

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL

BIG IDEA FOR SERIES: CHRISTIANS SHOULD BE EQUIPPED TO GIVE INTELLIGENT REASONS FOR THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH.

PURPOSE: YOUTH SHOULD COME AWAY FROM THIS SERIES WITH THEIR OWN FAITH MORE SECURELY GROUNDED. ADDITIONALLY THEY SHOULD BE MORE CONFIDENT IN ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS OF NONBELIEVING SEEKERS.

PERSONAL NOTE TO YOUTH LEADERS: I write this material with a profound conviction that this is one of the most important series of lessons you could cover with your youth. Our relativistic age has done a superb job of prejudicing youth against the existence of absolute truth. University Professor Allan Bloom states, "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative." (*The Closing of the American Mind*, p. 25) In a survey of *church youth*, 40% agreed with the statement, "no one can prove which religion is absolutely true." (*Right From Wrong*, Josh McDowell, p. 68) Yet, Jesus presented himself alive "by many convincing proofs" (Acts 1:3). Twenty one percent (*again, church kids*) agree that "it does not matter what religious faith you follow because all faiths teach similar lessons." (McDowell, p. 69)

Even your strongest youth, if they were honest, might express doubts, questions, or even agnosticism concerning the Christian faith. I feel for them. Though viewed as a Christian leader my some of my high school classmates, I privately struggled with doubts and questions.

But after much time in prayer, God's Word, and scores of books on Christian evidences (I have around 150 such books in my personal library), God has given me a solid foundation for my faith in God and His Word. I'll pass on some basics in these lessons. If we fail to help our youth with their questions now, an atheistic professor will gladly respond to their questions later.

Many youth besides your regulars might be interested in this study. If you get the word out ahead of time, your youth could bring their interested non Christian friends. Also make parents of teenagers in your church aware of the series. They could encourage their youth to take part.

A word of caution. When youth open up about their doubts, don't become defensive or demeaning. ("I can't believe that you, of all people, would ask a question like that!") Rather, express appreciation that they are honest about their questions. And don't think that as a leader you must have an immediate solution to every problem. Get comfortable with the little phrase, "I don't know."

But assure them that if the question troubles them, you will talk to people who can find answers and will try to help them through it.

I put up a display rack in the youth room that included books on evidences. Look to the end of this lesson for recommended books.

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CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL

LESSON I

HOW CAN I KNOW THAT GOD EXISTS?

(PART 1)

BIG IDEA: I CAN KNOW THAT GOD EXISTS BECAUSE THE COMPLEXITY OF OUR WORLD REQUIRES AN INTELLIGENT CREATOR.

PURPOSE: YOUTH SHOULD LEAVE THIS STUDY WITH A CONVICTION THAT IT IS MORE REASONABLE TO BELIEVE IN GOD THAN TO DISBELIEVE.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Hint: You may wish to adopt a "Courtroom Trial" theme as you cover this series. Each week you could have a "prosecutor" (one of your youth) list "charges" that people bring against Christianity. But as you teach, a "defense attorney" (another of your youth) will list arguments for the truth of Christianity. You could use large sheets of paper or poster board that could be put up each week, reminding them of the arguments of past weeks. Ask the "members of the jury" (the rest of the youth group) to come to a "verdict" on the truth of Christianity by the end of the "Trial" (teaching series).

Opening Discussion Time: We're beginning a series entitled, "Christianity on Trial," where we will ask some hard questions about the truth of Christianity. But before we start, let me get some input to see if we really need this series. First, how many of you have been ridiculed for your faith by either family members, teachers, or schoolmates? Could someone tell us about an experience? Have teachers or textbooks challenged your faith? What did they say?" If a non-believing student were to ask, "Why you believe Christianity is true?" how many of you could give an intelligent defense of your faith? (Get a hand raise.)

But this series is not just to equip you to talk to others. Let's be honest. Probably most of us at times question our own faith. (Teacher, if you have ever struggled with doubts and questions, tell your students about it now. They will be more open if they know you are.) How many of you have ever questioned God's existence, or wondered if the Bible were really true. (Get a hand raise.) If so, this series is for you.

Let's pray that God will teach us today.

PRAY

THE PROSECUTION: "YOU CAN'T TALK ABOUT EVIDENCE REGARDING RELIGION. SCIENTISTS AND LAWYERS DEAL IN EVIDENCE. BUT RELIGIONS ARE BASED ON FAITH, NOT FACTS."

THE DEFENSE:

Some would say that since our spiritual life is to be lived by faith, that evidence and reason have no place. "Where there is proof," they would say, "there is no need for faith." But let's see what the Bible says. Is God against evidence? (Ask volunteers to read each passage out loud and

explain what it tells us about evidence for our faith.)

I Peter 3:15b *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”*

Acts 1:3 *“After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.”*

John 5:30-47 *“I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.”*

Acts 17:31 *“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”*

Luke 24:36-43 *“He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.”*

I Peter 3:15: (The Greek word for "defense" means a "speech in defense; an answer." It is used here "of the defense or reply which the Christians should be willing to give of his hope to outsiders and opponents.")

Acts 1:3 The Greek word here means "convincing, decisive proof."

According to these verses, God seems to have no problem with appealing to evidence to support our faith. For me, faith is not a blind commitment to something that is totally unreasonable. Rather, it is the trust I place in something that I know to be true. Jesus' resurrection was open to verification. He didn't rebuke Thomas for his doubts about His resurrection. Rather, He showed Thomas his nail-pierced hands and feet and even encouraged Thomas to touch him (John 20:24-28). This does not deny the Spirit's work in opening people's eyes to the truth. Often the Spirit works through evidences to convince people of the truth of Christianity.

(Note to teachers: If this introduction stirred up enough discussion, it could be a complete lesson in itself. Don't rush through this material. Rather, allow for discussion and encourage kids to

Debate Time! The judge has allowed for a debate to clarify arguments regarding the existence of God. Divide your youth group into two groups. Let one side be the Atheists and the other side be the Theists (those who believe God exists). Give the groups 5 minutes to prepare arguments for their position. Now, taking turns with each team, let them argue their case in a debate format. (Leaders, you know your group. If they are all very shy, this probably won't fly. Rather, you may simply have a "testimony time" where youth share arguments they have heard or thought of either for or against the existence of God. If you have a rather large group, each team may wish to appoint a few spokesmen to present the arguments of the group.)

open up.)

Now we will look at one way to argue for God's existence.

I. EVIDENCE FROM CREATION

THE PROSECUTION: THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW WHETHER OR NOT GOD EXISTS. SINCE SCIENCE HAS PROVIDED A REASONABLE NATURALISTIC EXPLANATION FOR THE EMERGENCE OF OUR SOLAR SYSTEM AND THE LIFE WE FIND ON EARTH, I SEE NO REASON TO BRING GOD INTO THE PICTURE.

THE DEFENSE:

Romans 1:20 states that God's "eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." The following points will seek to show that it is more rational to believe that God, not blind chance and unaided natural laws, created this world.

A. Structures of complex order point to an intelligent

Orderer. (Teacher, have a youth write these outline titles on the poster board as the items for the defense.)

1. Our Personal Observations Concerning Chance and Order

ILLUSTRATION: Sir Isaac Newton, the English scientist, astronomer, and mathematician, once had a model of our solar system in his office. One day an atheistic scientist entered his study and exclaimed, "My! what an exquisite thing this is! Who made it?" "Nobody!" replied Newton. "You must think that I am a fool. Of course somebody made it, and he is a genius," argued the atheist. Then Newton, a believer, pointed out that if he couldn't convince the atheist that the toy was without a designer, how much more absurd would it be to argue that the real solar system had no designer. (From W.G. Polack in the "Lutheran Witness.")

Newton's remark reminds us of our common assumption that structures of high order are designed and constructed by intelligent beings.

ILLUSTRATION: Think, for example, of a large, modern office building you have seen. I like to think of the Sears Tower in Chicago. Towering 110 stories to a height of 1,454 feet, it was at the time of its construction the tallest building in the world. Imagine for a moment the complex electrical, heating, and structural systems required to support and operate such a building. If someone were to tell you that given enough millions of years, this complex structure could have been assembled by purely natural causes, what would you think? Is it really reasonable to believe that the steel could be forged, wiring skillfully placed, mortar poured, carpet laid, all as a result of blind chance operating over millions of years? I would say no. This building is far too complex. I must assume that intelligence is behind it. But as we will soon see, even simple forms of life are far more complex than the Sears Tower.

TEACHING HINT: In order to make these lessons your own, study this material well in advance, mark what you want to use, and either highlight key words or make your own teaching notes. The only parts of a lesson that I read to my youth are the quotes I want to use. Otherwise, I use key words or phrases or key words to remind me of what is next. Don't simply read the lesson to your youth! Your eye contact, conversational manner, and personal approach will go a long way toward communicating with the youth.

2. The Law of Entropy and the Second Law of Thermodynamics

These well-established scientific laws note that without an outside infusion of energy, systems proceed from order to disorder. My bedroom is proof. I have never once returned to my bedroom and found that it has become more orderly on its own. Yet, it proceeds quite easily toward disorder and randomness unless I make the effort to clean it up. It seems odd that scientists

would posit an exception to this law when trying to explain the origin of life. Non believing evolutionists must say that simple disorder evolved into complex order, with nothing on the outside energizing and ordering the process. This seems to violate these well-established laws.

CONCLUSION

The defense has begun its case. Could a couple of people sum up for us. Imagine that tomorrow someone in the lunchroom asks you why you believe in God. Who can tell me something from today's lesson that you could easily share with them? (Let a couple of people share.)

PRAY

Next week we will take a fascinating look at the complexity of the smallest unit of human life, the cell. Then we'll calculate the odds of a cell ever forming without the hand of God. Could someone bring in some large, colorful pictures of cells, or parts of cells, that we could pass around next week? (Make sure to have them in hand at least a day before the session.)

SHARPENING YOUR AX BOOKS ON CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

Are you able to give a defense for the hope you have in Christ? Are you at ease helping youth through their doubts and questions? Here are some books I recommend. Keep some on display in the youth room. Recommend them to questioning youth. And there are lots more, should you need them.

Historical Evidence

- **More Than a Carpenter**, Josh McDowell. Start here. A small, readable book that gives a basic defense of the faith. Read this before digging deeper. Give it to a questioning friend.
- **Evidence That Demands a Verdict**, Josh McDowell. Almost 400 pages of evidence, well outlined and documented. Josh is currently rewriting this book, updating it for the 90's.
- **Know Why You Believe**, Paul E. Little. Good, readable introduction.
- **Set Forth Your Case**, Clark H. Pinnock. Slightly heavier reading. Deals with the inadequacy of contemporary non-Christian worldviews before presenting his historical case.
- **Therefore Stand**, Wilbur Smith. College level. This brilliant man worked from a personal library of 24,000 volumes!

Reliability of the Bible

- **The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?** F.F. Bruce. Discussion of the transmission of the text by a respected New Testament scholar.

Other Religions

- **Christianity and Comparative Religion**, J.N.D. Anderson. Good for those in a college world religions class.

Bible "Contradictions"

- **Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties**, Gleason L. Archer. The most comprehensive book on the subject by a Harvard grad who knows over 25 languages!

The Problem of Suffering

- **Where is God When it Hurts?**, Philip Yancey. Clear and practical.
- **The Problem of Pain**, C.S. Lewis. Good work by a former Cambridge scholar and popular defender of the faith.
- **When God Doesn't Make Sense**, James Dobson. Clear and practical.

Evolution

Some Christians (e.g., C.S. Lewis) believe that the creation account is not literal and thus there is no conflict with evolution. If you are in that camp, then evolution presents no problem. Those who take the Genesis account more literally will find the following books helpful.

- Evolution and the Christian Faith, Bolton Davidheiser. A Christian challenge to Evolution. By a former evolutionist who holds a doctorate in Zoology from Johns Hopkins.
- Evolution: The Challenge of the Fossil Record, Duane T. Gish. Has Ph.D. in Biochemistry from Berkeley and worked in biochemical research at Cornell University.
- Evolution: A Theory in Crisis, Michael Denton. Masterfully written by an Australian Microbiologist. Massive, scholarly documentation. Published by a secular publisher with no reference to the Bible or Christian literature, this is the perfect book to give to that critical, but open science professor. Heavy for the non-specialist. Respectfully demolishes Darwinism, but concludes in agnosticism as to how we arrived at this place. Christians can easily fill in the blanks.

“CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL”
LESSON II
HOW CAN I KNOW THAT GOD EXISTS?
(PART 2)

INTRODUCTION

We have just begun a series entitled "Christianity on Trial", where we are looking at evidence for the Christian faith. These are the most important questions you could ever resolve, because they impact not only time, but your eternity. So don't be surprised if you find other forces at work in your mind besides objective reason. If you decide that Napoleon was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo, your lifestyle will not be affected. But if you decide that Jesus was the Son of God, your lifestyle will be challenged.

Comfortable with their own lives, many people don't want to believe. They have a heart problem that interferes with their ability to look clearly at the evidence. Jesus put it this way: "If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself" (John 7:17). So before we continue our investigation, take a moment to check your heart and your motives. Ask yourself this question, "If I were to conclude that Jesus was truly God, would I be willing to follow Him?"

PRAYER: Take a moment for youth to pray silently, "God, if you are there, I truly want to know You. Reveal yourself to me."

Briefly review last week. We are in a court of law examining the credentials of Christianity. So far, the prosecution has argued this (point to the appropriate argument on the poster board) and the defense has responded this. I am now calling our court into session. (A gavel would be appropriate to use here.)

B. The Science of Probability Challenges Atheism

1. How the Science of Probability Works

Idea: You could have some fun with this. Let youth place imaginary bets of \$20.00 on an order. Throw the cards on the floor, and see how long it takes you to make some serious money!

The science of probability tells us the odds that a certain chance event will occur. For example, if I flip this coin, (actually flip a coin before the youth), what will be the odds that side "A" will land in the up position? (The odds are one chance out of two.) Now, take the letters "a", "b", and "c". (Show youth three note cards, each having one letter.) If the letters were randomly rearranged, what would be the odds that they would end up in alphabetical order? (Let the youth try to guess.) The odds would be one chance in 6. (Possible orders: {a,b,c}, {a,c,b}, {b,a,c},

{b,c,a}, {c,a,b}, {c,b,a}). Now, how many of you would bet \$20.00 that if I were to shuffle these letters

randomly and throw them on the floor, that they would fall in alphabetical order? Not on one in six odds! As we will soon see, the atheist is betting his life on incredibly worse odds that life arose spontaneously, without the outside aid of God.

2. The Probability of Forming a Cell by Chance

The atheist must maintain that the cell (the smallest unit of life that is capable of independent functioning), came together spontaneously by blind chance at some remote time in history. Parts of the cell could not have evolved slowly over time, because only a completely assembled cell could both survive and reproduce. For instance, two components of a cell are protein molecules (each composed of about twenty different amino acids) and DNA molecules. DNA can only be replicated with the help of certain correctly functioning protein molecules (enzymes). But the enzymes can only be produced at the direction of correctly functioning DNA molecules. All must be in place for life and reproduction to carry on. (Think of a human body. If every part of the human body were in place except for the lungs, we could neither live nor reproduce.)

But even the simplest cells are incredibly complex. Entire books are now written on the make-up and function of cells. (If someone brought the cell pictures, pass them around.) What, then, are the odds that a cell could form by chance?

(Unidentified quotes are taken from Denton's book, Evolution: A Theory in Crisis, Great Britain, Burnett Books, 1985.)

At this point we will follow the reasoning of Michael Denton, an Australian microbiologist, and other specialists who have written on this subject. As I read this description of a cell, sit back and try to imagine the picture he paints for us.

A typical cell contains about 10 million million (this is not a typo!) atoms.

Even the simplest cell, as understood by modern molecular biologists, is like a miniature factory, "containing thousands of exquisitely designed pieces of intricate molecular machinery, made up altogether of one hundred thousand million atoms, far more complicated than any machine built by man and absolutely without parallel in the nonliving world." (p. 250)

In other words, do you remember the Sears Tower illustration from yesterday. Denton says that the simplest cell, which the atheist says had to come together all at once by chance, is much more complex than the most complex engine or computer we know of! But keep imagining. Let's move further, because I don't want you to ever doubt God's existence again. How many of you saw the movie, "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids?" Well, I'd like you to imagine that a mad scientist shrunk our entire youth group, so small that we could walk into a living cell. Close your eyes and let's let our microbiologist friend take us on a guided tour.

"To grasp the reality of life as it has been revealed by molecular biology, we must magnify a cell a thousand million times until it is twenty kilometers (twelve and a half miles) in diameter and resembles a giant airship large enough to cover a great city like London or New York. What we would then see would be an object of unparalleled complexity and adaptive design. On the surface of the cell we would see millions of openings, like the port holes of a vast space ship, opening and closing to allow a continual stream of materials to flow in and out. If we were to enter one of these openings we would find ourselves in a world of supreme technology and bewildering complexity (p.328). Is it

Note: It's impossible to condense Denton's book of 368 pages without seriously watering down his powerful arguments. Youth need to understand that we are merely skimming the surface of fully documented books written by brilliant men.

Are you beginning to get the picture of what we are talking about here? The odds of one part of a cell forming by chance is practically the odds that an explosion in a print factory could produce a complete set of Encyclopedia Britannica. It's about as likely as your throwing up a bone for you dog to catch and he jumps all the way to the moon! We're talking about the odds of Rodney Dangerfield winning the Miss Universe Pageant!

And please remember that we are not here speaking of the odds of the *entire cell* coming about by chance. A cell is also composed of carbohydrates, lipids, complex nucleotides, and

hundreds of other kinds of organic substances, all highly organized. And we are still light years from speaking of the odds of forming a complex organ, such as the eye, which is made up of legions of such cells.

CONCLUSION

We took bets earlier on what order the A B C cards would end up. We decided that 1 in 6 odds was too risky to bet \$20.00 on. If I were taking bets on whether or not blind chance was behind the first appearance of a living cell, would you bet your life on it? If you were the jury in this court case, would you rule that blind chance created the first cell? If chance did not create the first cell, then what did? If it could not have occurred naturally, it must have occurred supernaturally.

Now, with the bewildering complexity of a living cell before us, let's take a final look at the verse we read last week. *"For since the creation of the world (think billions and billions of cells in all the living things) God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."* (Rom. 1:20)

Folks, the bewildering complexity of this creation cries out that there is a Creator behind it all. There's no excuse for being confused about this fact. God has left His hand prints everywhere for the honest seeker to find. Every time I look up at the stars, observe a snowflake, or look in a mirror at the complexity of my own eye, I see His handprints. As the Bible says, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."* (Psalm 19:1)

Somebody may say, "So what does this Biology class you put me through tonight have to do with my life?" Everything in the world. If there's a God, there's more to be concerned about than whether you are fitting in at school and whether or not you are having a bad hair day. It's time to grow up and start asking some significant questions, such as "God, why did you put me here?" "God, what do You want me to do with my life?" "God, how do You want me to live?" "God, what comes after this life and how can I face eternity with confidence?"

Our Creator is here with us today. Do you need to clear some things up with Him? I'll let you pray silently.

Homework: Ask for a volunteer who will next week tell the group in five minutes or less why he or she believes in God. In order to train youth who can "give a defense for the hope that is within them"

(I Peter 3:15), we need to encourage them to put these concepts in their own words, in a way they could express it to their non believing, seeking friends.

Leader: For your information, I have listed some other ways people argue for God's existence. Pass them on to a seeking student who may be interested in pursuing the issue further. I do not advise your going any further with these arguments, since it could take away from the force of the argument we just developed.

II. OTHER EVIDENCES

We have looked at only one line of proof for the existence of God. Many other lines of argument (again argued fully in many volumes) include:

* **The Cosmological Argument.** We see in everyday life that every effect must have a sufficient cause. There must have been a Cause great enough to explain the beginning of the universe. (The "Big Bang Theory" still doesn't sufficiently explain what existed prior to the "Big Bang", or what caused the "Big Bang.")

* **The Teleological Argument.** We see design and order in the universe. This implies the existence of a Designer or Orderer.

* **The Moral Argument.** C.S. Lewis argues that our inner sense of "oughtness", the felt obligation to do what is right rather than what is wrong, cannot be adequately accounted for in a purely materialistic world.

* **The Widespread Experience of God.** A multitude of diverse, yet intelligent people, claim to have personally experienced God.

* **The Second Law of Thermodynamics and the Law of Entropy.** According to these well-established laws, the amount of useful energy in the universe is constantly decreasing, while the amount of useless energy is increasing. The process can't be reversed. The universe is like a clock that is winding down. But if so, Someone must have wound it up in the beginning.

* **Historical Evidence.** We find evidence that God revealed Himself to man in special ways at different points in history. The following lessons will present some of this evidence.

* **Present Day Miracles.** Many diverse, intelligent people claim that God has performed miracles in answer to prayer. The nature of these miracles defies the efforts of men to supply probable naturalistic explanations.

It is good for some youth to be aware of the variety of arguments, since some may appeal to some people more than the argument I expanded on above.

SHARPENING YOUR AX TEACHING DEEP OR COMPLEX MATERIAL

Someone said that the Bible is shallow enough for small children to splash around in with no fear of drowning, yet deep enough for theologians to dive into without ever completely fathoming its depths. Many youth are ready for the deep end of the theological pool, but have never been allowed in. Yet it's only here that some of their deepest needs will ever be satisfied. How can we introduce deep or complex material, without drowning them in the process? Here are some ideas:

1. Master the material yourself before trying to teach it. (I had to go back to my college biology text to better grasp the intricacies of the cell.)

2. Show sincere excitement about the material. It will take effort on their part as well as yours to grasp certain truths. Convince them it is well worth their effort.
3. Don't use specialized, unfamiliar words if a well-known word will do.
4. Restate in different words.
5. Illustrate. I have one basic point in this lesson: "*The complexity of life in its simplest form proves God's existence.*" I illustrate it with a description of the cell, the Sears Tower, the ABC cards, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* coming from the explosion in the print shop, and John Candy. I believe that at least one of these illustrations will turn on the light in each youth's head. Some respond well to bare facts. Most respond better to stories. Give them both.
6. If it takes time to make a point, and they need to follow the entire train of thought, regularly reclaim their attention with phrases like, "stay with me now," "this will all tie together in a few minutes," "now catch this."
7. Be alert for puzzled looks. Ask occasionally if they are following.
8. Don't get in a rush.
9. Ask questions to see if they are following.
10. Generate an atmosphere where no question is a stupid question. Often youth will ask a question that you just specifically answered two sentences ago. Resist leading the rest of the group in a hearty laugh. Patiently put it in a slightly different way, preserving his ego, and leaving the door open for other "stupid" questions that nevertheless need to be asked.

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON III
CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?
(PART I)

BIG IDEA: GOD HAS GIVEN US SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE THAT WE CAN TRUST THE BIBLE.

PURPOSE: YOUTH SHOULD LEAVE THIS STUDY CONFIDENT THAT THE BIBLE CAN BE TRUSTED.

Note to leaders: Youth who come to your meetings with head problems with Christianity, usually have emotional and heart problems as well. Beyond just seeing rational evidence, they also need heart evidence -- the love that can melt the hardest of hearts. Outside of these sessions, you would do well to remind key youth to show friendliness and love to visitors. Since some youth lack social confidence and skills, I have on occasion taught them how to meet new people, what to say to get a conversation started, how to ask questions that show a concern and interest in the other person, and how to introduce the new person to others. Use Scriptures such as John 17:20-23 and John 13:35 to demonstrate the great importance of this "friendliness ministry." During youth meetings where newcomers were present, I used to say during announcement time, "Remember 'Project Friend'." To the newcomers, it meant nothing. To my key youth, it reminded them to look around for newcomers and regular youth who felt left out, so that they could give them some attention during a break or after the session.

INTRODUCTION

In case you are new to this series, we are putting Christianity on Trial in a Courtroom setting. You are a part of the jury, trying to decide whether Christianity is either true or false. For the last two weeks we examined evidence for the existence of God. Last week the jury determined that the evidence favored the existence of God. Can someone briefly tell us why you believe in God?" (This is from the one who volunteered last week to give a summary. A few others may wish to add arguments that convince them.) You might even add a few of the other arguments for God's existence (see end of last lesson) to broaden their

perspective.

Belief in God is a major step. But what kind of God is He? He must be *powerful* and *smart* if He created everything from complex microscopic cells to the expanse of the universe. But beyond power and intelligence, we don't know much yet. Is God good or bad? Could this earth be a cosmic zoo that He created to keep Himself entertained? Does He have answers to our friendship problems, your worries over passing that test, or another person's intense loneliness? Does He even care?

The only way we can know more about God is to find out whether or not at some point in history He chose to tell us something about Himself. Christians claim that in the first century God

This type of review is excellent for both increasing retention and gaining confidence in expressing their beliefs.

became a man and revealed His character and will for us in the Bible.

For the next three court sessions, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, our task is to examine the claim that the Bible is the Word of God. Today, we will ask the question, "Did the New Testament documents come down to us accurately?" Let the prosecution begin. (Have the youth playing the part of the prosecution read this opening statement, clearly, and preferably with some dramatic flair.)

THE PROSECUTION:

ALTHOUGH THE DEFENSE CONVINCED THE JURY OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, HE IS A LONG WAY FROM PROVING THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY. GOD COULD BE THE GOD OF THE ISLAM, OR ONE OF THE ANCIENT GREEK GODS, OR PERHAPS EVEN "THE FORCE" OF THE MOVIE "STAR WARS." UNLESS GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF IN HISTORY, OR IS PRESENTLY REVEALING HIMSELF, WE CAN KNOW LITTLE ABOUT HIM. CONCERNING YOUR BIBLE, WHICH YOU CLAIM CONTAINS TRUTH ABOUT GOD, IT HAS BEEN THROUGH SO MANY TRANSLATIONS AND COPIES THROUGH THE CENTURIES THAT WE HAVE NO REASON TO TRUST IT AS A RELIABLE DOCUMENT.

THE DEFENSE:

In order to make this material easier to grasp, either use your overhead or prepare a poster board with the outline of these two lessons and the chart comparing the transmission of the Bible's text with that of other literature.

Many people claim that the Bible contains merely myths, legends and man's ideas about God. But the Bible claims to record, not man's search for God, but God's revelation of Himself to man, especially through His Son, Jesus Christ. If the Scriptures are accurate, then Jesus proved Himself to be the Son of God through His miracles (particularly His resurrection) and fulfillment of ancient prophecies. In other words, if Jesus miraculously healed the blind, fed 5,000 people with a few loaves and fish, raised a person long declared dead, and predicted and pulled off His own resurrection, we have excellent evidence that God wanted to tell us something through Jesus Christ. (To the jury) Do you agree? The task before us now is to decide whether

or not the documents that record His life are trustworthy.

GROUP PROJECT: Imagine for a moment that you are in history class, covering the life of Julius Caesar. Suddenly, a student raises his hand and asks the teacher, "Why should I believe that any of this really happened? After all, Caesar lived thousands of years ago and any records we have of him were copied and recopied through the centuries. How can I know that what the history books say of him is accurate?" I will give you 5 minutes by yourself to give me some ways that you could test a historical event, to see if it is accurate. (After the 5 minutes, gather their ideas and compare them to the historian's test which follows.)

The following test for historical accuracy comes from C. Sanders, a professor of military history. Let's take the same test that he would use to judge any historical event, and apply it to the New Testament documents, which tell us of the life of Christ.

I. The Transmission Test.

This does not test your knowledge of automobile transmissions. Rather, it asks the question, "How can I know that the text of the Bible I'm holding in my hands right now was not corrupted through all the years of translation and copying?" When I read what Mathew, Mark, Luke, John, and other authors wrote about Jesus, am I really reading what they wrote, or something so corrupted that I can't tell where the fact ends and the fiction starts?

Concerning translations, we have no worries since we can study the Greek language as it was spoken in the first century. We can actually read the New Testament in the same language that the original readers read it. It was not translated from one language into another, and from that language into another, finally ending up with a version that barely resembles the original. Today's translators translate from the original Greek text. And because of the reverence and care given by the translators of the Scriptures, we can be assured that our translations are more accurate than translations of other literature which no one questions concerning accuracy.

But since Luke didn't have a Xerox Copier, people had to copy the text by hand. How can we tell if something was lost in the continual copying? We have two ways to determine accuracy:

*First, find the length of time between the original writings and the earliest manuscript we now have. The shorter the time span, the less corruption would tend to occur. (Point to the headings of your chart to help them understand.) Are you following me? I want to make sure you catch this, because it's pretty remarkable when you see these tests applied to the New Testament.

*Second, find out how many manuscripts we have. The more the better, since by comparing manuscripts, we can again determine if corruption has occurred. Are you following me? Any questions?

The following chart pits the New Testament against other respected works of antiquity, to compare the textual evidence we have for their trustworthiness. (Carefully go through the chart, not revealing the New Testament data until the end.)

<u>TEXT</u>	<u>DATE WRITTEN</u>	<u>FIRST COPY</u>	<u>TIME BETWEEN</u>	<u>NUMBER OF COPIES</u>
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400 years	49 (Of any one work.)
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 years	10
Plato (Tetralo-gies)	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 years	7
New Testament	40-100 A.D.	125 A.D.	25 years	OVER 24000

From the chart you can see that other respected texts from antiquity don't even compare with the textual evidence we have concerning the New Testament! (Other works, such as Tacitus, Herodotus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes compare similarly.) If our history professors trust the accuracy of these other works, how much more should they trust the transmission of the New Testament!

This is a powerful quote from a respected authority. Read it slowly, deliberately, authoritatively.

I want the judge to keep this chart on file. To sum up, I submit to you the witness of Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, formerly director and principal librarian of the British Museum, who concluded that (and I quote) *"the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed."*

CONCLUSION

Tip: Someone said that a good teaching plan is to tell what you're going to tell them, (our introduction) tell them (the body of our text), and tell them what you told them (our conclusion).

So far, we've concluded that God exists and that what I read about Jesus in the Bible came down to me accurately from the guys who wrote about Him. We have much more to say about the authority of the Bible, but the court must adjourn because of time.

In closing, let's ask one more question. "What does all this mean to me?" It's beginning to look like that what I read about Jesus really happened. It's real history, not a fairy tale with

a moral at the end. Guys, if these gospels are accurate, then you can read a book about God. You can find out what He's like. He cared enough to write you a letter all about Himself. Have you cared enough to read it?

This week, begin to read the book of Luke. If you don't have a readable translation, let me turn you on to a New International Version. But as you read, look at it through new eyes. This is not just religious sayings. It's real history. Stuff that really happened. Now get home and open that letter from God.

SHARPENING YOUR AX APPEALING TO THE MINDS OF YOUTH (PART I)

Too often, we assume our youth are mental midgets who secretly long for a Crayola whenever we present a deep thought. True, some youth devote their entire mental faculty to choosing a new Spring outfit. Their greatest contribution to the world may be to inspire blonde jokes. But I feel that youth are generally much brighter than we assume. Some successfully study Physics and Algebra during the week and frankly tire of your booger jokes. Others flunk Math but run straight home after school to work on rebuilding their complex car engine. Still others lay awake nights, wondering how a God of love could have allowed their parents to separate. Many of these starve for lack of solid food, but we keep dishing out the milk and donut holes, terrified by the possibility of boring a shallow thinker with a challenging thought.

Bill Gates (CEO of Microsoft) read the entire *World Book Encyclopedia* by the age of nine. As an eighth grader, he had such a thirst for computer time (personal computers weren't around at the time) that he hacked his way into a company computer system to get free time. Imagine Gates visiting your eighth grade Bible class the day you are building a mobile. Some of your youth probably feel as he would have felt.

From the makeup of a cell to the deity of Christ, we cover some weighty material in this series. But don't worry. Your youth desperately need to grasp these truths. And some will love it! Remember, God wants us to love Him, not only with our affections, but with all our minds (Mt. 22:37). How can we not only impart wisdom, but inspire wisdom seekers, who seek wisdom as they would search for hidden treasures (Prov. 2:2-5)? I'll give you some hints over the coming weeks.

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON IV
CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?
(PART II)

INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on what we covered last week, imagine that you are talking to a friend about the Bible, and the friend objects: “Those writings about Jesus are 2,000 years old. They’ve been through so many copies and translations that who knows what they originally said?” Give me some responses. (Let several youth respond. If they do better in small groups, divide them up. After a couple of minutes, pull out the chart [or put on the overhead] to remind them.)

We’ve been putting Christianity on Trial, in a courtroom setting. You are the jury. So far, we’ve determined that God exists and these writings about Jesus’ life came down to us accurately. The court is now in session (hit the podium with your gavel.)

Say this with an attitude of haughty disgust.

THE PROSECUTION: (A youth should read this with flare.) **SO THE JURY AGREES THAT THESE, THESE DOCUMENTS ABOUT JESUS CAME DOWN TO US SUBSTANTIALLY AS THEY WERE ORIGINALLY WRITTEN. SO WHAT? LUKE COULD HAVE BEEN PSYCHOTIC. JOHN MIGHT HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO WRITE FICTION. I SUBMIT TO THE JURY THAT WE HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHETHER THE ORIGINAL AUTHORS WROTE FACT OR FICTION.**

THE DEFENSE:

II. The Internal Test

The “Transmission Test” we spoke of last week is only one test that historians use to determine the trustworthiness of a document. Another is the “Internal Test.”

This test asks, “What does the document claim for itself?” If it claims to be written by a

criminal who overheard the story as a rumor at the hairdresser's shop, one thousand miles and two generations removed from the events he wrote about, we would have reason to question the accuracy of the document.

Let's examine the documents themselves to see who wrote them, and what their qualifications may be. I need three members of the jury to read aloud John 19:35, I John 1:1-3, II Peter 1:16. and Luke 1:1-4. (Make sure they draw out the following points: 1) John and Peter were eye witnesses of the events they record. 2) The author of Luke and Acts carefully gathered his data from eyewitnesses.) As we know from any court case, eyewitness testimony is key to the verification of facts. The New Testament again passes this test well.

THE PROSECUTION:

BUT CAN THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS BE TRUSTED? PERHAPS THEY LIED.

THE DEFENSE:

Three points make it unlikely that the authors would have, or could have lied.

First, remember that their teaching and writings were circulating at a time when other witnesses to the life of Christ could have confirmed or denied their testimony. Peter, in his first speech after the resurrection of Christ, addressed a crowd of people, appealing to their general knowledge of the life of Christ:

*"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles wonders and signs, which God did **among you** through him, as you yourselves know."* (Acts 2:22)

Paul, when defending himself before Roman officials and prominent men, addressed King Herod Agrippa II directly, declaring,

*"What I am saying is true and reasonable. **The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.**"*(Acts 26:25,26)

Second, eleven of the 12 apostles sealed their testimonies with their blood.

GROUP PROJECT! Divide into groups into groups of 5 or less. Your group has been following a certain teacher (not a miracle worker, but a good, moral person) for the past 3 years. But recently the leader fell into such poor favor with the religious and governing authorities that he was sentenced to death. Now you've got your future to consider. You have families, friends, goals and dreams. But you are concerned that the authorities may be after you next. Decide what you will do to move on with your lives, now that your leader is dead. (Teacher: This project should demonstrate the absurdity of the apostles deciding to fabricate a wild story about a miracle worker who rose from the dead, and agreeing to face the beatings, jail terms, and other consequences of promulgating this charade for the rest of their lives.)

Good work guys! Now, let's compare the situation you just imagined to the plight of the disciples just after Jesus' death. Imagine for a moment that you are one of the disciples following the cruel death of your leader. Peter had been so frightened that he denied he even knew Jesus. The rest had fled. If Jesus never performed miracles or rose from the dead, why in the world would you (excluding Judas, who betrayed Christ for money) dedicate the rest of your life to spreading a lie that you knew would snuff out every other dream you had for your life and exchange it for suffering, imprisonment and the likelihood of a painful execution?

Some men of history have died for ideas which were untrue. But martyrs for a cause believe that their ideas are true. If Jesus' resurrection and miracles did not happen, then the disciples of all people *knew* they didn't happen. It would be incredible to believe that they risked their lives for something they knew to be a lie.

Listen carefully as I tell you how each of Jesus' disciples died. Their deaths tell us how much they believed in the truth of their testimony.

Andrew -- death by crucifixion

Bartholomew -- crucifixion

James the brother of Jesus -- death by stoning

James the son of Alphaeus -- death by crucifixion

James the son of Zebedee -- death by the sword

John -- Although banished to a small island in his later years, perhaps sentenced to hard labor in the quarries, he may have died a natural death.

Matthew -- death by the sword

Peter -- death by crucifixion (upside down)

Philip -- death by crucifixion

Simon -- death by crucifixion

Thaddaeus -- death by arrows

Thomas -- death by spear

Running out of time? If so, don't lose your momentum by trying to cram in another point. You're not enslaved to this lesson plan! This is a great place to wrap up. Ask the jury for a thumbs up or down on the accuracy of the gospels. Slam down the gavel. But look them in the eye and transform this heady material into action. "This youth group meets tonight because some first century fishermen, a tax collector, and other normal guys, dedicated their lives to spreading the good news of Jesus. Are the things you're living for worth what Jesus' and His followers died for? Are you willing to forgo some popularity, some parties, some time, in order to make a stand for the kingdom?"

But in addition to these sources we also have the words of many other early writers, including Papias (A.D. 130) and Polycarp (A.D. 70-156, disciple of John), on New Testament events and the See F.F. Bruce, Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament.

Think for a moment. They sealed their testimony with their blood. If you miss everything else, don't miss this thought: Is it really reasonable to believe that all these followers of Jesus suffered and died for something that they knew to be a lie? It's absurd. My conclusion: Jesus actually performed the miracles that you read about this week in the book of Luke. He actually defeated death in his resurrection. It's the *only* reasonable way to explain the lives of his followers.

To review, we've covered two tests that a historian uses to determine accuracy in historical sources. First, he tests the transmission of the text. Second, he tests the document internally to see if the authors were trustworthy. But we have one more test.

III. The External Test

This test asks, "What other historical evidence either confirms or casts doubt upon the document?" We will look at two types of external evidence.

A. Independent written sources. Long before Matthew, Mark, etc. were pulled together into what we now call the New Testament, each document circulated independently. So, if we are looking for confirmation of the life of Christ as written by Matthew, for example, we should look first to the documents we have from Mark, Luke, John, and references to His life by other writers as we have them in the New Testament. The New Testament is not one source. It is a compilation of many sources.

B. Archeology can tell us whether or not the kings, places, and customs mentioned by the authors were accurate. If documents were forged at some later date or distant place, assuredly there would be inaccuracies in these areas. As F.F. Bruce, professor at the University of Manchester, England, observes,

"A writer who thus relates his story to the wider context of world history is courting trouble if he is not careful; he affords his critical readers so many opportunities for testing his accuracy." (Bruce, p. 82)

ILLUSTRATION: For example, another religious document that refers to ancient cities and civilizations is the Book of Mormon. But none of the more than 38 cities named in the Book of Mormon has ever been found. A member of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., stated that "Smithsonian archaeologists see no connection between the archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book (of Mormon)." (Tanner, Mormonism, Shadow or Reality, p. 97)

In contrast, there is so much archeological confirmation on the Bible that certain magazines and many books are written solely about archaeology and the Bible. Civilizations, cities, and specific rulers referred to in the Bible often have outside confirmation by archaeology. If you want to see it the evidence for yourself, take a trip to the Holy Land! Bruce notes the remarkable accuracy of Luke's references to the names and proper titles of officials. Whether they be emperors, proconsuls, governors, or town clerks, Luke always got it right. (Bruce, p. 82)

ILLUSTRATION: Sir William Ramsay, regarded as one of the greatest archeologists of all time, began his career assuming that Luke and Acts were written around 100 years after the events they wrote about. So he doubted their accuracy. But his discoveries changed his opinion. After 30 years of work, Ramsay concluded that

"Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."(Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen, p. 222)

CONCLUSION

The defense has presented a case for the accuracy of the New Testament documents. He examined the New Testament documents in light of the normal laws by which we distinguish historical fact from fiction or error. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, in the light of the evidence you have heard, do you believe that the New Testament documents present a trustworthy, or a distorted picture of Jesus Christ and the early church? (You may wish to have the jury write their verdict anonymously on slips of paper. You can tally the votes.)

Books consulted in Lessons 3 and 4: John Warwick Montgomery, History and Christianity, (InterVarsity Press, 1964), William M. Ramsay, The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament, (Baker Book House, 1979), F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? (Eerdmans, 1943), F.F. Bruce, Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament, (Eerdmans, 1974), Josh McDowell, More Than a Carpenter, (Tyndale House, 1977), Josh McDowell, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, (Here's Life, 1972), Floyd C. McElveen, The Mormon Illusion, Regal, 1979.

SHARPENING YOUR AX APPEALING TO THE MINDS OF YOUTH (PART II)

How can we fire a passion for wisdom among our student? Here are some hints:

- I. Model a passion for seeking wisdom. Do you want your youth to drink from a fresh, flowing stream, or a stagnant pool? Character is easier caught than taught. Are you hot after wisdom?
 - A. Develop a long-range, systematic plan of Bible study. Have you ever read the entire Bible? Set a goal for this coming year. Do you systematically memorize Scripture? The Navigators *Topical Memory System* would be a great place to start.

- B. Set reading goals.** A large percentage of people never read an entire book following high school. Of those who do read, many never venture beyond romance novels. James Dobson's father used to vary his reading between different disciplines. Medicine now, Psychology later, etc. Start with your personal interests and needs, but occasionally force yourself outside these areas to broaden yourself. Do you need to understand money management? Digest Larry Burkett and others. Is your marriage mediocre, or worse? Desperately seek wisdom from the experts. As you grow in wisdom, you will grasp many fresh illustrations for your youth, and they will catch your zeal for seeking wisdom.
- C. Set aside time for study.** A missionary tried to set up an appointment with a man in Eastern Europe. He suggested a time, but the man replied, "I'm sorry. That's during my reading time." "My what?!!" most American's would react. Apparently this man realized the importance of setting aside and jealously guarding his time for acquiring wisdom.
1. **Avoid time wasters.** You'll never become wise watching hours of television every day. For TV addicts, start by replacing a ball game per week with a book. Or, take off a 30 minute show per day. If you start going through severe withdrawal, either cure the urge by applying a four-way lug wrench to your set, or keep a broken remote control in your pocket and punch the station button each time you flip a page.
 2. **Redeem stray moments throughout the day.** Finding myself stranded at Wal Mart with a seasoned shopper, I pulled out paper and pen, scanned the magazine rack, and mined about eight superb illustrations from an article about basketball super coach Pat Riley. (Then, being the cheapskate that I am, I placed the magazine back on the rack and never bought it.)
- I never leave home without a book. While running taxi service for my boys, I often salvage 10 minutes of reading while waiting for soccer practice to end. Borrow cassette tapes from your church library or your library's lending library. Invest in a set of the New Testament on tape, or the entire Bible, in your favorite version. During a 30 minute round trip commute to work or school every day, you can get through the entire New Testament rather quickly. (And it beats listening to that talk show host who pulls out a gem of wisdom on the average of once a month.)
- D. Seek out wise counsel.** When Bible teacher Dan Dehaan married into a sizeable estate, he needed wisdom on investing. So he promptly set up weekly lunches with successful businessmen, to soak up their wisdom. He also loved to find when godly Christians had a layover at the Atlanta airport, or needed a ride somewhere, so that he could ask questions and grow in wisdom. It's no surprise that Dehaan's home bible study group grew to around 2000 people meeting every Tuesday night. He wasn't teaching from a stagnant pool.

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON V
WAS JESUS MORE THAN A MAN?
(PART I)

BIG IDEA: JESUS WAS MORE THAN A GOOD TEACHER. HE WAS THE SON OF GOD.

PURPOSE: YOUTH SHOULD LEAVE THIS STUDY BELIEVING THAT JESUS WAS THE SON OF GOD.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past weeks, we've been examining the evidence for the Bible's trustworthiness. To present the evidence, we adopted a courtroom scene, complete with a Judge, Prosecutor, Attorney for the Defense, and you guys, of course, the jury.

Review: (Have a youth run in with pad and pen in hand, camera slung around his neck.) I'm a reporter for "The Daily Planet." Before the trial resumes, I need you guys to tell me what convinced you to rule that the Bible is trustworthy. How can you trust a document that is thousands of years old?" Let individual members of the jury respond. After their response, show them the poster (or overhead) with the outline and remind them of any main points they may have missed.

The judge now opens today's court session with his gavel. "The prosecution can now speak."

THE PROSECUTION:

(ADDRESSING THE DEFENSE.) "YOUR ARGUMENTS FOR THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY STILL FALL SHORT. JUST LOOK AROUND TODAY AT ALL THE DIFFERENT "JESUSES" PEOPLE FOLLOW. SOME CALL HIM THE SON OF GOD. BUT OTHERS DENY THIS, CALLING HIM MERELY A PROPHET, OR A GREAT TEACHER, OR SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARY OR MORAL LEADER. AND MOST OF THESE PEOPLE LOOK TO THE BIBLE TO JUSTIFY THEIR POSITIONS. EVEN IF THE BIBLE IS ACCURATE IN ITS PRESENTATION OF JESUS, WE CAN KNOW LITTLE ABOUT HIM FROM THESE DOCUMENTS. UNDOUBTEDLY THEY DO NOT PRESENT A CLEAR PICTURE OF JESUS, CERTAINLY NOT CLEAR ENOUGH TO PROVE HE IS THE SON OF GOD."

THE DEFENSE:

"It is understandable that people would try to fashion a Jesus to their own liking. After all, believing in His divinity requires something of our lives. It is much easier to be inspired by a moral leader, challenged by a revolutionary, or taught by a good teacher, than to fall on my knees before a God who became man. To acknowledge Him as Lord implies he has rightful claims on our lives. So the tendency to distort Jesus' identity is understandable. The only way we can judge the truth about Jesus is to objectively look to the documents themselves. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, today I will take you to the primary documents on the life of Jesus to make your own judgement as to who He is."

A. The Claims of Jesus and New Testament Authors

"At this time we will ask the members of the jury to read from these early historical accounts to see if the documents present a clear picture of Jesus." (Divide up the verses among your youth group. Discuss as a group the implications of the verses concerning the New Testament claims to Jesus' divinity. And encourage your youth to write this outline in a blank leaf in the back of their Bibles. They will find themselves needing this defense when they encounter Jehovah's Witnesses and other groups throughout their lives.)

1. He has qualities that only God has.

- a. He is eternal (Jn. 8:58, Col. 1:15, Heb. 13:8).

- b. He is omniscient (Jn. 16:30; 21:17; Col. 2:3).
- c. He is omnipotent (Jn. 5:19; Heb. 1:3).

2. He does the things that only God can do.

- a. Creating the world. (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:10)
- b. Forgiving sins which were committed against God. (Matt. 9:2,6; Lk. 7:47f.)
- c. Judging the world (Jn. 5:22; Rom. 14:10, 2 Cor. 5:10; Mt. 25:31f.)
- d. Accepting Worship (Ex. 34:14; Jn. 5:23; Heb. 1:6)

3. He is identified with Jehovah

Jehovah was God's name in the Old Testament [See Exodus 6:2,3 and Deut. 6:4]. Note how the references to Jehovah in Ps. 102:24-27 are applied to Jesus in Heb. 1:10- 12.)

4. He is called God. (Jn. 1:1,14; Jn. 20:28; Heb. 1:8).

5. He claims to be one with God (Jn. 10:30).

Muslims claim Jesus was merely a prophet. Jehovah's witnesses deny His divinity. Many hail Him as simply a good teacher or moral example. But as we see, the New Testament paints a picture of a God who took on flesh.

B. Our Limited Options

At this point, we begin to realize that Jesus was not just a nice person who went about doing good. Rather than teaching a way to God, He proclaimed Himself as the only way to God (John 14:6). Although we can forgive those who sin against us, He forgave those who sinned against God. He claimed to be one with God and didn't rebuke Thomas when he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

But this self-proclamation limits our options. If Jesus were not God, but claimed to be God, we should not consider Him a great moral example. An egomaniac, perhaps. But not an admirable religious leader or inspired teacher.

C.S. Lewis, formerly a professor at Cambridge University, put it best:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let

us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

CONCLUSION

The court will take a recess until next week, when the defense will resume this argument. But for now, reflect on the things we have heard. In the light of C.S. Lewis' statement, it would seem foolish to believe Jesus was merely a good moral teacher. But for those of us who already believe that Jesus is God's Son, is it not even more foolish to believe that Jesus is God, yet to ignore Him in our lives? For those of you who consider yourselves Christians, reflect this week on your relationship to Jesus. If it were declared illegal to be a Christian, would your life produce enough evidence for someone to convict you? Some of us, tonight as we get into bed, should slip down onto our knees and tell Jesus that He is the Lord, the Boss, and you are His humble servant.

Close in prayer.

SHARPENING YOUR AX APPEALING TO THE MINDS OF YOUTH (PART III)

- II. Always give direction to those who want more. "I've just skimmed the surface. If you want to dig deeper, you've just got to read *More Than a Carpenter*. I've got copies on the bookshelf in the back of the youth room that you can either check out or purchase."
- III. Let them in on the consequences of your wise and foolish decisions. Failure is a wonderful teacher, but it's less costly to learn from someone else's failures than your own.
- IV. Enthusiastically tell them what you are currently reading. "As I read this Larry Burkett book on managing my money, it occurred to me that this is exactly what we're talking about on Wednesday nights." Remember, many parents never read. For some of your youth, you may be their only adult mentor in this regard.
- V. While teaching, actually hold up books that you draw illustrations or information from.
- VI. Let youth hold you accountable for scripture memory, daily devotions, or other reading goals. They will probably want you to mutually keep them accountable.
- VII. Learn from your youth. Treat them as respected resources into youth culture and their particular areas of interest.

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON VI
WAS JESUS MORE THAN A MAN?
(PART II)

INTRODUCTION

THE JUDGE BRINGS THE COURT TO ORDER WITH HIS GAVEL. The defense may continue its case.

THE DEFENSE:

The prosecution argued that the New Testament documents did not paint a clear picture of who Jesus was. Last week I began a line of reasoning that I hope to complete today. I began by arguing, from very clear evidence, I might add, that Jesus claimed to be God. I proceeded to reason that this claim disqualified the options of "mere prophet," "only a good teacher", and "moral example". A mere mortal claiming to be God would not be revered for these other traits. Just think about it --"He's really a great guy. He just has this one problem. He thinks He is God." Jesus limited our options to lunatic, liar, or Lord. Today we will look at the evidence He gave to substantiate His claim to be Lord.

C. Jesus' Evidence for His Claims

Jesus didn't expect us to believe His claims without evidence. God gave us proof of Jesus' claims in at least three ways (John 5:30-47).

1. His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies

"...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son...." (Romans 1:2-4)

Over 60 major Old Testament prophecies foretold the coming of a Messiah. For example, the Messiah was to...(Ask youth to read each of these verses out loud. As they read write each specific prophecy on your poster board or overhead.)

Micah 5:2 -- be born in Bethlehem.

Malachi 3:1 -- be announced by a forerunner.

Zechariah 9:9 -- enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

Isaiah 7:14 -- be born of a virgin.

Deut. 18:18 -- be a prophet.

Jer. 23:5 -- be a descendent of David.

Isa. 53:1ff. -- be despised, forsaken, pierced through, scourged. He did not open His mouth when accused, took our iniquities upon Himself, was killed, put into a rich man's grave.

If you know your Bible, you know that all of these were fulfilled in Jesus.

Two science professors, Peter W. Stoner and Robert C. Newman, applied the science of probability to just 8 select Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in one man. The odds? One chance in 10 to the 28th power. To make this huge number more understandable, they illustrate it:

"Suppose we take 10 silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time, providing they wrote using their own wisdom."(Stoner and Newman, Science Speaks, p. 107)

THE PROSECUTION:

I OBJECT! PERHAPS THESE "PROPHECIES" WERE ACTUALLY WRITTEN INTO THE OLD TESTAMENT FOLLOWING THE LIFE OF CHRIST, TO MAKE HIM APPEAR TO BE THE FULFILLMENT OF ANCIENT PROPHECIES.

THE DEFENSE:

Impossible. A translation of the entire Hebrew Old Testament, called the Septuagint, was begun about 250 B.C. and completed about 117 B.C. Copies of the Septuagint are still studied by scholars today. So to have a translation, you've got to have the original Hebrew that preceded it. And we know that these books were written long before Jesus' birth.

2. His miracles

“Men of Israel,, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”
(Acts 2:22)

Jesus did works which cannot be explained naturalistically. Although we occasionally see miraculous healings today, the ones performed by Jesus were of a different quality.

First, His healings were effective 100% of the time. Today, no self-professed healer would claim the ability to heal every person he or she prayed over. Yet, with Jesus, there were no failures.

Second, His healings were public and available for all to scrutinize. No complex stage sets with mirrors. He healed people that the local folk knew had been blind or lame from birth.

Third, he healed maladies which defy the healing efforts of physicians or psychics. Certain ailments lend themselves to the possibility of surprising or dramatic recoveries. Cancer can go into remission. A person pronounced dead one minute may come to life the next. But people born blind don't tend to regain sight. People dead and buried for 3 days don't revive.

Fourth, His healings were instantaneous and complete.

ILLUSTRATION: Imagine for a moment that a stranger comes to your school during lunch, announcing that he has an important message from God for your school. Some laugh and invite him to a weekend toga party. Others show mild interest. So he repeats, “I come with a word from God. But I understand your skepticism. Over the next few days I’ll prove to you that God’s working through me. (The school administrators try to throw him out, but he repeatedly eludes them.)

The bread truck missed its delivery, so he takes a dinner role from someone’s lunch box and divides it to feed the entire student body. “Can’t be,” mumble some. “Must be a trick,” conclude others. But over the next days you and your friends gasp in amazement as he gives sight to a 9th grader you know who was born blind. (Your school newspaper promptly assigns a reporter to stick to this guy like glue.) After school you notice Him standing by the pool one day at swim practice. With everyone’s eye on him, he casually walks across the pool lengthwise to reach your team manager, who is crippled from a childhood bout with

polio. All eyes are on him as he says, "Arise!" and she begins to walk normally.

The next day at school the halls are a beehive of conversation about this man. Then, a hush comes over the crowd as he enters. Following him are the two Seniors who died in the car accident last weekend! They claim that he raised them from the dead at the funeral home! "Now," says the stranger, "are you ready to listen to my message from God?"

Jesus did this quality of miracles over a period of three years. Accompanied by such dramatic signs we have plenty of good reasons to trust that God is speaking through Him. (John 9 provides a good, even humorous example of how people responded to Jesus' miracles.)

3. His resurrection (Acts 1:3)

The resurrection is so dramatic that it deserves attention apart from the other miracles. Lazarus was raised to die again. But Jesus defeated death, and by His death and resurrection proved His authority to give us hope and life. The proof of the resurrection contained in the biblical documents satisfies the honest inquirer. The witness of Peter, John, Paul, Matthew, Mark and Luke converge to give compelling evidence. Picture it. Observers watch Him die, witness His preparation for burial with around 100 lbs of wrappings and spices, note the rolling of a heavy stone over the tomb's entrance. A Roman guard is placed at the grave.

But on the third day He begins appearing, not in the feeble state of one revived after death by torture, but triumphantly. His appearances convince skeptics and transform discouraged, fearful followers into bold witnesses.

We don't have enough time to retrace the steps of lawyers, former skeptics, and others who have become believers through examining the evidence for this miracle. But here are a few that I will leave with the judge as exhibits "A", "B", "C", and "D".

EXHIBIT A: Oxford professors Gilbert West and Lord Lyttleton set out to disprove the Christian faith. Lyttleton purposed to disprove the conversion of Paul; West, the resurrection of Jesus. Following their investigations, both men became believers.

EXHIBIT B: Frank Morison, an English journalist, set out to write a book disproving Christ's resurrection. But as a result of his investigations, his thesis reversed, and the title became, Who Moved the Stone?, a book defending the resurrection. His first chapter was entitled, "The Book that Refused to Be Written."

EXHIBIT C: Lord Lyndhurst, regarded as one of the greatest legal minds in British history, wrote, "I know pretty well what evidence is; and, I tell you, such evidence as that for the Resurrection has never broken down yet." (Quoted by Wilbur Smith, Therefore Stand,) p. 425.

EXHIBIT D: Thomas Arnold, author of a famous three-volume History of Rome, appointed to the chair of Modern History at Oxford, made the following statement:

"The evidence for our Lord's life and death and resurrection may be, and often has been, shown to be satisfactory; it is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece, as carefully as every judge summing up on a most important cause. I have myself have done it many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself. I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence

of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead." (Sermons on the Christian Life. Its Hopes, Its Fears, and Its Close. 6th ed. London. 1859, p. 324, quoted from Smith, Therefore Stand)

CONCLUSION

Youth leader, have some booklets which explain the gospel, such as the Four Spiritual Laws, available to hand out to youth at the end of this session. Many skeptics have confused ideas about the nature of Christianity. An accurate understanding of the gospel message can clear many of their roadblocks to faith. Tell certain youth that you would like to get their opinion of the booklet after they read it. This can open up a later time of discussion concerning the gospel.

I challenge you to search through all human history and find someone who worked signs greater than those of Jesus of Nazareth. No one comes even close. Sinless in character, pure in His teachings, predicted by ancient prophecies and attested by extraordinary miracles, Jesus Christ stands unique among men. No one claiming to speak for God compares to Jesus. If you are seeking answers to life's most important questions -- "What is life's meaning?", "What is my purpose in life?", "Where can I find peace and hope?" Let me recommend to you Jesus Christ. He doesn't just *have* the answer, He is the answer.

And this brings us to a decision. According to Jesus, our eternal destiny is at stake. He came with good news from the Father. Will you accept it or reject it? I urge you to look over this booklet during the week, read the verses, and follow through with the basic message that it shares.

(Youth leader, consider showing "The Jesus Film" next week. It is an excellent film of Jesus' life. It would mean a lot following the last few lessons.)

Books consulted: C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity; Josh McDowell, More Than a Carpenter, Evidence That Demands a Verdict; Frank Morison, Who Moved the Stone?; Wilbur Smith, Therefore Stand; Stoner and Newman, Science Speaks; Henry C. Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology.

SHARPENING YOUR AX APPEALING TO THE MINDS OF YOUTH (PART IV)

- VIII. Encourage good questions. Wise does not equal "know-it-all." If a student stumps you with a good question, respond, "frankly, no one's ever asked me that question before. And *very* frankly, I have no clue as to how to respond. Can anyone else here help me answer this insightful question? Give me a week to do some research and I'll get back to you next week." How does this response make the student feel? Will this encourage further interaction?
- IX. Show sincere enthusiasm over what God is teaching you through His Word. A wise, old professor named Buck Hatch had taught the Prophets for decades. Wouldn't you expect that

the twentieth time through Jeremiah would bore him to tears? Not a chance. It deeply affected me when he'd say, "I was reading this in Jeremiah last night, and it just never struck me like this before!" As you can imagine, his enthusiasm was contagious. A youth ministry mentor used to tell me, "Steve, if you want youth to get excited about something, you be crazy about it. If you want them to bleed, you've got to hemorrhage!"

- X. Enlist youth as researchers. I asked a ninth grader to help me research a dating series. Several middle schoolers helped me research a book on music during their summer break. We would drive to a theological library and they'd research their hearts out. Then, I'd buy them submarine sandwiches and throw frisbees on the campus lawn. The ninth-grader has since earned a graduate degree in Bible and serves a church as minister of education. The middle schoolers loved to read C.S. Lewis (not just the fiction) on their own. This Summer, as college students, two of them are studying at Oxford. And both seem to be flourishing spiritually.

***CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
(LESSON VII)***

***HOW CAN I KNOW THAT
THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?***

BIG IDEA: WE CAN KNOW THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED BECAUSE OF THE TEACHING OF

JESUS AND THE MIRACULOUS NATURE OF PROPHECY.

PURPOSE: YOUTH SHOULD COME AWAY FROM THIS STUDY ASSURED THAT THE BIBLE IS A DIVINE BOOK.

INTRODUCTION

Some of you are probably saying, “Bring on a Dating Series! This evidence for our faith stuff is pretty heavy.” True, I’m making you think. But within the next year some of you will sit under a teacher who mocks Christianity, or a tragedy will happen and you will be tempted to doubt God’s goodness. If you’re struggling right now, you’re eating this up. If you’re not struggling with these issues, this will protect you in the future and give you ammunition when others attack your faith.

PRAY

Let the judge bring the court to order.

THE PROSECUTION:

YOU HAVE TALKED ABOUT THE BIBLE PRESENTING ACCURATE HISTORY AND INFORMATION ABOUT JESUS AND THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY. BUT TO SAY THAT ITS HISTORY IS ACCURATE DOESN'T MEAN IT IS INSPIRED. THE PSALMS MERELY LOOK LIKE A POET EXPRESSING HIS HEART. PROVERBS CONTAINS LOTS OF GOOD ADVICE. BUT YOU HAVE GIVEN THE JURY NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THE BIBLE IS THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.

THE DEFENSE:

I. THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Our jury found convincing evidence that Jesus was who He claimed to be: The Son of God, who worked the works of God and spoke the words of God. So now we have a word of authority we can appeal to. If Jesus' words have the authority of God, we can learn not only how to go to heaven and how to live, but we can also learn the nature of this special book, the Bible. Scriptures.

If Jesus is our Lord, we’re committed to look to Him for His view of the Scriptures. Today I set before the jury some of the words which Jesus spoke concerning the Scriptures. (Since Jesus had only the Old Testament to refer to, we would assume that the New Testament, once completed, should be regarded in the same manner that Jesus regarded the new.) I challenge the jury to look again to the primary documents which contain Jesus' life and teachings, to discover for yourselves what Jesus believed about the Bible. Divide the jury [youth group] into a few groups and give each group a category of Scriptures to look up. Ask them to write their observations on a large sheet of paper that they can present to the judge as evidence.

A. Does Jesus treat Old Testament people and events as truth, or fables?

Jesus referred to Abel (Lk. 11:51), Noah (Mt. 24:37-39), Abraham (Jn. 8:56), Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt. 10:15), Solomon (Mt. 6:29), and Jonah (Mt. 12:39-41) as real people and places. Not only do we find Jesus often referring to Old Testament people and places as fact, but we never find Jesus questioning the truth of any Biblical event or person.

B. Does Jesus see the Old Testament teachings as having authority, or just containing good ideas?

1. His Authoritative Use of Scripture (Mt. 22:31,32; Mt. 4:3-11)

"...have you not read what God said to you..."(Mt. 22:31,32)

2. His Statements about the Authority of Scripture

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."(Mt. 5:17-20)

THE PROSECUTION: BUT PERHAPS JESUS IS MERELY ACCOMMODATING HIMSELF TO THE BELIEFS OF HIS HEARERS. YOU KNOW, THE RELIGIOUS CROWD BACK THEN BELIEVED THE SCRIPTURES WERE INSPIRED, SO JESUS JUST ARGUED ON THEIR OWN TERMS, NOT CHALLENGING THEIR UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS SO AS TO NOT STIR UP UNNECESSARY STRIFE. (Teacher, ask, "Do you understand the issue?")

THE DEFENSE

a. But Jesus claimed the Scriptures had authority. This would not be accommodation, but lying.

b. It would be out of character for Jesus to dodge such a crucial issue due to public opinion. Jesus wasn't a politician, He was a revolutionary. He routinely put down the "politically correct", or commonly held opinions of men, infuriating hypocrites by presenting the truth.

For further study on Jesus' view of the Scriptures, see John W. Wenham, Christ and the Bible.

c. If the Scriptures were not inspired, why did Jesus quote them to Satan (Mt.4:3-11)? There was no need for accommodation here. If the Scriptures were filled with simply

fairy tales with a moral attached, can you imagine Satan's response when Jesus would rebuke him with words like, "I can't worship you, remember what the dwarf said to Snow White when...". We can all imagine Satan responding, "But as the witch said to Snow White...". A moral story appeals to our imagination, but it holds no authority. Jesus quoted the Old Testament with authority.

II. THE WONDER OF PROPHECY

Activity: "Will the Real Prophet, Please Stand Up?" Before this session, do some research on the history of a familiar city. Come up with some interesting details that the youth would not be familiar with. Perhaps it was destroyed or burnt in a certain year, rebuilt in another, was famous for a certain type industry, etc. Bring at least 6 details with you, written on paper (or an overhead sheet).

"I am seeking a contemporary prophet of God. But in order to prove you are a prophet, I'm challenging you to see something in the past in order to prove you can see the future. I know some things about the history of (the city) that I don't think you know. They are written on this overhead sheet (covered). I want you to try to guess the answers to my questions." Have them try to guess the answers, writing them on your student sheet. Have a piece of candy or something else as a prize for the person that gets closest to the correct answers.

This activity demonstrates the difficulty of seeing the past or future. While many books today try to predict the economic and political future of cities and countries, it is often entertaining to read the books at a later time. While parts may be accurate, the arrival of the future makes laughable many predictions. Yet, biblical prophets had to pass an exacting test. Their prophecies had to be true 100% of the time. 95% accuracy would disqualify them. Yet, we find some of the most wondrous prophecies in our Old Testament. We have time to look at only one. Hold on to your seats for this one.

THE DEFENSE:

I ask the members of the jury to turn in their Bibles to Ezekiel 26. As someone reads verses 2-14, I will list the specific prophecies on the black board (or poster board). These prophecies were made by the prophet Ezekiel at around 586 B.C.

1. Many nations will be against Tyre (vs. 3).
2. Tyre will become a bare rock (vs. 4).
3. Fishermen will spread their nets over the site (vs. 5).
4. Nebuchadnezzar will destroy the mainland city (vss. 7,8).
5. The debris will be thrown into the water (vs. 12).
6. Tyre will never be rebuilt (vs. 14).

Note how specific these prophecies are. Not vague, like so much of today's horoscopes ("Something good will happen to you this week"). Now let's see what has transpired in the past 2,500

years to check the prophecy for accuracy. Remember, most books which predict even short periods of time are rather comical to read when the future becomes the present. I need a member of the jury to come to the board and check off any prophecies that we find fulfilled in history.

Nebuchadnezzar attacked Tyre three years after the prophecy, finally destroying the mainland city in 573 B.C. (prophecy #4). But before he broke the gates down, most of the people had fled to a fortified island 1/2 mile into the sea. This city remained powerful for several hundred years.

Two hundred fifty three years later, Alexander the Great attacked Tyre. He used the debris from the mainland city to build a causeway, 200 ft. wide, to the island city (prophecies #2 and #5). But the citizens of Tyre made successful raids on the project, causing as much damage as they could. Finally, Alexander realized he needed ships. He collected ships from many regions, including Sidon,

It may be interesting to compare the predictions concerning Sidon, Tyre's sister-city in Ezekiel 28:22,23. Ezekiel prophesied blood in the streets and swords on every side, but not her destruction. History recounts time after time that conquerors captured Sidon, butchered her citizens and razed her houses. Yet she has always been rebuilt, today having a population of about 20,000. Who could have guessed which city would stand and which would fall?

Aradus, Byblus, Rhodes, Lycia, Macedon, and Cyprus (prophecy #1). Finally, Alexander defeated Tyre, killing 8000 citizens and selling 30,000 into slavery. Some consider this victory his greatest military achievement.

Tyre continued to be rebuilt and besieged by armies (prophecy #1), until it fell in 1291 A.D., never to be rebuilt (prophecy #6). Today small fishing vessels anchor there often spreading their nets over the bare rock (prophecy #3).

In order to fulfill prophecy #3, there must of course be a fishing village, which there is on the site. But it is not the great, ancient city of Tyre. (There is a city named Tyre today, but it is built down the coast from the from the city we have been examining. But the old city of Tyre has never been rebuilt.)

Jerusalem was destroyed many times, but it always recovered. Great freshwater springs still flow at the site of former Tyre, supplying about 10,000,000 gallons of water daily, enough to supply free water for a large city. Yet, it was never rebuilt. (

These are not the only prophecies we could discuss. Josh McDowell, in his book, Evidence That Demands a Verdict, lists 12 such prophecies which have been fulfilled through history.

CONCLUSION

The judge: Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you must decide from the evidence of Jesus' teaching and the fulfillment of these fantastic prophecies, whether or not the Bible is an inspired book.

Action Point: If a person really believed that this book (hold up your Bible) is an inspired book, a letter of love and instruction from our heavenly Father to us, what should we do with it? (Obviously, if we believe the book is from God to us, we should read it.) Give some hints to youth that will help them with their daily devotions and systematic reading of Scripture. Ask your youth for good suggestions as well. For example, 1 - Have a time and place. 2 - Begin with the gospel of John, if you are just beginning. 3 - Perhaps read a Proverb and a Psalm each day. 4 - Find a friend who will encourage and motivate you regularly. 5 - Use an understandable version. 6 - Don't get discouraged when you miss certain days. 7 - Reflect on how what you have read can apply to your life. 8 - Pray that God will motivate you to read and teach you through your study. 9 - Don't set a goal so lofty that it discourages you.

Resources: Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, World Book Encyclopedia.

ASSIGNMENT: Next week we will talk about what God is up to here and now. Could you write down any dramatic answers to prayer that you know of, either from your personal life, your family, books you have read, or the lives of respected ministers or friends. (Call some youth during the week to make sure they remember to gather these illustrations.)

SHARPENING YOUR AX

APPEALING TO THE MINDS OF YOUTH (PART V)

XI. Give youth teaching opportunities. This is how we inspire and train the next generation of teachers. Ideas:

1. Regularly allow youth to share what God is doing in their lives, or to share their salvation testimonies with the group. The less formal share times can pave the way for more formal opportunities.
2. Some churches have a “Youth Sunday,” where youth lead the church’s Sunday School classes.
3. Schedule a regular day (quarterly?) when youth take over the teaching of your youth meeting. Take the time you would have spent preparing and help them prepare messages. Since a full 30 minute message may be overwhelming, schedule three youth to share ten minutes each. Even if a message is relatively boring, ten minutes is bearable. But I have never been disappointed and have been consistently impressed by their skill. And realizing the guts it takes to share before a group, their fellow youth are very forgiving of mistakes and usually respond very well. (I preface the talks by sternly demanding the utmost respect from the listeners.) Ask youth, “what is something the Lord has been teaching you that you feel the youth group needs to hear?” Have them prepare an outline and share it with you a week prior to their teaching. Take notes when they speak, expecting God to speak to you through them. Tell them afterward what you learned.

XII. Start a lending library and/or book store in the youth area. Put speaking tapes, books on relevant topics, Christian music tapes, Christian novels and magazines on display. This keeps good reading before youth each time they enter the youth area. Ask your local Christian bookstore to give you their temporary book displays as new ones come in. Put a couple of organized youth in charge, developing a system of check-out cards, etc.

Think your youth are academically uninspirable? Check out the movie “Stand and Deliver,” not for your youth, but for yourself. Based on a true story, a teacher inspires inner city kids to study advanced math, even motivating them to stay after school for more. Some are awarded scholarships to prestigious universities. If he could motivate kids to study calculus during their free time....

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON VIII
DOES ANYTHING WE SEE TODAY

VALIDATE CHRISTIANITY?

BIG IDEA: WE CAN SEE GOD'S WORKING IN MODERN TIMES.

PURPOSE: YOUTH SHOULD COME AWAY FROM THIS LESSON BELIEVING THAT GOD'S ACTIVITIES TODAY POINT TO THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

INTRODUCTION

We've been examining the evidence for our Christian faith. Last week we saw a prophecy, fulfilled so dramatically in history that we know God must have been behind it. Today, let's move out of history into the present. Surely we can find evidence that God is up to something today.

THE JUDGE:

THE COURT IS NOW IN SESSION.

THE PROSECUTION:

MOST OF YOUR EVIDENCE CONCERNS EVENTS OF THE PAST. BUT IF CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE, THEN THE GOD OF THE BIBLE SHOULD BE ALIVE AND WORKING TODAY. BUT I DON'T SEE ANY EVIDENCE THAT HE IS AROUND. SURELY THIS CASTS DOUBT ON YOUR CLAIMS.

THE DEFENSE:

I agree with your premise. If Jesus lives today, we should find evidence of His working. I will set forth some of this evidence for the jury's consideration in a few moments. But a caution is in order. The Bible never claimed that miracles as frequent and dramatic as the time of the Exodus or the life of Christ should be normative for all Christians at every time of history. Sometimes God's works are few due to our unbelief. In times of revival or renewal His presence is sensed more readily. Sometimes God simply chooses to give more signs than other times. For instance, during the Exodus, God dramatically unleashed His power to judge Egypt and deliver Israel. But rather than promise that He would always provide such evidence for faith, He instructed Moses to keep some of the manna and institute religious observances which would remind people of these great works (See Exodus 13:1-16; 16:31-36).

But the prosecution apparently does not frequent gatherings of believers. Among His people, God is alive and well. We will first look at contemporary miracles.

If Christianity were true, we would expect to find...

I. CONTEMPORARY MIRACLES

A. Answers to prayer

"... if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him." (I John 5:14,15)

Last week I asked you to try to think of any dramatic answers to prayer that you are aware of. Do any of you have some you'd like to share?

Teaching hint: We all love stories, and this lesson is full of them. But even great stories can be ruined by a dull, lifeless reading. Don't *memorize*, but *familiarize* yourself with these stories. Practice telling them in a captivating way. If some of your youth are good story tellers, hand each a story a week prior to the lesson, and let the youth tell the story during the appropriate part of the lesson. Besides enhancing the lesson, this also helps your youth build their skill and confidence in teaching.

Helen Rosevere, a medical missionary to the Congo, was living in the middle of a jungle near the equator. A premature baby, whose mother had just died, would probably lose its life if they could not acquire a hot water bottle. So, a girl prayed for a hot water bottle to arrive that afternoon, and additionally a doll for the motherless girl. Rosevere frankly doubted it would happen. She had never received a parcel from home. And even if a parcel came, what are the odds that someone would send a hot water bottle to a jungle on the Equator? That very afternoon a parcel arrived. Sure enough, among the contents she found a hot water bottle! The girl who had prayed dived in, saying that if there was a hot water bottle, there would also be a doll. Sure enough, she found one.

Okay, let's think. What were the odds of this package with these contents arriving on this day, if God were not real?

George Mueller's diary contains so many instances of answered prayer that, were it possible, a person could be bored by the miraculous. Mueller's heart was stirred by the plight of England's orphans in the mid 1800's. Seven year olds worked 12 hours a day in factories. Escapees lived on the streets as thieves. Mueller, though a poor man himself, determined to build and operate an orphanage by faith and prayer alone, asking no person for financial assistance, telling no person of his financial needs, and never buying on credit.

All by faith, Mueller eventually operated 5 orphan houses caring for 2000 orphans. When money ran out or emergencies arose, the money always came, so that their needs were always supplied. For example, "in the two years August 1838 to August 1840, there were fifty occasions on which they were either penniless, or had insufficient means to pay their way for the day. But the money always came."(See The Diary of George Mueller, Great Man of Prayer, compiled

by A.J. Rendle Short.)

Let me give you just one dramatic incident. One morning Mueller had neither bread, nor money to buy bread, for the orphans. Rather than despair, he sat the orphans at the table and instructed them to bless their food. "What food?" the orphans must have thought. But they went ahead with the prayer. Just then, a knock came at the door. A bread truck had broken down nearby and the driver wished to donate the bread to the orphanage.

B. Encounters with the enemy

"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (I Peter 5:8)

The Bible talks plainly, not only of the miraculous work of God, but also of the existence of other spiritual realities that should be active in our world. The good guys are angels; the bad guys are (ask them) demons. First, for the bad guys.

Arthur P. Johnston, noted author and professor of missions, came upon a group of people in France who had gathered around a girl with supernatural powers. She read license plates that were behind her, told people the numbers on their money, told them what was on the page of any book that they might have. Johnston silently prayed that if this power were of the devil, she would lose her power. When the next book was offered, she fell silent. Neither could she tell what was on the page of the next book. Soon, the crowd dispersed.

Reflecting on this incident, her loss of power could not be attributed to a psychological reaction to Johnston's prayer. She couldn't hear his silent prayer. It must have been the hand of God.

See Demon Possession, ed. by John Warwick Montgomery for a collection of case histories, studies, and conclusions from doctors, psychiatrists, scientists, and other professionals.

More dramatic instances of demon possession and exorcism by prayer could be mentioned. The possessed have been observed speaking languages they do not know, speaking in a variety of voices, changing personalities, exhibiting many times their usual strength, recoiling at the name of Jesus, and other traits that cannot be completely explained by Psychologists and Psychiatrists. Often, they are delivered by the prayers of believers.

C. Encounters with angels

"...angels came and attended Him." (Matthew 4:11)

Billy Graham, in his book, Angels: God's Secret Agents, gives accounts of

angels protecting God's servants. I'll share two of them. The first is of John Paton, a missionary to the New Hebrides Islands.

"Hostile natives surrounded his mission headquarters one night, intent on burning the Patons out and killing them. John Paton and his

In Old Testament times, God told the Israelites to keep reminders of the great things He had done among them. For example, they were told to take 12 rocks from the Jordan River and set them up to remind them and their children of how God parted the waters. (See Joshua 4:1-7; 19-24) One day I decided to start recording those rather dramatic answers to prayer as I heard from friends and experienced them in my own life. Now, I can refer back to them when I go through dry times and remind myself of all that God has done. You may want to recommend this practice to your youth as well. The examples shared today could be the start of their journals.

wife prayed all during that terror-filled night that God would deliver them. When daylight came they were amazed to see that, unaccountably, the attackers had left. They thanked God for delivering them. A year later, the chief of the tribe was converted to Jesus Christ, and Mr. Paton, remembering what had happened, asked the chief what had kept him and his men from burning down the house and killing them. The chief replied in surprise, "Who were all those men you had with you there?" The missionary answered, "There were no men there; just my wife and I." The chief argued that they had seen many men standing guard -- hundreds of big men in shining garments with drawn swords in their hands. They seemed to circle the mission station so that the natives were afraid to attack. Only then did Mr. Paton realize that God had sent His angels to protect them. The chief agreed that there was no other explanation. Could it be that God had sent a legion of angels to protect His servants, whose lives were being endangered?"(pp. 16,17)

"A Persian colporteur was accosted by a man who asked him if he had a right to sell Bibles. 'Why, yes,' he answered, 'we are allowed to sell these books anywhere in the country!' The man looked puzzled, and asked, 'How is it, then, that you are always surrounded by soldiers? I planned three times to attack you, and each time, seeing the soldiers, I left you alone. Now I no longer want to harm you.' Were these soldiers heavenly beings?"(p. 17)

Graham further states that during his ministry he has heard or read "literally thousands of similar stories."(p. 17)

II. Intelligent Believers

Magi, a caste of wise men, sought out and worshipped Jesus as a child (Matthew 2:1-12). Today, wise men still seek Him.

Some primitive beliefs are dispelled by education. As primitive peoples find natural explanations for weather changes, droughts, and illnesses, they no longer look to animism or witches for explanations. But some non-Believers try to put Christians in the same category, assuming that enlightened reason will always move people away from belief in God. Sometimes non-believing professors delight in humiliating Christians, intimidating them with their Ph.D's and vast personal libraries. Have any of you had teachers like that?

Because of this, it helps to know of committed Christians who earned the same or higher degrees, and have the same or greater intelligence than the professors who put you down. We could list thousands. Why don't you make a list of intelligent believers you know? Here are a few I know:

The problem: Professors who intimidate believers by espousing liberal theories about the Bible and looking for contradictions.

The solution: *Robert Dick Wilson, former professor at Princeton. After earning his doctorate in the States and studying several more years in the States and Europe, Dr. Wilson dedicated his life to the study of the Old Testament. He wearied of seeing students lose their faith in the Scriptures because of the teaching of learned liberals, so he decided to earn credentials that no person could challenge. For 15 years he studied the necessary languages, **mastering 45 languages and dialects** useful to biblical study! For the next 15 years he studied the text of the Old Testament, investigating evidence of its reliability. For the last 15 years he taught and wrote on the results of his studies, defending the accuracy of the Old Testament. "Having done all this," says Wilson, "I claim to be an expert. I defy any man to make an attack upon the Old Testament on the ground of evidence that I cannot investigate.... If you know any language that I do not know, I will learn it." (McDowell and Stewart, Answers to Tough Questions.)*

The problem: Professors who intimidate students with their large personal libraries and knowledge of literature.

The solution: *Wilbur Smith, known worldwide for his great knowledge of books, author of the classic defense of Christianity, Therefore Stand, who drew wisdom from his personal library of 24,000 volumes.*

The problem: Certain scientists who think science and religion are incompatible.

The solution: *Dr. Boris P. Dotsenko, formerly of the Institute of Physics in Kiev, Ukraine and head of the Nuclear Laboratory before seeking political asylum in Canada in 1966. Although raised in atheism, in a political climate hostile to religion, Dotsenko found God while studying physics and mathematics at the University of Kiev. While reflecting on the Law of Entropy, he realized that, (and I quote), "the whole material world should have turned into a cloud of chaotic dust a long, long time ago! As I thought about all of that, it suddenly dawned on me that there must be a very powerful organizing force counteracting this disorganizing tendency within nature, keeping the universe controlled and in order. This force must be nonmaterial; otherwise, it too would become disordered... I realized also that even the most brilliant scientists in the best equipped laboratories are still incapable of copying even the simplest living cell: God must be the creator of life on Earth." After three chance discoveries of Bibles (one in a hay loft, one in a professor's library, and one in a hotel room) he became a Christian. (Barrett and Fisher, Scientists Who Believe, pp. 5,6.)*

Dr. C. Everett Coop (pioneer in developing pediatric surgery, the distinguished surgeon known for successfully separating siamese twins, appointed to the post of U.S. Surgeon General) stated, "I think that

the hallmark of my existence is the integration of my surgical life with my Christian faith." "I never operate without having a subconscious feeling that there's no way this extraordinarily complicated mechanism known as the human body just happened to come up from slime and ooze someplace. When I make an incision with my scalpel, I see organs of such intricacy that there simply hasn't been enough time for natural evolutionary processes to have developed them." (Scientists Who Believe, p. 163)

THE PROSECUTION:

BUT IF CHRISTIANITY IS SO REASONABLE, WHY AREN'T ALL INTELLECTUALS CHRISTIANS?

THE DEFENSE:

For the same reason that most window washers, truck drivers, mechanics, and executives are not Christians. The main roadblock to faith is not the head. It is the heart. People don't want to submit to God. People won't put aside their pride and admit their need for God. People want to control their own lives.

***ILLUSTRATION:** Famous antagonist of Christianity Aldous Huxley said, "I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning.... For myself, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from ... a certain system of morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom." (McCloskey, Tell It Often, Tell It Well, p. 104)*

So, intellectuals have to overcome the same hurdle to Christianity that you must overcome: a rebellious heart.

CONCLUSION

What about you? Be honest with yourself. What holds you back from a total commitment to God? Are you hiding behind intellectual excuses, refusing to admit that the real issue is who will direct your life? Next week we will look at how God changes lives. If God loved you enough to send His Son to die for you, you need not fear giving your life to Him.

Are you too proud to admit your need for God, thinking He will let you into heaven because of your good deeds. If you could have been good enough to get to heaven, why did Jesus bother to come to earth to die for you? Without a Savior, you're in the middle of the Sahara desert without a canteen, lost and hopeless. Isn't it about time that you trust Him to forgive you and give you a new life?

PRAY

Assignment: Next week we will talk about the benefits of being a Christian. During the week, think of some benefits that you can share with the group next week. Also, if you have any songs that that reflect the despair or meaninglessness in life without Christ, tell me after this session or call me during the week so that I can listen and see if it's appropriate to play for next week's group. (Your best bet may be to go with some songs from the past that they may still have heard. Suggestions: *Dust in the Wind*, written by Kerry Livgren before he became a Christian, performed by "Kansas".

Man in the Wilderness, or *Show Me the Way*, both performed by Styx. All these have

powerful, gripping words.)

SHARPENING YOUR AX GETTING YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE

When teaching small groups, your success is often determined more by what you can bring out of your students than how well you speak. The benefits of good discussions are legion. For example, 1) You get a valuable pooling of insights and experiences. 2) Many youth hate lecture, but love conversation. 3) Good interaction engages their minds, often enhancing understanding and retention. 4) Sharing gives youth a chance to teach one another, thereby using their gifts. Convinced? Then how can we get kids to open up and take part in discussions?

- I. Realize the barriers faced by many. A survey was taken to determine people's greatest fears. The number one fear they listed? The fear of speaking in public. I know respected, intelligent adults who tell their preacher, "Never call on me to pray in church." They can't handle it. But the smaller the group, the less intimidation. If your group is large, consider regularly breaking into smaller groups. And beware of putting them on the spot by spontaneously calling on them, unless they tell you that they don't mind. If some people think they might be called on, they may never come back.
- II. Praise good input. "Great point!" "Thanks for your input." A compliment at another time in the week ("Your input helped to make that lesson fly!") will put her on board as a regular contributor.
- III. Avoid put downs. Even the most boring, irrelevant comment can be followed by, "I really appreciate your sharing. Does anyone else have a comment?" Or, "Good input, but not exactly what I was looking for." Remember, it takes lots of guts for some to open their mouths. One strong put down could seal her mouth permanently.
- IV. Don't feel obligated to correct every mistake. Can you imagine what life with Jesus would have been like, had He felt constrained to point out every lustful thought, every mixed metaphor, every poorly worded comment by His disciples? Sometimes, it's best to brainstorm, pooling together all their ideas, without pronouncing judgment on any, before making your point.
- V. Don't tolerate distractions, such as:
 - A. "Blabber Mouth Bernard." During the session: "Bernie, let's get some input from others who haven't had a chance to share." Following the session, one on one: "Bernie, I appreciate your input during the lesson. But I've got a problem. How do you think we could get more people involved? Next week, after you get the ball rolling with a comment or two, let's allow some dead time after a question to see if someone else might open up."

- B. “Jim Carey Wannabe.”** Before a session, to the entire group: “I feel so important about our time in the Word of God, that I can’t tolerate any distractions. I truly believe that God wants to touch some lives within the next hour, and it’s not fair to the group if anyone distracts from what God is up to. So here are the rules during the teaching time. Distract once and I’ll warn you to stop. Distract again and my assistant will take a walk with you.” I only remember once that I had to ask someone to leave. Setting your rules clearly ahead of time can clear a lot of confusion. From my experience, the majority of youth don’t want distractions. Oh sure, they’ll laugh along with the wise cracks and not act like it bothers them. But I was amazed when I took a survey of my youth to find that many expressed that they were bothered by the distractions of a few. They want you to keep control.
- VI.** Give a chance to prepare a response. For a shy group, try dividing into small groups, brainstorming with a secretary recording the main ideas, and having someone read the ideas. Or, have youth individually write out a response, and read it back.
- VII.** Ask open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions can be answered with a yes or no. Once they answer, you’re still struggling to get that conversation going. Open-ended questions require a sentence or more to respond. For example, “What kind of excuses would have come to your mind had Jesus asked *you* to drop everything and follow Him?”

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
(LESSON IX)
DOES ANYTHING WE SEE TODAY
VALIDATE CHRISTIANITY?
(PART 2)

INTRODUCTION

Group discussion: Today we conclude our series: 'Christianity on Trial.' Last week we began looking at today's evidence. To review, imagine I am a non believer who is honestly seeking religious truth. What present day evidence can you give me for the truth of Christianity?" (Give several youth an opportunity to share an illustration of answered prayer, vivid spiritual warfare, etc. It could come from last week's lesson or their own personal experience. If they are more comfortable sharing in small groups, divide up.)

THE PROSECUTION:

(The jury, being persuaded by the arguments of the defense, voted during the week for the truth of Christianity. The prosecutor, his curiosity aroused by the trial, decided to visit your youth group today.)

THIS TRIAL CHANGED MY VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY. I NOW BELIEVE THAT THE BIBLE IS TRUE. BUT TO ME, EVEN IF IT IS TRUE, IT SEEMS TO BE A CRUTCH FOR THE WEAK. I'M A VERY PRACTICAL PERSON. WHAT CAN CHRISTIANITY DO FOR ME?

THE YOUTH LEADER:

Remember last week's assignment? Call a few youth during the week to remind them to be prepared to share.

"Perhaps I should first ask some of our youth themselves to share. Why would you recommend Christianity to Mr. Prosecutor?" (Give youth time to share.)

As well as a motivation to embrace Christianity, these benefits also confirm Christianity's truth claims. For if the Bible is true, we would expect its promises to be evident in the lives of believers today. A few additional benefits deserve our attention.

If Christianity were true, we would expect to find...

III. BENEFITS TO THE BELIEVER

A. Character Change

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (II Cor. 5:17)

C.E.M. Joad, former head of the philosophy department of the University of London, was antagonistic toward Christianity most of his life. He believed in man's essential goodness and that given time, we could create our own utopia on earth. But two world wars proved to him the Christian teaching of man's sinfulness and need of a Savior. In his later years, he became a Christian.

Many people, recognizing their tendency toward sin, long to be better people but lack the power to change. Prisons punish, but rarely reform. Neither have material security or education diminished crime in the Western World. Yet, many people testify of the dramatic changes that have occurred since they became new creatures in Christ. Some changes happen overnight; others over a lifetime. (Have some youth share the way Christ changes lives.)

Some people judge Christianity by the faults in our churches and our hypocrites. And I hate to say it, but some churches and youth groups are little more than social clubs. But if even among Jesus' closest followers, one was a Judas, we should not be surprised that plenty of hypocrites are still around today. But we *should* expect to find a core of committed believers whose lives have been transformed by the power of God. If you're looking for evidence of lives that Jesus has changed, you can find thousands.

ILLUSTRATION: Take, for example a group of prisoners held captive by the Japanese on the Malay peninsula during World War II. Starving for food, they became like animals, stealing food from one another to survive. Although all were unbelievers, they desperately needed hope and asked a fellow prisoner named Earnest, being a university graduate, to read the New Testament to them. As a result, they believed in Christ and were transformed from a pack of hungry animals into a community of love. (Earnest Gordon, Valley Over the Kwai)

B. Purpose in Life

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (Jn. 10:10)

(If youth brought songs reflecting the meaningless or despair of life without Christ, either play one with the words on an overhead, or read the words of one here. I give suggestions for songs at the end of the last lesson.)

Although we long to be significant players in a purposeful life, atheism fails to provide

such a world view. As William James wrote,

"We may be in the universe as dogs and cats are in our libraries, seeing the books and hearing the conversations, but having no inkling of the meaning of it all. (From Pluralistic Universe)"

The atheist Bertrand Russell well wrote of the purposelessness of life without God: (This is a long quote. If you wish to use all of it, break in occasionally, look at your youth and say, "Can you feel the hopelessness and purposelessness of this guy?")

"Such, in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which science presents for our belief.... That man is the product of causes which had no provision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins - all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built."
(Bertrand Russell, Why I Am Not a Christian, pp. 106,107)

If we are the accidental result of the operation of impersonal physical laws, we have no reason for existence, no purpose in life. Some people, caught up in the pursuit of pleasures or money or security, don't stop to fully realize the despair of such a world view. Others feel it deeply. Ralph Barton, a cartoonist, wrote in his suicide note:

"I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife, and from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up 24 hours of the day."

Some of you can identify with his despair. You may be a Christian, but you've entirely missed the joy and purpose that God has for you.

O.J. Simpson, long before the murder of his wife, at the time a football super-star and millionaire with everything going for him, said in a 1978 interview,

"I sit in my house in Buffalo (New York) and sometimes I get so lonely it's unbelievable. Life has been so good to me. I've got a great wife, good kids, money, my own health -- and I'm lonely and bored.... I often wondered why so many rich people commit suicide. Money sure isn't a cure-all."

The Christian perspective views man as created by God, in His image, with eternal significance. Destined for heaven, armed with weapons to fight spiritual battle, equipped with gifts to build His church and expand His kingdom, Christians can approach life with a sense of adventure, wonder, and purpose.

C. Moral Absolutes

“Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.”(Psalm 119:165)

The paragraph about societies crumbling will be of great interest to those in Eastern Europe, who have experienced this in their lifetime. Americans teaching this lesson may want to skip down to the part about sex (which is the great interest of many American youth!).

“Moral what’s?” some of you are thinking. Moral absolutes are things that are true for all people, at all times, in any culture. “Your telling me that one of the *benefits* of Christianity is its rules? I thought that’s what kept Christians from having fun?”

But without moral absolutes, societies crumble. This is exactly what happened in Eastern Europe. Under Communism, people were held accountable to a centralized government, which was in turn accountable to no one. In an atheistic system, truth is spoken when it is useful or convenient, not because a Higher Power will one day hold them accountable for their words. But within this system of relativity stood some

Christians who believed in absolutes such as truth and human rights.

ILLUSTRATION: Father Vaclav Maly was taught by his parents, "Speak freely. If anyone asks you what we speak about at home, tell them. We don't say one thing at home, and another at school. Always speak the truth. That's where you'll find real freedom." This stubborn stand for absolute truth led to his involvement with "Charter 77" and his part in the Czechoslovakian revolution. (Bud Bultman, Revolution by Candlelight, p. 25)

But absolutes are not just needed to make governments work. We also see the need for absolutes on a personal level. The Atheist Nietzsche well argued that those who deny God's existence should be consistent and sacrifice their belief in Christian morality as well. For the authority for Christian morality is anchored in the Bible. But we desperately need absolute, unchanging morals.

ILLUSTRATION: For instance, the Western media tends to present premarital sex as the norm. Atheist Burtrand Russell, in his writings, reasoned that premarital sex was healthy. During the Sexual Revolution of the 60's, a new generation agreed. With "The Pill" effectively preventing pregnancy, many saw no need to limit sex to marriage, or to a heterosexual relationship. And to a person with no absolutes, this conclusion would have seemed reasonable. But who then could have known the devastating results of the sexual revolution? The media has well-documented the AIDS epidemic. But even prior to AIDS, America's Medical Health Association was calling sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) the worst

disease epidemic in American society. Someone said that at one time Gonorrhoea and Syphilis were the second and third most reported communicable diseases in the U.S. Only the common cold was reported more often. And some STD's such as Herpes Simplex II, have no cure. How do these diseases spread? Through multiple sexual partners. Losing sight of one moral absolute - one sexual partner for life - paved the way to today's epidemic and the resulting heartache.

There is no way to know all the possible consequences of following the popular ethics of your peers, or your most carefully reasoned ethics. We desperately need an unchanging word from an all-wise God. And His ways work! (See Joshua 1:7,8)

D. A Way to Handle Death

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”(I Cor. 15:54,55)

The mortality rate in (your city) is astounding. Do you know what it is? 100%! Everyone here will one day die! And to the atheist, death is a frightening journey into the unknown. He *thinks* that at death his conscious life will cease. But he can never be certain. While Science boldly conquers many of life's mysteries, it cowers before the grave. Death remains a mystery. A terrifying mystery. For people can't peek through death's door and returned to tell us about it.

But as Christians we believe that Someone has returned from the dead. And on His authority we can know what lies on the other side for the Christian.

Give me some specifics. Let's dream a little about heaven. What do you know about heaven. What will it be like?

It's a paradise. A land where death is vanquished, tears are dried, pain is unknown. The apostle John, in his vision, beheld a heavenly land of such beauty that he employed images of the world's most precious stones to communicate its brilliance (Revelation 21:18-23).

"The conquest of death," writes J.P. Jacks, "is the final achievement of religion. No religion is worth its name unless it can prove itself more than a match for death." (The Inner Sentinel)

Can the "religion" of atheism conquer the fear of death? Listen to some atheists at their time of death (Quotes taken from Herbert Lockyer, Last Words of Saints and Sinners):

Has the name Voltaire come up in your literature or history classes?, This famous 18th century French philosopher spent most of his life fighting Christianity. But in his last moments he cried out desperately to his physician, "I am abandoned by God and man! I will give you half of what I am worth if you will give me six months' life. Then I shall go to hell; and you will go with me. O Christ! O Jesus Christ!" (His attending nurse said, "For all the wealth in Europe I would not see another infidel die.")

Sir Thomas Scott, Chancellor of England: "Until this moment, I thought there was neither God nor hell; now I know and feel that there are both, and I am doomed to perdition by the just judgment of the Almighty!"

Thomas Paine, influential American author who fought belief in God and the Bible: "I would give worlds, if I had them, that Age of Reason had not been published. O Lord, help me! Christ, help me! ... "If ever the devil had an agent, I have been that one."

Can salvation through Jesus conquer the fear of death? Listen to some Christians at their deathbeds:

Sir David Brewster, distinguished Scottish physicist: "I shall see Jesus, and that will be grand. I shall see Him who made the worlds."

William Blair, well-known English surgeon and medical author: "Reach me that blessed Book, that I may lay my hand on it once more. I rest in Christ."

John A. Lyth: "Can this be death? Why, it is better than living! Tell them I die happy in Jesus!"

CONCLUSION

Over the past weeks, we have looked at a truckload of evidences for Christianity. We started with the complexity of life leading us to belief in God. We found historical evidence, incredible prophecies, miracles, and changed lives that cry out "The Bible's true!" and "Jesus is Lord!" So now is decision time. God wants more than your mind. Even the demons believe that God exists. He wants your heart.

Like the jury at the end of the trial, you may still have unanswered questions, but you've got to declare a verdict. With Christianity, to not decide for Christ, is to decide against Him. What will you decide?

If you were to die today, do you know for sure that you will be in heaven tomorrow? The Bible says, "*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*"(I Jn. 5:13) So the Bible tells us we can know that we have eternal life. Do you know? Would you like to know? (At this point, present the gospel to the youth, giving an opportunity to express their faith in Christ through prayer. You may wish to use the "Four Spiritual Laws" or another booklet that expresses the gospel well. Make sure they have a copy to take home.)

For youth leaders and youth who are dealing with doubters:

SHARPENING YOUR AX HOW TO DEAL WITH DOUBTERS

1. **Pray for them.** The best of arguments can't penetrate the devil's blinding power. (John 15:7)
2. **Love them.** (John 13:35)
3. **Let them see true Christian fellowship.**(John 17:20-23) A well known skeptic attended church one day and responded to the invitation to trust in Christ. The pastor asked what part of the message convinced him of the truth of Christianity. The former skeptic responded that after assisting an old lady up the church steps, she said, "Isn't Jesus wonderful?" That lady's sweet comment broke his stubborn heart opened his eyes to the gospel.

4. **Clarify their real roadblocks to faith.** As I witnessed to a university student, he responded that he had intellectual problems with Christianity. I said, "If I could convince you that Jesus is the Son of God, would you submit your life to him?" He sheepishly smiled and said, "I guess that's the real problem. I don't want to give up my parties."(John 7:17)
5. **Offer to talk to them about their doubts. Lend them a book on evidences** (see Part 1 for recommended reading). "I think that these are important issues. Would you like to read this book and meet together to give me your opinion on it?"(I Peter 3:15)
6. **Encourage them to read the New Testament,** starting with the Gospel of John. (Romans 10:17) The Word of God has power. Often a fair reading of the Scriptures will suffice to clear away misconceptions and convince skeptics of the truth.

Handout

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON I
PART I: HOW CAN I KNOW THAT GOD EXISTS?
PART 1

INTRODUCTION

Is it okay to look at the evidence for our faith?

I Peter 3:15 "Always be _____ to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

Acts 1:3 "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing _____ that he was alive."

John 5:30-47 "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, _____ that the Father has sent me."

Acts 17:31 "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given _____ of this to all men by raising hem from the dead."

Luke 24:36-43 "He said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! _____; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.' And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet."

I. EVIDENCE FROM _____

God's "eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from _____, so that men are without excuse."(Romans 1:20)

A. Structures of _____ point to an intelligent Orderer.

1. Our _____ Concerning Chance and Order

“Sir Isaac Newton stumps an atheist.”

“Could the Sears Tower have just happened?”

2. The _____ and the Second Law of Thermodynamics

Without an outside infusion of energy, systems proceed from order to _____.

B. The Science of _____ Challenges Atheism

1. How the Science of Probability _____

“The odds of ‘a’, ‘b’, and ‘c’ falling in order are one chance in six.”

2. The Probability of Forming a _____ by Chance

“The incredible complexity of the simplest cells” according to microbiologist Michael Denton.

“Honey, I Shrunk the Youth Group!” If we could shrink small enough to enter one of the millions of openings on a cell’s surface, “we would find ourselves in a world of supreme technology and bewildering complexity. Is it really credible that random processes could have constructed a reality, the smallest element of which – a functional protein or gene – is complex beyond our own creative capacities, a reality which is the very antithesis of chance, which excels in every sense anything produced by the intelligence of man?”

Two of the components of a cell are protein molecules (each composed of about twenty different amino acids), and DNA molecules. *Each protein molecule can be made up of from hundreds to thousands of amino acid units, of typically 23 different types.*

“To get a cell by chance would require at least one hundred functional proteins to appear simultaneously in one place. The odds of this happening are one chance in 10, followed by 2,000 zeros!”

Another author figured it this way, “Even if 500 trillion shakings per second were employed the possibility of a chance variation occurring which would be a protein molecule is one in 10 to the 243rd power billion years.” But scientists limit life on the earth to only a few billion years.

Question: Could life have begun apart from an intelligent Creator?

Answer: Could John _____ win the Miss Universe Pageant?

Could an explosion in a print shop produce a complete set of _____
_____?

Action Points:

*CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON III
CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?
(PART I)*

INTRODUCTION: “Imagine that you are in history class”

I. The _____ Test.

First, find the length of time between the original writings and the earliest manuscript we now have.

Second, find out how many manuscripts we have.

<u>TEXT</u>	<u>DATE WRITTEN</u>	<u>FIRST COPY</u>	<u>TIME BETWEEN</u>	<u>NUMBER OF COPIES</u>
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400 years	49 (Of any one work.)
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 years	10
Plato (Tetralogies)	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 years	7
New Testament	40-100 A.D.	125 A.D.	25 years	OVER 24000

"The last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed." (Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum)

ACTION POINTS:

*CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?
(PART II)*

II. The _____ Test: "What does the document claim for itself?"

John 19:35

I John 1:1-3

II Peter 1:16

Luke 1:1-4

But could they have lied?

First, remember that their teaching and writings were circulating at a time when other witnesses to the life of Christ could have confirmed or denied their testimony.

*"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles wonders and signs, which God did **among you** through him, as you yourselves know." (Acts 2:22)*

Second, eleven of the 12 apostles sealed their testimonies with their _____:

Andrew -- death by crucifixion

Bartholomew -- crucifixion

James the brother of Jesus -- death by stoning

James the son of Alphaeus -- death by crucifixion

James the son of Zebedee -- death by the sword

John – Although banished to a small island in his later years, perhaps sentenced to hard labor in the quarries, he may have died a natural death.

Matthew -- death by the sword

Peter -- death by crucifixion (upside down)

Philip -- death by crucifixion

Simon -- death by crucifixion

Thaddaeus -- death by arrows

Thomas -- death by a spear

Is it really reasonable to believe that all these followers of Jesus suffered and died for something that they knew to be a lie?

III. The _____ Test: "What other historical evidence either confirms or casts doubt upon the document?"

A. Independent _____

B. _____ can tell us whether or not the kings, places, and customs mentioned by the authors were accurate.

"Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."(Sir William Ramsay, regarded as one of the greatest archeologists of all time)

ACTION POINTS

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON V
WAS JESUS MORE THAN A MAN?

The _____ of Jesus and New Testament Authors

1. He has _____ that only God has.
 - a. He is _____ (Jn. 8:58, Col. 1:15, Heb. 13:8).
 - b. He is _____ (Jn. 16:30; 21:17; Col. 2:3).
 - c. He is _____ (Jn. 5:19; Heb. 1:3).

2. He does things that only God can _____.
 - a. _____ the world. (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:10)
 - b. Forgiving sins which were committed _____. (Matt. 9:2,6; Lk. 7:47f.)
 - c. _____ the world (Jn. 5:22; Rom. 14:10, 2 Cor. 5:10; Mt. 25:31f.)
 - d. Accepting _____ (Ex. 34:14; Jn. 5:23; Heb. 1:6)

4. He is identified with _____

Jehovah was God's name in the Old Testament [See Exodus 6:2,3 and Deut. 6:4]. Note how the references to Jehovah in Ps. 102:24-27 are applied to Jesus in Heb. 1:10-12.)

4. He is called _____. (Jn. 1:1,14; Jn. 20:28; Heb. 1:8).

5. He claims to be _____ with God (Jn. 10:30).

B. Our _____ Options

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."(C.S. Lewis)

**WAS JESUS MORE THAN A MAN?
(PART II)**

Jesus' _____ for His Claims

1. His _____ of O.T. prophecies

"...the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son...." (Romans 1:2-4)

Micah 5:2

Malachi 3:1

Zechariah 9:9

Isaiah 7:14

Deut. 18:18

Jer. 23:5

Isa. 53:1ff.

The odds? According to science professors Peter Stoner and Robert Newman, one chance in 10 to the 28th power. To make this huge number more understandable, they illustrate it:

"Suppose we take 10 silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the state. Blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What chance would he have of getting the right one? Just the same chance that the prophets would have had of writing these eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, from their day to the present time,

providing they wrote using their own wisdom."(Stoner and Newman, Science Speaks, p. 107)

2. His _____

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.”
(Acts 2:22)

First, His healings were effective 100% of the time.

Second, His healings were public and available for all to scrutinize

Third, he healed maladies which defy the healing efforts of physicians or psychics.

Fourth, His healings were instantaneous and complete. _

“A stranger comes to your school.”

3. His _____ (Acts 1:3)

EXHIBIT A: Oxford professors Gilbert West and Lord Lyttleton

EXHIBIT B: Frank Morison, an English journalist

EXHIBIT C: Lord Lyndhurst

EXHIBIT D: Thomas Arnold, author of a famous three-volume History of Rome, appointed to the chair of Modern History at Oxford, made the following statement:

*"The evidence for our Lord's life and death and resurrection may be, and often has been, shown to be satisfactory; it is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece, as carefully as every judge summing up on a most important cause. I have myself have done it many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself. **I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead.**"*

ACTION POINTS:

**CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
(LESSON VII)
HOW CAN I KNOW THAT
THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?**

I. THE _____ OF JESUS

If Jesus is Lord, then we should believe His view of Scripture.

A. Does Jesus treat Old Testament people and events as fact, or _____?

Jesus referred to Abel (Lk. 11:51), Noah (Mt. 24:37-39), Abraham (Jn. 8:56), Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt. 10:15), Solomon (Mt. 6:29), Jonah (Mt. 12:39-41). Not only do we find Jesus often referring to Old Testament people and places as fact, but we never find Jesus questioning the truth of any Biblical event or person.

B. Does Jesus see the Old Testament teachings as having _____, or just containing good ideas?

3. His _____ Use of Scripture (Mt. 22:31,32; Mt. 4:3-11)

"...have you not read what God said to you..."(Mt. 22:31,32)

4. His _____ about the Authority of Scripture

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."(Mt. 5:17-20)

But perhaps He just accomodated Himself to His hearers.

- a. It would be a lie.
- b. It would be out of character.
- c. If the Scriptures were not inspired, why did he quote them to Satan (Mt.4:3-11)?

II. THE _____ OF PROPHECY

Ezekiel 26:2-14. (A prophecy made around 586 B.C.)

	<u>Prophecy</u>	<u>Fulfillment</u>
1.	Many nations will be against Tyre	(vs. 3).
2.	Tyre will become a bare rock	(vs. 4).
3.	Fishermen will spread their nets over the site	(vs. 5).
4.	Nebuchadnezzar will destroy the mainland city	(vss. 7,8).
5.	The debris will be thrown into the water	(vs. 12).
6.	Tyre will never be rebuilt	(vs. 14).

ACTION POINTS:

**CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
(LESSON VIII)
DOES ANYTHING WE SEE TODAY
VALIDATE CHRISTIANITY?**

If Jesus is alive today, we should find evidence of His working.

I. CONTEMPORARY _____

A. _____ to prayer

"... if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him." (I John 5:14,15)

"A hot water bottle to the Equator"

"A bread truck answers a prayer"

B. _____ with the enemy

"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (I Peter 5:8)

"A silent prayer stumps a psychic"

C. _____ with angels

"...angels came and attended Him." (Matthew 4:11)

"Hostile natives meet their match."

II. _____ Believers (Mt. 2:1-12)

"He mastered 45 languages!"

"A personal library of 24,000 volumes!"

"An atheistic physicist finds God"

"A famous surgeon makes incisions and finds God."

Action Points:

**DOES ANYTHING WE SEE TODAY
VALIDATE CHRISTIANITY?
(PART 2)**

III. _____ TO THE BELIEVER

E. _____ Change

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (II Cor. 5:17)

"P.O.W.'s get a change of heart"

F. _____ in Life

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (Jn. 10:10)

"I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife, and from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up 24 hours of the day." (Famous cartoonist Ralph Barton in his suicide note)

"I sit in my house in Buffalo (New York) and sometimes I get so lonely it's unbelievable. Life has been so good to me. I've got a great wife, good

kids, money, my own health -- and I'm lonely and bored.... I often wondered why so many rich people commit suicide. Money sure isn't a cure-all." (O.J. Simpson during his prime)

G. Moral _____

“Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.”(Psalm 119:165)

“The high price of free sex”

H. A Way to Handle _____

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”(I Cor. 15:54,55)

“Our local mortality rate is _____%”

“Their philosophy of life failed them at death – Voltaire, Sir Thomas Scott, Thomas Paine”

“Their faith pulled them through – David Brewster, William Blair”

ACTION POINTS:

OVERHEAD

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON I
PART I: HOW CAN I KNOW THAT GOD EXISTS?
PART I

INTRODUCTION

Is it okay to look at the evidence for our faith?

I Peter 3:15 “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Acts 1:3 “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.”

John 5:30-47 “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.”

Acts 17:31 “For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising hem from the dead.”

Luke 24:36-43 “He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet.”

II. EVIDENCE FROM CREATION

God's "eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."(Romans 1:20)

B. Structures of complex order point to an intelligent Orderer.

3. Our Personal Observations Concerning Chance and Order

"Sir Isaac Newton stumps an atheist."

"Could the Sears Tower have just happened?"

2. The Law of Entropy and the Second Law of Thermodynamics

Without an outside infusion of energy, systems proceed from order to disorder.

B. The Science of Probability Challenges Atheism

1. How the Science of Probability Works

"The odds of "a", "b", and "c" falling in order are one chance in six."

4. The Probability of Forming a Cell by Chance

"The incredible complexity of the simplest cells" according to microbiologist Michael Denton.

"Honey, I Shrunk the Youth Group!" If we could shrink small enough to enter one of the millions of openings on a cell's surface, "we would find ourselves in a world of supreme technology and bewildering complexity. Is it really credible that random processes could have constructed a reality, the smallest element of which – a functional protein or gene – is complex beyond our own creative capacities, a reality which is the very antithesis of chance, which excels in every sense anything produced by the intelligence of man?"

Two of the components of a cell are protein molecules (each composed of about twenty different amino acids), and DNA molecules. *Each protein molecule can be made up of from hundreds to thousands of amino acid units, of typically 23 different types.*

"To get a cell by chance would require at least one hundred functional proteins to appear simultaneously in one place. The odds of this happening are one chance in 10, followed by 2,000 zeros!"

Another author figured it this way, "Even if 500 trillion shakings per second were

employed the possibility of a chance variation occurring which would be a protein molecule is one in 10 to the 243rd power billion years." But scientists limit life on the earth to only a few billion years.

Question: Could life have begun apart from an intelligent Creator?

Answer: Could John Candy win the Miss Universe Pageant?

Could an explosion in a print shop produce a complete set of Encyclopedia Britannica?

Action Points:

**CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON III
CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?
(PART I)**

INTRODUCTION: "Imagine that you are in history class"

I. The Transmission Test.

First, find the length of time between the original writings and the earliest manuscript we now have.

Second, find out how many manuscripts we have.

<u>TEXT</u>	<u>DATE WRITTEN</u>	<u>FIRST COPY</u>	<u>TIME BETWEEN</u>	<u>NUMBER OF COPIES</u>
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	1100 A.D.	1400 years	49 (Of any one work.)
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 years	10

Plato (Tetralogies)	427-347 B.C.	900 A.D.	1200 years	7
New Testament	40-100 A.D.	125 A.D.	25 years	OVER 24000

"The last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed." (Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum)

ACTION POINTS:

*CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?
(PART II)*

II. The Internal Test: "What does the document claim for itself?"

John 19:35

I John 1:1-3

II Peter 1:16

Luke 1:1-4

But could they have lied?

First, remember that their teaching and writings were circulating at a time when other witnesses to the life of Christ could have confirmed or denied their testimony.

*"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles wonders and signs, which God did **among you** through him, as you yourselves know." (Acts 2:22)*

Second, eleven of the 12 apostles sealed their testimonies with their blood.

Andrew -- death by crucifixion

Bartholomew -- crucifixion

James the brother of Jesus -- death by stoning

James the son of Alphaeus -- death by crucifixion

James the son of Zebedee -- death by the sword

John – Although banished to a small island in his later years, perhaps sentenced to hard labor in the quarries, he may have died a natural death.

Matthew -- death by the sword

Peter -- death by crucifixion (upside down)

Philip -- death by crucifixion

Simon -- death by crucifixion

Thaddaeus -- death by arrows

Thomas -- death by a spear

Is it really reasonable to believe that all these followers of Jesus suffered and died for something that they knew to be a lie?

III. The External Test: "What other historical evidence either confirms or casts doubt upon the document?"

C. Independent sources

D. Archeology can tell us whether or not the kings, places, and customs mentioned by the authors were accurate.

"Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."(Sir William Ramsay, regarded as one of the greatest archeologists of all time)

ACTION POINTS

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON V
WAS JESUS MORE THAN A MAN?

A. The Claims of Jesus and New Testament Authors

1. He has qualities that only God has.

- a. He is eternal (Jn. 8:58, Col. 1:15, Heb. 13:8).
- b. He is omniscient (Jn. 16:30; 21:17; Col. 2:3).
- c. He is omnipotent (Jn. 5:19; Heb. 1:3).

2. He does things that only God can do.

- a. Creating the world. (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:10)
- b. Forgiving sins which were committed against God. (Matt. 9:2,6; Lk. 7:47f.)
- c. Judging the world (Jn. 5:22; Rom. 14:10, 2 Cor. 5:10; Mt. 25:31f.)
- d. Accepting Worship (Ex. 34:14; Jn. 5:23; Heb. 1:6)

5. He is identified with Jehovah

Jehovah was God's name in the Old Testament [See Exodus 6:2,3 and Deut. 6:4]. Note how the references to Jehovah in Ps. 102:24-27 are applied

to Jesus in Heb. 1:10-12.)

4. He is called God. (Jn. 1:1,14; Jn. 20:28; Heb. 1:8).

6. He claims to be one with God (Jn. 10:30).

B. Our Limited Options

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."(C.S. Lewis)

WAS JESUS MORE THAN A MAN?

(PART II)

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"A stranger comes to your school."

3. His resurrection (Acts 1:3)

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ACTION POINTS:

CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL (LESSON VII) HOW CAN I KNOW THAT THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?

IV. THE TEACHING OF JESUS

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If Jesus is Lord, then we should believe His view of Scripture.

A. Does Jesus treat Old Testament people and events as facts, or fables?

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B. Does Jesus see the Old Testament teachings as having authority, or just containing good ideas?

5. His Authoritative Use of Scripture (Mt. 22:31,32; Mt. 4:3-11)

“...have you not read what God said to you...”(Mt. 22:31,32)

6. His Statements about the Authority of Scripture

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”(Mt. 5:17-20)

But perhaps He just accommodated Himself to His hearers.

- d. It would be a lie.
- e. It would be out of character.
- f. If the Scriptures were not inspired, why did he quote them to Satan (Mt.4:3-11)?

V. THE WONDER OF PROPHECY

Ezekiel 26:2-14. (A prophecy made around 586 B.C.)

	<u>Prophecy</u>	<u>Fulfillment</u>
1.	Many nations will be against Tyre	(vs. 3).
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4.	Nebuchadnezzar will destroy the mainland city	(vss. 7,8).
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ACTION POINTS:

**CHRISTIANITY ON TRIAL
LESSON VIII
DOES ANYTHING WE SEE TODAY
VALIDATE CHRISTIANITY?**

If Jesus is alive today, we should find evidence of His working.

I. CONTEMPORARY MIRACLES

A. Answers to prayer

"... if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him." (I John 5:14,15)

"A hot water bottle to the Equator"

"A bread truck answers a prayer"

B. Encounters with the enemy

"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (I Peter 5:8)

"A silent prayer stumps a psychic"

C. Encounters with angels

"...angels came and attended Him." (Matthew 4:11)

"Hostile natives meet their match."

II. Intelligent Believers (Mt. 2:1-12)

"He mastered 45 languages!"

"A personal library of 24,000 volumes!"

"An atheistic physicist finds God"

"A famous surgeon makes incisions and finds God."

Action Points:

***DOES ANYTHING WE SEE TODAY
VALIDATE CHRISTIANITY?
(PART 2)***

VI. BENEFITS TO THE BELIEVER

I. Character Change

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (II Cor. 5:17)

"P.O.W.'s get a change of heart"

J. Purpose in Life

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (Jn. 10:10)

"I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife, and from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up 24 hours of the day." (Famous cartoonist Ralph Barton in his suicide note)

"I sit in my house in Buffalo (New York) and sometimes I get so lonely it's unbelievable. Life has been so good to me. I've got a great wife, good kids, money, my own health -- and I'm lonely and bored.... I often wondered why so many rich people commit suicide. Money sure isn't a cure-all." (O.J. Simpson during his prime)

K. Moral Absolutes

"Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble."(Psalm 119:165)

"The high price of free sex"

L. A Way to Handle Death

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."(I Cor. 15:54,55)

"Our local mortality rate is 100%"

"Their philosophy of life failed them at death – Voltaire, Sir Thomas Scott, Thomas Paine"

"Their faith pulled them through – David Brewster, William Blair"