

A person is standing on the peak of a rocky mountain. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is dramatic and inspiring.

10 *Reasons to* Believe

In the Existence of God

In the Bible

God Became a Man

Christ Rose from the Dead

God Offers the Perfect Gift

Answering Questions about Faith

10 *Reasons to* Believe

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We live in a world filled with voices proclaiming religious ideas—ideas that often conflict. It is not a small issue, for it impacts our eternal destiny. How can I know whom to believe? What to believe? These are the questions on which our destiny forever hangs. How can I know if God exists or if the Bible is trustworthy? Is there reliable evidence that the claims of the Bible can be believed?

This booklet gathers together evidence on issues of faith that deserves examination. Evidence that can be trusted. Evidence that points to answers to the questions of eternity. In the midst of the heart's pursuit of something to believe in, it is evidence that is worth considering.

Bill Crowder

10 *Reasons to* Believe

In the **Existence of God**

1. THE INEVITABILITY OF FAITH.

Everyone believes in something. No one can endure the stress and cares of life without faith in something that cannot ultimately be proven. Atheists cannot prove there is no God. Pantheists cannot prove that everything is God. Pragmatists cannot prove that what will count for them in the future is what works for them now. Nor can agnostics prove that it is impossible to know one way or the other. Faith is unavoidable, even if we choose to believe only in ourselves. What is to be decided is what evidence we think is pertinent, how we are going to interpret that evidence, and who or what we are willing to believe in (LUKE 16:16).

2. THE LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE.

Scientific method is limited to a process defined by that which is measurable and repeatable. By definition, it

cannot speak to issues of ultimate origin, meaning, or morality. For such answers, science is dependent on the values and personal beliefs of those who use it. Science, therefore, has great potential for both good and evil. It can be used to make vaccines or poisons, nuclear power plants or nuclear weapons. It can be used to clean up the environment or to pollute it. It can be used to argue for God or against Him. Science by itself offers no moral guidance or values to govern our lives. All science can do is show us how natural law works, while telling us nothing about its origins.

3. THE PROBLEMS OF EVOLUTION.

Some have assumed that an evolutionary explanation of life would make God unnecessary. This overlooks some problems. Even if we assume that scientists will someday find enough “missing links” to confirm that life appeared and developed gradually over great periods of time, laws of probability would still show the need for a Creator. As a result, many scientists who believe in evolution believe also that the universe in all of its immensity and complexity did not “just happen.” Many feel compelled to acknowledge the possibility or even likelihood of an intelligent designer who provided the ingredients for life and set in motion the laws by which it developed.

4. THE HABITS OF THE HEART.

Mankind has been described as incurably religious. In unguarded moments of trouble or surprise, in prayer or in profanity, references to deity persist. Those who would dismiss such thoughts as bad habits or social vices are

left with unanswerable questions. Denying the existence of God does not dispel the mysteries of life. Attempts to exclude God from the language of civil life does not eliminate the persistent longing for more than this life has to offer (ECCLESIASTES 3:11). There is something about truth, beauty, and love that makes our hearts ache. Even in our anger with a God who would permit injustice and pain, we draw upon a moral conscience to argue that life is not as it ought to be (ROMANS 2:14-15). Even unwillingly, we are drawn to something that is more rather than less than ourselves.

5. THE BACKGROUND OF GENESIS.

On first reading, the opening words of the Bible seem to assume the existence of God. Genesis, however, was written at a point of time in history. Moses wrote, “In the beginning God” after Israel’s exodus from Egypt. He wrote after miraculous events that were said to have been witnessed by millions of Jews and Egyptians. From the Exodus to the coming of Messiah, the God of the Bible rests His case on events witnessed in real time and locations. Anyone who doubted the claims could visit real places and people to check out the evidence for themselves.

6. THE NATION OF ISRAEL.

Israel is often used as an argument against God. Many find it difficult to believe in a God who would be partial to a “chosen people.” Others find it even harder to believe in a God who would not protect His “chosen nation” from the boxcars, gas chambers, and ovens of Auschwitz

and Dachau. Yet from the beginning of Old Testament history, Israel's future was prewritten. Together with other prophets, Moses predicted not only Israel's possession of the land but also her unparalleled suffering and dispersion throughout the whole earth, her eventual repentance, and then finally her last-days restoration (DEUTERONOMY 28–34; ISAIAH 2:1–5; EZEKIEL 37–38).

7. THE CLAIMS OF CHRIST.

Many who doubt the existence of God have reassured themselves with the thought, “If God wanted us to believe in Him, He would appear to us.” According to the Bible, that is what God has done. Writing in the 7th century BC, the prophet Isaiah said that God would give His people a sign. A virgin would bear a son who would be called “God with us” (ISAIAH 7:14; MATTHEW 1:23). Isaiah said this Son would be called, “Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (ISAIAH 9:6). The prophet also said that this child would die for His people's sins before seeing His life prolonged and honored by God (ISAIAH 53). According to the New Testament, Jesus claimed to be that Messiah. Under the oversight of a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate, He was crucified on charges that He claimed to be the king of Israel and that He had represented Himself as being equal with God (JOHN 5:18).

8. THE EVIDENCE OF MIRACLES.

The reports of the first followers of Jesus agree that He did more than just claim to be the long-awaited Messiah. These witnesses said He won their trust by healing

paralytics, walking on water, and then voluntarily dying a painful, undeserved death before rising from the dead (1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8). Most compelling was their claim that many witnesses had seen and talked to Christ after finding His tomb empty and before watching Him ascend visibly into the clouds. These witnesses didn't have anything on earth to gain by their claims. They had no hopes of material wealth or power. Many became martyrs, claiming to the end that the long-awaited Messiah of Israel had lived among them, that He had become a sacrifice for sin, and that He had risen from the dead to assure them of His ability to bring them to God.

9. THE DETAILS OF NATURE.

Some who believe in God do not take His existence seriously. They reason that a God great enough to create the universe would be too big to be concerned about us. Jesus, however, confirmed what the design and detail of the natural world suggest. He showed that God is great enough to care about the smallest details of our lives. He spoke of one who not only knows every move we make but also the motives and thoughts of our hearts. Jesus taught that God knows the number of hairs on our heads, the concerns of our hearts, and even the condition of a fallen sparrow (PSALM 139; MATTHEW 6).

10. THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE.

The Bible says that God designs the circumstances of our lives in a way that will prompt us to look for Him (ACTS 17:26). For those who do reach out for Him, the Scriptures

also say that He is close enough to be found (v.27). According to the apostle Paul, God is a Spirit in whom “we live and move and have our being” (v.28). The Bible makes it just as clear, however, that we must reach out for God on His terms rather than our own. He promises to be found, not by just anyone but by those who admit their own need and are willing to trust Him rather than themselves.

10 *Reasons to* Believe

In the **Bible**

1. ITS HONESTY.

The Bible is painfully honest. It shows Jacob, the father of its “chosen people,” to be a deceiver. It describes Moses, the lawgiver, as an insecure, reluctant leader, who, in his first attempt to come to the aid of his own people, killed a man, and then ran for his life to the desert. It portrays David not only as Israel’s most loved king, general, and spiritual leader, but as one who took another man’s wife and then, to cover his own sin, conspired to have her husband killed. At one point, the Scriptures accuse the people of God, the nation of Israel, as being so bad they made Sodom and Gomorrah look good by comparison (EZEKIEL 16:46-52). The Bible represents human nature as hostile to God. It predicts a future full of trouble. It teaches that the road to heaven is narrow and the way to hell is wide. Scripture was clearly not written for those who want

simple answers or an easy, optimistic view of religion and human nature.

2. ITS PRESERVATION.

Just as the modern state of Israel was emerging from thousands of years of dispersion, a bedouin shepherd discovered one of the most important archaeological treasures of our time. In a cave on the northwest rim of the Dead Sea, a broken jar yielded documents that had been hidden for two millennia. Additional finds produced manuscripts that predated previous oldest copies by 1,000 years. One of the most important was a copy of Isaiah. It revealed a document that is essentially the same as the book of Isaiah that appears in our own Bibles. The Dead Sea scrolls emerged from the dust like a symbolic handshake to a nation coming home. They discredited the claims of those who believed that the original Bible had been lost to time and tampering.

3. ITS CLAIMS FOR ITSELF.

It's important to know what the Bible says about itself. If the authors of Scripture had not claimed to speak for God, it would be presumptuous for us to make that claim for them. We would also have a different kind of problem. We would have a collection of unsolved mysteries, embodied in historical and ethical literature. But we would not have a book that has inspired the building of countless churches and synagogues all over the world. A Bible that did not claim to speak in behalf of God would not have become foundational to the faith of hundreds of millions of Christians and Jews (2 PETER 1:16-21). But with much

supporting evidence and argument, the Bible's authors did claim to be inspired by God. Because millions have staked their present and eternal well-being on those claims, the Bible cannot be a good book if its authors consistently lied about their source of information.

4. ITS MIRACLES.

Israel's exodus from Egypt provided a historical basis for believing that God revealed Himself to Israel. If the Red Sea did not part as Moses said it did, the Old Testament loses its authority to speak in behalf of God. The New Testament is just as dependent upon miracles. If Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead, the apostle Paul admits that the Christian faith is built on a lie (1 CORINTHIANS 15:14-17). To show its credibility, the New Testament names its witnesses, and did so within a time-frame that enabled those claims to be tested (1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-8). Many of the witnesses ended up as martyrs, not for abstract moral or spiritual convictions but for their claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. While martyrdom is not unusual, the basis on which these people gave their lives is what's important. Many have died for what they believed to be the truth. But people do not die for what they know to be a lie.

5. ITS UNITY.

Forty different authors writing over a period of 1,600 years penned the 66 books of the Bible. Four hundred silent years separated the 39 books of the Old Testament from the 27 of the New Testament. Yet, from Genesis to Revelation, they tell one unfolding story. Together they

give consistent answers to the most important questions we can ask: Why are we here? How can we come to terms with our fears? How can we get along? How can we rise above our circumstances and keep hope alive? How can we make peace with our Maker? The Bible's consistent answers to these questions show that the Scriptures are not many books but one.

6. ITS HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL ACCURACY.

Down through the ages, many have doubted the historical and geographical accuracy of the Bible. Yet modern archaeologists have repeatedly unearthed evidence of the people, places, and cultures described in the Scriptures. Time after time, the descriptions in the biblical record have been shown to be more reliable than the speculations of scholars. The modern visitor to the museums and lands of the Bible cannot help but come away impressed with the real geographical and historical backdrop of the biblical text.

7. ITS ENDORSEMENT BY CHRIST.

Many have spoken well of the Bible, but no endorsement is as compelling as that of Jesus of Nazareth. He recommended the Bible not only by His words but by His life. In times of personal temptation, public teaching, and personal suffering, He made it clear that He believed the Old Testament Scriptures were more than a national tradition (MATTHEW 4:1-11; 5:17-19). He believed the Bible was a book about Himself. To His countrymen He said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you

are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (JOHN 5:39-40).

8. ITS PROPHETIC ACCURACY.

From the days of Moses, the Bible predicted events no one wanted to believe. Before Israel went into the Promised Land, Moses predicted that Israel would be unfaithful, that she would lose the land God was giving her, and that she would be dispersed throughout all the world, regathered, and then re-established (DEUTERONOMY 28–31). Central to Old Testament prophecy was the promise of a Messiah who would save God’s people from their sins and eventually bring judgment and peace to the whole world.

9. ITS SURVIVAL.

The books of Moses were written 500 years before the earliest Hindu Scriptures. Moses wrote Genesis 2,000 years before Muhammad penned the Koran. During that long history, no other book has been as loved or as hated as the Bible. No other book has been so consistently bought, studied, and quoted as this book. While millions of other titles come and go, the Bible is still the book by which all other books are measured. While often ignored by those who are uncomfortable with its teachings, it is still the central book of Western civilization.

10. ITS POWER TO CHANGE LIVES.

Unbelievers often point to those who claim to believe in the Bible without being changed by it. But history is also marked by those who have been bettered by this book. The Ten Commandments have been a source of moral direction

to countless numbers of people. The Psalms of David have offered comfort in times of trouble and loss. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount has given millions an antidote for stubborn pride and proud legalism. Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 has softened angry hearts. The changed lives of people like the apostle Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Newton, Leo Tolstoy, and C. S. Lewis illustrate the difference the Bible can make. Even entire nations or tribes, like the Celts of Ireland, the wild Vikings of Norway, and the Auca Indians of Ecuador, have been transformed by the Word of God and the unprecedented life and significance of Jesus Christ.

10 *Reasons to* Believe

God Became a Man

1. A VIRGIN CONCEIVED.

If Mary was telling the truth, her baby had no human father. She claimed an angel appeared to her and told her she would conceive a son by God's Spirit. Then he said that this child, whom she was to name Jesus, would be the Son of God. If Mary was lying, the night of Jesus' birth was not holy, and the only thing that was silent was the truth. But how can we know? How can we take seriously the kind of story that usually deserves laughs of disbelief? The answer is in what followed. If there were no witnesses and no evidence, we could ignore Mary's claims. If her son's life was the same as any other life, her claim of a virgin birth would be the easiest of all stories to dismiss.

2. AN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHET PREDICTED A GOD-MAN.

What we do know is that in the seventh-century BC, the prophet Isaiah made predictions about a Servant of the Lord who would rule the earth in the last days. He described a day in which all of the earth would be at peace and all the nations would go up to Jerusalem to worship God (ISAIAH 2). Isaiah announced, “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6). Isaiah also gave a mysterious prophecy that was only partially fulfilled in his lifetime. He wrote, “The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (7:14). Immanuel means “God with us.””

3. ANGELS ANNOUNCED THE BIRTH.

In the shepherds’ fields outside of Bethlehem, a group of witnesses formed a bridge between Isaiah and Mary. According to New Testament records (LUKE 2:8-14), terrified Jewish shepherds were visited by an angel who announced the birth of Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. The angel said, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger” (VV.10-12). As the shepherds told it, the sky was filled with angels praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and

on earth peace among men in whom He is well pleased” (V.14 ASV).

4. A SIGN APPEARED IN THE SKY.

According to the New Testament, a light in the sky gave additional credibility to Mary. A group of Magi from the East followed a “starlike sign” to the Jewish town of Bethlehem. What they found was a child they believed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. For hundreds of years Old Testament prophets had been speaking of “a Star” and “a Scepter” that would come out of Israel (NUMBERS 24:17). The Old Testament also predicted a ruler of Israel who would come out of Bethlehem, a ruler “whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting” (MICAH 5:2).

5. THE TIME WAS RIGHT.

Many believe that the Magi who worshiped Jesus after His birth came from the region of Babylon. If so, they could have had access to the prophecy of a Jewish prophet named Daniel. While in exile in Babylon 400 years earlier, Daniel had a vision that allows for the calculation of the arrival of the Jewish Messiah. According to Daniel’s vision, from the command to rebuild the temple (458 BC or 444 BC), 69 “sevens” would be followed by the arrival and death of Messiah (DANIEL 7:13-14; 9:24-27). Some believe this prophecy predicted the exact number of days until Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

6. JESUS CLAIMED TO BE EQUAL WITH GOD.

Some have suggested that Jesus never claimed for Himself

what His followers claimed for Him. Yet the commotion that surrounded His life can be best explained by His repeated claim to be one with God. John, one of the Gospel writers, quoted Jesus as saying, “Before Abraham was, I AM” (8:58). (In Exodus 3:14, the name I AM was used by God to identify Himself to Moses.) John also quoted Jesus as saying, “I and My Father are one” (10:30) and “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him” (14:7). According to the Gospels, Jesus said that to love or hate Him, or to receive or reject Him, was to love or hate, receive or reject, His Father in heaven.

7. HIS FRIENDS WORSHIPED HIM.

When Thomas, one of Jesus’ disciples, saw the resurrected Christ, he declared, “My Lord and my God!” (JOHN 20:28). Years later, Jesus’ close friend and follower John wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (JOHN 1:1-3,14). Another friend, Peter, in one of his letters to the early church, addressed his readers as “those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 PETER 1:1).

8. JESUS' ENEMIES ACCUSED HIM OF BLASPHEMY.

Jesus' friends may have wanted to believe He was more than a man, but His enemies did not. The religious leaders of Israel were outraged to think that the same man who accused them of being hypocritical, blind leaders of the blind, would also claim to forgive sins, would speak of God as His Father, and would even say that He was one with God. On more than one occasion the leaders of Israel picked up stones to kill Jesus, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (JOHN 10:33).

9. JESUS' MIRACLES SUPPORTED HIS CLAIMS.

Jesus' miracles recorded in the New Testament were more than wonders. They were signs. He did them to encourage men and women to believe in Him for everlasting life. He healed a crippled man to affirm His right to forgive sins. He fed thousands of people with a little boy's lunch, setting the stage for His claim to be the "bread of life." He walked on water, stilled angry seas, healed the sick, restored paralyzed limbs, gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, and even raised from the dead an embalmed man by the name of Lazarus. One reason Jesus performed miracles was to support His claim to be God. The apostle John wrote, "Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (JOHN 20:30-31).

10. HIS DEPARTURE WAS GREATER THAN HIS ARRIVAL.

Many people down through history have claimed to be gods. Yet only one man has been willing to die for the sins of others. Only one has risen from the dead to prove that He is the Son of God. According to the New Testament, after Jesus voluntarily gave His life on an executioner's cross, He appeared to His closest disciples and more than 500 other followers for a period of 40 days (1 CORINTHIANS 15:5-8). The eyewitnesses were so convinced of His resurrection that they were willing to suffer and die for their claims. His disciples said that He showed them His scarred hands and feet, walked and talked with them, and even ate with them. Then while they met with Him on the Mount of Olives, He gave them His last words and ascended into the clouds. With a departure more spectacular than His arrival, Jesus left us with a better understanding of the announcement of the angel who said, "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (LUKE 2:11).

10 *Reasons to* Believe

Christ **Rose** from the **Dead**

1. A PUBLIC EXECUTION ASSURED HIS DEATH.

During the Jewish Feast of Passover, Jesus was taken by an angry crowd into a Roman hall of justice. As He stood before Pilate, the governor of Judea, religious leaders accused Jesus of claiming to be the king of the Jews. The crowd demanded His death. Jesus was beaten, whipped, and sentenced to a public execution. On a hill outside of Jerusalem, He was crucified between two criminals. Brokenhearted friends and mocking enemies shared in His deathwatch. As the Sabbath neared, Roman soldiers were sent to finish the execution. To quicken death, they broke the legs of the two criminals. But when they came to Jesus they did not break His legs, because from experience they knew He was already dead. As a final precaution, however, they thrust a spear into His side. It would take more than resuscitation for Him to ever trouble them again.

2. A HIGH OFFICIAL SECURED THE GRAVESITE.

The next day, religious leaders again met with Pilate. They said Jesus had predicted He would rise in 3 days. To assure that the disciples could not conspire in a resurrection hoax, Pilate ordered the official seal of Rome to be attached to the tomb to put graverobbers on notice. To enforce the order, soldiers stood guard. Any disciple who wanted to tamper with the body would have had to get by them, which wouldn't have been easy. The Roman guards had good reason for staying alert—the penalty for falling asleep while on watch was death.

3. IN SPITE OF GUARDS, THE GRAVE WAS FOUND EMPTY.

On the morning after the Sabbath, some of Jesus' followers went to the grave to anoint His body. But when they arrived, they were surprised at what they found. The huge stone that had been rolled into place over the entrance to the tomb had been moved, and Jesus' body was gone. As word got out, two disciples rushed to the burial site. The tomb was empty except for Jesus' burial wrappings, which were lying neatly in place. In the meantime, some of the guards had gone into Jerusalem to tell the Jewish officials that they had fainted in the presence of a supernatural being that rolled the stone away. And when they woke up, the tomb was empty. The officials paid the guards a large sum of money to lie and say that the disciples stole the body while the soldiers slept. They assured the guards that if the report of the missing body got back to the governor they would intercede on their behalf.

4. MANY PEOPLE CLAIMED TO HAVE SEEN HIM ALIVE.

About AD 55, the apostle Paul wrote that the resurrected Christ had been seen by Peter, the 12 apostles, more than 500 people (many of whom were still alive at the time of his writing), James, and himself (1 CORINTHIANS 15:5-8). By making such a public statement, he gave critics a chance to check out his claims for themselves. In addition, the New Testament begins its history of the followers of Christ by saying that Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by [the apostles] during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (ACTS 1:3).

5. HIS APOSTLES WERE DRAMATICALLY CHANGED.

When one of Jesus’ inner circle defected and betrayed Him, the other apostles ran for their lives. Even Peter, who earlier had insisted that he was ready to die for his teacher, lost heart and denied that he even knew Jesus. But the apostles went through a dramatic change. Within a few weeks, they were standing face to face with the ones who had crucified their leader. Their spirit was like iron. They became unstoppable in their determination to sacrifice everything for the one they called Savior and Lord. Even after they were imprisoned, threatened, and forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus, the apostles said to the Jewish leaders, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (ACTS 5:29). After they were beaten for disobeying the orders of the Jewish council, these once-cowardly apostles “did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (ACTS 5:42).

6. WITNESSES WERE WILLING TO DIE FOR THEIR CLAIMS.

History is full of martyrs. Countless men and women have died for their beliefs. For that reason, it is not that significant to point out that the first disciples were willing to suffer and die for their faith. But it is significant that while many will die for what they believe to be the truth, few, if any, will die for what they know to be a lie. That psychological fact is important because the disciples of Christ did not die for deeply held beliefs about which they could have been honestly mistaken. They died for their claims to have seen Jesus alive and well after His resurrection. They died for their claim that Jesus Christ had not only died for their sins but that He had risen bodily from the dead to show that He was like no other spiritual leader who had ever lived.

7. JEWISH BELIEVERS CHANGED THEIR DAY OF WORSHIP.

The Sabbath day of rest and worship was basic to the Jewish way of life. Any Jew who did not honor the Sabbath was guilty of breaking the law of Moses. Yet Jewish followers of Christ began worshiping with Gentile believers on a new day. The first day of the week, the day on which they believed Christ had risen from the dead, replaced the Sabbath. For a Jew, it reflected a major change of life. The new day, along with the Christian conversion rite of baptism, declared that those who believed Christ had risen from the dead were ready for more than a renewal of Judaism. They believed that the death and resurrection of Christ had cleared the way for a new relationship with God. The new way was based not on the law, but on the sin-bearing, life-giving help of a resurrected Savior.

8. ALTHOUGH IT WAS UNEXPECTED, IT WAS CLEARLY PREDICTED.

The disciples were caught off guard. They expected their Messiah to restore the kingdom to Israel. Their minds were so fixed on the coming of a messianic political kingdom that they didn't anticipate the events essential to the salvation of their souls. They must have thought Christ was speaking in symbolic language when He kept saying over and over that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem to die and be resurrected from the dead. Coming from one who spoke in parables, they missed the obvious until after it was all over. In the process, they also overlooked the prophet Isaiah's prediction of a suffering servant who would bear the sins of Israel, being led like a lamb to the slaughter, before God "prolong[ed] His days" (ISAIAH 53:10).

9. IT WAS A FITTING CLIMAX TO A MIRACULOUS LIFE.

While Jesus hung on a Roman cross, crowds mocked Him. He helped others, but could He help Himself? Was the miracle suddenly coming to an end? It seemed like such an unexpected ending for someone who began His public life by turning water into wine. During His 3-year ministry, He walked on water; healed the sick; opened blind eyes, deaf ears, and tongue-tied mouths; restored crippled limbs; cast out demons; stilled a violent storm; and raised the dead. He asked questions wise men couldn't answer. He taught profound truths with the simplest of comparisons. And He confronted hypocrites with words that exposed their cover-up. If all this was true, should we be surprised that His enemies didn't have the last word?

10. IT FITS THE EXPERIENCE OF THOSE WHO TRUST HIM.

The apostle Paul wrote, “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (ROMANS 8:11). This was the experience of Paul, whose heart was dramatically changed by the resurrected Christ. It is also the experience of people all over the world who have “died” to their old ways so that Christ can live His life through them. This spiritual power is not evident in those who try to add belief in Christ to their old lives. It is seen only in those who are willing to “die” to their old lives to make room for the rule of Christ. It is apparent only in those who respond to the overwhelming evidence for Christ’s resurrection by acknowledging His lordship in their hearts.

10 *Reasons to* Believe

God Offers the **Perfect Gift**

1. GOD LOVES TO GIVE GIFTS.

Long before we took our first breath, our Creator showed Himself to be a great giver of everything a man or woman could ask for. Today, He still wants to give us the desires of our hearts (PSALM 37:4). As the Father of heaven, He is behind “every good gift and every perfect gift” (JAMES 1:17). When we say that “the best things in life are free,” it’s a way of acknowledging that when God gives life, friendship, and laughter, He is showing that no one can give a better gift than He can. Yet His best offer is so priceless and so perfectly suited to our needs and happiness that many think it’s too good to be true.

2. IT’S DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE.

The most quoted of all books describes a wonderfully mysterious gift that goes far beyond anything we have

ever received. When unwrapped, it includes peace of mind, acceptance, forgiveness, adoption into the family of heaven, and everlasting life. But does God offer to give us the desires of our hearts as a reward for good living? Not according to the Bible. It refers to this spiritual package as salvation and calls it “the gift of God” (ROMANS 6:23; EPHESIANS 2:8-9).

3. IT CANNOT BE EARNED.

In most areas of life we work hard to earn respect and the right to be trusted and promoted. But God’s perfect gift of salvation is different. It comes not by merit but by mercy, not by trying but by trusting, and not by working but by resting. In the words of the apostle Paul, “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (EPHESIANS 2:8-9). In another of his New Testament letters, Paul added, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (TITUS 3:5).

4. GOD PAID FOR IT HIMSELF.

Long before wise men brought gifts to Bethlehem, our Creator gave us the gift of choice. Knowing that love must be voluntary to be meaningful, He gave us the freedom to accept or reject Him. From the beginning, however, our first parents chose to walk away from Him. Instead of leaving them in their rebellion, He revealed a plan of rescue whereby an innocent victim would die on behalf of the guilty. An elaborate system of symbolic Temple

ritual anticipated what God Himself would do for us on the center page of human history. At the time of God's own choosing and in a moment of infinite and eternal significance, He did what can only be explained by love—He sacrificed His Son to pay for our sin (JOHN 1:29; HEBREWS 10:5-10).

5. IT COMES WITH A PROOF OF PURCHASE.

The receipt we hold for His payment is the record of history. Jewish prophets predicted a Messiah who would deliver His people from their sin (ISAIAH 53; DANIEL 9:26). When He arrived, the Gospel writers tell us that He healed the sick, raised the dead, and gave hope to the oppressed. Then He did what no one expected Him to do. Instead of riding to power on the shoulders of adoring crowds, He silently bore the slander of critics, and voluntarily died at the hands of Roman executioners. Three days later, He walked out of a guarded tomb (LUKE 24:1-7). Eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ died at the hands of enemies rather than deny that they had seen Him alive.

6. IT WAS WRAPPED WITH CARE.

God packaged His perfect gift in thousands of years of fulfilled predictions, widely observed miracles, and breathtaking rescues. Then after centuries of anticipation, the Lord of heaven visited a young Jewish woman named Mary and, in the greatest of all that followed, He surrounded the gift in the irony of obscurity, the affection of unlikely followers, the envy of religious leaders, and the crushing disappointment of death. When

all seemed lost, God wrapped His gift in the excited reports of witnesses who announced an unexpected resurrection from the dead. For a final touch, the Creator gave His gift of salvation a colorful bow of diversity—people from every nation on earth whose hearts and lives have been changed by His love (REVELATION 5:9).

7. GOD OFFERS IT BY GRACE.

To those who had accepted the offer of God's mercy, the apostle Paul wrote, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (EPHESIANS 2:8-9). Paul had once tried to earn his own way into God's favor (PHILIPPIANS 3:3-9). Now he wanted his readers to know what he himself had discovered—that it is only by the grace of God that the angels of heaven welcome fallen and broken rebels into the eternal family and presence of God. In another letter, Paul described the difference between Adam, who spread sin and death to all his descendants, and Christ, who brought grace and life to all who trust Him. So he wrote, "But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense [Adam's sin] many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many" (ROMANS 5:15).

8. IT CAN BE RECEIVED ONLY THROUGH FAITH.

Paul's carefully chosen words to the Ephesians were, "By grace you have been saved through faith." In this qualifying phrase, he reminds us that God comes only where He is invited. The One who wants us to share the

happiness of His eternal family knocks gently at the door of our hearts, waiting for us to welcome Him into our lives (JOHN 1:12). So the gospel says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (JOHN 3:16).

9. IT'S AVAILABLE TO ANYONE WILLING TO RECEIVE IT.

Most of Jesus' best friends were fishermen, not scholars. One was a tax collector. One was a passionate political revolutionary. One had been possessed by demons. What they had in common was their willingness to accept the gift of God. Together they were the kind of men and women Jesus loved to bring to His Father. Even in His dying hour, while hanging on a cross between two dying criminals, Jesus gave the gift of eternal life. One of the two mocked Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” The other criminal rebuked the first and said, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” Only because salvation is a gift of grace could Jesus say to him, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (LUKE 23:39-43).

10. IT INSPIRES GRATITUDE.

Those who avoid asking for help often take pride in being obligated to no one. But those who are willing to admit

their spiritual need discover something more meaningful than self-sufficiency. They join those grateful people who know they owe their lives to someone else. Those who have been saved from a burning car or building by a courageous firefighter or bystander know what it means to live the rest of their lives with a deep sense of gratitude. In a similar way, those who know they have been rescued by God's grace from the fires of judgment have reason to live the rest of their lives out of the overflow of their gratefulness to God (EPHESIANS 2:10). Nothing puts a smile on a face or love in a heart like the overwhelming awareness that all we could ever ask for has been given to us in the perfect gift of God.

Making it *Personal*

You're not alone if you are still wondering whether to open your heart to the offer of God's gift of salvation. Many think the offer is too good to be true. Many more are afraid they'll be obligated by an eternal debt of gratitude and love.

Yet the decision to receive the gift of salvation is yours. The apostle John wrote, "He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (JOHN 1:11-12 NIV).

If you are ready to receive the greatest of all gifts, the openness of your heart is what God is looking for. You might want to use your own words, or express a prayer like this:

God, I know I have sinned against You. I believe that Jesus is Your Son, that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins, and that He rose from the dead to prove it. Now I accept Your offer of full forgiveness and eternal life. I accept Jesus as Your gift of my salvation.

If this is the honest expression of your heart, you have entered into a personal relationship with God!

We encourage you to start attending a church and to let a pastor know of your decision.