

“The Word of Life”

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Have you ever heard news that sounds too good to be true? Years ago, I used to get emails offering me great fortune. I'm not sure when this started, but it was around 2004, and I got several of these messages. I guess I was particularly lucky. Here's an example:

Dear Friend,

I am Barrister Rotimi Adams, the personal attorney to Mr. James Watson, herein after referred to as my client, a national of your country, who until his death was a major crude oil contractor with the federal government of Nigeria.

My client and his entire family were involved in a fatal motor accident along the Sagamu express road, sparing none of the occupants of the vehicle. I have since then made several enquiries to your Embassy, in a bid to locate any relation of my client, and these efforts of mine have not been productive. I then decided to trace his last name over the Internet, and came across your name that is why I have contacted you to assist me in securing the money and property left behind by my client before they are declared as unclaimed and unserviceable by the bank where they have been lodged for safekeeping. I am particularly interested in securing the funds lodged with Global Trust Bank Plc, totaling fifteen Million, United States Dollar (USD15M). This is because the said Bank has issued a notice to me, unequivocally instructing me to produce the Next of Kin/Beneficiary to the said account within the next ten official working days, or have the account confiscated.

I solicit your consent to enable me produce you as The Next of Kin to my deceased client, since you both bear the same last name. The funds will then be transferred to you as the beneficiary and shared according to a proposed sharing pattern /ratio of 70:30, i.e. 70% for me and 30% for you. I will provide all the necessary legally obtained documents to back up any claim we make regarding this process, and will just require your understanding and cooperation to enable us achieve success within a legitimate arrangement, eliminating any liability resulting from any breach of the prevalent laws.

Your urgent response will be highly appreciated; you can as well forward to me your Telephone number immediately for more discussion.

Best Regards,
Barrister Rotimi Adams¹

¹ I didn't actually save the original emails. I found this example at https://www.expertlaw.com/library/consumer/spam_email_fraud3.html and slightly edited it.

That's great news. I could get 30 percent of \$15 million—that's \$4.5 million! Of course, all I have to do is transfer the good barrister some funds in order to pay the fees for acquiring the necessary documents. But it's totally worth it. After all, what's an investment of a thousand or two dollars when I'm getting millions of dollars back?

Of course, this is a scam. And we know it is. You'd have to be pretty naïve not to see that. And I should know, because I fell for it twice. But by the third time I received a message like that, I was wise to those scammers. All kidding aside, we know that such a message is too good to be true. We don't have reason to trust Barrister Adams, or whoever it was that wrote that email.

That email promised great wealth, but the message of the Bible promises us something far greater. The Bible promises us not a few million dollars. The Bible promises us eternal life, a life with God in a perfect world, a life that never ends.

Today, we're starting to look at a letter that is most certainly written by the apostle John, one of Jesus' original followers. Towards the end of the 1 John, he tells us the reason for writing this letter. In 1 John 5:13, he says, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life." In the Gospel of John, which uses very similar language, John writes,

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

John wrote his Gospel, his biography of Jesus, so that we would believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, and that we would have life by believing in him. And John wrote his first letter so that his readers would know for certain that they have eternal life.

John tells us that by having a proper relationship with Jesus, we will live forever. It's hard to top that claim. It's the best news. And John is so sure about his message that he writes, in chapter 4: "We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (v. 6). John says that those who disagree with him don't know God. That, too, is a big claim. In chapter 2, he writes, "No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also" (v. 23). So, not only do you have to listen to John to know God, but you must agree with how he describes the Son, Jesus, in order to have the Father. No one who holds a different view of Jesus

than the one John presents has a right relationship with God. No one who denies John's view of Jesus has eternal life.

A lot is riding on these claims. If John is right, one's eternal destiny is on the line. John wrote this letter because people who had different views of Jesus left the churches that he wrote to. John wanted to reassure his readers about who Jesus is and how they could know they have eternal life. Having a right view of Jesus is essential. That's not because God is going to give us a final exam at the end of our lives, as if we'll be tested on some theological knowledge. No, the idea is that if you have a real relationship with Jesus, you'll know what he's like, just as if you're actually married to your spouse, you'll know what he or she is like. Jesus isn't a wax nose. He has a particular identity. And the gospel, the good news about who Jesus is and what he's done for us, isn't something we can edit. This message has a particular content. Different religions say very different things about God and Jesus. We need to know who the real Jesus is.

So, how do we know that John is right? How do we know his claims are true? Why should we trust John when we can't trust Barrister Adams?

One reason we should consider John's claims is that he says he was an eyewitness to the life of Jesus. And, unlike Barrister Adams, John had little to gain by making that claim. He certainly didn't stand to make \$10.5 million. As a Jewish man living in the Roman Empire, John's claims about Jesus would put him at odds with both Jews who weren't Christians and Romans who weren't Christians. In fact, it's hard to understand why John and the other apostles would make the claims they do unless they believed what they were writing was true.

But before we get ahead of ourselves, let's read the beginning of John's first letter. I'll read 1 John 1:1–4:

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— ² the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.²

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

John begins by talking about “the word of life.” That could be the message of the gospel, the good news about who Jesus is and what he’s done. But John says that he and others touched the word of life. So, he must be referring to Jesus himself. Jesus *is* the word of life. You can’t separate the man from the message about him. This is very similar to the beginning of John’s gospel:

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ⁴ In him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:1–5).

In both his Gospel and his first letter, John talks about “the beginning.” In 1 John, it seems like he could be talking about the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. But in the Gospel, he’s talking about *the* beginning. In this Gospel, John says that Jesus is God and that he created the universe. Christianity says that Jesus is both God and man, that he is the one who created the universe and everything in it, and that he is the one who gives eternal life.

So, why should we believe this claim?

That’s a complex question, and I won’t be able to do justice to it fully this morning. The evidence is too complex to get into fully, but I’ll try to give us reasons why it’s rational to believe that Christianity is true. After all, if it’s not true, it’s useless. If you read the New Testament, you can very easily see that the writers are stating quite clearly that Jesus is *the* truth (John 14:6). They say that if he didn’t rise from the grave in a real, indestructible body, Christianity is worthless (1 Cor. 15:12–19).

There are many reasons why people believe in a certain religion. Often, people accept their parents’ faith, or the faith of those around them. Of course, other people rebel against their parents’ faith, and their own faith (or lack thereof) seems to be a reaction against their upbringing. Some people are attracted to a religion because they like what it teaches. They are attracted to a certain vision that a religion paints. But if a religion isn’t true, there’s no good reason to embrace it.

If I didn’t think John and others saw Jesus during his life, could testify to his death, and saw and even touched Jesus after he rose from the grave, I wouldn’t be a Christian. I was thinking about this recently: What would have to be true for me to stop being a Christian? In other words, what would be a defeater for the Christian faith?

I don't think science can disprove Christianity. I don't believe the Bible is a book of science. There are ways to harmonize the Bible with various scientific paradigms without doing damage to the text of the Bible. That doesn't mean that scientists are always right. Not at all. But I don't think science has the tools to disprove Christianity.

Some people assume that the miraculous and the supernatural don't exist, and that since Christianity is built on these things, it's false. But, again, I don't think science disproves miracles. To disprove miracle claims, you would have to be omniscient. Think about it: To say, "A dead man has never risen from the grave two days after being killed," is to say that you have known what has happened to every single dead person from the dawn of time. Of course, dead people stay dead. Unless. Unless God exists. If God exists, anything is possible. If God exists, he can bring the dead to life, just as he made a universe out of nothing. We have a number of lines of evidence for the existence of God as well as philosophical arguments that show that the idea of God is rational and coherent. So, miracles are certainly philosophically possible. And we have numerous miracle claims throughout history, from around the world. Many people from all times and places have claimed to have witnessed miracles.³ Though I have never personally witnessed a miracle, I have every reason to believe that miracles are possible.

I think there are only two ways that you could disprove Christianity. One is to show that the Christian system of thought, or the Christian worldview, is incoherent or self-contradictory. Having studied the Christian worldview extensively, I think it's a system of thought that doesn't contradict itself. By itself it makes sense. And I think it makes sense of life. But that doesn't necessarily mean Christianity is true. It could all be a lie. If someone could prove that the Gospels and the other New Testament documents were simply made up, and if Jesus didn't rise from the grave, then I would have to abandon Christianity.

So, should we trust John and his claim that he and others can testify that Jesus is the Son of God, that he is God, that he is the Creator, and he is the one who can give eternal life? I think we have many good reasons to trust John. But in order to see why Christianity is unique as a religion, we have to consider how it differs from other religions.

Before we do that, let make one important comment: We live in a pluralistic society, in which there are many religions. And we live in a relativistic culture, which often refuses to state

³ For an in-depth treatment of miracles, see Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

that any religion is true. But the fact is that they can't all be true. They say very different things about God and Jesus. They say very different things about how to be reconciled to God and have an eternal reward. The things they say are contradictory. It is impossible that they're all true. I believe that Christianity is true and that other religions are false. That doesn't mean I have to be hateful or disrespectful to people with different views. I can love other people even when I say, "I think you're wrong." That's true tolerance.

So, my point is that we shouldn't belittle other religions. My point is that they can't all be true. We should, at the least, know the story of their origins. To see why we should trust that the Bible is God's message to us, we should look at how other religions have made claims about their holy books.

First, let's consider the story of how Islam started. The story is about a man named Muhammad, living in what is now Saudi Arabia. "Muhammad was in the habit of taking regular periods of retreat and reflection in the Cave of Hira outside Mecca. This is where the first revelation of the Qur'an came to him in 610 CE, when he was 40 years old."⁴ Muhammad was alone in the cave the first time the angel spoke to him, but subsequent times others were with him. According to one account,

When he experienced the 'state of revelation', those around him were able to observe his visible, audible, and sensory reactions. His face would become flushed and he would fall silent and appear as if his thoughts were far away, his body would become limp as if he were asleep, a humming sound would be heard about him, and sweat would appear on his face, even on winter days. This state would last for a brief period and as it passed the Prophet would immediately recite new verses of the Qur'an. The revelation would descend on him as he was walking, sitting, riding, or giving a sermon, and there were occasions when he waited anxiously for it for over a month in answer to a question he was asked, or in comment on an event: the state was clearly not the Prophet's to command. The Prophet and his followers understood these signs as the experience accompanying the communication of Qur'anic verses by the Angel of Revelation (Gabriel), while the Prophet's adversaries explained them as magic or as a sign of his 'being possessed'.⁵

According to another account, after Muhammad experienced the first encounter with the angel, "Mohammed [*sic*] came down from the mountain sick with fear, thinking he might have

⁴ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, "Introduction," in *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), xi.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xiv.

been possessed by a jinn, an evil spirit.”⁶ Both of those accounts, by the way, were written by Muslims.

Muhammad then spoke these revelations to others, who wrote down the revelations. They were only collected into the form of the Qur’an after Muhammad’s death in 632. The Qur’an is very different from the New Testament for a few reasons. One, the revelation came from an angel to one man. Two, Muhammad is not really the author of the Qur’an. He relayed a message, but, at least in the story of Islam, he is not considered an author. And, three, the content of the Qur’an ranges from the time of the Old Testament, including many stories of Old Testament figures like Adam, Noah, Moses, and David, to the time of the New Testament, including many mentions of Jesus. But these revelations were given many centuries after the events took place.

The New Testament, on the other hand, is different. One, it was written by at least eight people and probably nine. Two, it was authored by people, who were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to write what he wanted written. That’s why we can talk of John writing his Gospel or a letter, or Paul writing letters. They are truly authors, but they were doing exactly what God wanted them to do, so that we also say their words are God’s words. And, three, the authors of the New Testament claim to be eyewitnesses or people associated with eyewitnesses. For example, at the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, he makes it clear that he wasn’t an eyewitness to Jesus, but he interviewed eyewitnesses and wrote up his own orderly account of Jesus’ life (Luke 1:1–4).

The Qur’an talks about Jesus but it says he isn’t the Son of God. It says,

People of the Book [in this case, Christians], do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word directed to Mary, and a spirit from him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a ‘Trinity’—stop [this], that is better for you—God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust.⁷

To Muslims, Jesus is just a great prophet, but he is not divine.

The Qur’an also claims Jesus wasn’t crucified. Therefore, there is no resurrection. The Qur’an curses “The People of the Book” (in this case, unbelieving Jews) for killing prophets. These are the people who said, “We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.”

⁶ Tamim Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World through Islamic Eyes* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 19.

⁷ Qur’an 4.171 in Haleem’s translation.

But then, in a parenthetical note, it says, “They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them; those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition; they certainly did not kill him—No! God raised him up to Himself. God is almighty and wise.”⁸

The problem with this is that the Qur’an was delivered six hundred years after Jesus was crucified and raised from the grave. Even people who are skeptical about Jesus’ identity know that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. That is one of the most agreed-upon facts in the ancient world.⁹

So, the Qur’an gets Jesus wrong. It seems that the Qur’an is a bit of a mash-up of Jewish and Christian doctrines, including later Jewish legends. It seems to contain information from false Gospels, which were written beginning in the late second century, well after all the eyewitnesses to Jesus had died.¹⁰

Here is the point: The Qur’an is wrong about Jesus’ death. That is certain. And it says very different things about God than the New Testament does. It says different things about salvation, or how to achieve eternal life. Which one would you trust: Eyewitness testimony written by multiple sources within a lifetime of Jesus’ ministry or supernatural revelations directed through one man six centuries later?

Now let’s move on to the origins of Mormonism. Their major prophet, Joseph Smith (1805–1844), lived twelve hundred years after Muhammad. In 1823, in upstate New York, Smith was allegedly visited by an angel named Moroni. The angel told Smith about golden plates, upon which was engraved “the fullness of the everlasting Gospel.” He also told Smith about two stones, the Urim and Thummim, which were “seer stones” that could help Smith translate the

⁸ Qur’an 4.157–158 in Haleem’s translation.

⁹ In fact, one strategy for demonstrating the truth of Jesus’ resurrection is to rely on three facts that most scholars, whether they’re believers or not, agree to be true. The first is that Jesus of Nazareth, a remarkable figure who was a wise teacher and possibly a miracle worker, was crucified by Pontius Pilate during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius. The second is that after Jesus died, his followers claimed to have seen him alive again. They claimed that the resurrected Jesus appeared to various groups of people for a number of days. The third is that Saul of Tarsus, otherwise known as the apostle Paul, came to believe in Jesus even though he had previously been an unbelieving Jew and an opponent of Christianity. Given these three facts, it’s hard to explain how they could have occurred unless Jesus actually rose from the grave. Jesus’ followers could be lying, but they couldn’t have experienced a group dream or hallucination. But why would they lie? Lying would bring persecution to them from both Jews who rejected Jesus and Roman Gentiles who said that Caesar, not Jesus, is Lord. And since Christians refused to worship the many gods of the Greco-Roman world, they were often ostracized. And why would Paul lie? He was an enemy of Jesus. He would have no reason to hallucinate a vision of Jesus or to fabricate stories of Jesus.

¹⁰ For more information, see James R. White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur’an* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2013), 229–247.

contents of the plates into English. The angel told Smith that when he got these plates and stones, he could only show them to a few people. If he showed them to others, he would die. Then, a vision was given to him that indicated the location of the plates. However, he wasn't allowed to take the plates, which were buried in the ground in a stone box, until 1827.¹¹

Between 1827 and 1829, Smith “translated” the “reformed Egyptian” hieroglyphics on the plates by using a “seer stone.”¹² Smith would look at the seer stone, placed at the bottom of a stovepipe hat (in order to block out any light), to “translate” the contents of the golden plates. He dictated what he saw to his disciple, Oliver Cowdery, who sat on the opposite side of a curtain from Smith. Shortly before *The Book of Mormon* was completed, Smith claims that John the Baptist appeared in person.¹³ After translating *The Book of Mormon*, the angel told Smith to return the golden plates.

There are a number of problems with *The Book of Mormon*. One great problem has to do with its original language, the so-called “Reformed Egyptian” language. In another Mormon book, *The Pearl of Great Price*, we're told that one of Smith's associates, a man named Martin Harris, brought samples of this “Reformed Egyptian” language to a professor at Columbia University, named Charles Anthon. (Martin Harris, by the way, is listed in *The Book of Mormon* as one eleven total witnesses who saw the golden plates.) According to *The Pearl of Great Price*, Anthon said that Smith's translation was correct and that the portion not translated yet contained Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic characters.¹⁴

That sounds impressive. Who wouldn't want to have their translation of an ancient language verified by a professor? But there's a problem. A man named E. D. Howe learned of Smith's claim and wrote a letter to Anthon about it. Anthon wrote a letter back to Howe, dated February 17, 1834. In the letter, Anthon stated that the story was “perfectly false.” He wrote, “Upon examining the paper in question, I soon came to the conclusion that it was all a trick, perhaps a *hoax*.” He then described the writing on the paper as a jumble of Greek and Hebrew,

¹¹ This information is taken from “The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” located at the beginning of *The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).

¹² It should be noted that Smith used seer stones to attempt to locate treasure. He had a reputation for being involved in magic and treasure hunting. See Richard Abanes, *One Nation under Gods* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003), particularly chapter 2, “Moroni, Magic, and Masonry.”

¹³ See “Joseph Smith—History,” 1:68–73, in *The Pearl of Great Price*.

¹⁴ “Joseph Smith—History,” 1:63–65, in *The Pearl of Great Price*.

as well as Roman letters inverted or placed sideways, arranged in columns. He wrote, “[I] well remember that the paper contained anything else but ‘Egyptian Hieroglyphics’.”¹⁵

As if that were not enough, *The Book of Mormon* has other problems. It has long passages copied out of the King James Bible and though it claims to recall the history of people living in the Americas between 600 B.C. and A.D. 421, archaeologists have not located any of these places and have no evidence of these peoples. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, a professor at Brigham Young University, was given the task of finding archaeological evidence for *The Book of Mormon*. “After twenty-five years of dedicated archaeological research, Ferguson found nothing to back up the book and, in fact, he called the geography of *The Book of Mormon* ‘fictional.’”¹⁶

Now, let’s compare those stories with the story of how the New Testament was written. The New Testament wasn’t delivered on plates by an angel. It wasn’t dictated by angel. The story is that the eternal Son of God became man and lived in Galilee. He taught in unforgettable, unparalleled ways. He called twelve disciples, who witnessed his teachings and the miracles he performed. At least one of them saw him die, and they all (minus Judas, who was replaced by Matthias) saw him alive after he rose from the grave. Some of them would later write down biographies of Jesus. Others would write letters to churches. At least two other people who weren’t eyewitnesses—Mark and Luke—wrote their own biographies. Mark knew the apostle Peter and Luke knew the apostle Paul. Luke seems to have interviewed other eyewitnesses, including Mary. And Luke wrote the history of the early church called the book of Acts. When they wrote, they were under the direction of the Holy Spirit, who caused them to write what he wanted written. The Holy Spirit used their experiences, knowledge, and personalities to write what he wanted written.

¹⁵ E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: n.p., 1834), 270–272; quoted in Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, gen. ed. Ravi Zacharias, managing ed. Jill Martin Rische and Kevin Rische (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2003), 212–213.

¹⁶ Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 216. The historical problems of Mormonism go from bad to worse. Joseph Smith claimed that he acquired the *Book of Abraham* in 1835. In that year, Smith’s church purchased several papyrus scrolls supposedly written by Abraham and Joseph, patriarchs who appear in biblical book of Genesis. (These men would have lived well over three thousand years earlier.) Smith translated these scrolls, which contained important information regarding Mormon doctrines such as pre-existence. However, the truth of the matter is that the scrolls Smith acquired were copies of common Egyptian funeral texts. In 1912, several Egyptologists examined Smith’s “translations” and found them to be “fraud,” “absurd,” “a fabrication,” and “undoubtedly the work of pure imagination.” These judgments were based on Smith’s drawings of the scrolls. However, the actual scrolls themselves were destroyed in a fire in Chicago in 1876. Therefore, Mormons could claim that Smith’s translation, based on the scrolls, not the drawings, was accurate. However, papyri fragments of these scrolls reappeared in New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1967. These fragments showed that Smith’s critics were right all along. We have proof that Smith was a fraud. See Abanes, *One Nation under Gods*, 449–55.

At least eight different people wrote the 27 books of the New Testament. They didn't write it all together, in the same time and in the same place. It's not as if they stayed together in a room in Jerusalem and churned it out in a few months. They wrote in different places (Judea, Antioch, Rome, Corinth, etc.), at different times (roughly 48–96), to different churches and/or individuals in different locations. James White, an author who has written on many topics related to the Bible, calls this “multifocality.”¹⁷

We should observe that the apostles and their associates had no political power. Their own writings admit that sometimes they disagree with each other. Paul says that he had to correct Peter in Galatians 2:11–14. In Acts 15:36–41, we're told that Paul and Barnabas had a “sharp disagreement.” One can suppose that the apostles as well as men like Mark and Luke conspired to fabricate a story, that they made things up to get a following or to gain power. But they had everything to lose, including persecution by Jews and Gentiles. And they don't always present themselves in most flattering light. In the Gospels, Peter is often presented as headstrong and foolish. Yet he was the leader of the apostles. Why would anyone make that up?

Here are some positive reasons to believe that the New Testament is trustworthy. One, the documents of the New Testament were written early, within the first century A.D. As opposed to the Qur'an, which reports on events that took place hundreds and even thousands of years earlier, the New Testament reports on events that took place only years or decades earlier. Two, the books of the New Testament were written by eyewitnesses (Matthew, John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude) or those who associated with eyewitnesses (Mark, Luke, and perhaps the author of Hebrews). Three, the New Testament documents were written by multiple men, who didn't always agree in life, but who agreed in their writings. Four, we have thousands of manuscripts of these books, some dating to as early as the beginning of the second century. That may not seem very impressive until you start comparing manuscript evidence with other ancient books. Five, archaeological evidence corroborates the New Testament. That doesn't mean that every event described in the New Testament has left an artifact. But historical places and the names of people have been verified. It used to be that people thought that John's Gospel was written far too late to be written by one of Jesus' followers. But archaeological discoveries have shown that John's knowledge of Jerusalem, was very accurate. And this is something that only someone who was familiar with the city prior to its

¹⁷ James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009), 82.

destruction in the year 70 could know.¹⁸ Six, if we can trust that the New Testament is basically historically accurate, then we can see that Jesus often referred to the Old Testament as God’s word (John 10:35; cf. Matt. 19:4–5; 22:43), as an unbreakable (John 10:35), and unalterable document (Matt. 5:17–20). He clearly viewed the Old Testament as authoritative (Matt. 4:1–11). He told his disciples that his words would never pass away (Matt. 24:35). He told them that after he had ascended to heaven, he would send the Holy Spirit to teach them all things and cause them to remember what he said (John 14:26; 16:13–14).¹⁹

If you want to know more about why you can trust the New Testament to be true, you can visit our website, wbcommunity.org, and find some things I’ve written under the “Articles” section, which is under the “Media” tab.²⁰ I would also recommend a couple of books. One is *Cold Case Christianity*, by an LA homicide detective named J. Warner Wallace.²¹ Wallace has solved many previously unsolved murder cases, cases that went “cold.” He has been featured on *Dateline NBC*. He was an atheist in his mid-30s when he decided to investigate the “case” of Christianity. He treated the Gospels like evidence reports and after doing a lot of research, he came to believe they’re true. He also has a website: <http://coldcasechristianity.com>. Another book that I would recommend is Tim Keller’s *The Reason for God*.²² He has a chapter on the trustworthiness of the Gospels, but his book also handles common objections to Christianity and presents a positive, and even beautiful, case for the faith.

¹⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 182–183. See also J. Warner Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity*: (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013), 20

¹⁹ One could also add a seventh reason to believe the New Testament. Where the Qur’an and *The Book of Mormon* seem to protest too much about their truthfulness, the New Testament, while affirming its truthfulness, has an actual ring of truth to it. It doesn’t sound like a fable or a myth. If you compare it with false Gospels from the second and third centuries, such as *The Gospel of Peter*, you can see what I mean. (You can read that document here: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelpeter-brown.html>.) C. S. Lewis, who was a professor of literature, once made the following observation:

I have been reading poems, romances, vision literature, legends, and myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know none of them are like this. Of this [gospel] text there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage . . . or else, some unknown [ancient] writer . . . without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern novelistic, realistic narrative . . . (C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967], 155, quoted in Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* [New York: Riverhead, 2008], 110).

²⁰ <https://wbcommunity.org/articles>. See, “Why We Can Trust the New Testament,” <https://wbcommunity.org/can-trust-new-testament>; “The New Testament versus The Book of Mormon and the Qur’an,” <https://wbcommunity.org/new-testament-versus-book-mormon>; and “Evidence for the Resurrection,” <https://wbcommunity.org/resurrection>.

²¹ J. Warner Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity*: (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013).

²² Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead, 2008).

Not only is the story of how the New Testament was put together different from the origin stories of the Qur'an and the Book of Mormon, but the message is very different. In Christianity, there is a clear distinction between God and human beings. The same can't be said of Mormonism, which teaches that God was a man and that men can be gods. But Christianity, as opposed to Islam, also teaches that we can truly know God and call him our Father. Christianity says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). There is no equivalent concept in Islam. In fact, John tells (1 John 1:3) that we can have fellowship with one another *and* with God. We can be united to God and have a real, personal relationship with him. That's why John says that his letter makes his joy—and our joy—complete.

And both Islam and Mormonism have a system of merit. Islam says all our works will be weighed on scales.²³ Those whose good works outweigh their bad works and who confess that "there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger" will enter Paradise. Mormonism focuses on obedience. In the words of Joseph F. Smith, the sixth President (or Prophet) of the LDS Church, "Every blessing, privilege, glory, or exaltation is obtained only through obedience to the law upon which the same is promised. If we will abide by the law, we shall receive the reward; but we can receive it on no other ground."²⁴

But Christianity is different. It says we can't earn our way to God (or become gods and earn our own planets). Christianity says that God came down to us. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The God who is love sent his Son. That is, God the Father sent God the Son, by the power of God the Holy Spirit. Jesus fulfilled the perfect life that God required; he is the only truly righteous person. Yet his righteousness is credited to all who trust him. (We'll learn more about what that faith looks like as continue to study 1 John). And Jesus died for us. His death satisfied God's just demands. All who trust in him have eternal life. This is a gift given to us by a God who comes to us. It is not something we can earn from a God who is either distant and tyrannical or who is, in the end, fundamentally not all that different from us.

If you're a Christian, I hope this message gives you confidence to know that we have good reasons to believe that Christianity is true. I hope that you can use elements of this message when

²³ Qur'an 21.47; 23.99–104; 99:6–8

²⁴ Joseph F. Smith, "Eternal Life and Salvation 441," in *Gospel Doctrine*, 11th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1959), https://archive.org/stream/gospeldoctrine009956mbp/gospeldoctrine009956mbp_djvu.txt.

you try to share the gospel with others. And if you're not yet a Christian, I would encourage you to do your homework. Be like Jim Wallace and examine the evidence. I would be glad to meet with you, answer any questions you have, and give you resources.

The story of Christianity is unique. I think it's more beautiful than the story of other religions. And, more importantly, it's true.