

WHY DO WE BELIEVE IN JESUS?

2 Peter 1:16-19

By Andy Manning

INTRODUCTION

Why do we believe in Jesus?

There are over 4,000 religions in the world. Why do we believe that Christianity is the right religion?

23.2% of the people in the world are Muslims, 15% are Hindus, 7.1% are Buddhists. That's billions of people who do not believe in Jesus. Are they all wrong?

There are many different gods that people believe in.

The ancient Greeks believed in twelve different gods, such as Zeus and Apollo.

The ancient Romans believed in many different gods. In fact, most of our planets are named after the Roman gods: Jupiter, the son of Saturn and the brother of Pluto and Neptune, Venus, Mars, and Mercury, just to name a few.

Even though they were commanded not to, the ancient Jews worshiped many gods: The goat-demons, Baal, Ashtoreth, Asherah, the star-gods such as Kaiwan, Molech, the queen of heaven, Sakkuth (the planet Saturn), and Milcom.

The ancient Egyptians believed in over 2,000 gods such as Ra and Osiris.

Today the Hindus believe in 33 million gods.

Are all of these different gods false gods, and Jesus the only true God? Why do we believe in Jesus rather than all of these?

Some people believe that our beliefs are merely the product of our culture. The people in China are Buddhist because most people they are from a Buddhist country. The people in India are Hindu because they are from a Hindu country.

The people from Israel are Jewish because they are from a Jewish country. We are Christians because we grew up in a Christian country. In other words, it is argued that we don't believe in Jesus because of the evidence, but because of the way we were raised.

So why do we believe in Jesus?

This is the question that Peter sets out to answer in **2 Peter 1:16-19**.

16 For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased!" 18 We ourselves heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain. 19 We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.ⁱ

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT JESUS?

Before Peter gets into why we believe, he starts out by stating five things that we believe about Jesus.

ONE: We believe Jesus is all-powerful. 2 Peter 1:16 "For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ....".

Christians believe that Jesus is all-powerful. He is omnipotent.

How is Christ's power displayed?

One: Jesus has the power to save (Rm 1:16). Jesus' blood has the power to rescue sinners from hell and give them eternal life.

Two: Jesus has the power over death (1 Cor 15:3-4). He was crucified, but death could not hold Him. He rose from the grave. On numerous occasions he raised the dead to life (John 11:43-44).

Three: Jesus has the power to create. He is called the Author of life (Acts 3:15). Everything was created by him, through him, and for him, and he holds all things together (Col 1:15-17).

Four: Jesus has power over nature. He walked on the water (Mt 14:25), and calmed a storm by simply saying, "Silence! Be still (Mk 4:39)!"

Five: Jesus has the power to heal. He gave sight to the blind, and speech to the mute, and hearing to the deaf; he made the lame walk; he cured the leper. People scrambled to simply touch the end of his robe, and whoever touched it was healed (Matthew 14:36).

Six: Jesus has the power to transform lives. Jesus transformed a crooked tax collector into a philanthropist -- Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10). He transformed the main enemy of Christianity into its leading missionary – the apostle Paul (Acts 9).

Seven: Jesus has power over sin. He did what no other human being has ever done. He lived an absolutely perfect life. He never sinned (2 Cor 5:21). He was tempted to sin just like us, yet he never did evil (Heb 4:15).

TWO: We believe Jesus is coming back. 2 Peter 1:16 "For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Greek word for "coming" here is *Parousia*. It is one of the three primary words used in the New Testament for the second coming of Christ.

Christ's return is called His revelation or revealing (Gr. *Apokalupsis*; 1 Cor 1:7-8); it is called His appearance (Gr. *Epiphaneia*; 2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14); and it is called His coming (Gr. *Parousia*; Jas 5:7).

This is a major theme throughout the New Testament; in fact, every book in the New Testament mentions the return of Christ except for 3 John.

We do not know when Christ will return, but we know what He is going to do.

One: Jesus is coming back to save. When Jesus comes back He will give Christians their new, glorified bodies; bodies that are eternal and without sin (Philippians 3:20-21).

Two: Jesus is coming back to judge (Mt 25:31-34). Everyone will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the sheep from the goats – the righteous from the unrighteous. The righteous will be given an eternal home in heaven. And the unrighteous will be given an eternal prison in hell.

Three: Jesus is coming back to reign. When He returns, He will sit on his glorious throne (Mt 25:31). Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2:10-11).

Four: Jesus is coming back to create. When Jesus returns, He will destroy the earth and recreate perfect new heavens and earth where we will live with Him forever (2 Pt 3:12-13; Rev 21:1).

THREE: We believe Jesus is Lord. 2 Peter 1:16 “For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Peter refers to Jesus as “Lord.” What does that mean? Two things.

One: Jesus Christ is God. He is deity. He is divine. He is the coeternal, coequal, second person of the Holy Trinity. The Son of God. The Greek word for “Lord” is *kurios* (koo-ree-os). When the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek a few hundred years before Christ’s birth (the LXX or Septuagint), they translated the two primary names of God – Yahweh and Adonai – as Lord. In your English Bible, in the Old Testament Yahweh is translated LORD, and Adonai is translated Lord. Lord is what the Jews called God in Greek. To say that Jesus is Lord is to say that He is God. And that is what Christians believe (Jn 1:1).

Two: Jesus Christ is Master. The Greek word *kurios* simply means “master.” It means boss. It means ruler. To say that Jesus is Lord means that He is Master; He is in charge and has the right to control every part of our lives.

FOUR: We believe Jesus saves. 2 Peter 1:16 “For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The name “Jesus” is very significant. In Greek it is *Iesous*. It is the equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua, or Yeshua. The name Jesus literally means “The Lord shall save.”

In Matthew 1:21 the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and commanded him give Jesus this name, “because he will save his people from their sins.”

Christians believe that Jesus is the Savior – the only Savior (Acts 4:12). That people are sinful and deserve eternal punishment, and the only remedy for man’s sin is the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Jesus died on the cross, in our place, for our sins, so that God’s justice might be satisfied, and so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God. And now, all those who repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord receive the gift of salvation.

FIVE: We believe Jesus is the Messiah. 2 Peter 1:16 “For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Christians believe that Jesus is the Christ.

“Christ” is not Jesus’ last name; it is His title. It is the Greek word (*Christos*) for Messiah (Hebrew *Mashiach*).

Christ/Messiah literally means “anointed one.” In the Old Testament “Messiah” was used to refer to prophets, priests, and kings, because they were anointed with oil, which symbolized their dedication to serve God.

But the Old Testament spoke of a future Messiah (Anointed One) who would be the ultimate and eternal prophet, priest, and king.

When Jesus started His ministry, the Jews were awaiting and looking for their Messiah. Still today, Jews are awaiting and looking for their Messiah. But the New Testament tells that us that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the anointed one.

One time Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” **Matthew 16:16** “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.’”

Jesus is all-powerful, Savior, Lord, Messiah, and He is coming back.

He is worthy of our greatest love; our strongest affection; our highest esteem; our perfect obedience; our wholehearted service.

There is nothing greater in life than Jesus. He is the only One who can satisfy. He is the only One who can save.

Don’t waste your life lesser things. Don’t waste your Christianity on lukewarm living. Don’t waste your eternity by rejecting the Author of Life.

WHY DO WE BELIEVE IN JESUS?

ONE: The eyewitnesses.

2 Peter 1:16 “For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”

Jesus is not a myth.

The word for “myths” was used to refer to mythical stories about gods and miracles (MacArthur Study Bible). The Greek word is *mythos*, a story without basis in fact.

Jesus is not a myth, or a legend, or a fable. Jesus is not in the same category as Santa Claus, or the Tooth Fairy, or the Easter Bunny, or Peter Pan. Jesus is a real person in history.

“Jesus is mentioned by two Roman writers of the first century, Tacitus (Annals 15.44) and Pliny the Younger (Letters 19.96), as well as by some Jewish writings of that period, including Josephus (Antiquities 18.3.3) and the Mishnah, a collection of traditions under compilation in Jesus’ day (NKJV Study Bible, 2035).”

No legitimate, respectable historian, Christian or not, believes that Jesus did not exist.

But why do we believe that Jesus was more than just a man? The first reason is that we have eyewitness testimony.

Peter uses the word “we.” “We were witnesses of his majesty.”

This is what separates Christianity from religions like Mormonism and Islam. Mormonism is based on the eyewitness testimony of one man, Joseph Smith. Islam is based on the eyewitness testimony of one man, Muhammad. There are no other eyewitnesses, and no physical evidence whatsoever to verify their testimonies.

Christianity is not like that. Christianity is based on the eyewitness testimonies of Peter, and John, and all of the apostles, and the hundreds of people who followed Jesus during His life, and who saw Him after His resurrection.

Paul records many of the eyewitnesses of the resurrection in **1 Corinthians 15:4-8** “4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. 6 Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers and sisters at one time; most of them are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one born at the wrong time, he also appeared to me.”

And the most amazing thing about these eye-witnesses was they were willing to die for their claim that they had seen Jesus alive. They either truly saw Jesus

alive, or they were willing to die for something that they knew wasn't true. Nobody dies for a lie.

Historians use what is called the Historical Method to investigate the past. These are criteria and tests that they use to determine what really happened. Let me give you two of them.

One: The Criterion of Multiple Attestation. "A recorded event is more likely to be historically accurate if it is recorded in multiple independent sources."

Christianity passes this test like nothing else in history. We have the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, written by 9 different authors, all pointing to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Two: The Criterion of Early Testimony. "Early accounts of an event are more likely to be accurate than later accounts, all else being equal."

Again, we have this with the New Testament. All of the books of the New Testament were written just a few years after Christ died. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written about thirty years after Christ's death. John was written a few years later. The book of Galatians was written just 14 years after Christ's death! According to the Historical Method, the information about Jesus recorded in the New Testament is reliable.ⁱⁱ

TWO: The Transfiguration.

2 Peter 1:17-18 "17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased!' 18 We ourselves heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with him on the holy mountain."

Peter is referring to an event in the life of Jesus called the Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-8; Lk 9:28-36).

What happened at the Transfiguration? On one occasion Jesus took three of His disciples – Peter, James, and John – up a high mountain by themselves. As Jesus was praying, He was transfigured (changed) in front of them. His face shone like

the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Then Moses and Elijah, two Old Testament heroes from centuries back, appeared and starting talking with Jesus about His departure (Greek *exodus*) – His death, burial, and resurrection. And if that was not enough to blow you away, God the Father spoke from heaven and said to Peter, James, and John, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

In 2 Peter 1:17-18, Peter explains the purpose of the Transfiguration.

One: To honor Jesus. 2 Peter 1:17 “For he received honor and glory from God the Father....”

To honor means to ascribe value to someone; to esteem them.

The Transfiguration showed that Jesus was of supreme value, that He was of the utmost importance.

He was visited by the two greatest personalities in the Old Testament; Moses, the author of the Pentateuch; and Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, a man who never died, but was taken up to heaven by God in a chariot of fire.

And then Jesus was honored when God the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased.”

Imagine if the President of the United States stopped by your house one day in limo, with his entire entourage, to visit with you. All your neighbors came out to watch. And the TV stations showed up to film it. And then in front of everyone the President said, “This is my friend; a great patriot; I am so proud of this guy!” Wouldn’t that make you feel honored – important, valuable? And wouldn’t it show others how important and valuable you were?

The Transfiguration honored Jesus. It showed His supreme value; His utmost importance.

Two: To glorify Jesus. 2 Peter 1:17 “For he received honor and glory from God the Father....”

To glorify can mean to give praise to someone. And that's what happened with the Transfiguration. God the Father praised Jesus in front of the apostles. He said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased."

Three: To confirm the deity of Jesus.

When God the Father said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased," He was confirming to the disciples that Jesus was the Son of God.

So from that day on, Peter, James and John heard it from the very mouth of God with their own ears, that Jesus is the Son of God.

When Jesus' face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light, He was peeling back His humanity for just a moment to show them His divinity. "I know that it looks like I'm just a normal man, but get a glimpse of this! There's much more to me than meets the eye!"

Four: To show that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Moses and Elijah were not just the two greatest personalities in the Old Testament, they also represent something significant.

Moses represents the law in the Old Testament, since he wrote the first five books of the Old Testament (the Torah, or law).

And Elijah represents the rest of the Old Testament, referred to as "the prophets," because he was the greatest of the prophets.

The presence of Moses and Elijah conversing with Jesus showed the three apostles that Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of the Old Testament. And this is what Jesus had been teaching them (Luke 24:27, 44).

We believe in Jesus because we have three eye-witnesses of the Transfiguration in which God the Father confirmed Christ as the Son of God.

THREE: The Old Testament prophecies.

2 Peter 1:19 “We also have the prophetic word strongly confirmed, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

We also believe in Jesus because of the Old Testament prophecies – “the prophetic word strongly confirmed.”

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies about the coming Messiah, and they are all fulfilled in Christ.

This is remarkable because the Old Testament was completed four hundred years before the birth of Christ.

Let me show you 12 examples of how Christ fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

One: The Messiah will be born of a virgin. **Isaiah 7:14** “Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.”

Two: The Messiah will reach both Jews and Gentiles. **Isaiah 42:6** “I am the Lord. I have called you for a righteous purpose, and I will hold you by your hand. I will watch over you, and I will appoint you to be a covenant for the people and a light to the nations,”

Three: The Messiah will be rejected by the Jews. **Psalms 118:22** “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

Four: The Messiah will perform miracles. **Isaiah 53:4** “Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains.”

Five: The Messiah will face opposition. **Zechariah 13:7** “Sword, awake against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate— this is the declaration of the Lord of Armies. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered”

Six: The Messiah will be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. **Zechariah 11:12-13** “12 Then I said to them, ‘If it seems right to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.’ So they weighed my wages, thirty pieces of silver. 13 ‘Throw it to the

potter,' the Lord said to me—this magnificent price I was valued by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw it into the house of the Lord, to the potter.”

Seven: The Messiah will die for our sins. **Isaiah 53:6** “We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the Lord has punished him for the iniquity of us all.”

Eight: The Messiah’s hands and feet will be pierced. **Psalms 22:16** “For dogs have surrounded me; a gang of evildoers has closed in on me; they pierced my hands and my feet.”

Nine: The Messiah will remain silent before His accusers. **Isaiah 53:7** “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth.”

Ten: The Messiah’s clothes would be divided among His executioners. **Psalms 22:18** “They divided my garments among themselves, and they cast lots for my clothing.”

Eleven: The Messiah will die among thieves. **Isaiah 53:12** “... he willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.”

Twelve: The Messiah will be buried in a rich man’s grave. **Isaiah 53:9** “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully.”

“Peter Stoner, professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College, calculated the probability of one person fulfilling just eight of the major prophecies concerning Messiah. His conservative estimate was one chance in 100,000 trillion (1 with 17 zeros). In another calculation, Stoner used 48 prophecies and arrived at the conservative estimate that the probability of 48 prophecies being fulfilled by one person is 10 to the 157 – that’s 1 with 157 zeros trailing behind it. Could Jesus have fulfilled all of the Messianic prophecies by chance? Not a chance (John Ankerberg, *Apologetics Study Bible for Students*, 744)!”

One time D. James Kennedy was having a conversation with an unbeliever. He was an articulate, well-educated man. Dr. Kennedy said, “I would like to read some statements to you about someone and have you tell me assuredly, without question, about whom I am reading.” Dr. Kennedy proceeded to read twenty-four statements, and then asked the man who he was reading about. The man said Jesus. Dr. Kennedy asked, “Is there any doubt in your mind.” The man said no, he could only be reading about Jesus. Then Dr. Kennedy proceeded to tell him that those 24 statements were actually verses from the Old Testament, which was completed 400 years before Christ was born.ⁱⁱⁱ

CONCLUSION

Why do we believe in Jesus?

Not because our parents believe in Jesus. Not because we live in the West.

We believe in Jesus because of eyewitness testimony. Because of the Transfiguration. And because of the fulfilled prophecies.

ⁱ Christian Standard Bible, 2017.

ⁱⁱ I learned about the Historical Method from Nabeel Qureshi in his book *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, p. 159

ⁱⁱⁱ “Christ: The Fulfillment of Prophecy,” By D. James Kennedy, in *If God Made the Universe, Who Made God?*, p. 80.