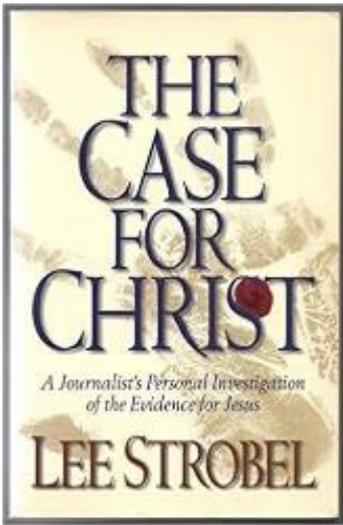


# Adventure Club

A weekly lesson for children, young people, parents and grandparents, from the GCI Watford Church.  
Number 31, 23rd October 2020

## The Case For Christ

### A Seasoned Journalist Chases Down the Biggest Story in History



Is there credible evidence that Jesus of Nazareth really is the Son of God? Retracing his own spiritual journey from atheism to faith Lee Strobel, a former legal editor, cross-examines experts on this question. *The Case for Christ* book summarises Lee's interviews with thirteen evangelical Christian scholars in which they defend their views regarding the historical reliability of the New Testament. Lee challenges them with questions like: How reliable is the New Testament? Does evidence exist for Jesus outside the Bible? What reasons are there to believe the resurrection was an actual event? Lee's tough, point-blank questions make this remarkable book read like a captivating, fast-paced novel. However, it's not fiction. It's a riveting quest for the truth about history's most compelling figure. If you would like to build up your own



Lee Strobel

evidence that Jesus of Nazareth really is the Son of God, then this book is recommended. Below are introductory overviews to the fourteen chapters in the book.

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### Can the Biographies of Jesus be Trusted?



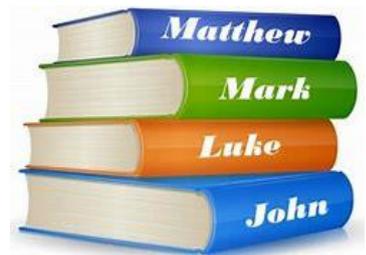
Craig Blomberg

Lee Strobel once thought the Gospels were merely religious propaganda, hopelessly tainted by overactive imaginations and evangelistic zeal. However, Craig Blomberg, one of the country's foremost authorities on the biographies of Jesus, built a convincing case that they reflect eyewitness testimony and bear the unmistakable earmarks of accuracy. So early are these biographies that they cannot be explained away as legendary invention. In fact, the fundamental beliefs in Jesus' miracles, his resurrection and his deity go way back to the very dawning of the Christian movement.

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### Do Jesus' Biographies Stand Up to Scrutiny?

Craig Blomberg argued persuasively that the Gospel writers intended to preserve reliable history, were able to do so and were honest and willing to include difficult-to-explain material. Also, they didn't allow bias to unduly colour their reporting. The harmony among the Gospels on essential facts, coupled with divergence on some incidental details, lends historical credibility to the accounts. What's more, the early church could not have taken root and flourished right there in Jerusalem if it had been teaching facts about Jesus that his own contemporaries could have exposed as exaggerated or false. In short, the Gospels demonstrate their basic trustworthiness as historical records.



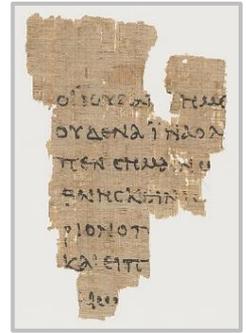
## Over 25,000 Ancient Manuscripts

‘The New Testament has been preserved in more manuscripts than any other ancient work of literature, with over 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts catalogued, about 10,000 Latin manuscripts and about 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages including Syriac, Slavic, Gothic, Ethiopic, Coptic and Armenian. The dates of these manuscripts range from c. 125 to the introduction of printing in Germany in the 15th century.’

*Wikipedia*

## Were Jesus’ Biographies Reliably Preserved For Us?

World-class scholar Bruce Metzger said that compared with other ancient documents, there is an unprecedented number of New Testament manuscripts which can be dated extremely close to the original writings. He estimates that the modern New Testament is 99.5 percent free of textual discrepancies,



Ancient parchment, dated about 125-175 AD, with part of John 18:31-33.

with no major Christian doctrines in doubt. The criteria used by the early church to determine which books should be considered authoritative have ensured we possess the best records about Jesus.

## Jesus is mentioned by Josephus

‘Festus was now dead, and Albinus . . . he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.’

Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 20, Chapter 9, 1st paragraph

## Is There Credible Evidence for Jesus Outside His Biographies?

‘We have better historical documentation for Jesus than for the founder of any other ancient religion,’ said Edwin Yamauchi, a leading expert on ancient history. Sources from outside the Bible corroborate that many people believed Jesus performed healings and was the Messiah, that he was crucified, and that despite this

shameful death, his followers, who believed he was still alive, worshipped him as God. One expert documented thirty-nine ancient sources that corroborate more than one hundred facts concerning Jesus’ life, teachings, crucifixion and resurrection. Seven secular sources and several early Christian creeds concern the deity of Jesus, a doctrine ‘definitely present in the earliest church,’ according to Gary Habermas, the scholar who wrote *The Historical Jesus*.

## Does Archaeology Confirm or Contradict Jesus’ Biographies?

John McRay’s articles have appeared in 17 encyclopaedias and dictionaries! He is a professor of archaeology and is author of *Archaeology and the New Testament*. He said there’s no question that archaeological findings have enhanced the New Testament’s credibility. No discovery has ever disproved a Biblical reference. Further, archaeology has established that Luke, who wrote about one-quarter of the New Testament, was an especially careful historian. One expert concluded that: ‘If Luke was so painstakingly accurate in his historical reporting [of minor details], on what logical basis may we assume he was credulous or inaccurate in his reporting of matters that were far more important, not only to him, but to others as well?’ Like, for instance, the resurrection of Jesus – the event that authenticated his claim to being the unique Son of God.

## Head of Augustus Caesar



Gaius Octavius, the first Roman Emperor, great nephew and subsequently adopted son of Julius Caesar, became supreme ruler in 29 BC, and received the name Augustus in 27 BC. He was the emperor in power at the time of the birth of Jesus as is stated in Luke 2:1, where he is referred to as ‘Caesar Augustus’.

*The Bible in the British Museum*, page 91

## 10 Crucial Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible

1. Rosetta Stone. 2. Dead Sea Scrolls. 3. Tel Dan Inscription. 4. Ketef Hinnom Scrolls. 5. Moabite Stone. 6. Lachish Letters. 7. Epic of Gilgamesh. 8. Hezekiah’s Tunnel. 9. Crucified Man at Givat Hamivtar. 10. Ugaritic Texts. John D. Currid, *ESV Archaeology Study Bible*.

## Is the Jesus of History the Same as the Jesus of Faith?

Dr Gregory Boyd is a Biblical scholar. He observes that the *Nicene Creed* says Jesus Christ was crucified under Pontius Pilate and the third day he rose again from the dead. Thus, theological truth is based on historical truth, that's the way the New Testament talks he says. Look at the sermon of Peter in Acts chapter 2. He stands up and says: 'You guys are a witness of these things; they weren't done in secret. David's tomb is still with us, but God has raised Jesus from the dead. Therefore, we proclaim him to be the Son of God.' Christian faith has always been rooted in reality. In sum, the Jesus of history is the same as the Jesus of faith.



Gregory Boyd

### The 'Son of Man' in Daniel

'Behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away.'

Daniel 7:13-14, NKJV

## Was Jesus Really Convinced that He Was the Son of God?

By going back to the very earliest traditions, which were safe from legendary development, Ben Witherington, author of *The Christology of Jesus*, was able to show that Jesus had a supreme and transcendent self-understanding. Based on the evidence, Witherington said: 'Did Jesus believe he was the Son of God – the anointed one of God? The answer is yes. Did he see himself as the Son of Man? The answer is yes. Did he see himself as the final Messiah? Yes, that's the way he viewed himself.' Some scholars

have said that Jesus' repeated reference to himself as the 'Son of Man' was not a claim of humanity, but a reference to Daniel 7:13-14, in which the 'Son of Man' is seen as having universal authority and everlasting dominion and who receives the worship of all nations. Said one scholar: 'Thus, the claim to be the 'Son of Man' would be in effect a claim to divinity.'

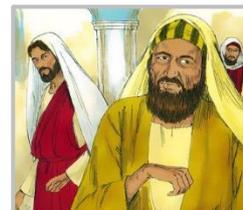
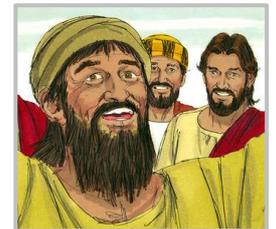
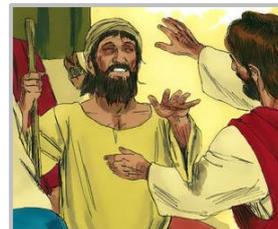
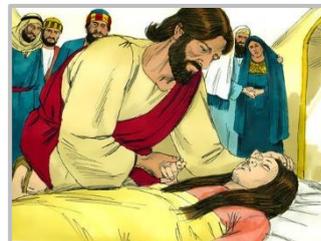


## Was Jesus Crazy When He Claimed to Be the Son of God?

Gary Collins, a professor of psychology and author of 45 books on psychology-related topics, said Jesus exhibited

no inappropriate emotions, was in contact with reality, had amazing insights into human nature and enjoyed deep and abiding relationships.

'Jesus was loving, but didn't let his compassion immobilise him; he didn't have a bloated ego, even though he was often surrounded by adoring crowds; he maintained balance despite an often demanding lifestyle; he always knew what he was doing and where he was going; he cared deeply about people, including women and children, who weren't seen as being important back then; he was able to accept people while not merely winking at their sin; he responded to individuals based on where they were at and what they uniquely needed. All in all, I just don't see signs that Jesus was suffering from any known mental illness', he concluded, adding with a smile: 'He was much healthier than anyone else I know, including me!' In addition, Jesus backed up his claim to being God through miraculous feats of healing, astounding demonstrations of power over nature, unrivalled teaching and divine understanding of people. Also, his own resurrection was the ultimate evidence and authentication of his identity and deity.



## Did Jesus Fulfil the Attributes of God?

While the Incarnation – God becoming man, the infinite becoming finite – stretches our imagination, prominent theologian D.A. Carson pointed out that there’s lots of evidence that Jesus exhibited the characteristics of deity. Based on Philippians 2:5-11, many theologians believe Jesus voluntarily emptied himself of the independent use of these divine attributes as he pursued his mission of human redemption. Even so, the New Testament specifically confirms that Jesus ultimately possessed every qualification of deity, including omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, eternity and immutability.

**Dictionary**

**Incarnation:** ‘The embodiment of God the Son in human flesh as Jesus Christ’  
**Deity:** ‘The Creator God’  
**Redemption:** ‘Man’s deliverance from sin’  
**Omniscience:** ‘Knowing everything’  
**Omnipresence:** ‘Present everywhere at the same time’  
**Omnipotence:** ‘Having absolute power’  
**Immutability:** ‘Unchangeable’

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*

## Did Jesus – and Jesus Alone – Match the Identity of the Messiah?

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah, or the Anointed One, who would redeem God’s people. In effect, dozens of these Old Testament prophecies created a finger-print that only the true Messiah could fit. This gave Israel a way to rule out impostors and validate the credentials of the authentic Messiah. Against astronomical odds – one chance in a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion – Jesus, and only Jesus throughout history, matched this prophetic finger-print! This confirms Jesus’ identity to an incredible degree of absolute certainty.

**Just Some of the Many Old Testament Prophecies That Jesus Fulfilled**

Jesus would be a descendant of Abraham	Genesis 12:3
Jesus’ bones would not be broken	Exodus 12:46
Jesus would be a descendant of David	2 Sam. 7:12-13
Jesus would be resurrected	Job 19:23-27
Jesus’ hands and feet would be pierced	Psalms 22:16
Jesus’ clothing would be gambled for	Psalms 22:18
Jesus would teach in parables	Psalms 78:1-2
Jesus’ parables would fall on deaf ears	Isaiah 6:9-10
Jesus would be born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14
Jesus’ ministry would start in Galilee	Isaiah 9:1-2
Jesus’ ministry preceded by a forerunner	Isaiah 40:3-4
Jesus would be despised and rejected	Isaiah 53:3
Jesus would come out of Egypt	Hosea 11:1
Jesus would be born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2
Jesus would ride a donkey into Jerusalem	Zech. 9:9
Jesus would be betrayed for 30 silver pieces	Zech. 11:12-13

‘Jesus said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ’ Luke 24:44, CEB

**A trillion, trillion!**

Such a number is roughly the number of atoms in a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, billion universes!  
 The probability of just eight Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled is one chance in about one hundred million billion!



## Was Jesus’ Death a Sham, and His Resurrection a Hoax?

By analysing the medical and historical data, Dr Alexander Metherell concluded Jesus could not have survived the gruesome rigours of flogging and crucifixion, much less the spear that pierced his lung and heart. The idea that he somehow swooned on the cross and pretended to be dead lacks any evidential basis. Roman executioners were grimly efficient, knowing that they themselves would face death if any of their victims were to come down from the cross alive. Even if Jesus had somehow lived through the torture, his ghastly condition could never have inspired a worldwide movement based on a premise that he had gloriously triumphed over the grave.



## Was Jesus' Body Really Absent From His Tomb?

William Craig, who has earned two doctorates and written several books on the Resurrection, presented striking evidence that the vacant tomb of Jesus was a historical reality. The empty grave is reported or implied in extremely early sources – Mark's gospel and a creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 which date so closely to the event that they could not possibly have been products of legend. The fact that the Gospels report that women

discovered the empty tomb bolsters the story's authenticity, because women's testimony lacked credibility in the first century and thus there would have been no motive to report they found the empty tomb if it weren't true. The site of Jesus' tomb was known to Christians, Jews, and Romans, so it could have been checked by sceptics. In fact, nobody, not even the Roman authorities or Jewish leaders, ever claimed that the tomb still contained Jesus' body. Instead, they were forced to invent the absurd story that the disciples, despite having no motive or opportunity, had stolen the body – a theory that not even the most sceptical critic believes today.

## Was Jesus Seen Alive After His Death on the Cross?

The evidence for the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus didn't develop gradually over the years as mythology distorted memories of his life. Rather, said resurrection expert Gary Habermas, the resurrection was: 'the central proclamation of the early church from the very beginning'. The ancient creed from 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 mentions specific individuals who encountered the risen Christ, and Paul even challenged first-century doubters to talk with these individuals personally to determine the truth of the matter for themselves. The book of Acts is littered with extremely early affirmations of Jesus' resurrection, while the Gospels describe numerous encounters in detail. Concluded British theologian Michael Green: 'The appearances of Jesus are as well authenticated as anything in antiquity. There can be no rational doubt that they occurred.'



After his resurrection Jesus walks with two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-15).



After his resurrection Jesus meets with some of his disciples by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1).

## Are There Any Other Supporting Facts That Point to the Resurrection?

J. P. Moreland's circumstantial evidence added final documentation for the resurrection. First, the disciples were in a unique position to know whether the resurrection happened, and they went to their deaths proclaiming it was true. Nobody knowingly and willingly dies for a lie. Second, apart from the resurrection, there's no good reason why sceptics like Paul and James would have been converted and would have

died for their faith. Third, within weeks of the crucifixion, thousands of Jews began abandoning key social practises that had critical sociological and religious importance for centuries. Fourth, the early sacraments of communion and baptism affirmed Jesus' resurrection and deity. And fifth, the miraculous emergence of the church in the face of brutal Roman persecution 'rips a great hole in history, a hole the size and shape of resurrection', as C.F. D. Moule put it.

See if you can memorize these words: 'Jesus said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the Law from Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ' Luke 24:44, CEB

# Word Search

- CASE            BIOGRAPHIES
- BIGGEST        STORY
- HISTORY        ARCHAEOLOGY
- LEE             STROBEL
- MATTHEW       HEZEKIAHS
- MARK            TUNNEL
- LUKE            OMNISCIENCE
- JOHN            OMNIPRESENCE
- ANCIENT        OMNIPOTENCE
- JOSEPHUS      TRILLION
- AUGUSTUS      CAESAR
- LAW             MOSES
- PSALMS        PROPHETS
- EMMAUS        DEITY

A	R	C	H	A	E	O	W	L	C	A	E	S	A
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Bible abbreviations: *CEB*: Common English Bible. *ESV*: English Standard Version. *NKJV*: New King James Version.

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Any questions, etc, please contact the UK GCI Watford Church Council or Geoff Sole, 01707 880782 or geoff@geoffsole.co.uk.