

The Case for Christ

The Christian worldview bases its proclamation of the Gospel on the claim that Jesus died and rose as the Christ (Messiah) and as the Son of God. How do contemporary worldviews attempt to discredit this Biblical view? What evidence supports the Biblical view?

The Case for Christ

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The Case for Christ

Where we're going:

1. How scientific reasoning works

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2. Questions for Those Who Doubt
 - Revealing the evidence
 - And its significance

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3. The Principle Objection
4. Conclusion

How scientific reasoning works

- Science is “theoretical”
 - It proposes *theories* to explain things.
 - We cannot *directly observe* whether a scientific theory is true or false.
- They always *go beyond* what we can observe.
 - They are *universal generalizations*.
 - They refer to *unobservable* things.

How scientific reasoning works

- Science is “based on observation”
 - Scientists seem to *infer*,
from what they have observed,
that certain theories and hypotheses
are (at least probably) true.

How scientific reasoning works

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- Two basic (mutually supporting) answers:
 1. Argument to the Best Explanation
 2. Hypothetical Reasoning

How scientific reasoning works

1. Scientific reasoning nearly always involves **“Argument to the Best Explanation.”**
 - In science (as in everyday life) we tend to believe whatever provides *the best available explanation* of the evidence we have.
 - We tend to think that *the best available explanation* is *probably true*.

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 2. *Simplicity*

How scientific reasoning works

1. Scientific reasoning nearly always involves **“Argument to the Best Explanation.”**
 - But what determines *how good* an explanation is?
 1. *Plausibility*
 - (How well it fits in with what else we know.)
 2. *Simplicity*
 3. *Explanatory Power*
 - How *well* it explains (explanatory *strength*)
 - How *much* it explains (explanatory *scope*)

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Hypothetical Reasoning.

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Hypothetical Reasoning.

- Considers *what we would expect*
if our hypothesis were true.
- Evidence that *is not* what we would expect
(if our hypothesis were true)
counts against our hypothesis.

How scientific reasoning works

2. Science also clearly uses

Hypothetical Reasoning.

- More precisely:

- Evidence ***raises*** the probability of a claim
to the extent that

the evidence is **more to be expected** (more probable)
if the claim were true than if it were false.

- Evidence ***lowers*** the probability of a claim
to the extent that

the evidence is **less** to be expected (less probable)
if the claim were true than if it were false.

How scientific reasoning works

2. Science also clearly uses

Hypothetical Reasoning.

- How probable a claim is,
in light of some evidence,
is determined by:
 - A. How probable it was to start with
(determined by its simplicity and plausibility)
 - B. And how much the evidence
raises or lowers that probability

Questions for Those Who Doubt

Preliminary Questions:

A. Do you believe in God?

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- God provides the *best explanation* of all these things.

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Preliminary Questions:

A. Do you believe in God?

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- The existence and order in the universe, individuals' experiences, etc., strongly support the existence of God.
- God provides the *best explanation* of all these things.
- All this is *much more to be expected* assuming God than assuming no God.

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A. Do you believe in God?

B. Isn't it fairly plausible that God exists?

- This is important because it makes the story of Jesus more plausible to begin with.

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1. If God exists, does this
(the Christian story about Jesus)
seem like the sort of thing God might do?
 - Surely it is.
 - In light of the evidence for God,
and the evidence from the Old Testament
(Messianic Prophecies, etc.),
the story of Jesus does not start out as
extremely unlikely.

Questions for Those Who Doubt

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2. Did Jesus really say and do the things
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Questions for Those Who Doubt

2. Did Jesus really say and do the things the New Testament attributes to him?
 - If Jesus really did
 - 1) live that extraordinary life,
 - 2) deliver those amazing teachings,
 - 3) fulfill those prophecies,
 - 4) perform those miracles,
 - 5) and rise from the dead,it's simply not credible to maintain that he *isn't* who the N.T. says he is.

Questions for Those Who Doubt

- So if Jesus isn't who the N.T. says, then he must *not* have done and said those things.

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But,

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3. If Jesus *didn't* say and do these things,
how did the N.T. come to say he did?

More generally,

4. If Jesus *didn't* say and do these things,
how do you explain
the origins of Christianity?

Questions for Those Who Doubt

- Every alternative explanation
(to Jesus really doing these things)
ends up being *extremely* implausible:

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 - 1) Many (checkable) historical details.
 - 2) Embarrassing facts.
 - Female first witnesses to the risen Christ
 - The disciples made themselves look bad.

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- Did the authors or their sources *lie*?
 1. The accounts contain characteristics uncharacteristic of lies:
 - 1) Many (checkable) historical details.
 - 2) Embarrassing facts.
 - 3) Jesus portrayed as doing these things *publicly*
 - Easily refuted, if a lie

Questions for Those Who Doubt

- Did the authors or their sources *lie*?
 1. The accounts contain characteristics uncharacteristic of lies:
 - Many (checkable) historical details.
 - Embarrassing facts.
 - Jesus portrayed as doing these things *publicly*
 2. How could so many have been fooled?
 - 1) The claims were truly unbelievable.
 - 2) They could easily have “checked” the stories.

Questions for Those Who Doubt

- Did the authors or their sources *lie*?
 1. The accounts contain characteristics uncharacteristic of lies.
 2. How could so many have been fooled?
 3. Most importantly, the way the first proclaimers of this message lived and died for it, make their simply *lying* incredible.

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- Did the authors or their sources *lie*?
- Were they mistaken themselves?
 - They lived with Jesus, how could they have been deceived about what he did and said?
 - Were they actively deceived?
 - by whom?
 - why?
 - how?

Questions for Those Who Doubt

- Did the authors or their sources *lie*?
- Were they mistaken themselves?
 - It is extremely unlikely that the first preachers of the gospel were mistaken about what Jesus really did and said.

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- Did the authors or their sources *lie*?
- Were they mistaken themselves?
- Were the hard-to-believe bits inserted later?
 - Why would they have been making such a big deal about Jesus in the first place, if he didn't say and do amazing things?
 - Text and source criticism refutes this.

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- Were they mistaken themselves?
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- Is it myth, or legend?
 - It doesn't have the characteristics of myth.
 - Not enough time elapsed between the events and the writing to be legend.

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- Did the authors or their sources *lie*?
- Were they mistaken themselves?
- Were the hard-to-believe bits inserted later?
- Is it myth, or legend?
- Is it historical fiction?
- Was it not meant to be taken literally?
 - Given what the authors said, did, and how they died, they obviously meant to be taken literally.

Questions for Those Who Doubt

- Every alternative explanation of how the New Testament came to say these things,
and how the Christian Church originated,
is extremely implausible.

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5. Wouldn't the supposition that Jesus *really did* say and do these things, explain all this *very well*?
 - It provides a very 1) *simple*, 2) *powerful*, and 3) reasonably *plausible* explanation.
 - It is reasonably plausible in light of our evidence for God, the Old Testament, and what it seems like God might do.
 - (We'll deal with the principle objection to this shortly.)

Questions for Those Who Doubt

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 - This explanation is at least better than the competition in the combination of these three characteristics.

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 - It provides a very 1) *simple*, 2) *powerful*, and 3) reasonably *plausible* explanation.
 - This explanation is at least better than the competition in the combination of these three characteristics.
 - It's the *best available* explanation.

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6. If Jesus *really was* God (etc.) and *really did* the things the N.T. says he did, *how surprising is it* that the N.T. would say these things, & Christianity would originate as it did?

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 - *not surprising at all!*
 - The probability of that historical evidence is *very high*, if Jesus really did, and was, those things.

Questions for Those Who Doubt

In contrast,

7. If Jesus *was not* God (etc.) and *did not* do the things the N.T. says he did, *how surprising is it* that the N.T. would say these things, & Christianity would originate as it did?

Questions for Those Who Doubt

In contrast,

7. If Jesus *was not* God (etc.) and *did not* do the things the N.T. says he did,

how surprising is it

that the N.T. would say these things,

& Christianity would originate as it did?

- *Very surprising indeed!*
- The probability of all that happening, if Jesus *isn't* God and *didn't* do those things, is *extremely* low!

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So,

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more to be expected

if Jesus really was God

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- Obviously, yes!
- *How much more?*
 - *Vastly* more!
- So our evidence *strongly* supports Jesus' deity, etc.

The Case for Christ

- ***The*** main objection:
 - Isn't Jesus being all that, and doing all that *extremely* improbable to begin with?
 - (So even if the evidence *raises* the probability a lot, it's *still* very unlikely.)
 - I.e., as implausible as the alternatives are, aren't they still more plausible than Jesus' really rising from the dead, etc.?

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- ***The*** main objection:
 - Isn't Jesus being all that, and doing all that *extremely* improbable to begin with?
- Answer:
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- ***The*** main objection:
- Answer:
 - Especially in light of the evidence for and about God,
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 - It is to *assume* the answer before one honestly considers the evidence.
 - It is not to be open minded.

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- Answer:
 - Especially in light of the evidence for and about God,
to assume all this is *extraordinarily* improbable
is just to *beg the question*.
 - It is to *assume* the answer before one honestly considers the evidence.
 - It is not to be open minded.
 - Nothing justifies that prejudice.

The Case for Christ

- In light of the historical evidence, then, and the principles of scientific reasoning, it is highly likely that Jesus really was who the New Testament says he was.
 - (Of course, I'm really much more certain than that, personally, but I attribute that to the work of the Holy Spirit.)

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- Recommended resources:
 - This basic approach based largely on the work of Richard Swinburne
 - E.g., *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, OUP.
 - scholarly and difficult

An excellent easy-to-understand resource, but giving lots of details:

- Geisler & Turek:
 - *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, 2004, Crossway.