

STUDY PACK 20

JESUS CHRIST THE CENTER OF HISTORY

“I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him.”
~~ Napoleon ~~

“I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily _____
_____.”
~~ H.G. Wells ~~

I. THE FULLNESS OF TIME

During the reign of Caesar Augustus one of the greatest events in the history of mankind took place, an event that would change the course of history. But more than that, it was an event that could change the life of an individual. That event was the birth of a baby, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would die for the sins of man, that man might be able to have eternal life.

Many scholars in church history believe that the Roman Empire helped to prepare the way for the spread of Christianity. The united empire had eliminated barriers between east and west and united them under Rome. The land of Palestine was under Rome and Jewish leaders ran the government under its direction. The Jews were free to travel and settle in all parts of the empire. There was excellent opportunity for spreading the gospel, probably more opportunity than at any previous time.

Roman _____. The excellent roads built by the empire aided the taking of the Word, and the world was a much safer place than it had been. The widespread use of the Greek language aided in communication without learning new languages.

The public ministry of Christ probably began in 27 A.D. and ended in 30 A.D. The account of the birth and life of Christ is given in the four Gospels as well as in the writings of early historians.

II. HISTORICAL REFERENCES TO CHRIST

It is common to hear the enemies of Christianity declare that there isn't any information to prove that Christ even existed. However, there are a number of very early “_____” historical references to Christ as a real historical character.

“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. _____. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among 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.”
~~ Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.33 ~~

Tacitus (Annals, XV, 44), a Roman historian of the 2nd century, in writing of the reign of Nero, alluded to the death of Christ and to the existence of Christians in Rome:

“But not all relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration. Hence, to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christ, the founder of that name, _____, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius; but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broken out again not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also...”

The younger Pliny (Letters I, XCU), who was a correspondent of Trajan, spoke in one of his letters of the Christians as he had met them in Asia:

“They affirmed, however the whole of their guilt, of their error, was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a _____, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called on to deliver it up...”

Lucian, the satirist of the second century, spoke scornfully of Christ and of the Christians. He connected them with the synagogues of Palestine, and alluded to Christ as “...the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world... Furthermore, their first law giver persuaded them that they are all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws.”

Other important early references include Suetonius Thallus and Mara Bar. To deny the very existence of Christ is simply to choose to ignore the record of history.

III. THE LIFE OF CHRIST

After the birth of Christ, little information is given of His young life in Nazareth except His visit to Jerusalem and the Temple with His family when He was twelve years of age (Luke 2:41-50). Luke 2:52 tells us of the intellectual, physical, spiritual, and social development of Christ. The most significant event in His life prior to His public ministry was probably His baptism by John as given in Matthew 3 and John 1.

During His earthly ministry Christ did much of His teaching _____ as indicated in Matthew 13:34-35, Mark 4:2, and Luke 8:4. He not only taught, but He ministered through much preaching. He preached in the synagogues as revealed in Mark 1:38-39 and Luke 4:18. Luke 20:1 informs us that He also preached in the Temple. Christ taught and preached anywhere that there were people, including the open air as told in Matthew 5:1 and Luke 8:1.

Traveling was a regular experience for Jesus as we find Him in such places as Galilee, Nazareth, Capernaum, and Sychar. He was in Jerusalem often also. Many accounts of Christ’s miracles are given to us in the Bible such as in Matthew 15:30. Great crowds of people followed Christ around the countryside, as we find in Matthew 8:1.

Though Christ was followed by the multitudes, He was hated and despised by many others (Matthew 12:15, Mark 11:18, Luke 6:11).

Jesus revealed His wrath when He _____, and showed His compassion to the woman at the well. He demonstrated His humility by washing the feet of the disciples, and He demonstrated His concern for others when He raised Lazarus from the dead.

Christ taught the disciples, loved them, and prepared them to minister. He warned them of what would happen to Him. In John 17 we find that just prior to His betrayal, Jesus talked to the Father and revealed His desires regarding the believers whom He was ready to die for. Though Christ constantly showed His love and concern for His disciples, Peter denied Him, Judas betrayed Him, and even after the resurrection Thomas doubted Him.

The Jews rejected Christ and demanded His crucifixion, _____. Yet in His death, burial and resurrection, the Lord demonstrated His love for the world (John 3:16).

After His betrayal, Matthew 26:59 indicates that the Jews looked for false witnesses and accused Him of making Himself God. Jesus confessed that He was the Christ in Mark 14:62. Pilate found Christ _____, but he let the Jews pronounce the judgment and penalty by crucifixion.

The custom on a certain feast day was to release a prisoner, and Christ was presented for release. But the people insisted that a criminal named Barabbas be released instead. Christ was beaten, made to carry His own cross, crucified between two thieves, and given vinegar when He was thirsty. In spite of all this, He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

IV. THE HISTORICAL FACT OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The Scripture declares that the resurrection of Christ has been demonstrated by "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). The resurrection of Christ had been predicted in the Old Testament (Psalm 2, 16, 22) and by Christ himself (John 2:19-21, Mark 8:31, 14:59, John 10:18).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is _____. Everything else that was said or done by Christ and the Apostles, no matter how great or marvelous, is secondary in importance to the resurrection. If the resurrection did not take place, then Christianity is a false religion. But because it did take place, then Christ is God and the Christian faith is absolute truth.

All the other founders of religions and movements more than a few years old are dead. _____, Christianity is unique. No other religious leader _____.

V. PROPOSED EXPLANATIONS FOR THE EMPTY TOMB

The Roman soldiers suggested that the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:13) while the soldiers were asleep. But if they were asleep, how did they know what happened? How did the disciples move the huge stone without waking the Roman soldiers? Why did the disciples face

persecution, imprisonment, beatings and even death rather than recant their faith in the risen Lord? _____.

Some have suggested that either the Roman or Jewish authorities removed the body. But both the Roman and Jewish rulers went to great lengths to destroy faith in the risen Saviour. If either group had the body, all they had to do was produce it and Christianity would have ended. They would have produced the body but they could not.

Others have suggested that “emotionally disturbed women” went to the wrong tomb and the tomb was never really empty. But again, why did not the authorities just produce the body and end Christianity? The tomb was guarded and had a Roman seal on it. It would have been easy to locate.

Others have suggested that Christ never really died. They feel that Christ was either drugged into unconsciousness or faked his death and later revived in the garden tomb and made his escape. This is taught in the Moslem Koran and was more recently popularized by books like *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail* and *The Passover Plot*. Dr. John Hosler comments on this suggestion:

“Speaking of possibilities, calculate the possibilities of this theory. Here is a man who had his beard plucked from his face and his head buffeted by soldiers. He had been beaten with a whip until wounded from head to toe. He was pierced in four areas and hung vertically for at least six hours, allowing his blood to drain before being pierced a fifth time in the side. What are the reasonable possibilities that such a man, without stitches or a blood transfusion, could live and walk on such pierced feet, and appear generally healthy to the public three days later? It would require more faith to believe this than to believe in a literal resurrection of an omnipotent God.”

It has been suggested that the supposed witnesses were all hallucinating. But notice that Christ appeared at least nine different times:

- To Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18; Mark 16:9)
- To the other women (Matthew 28:8-10)
- To Peter (Luke 24:34; I Corinthians 15:5)
- To the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35; Mark 16:12)
- To all eleven disciples, eight days later (John 20:24-29)
- To seven disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-23)
- To five hundred followers (I Corinthians 15:6)
- To James (I Corinthians 15:7)
- To the eleven at the ascension (Acts 1:3-12)

Many of these individuals were not expecting to see Christ but they did. If someone was accused of being a bank robber because they had been seen ten different times robbing a bank, usually by multiple witnesses (_____), we would feel that we had clear proof that he was really a bank robber.

VI. THE OVERWHELMING EVIDENCE HAS CONVINCED MANY

An attorney named Frank Morrison attempted to write a book disproving the resurrection. The first chapter of the book that he ended up writing was entitled “*The Book That Refused to be Written!*” He became convinced of the resurrection, was converted and authored “*Who Moved the Stone.*”

Henry Morris (*Many Infallible Proofs*, p. 95-96) quotes historian Thomas Arnold:

“No wonder then, in view of the combined evidence of the empty tomb, the numerous appearances, the change in the disciples, and the authenticity of the records, not to mention the testimony of two thousand years of Christian history, that such a man as Thomas Arnold, formerly Professor of History at Rugby and Oxford, one of the world’s great historians, could say:

“I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better, fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died, and rose again from the dead.”

Morris also quotes noted legal authority Simon Greenleaf (*Many Infallible Proofs*, p. 96).

“In like manner, Simon Greenleaf, one of the most skilled legal minds ever produced in this nation, top authority on the matter of what constitutes sound evidence, developer of the Harvard Law School, after a thorough evaluation of the four Gospel accounts from the point of view of their validity as objective testimonial evidence, concluded:

‘It was therefore impossible that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they know any other fact.’”

Famous English attorney Sir Edward Clarke wrote:

“As lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter Day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence, and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The Gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.” ~ McDowell, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, p. 198 ~

Lord Lyndurst (Former Solicitor-General, Attorney-General, High Chancellor in 19th Century England) wrote:

“I know pretty well what evidence is; and I tell you, _____.”

VII. JESUS CHRIST AS THE CENTER OF HISTORY

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Hebrews 1:1-3

All of history _____
_____ These are the most important facts of history.

John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.