

# CHRISTIANITY: WHY I KNOW IT'S TRUE

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Why are you a Christian?

The Need

Preliminary Remarks

Terms

1. Atheism

2. Agnosticism

3. Theism (Worldview)

4. Deism (Worldview)

5. Religion

6. Metaphysical Naturalism/Materialism (worldview)

7. Logical Positivism/Scientism (methodological assumption)

A. Event causation

B. Agent causation

For more, read Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* and John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?*

“What would it take for you to believe something?”

## The Nature of Evidence

What atheists typically say...

Evidence is a thing the existence or characteristics of which are relevant and material (e.g., “strength” of the evidence). Federal Rules Evidence 401: *Evidence is relevant if: (a) it has any tendency to make a fact more or less probable than it would be without the evidence; and (b) the fact is of consequence in determining the action.*

A. Direct evidence

B. Circumstantial evidence

**THREE LAYERS OF PROBABILITY (2x Circumstantial and 1x Direct)****“QUITE PROBABLE” = GOD IS THE BEST EXPLANATION FOR...**

1. Why anything exists

2. Why the (multi-)universe had a beginning

For more on reading Genesis on this issue, read John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*

3. Why the universe has constants and quantities that are fine-tuned for life

4. Why there are “laws of nature”

5. Why the universe is “rational” and comports to mathematics perfectly

For more on #2-#5, read Hugh Ross, *Why the Universe is the Way it Is* and Geraint F. Lewis and Luke A. Barnes, *A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely Tuned Cosmos* and for an opposing view, read Leonard Susskind, *The Cosmic Landscape*

6. Why there is information in the cell (DNA)

Read Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell* and Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*

7. Why there are objective moral values

For more, read C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* and J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*

8. Why consciousness exists (apart from your brain)

For more, read Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*

9. Why the soul exists

For more on #8 and #9, read J.P. Moreland, *The Soul: How We Know It's Real and Why It Matters* and read Jeffrey Long, *Evidence Of The Afterlife* and idem., *God and the Afterlife* and for an opposing view, read Stanislas Dehaene, *Consciousness and the Brain: Deciphering How the Brain Codes Our Thoughts*

10. Why we appreciate beauty

For more on #1-#10, read Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Belief and Knowledge and Christian Belief*; William Lane Craig, *On Guard*; Keith Ward, *Why There Almost Certainly Is a God: Doubting Dawkins* and for an opposing view, read Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* and Victor J. Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis. How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist*

## **“VERY probable” = HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIANITY**

### **EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DATA**

Did it “really happen”? Most scholars are convinced when both external and internal evidence can be corroborated.

### **EXTERNAL DATA**

1. Manuscripts are ancient, written within a short time span of the “originals”
2. Manuscripts come from different regions of the Empire from different families of manuscripts (e.g., Alexandrian, Western, Byzantine), which take us back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century
3. It’s not the “telephone game”!
4. Earliest fragments corroborate later codices (e.g., Oxyrhynchus papyri of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cents.)
5. No major lacunae exist (except, perhaps, the ending of Mark)

6. “Variants” can be spotted, but fewer than 1% of variants are “meaningful and viable” and none of them affect doctrine (e.g., Mark 16:9ff; John 7:53-8:11; Mark 1:1)

For more on #1- #6, read Larry Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* and Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts, Revised Edition* and F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?*

## **INTERNAL DATA**

1. Gospels as ancient *bios* (“biography”)

For more, read Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* and Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels?*

2. Gospels record characters who are corroborated outside the NT



3. Gospels record locations that are corroborated outside the NT (80% of Josephus's locations are corroborated; 81% of the Gospels' locations are corroborated; cf. The Apocryphal Acts are worthless!) and other archaeological data

For more, read J. Randall Price and H. Wayne House, *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology: A Book by Book Guide to Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible* and two separate volumes by David Elton Graves, *Biblical Archaeology, Vol. 1: An Introduction with Recent Discoveries that Support the Reliability of the Bible* and *Biblical Archaeology: Vol. 2: Famous Discoveries That Support the Reliability of the Bible*

4. Names, and the frequency of names, fit perfectly for first-century Palestine (only)

For more, read Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*

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5. Gospels are not Pauline or later

6. Gospels fit the Jewish theological landscape of the Middle East (and first century) perfectly

For more, read Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* and N. T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did and Why He Matters* and Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*

7. The resurrection best explains several historical facts

For more, read N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* and Larry Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*

8. The overall narrative is quite plausible

For more, read Ben Witherington III, *What Have They Done with Jesus?: Beyond Strange Theories and Bad History--Why We Can Trust the Bible* and idem., *New Testament History: A Narrative Account*

**“VIRTUALLY CERTAIN” = RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

1. I’ve had religious experiences (cf. Rom 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:22; Gal. 4:6)
2. I know countless people who have had religious experiences