

Excerpts from “THE CASE FOR CHRIST” by Lee Strobel

**A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus
“Lee uses his background in law and journalism”**

INTRODUCTION *Reopening the Investigation of a Lifetime*

Had the collection of evidence really been thorough? And which explanation best fit the totality of the facts? Finally I allowed the evidence to lead me to the truth, regardless of whether it fit my original presuppositions.

For much of my life I was a skeptic. In fact, I considered myself to be an atheist.

I had read just enough philosophy and history to find support for my skepticism – a fact here, a scientific theory there, a pithy quote, a clever argument. Sure, I could see some gaps and inconsistencies, but I had a strong motivation to ignore them: a self-serving and immoral lifestyle that I would be compelled to abandon if I were ever to change my views and become a follower of Jesus.

ANSWERS FOR AN ATHEIST

my wife ... Leslie ... had become a Christian.

I was pleasantly surprised – even fascinated – by the fundamental changes in her character, her integrity, and her personal confidence. ... so I launched an all-out investigation into the facts surrounding the case for Christianity.

I applied the training I had received at Yale Law School as well as my experience as legal affairs editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. And over time the evidence of the world – of history, of science, of philosophy – began to point toward the unthinkable.

JUDGING FOR YOURSELF

If you were to dig deeper – to confront your preconceptions and systematically seek out proof – what would you find?

In this quest for truth, I've used my experience as a legal affairs journalist to look at numerous categories of proof – eyewitness evidence, documentary evidence, corroborating evidence, rebuttal evidence, scientific evidence, psychological evidence, circumstantial evidence, and yes, even fingerprint evidence.

If you were selected for a jury in a real trial, you would be asked to affirm up front that you haven't formed any preconceptions about the case. You would be required to vow that you would be open-minded and fair, drawing your conclusions based on the weight of the facts and not on your whims and prejudices. You would be urged to thoughtfully consider the credibility of the witnesses, carefully sift the testimony, and rigorously subject the evidence to your common sense and logic. I'm asking you to do the same thing while reading this book.

... take it seriously. If Jesus is to be believed – and I realize that may be a big *if* for you at this point – then nothing is more important than how you respond to him.

CONCLUSION: THE VERDICT OF HISTORY

What Does the Evidence Establish – And What Does It Mean Today?

I had asked questions and analyzed answers with as much of an open mind as I could muster. Now I had reached critical mass. The evidence was clear. The one remaining issue was what I would do with it.

... I began listing the questions ... some of the key facts.

CAN THE BIOGRAPHIES OF JESUS BE TRUSTED?

... they reflect eyewitness testimony and bear the unmistakable earmarks of accuracy.

DO THE BIOGRAPHIES OF JESUS STAND UP TO SCRUTINY?

... the gospel writers intended to preserve reliable history, were able to do so, were honest and willing to include difficult-to-explain material, and didn't allow bias to unduly color their reporting. The harmony among the gospels on essential facts, ... In short, the gospels were able to pass all eight evidential tests.

WERE JESUS' BIOGRAPHIES RELIABLY PRESERVED FOR US?

The modern New Testament is 99.5 percent free of textual discrepancies, with no major Christian doctrines in doubt.

IS THERE CREDIBLE EVIDENCE FOR JESUS OUTSIDE HIS BIOGRAPHIES?

“We have better historical documentation for Jesus than for the founder of any other ancient religion,” said Edwin Yamauchi (scholar).

DOES ARCHAEOLOGY CONFIRM OR CONTRADICT JESUS' BIOGRAPHIES?

Archaeologist John McRay said there's no question that archaeological findings have enhanced the New Testament's credibility. No discovery has ever disproved a biblical reference. Archaeology has established that Luke, who wrote about one-quarter of the New Testament, was an especially careful historian. Concluded one expert, “If Luke was so painstakingly accurate in his historical reporting [of minor details], on what logical basis may we assume he was credulous or inaccurate in his reporting of matters that were far more important, not only to him but to others as well?” Like, for instance, the resurrection of Jesus.

IS THE JESUS OF HISTORY THE SAME AS THE JESUS OF FAITH?

In sum, the Jesus of faith is the same as the Jesus of history.

WAS JESUS REALLY CONVINCED THAT HE WAS THE SON OF GOD?

Ben Witherington III (expert) said, “Did Jesus believe he was the Son of God, the anointed one of God? The answer is yes.”

WAS JESUS CRAZY WHEN HE CLAIMED TO BE THE SON OF GOD?

Well-known psychologist Gary Collins said ... “I just don't see signs that Jesus was suffering from any known mental illness,” he concluded. In addition, Jesus backed up his claim to being God through miraculous feats of healing, astounding demonstrations of power over nature, unrivaled teaching, divine understanding of people, and with his own resurrection, which was the final authentication of his identity.

DID JESUS FULFILL THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD?

... the Incarnation – God becoming man, the infinite becoming finite – stretches our imagination ...

... the New Testament specifically confirms that Jesus ultimately possessed every qualification of deity, including omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, eternity, and immutability.

DID JESUS – AND JESUS ALONE – MATCH THE IDENTITY OF THE MESSIAH?

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, prophets foretold the coming of the Messiah, or the Anointed One, who would redeem God's people. ... Jesus, and only Jesus throughout history, matched this prophetic fingerprint. This confirms Jesus' identity to an incredible degree of certainty.

WAS JESUS' DEATH A SHAM AND HIS RESURRECTION A HOAX?

Dr. Alexander Metherell concluded Jesus could not have survived the gruesome rigors of crucifixion, much less the gaping wound that pierced his lung and heart. Even if Jesus had somehow lived through the torture, his ghastly condition could never have inspired a worldwide movement based on the premise that he had gloriously triumphed over the grave.

WAS JESUS' BODY REALLY ABSENT FROM HIS TOMB?

William Lane Craig presented striking evidence that the enduring symbol of Easter – the vacant tomb of Jesus – was historical reality. In fact, nobody, not even the Roman authorities or Jewish leaders, ever claimed that the tomb still contained Jesus' body. Instead they were forced to invent the absurd story that the disciples, despite having no motive or opportunity, had stolen the body – a theory that not even the most skeptical critic believes today.

WAS JESUS SEEN ALIVE AFTER HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS?

Concluded British theologian Michael Green, “The appearances of Jesus are as well authenticated as anything in antiquity ... There can be no rational doubt that they occurred.”

ARE THERE ANY SUPPORTING FACTS THAT POINT TO THE RESURRECTION?

J. P. Moreland's circumstantial evidence added final documentation for the Resurrection. First, the disciples were in a unique position to know whether the Resurrection happened, and they went to their deaths proclaiming it was true. Nobody knowingly and willingly dies for a lie. Second, apart from the Resurrection, there's no good reason why skeptics like Paul and James would have been converted and would have died for their faith. Third, within weeks of the Crucifixion, thousands of Jews began abandoning key social practices. They believed they risked damnation if they were wrong. Fourth, the early sacraments of Communion and baptism affirmed Jesus' resurrection and deity. Fifth, the miraculous emergence of the church in the face of brutal Roman persecution.

FAILING MULLER'S CHALLENGE

I'll admit it: I was ambushed by the amount and quality of the evidence that Jesus is the unique Son of God. The cumulative facts and data pointed unmistakably toward a conclusion that I wasn't entirely comfortable in reaching.

Frankly, I had wanted to believe that the deification of Jesus was the result of legendary development in which well-meaning but misguided people slowly turned a wise sage into the mythological Son of God. But while I went into my investigation thinking that this legendary explanation was intuitively obvious, I emerged convinced it was totally without basis.

Now consider the case of Jesus. Historically speaking, the news of his empty tomb, the eyewitness accounts of his post-Resurrection appearances, and the conviction that he was indeed God's unique Son emerged virtually instantaneously.

The gospels, attesting to Jesus' teachings, miracles, and resurrection, were circulating within the lifetimes of Jesus' contemporaries, who would have been only too glad to set the record straight if there had been an embellishment or falsehood.

Concluded William Lane Craig, “The time span necessary for significant accrual of legend concerning the events of the gospels would place us in the second century A.D., *just the time in fact when the legendary apocryphal gospels were born.* These are the legendary accounts sought by the critics.”

There was simply nowhere near enough time for mythology to thoroughly corrupt the historical record of Jesus, especially in the midst of eyewitnesses who still had personal knowledge of him.

I realized that my biggest objection to Jesus also had been quieted by the evidence of history.

... in face of this overwhelming avalanche of evidence in the case for Christ, the great irony was this: it would require much more faith for me to maintain my atheism than to trust in Jesus of Nazareth!

IMPLICATIONS OF THE EVIDENCE

- **First, Has the Collection of Evidence Really Been Thorough?**

Yes, ... experts who could state their position and defend it with historical evidence ... I wanted facts. I challenged them.

- **Second, Which Explanation Best Fits the Totality of the Evidence?**

... my legend thesis, to which I had doggedly hung for so many years, had been thoroughly dismantled. What's more, my journalistic skepticism toward the supernatural had melted in light of the breathtaking historical evidence that the resurrection of Jesus was a real, historical event. In fact, my mind could not conjure up a single explanation that fit the evidence of history nearly as well as the conclusion that Jesus was who he claimed to be: the one and only Son of God.

The atheism I had embraced for so long buckled under the weight of historical truth. ... a stunning and radical outcome ... But it was, in my opinion, a decision compelled by the facts.

All of which led me to the “So what?” question. If this is true, what difference does it make? There were several obvious implications.

- **If Jesus is the Son of God, his teachings are more than just good ideas from a wise teacher; they are divine insights on which I can confidently build my life.**
- **If Jesus sets the standards for morality, I can now have an unwavering foundation for my choices and decisions, rather than basing them on the ever-shifting sands of expediency and self-centeredness.**
- **If Jesus did rise from the dead, he's still alive today and available for me to encounter on a personal basis.**
- **If Jesus conquered death, he can open the door of eternal life for me, too.**
- **If Jesus has divine power, he has the supernatural ability to guide me and help me and transform me as I follow him.**
- **If Jesus personally knows the pain of loss and suffering, he can comfort and encourage me in the midst of the turbulence that he himself warned is inevitable in a world corrupted by sin.**
- **If Jesus loves me as he says, he has my best interests at heart. That means I have nothing to lose and everything to gain by committing myself to him and his purposes.**

- If Jesus is who he claims to be (and remember, no leader of any other major religion has even pretended to be God), as my Creator he rightfully deserves my allegiance, obedience, and worship.

THE FORMULA FOR FAITH

... my own verdict in the case for Christ was clear. However, ... I realized that I needed more than an intellectual decision. I wanted to take the experiential step ...

John 1:12 “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

The key verbs in that verse spell out with mathematical precision what it takes to go beyond mere mental assent to Jesus' deity and enter into an ongoing relationship with him by becoming adopted into God's family: believe + receive = become.

1. Believe

I was trained to respond to facts, wherever they lead. For me, the data demonstrated convincingly that Jesus is the Son of God who died as my substitute to pay the penalty I deserved for the wrongdoing I had committed.

... there was plenty of wrongdoing. I was a liar, a cheater, and a deceiver.

My heart had shrunk to the point where it was rock hard toward anyone else. My main motivator was personal pleasure – and ironically, the more I hungrily sought after it, the more elusive and self-destructive it became.

When I read in the Bible that these sins separate me from God, who is holy and morally pure, this resonated as being true. ... it became obvious to me that I needed the cross of Jesus to bridge the gulf. “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

2. Receive

Every other faith system I studied during my investigation was based on the “do” plan. In other words, it was necessary for people to do something.

Christianity is unique. It's based on the “done” plan – Jesus has done for us on the cross what we cannot do for ourselves: he has paid the death penalty that we deserve for our rebellion and wrongdoing, so we can become reconciled with God.

I didn't have to struggle and strive to try to do the impossible of making myself worthy. Over and over the Bible says that Jesus offers forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift that cannot be earned. It's called grace – *amazing* grace, unmerited favor. It's available to anyone who receives it in a sincere prayer of repentance.

Yes, I had to take a step of faith, as we do in every decision in life. But here's the crucial distinction: I was no longer swimming upstream against the strong current of evidence; instead I was choosing to go in the same direction that the torrent of

facts was flowing. That was reasonable, that was rational, that was logical. What's more, in an inner and inexplicable way, it was what I sensed God's Spirit was nudging me to do.

So on November 8, 1981, I talked with God in a heartfelt and unedited prayer, admitting and turning from my wrongdoing, and receiving the gift of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus. I told him that with his help I wanted to follow him and his ways from here on out.

... some people feel a rush of emotion at such a moment; as for me, however, there was something else that was equally exhilarating: there was the rush of reason.

3. Become

After taking that step, I knew from John 1:12 that I had crossed the threshold into a new experience. I had become something different: a child of God, forever adopted into his family through the historical risen Jesus. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

To paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr., I may not yet be the man I should be or the man, with Christ's help, I someday will be – but thank God I'm not the man I used to be!

... so radical was the difference in my life ... our 5year-old daughter ... said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy." ... she had seen up close the influence that Jesus can have on one person's life.

Looking back nearly two decades, I can see with clarity that the day I personally made a decision in the case for Christ was nothing less than the pivotal event of my entire life.

REACHING YOUR OWN VERDICT

Now to you.

Perhaps after reading expert after expert, listening to argument after argument, seeing the answers to question after question, and testing the evidence with your logic and common sense, you've found, as I have, that the case for Christ is conclusive.

The believe part of John 1:12 is firmly in place; all that's left is to receive Jesus' grace, and then you'll become his son or daughter, engaged in a spiritual adventure that can flourish for the rest of your life and into eternity. For you, the time for the experiential step has arrived, and I can't encourage you more strongly to take that step with enthusiasm.

On the other hand, maybe questions still linger for you. However, I trust that the amount of information reported in these pages will at least have convinced you that it's reasonable – in fact, imperative – to continue your investigation.

Resolve that you'll reach a verdict when you've gathered a sufficient amount of information, knowing that you'll never have full resolution on every single issue. You may even want to whisper a prayer to the God who you're not sure exists, asking him to guide you to the truth about him.

... I do feel a strong obligation to urge you to make this a front-burner issue in your life. Don't approach it casually or flippantly, because there's a lot riding on your conclusion. As Michael Murphy aptly put it, "We ourselves – and not merely the truth claims – are at stake in the investigation." In other words, if my conclusion in the case for Christ is correct, your future and eternity hinge on how you respond to Christ. As Jesus declared, "If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24).

Those are sober words, offered out of authentic and loving concern. I cite them to underline the magnitude of this matter and in the hope that they will spur you to actively and thoroughly examine the case for Christ.