

## **The Historicity of the Bible**

**By Dan Jensen (2023)**

(In order to fully benefit from this essay, I recommend reading through my “works for beginners” first. They can be found on my website.)

For further resources giving you some background to much of what I will be arguing in this essay, please see #'s 1-9 in the first list of resources at the end of my apologetics essay. That essay can be found in the “works for beginners” section of my website. For resources defending the skeptical position, I recommend the works of Bart Ehrman and Richard Carrier. Carrier is quite radical, as I will further elucidate later in this essay, so it may seem odd that I would recommend him. But, while Ehrman is fairly representative of the more mainstream version of New Testament scholarship among skeptics of Christianity, Carrier is the best representative (from a scholarly standpoint) of the more radical and fringe element of skeptical New Testament scholarship. Most (if not all) of the works of those men can easily be found on Amazon.

Before diving in, I want to be very clear that I am not an apologist who believes that the primary way we should defend the faith is through the historical evidence. I actually believe that this is a very misguided way to approach apologetics. I further believe that the fact that this approach has become so popular in the church today has led to a lot of problems. While it has indeed helped many, many lay Christians, and I rejoice over this, it has also caused skeptics to see the real epistemological holes inherent in that methodology.

We simply cannot prove a great deal of the material in the Bible, at least not at this time, from a purely historical vantage point. And even much of what we can prove to a very, very high degree, still does not rise to the level of what I would call absolute fact. For more information on that point, see my discussion of this on pages 50-52 of my *The*

*Idolatry of Progressive Christianity: A Response to Randal Rauser.* That work can be found on my website.

Even further, we have to be honest, especially when it comes to much of the Old Testament, that there is actually a great deal of historical evidence against us. It does not serve us well to ignore, gloss over, and mislead people about this evidence. It is enough to say that none of it rises to the level of absolute fact, and that when we put it against the backdrop of everything I will say in this essay, we should interpret that evidence in light of the overall stronger evidence for the basic historicity of the entire Bible. With that said, we should still be very honest about the fact that if this evidence is boxed in and not put against that background, it in itself is not supportive of orthodox Christianity. And most importantly, I would be adamant in saying that even everything in this essay can only be truly seen for its strength when placed against the backdrop of the philosophical evidence for Biblical Christianity. For more information on that point, please see all of my “call” essays, my essay on the moral argument, and my essay on faith and reason. All of these can be found on my website.

With that extremely important caveat firmly in place, let us now examine the basic evidence for the historicity of the Bible. Obviously, the resources I cited above will provide you with a great deal more information and depth than will be given in this essay. Nevertheless, from that evidence I will lay out a bare minimum basic case in this essay and I am persuaded that it is very strong. You may say, “Well duh! You are an orthodox Christian.” In response to this, I want to reiterate that neither my faith nor my overarching apologetic absolutely requires this line of evidence and argumentation. I am a staunch advocate of the position that the case for orthodox Christianity is primarily philosophical in nature, as implied above.

The debate between all worldviews is essentially a philosophical one. I’m not saying science and history don’t have their place (after all, that’s why I’m writing this essay!), but they should not be given first priority. They can be used to supplement any given worldview, but at the end of the day, this is a philosophical debate and therefore the

philosophical arguments must always be paramount. The fact that I believe that the historical case strongly supplements my case is only a massive bonus for me. I'm deeply grateful to God for this bonus, but again, it does not make up the core of my apologetic for the true Christian faith.

With that objection out of the way, let us get into the actual presentation of evidence. The first place to start is the fact that almost all New Testament scholars, historians, archeologists, etc., believe that much of the New Testament is historically accurate. At this point, an ignorant person may wish to say, "Well uh yeah, it's your guys' book! So, of course Bible scholars are going to think it is accurate!" The fact of the matter is that unlike other religious books such as the Koran and the Book of Mormon, as two examples, the Bible has not been studied primarily only by orthodox scholars. In fact, orthodox scholars are a minority among Bible scholars. It is true that many scholars are conservative Catholics, but many are very liberal Catholics as well. Many are Liberal Protestant. Many are secular and don't have any strong religious connections. Many are Atheists and Agnostics. Many are very hostile to the biblical witness. So, yeah, sorry, no dice my friend.

Even the strongest skeptics, along the lines of Carrier, believe that the New Testament is not an entirely fictional work along the lines of the Book of Mormon. All scholars believe that the Roman Empire, that forms so much of the cultural background to the New Testament, existed. All scholars believe that the bulk of the Jewish people were in what today we would call Palestine in the 1st century. All scholars believe that many Jews were spread out all over the Roman Empire, but that most were in Palestine. All scholars agree Galilee existed, Samaria existed, and that Judea existed. They all agree that Jerusalem existed, and that the temple was in that great city until AD 70. They all assert that the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, and the Zealots were all real sects within Judaism in the 1st century. They all agree that king Herod was a real figure, that Pilate was as well, and that both Caesar Augustus and Caesar Tiberias were actual Roman emperors. They all agree that Annas and Caiaphas were real high priests in the 1st century. They all agree that Jews worshiped in synagogues in the 1st century. They

also agree that many of the other cities, towns, regions, and descriptions in the New Testament accord with what we know from extra-biblical data.

Now, many will say big whoop to all of this. In fact, it has become very common among pop-Atheist apologists online to talk about how pointing all of this out amounts to what they call the Spiderman fallacy. They say that all of this is like pointing out how many of the people and places in Spiderman are real. So, the argument goes, is Spiderman nonfiction? We all of course know the answer. I agree that if we were to go by this information alone, it would not amount to much. However, it is still an important starting point to make clear that much of what is in the New Testament has not been made up from whole cloth as is the case with Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. This is a key starting point.

Further, the above alleged fallacy doesn't work. Unlike Spiderman, the overwhelming vast majority of scholars believe that Jesus of Nazareth, the main character of the New Testament (and that is putting it mildly!), was a real human being. The vast majority believe that He was a revolutionary character that said and did many of the things that are attributed to Him throughout the New Testament, especially the Gospels (especially the Synoptic Gospels). Even if you don't agree with this and take the side of Carrier, the mere fact that not only so many, but the *overwhelming vast majority*, believe that Jesus existed in the manner described above, makes the New Testament nothing like Spiderman. No scholars believe Spiderman was or is a real person. Again, I'm not saying that this alone proves the existence of Jesus from a purely historical vantage point (we'll get to that case later). Truth is not determined by numbers and if it was, it would destroy my case because orthodox scholars are in the minority as said above. My only point here is that the above facts render Jesus and Spiderman as being completely different from a historical perspective.

Even further, it is not only Jesus that the overwhelming vast majority of scholars believe existed. These same scholars, for the most part, believe that most of the other main characters of the New Testament existed and said and did many of the things that are

attributed to them throughout the New Testament. This is true of Mary, the original 12 apostles, James (the brother of Jesus), Mary Magdalene, and the Apostle Paul. In fact, these same scholars believe that Paul wrote almost all of the books attributed to him, and that he is very sincere in these letters. The skeptical ones believe he was deluded to some degree, but they (for the most part) do not believe he was crazy across the board. So again, the alleged Spiderman fallacy is one giant dud.

The mainstream scholars believe that Jesus was born a few years before AD 1. Why that is the case is a story for another day. You can email me if you would like a further explanation on that point. My email can be found on my website. These same scholars believe that the ministry of Jesus took place somewhere between the years 27-33 (AD). These same scholars believe that the apostles, including James and Paul, preached the gospel all over the Roman Empire from about 35-70. They also all agree that Paul wrote his epistles within that time frame. Hence, Paul is our earliest concrete written witness to the beliefs and practices of the infant church. The rest of the New Testament, all of the Gnostic literature, and all other literature on the topic, are all later than the earliest Pauline epistles.<sup>1</sup>

Many of these scholars agree that John, the son of Zebedee, preached for much longer than that time frame above, and died towards the end of the 1st century. These same scholars agree that the Gospels were written in the late 1st century, and a minority would place the Gospel of John in the early 2nd century. But, they all agree that all 4 Gospels were written less than 100 years after the ministry of Christ, when many people would have still been alive who would have seen the events described in the Gospels. It is very important to remember that the Gospels describe very public events surrounding the last days of Jesus. They describe a very public trial and execution in Jerusalem during Passover, when hundreds of thousands of Jews would have been in the holy city.

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<sup>1</sup> It is true that many scholars say that Q represents the earliest Christian literature available to us. The problem with this assertion is that we cannot even be dogmatic about the fact that Q even existed. I am not here denying its existence, I am merely pointing out a fact. Therefore, as far as documents we know existed, the universally accepted epistles of Paul constitute the earliest Christian literature we possess.

Many of those scholars do not believe that the Gospel of John is very accurate historically because they say that the theology found within it is too advanced. They also have other reasons as well. Most though, believe that the Synoptic Gospels are fairly accurate historically. And most would still say that the very, very basic story of Jesus teaching, preaching, doing miracles (or doing things that appeared to be miraculous), and then going to Jerusalem for His last days where He was very publicly tried and executed by Pilate at the hands of the Jewish leaders, as is found in John, is indeed accurate. Most don't believe that the traditional authors of the Gospels were the actual authors, but that does not change the fact that they believe all of the above.

These same scholars believe that Paul wrote almost all of the epistles in the New Testament that are attributed to him. They believe he wrote Romans, both of the letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, Philipians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. That right there makes up almost 70% of the Pauline corpus. This is because the disputed books are much smaller than Romans for example. Further, most of these same scholars believe that Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and 2 Thessalonians as well. That only leaves the two letters to Timothy and Titus (the pastoral epistles) that are seen by most of these scholars as not being from Paul.

It is true that most scholars do not believe that the rest of the New Testament was written by the traditional authors ascribed to them. None of that changes though, all that I've made clear about the Gospels and the Pauline corpus. Only going by the undisputed letters in the Pauline corpus and the Synoptic Gospels, they combined make up 50% of the entire New Testament. This is why the vast majority of Bible scholars believe that so much of the New Testament is historically accurate. Further, while many of these scholars believe that Acts has some serious historical blunders, most agree that the same author of that book is the man who wrote the Gospel of Luke. But, if the Gospel of Luke gets many details correct, we would not expect him to get a ton of details wrong in Acts. Therefore, even if, for the sake of argument, we agree that there are some historical problems in Acts, it would be very inconsistent to say that book is wildly inaccurate across the board, historically speaking.

And it is not like the rest of the New Testament is incredibly at odds with these core historical books. If they were, the early church would never have included them in the canon in the first place. If you are unfamiliar with the concept of *canon*, please see pages 158-165 of my *A False Kind of Christianity* (it can be found on my website). I understand that certain scholars argue otherwise, mostly from the fringe group that we will address soon, but even from some of the more mainstream ones, but these arguments are generally pretty weak. I am more than happy to answer any of them. Simply email any one that you would like me to address, and I will do so. As one example, Ehrman often gives a small handful of reasons as to why he does not believe that the author of Acts was very careful historically. But, they are easily answered.

The most common example from Ehrman and others is the argument that Gal 1:17 contradicts Acts. Since Galatians is almost universally accepted as historically accurate by the mainstream scholars, this is seen as a strong piece of evidence that the author of Acts could be careless sometimes. You would be absolutely shocked by how much mileage the skeptical scholars try to get out of this one tiny objection. But, I answered it on page 21 of my *All That's Wrong With Jonah* (under #33 on that page). That work can be found on my website. I answered it in one short paragraph.

At this point many of you are probably tempted to say, "Ok fine. You have demonstrated the high probability of the historical accuracy of much of the New Testament. I can agree with you there. That doesn't mean that I should become an orthodox Christian. In fact, you keep pointing out what most of the mainstream scholars believe. But, as you yourself admit, most of them don't believe in a lot of what orthodox Christians believe. Therefore, when they don't believe that Peter wrote 2 Peter, as one of many examples that could be given, that according to your own logic shows that 2 Peter was probably not written by Peter. Or, if you say that the mainstream scholars are wrong about this detail and many others, then you have undercut your case for appealing to them regarding all that you have appealed to them over thus far." All of this misunderstands things.

I agree with the vast majority of the mainstream scholars over the basic gist of things when it comes to most of the data that is not favorable towards me. For instance, if we did not have the mountain of evidence we have for Biblical Christianity as a whole, I would agree with them that it does not appear that Paul wrote 1 and 2 Timothy. The language is too different from his other epistles at certain points. There is a reason these scholars reject Pauline authorship, and I don't deny that those reasons are based on some strong evidence. And the same is true for all of the evidence that I said is favorable to orthodox Christianity. There is a reason that the bulk of Bible scholars are agreed upon so much. It is because that is where the evidence leads us.

Remember, I am only trying to offer historical evidence that confirms Biblical Christianity. I am not trying to establish the faith based upon the historical data. And where the data is against me, I can say in faith that if we had all of the data, the negative evidence would be better understood. This is not a blind faith position either. If I first prove the faith in an overarching sense, then this faith claim is based on evidence. Even further, I will go on to prove in this essay that even from a purely historical standpoint (although not without some basic philosophical principles in place), the evidence points in the direction of the basic historicity of the Bible. Therefore, even on those grounds alone, the greater historical evidence must trump the lesser evidence.

This happens all the time in life. When we see something anomalous, we don't immediately jump to conclusions and discount all of the evidence we have for something else. We tentatively suspend judgment and seek to better understand the anomaly. We understand that we may never get to the bottom of this anomaly in this life. But, what we don't do is interpret all of the solid evidence in light of the anomaly. We do the opposite. We interpret the anomaly in light of the much broader and stronger evidence. And that is all I'm saying we are doing as orthodox Christians in regard to the anomalous evidence, historically speaking, in connection with the Bible.



Now, this does not mean that I always think the mainstream skeptics are interpreting the evidence correctly even apart from the case for Biblical Christianity. As I will show as we proceed in this essay, and as I have already alluded to in regard to Ehrman, I believe their anti-supernatural bias grossly clouds their interpretations of certain key pieces of data. I have already given an example of this with Acts above. With that said, on most points, such as who wrote 1 and 2 Timothy, I usually agree with them. I take it on faith that Paul wrote those letters and seek to explain the anomaly in other ways. I fully admit that my explanations are not, taken alone, the most likely explanations from a purely historical investigation standpoint. But, they are the most likely when looking at all of the evidence, not only the historical, for the Bible.

Ok, with all of that laid out, let us now look at the more fringe scholars. It is not right for us to dismiss them anymore than it is right for people to dismiss the minority of believing scholars. These scholars do not believe that Jesus existed, or have very serious doubts about that. Many also question the sincerity of Paul. And they question many other items we have discussed. But, remember, they still believe in most of the major background elements that are found in the New Testament from a historical standpoint. Even further, and this is a massively important point, they all agree that Paul existed, and the vast majority agree that he wrote the undisputed letters we discussed in the time frame we covered. Some question Philemon, but that epistle is only one chapter and so almost everything I said about this point above is still left intact. Price, who I will discuss later, and a few others, dispute the points about Paul writing what are essentially undisputed letters in the near unanimous consensus time frame. But, he and these others are in the extreme minority even within the already very small fringe minority.

It is also important to understand why these scholars are considered fringe scholars. It is not merely that they are in the minority like the conservative scholars. The conservative scholars (whether believers or conservative Catholics) are not considered fringe scholars. They are seen as misguided by most of the mainstream ones for allowing their believing biases to cloud their interpretations, but they are not seen as

fringe for the most part. Allow me to give you some idea of just how fringe the fringe scholars are perceived as being by the mainstream scholars. Ehrman, who has been the foremost critic of orthodox Christianity from a New Testament scholarship perspective for the past 20 years, often says (in many venues) that not believing in the existence of Jesus is like believing that the moon is made of cheese. That is not a statement coming from an orthodox Christian apologist like myself. That is Bart Ehrman who is saying that.

Further, conservative scholars probably make up about 25% or so of New Testament scholars. These fringe scholars probably make up about 2%. And the two best known of these scholars are very radical people. These two men are Richard Carrier and Robert Price. I am genuinely not trying to engage in *ad hominem* here, but it is important to give you some idea of how radical these men are as people. This is a legitimate point as it helps us better understand why they are so fringe when it comes to their scholarship. It seems to be part and parcel of the personalities of these men. If I pointed out similar behavior from a mainstream scholar who is universally revered by the scholarly community from all perspectives, that would be plain old *ad hominem*. His behavior, while being extremely odd, inappropriate, and immoral, would in the end be irrelevant to his scholarship. That is not the case though with Price and Carrier.

Despite these two men often praising each other for their scholarship, they are both on the far end of the spectrums politically. Price is such a far-right character that Derek (the man behind the MythVision YT channel) had to give a tearful apology for platforming him on his show for so long. Despite my vehement disagreements with Derek's beliefs and approach to Atheist apologetics (he is quite the sensationalist), I appreciate that he rarely gets political. And yet even he could stomach Price for only so long. Carrier is very far to the left politically. He divorced his wife so that he could continue with his lifestyle of swinging. And he has been credibly accused by many women of sexually harassing them at Atheist conferences. These are the two leading scholars of the fringe wing of New Testament scholarship. That gives you some idea of what that wing is all about. Simply search "MythVision" on YT, and then "Price," and a lot of information will

come up for you. And an easy Google search will lead you to plenty on Carrier as well. I am not pushing any conspiracy theory nonsense here. All of this is well-known in the scholarly world.

With all of that said, I am not seeking to dismiss this wing, although it may sound that way so far. My honest motive for explaining the above is to merely put in context how far I am going to give the other side the benefit of the doubt. To my knowledge, there is only one major scholar that rejected the existence of Paul (and he isn't even with us any longer), and even Carrier makes it clear how out there such a position is.<sup>2</sup> As far as Price and the few others, they make up a tiny percentage of the fringe wing, which is already a tiny percentage of scholars. They are essentially the "fringiest" of the fringe. Hence, our starting point moving forward will be that the Apostle Paul existed and that he wrote Romans; 1 and 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Philippians; and 1 Thessalonians. And that he did so shortly after the time when most scholars believe Jesus was crucified. We'll even give the fringe guys Philemon for good measure. Based on everything I have said so far, it should be clear by now that if you want to deny even these basic facts, you are moving into like flat-earth territory, and that is no exaggeration whatsoever.

From this bare minimum launching point, let us hone in on the lucidity and sincerity of Paul in the undisputed letters (minus Philemon). The fringe wing believes that Paul was either hopelessly deluded, was a pathological liar, or was some combination thereof. Although, they feel very confident that he was lucid and truthful in Galatians 1:17 so that they can use that text to come against the historicity of Acts. Leaving that odd tidbit aside, let us now examine this claim. We will start with the deluded aspect to the claim. The first piece of rebuttal evidence is the fact that Paul's letters certainly don't read like a deluded man. While he can be hard to understand at times, he is lucid and articulate throughout them. Second, Paul often writes with such passion and concern, it is very hard to see this as someone who is deluded. If Paul went on and on in great detail

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Carrier, "The Historicity of Paul the Apostle," *Richard Carrier Blogs*, accessed Jul 13, 2023, <https://www.richardcarrier.info/archives/7643>. Carrier says in this article that he does not know the credentials of Detering, but Detering was an actual, albeit wildly fringe, scholar.

about the angels fighting in the sky or something, we would have room for doubt here. But, in every epistle, it seems that he is deeply worried about the practical concerns of each of the churches to whom he is writing. So, where is the evidence of terrible delusion?

Now, many will object that the argument is not that Paul was deluded in every sphere of his life. The argument is that he is deluded concerning his alleged vision of Jesus. This event clouded all of his other thinking. The argument is that Paul is not deluded when he writes to the churches, he is merely deluded about what he saw. The problem with this is it cannot then explain Paul's interactions with the other apostles. Were these interactions delusions as well? Were the other apostles equally deluded? And if so, how did they all end up becoming so united in their doctrine? If each of them were deluded, would not each of them have had distinct delusions and thus very different ideas about this "Jesus" character? If they all did have somewhat different delusions and colluded later to coordinate and clean them up, that would constitute lying, and we will deal with that aspect of the fringe argument against Paul down the road.

At this point, you may ask how I even know that Paul had such interactions with the other apostles. We know this from Galatians 1 and 2. There Paul describes in detail three separate interactions with the other apostles, including the brother of Jesus, James. You can say, "Maybe he was lying." Again, we will get to that objection soon. That is not the present argument though. One also cannot argue that maybe there are some textual issues here. This is because these descriptions make up large portions of both of these chapters, especially chapter 2. One can argue that chapter 2 of Galatians shows that the apostles did not actually see eye to eye on things. Thus, this undercuts one of my key points above. The chapter shows no such thing. The chapter shows that Peter knew he was in the wrong. There is no evidence from Paul here that Peter argued back with Paul. And if Peter and Paul were at odds after this event, why does Paul still refer to Peter in a positive sense in 1 Corinthians (see 9:5 and the first part of chapter 15)? If Paul and James were at odds, why does Paul refer to James in the same manner in those same sections?

If 1 Cor was written before Gal, which would sort of explain the 1 Cor references, why do we not find a hint of the supposed full apostasy (in the mind of Paul) of these apostles in Paul's descriptions in Gal? Certainly Paul would have made it clear that these men had fallen from the faith if that had been the case after their confrontation. We see nothing of the sort. And this would still not fully explain why Paul positively references them in 1 Cor even if 1 Cor was written first. Did Peter, James, and Paul all share the same basic delusion at first, only to have Peter and James become deluded in a different direction down the line? If so, then how do we explain the uniformity of the earlier delusion? And if Gal was written before 1 Cor, as it probably was, the references in 1 Cor would make no sense if a full apostasy had taken place in the mind of Paul.

You may ask, "Ok then, how do you explain the controversy described in Gal 2 if Peter and James were so in line with Paul." It is not difficult. Peter and James knew the gospel. But, that in no way means they were perfect. They still held to many of their prior prejudices towards Gentiles and struggled to overcome them. This is why there is no evidence that Peter tried to defend himself in Gal 2. He knew what he was doing was wrong. Whether or not the friends of James repented is impossible to know. If some did not, this would have only shown they were not saved in the first place. Paul would have felt little need to overly highlight them in this context. As far as this party insisting on circumcision, there is no reason to believe that these were full Judaizers who insisted on circumcision to be saved. In all likelihood, James felt that Jewish converts should continue to circumcise their children so as to avoid offending other Jews until the church had become more fully mature. Such a belief would not have been heretical at the juncture. Obviously though, these friends of his were taking things too far and James certainly holds some responsibility for not better training them. That fact in no way proves that James was at odds with Paul over the basics of the gospel.

One could argue that Paul was deluded, but Peter and James and others may have been the liars. But, Paul's letters display an extremely smart and well-educated man. He himself says that he was a Pharisee that was rapidly moving up the ranks (Gal 1:14 and

Phil 3:2-6 [especially v. 5]). There is nothing in his letters to indicate that this was not actually the case. All scholars agree that his letters read like a very educated man that was extremely well-versed in the Old Testament. Hence, it is highly unlikely he would have failed to see through their duplicity. Further, how was Paul's delusion completely in keeping with the lies of the apostles from the outset?

One could argue that Paul was already familiar with the content of the gospel well before his conversion because he was persecuting the believers. Thus, after his hallucination or whatever happened, he merely read what he knew of Christianity into that experience. And this content could have come from the lying apostles who spread those lies to the believing community at large, whereby Paul was later exposed to these beliefs (lies) that led to him hating Christians based on his Pharisaism. But, this would overtly contradict all that Paul so vehemently says in Gal 1. That would make Paul a liar, and not deluded. Someone may retort that Paul surely knew some of the Christian message. Of course he did. But, it is doubtful that he knew very much beyond the fact that the Christians were saying that Jesus is the Messiah who was raised from the dead. That is hardly the full Christian gospel and message.

You may argue that this would undercut what I will say down the line about countless Jews knowing about the events surrounding the ministry of Jesus. I am not saying that all Jews would have known this, I am saying that many, many of them would. There is no evidence in the biblical record that Paul was ever in Galilee or Jerusalem during the time of Jesus' ministry. There is no evidence, none whatsoever, that he ever saw Jesus before the Damascus road. I understand that many will argue that it is highly unlikely he would not have gone to Jerusalem for Passover. It is, but it is not impossible. He could have had to miss that year due to illness, family business, or some work that the Pharisees had given him elsewhere. He probably only came to Jerusalem after the ascension, was fully updated about Jesus from the Pharisees, and was enraged by what he heard. The leaders of the Pharisees in all likelihood gave him a very truncated version of the events and basically said that Jesus was a false prophet that has gained numerous followers, and the movement is growing out of control. If we are, for the time

being, not going to say that Paul was a liar, then we must go with explanations along these lines to account for what he so ardently says in Gal 1.

Thus, the data leads us away from any notion that Paul was deluded. And with that, we now move to the accusation of pervasive dishonesty. First, it must be said that we have no concrete extra-biblical evidence of Paul's dishonesty the way we do with the many "witnesses" to the Book of Mormon. Or along the lines of what we have with Charles Russell. Both he and Joseph Smith were shown to be frauds in courts of law. Even further, we have two very notable and concrete cases of founders of religions, or foundational figures for religions, that do not seem from the historical record to have been either clinically deluded across the board or pathological liars. Hence, it is not at all the case that we are merely trying to let Paul off the hook here. We can compare him with both the frauds and the two other cases I will now unpack.

The first of these two cases is Siddhartha Gautama. Gautama was of course the founder of Buddhism. There is little evidence that he was either clinically deluded across the board or was a habitual liar. He was more of a philosopher. He was largely giving his opinion of things and that was that. He made no claims to the supernatural, a strong indicator of his honesty. This is not to say that he was uninfluenced by religion. He was highly influenced by Hinduism. He largely worked within that paradigm. But, he did not claim to be a prophet or a seer. He merely said where he thought Hinduism got it right and where he thought it got things wrong. And these assertions were almost entirely philosophical in nature. We can say that Gautama was deluded in the sense that he was deeply mistaken. But, there is no evidence that he was deluded in any clinical sense. There is also no evidence of his dishonesty either.

The second case is Muhammad. As far as he goes, I do not believe the evidence supports the idea that he was a serial liar. I believe he was deluded. But, I don't believe he was clinically deluded. The evidence seems to point in the direction that he was either hallucinating in the cave due to sleep and food deprivation, or that he had an encounter with a demonic force. As I am mostly arguing against Naturalists in this

essay, we can, for the sake of argument here, adopt the former position for now. But, I do believe that he believed he had a very real encounter with an angelic being. There is strong evidence that he questioned this event himself. He thought that it very well may have been an evil spirit. But, he was then forcefully convinced by his wife that the experience was from Allah. I believe that he took her testimony extremely seriously. I believe that she was a self-serving liar, but I see no incontrovertible evidence of that for him.

When we look at Paul, he fits in far more closely to that of these two cases than he does with the frauds as far as dishonesty is concerned. We have no evidence of his fraud, as already stated, and his letters everywhere read like a sincere and earnest man. His radical conversion also speaks to his truthfulness. Almost no scholar denies that this conversion happened. Now, some argue that Paul “converted” for self-serving reasons. He allegedly wanted the power and prestige he felt would come from becoming a Christian leader. The problem with this is that Paul throughout his letters describes all of the suffering he endured due to his conversion. This was something that could have easily been tested by his readers, especially his enemies. Yet, we see no fear of this from Paul.

Now, many try to say, “Ok fine. Paul was neither clinically deluded or a serial liar. But, this doesn’t make him correct in his assessments of what happened to him anymore than Gautama or Muhammad were correct. You yourself have to admit that Gautama and Muhammad were both quite mistaken despite their sanity and honesty.” None of this follows. The differences between Paul and Gautama are obvious. Paul was clearly not claiming to be a mere philosopher.

You may wish to argue that Paul and Muhammad are actually not all that different. Muhammad had an odd experience, and then had someone convince him that it was in fact from Allah. Paul had an odd experience on the Damascus road, and then had the apostles convince him the experience was from God. But, Paul is explicitly clear and adamant that he was not convinced about this experience from anyone else in Gal 1



(again, you can say that he was lying here, but you need to show some evidence of this first). Further, Khadija did not have any of the content of Muhammad's experience before he gave it to her. He gave her the content and she convinced him it was true. Paul did not give the content of the gospel to the apostles. They already had it. They only would have been convinced by Paul if his testimony was in line with the gospel.

Even further, there is no evidence that Paul was either food or sleep deprived when he had his Damascus Road experience. And why would his hallucination have told him to convert? Muhammad had already passionately converted to a very strict Monotheism. His hallucination worked within his existing paradigm, which is the normal pattern with hallucinations. Why would Paul's go so against his paradigm? All of this makes his experience almost entirely dissimilar to that of Muhammad on a number of very key points. Therefore, we have nothing outside of the Bible to indicate that Paul was deluded or was a huckster like we do with so many other early religious leaders, and not only the more well-known ones discussed above (Smith and Russell).

Next, we have two astonishing statements from Paul that make it near impossible to conclude that he was a blatant liar. These statements come from Gal 1:20 and 1 Cor 15:6. The implication in both of these statements is that Paul was not in any way afraid of people checking what he was saying. There would be no other reason for making such an emphatic statement in the Gal text, and there would also be no other reason for making the statement about how most of the 500 witnesses were still alive in the 1 Cor text. There are no known textual issues with either of these passages. There is no reason to think that these statements are later interpolations as both flow perfectly in the context and contradict nothing else Paul says in the slightest degree. Even if someone wishes to argue that one of these statements may be a later interpolation and we simply don't have any textual information to back that up, it is highly unlikely that both of these statements could fall under that category. Therefore, if Paul is willing to put himself on the line like this in one epistle, there is no reason to believe that he would be unwilling to do so in another. Thus, in all likelihood, both texts are fully authentic and Pauline.

Many especially object to the 1 Cor text. They say that the entire rest of the New Testament nowhere makes this same point. Such a highly significant event would have certainly been mentioned at another point in the New Testament. This argument does not wash. The core message concerning the resurrection of Jesus found consistently and repeatedly throughout the New Testament, throughout Paul himself, is that He was risen from the dead and that it was the primary role of the apostles to proclaim this to the world. That is always the focus. But, there were many other amazing things that happened that added apologetic value to the resurrection. Just days prior to the resurrection, there was darkness over the land, there was an earthquake, the temple curtain was torn in two, and many deceased people rose from their graves at the crucifixion. At the tomb, there were two angels that appeared when Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus appeared to two men on the Emmaus road that were not apostles. Thomas saw the wounds of Christ that he said he had to see in order to believe. Other examples could be given. These examples come from different authors and are not emphasized throughout the New Testament (most are only mentioned once). That in no way proves that they did not happen. Again, the focus was on the Lord appearing to the apostles and giving them their authority. Hence, in light of the entire New Testament, Paul's statement here is not odd at all.

Now, many may argue that I have now left my commitment to first prove things from the undisputed Pauline corpus. No, I am merely answering the above objection. Someone may say, "Ok, but maybe this objection holds within the undisputed Pauline corpus alone. Why don't we see another statement like this anywhere else in that corpus?" Paul's epistles are addressed to Christians. Thus, there is for the most part little reason for Paul ever to get terribly apologetic other than in the sense of refuting heretical groups. And there seems to have been little debate about the resurrection of Christ even among the heretical groups, so strong was that testimony from the early church from the earliest days.

It does not even seem that the Corinthians were too hung up about this doctrine, even though it assuredly gave them pause. What was confusing to them was how bodily

resurrection could ever be normative. They were probably more than willing to see the resurrection of Jesus as a mystery, but the idea that God would raise the bodies of all Christians unto glory on the last day was a lot for these people, steeped in Greek thought, to swallow. This explains the overarching discussion in 1 Cor 15. And with Paul being so detailed about the resurrection at the beginning of the chapter, he throws in this very important detail for good measure. Hence, Paul's statement is not the norm, but there is no good reason to question its authenticity.

If Paul were a liar, he would not challenge or even encourage people to test what he is saying. The last thing he would want is people snooping around Jerusalem where they could test out what he is saying. And remember, Paul had his enemies. That is very, very clear from the entire Pauline corpus, and Galatians and 1 Corinthians in particular. His enemies would have loved nothing more to report back to these churches that Paul was full of it and they could prove it. Now, many may object at this point that the last thing these enemies would want people to do is go snooping around asking the apostles about things because they were probably every bit as much at odds with the apostles as was Paul.

First, this does not explain why Paul makes such general statements. Certainly there were wealthy Christians at both Galatia and Corinth that could have had the means to travel to Jerusalem and around Palestine. Paul shows zero concern for anyone along those lines getting curious. Second, these false teachers could have said, "The original apostles have unfortunately apostatized. But, the fact that they do not support Paul's statements shows that he is a liar or is at least probably lying." Again, Paul shows no concern about either your average Christian or these heretical leaders taking him up on his challenges.

And any notion that *all* of the apostles (Paul included) were lying makes no more sense either. If this were true, Paul would be every bit as averse to people going to Jerusalem to check things out even if the apostles would have backed him up. They could have

asked about the 500 witnesses and sought to corroborate the details of the life of Jesus from many sources other than the apostles.

One final key point here. As was stated earlier, Paul says that he was a Pharisee who was quickly moving up the ranks. We also saw that there is nothing in his epistles that would seem to contradict this claim. While we looked at that in connection with the idea that he was deluded, it is worth repeating here in our discussion on whether or not Paul was a liar. This fact is another piece of very strong evidence that Paul was no liar.

We have now seen that Paul was neither deluded or a liar. He received his gospel directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, and this gospel was confirmed to be the same gospel as was preached by the original apostles and James the brother of Jesus.

With all of this in place, when only going by the undisputed Pauline corpus, it yields a number of key doctrines from Paul (we could examine many others). These doctrines are:

- 1.) Jesus was/is a full human being
- 2.) Jesus was/is truly an Israelite
- 3.) Jesus was/is descended from David
- 4.) Jesus was/is the Messiah
- 5.) Jesus was/is God in the flesh
- 6.) Jesus was/is the Son of God (the Father)
- 7.) Jesus' Spirit (in His divine nature) is the Spirit of God
- 8.) Jesus instituted communion at the Last Supper
- 9.) The very public trial and execution of Jesus
- 10.) The resurrection of Jesus
- 11.) The gospel of Jesus Christ that we are saved from the penalty and power of sin by faith in Jesus alone, based upon the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ

All of these doctrines can be easily proved from a small sampling of verses from the undisputed Pauline corpus: Rom 1:1-4; ch. 4; ch. 6; 9:5; 1 Cor 2:8; 11:23-26; 15:1-9; 2 Cor 3:16-18; Gal 4:4-5; Phil 2:4-11; and 1 Thess 2:14-16.

And this historical core that we have gleaned from Paul forms the historical core that pervades the entire New Testament. All of the rest of the historical details and doctrines are not in conflict with this core or with each other. This is not to say that there are no problematic texts in this regard. There certainly are. But, there is nothing that overtly and undeniably conflicts with anything else. I am happy to answer any attempted challenges to that assertion via my email. Therefore, there is no reason to question the historical reliability of the New Testament across the board. Even if scholars would still wish to say that they believe that this or that narrative is not historical, there would be no sound reason to question the New Testament overall from a purely historical vantage point at this juncture. Hence, the basic historicity of the New Testament has been established.

You may say, "But, even if one narrative from the NT can be shown to be historically inaccurate, that destroys the 'orthodox' doctrine of inerrancy." This again is to badly misunderstand my arguments and purpose in this essay. There is simply not enough evidence to say that anything is historically inaccurate in the New Testament, or the entire Bible for that matter, beyond all doubt. Therefore, if the philosophical case for Biblical Christianity establishes that worldview and destroys all other worldviews, that is that. All of the empirical data must be interpreted accordingly. My point in this essay is merely to say that we hardly have to sweep all of the historical data under the rug in order to do this.

Many, perhaps even most, mainstream scholars would not dispute #'s 1-3; and 8-10 in my list above. Most would not dispute the bulk of #11 (many would take exception to the *faith alone* aspect) either. Most would say that they do not believe 10-11, but they agree that Paul and the apostles believed this (or at least 11 in the main). Some argue that the apostles only believed in a spiritual resurrection, which turns 1 Cor 15 completely on its

head as that was the very thing the Corinthians would have had a problem with being applied to our resurrection, but they still say that the earliest Christians did believe in some form of the resurrection. That's almost 60% of those doctrines that would not be disputed by many, if not most, mainstream scholars as being the doctrines taught by Paul. As for the other doctrines, most only reject them as being the teachings of Paul because of their anti-supernatural bias. They have to explain away his belief in the resurrection (which we will address soon) and believe that the rest of these doctrines came later, and that we are reading them back into Paul as orthodox believers. Read the passages above. We are doing no such thing. If anyone wants to challenge the traditional exegesis of any of these texts, you can do so through my email and I will be happy to respond. You have my full permission to post or publish our correspondence.

It is very common in the skeptical scholarly world, both the mainstream and the fringe, to say that Paul says almost nothing about the life of Jesus. This is hogwash as the above doctrines make clear. Paul focuses on the most important doctrinal aspects to the life of Christ. Those doctrines made up the primary core of the apostolic testimony and gospel. It was not the purpose of the apostles to overly focus on the biography of Jesus, as important as that is. It should be remembered that #'s 8-10 all took place during the very end of Jesus' time on earth. And the rest of the numbers can only be fully understood in light of that time period. And that time frame is clearly the focus of all 4 of the Gospels. It takes up almost 30% of Matthew; almost 40% of Mark; almost 25% of Luke; and almost half of John. The idea that Paul and the Gospels wildly diverge from each other over emphasis is simply not true.

Many still object that it is odd that Paul does not discuss the sayings or miracles of Jesus more. Paul often, either directly or indirectly, refers to the doctrine of Jesus all throughout his epistles. His teachings on love, government, divorce, and the end times are all in line with Jesus. And those subjects were all major subjects that were the focus of Jesus according to the Gospels. Further, Paul does quote directly from Jesus in 1 Cor 11. Even further, Paul heavily focuses on the resurrection as we have seen, and that is the most important miracle of Christ. Past this, we can say that it is somewhat odd that

we do not see more quotes or miracle references, but this point hardly proves as much as the skeptical scholars like to pretend that it does. It is anomalous, but that is about it.

Many will argue that it still seems odd that the Gospel of John (which everyone [no matter how conservative] agrees came late in the 1st century)<sup>3</sup> is so much more advanced theologically than the Synoptics, especially Mark. They will say that if all of these core doctrines were present from the outset (allegedly going all the way back to Paul at the least), why are they not more explicit or at least clear in Mark? But, it really isn't all that odd at all. Philosophical presuppositions are being read into this fact at every point. It makes perfect sense that as the church came to realize that inspired biographies of Jesus were going to be needed for the church as the apostles continued to die out, the church would also want to start out with a very introductory Gospel. When we teach our children or new believers about the faith, we don't go right into the Trinity, the hypostatic union, the intricacies of atonement theory, etc. We start with the basics. We start with Bible stories. This is why Mark, the first Gospel to be written, is at such an introductory level. Then Matthew and Luke came along, and they were much more advanced. Finally, John came along and it is the most advanced by far.

Even further, it is not like John has Jesus acting in wildly out of character ways in comparison to the Synoptics, despite what is so often alleged to the contrary. Jesus does not go around in John screaming from the mountaintops, "I am God! I will smite all who don't accept this!" John does record a few instances of Jesus being far more clear about His full deity and other matters than do the Synoptics for the reasons I've stated, but even in those statements Jesus is not explicit. He was clear for sure, and the Jews understood Him, but He was still not explicit. Plus, Jesus was often clear enough in the Synoptics as well. He overtly forgives sins and the Jewish leaders understood what He meant by this every bit as much as they understood His "I Am" statements from John. Jesus is also repeatedly worshiped throughout the Synoptics and He never, not a single time, rejects this worship. And most of Jesus' in-depth teaching in John, over the course

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<sup>3</sup> Even those who believe that it was written before AD 70 still agree that it was the last Gospel to be written and was one of the last books of the NT to be penned. Further, they all agree that it was not written much before AD 70, thus placing it towards the end of the 1st century.

of a number of chapters (13-17), comes at the very, very end of Jesus' life in connection with His last meal with the disciples. It makes perfect sense that Jesus would go far more in-depth with the disciples here than He had at any time previously in His ministry. And the Synoptic authors did not feel it wise to include these discussions for the reasons I've highlighted.

As far as the rest of John before these crucial late chapters, most of the material covers when Jesus was in Jerusalem for the feasts. It makes perfect sense that Jesus would go more in-depth in Jerusalem as Galilee was a far less educated place. Further, John never tells us how many disciples went with Jesus for these visits. In all likelihood, He probably only took John and one or two others for these trips. Peter was probably left behind in Galilee during these trips so as to monitor the ministry in Jesus' absence. Thus, no strained explanations are required as to why these episodes are exclusively included in John.

None of this is a stretch. There is squat doctrinally in John that cannot also be found in Paul, our earliest witness to infant Christianity by far. Granted, John gives us far more material to support these doctrines than does Paul, but that is only because his work was in all likelihood polemical. He was probably writing against the growing influence of the proto-Gnostics. I understand that some have argued that John is actually a Gnostic Gospel, or at least the original parts of it were, but this theory is not supported by the evidence. The full deity and humanity of Jesus drip off of every page of the Gospel of John. The prologue makes this clear, and then the rest of the Gospel flows from this introduction.

As far as why Paul does not give us as much material on many of these doctrines as John, that was not his purpose. Almost all of his epistles are addressing other heresies or practical matters/concerns/problems. I am not even convinced that Colossians is being written in part to combat the proto-Gnostics. It seems to me, primarily because of chapter 2, that Paul again has the Judaizers in his sights. I think the statements on Christ's deity in that epistle are said for other reasons, as is the case in Phil 2. As far as



why we don't see more development in Paul along the lines of what we see in the Gospels, from more introductory material to more advanced material, Paul probably wrote all of his epistles within a fairly short time span (probably only about 10 years from 55-65) to already flourishing churches. These churches did not need him to start with basic stories about Jesus. They already knew them. This is not to say that none of these churches showed signs of immaturity. We all know that they did. But, this had more to do with sin and a failure to learn at a pace that was becoming of them. Neither of those facts changes the reality that they did not need to have Paul start from scratch with basic stories about Jesus.

With all that said, as the apostles began to die out, it makes perfect sense that the church would desire to have inspired written Gospels of the life of Christ, and would want the first one to be written for beginners. Thus, Mark.

With all of that clearly laid out, all of the attempted explanations that are from a Naturalistic perspective among those mainstream scholars who essentially agree with much of what I have said so far are untenable in the extreme. We are not reading Johannine theology back into Paul. Many texts from Paul have to be distorted and contorted beyond all recognition to make this theory work. Further, all of the alternative theories to the resurrection are laughable with the exception of the hallucination theory, and even it is quite a stretch. I could spend a great deal of time on this point, but for the sake of brevity, let us take one example of mass hallucination.

The Miracle of the Sun is probably the most well documented case of mass hallucination (a simple Google search will give you a plethora of information regarding the basic details of what took place that day). If this was not a case of mass hallucination, then it was a supernatural event (whether directly orchestrated by God or by Him allowing evil forces to perform it). If the latter is true, then Naturalism fails, and thus there is no reason to question the evidence in favor of the resurrection. Even if one were to say that it was done by forces of darkness, the resurrection would still need to be admitted. And the dark forces argument would run into a number of very serious

problems, most notably all that we have already discussed (and will further discuss) concerning the learning and character of Paul.

Getting back to the Miracle of the Sun, the purely Naturalistic explanations of this event do not solve all of the problems, such as many witnesses claiming that a sudden dryness to everything came about after a long rain. Therefore, the only viable Naturalistic explanation of this event is mass hallucination. And the key factor here is that the descriptions of the witnesses varied widely. Some said they saw nothing at all, which would contradict many of the Naturalistic explanations in the first place. For instance, if most of the people saw the light phenomena and this is to be explained by optical effects and retinal distortion, why did some see nothing at all?

The obvious reason for all of this is the fact that no two people are going to have the exact same hallucination. There may be many points of general overlap among many of the people because of suggestibility and the mass hysteria that led up to the event, but that is about it. Now, many may object here that if this is the case, why not explain all of this event as coming from suggestibility and mass hysteria? That would be a Naturalistic explanation with no need of help from any purported hallucination explanation. The problem with that explanation is that there were many unbiased people, such as reporters and soldiers that were deeply against the Catholic Church at the time, at the event that said they saw something. Those who saw nothing were the exception. Something truly odd happened that day that went beyond mere suggestibility and mass hysteria. The only Naturalistic explanation for this is mass hallucination. But, as said, when it came to countless peripheral details, the witnesses wildly diverged from each other.

Paul was not a stupid man, as we have demonstrated. He would have seen through all of this if the many witnesses, including the apostles, were giving testimony that was all over the map. And this hallucination theory cannot explain the missing body. If the body had been thrown to the dogs, or lost, or stolen, or the disciples went to the wrong tomb, surely he would have figured this out eventually. You can say all you want that Paul

probably did have some sort of bizarre experience on the Damascus road that then clouded everything he saw and heard after that; that everything was thereafter interpreted by him through the lens of that event. The problem with this, again, is that Paul was not dumb. If the testimony of all the witnesses was patchy and all over the place, and he was trusting that somehow it all fit together, he would hardly challenge or encourage people (possibly even his enemies) to go and check those sources.

You can say that maybe Paul never did check any of these sources himself, but only went by what others were telling him. Ok, fair enough. It just doesn't seem like Paul would take that risk with his enemies though. And I have shown that Paul seems every bit as reliable as any other major historical source that we have for any subject in the historical record. If we are going to pick him apart, why don't we pick apart everyone? Maybe Gettysburg never took place, but all of the generals got together and put together a giant conspiracy to finally end the war. I have no foolproof way to refute that, but everyone can see what a massive stretch that is.

Many may say that the Gettysburg comparison is quite a stretch. They may point out the photographic evidence, the diaries of the surviving soldiers, the men who never came home to loved ones. I agree that such a theory would be preposterous. That is the entire point. Conspiracy theories are lame in the extreme. But, the idea that this is so much different than the case with Jesus is simply not true. Even going by the 4 Gospels, they, according to even the most skeptical scholars, were written within a hundred years of the events of Christ. And as we have seen, the witness of Paul is far, far closer than that. Paul shows us that the Gospels are not legendary, as we have seen. Paul certainly did not take the core message that is later found in the Gospels as being legendary, as I have shown. Therefore, people could have gone to Jerusalem and Palestine in general and asked all about the core doctrines of the faith that we examined above.

Was Jesus a real man? If people said they never saw Him, but only heard about Him, that of course would be cause for suspicion. Was He actually a Gentile and His Jewish followers tried to paint Him as being of Israel so that they could proclaim Him as the

Messiah? This would be verifiable. Was He actually descended from David? Did anyone have any evidence of this? Did He claim to be God, either implicitly or explicitly? Certainly such an outlandish claim in the mouths of most people could have been verified. Did He give any evidence to back up that claim? Did He preach the same gospel as Paul and the other apostles? Was He actually publicly tried and crucified? Again, that last point could especially be *easily* verified. Was He actually raised from the dead? If not, where is His body now? The idea that Paul was too dumb to think of these things himself is absurd.

Many will argue that most people in Jerusalem and around Palestine would not be interested in helping Christians as they had become the spiritual enemies of mainstream Judaism. There are a number of problems with this objection. First, by the time Paul was writing there were a number of Christians in Jerusalem, Palestine, and throughout the Roman Empire. They may have been a small minority overall, but there were still many of them. You may say, "Well of course converts would confirm the Christian message!" Not all of them. Many of them could have said that they did not see the events that took place, but converted through the power of the Spirit. If all of the Christian witnesses gave testimony along these lines, that would render the veracity of the events in question very unlikely.

Second, as said before, there would have been hundreds of thousands of Jews in Jerusalem for the Passover the year Jesus was crucified. The idea that none of these Jews would be willing to talk to Christians is quite a stretch. This is not to say that they would have interpreted all of the events in a favorable light towards the faith. They certainly would not have done so. But, the idea that most would overtly lie about the events is also thoroughly untenable. They could have lambasted the fact that "Jesus" was a false prophet, who got what "he" deserved. Right there, that would have confirmed a number of our key teachings. It would have confirmed the existence of Jesus, that He was a man, that He was Jewish, and that He was very publicly tried and executed by crucifixion.

At that point, the Christian or any other interested person could have probed about what led up to the crucifixion. If Jesus did not actually have the reputation that is ascribed to Him by Paul, this could have easily been verified. If He was merely an apocalyptic preacher as so many scholars (including many of the mainstream ones) say, that would have shown that He did not claim to be the Messiah and/or God. If Jesus did have this reputation, the Jewish opponent would have ascribed that reputation to the “delusion” of Jesus or to the forces of evil allegedly working upon Him. All of this would have confirmed the vast majority of our key teachings. One could have also snooped around and figured out where Jesus was from, talked to some of His family, and ascertained if there was any actual concrete evidence of Him descending from king David or not. Finally, one could have also thoroughly investigated around Jerusalem to figure out what actually happened to the body of Jesus. I do not deny that many Jewish and Roman officials would probably not want to talk about this. But, the idea that someone could not find a single soldier that was willing to take some money to talk about what happened is not a sustainable argument. It would not have been difficult, as one example, to ascertain whether or not the body had been thrown to the dogs.

Third, not everyone who could have been searching for answers would need to be a believer or would necessarily need to disclose that information. Many people could have been curious about the Christian claims and gone in search of answers. The testimony of such people after their search would have been either invaluable or entirely damning to Paul. Again, the idea that he was too oblivious to think of this has no evidence behind it. The fact that Paul shows nill signs of worry on this front speaks volumes. And a curious Christian did not have to disclose that information. If asked, he would probably not want to lie, but the idea that he could not find a single blabbermouth willing to talk to him without him disclosing his faith is, again, not credible. I’m not saying this chatterbox would say positive things about Jesus, but again, even such a person could have confirmed most of the details of our key doctrines.

Thus, the argument regarding Paul is not much different than Gettysburg. He testifies to the reality of the resurrection and the supernatural character of Jesus. He testifies to the

fact that countless others, including the very brother of Jesus, could testify to the same. His testimony could have easily been checked and refuted. There is therefore no reason to buy these stretched arguments other than unmitigated anti-supernatural bias. It is no accident that many mainstream scholars, including Ehrman, basically admit that they cannot allow the possibility of the supernatural from the outset because, according to them, it can have no place in historical inquiry. Says who? That is not what historians thought for the vast majority of human existence. And countless historians do not accept this today. That is not a historical argument, it is a philosophical one, and a bad one at that. To say that the only thing that separates Gettysburg and the case for Christ is the supernatural element, and that element alone is enough to dismiss the case for the latter, is not historical analysis, it is sheer unvarnished bias.

In light of this historical reliability of the New Testament, we can conclude with a very high degree of certainty from a historical perspective (we of course are 100% certain from a philosophical and spiritual standpoint) that Jesus was and is God in the flesh. This is because the Gospels plainly record Him as claiming to be fully God, and vindicating this claim through His life, teachings, ministry, miracles, and especially His resurrection. And this was also the uniform testimony of the apostles as evidenced from the New Testament as a whole. Therefore, His testimony concerning the historical veracity of the Old Testament trumps any and all other pieces of data. And according to the record of the Gospels, and this fact is disputed by no one, Jesus believed the Old Testament Scriptures to be the word of God. Even those that do not believe Jesus existed, do not dispute that the Gospels say this about Jesus. They merely believe the Gospels are making things up. We have seen why their case on that front fails.

From all 4 of the Gospels we see the following basic testimony: Jesus often alluded to the Old Testament; He often directly quoted from the Old Testament; He often prefaced His quotes from the Old Testament by saying, "It is written;" and He held His interlocutors among the Jews, especially the leadership, responsible for knowing the Old Testament Scriptures. All of this implies that Jesus held to the full inspiration and authority of the Old Testament, its perspicuity, and that a basic canon existed among the

Jews at the time of Jesus that He Himself embraced. Further, while Jesus did on occasion use *sensus plenior*, there is absolutely no indication from the Gospels that Jesus did not employ a basically literal hermeneutic for the most part, or that He did not interpret the historical narratives of the Old Testament as history. Here are a few examples demonstrating this fact: Mt 6:29; 8:11; 12:1-3; 40; 42; 13:13-14; 24:15; 37-38; Mk 2:25; 10:6-8; Lk 10:26-28; and Jn 8:56.

Many will argue that we cannot sweep under the rug the many problems with the Old Testament from a purely historical vantage point. I am seeking to do no such thing. Previous paradigms are often turned over in the world of historical scholarship by new and better data. One archeological find can upend centuries of bad interpretation. No one is saying that the current data that is not favorable to orthodox Christianity should be spun. We should continue to be honest about the fact that at the present time this data is hard to explain from an orthodox perspective. But, the greater evidence always trumps the lesser. In this case, the testimony of God Himself (Christ in the flesh) must supersede the current data, which by its nature can never be exhaustive of all the facts.

Many will retort, "I mean ok, I guess. Even if I grant you that for the sake of argument, it still seems that we should see some historical evidence in favor of the Old Testament." I couldn't agree more, and this is precisely what we do see. Lots of it. Further, we also have the wealth of evidence showing how many times scholars have been wrong about certain elements of the Old Testament from a historical perspective. A summary of all of this evidence can be found within my essay on the basic evidence for Christianity that I referenced at the very beginning of this essay. Therefore, this is hardly a purely philosophical/theological argument I am making when I appeal to the full deity of Christ from a historical perspective. That argument is strongly supported by all of that evidence to which I just alluded.

As far as traditional authorship for the books of the Bible goes, once we have proven that Jesus held to the basic Jewish canon, its inspiration, authority, accuracy, and historicity, we are of course going to lean in the direction of traditional OT authorship.

Again, this does not mean we have to spin the evidence that makes this stance problematic. We can readily acknowledge and be honest about it. But as stated, the greater evidence must trump the lesser evidence.

As far as traditional authorship and the New Testament goes, the historical witness that we have already shown makes it clear that Jesus would build His church. Therefore, we must go with the community that was most in line with the basic doctrines we discussed above. And that community was plainly the proto-orthodox community. That is the title given by the scholarly community (including the skeptical ones) to the earliest version of “Christianity” that was most in line with the New Testament. Many try to argue that this version of “Christianity” won out and then decided upon the New Testament canon. But, we have seen that this is not so. The faith of Paul was the earliest faith of true Christians and can be traced back to Jesus Himself. This community over time landed on the New Testament canon. Therefore, the New Testament canon is that which was inspired by God. This community was also adamant about most of the traditional authors. Hence, we should be as well.

None of this is to say that the proto-orthodox community was perfect. I am not advocating anything so silly as the notion that it was a veritable Evangelical utopia. But, we should not expect that. The infant church was just that; it was in its infancy. Socrates did not come out of the womb dropping wisdom bombs. Mozart did not come out of the womb composing epic music. Jordan did not come out of the womb spinning a basketball on his finger. The infant church was often confused, persecuted, and fledgling. It did not even have the entire Scriptures at first. With that made clear, we would not expect Christ’s church to be so wrong over the long run about the canon and its basic authors.

This is also not to say that we have to adopt a Catholic/Eastern Orthodox view of the canon. I am not saying that the church authoritatively proclaimed what books were canonical or not. I am saying that it was led by the Spirit to recognize what books were canonical and which were not, in fulfillment of Christ’s promise to establish His church.



Thus, we should see that in the historical record and we do. My primary reason for accepting the New Testament Scriptures is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. The historical arguments are deeply secondary. But, they are there and that is not insignificant. Many ignorant folks may say that my logic would lead inexorably to the necessity of me accepting the Old Testament Apocrypha. The Apocrypha was disputed within the orthodox church all the way until the Reformation. So sorry, no dice.

None of this means that we have to accept traditional attribution in every instance. We do not have to say that Moses wrote Job. Such is a massive stretch. I understand that my opponents will say that Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is every bit as much of a stretch, but we all know that isn't so. I'm not denying the very real problems with positing Moses as the author of that body of work, but it is not the same as saying that he wrote Job. The same is true of Hebrews. The authorship of that work was questioned and debated throughout the early church period. Therefore, remaining agnostic about its authorship does not in any way contradict what I said about the basic historical testimony of Christ's bride.

With all of that made clear, if the Old Testament and the New Testament were both inspired by God, then all of it was written by God's prophets and apostles. Thus, we must lean in the direction of traditional authorship as much as is reasonably possible because the traditional authors were seen as prophets or apostles. For the works where we remain unsure, we can say that we know they were written by prophets (some were probably official prophets and some were probably unofficial). However, we will of course want to avoid having to say this as much as possible. Again, this is why traditional authorship must be preferred in light of the historical conclusion that both the Old and New Testaments were inspired by God.

In light of my approach, it should be clear by now that I don't agree with many of the approaches to authorship from many conservative scholars. For instance, Pitre in *The Case for Jesus* tries to argue forcefully for traditional authorship of the Gospels based on the initial historical data for that conclusion. I do not find this convincing or wise. I still

love his book overall and I often recommend it. But, that does not mean I agree with everything in it. It is rather annoying when I often recommend it to people online and then they point out problems with it as if that discounts the entire work or demands that I then have to agree with the problematic points. That is not how things work. I recommend works all of the time I do not fully agree with. For instance, I often recommend the classic by Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*. But, there are lots of minor problems with that work scattered here and there. The biggest substantive problem is his doctrine of incarnational Sonship (you can email me if you would like an explanation of that doctrine). None of that changes how thorough and excellent that work is, especially the historical portions.

Back to Pitre though, I maintain that we should adopt the traditional authors of the Gospels based on all that I laid out in this essay. And then much of the historical case he makes can be used as supplemental evidence of that conclusion. I see no reason to mount any massive offensive against the direct evidence that mainstream scholars use to say that they do not believe in traditional authorship concerning the Gospels. This evidence can be seen as merely problematic to orthodoxy and left at that. It does not definitively disprove traditional authorship, and thus there is no illogical reasoning in us accepting the tradition in light of all that I believe I have demonstrated.

As far as the problematic evidence goes concerning the historicity of the entire Bible, there exists no theory or paradigm that does not have to deal with problematic evidence. This is what the pop-Fundamentalist Atheist YT bozos never understand. Anyone who tries to tell you differently is either fibbing or is woefully ignorant. That is not the issue with my case. Problematic evidence cannot be avoided. And the fact remains that the historical evidence from the Apostle Paul is about as strong as it gets. It has to be twisted all over the place or merely dismissed in the name of anti-supernatural bias. Neither of those options are acceptable. That evidence is far, far stronger than any of the negative evidence against the historicity of the Bible. It is more recent and far more verifiable. Thus, the case that I have laid out based upon it is not in any way hampered or disproved by the inevitable problematic evidence that

accompanies any historical theory or paradigm. Therefore, the historicity of the entire Bible has been established.

Now again, by “established” here, I do not mean beyond all doubt. That is not how historical analysis works. We can establish very, very few things historically or scientifically beyond all doubt. What it means is that when all of the historical evidence is taken into account, the basic historicity of the Bible is the best explanation of all of the data. And when that conclusion is placed against the backdrop of the philosophical evidence for Biblical Christianity, we can indeed say with absolute certainty that the Bible is historically accurate across the board.

Along the way, I have already answered most of the major objections to the historicity of the Bible from both mainstream and fringe scholars. I cannot address every one of them in-depth or cover all minor ones either. Please email me if you would like me to cover any point in a far more thorough fashion. With that made clear, there is one more objection from the mainstream scholars I want to cover, and there are a few more major objections from the fringe guys that we need to examine as we close this essay. We will start with the one from the more mainstream skeptical wing.

Many mainstream scholars assert that the New Testament witness strongly points in the direction of Jesus being a failed apocalyptic prophet. If that is the case, then “he” was certainly not “god” in the flesh. Any and all other evidence that seems to point in the opposite direction (which would include all of my argumentation in this essay) would have to be discounted on these grounds. I have already answered the bulk of this objection on page 7 of my essay responding to Joseph Sommer. It can be found on my website. As far as the many “soon” references found throughout the New Testament, they are only referring to the fact that the tribulation could start at any moment, followed shortly thereafter by the second coming. And thus, we need to be ready. This is made clear by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. For those not ready, the return of Jesus will seem to come suddenly and out of nowhere, even though worldwide signs will have

preceded it. Unbelievers, including the vast majority of people that claim some version of “Christianity,” will interpret those signs away.

Now, let’s dive into the remaining major objections from the fringe wing. The first is that some of the fringe scholars point out how there is some scant evidence that some people believed that Jesus lived far, far before the traditional 27-33 range. Carrier sometimes makes reference to the existence of this evidence, but even he does not make much of it in the end. The evidence is sketchy and makes nonsense of Gal 1-2; 1 Cor 9; 15; and many other portions of Paul. Therefore, those who wish to make a big deal of this are part of the fringe wing of the fringe wing. Not a great place to be in my estimation.

The next objection is that there is not enough non-Christian evidence for Jesus, and that there are no written documents from eyewitnesses. Actually, there are both. The overwhelming vast majority of scholars accept a number of non-Christian sources that refer to Jesus, and the fringe guys work hard to explain these away. And we have seen that the church believed that Matthew and John were not only written by eyewitnesses, but by two of the original apostles (one who was part of Jesus’ inner circle within the 12 [John; he was so along with Peter and his brother James]). It is true that most scholars do not accept this latter point, but we have seen why there is good reason to accept the church’s testimony here.

Further, we can actually grant both of these points for the sake of argument and it does not affect much. There may be good reasons why there are no non-Christian sources. Perhaps the Empire destroyed them as part of its efforts to eradicate Christianity. And could not do so with the Christian Scriptures because the believers worked so hard to preserve these documents. As for eyewitnesses, maybe there were such sources and the Empire destroyed them as well for the same reason. The church may have not fought this as hard as it should have if these works were not inspired. And even if the Synoptics were written by unknown writers, we could say that they were humble unofficial prophets. As for John, perhaps this author was writing in the stead of one of

the original 12 because he knew this apostle and his testimony. As long as the church understood that this is what he was doing, there would be no dishonesty here. Such a person would have been an unofficial prophet. Obviously, such would be a terribly problematic view to take, but it would hardly be impossible or fatal to orthodox Christianity. I obviously would never commend this theory for the reasons explained earlier in this essay, but again, it would not be heretical. None of this (either the lack of non-Christian sources or the lack of eyewitness sources) would affect one iota the testimony of Paul.

The next objection is that “Jesus” was clearly a mythical figure. They point out the alleged similarities between Jesus and previous mythical/religious heroes to make their case. I do not believe this objection is nearly as strong as the fringe scholars make out, but I also don’t believe it is as weak as many fellow Christian apologists try to paint it. I am content with what I have said about it on pages 165-166 of my *A False Kind of Christianity*, and on pages 54-55 of my *The Idolatry of Progressive Christianity*.

One cannot simply sweep the historical case for Jesus under the rug because of the existence of this evidence. If a person came along that seemed to have superhero powers today or in the near future, we could not discount her existence merely because our culture has a long tradition of superheroes in our fictional entertainment. I understand what a bizarre statement that will sound like to many people. But, from a purely Naturalistic standpoint, there is no absolute reason to discount such a person existing down the line. We do not understand everything that is out there in the universe today. In fact, we are discovering a great deal of highly, highly credible information about UFOs. I am in no way saying these are actually aliens. I do not believe that. What I am saying is that whatever is behind much of this phenomena, has the ability to do things that we currently do not understand. The idea that someone could not find a way to tap into some of this down the line is not something that can be discounted from a purely Naturalistic standpoint. And we would not even have to posit a supernatural explanation either. We could say that Naturalistic forces are at work here from other parts of our universe.

I am not saying that such a person would need to wear a funny costume and have a fascinating backstory. I'm not saying that such a person would fit the superhero mold in all respects. But, even the most fringe of the fringe guys admit that Jesus is quite different from the Pagan heroes in many respects as well. The point I am making is that such a seminal figure could not be dismissed merely because she had some similarities with the superhero tradition. If it was a historical fact that she exists or existed, that would be that.

As far as her abilities being purely Naturalistic, someone may object that we could say the same thing about Jesus then. That is not the case. Jesus could make things exist from nothing, such as the feeding of the 5K. He could raise people from the dead, including Himself, who had been dead for well over a day. There could never be any Naturalistic explanations for such things.

Before plowing forward, I understand that many may mock my statements above on UFOs. Let me be very clear about this. I hate conspiracy theories. Like with a passion. I was raised by an extremely rationalistic and anti-supernatural father. To this day, I am still very skeptical about the vast majority of supernatural or odd claims. I entirely rejected the entire UFO phenomena until very recently. When my students tried to defend conspiracy theories in their papers, I often lambasted them. I do not believe 9/11 was an inside job. I do not believe in Bigfoot. I do not believe in mermaids. Trump lost (get over it). On and on I could go. I changed my mind on this topic because the evidence demanded that I do so. And this does not mean that I now think most of the claims to UFOs are legit. I reject 95% of them.

With all that said, I was in the military for a short time. Granted, I was only a chaplain, but I did get to know many other more regular position military personnel, including a number of high ranking ones. My mentor, despite also being a chaplain, who is still a very close brother in Christ to this day to me, was in the military for about 10 years and got to know many high ranking officials. My brother has been in the military for almost

20 years, and my cousin was in the military for almost 20 years. The military has recognized these UFOs, fully admitted their existence, and has made a great deal of the information surrounding them public now. I'm sorry, but they exist. Again, I am in no way saying that these are actual aliens. People often conflate UFOs with aliens, but this is simply ignorant. I don't fully know at this time how to explain this information. What is clear from a purely Naturalistic standpoint, is that something exists that has powers well beyond what we currently understand.

I fully understand how utterly unlikely a future person along the lines of what I have described is to exist. But, this misses the point. It is possible and such a person would indeed be a wholly unique person in history. That is precisely what is being said about Jesus. His existence is completely out of the norm historically in almost every way. This is why so many scholars feel so confident in either denying His existence or denying His supernatural character. The problem is that the evidence is not in their favor. And if a person existed in the future along the lines of what I described, as bizarre as that would be and as radically unlikely as that is, her existence could not be denied simply because it made us uncomfortable.

Getting back to the objection itself about the alleged precursors to Jesus, many of these fringe scholars try to add to it all sorts of utterly bizarre interpretations. Some say that the presentation given in Paul is that "Jesus" was solely a heavenly figure who put on a body suit while on earth. And that the earliest Christians never said where exactly "Jesus" landed on our planet. This is the level of wackiness that exists within the fringe wing. You are free to examine the texts I provided for the basic doctrines of the faith from Paul above to see how easily refuted this position is and why even the most skeptical mainstream scholars look at it as inane.

Moving to our next major objection from the fringe crowd, many people, and not only the fringe scholars under examination here (although they are certainly not excluded and are the focus of my attention here), say that the long history of humanity is the history of people making up religious nonsense. And they point out the fact that certainly as an

orthodox Christian I cannot deny that fact. I do not. Therefore, they say that it is far more likely that the same is going on with the original Christian tradition. In response, I do not believe that most people are pathological liars. That has simply not been my personal experience interacting and having close relationships with people from all over the world, from many different cultures and religious affiliations. And the psychological evidence does not seem to favor this either. I am not denying that people lie in small ways in moments of weakness for all sorts of reasons. But, I do not believe most people are interested in making up religious claims out of whole cloth. The evidence points in the direction that this is the domain of very, very few people in history.

As we have seen, most religions are started by people who are deluded or are lying, and such people are few and far between. There is no reason to believe that the stories behind the ancient “gods” and heroes developed any differently. If we had more information about these origins, we can be confident that the same sorts of problems we see with Gautama (never claimed to be able to do miracles), Muhammad, Smith, and Russell, would accompany these religious claims as well. But, we do not have these problems with Paul as we have seen. The fact that he is the major exception to the rule, is a strong indicator that the religion he is pushing is the exception to all the rest on the truth front as well. I am not here saying that Paul was the founder of Christianity. He obviously was not from my perspective. But, he is our earliest witness to the beliefs of the first Christians. Further, he was the apostle to the Gentiles, who eventually became the bulk of the church, and remain so to this day. Hence, his foundational role cannot be denied.

The final objection we will discuss that is often used by many people and scholars, but especially among the fringe scholars, is that extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof. This is not true. Often people do amazing feats and the proof of those feats is as mundane as anything else in life. Athletes often perform acts that make us in awe of what certain human bodies can do. What is the proof that these athletes are actually doing these acts? Often, it is our own eyes. Often, it is the testimony of others. And many times, it is a camera. None of those things are extraordinary. Or take the



explosion of Mount St Helens. That was an extraordinary once in a lifetime event. What was the evidence that it happened? Again, mostly eyeballs, human testimony, and video cameras. Much of the evidence was indirect, such as the massive amount of damage that was left in its wake. And that damage was extraordinary in its scope. But again, what was the proof of even this indirect evidence? The same basic things.

Michael Jordan was a truly remarkable athlete. For those not into sports, you may not fully appreciate this and that's fine. But, at the time, he could do things that were unseen and unheard of on the court. Yet, most of the documentation of this was as mundane as could be. It included video footage, the recording of stats, writing about it in sports articles, etc. When we look back on his career today, we use the basic historical tools that are available to us to do so. There is nothing extraordinary about this.

Now, I agree that extraordinary claims require extremely strong proof, but that is not the same thing as extraordinary. The claim is only extraordinary because the feat itself is extraordinary. However, substantiating the claim only requires substantiating the feat. And substantiating an extraordinary feat or event can often be so well documented through the most mundane of means that it basically cannot be denied. I have already given examples of this. Many will retort that this is basically all they mean by the principle. But, extremely strong proof has nothing to do with the term *extraordinary*. Joe Biden was sworn in as President. There was nothing extraordinary about this. Countless white Presidents have been sworn in throughout U.S. history. And he was/is hardly a very exciting candidate. I understand that many were ecstatic that Trump was out, and that's fine, but almost no one was pumped about Biden taken alone. But, the evidence that this event took place is about as strong as can be. So strong, that almost no sane person denies it.

However, the swearing in of President Obama, regardless of what you think about him politically (and I'm not a fan politically in case it sounds like I'm sucking up), was truly extraordinary for all of the reasons we know. But, the undeniable proof that this extraordinary event took place is basically on the same level (as far as strength of

evidence alone) as the evidence that Biden was sworn in. So, this entire principle misses the mark. Those who use it are being highly equivocal (in many cases I believe intentionally so) about how they are using the term in question. This is so they can make it seem like our burden of proof for miraculous claims is so high that it basically can never be met.

No one is saying that if Mr. Rando off the street comes up to you and yells in your face that his uncle was raised from the dead yesterday, you should automatically believe this. It is an extraordinary claim and thus requires extremely strong proof to show that he is telling the truth. However, extraordinary evidence is not required to prove that he is telling the truth or not. A simple investigation into the matter would reveal if he is telling the truth, is lying, or is insane.

If the evidence in favor of the Bible is extremely strong, then it should be believed. To fail to do so because of the supernatural claims of the Bible is nothing other than palpable bias. One can argue that all of my examples don't work because they constitute a false comparison. None of my examples of extraordinary feats or events were supernatural. Fair enough. But, if a famous person were raised from the dead today, we would go about verifying this through mundane means. To say that we need another miracle or something close to a miracle is nothing more than plain bias. It is to assume Naturalism from the outset and then rig the game such that Naturalism can never be disproven. Sorry, not gonna play that game. If multiple unbiased and highly qualified physicians testified to and documented this resurrection in the hospital, as one possibility, that would be more than enough to establish the point. And that evidence would be extremely strong, but it would not be extraordinary. The resurrection of this famous person itself certainly would be, but the evidence establishing the fact of this resurrection would not.

## **Appendix A**

In this appendix I want to address an objection that is found incessantly on the web. The internet is truly a very ugly place, full of unbounded arrogance and ignorance. This objection is not one that comes from the scholars, even the most fringe, because all of them understand how illegitimate it is. The objection is that we can never in any way use the Bible in order to prove any point of the faith. This is said to be engaging in circular reasoning. This is incorrect. If we said that the Bible is true because the Bible says it is true, that would be begging the question. That is not what is being said or done. The Bible is being used as a historical source to then supplement the overall case for the faith, which comes from multiple lines of evidence.

This objection is like saying that a person charged with a crime cannot testify in his own criminal case in court because this would amount to circular reasoning. If his attorney said that he was innocent because he says he is innocent, yes, this would be a vicious case of circular reasoning. But, that is not what any attorney worth his or her salt would ever do. It is entirely legal and legitimate philosophically speaking for the person charged to offer his own testimony if he chooses to do so. His testimony alone would not establish the point. However, the jury could decide if they found his testimony credible or not. They could do so through a number of means. They could look at his body language. They could assess how he answered questions from his attorney. And most importantly, they could assess how he held up under intense cross-examination. If they found him to be a credible witness after using these 3 key pieces of criteria, along with others, they could then say that his testimony is indeed very valuable in making the case for his innocence. None of this would constitute circular reasoning in the slightest; either by the person charged, his attorney, or the jury itself.

The same basic principles are being used when we use the Bible to prove elements of the case for our faith. We are not saying that Paul is telling the truth because Paul says he is telling the truth. We are saying that all scholars believe he existed. 99.99999% believe he wrote the undisputed letters from him (thus the reason they are given that name; they are virtually undisputed). 98-99% believe he wrote the undisputed letters, minus Philemon. Almost all scholars do not believe that he was deluded, other than his

Damascus Road experience. Almost all scholars do not believe he was a blatant liar. All of these conclusions are reached using the objective tools of historical analysis. None of these scholars come to these conclusions by presupposing the inspiration of the Bible. Most of them reject that position, and many do so with ferocity. From this baseline, we can, using those same tools, look at both internal and external evidence to see if these undisputed letters are giving us historically accurate information. From there, we can then make even more historical conclusions about the rest of the Bible. None of this is circular and there is a reason that scholars don't use this line of argumentation against us in the first place.

This is not to say that no skeptical scholar has ever accused a believing scholar or apologist of engaging in circular reasoning. Many have and in some cases these accusations are fully justified. My point is merely to say that no scholar rejects the idea that we can look at the Bible from a historical perspective. And when those historical conclusions are supportive of the orthodox position, that is that. Even those scholars who would still passionately argue against the overarching conclusions I have made in this essay would not disagree with that last point at the very least. They may strenuously disagree with my overarching deductions. Many would heartily (and that is putting it very gently) disagree with even some of my most baseline conclusions. But again, even the most fringe of the fringe scholars still agree with me that Paul existed; the Roman Empire existed; Israel existed; Herod existed; etc. They would say that all of this doesn't amount to much, but they would not deny that these minimal conclusions are in line with orthodox theology. And they would not disagree with the fact that all of these conclusions are not only supported by the extra-biblical data, but are supported by the biblical data itself (this is especially true concerning the existence of Paul himself).

## **Appendix B**

I did not include the objection that is the subject matter of this appendix in the main of my essay because if the general thrust of my essay is granted (and I am not remotely

naive about the fact that most skeptics will still not grant this), then this objection would fall under what I earlier called the anomalous category. It is hardly all that strong in itself. Even if I had no good answer to it, it would affect little as far as the overall case that I laid out in this essay is concerned. In the main of this essay, I stuck solely to those objections that if true, would indeed cut right to the heart of my overall argument. With all that stated, because this objection is so often spewed by ignorant lay Atheists online, I feel compelled to briefly discuss it here in this appendix.

This objection is that it makes no sense to say that an apostle would need to use sources. If traditional authorship is granted from my essay, this would not be a problem with John. But, the argument goes, even the vast majority of conservative scholars agree that Matthew used sources, especially Mark. And I don't disagree with that perspective myself either. Therefore, the question they ask is: why would an eyewitness apostle need to use sources?

This objection is not nearly as weighty as the objectors so confidently assume. I really don't even have to put it in the anomalous category, it is so weak in my estimation. Memories are hardly perfect. In fact, the more we learn about memory, the more we learn just how imperfect it is. While the ancients would not have been as aware of this as we are today, they certainly would have known this to an extent as a point of common sense. Therefore, checking one's memory against the work of another that was seen as extremely reliable by the universal church would have made sense in every respect. And this would have been all the more the case with Matthew in regard to Mark. If traditional attribution is accepted, then Mark was substantially the work of Peter. And Peter was in the inner circle of Jesus, whereas Matthew was not.

Now, many will fire back that this severely undercuts so much of the case from conservatives regarding the power of oral tradition in the first century, especially among Jews. It does not. Matthew could have been operating largely from this body of well-preserved oral tradition in the early church that he of course knew conformed to his memory and any notes he had taken, and yet still desired to consult any highly

respected written sources in the early church to make absolutely sure he was getting things correct. Again, this would have especially been the case if Mark largely goes back to Peter.