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Facebook Rebuttal # 6 Jesus and the Bible

For many years, people have questioned the existence of Jesus and the accuracy of the bible. Many believe that Christianity is a religion for ignorant people who blindly believe in a book written by men that talks about a character named Jesus that allegedly existed 2000 years ago. However, while Christianity is a faith based religion, and the bible was penned by men, Christianity is an intelligent faith, and the bible, just as in the past and currently, can withstand the standard historical criticism applied to any historic documents. No Christian is expected to take a leap in the dark in terms of faith, nor are they expected to believe against contradictory evidences or their human reason. The Christian faith is believable in light of the historical facts, consistent with evidences, and on the basis of eyewitness testimonies.

In my opinion, an honest, unbiased look at the historical facts concerning Christianity and the bible will silence most critics. To begin that honest unbiased look at Christianity and the bible, consider the following:

The person of Jesus the Christ:

In the minds of, Christians have no support outside of the bible for the existence of Jesus. It has been said that Christians resort to “*circular reasoning*” when it comes to the person of Jesus. That is to say, Christians believe in Jesus’ existence based on what the bible says, thereby saying the Bible contains accurate information about Jesus. However, the fact that Jesus existed can be substantiated apart from the bible by the writings of early **non-Christian** writers:

1. **Cornelius Tacitus** (Born A.D. 52-54) was a roman historian, in A.D. 112, governor of Asia. Writing of the reign of Nero, Tacitus alludes to the death of Jesus and the existence of Christians at Rome, he writes:
“but not all the 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, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians,

who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also” (Annals, XV. 44, Josh McDowell, a ready defense, pg. 198).

The statements of Tacitus agrees with what the New Testament says about Jesus. In **Matthew 27:24-26** (NIV), we read, “when **Pilate** saw that he was getting nowhere, but instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I’m innocent of this man’s blood’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ (v25) All the people answered, ‘let his blood be on us and our children!’ (v26) **Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.**”

2. **Flavius Josephus** (born A.D. 37) a Jewish historian and a contemporary of the apostles, became a Pharisee at age 19 says in a hotly contested quotation: “**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 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 the principle 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 in 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, XVIII. 33 [early second century], Josh McDowell, a ready defense, pg. 199*). (Note: while some of what Josephus said has been regarded as highly suspect, it’s not possible for all of it to be inaccurate. That said, he definitely validates the existence of Jesus. It should also be noted that Josephus was a Jewish historian and not a Christian historian. Therefore, what he recorded was not subjective but objective)

The Arabic text of this passage is as follows:

“At this time there was a wise man who was **called Jesus**. And his conduct was good, and [He] was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became His disciples. **Pilate condemned Him to be crucified and to die**. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon His discipleship. **They reported that He had appeared to them three days after His crucifixion and that He was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.**” (the above passage is found in the Arabic manuscript

entitled: “*Kitab Al-Unwan Al-Mukallal Bi-Fadail AlHikma AlMutawwaj Bi-Anwa Al-Falsafa Al-Manduh Bi-Haqaq Al-Marifa.*”. the approximate translation would be: “ ***Book of history guided by all the virtues of wisdom. Crowned with various philosophies and blessed by the truth of knowledge***”

In addition, there is a reference from Josephus to James the brother of Jesus. In *Antiquities XX 9:1* Josephus describes the actions of the high priest Ananus: “*But the younger Ananus who, as we said, received the high priesthood, was of bold disposition and exceptionally daring; he followed the party of the Sadducees, who are severe in judgment above all the Jews, as we have already shown. As therefore Ananus was of such disposition, he thought he had now a good opportunity, as Festus was now dead, and Albinus was still on the road; so he assembled a council of judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James, together with some others, and having accused them as law-breakers, he delivered them over to be stoned.*”

Here, Josephus again mentions Jesus but he also mentions Jesus’ brother James. This corroborates what we read in **Mark 6:3** (AMP) “*Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Jose and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here among us?....*”

Josephus also mentions John the Baptist, in *Antiquities XVIII 18.5.2* we find the following: “*now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod’s army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against john, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man, and commanded the Jews exercise virtue....*” Again, what Josephus writes agrees with what we find in the bible.

In **Matthew 14:3-10** (HCSB) we read, “*For Herod had arrested John, chained him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, (v4) since John had been telling him, ‘it’s not lawful for you to have her!’ (v5) thought he wanted to kill him, he feared the crowd, since they regarded him as a prophet. (v6) But when Herod’s birthday celebration came, Herodias’s daughter danced before them and pleased Herod. (v7) so he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. (v8) And prompted by her mother, she answered, ‘give me John the Baptist’s head here on a platter!’ (v9) Although the king regretted it, he commanded that it be granted because of his oaths and his guests. (v10) So he sent orders and had John beheaded in the prison.*” Therefore, we can safely assume that Josephus was accurate in his mention of Jesus and him being crucified. This is not blind faith, this is a reasonable faith based on the evidence.

3. **The Jewish Talmud** – (Completed by 500 A.D.) The Babylonian reference to Jesus: *“On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (of Nazareth) and then herald went before him for forty days saying (Yeshu of Nazareth) is going to be stoned in that he hath practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel. Let everyone knowing aught in his defense come and plead for him. But they found naught in his defense and hanged him on the eve of Passover”* (Sanhedrin 43a, “Eve of Passover”)

The historic existence of Jesus cannot be denied by any person honest enough to examine the facts. Even the Muslim book, the Quran, mentions Jesus over and over. To Muslims, Jesus was a mere prophet/messenger. In **Sura 61:6** we read, *“And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: ‘O children of Israel! I am the messenger of Allah (sent) to you, confirming the taurat (which came) before me, and giving Glad tidings of a messenger.....”*

Therefore, the idea that Jesus was a mythological person or someone created in the minds of Christians disappears after reviewing the facts.

The question is can we rely on the new testaments account of the life of Jesus? While many come up with reasons for rejecting the new testaments account of the life of Jesus, none of them hold any water after a close examination. The excuses range from the New Testament has been tampered with (Muslims claim) to the New Testament was written by men and cannot be trusted.

There are a lot of different religions in the world today. You have Islam, Mormonism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism secular humanism, etc. That said, many think that Christianity is just another religion or “**ism**” like the rest. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact is, Christianity is unique among the world’s religions, and here’s why:

- Unlike other religions, as already proven, Christianity is historic and evidential. The fact is, Jesus himself is a figure of history. He was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of Caesar Augustus, and was put to death by Pontius Pilate, a first-century Roman governor. In addition, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection have come to us through eye witness accounts. In **2 Peter 1:16-18** (NIV) we read, *“¹⁶We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ ¹⁸We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the*

sacred mountain.”

In **1 John 1:1-4** (NIV) we read, *“¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us. And your fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴We write this to make our joy complete.”*

In **Acts 5:30-32** (NIV) we read, *“³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³²We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*

It should be understood that those preaching the resurrected Jesus suffered greatly as a result of their preaching. Even worse, with the exception of John who was banished to the Isle of Patmos, all of the apostles were put to death for preaching the resurrected Jesus. The thing that sticks out the most to me is how Peter, who is believed to have been crucified upside down for preaching the resurrected Lord, was initially a coward when asked if he knew or was with Jesus. Because of his fear of persecution and/or death he denied knowing Jesus three (3) times (**John 18:17, 25 and 26-27**). Later this same Peter was imprisoned, persecuted then killed for preaching this same Jesus he denied knowing.

Another man that had a change of mind about Jesus was the apostle Paul. Paul was a zealous Jew who went around throwing Christians in jail for preaching the resurrected Jesus and/or the gospel. When the first Christian (Stephen) was martyred, those that stoned him to death placed their clothes at Paul’s (then named Saul) feet to be watched by him. Later on, while on the road to Damascus, Paul had an encounter with Jesus (**Acts 9:1-9**). In short, Paul (his name was changed from Saul to Paul after his conversion) became, next to Jesus, the greatest man in the New Testament after his encounter with the resurrected Jesus. For example, there are 27 New Testament Books, at least 13 were written by Paul. Paul, like Peter, was persecuted, imprisoned and beaten for preaching this same Jesus whose disciples he gladly had put in jail.

At the end of Paul's life he was imprisoned and wound up living in a cold dungeon while awaiting his execution for preaching the same resurrected Jesus he had others thrown in jail for preaching.

My question is this, "***What would make Peter and Paul change their minds like this about Jesus and give their very lives for what they came to believe?***" The only logical explanation is they both really did see the resurrected Lord.

Throughout the history of man, many have been known to lay down their lives for what they believed to be true. However, I cannot recall any one laying down their lives for something they knew to be completely false. No other religion has such a powerful testimony from the eyewitnesses that gave their lives for what they saw and believed.

- One thing all the founders of major religions of the world have in common is the fact that they are all dead. Christianity is unique in that its founder is still alive. In **Matthew 28:6** (NIV) we read the words of the angel at the tomb the first Easter Sunday morning, "***He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.***"

To be sure his audience knew that Jesus rose from the dead and that his resurrection could be easily verified, Paul said in **1 Corinthians 15:3-6** (NIV), "³*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,* ⁴*that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures,* ⁵*and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve.* ⁶***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.***"

In essence, Paul is telling his audience that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time and many of them were still alive, so they could go and ask those still living if they had any doubts. This is a bold statement made by Paul; he would never have made such a bold statement if he was not sure Jesus rose from the dead.

- Unlike the founders of other religions, the founder of Christianity, Jesus Christ, claimed to be God. In **John 10:31-33** (NIV) we read, "³¹*Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him.* ³²*But Jesus said to them, 'I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?'* ³³*'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'But for blasphemy,*

because you, a mere man, claim to be God.’ ” (See also John 8:58-59, John 5:18)

It’s one thing to claim to be God, it’s quite another thing to prove it. For me, the acid test for anyone claiming to be God consists of two (2) things that cannot be done or ever be duplicated by no one but God himself. These two (2) things are:

1. **Power over Nature** – In **Luke 8:22-25** (NIV) we read, “²²*One day Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.’ So they got into a boat and set out. ²³As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. ²⁴The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we’re going to drown!’ He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. ²⁵‘Where is your faith?’ he asked his disciples.” In fear and amazement they asked one another, ‘Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.’ ”*

The Power of Life and Death – In **John 10:17-18** (NIV) we read, “¹⁷*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.*”

The Bible:

One of the most accurate statements I’ve heard regarding the reliability of the bible is from Dr. Clark H. Pinnock. He said, “*There exists no document from the ancient world witnessed by so excellent a set of textual and historical testimonies and offering so superb an array of historical data on which an intelligent decision may be made. An honest [person] cannot dismiss a source of this kind. Skepticism regarding the historical credentials of Christianity is based upon an irrational [i.e., anti-supernatural] bias.*”

One of the simplest ways to know that the Old Testament is true is to examine the Jewish people.

God Bless,
Bishop-Elect D. M. Duncan

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