

The BIG QUESTIONS about Christianity

Jesus the Legend???

11-14-10

Scripture Reading - John 1:1-18

Was Jesus just an amazing man who was made a legend by His followers, or is He the miracle working, resurrected, one and only Son of God and Savior of the world that the Bible claims Him to be?

This is a very important question for at least two reasons

1. A LOT of people believe He was a legend
 - a. Almost no one denies the existence of the historical Jesus. Even atheists, agnostics, and those who follow other world religions believe in Jesus in a human sense.
 - i. I know of no atheist or agnostic who would deny that a man named Jesus walked the earth 2,000 years ago, *but they obviously don't believe that He was God, or that He performed many miracles and was raised from the dead.*
 - ii. Muslims see Jesus as a great prophet along the same line as Mohammed, *but not as the Son of God or God incarnate.*
 - iii. Jews would never deny Jesus' existence, *but they do not believe that He was God, that He was the Messiah, or that His death on the cross can atone for sin.*
 - b. In other words, all of these folks, *along with many of our neighbors who would call themselves Christians,* see Jesus as an amazing man, *but not the miracle working, resurrected, one and only Son of God and Savior of that the World the Bible claims Him to be.*
2. According to the Bible, our salvation rests on our answer
 - a. A lot of people believe that a general belief in God plus being a "good person" equals Heaven, *but according to the Bible it doesn't.*
 - b. According to the Bible the only way your sins can be forgiven is by putting your faith and trust in Jesus the Christ, God's one and only Son, who died on the cross for your sins, and who was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

- c. **John 14:6 (NIV)**
⁶Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father *except through me*."
- d. **John 3:16 (NIV)**
¹⁶"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."
- e. **1 Corinthians 15:1-5 (NIV)**
¹Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ²*By this gospel you are saved...* ³...that Christ *died for our sins* according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was *raised on the third day* according to the Scriptures, ⁵and *that he appeared* to Peter, and then to the Twelve.
- f. **1 John 2:22-23 (ESV)**
²²Who is the liar but he who *denies that Jesus is the Christ?* This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. ²³*No one who denies the Son has the Father.* Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.
- g. **1 John 4:1-3 (ESV)**
¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that *Jesus Christ has come in the flesh* is from God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God...

So you can see why this is *such and important question* for those who take the Bible seriously. If you believe that Jesus was no more than an amazing man made a legend by His followers, *you will not be saved*.

So how do we go about answering it?

- We have to look to the *primary source* of information we have about Jesus, the Bible, *especially His biographies* (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

Can we trust that Jesus' biographies are not legendary accounts?

YES - FOUR REASONS WHY

- Recommend The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel

1) Historically reliable

- a. If it weren't for their miraculous nature and the implications of their teachings, NO ONE would doubt the authenticity or trustworthiness of Jesus' biographies. When it comes to historical reliability, no other ancient work *even comes close*.
- b. LOTS of EARLY copies
 - i. No originals BUT...
 1. 5664 Greek manuscripts of NT
 2. About 24,000 copies in other languages
 3. More than a million quotations
 4. Though there are some textual variants (slight differences) between them...
 - a. They are noted
 - b. NO doctrine affected
 - c. 99.5% are undisputed
 - ii. Very early (by ancient historical standards)
 1. Some within 100 years
 2. Many within 300 years
 - iii. Next closest Homer's Illiad
 1. Less than 650 Greek manuscripts
 2. Earliest - 2nd and 3rd Century AD
 3. Written 800 BC
 4. 900 year gap!!! (average 500+)
 5. No one doubts Illiad's authenticity WHY???
 - a. *It is clearly legendary* so no one is troubled by its miraculous, supernatural elements
 - b. It doesn't require you to change your life
- c. Seeming inconsistencies
 - i. If I were trying to pull the wool over someone eyes I would make sure that my stories lined up perfectly.

- ii. When you read the four gospels side by side, it doesn't take you long to realize that *they don't*.
 - 1. The angles at the tomb
 - a. Mt - one angel whose appearance was like lightening and whose clothes were as white as snow
 - b. Mark - A young man sitting on the right side dressed in a white robe
 - c. Lk - two men stood by in dazzling apparel
 - d. Jn - two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus' had lain
 - iii. Note, the BIG important details are clearly the same and the differences are reconcilable, but the stories don't line up perfectly.
 - iv. It's almost as though four independent writers were recalling the same historical event for themselves a few decades after it occurred ☺.
- d. Portrayal of disciples and women
- i. If I wanted to pull the wool over someone's eyes I would want to put forth the most credible, reliable witnesses possible
 - ii. The disciples were simple, ordinary men who are portrayed as slow, self-seeking, foolish, weak, and cowardly at various times throughout the Gospels
 - iii. Some of Jesus' closest followers were women and *they were the first to witness His resurrection*
- e. Corroborated by extra-biblical sources and archeology
- i. Josephus (Jewish) and Tacitus (Roman)
 - 1. First century historians
 - 2. *Non-Christians*
 - 3. Reference Jesus, His death, *His resurrection*, and His followers in their writings
 - ii. Archeology confirms reliability more and more

- 2) **Written too early for legend to develop** (J's bios not legendary)
- a. It typically takes a long time for historical legends to develop, *especially if they were witnessed by a lot of people.*
 - b. Good reason to believe Jesus' bios were written very early
 - i. Acts ends abruptly with Paul imprisoned in Rome
 - ii. Paul martyred 62 AD
 - iii. Luke's Gospel written before Acts
 - iv. Luke probably borrowed from Mark
 - v. Matthew thought to be 50's or 60's and John 80's
 - c. Even if they were written later (some liberal scholars date Mark in the 70's, Mt and Lk in the 80's, and Jn in the 90's) that's still WAY too early for legend to develop.
 - d. Plus, the *main and most controversial* message of Jesus' bios seemed to have been circulating almost immediately after His death, long before the supposedly legendary Gospels were written.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (ESV)**
³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶*Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.* ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.
 - ii. Many scholars believe that this is an early church creed that Paul received *as early as 35 AD!!!*

3) **Disciples had NO motive** (J's bios are not legendary)

- a. Gained nothing financially
 - i. Paul refused payment
 - ii. Those who didn't gave most of it away
- b. Gained nothing socially
 - i. Persecution, ostracism, and death
 - 1. All but John were martyred for their faith
- c. All that for lie????

4) **Transformed lives both then and now**

- a. The 11
 - i. **John 16:31-32 (ESV)**
 31 Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe?
 32 Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has
 come, when you will be scattered, each to his
 own home, and will leave me alone...
 - ii. **Acts 4:13 (ESV)**
 13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and
 John, and perceived that they were uneducated,
 common men, they were astonished. And they
 recognized that they had been with Jesus.
 - iii. **Acts 5:27-29 (ESV)**
 27 And when they had brought them, they set
 them before the council. And the high priest
 questioned them, 28 saying, "We strictly charged
 you not to teach in this name, yet here you have
 filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you
 intend to bring this man's blood upon us." 29 But
 Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey
 God rather than men.
 - iv. **Acts 5:40-42 (ESV)**
 40 and when they had called in the apostles, they
 beat them and charged them not to speak in the
 name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 Then they left
 the presence of the council, rejoicing that they
 were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the
 name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from
 house to house, they did not cease teaching and
 preaching Jesus as the Christ.

- b. Paul
 - i. **Acts 9:1-2 (ESV)**
¹ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
 - ii. **Philippians 3:7-8 (ESV)**
⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
- c. Same sorts of stories throughout history
 - i. Martyrs (Jesus Freaks & Foxes Book of Martyrs)
 - ii. Missionaries (John Newton, George Mueller, Adoniram Judson)
- d. Same sorts of stories today
 - i. Every believer at TWE has a wonderful story of how Jesus, *the supposed legend*, has absolutely transformed their lives

How do explain that??? Here's how I explain it...

Jesus CAN'T be a legend!

- 1) Historically reliable
- 2) Too early for legend
- 3) Disciples had no motive
- 4) He has been transforming lives throughout the ages

So why don't more people follow Him?

- 1) Ignorance
 - a. Look into it
- 2) Miracles
 - a. Consider the creation
- 3) Blindness
 - a. Pray for eyes to see

4) Fear

a. Pray for boldness to trust and follow Him