouted. "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"</p> <p><i>Mark 15:12-14</i></p>
<p>But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was <b>crushed for our iniquities</b>; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.</p> <p><i>Isaiah 53:5</i></p>	<p>But we see Jesus ... crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might <b>taste death for everyone.</b></p> <p>For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.</p> <p><i>Hebrews 2:9, 1 Peter 3:18</i></p>
<p>He was oppressed and afflicted, yet <b>he did not open his mouth</b>; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.</p> <p><i>Isaiah 53:7</i></p>	<p>The high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "<b>Are you not going to answer?</b> What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent.</p> <p><i>Matthew 26:62-63</i></p>
<p>He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.</p> <p><i>Isaiah 53:9</i></p>	<p>Two robbers were crucified with him</p> <p>There came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, ... Joseph took the body ... and placed it in his own new tomb</p> <p><i>Matthew 27:38, Matthew 27:57-60</i></p>
<p>Though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, <b>he will see his offspring</b> and prolong his days.</p> <p><i>Isaiah 53:10</i></p>	<p>Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.... For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive... Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.</p> <p><i>1 Corinthians 15:20-23</i></p>
<p>For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.</p> <p><i>Isaiah 53:12</i></p>	<p>So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.</p> <p><i>Hebrews 9:28</i></p>

The Old Testament portrayed the life of Christ hundreds of years before he existed. There are aspects of Old Testament prophecy that are utterly impossible for an imposter to fraudulently fulfill, for example:

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a **light for the Gentiles**, that you may **bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.**"

*Isaiah 49:6, NIV*

Consider the impact of Christianity throughout the world. Consider that the Christians who spread their faith during the first hundred years after the appearance of Jesus were greatly persecuted. In the face of this adversity, Christianity took a hold in the Roman empire, eventually becoming the state religion which enabled its spread throughout the world. The spread of Christianity throughout the non-Jewish world fulfills the prophecy that it would become "a light for the Gentiles". (Acts 26:23).

It is believed that the prophecies listed above are *specific*. This means that there is an ample opportunity to criticize should they prove to be inaccurate. The miracle of Bible prophecy is undermined by some who claim that others have also been able to predict the future. Nostradamus is a notable example. The Columbia Encyclopedia says of Nostradamus and his work:

His rhymed prophecies under the title 'Centuries' (1555) gained him favour in the French court. **Obscure and symbolic**, the predictions have been **subject to many interpretations**.

*Columbia Encyclopedia -- Vol 16, Pg. 4895:1978*

Those who have read his prophecies will be familiar with the lack of specific detail in his work. A feature which makes it difficult to measure against later history.

## New Testament Coincidences

Truthful witnesses support each other without collusion. When their stories are compared, the underlying validation becomes clear. A close inspection of truth will uncover aspects that unintentionally support each other whereas a close inspection of lies will normally uncover inconsistencies. This principle of cross examination of accounts is used to great effect by police and lawyers.

A close examination of the New Testament narrative of Jesus' life and works will show that it has a ring of truth about it. A few examples of the underlying co-incidences (from the book "*Undesigned Scriptural Co-incidences*" by J Blunt) are provided below:

### Prophecy... Who hit you?

The religious rulers of the day and the Roman soldiers were interrogating Jesus. The story according to Matthew (26:67) is that they found him worthy of death and then "*spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said 'Prophecy to us Christ, who hit you?'*"

It would appear to be an unusual thing to stand before a person, to hit him and then ask "*Who hit you?'*" A study of the parallel account in Luke's gospel (22:64) explains the mystery... "*They*

blindfolded him and demanded, "Prophecy! Who hit you?"

## The charges against Jesus modified to suit the audience

Matthew reports that Jesus was taken to the religious authorities and that "*the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death.*" (Matt. 26:59).

The charge against Jesus (in this situation) was that "*He has spoken **blasphemy!** Why do we need any more witnesses?*"

When the Jews brought Jesus before the Roman authorities, they changed the charge... "*We have found this man subverting our nation. He **opposes payment of taxes to Caesar** and claims to be Christ, **a king.***"

The coincidence is that other passages co-incidentally give reasons for this twisting of the charges. Consider these examples:

When Jesus proclaimed that "*I and the father are one*", the Jews "*picked up stones to stone him.*" (John 10:30-31). Jesus said to the Jews "*My father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working. For this reason, the Jews tried all the harder to kill him.*" The Jews reacted violently whenever Jesus claimed to be the son of God, and it would be natural for the religious leaders to note that this was an aspect of Jesus' teaching that offended the common people.

It is equally interesting to note that the charge of blasphemy would not be sufficient to obtain permission from the Roman authorities for the execution. The letter to the Roman Governor, Felix relating to the Apostle Paul demonstrates this point:

This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. **I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment.**

*Acts 23:27-29, NIV*

Would a writer of fiction think to include a twist in the story that dealt with the fact that the charge brought against Christ had to be manipulated to have maximum impact on the various groups that had to be influenced against Christ?

## Peter recognised by the door keeper

Jesus was taken to the high priest's residence for questioning before his crucifixion. During the questioning, Matthew tells us that Peter was identified as one of Jesus' disciples by a woman at the high priest's residence. "*Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee', she said.*"

The servant's recognition of Peter would normally be an unusual thing, how did this woman recognise a stranger from Galilee? Matthew's account gives no clue as to the underlying collaborating detail within the story, but the gospel of John fills in the gaps. John explains that

he was known to the high priest and that:

Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple [John], who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

*John 18:15-16, NIV*

John's record completes the picture by supplying the information that the servant girl knew that Peter was an associate of Jesus through their mutual friend John.

Once again, this collaborating information is included in the record in such an obscure way as to identify itself as the mark of truth.

## The crucifixion affected people's attitudes

Joseph of Arimathea before Christ's death, was identified as a secret follower of Jesus because he was scared of the Jews (John 19:38). Why would such a timid follower of Jesus go "**boldly to Pilate and ask for the body of Jesus.**" (Mark 15:43). It would appear that the events during the crucifixion changed people's outlook. People ridiculed Jesus at the beginning of the crucifixion:

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!" In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!

*Mark 15:29-31, NIV*

As Jesus approached death, the observer's attitudes towards him began to change. When he complained of thirst, a man **ran** and filled a sponge with vinegar and offered it to Jesus. At the moment of his death, it is recorded that the Roman centurion said "*Surely this man was the Son of God*".

What made the difference between the beginning of the execution and its end? Mark explains that there was darkness over the land for three hours and Matthew states that there was an earth quake. Is it merely coincidental that the new-found courage of Joseph of Arimathea (made evident in his approach to Pilate to request Jesus' body) happened after people had been shaken by the events surrounding Jesus' death?

## Jesus -- The Focal Point of Scripture

A study of many Old Testament characters reveals that their lives typified the life and mission of Jesus Christ. These coincidences add weight to Jesus' claim that he is the son of God. One of the many examples of the life of another paralleling Jesus is provided below. It is a comparison between the lives of Joseph and Jesus:

<b>Joseph</b>	<b>Jesus</b>
<p>His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us?"</p> <p><i>Genesis 37:8</i></p>	<p>"We don't want this man to be our king."</p> <p><i>Luke 19:14</i></p>
<p>They hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.</p> <p><i>Genesis 37:4</i></p>	<p>They hated me without reason</p> <p><i>John 15:25</i></p>
<p>Their father loved him more than any of them.</p> <p><i>Genesis 37:4</i></p>	<p>This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased</p> <p><i>Matthew 3:17</i></p>
<p>"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other.</p> <p><i>Genesis 37:19</i></p>	<p>They ... mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!"</p> <p><i>Matthew 27:29</i></p>
<p>They saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.</p> <p><i>Genesis 37:18</i></p>	<p>"This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours."</p> <p><i>Mark 12:7</i></p>
<p>His brothers ... sold him for twenty shekels of silver</p> <p><i>Genesis 37:28</i></p>	<p>So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.</p> <p><i>Matthew 26:15-16</i></p>
<p>"Do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you."</p> <p><i>Genesis 45:5</i></p>	<p>"They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."</p> <p><i>Zechariah 12:10</i></p>
<p>God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives.</p> <p><i>Genesis 45:7</i></p>	<p>Christ ... the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep ...so in Christ all will be made alive.</p> <p><i>1 Corinthians 15:20-22</i></p>

It is not coincidental or isolated that Joseph's life typified the life of Jesus. There are many types between the Old and New Testaments. The name "Jesus" is the Greek form of the Hebrew name "Joshua." Both names have the same meaning -- **God is salvation**. Paul notes the deliberateness of Old Testament parallels in Hebrews 10:1. He says that "*The law is only a shadow of good things that are coming...*"

The crucial question is -- Could this parallel be merely coincidental or is it a sign that there is a powerful force controlling history as it unfolds?

Most if not all of the other types within the Bible outline the life and mission of Jesus. You are welcome to contact *Bible Alive!* for more information on this topic.

## Eye Witnesses

The Old Testament predicted that Israel would be sent a Messiah who would be executed (involving the piercing of his hands and feet) and be raised from the dead. The New Testament writings claim that Jesus was crucified and that he rose from the dead. Many of the people who wrote the New Testament books were eye witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus, they were his disciples. Why believe the New Testament writers?

### The "tell it like it is" attitude of the disciples

It has already been shown that their accounts support each other. Another reason to trust their records is that they appear to be truthful in that they are a "*warts and all*" report of what happened, quite often showing themselves up in a poor light. The following examples demonstrate this point:

The Gospel of Mark reports that Jesus asked the Apostles,

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

*Mark 9:33-34, NIV*

Matthew reports that just before Jesus was to be crucified he said:

Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter.

*Matthew 26:38-40, NIV*

Peter's denial of Jesus is recorded in Matthew 26:69-75.

Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!"  
Immediately a rooster crowed.

*Matthew 26:74, NIV*

After the report of Jesus' resurrection by the eye witnesses, Thomas proclaimed:

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

*John 20:25, NIV*

This evidence highlights that the New Testament writers told the truth to their own detriment when they could have glossed over some of the embarrassing events.

## **The disciples report of Christ alive after the crucifixion**

The following are various eye witness reports of Jesus being alive after his crucifixion...

Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen.

*Mark 16:14, NIV*

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

*John 20:19-20, NIV*

A week later, Jesus caught up with Thomas and said:

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

*John 20:27, NIV*

Matthew reports that:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

*Matthew 28:16-17, NIV*

## The disciples proclaim that Jesus is alive in the face of adversity

Consider the case of the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. They began their mission to inform the world that Jesus had risen from death at Jerusalem. They began their mission in the heart of the society which had been hostile enough to execute Jesus that had a full knowledge of recent events. This situation would make it impossible to deceive the audiences in Jerusalem. If their account had been false, it would have been virtually impossible to begin the work of convincing people that Jesus had risen by starting at Jerusalem.

The easiest way to introduce a change is to start with those who are most easily influenced. The hardliners are then more easily swayed by the weight of numbers. The disciples of Christ began their campaign by debating with the hardliners in the city where Jesus had been crucified. They must have had some convincing arguments.

## The conversion of a hostile enemy

Jesus' followers remained steadfast in their insistence that Jesus was alive in the face of severe adversity. One of their adversaries was Saul of Tarsus. Shortly after the crucifixion of Christ, he was listening to Stephen (a believer in Jesus) recite the history of Israel up until Christ's death. The following words starting at Acts 7:51 are his concluding remarks and the crowds reaction:

"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him...

When they heard this, they were furious ... they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him...

**And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.** On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

*Acts 7:51 - 8:2, NIV*

The fanaticism of Saul is recorded in Acts 9. It shows that he was prepared to go out of his way to eliminate any who believed in Jesus:

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

*Acts 9:1-2, NIV*

It was on his journey to Damascus that Saul had a change of heart which was caused by him seeing and speaking with Jesus:

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

*Acts 9:3-5, NIV*

This meeting with Jesus had a massive impact on Saul (who was later known as Paul). He turned from being a major persecutor of Jesus, to one of his major advocates:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

*1 Corinthians 15:3-9, NIV*

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Paul's change of heart is remarkable. It was such that he became a persecuted believer. One would imagine that only an outstanding event would cause such a change. No doubt Paul's meeting with Jesus was outstanding enough to make the desired change. Paul must have been a severe embarrassment to the religious authorities of the day after his conversion.

What did the followers of Jesus stand to gain by spreading the news that Jesus was the Messiah and had risen from the dead? They received no money. They received no glory from the establishment. The Bible passages already quoted paint a graphic picture of the results of becoming a believer in Jesus in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection.

It is evident that the leaders in Jerusalem were concerned about the Roman response to any form of civil uprising, John reports the sentiments which were partly responsible for their actions in executing Jesus...

If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

*John 11:48, NIV*

Is it co-incidence that the very thing that they were trying to protect was shortly taken from them?

With this level of concern about changing the status-quo and the actions that they took in an effort to keep a lid on things, it can be imagined that these leaders would take whatever steps they thought were necessary to quell the subsequent upheaval after Jesus crucifixion. The fact that they were prepared to send Saul to Damascus to arrest believers is an indication of this point. Another indication is that they arranged for Roman soldiers to guard the tomb of a dead man.

The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead...

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

*Matthew 27:62-66, NIV*

The proclamation of Jesus' resurrection happened within days of his death. Linking the fact that the leaders would do whatever was required to quell Christianity, why did they not produce the body of Jesus? The answer from the New Testament is that they had no body to produce. Matthew reports on the events leading up to Jesus' resurrection:

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid... you are looking for Jesus... he has risen.

*Matthew 28:1-6, NIV*

The evidence shows that Jesus' followers were not motivated by the desire for personal glory or riches, they persisted in spite of persecution. Their claim is that they were motivated by the hope of eternal life. Their hope was based on their belief that Jesus had been raised from death. Paul's words quoted earlier in the paper are relevant at this point:

**If there is no resurrection** of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, **our preaching is useless** and **so is your faith**. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, **we are to be pitied more than all men**.

*1 Corinthians 15:13-19, NIV*

Insisting that the first century Christians had no evidence that Jesus had risen from the grave removes the only motive that they had for risking their lives to promote their beliefs.

Their faith was based on their witness of Jesus' fulfilling of all of the Old Testament prophecies relating to the Messiah.

Their faith was based on their observation of the miracles that Jesus had performed.

Their faith was based on the fact that they had touched him and seen him alive again after he had been put to death by the political powers of the day.

## Living With Jesus

The reason for drawing your attention to this information is to encourage you to accept the offer of eternal life that is associated with Jesus' continuing existence. Please consider the Bible passages listed below. It is our belief that they outline a wonderful hope for those who are searching for peace and justice.

The hope of eternal life is a core component of the Christian faith. We have this hope extended to us as a result of the birth of God's son Jesus Christ. In celebrating Jesus' birth, it is the custom of many to send Christmas cards. Some bear the words "Peace on Earth." To understand these words, it is helpful to consider their context:

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "**Glory to God in the highest**, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

*Luke 2:13-14, NIV*

Man is striving for peace. For example, 1996 was declared to be the International Year of Peace. The United Nations has been heavily involved in the promotion of world peace. The peace described by Luke in the passage above is a prophecy. This peace differs from that which man is striving for in that it will be true peace. It is also strongly linked to respect for God. "*Glory to God in the highest*" is a pre-condition. The message that there will be peace on Earth when man glorifies God is a message that is common to Bible teaching. It is linked to mankind's hope of eternal life and this is why Jesus proclaimed that "*the meek ... shall inherit the earth.*" The objective of this section is to illustrate this link.

## Eternal Life a Future Hope

Paul informs us that King David is dead and buried, and that he has not ascended to heaven (Acts 2:34). David recognised that death brought a state of unconsciousness:

No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave?

*Psalm 6:5, NIV*

His words show clearly that the Christian hope of eternal life is not granted immediately after death. Job recognised this truth. He pointed to a future hope that involved bodily resurrection:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;

*Job 19:25-26, NIV*

## God's Promise to Abraham

The hope outlined above is bound up in the promises that God made to Abraham. Abraham was living in the land we know as Israel. He received the following promise from God:

The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.

*Genesis 13:14-15, NIV*

Paul assists in understanding God's promise to Abraham. It did not mean that the land would be held by the successive generations of Abraham's descendants. The promise is centred upon Jesus Christ:

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

*Galatians 3:16, NIV*

A consideration of God's promise to Abraham in the light of Paul's explanation makes it clear that the land of Israel has been promised to Jesus as an everlasting possession. The words of Micah describe Jesus' rule from Jerusalem, and the extent to which true peace will be enjoyed by the inhabitants of the Earth:

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation nor will they train for war anymore.

*Micah 4:1-3, NIV*

It is obviously the case that other than Jesus are occupying the land of Israel. It is also obvious that there is no "*peace on earth*" at this point in history. The passage above clearly illustrates the link between glory to God and peace on earth. The Christian hope is aligned with Job's belief in bodily resurrection. The apostle Paul also makes it quite clear that it is linked to God's promises to Abraham:

... for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

*Galatians 3:27,29, NIV*

## The resurrection of the dead

Attention has been drawn to Job's indication of the **future** hope. Paul supports this concept. Chapter 11 of Hebrews contains a list of people who were faithful to God. Paul states that they have not received the promise:

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

*Hebrews 11:13, NIV*

Paul's words (Galatians 3:27) indicate that baptism brings people into relationship with Jesus. His words to the Romans expand upon this relationship:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

*Romans 6:3, NIV*

In the passage below, Paul makes it clear that the hope will be realised at the return of Christ to the earth:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

*1 Corinthians 15:20-23, NIV*

## Conclusion

We hope that this article convinces you that Jesus was and is in existence. The predictions contained in this article are only a small sample of Bible prophecy.

The Bible predictions put forward are part of the justification for our sincere belief that Jesus' offer of eternal life is real and we hope that you will see the force of the evidence so that you will share the same hope of eternal life.

A popular saying is "*Life is short -- play hard*". In a similar but more profound vein, the apostle Paul says:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...

*Hebrews 12:1-2, NIV*

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

*Philippians 3:8, NIV*

If you agree that the prophecies and alignments of accounts and incidents in the Bible are uncanny and unable to be put down to coincidence, then you may agree with us that there are very strong reasons to accept that Jesus is in fact the son of God. If you accept the Bible's witness of Jesus, we hope that you will also trust in the promise of eternal life made by Jesus:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes** in him shall not perish but have **eternal life**.

*John 3:16, NIV*