

A long, straight road stretches into the distance under a dramatic, cloudy sky. The road is flanked by fields of tall grass, and the sky is filled with large, white, billowing clouds. The overall scene is serene and evocative, suggesting a journey or a path forward.

# LUKE'S HISTORICAL DEFENSE OF CHRISTIANITY

*Biblical Research Library*  
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# LUKE'S HISTORICAL DEFENSE OF CHRISTIANITY

**The New Testament is the inspired word of God. The books of Luke, John and Acts were written from the viewpoint of being an apologetic of Christianity. Specifically, Acts was written from the view that the growth of the early church as a result of convicted lives is an apologetic evidence that Christianity originated from God. The transformed and committed lives of the early disciples can be answered only by the fact that they actually experienced the supernatural intervention of God in their lives. The rapid growth of the church throughout the early world can be explained only if the early members of the church experienced the miraculous work of God. The major part of the document of Acts was written as a defense for the apostle Paul who was on trial for his life before Caesar. It is interesting, therefore, to see how Luke writes this defense in order to substantiate Paul's innocence because he actually experienced the work of God in his life.**

## INTRODUCTION

The beliefs and behavior of the apostle Paul were the occasion for God to prove before the world the validity of the Christian religion. As we investigate the document that is referred to as Acts, an obvious defense is made for Christian belief. There has been much speculation concerning the purpose for which Luke wrote. However, one thing is clear. The document closes with Paul in Rome to appear for his life before a government that had little knowledge of Christianity nor concern for religious matters. Nero was Caesar at the time the document closes, and thus, tension against Jews was mounting in these final days of the Jewish State that would be finally destroyed in A.D. 70. Specific persecution was soon to be launched

against Christians as Nero mentally digressed in his obsession against all Christians.

It is my belief that Acts was written to be an apologetic, a defense of Christianity. However, we are not sure who Theophilus was to whom the epistle was directly addressed. He was the "Most Excellent" Theophilus, a title that was given to someone of official status. Allow me the assumption, therefore, to affirm that the document was addressed to the Most Excellent Theophilus for a defense on behalf of Paul. With this assumption I set forth the following outline of arguments that Luke covers in the document of Acts.

We must not assume that Paul is in Rome by accident or even by his own

choice. Before his appearances began before the Roman courts in Palestine and Rome, God assured Paul that He must stand before all Rome and testify to the validity of Christianity. On his last trip to Jerusalem the Lord came to him in a vision and said, *“Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome”* (At 23:11). Paul had this vision in mind when he appealed to Caesar in Felix’s court (At 25:11,12). We assume, therefore, that it was God who wanted Christianity to stand trial before Rome’s highest court. The plan was not of Paul.

On his way to Rome, God sent an angel to Paul during his stormy journey. The angel said, *“Do not be afraid, Paul, you must be brought before Caesar ...”* (At 27:24). It was God’s plan, therefore, to use Paul as the occasion to have Christianity tried before the highest court of the world. We must not overlook the point that Paul’s life was under the direction of the Holy Spirit (See At 16:6,7). Though misfortune came his way on several occasions, God was using the wickedness of men to accomplish His purposes. God led Paul throughout the central part of the Roman Empire. He did this in order to produce historical cases that would later be used in court to prove that Christianity is the true religion revealed from God. Therefore, Paul was in Rome in Acts 28 because God led him there. We must assume, therefore, that God led him there for a special purpose.

Realizing the significance and op-

portunity of Christianity appearing on trial before the world, Luke clearly and meticulously covered all the necessary evidence for his beloved friend Paul who was on trial. In particular, the Holy Spirit moved Luke’s hand to write a defense for Christianity that would be available for all time. With this purpose assumed, the document of Acts is primarily understood as a defense of Christianity on behalf of Paul.

I understand that Luke was not making a point by point outline of his defense. He was writing as a historian. He desired first to give Theophilus a chronological history of the origin and growth of the Christian movement (See Lk 1:1-4; At 1:1-3). In the treaties of both Luke and Acts, however, Luke gave an answer for every argument the Roman Court would make against the Christian faith. We sift through the document of Acts, therefore, outlining some of those key arguments that Luke used in defense of Paul and Christianity before the Roman Court and World Court of history since then.

We must keep in mind that Paul and his faith are being presented before an unbelieving court in Rome that had little, or no knowledge of Christianity. If we place ourselves in the seats of the judge or judges that would hear this case, we can understand why Luke took special care to write the defense documents. Luke sought to give a detailed history of the movement of Christianity. In this historical account, however, he sought to present answers to all the accusations or arguments that have been made against

Jesus and Christianity.

When Paul arrived in Rome, the Jews with whom he met stated, *“But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere”* (At 28:22). One can only imagine the twisted tales that were gossiped in the streets of Rome concerning Jesus and Christians. We would also wonder what was going on in the minds of the Roman Court judges. Roman judges would have little concern for religion. Since Christianity was a religion spoken against in many places by religious people, we could justly assume that they would have an assortment of questions for the first Christian who would stand before them.

We would also assume that the rumors that had come to the ears of Roman judges would most certainly be distorted. There were possibly distorted accounts circulated that confused Theophilus (See Lk 1:1). Luke’s objective, therefore, was to present a clear case of facts that proved the Christian movement and Christian belief. The documents of Luke and Acts, therefore, manifested the nature of one clarifying misunderstandings concerning Christianity.

Some of the more obvious questions the Court might ask are covered in detail throughout the remainder of this book. These are questions the Holy Spirit knew the Roman Court might ask during Paul’s trial. However, these were also questions that the World Court, since the beginning of the church, have also asked.

It is for this reason, that the document of Acts is one of the greatest defenses of Christianity.

We will use the word “Christianity” in the following material to refer to the belief or faith of the Way (the church). This is the truth that was revealed to man by God. The word “church” is the community of believers who have been separated from the world by their belief and obedience to the lordship of Jesus by immersion for remission of sins. As a generic term, therefore, the word Christianity refers to the belief and behavior of the church.

We will also assume that Theophilus has only the inspired documents of Luke and Acts. Therefore, the material for arguments must come only from these two documents. In the following material I will restrict the arguments to the material of Acts. I will do this simply because we would prove the truth of the Christian faith by the nature of the church that responded to the Sonship of Jesus. Several arguments in Acts are unique. Therefore, we will concentrate on organizing these arguments in order to highlight Luke’s defenses. Once we do this, then we will view the book of Acts from a different point of interpretation. Luke was not concerned with writing a simple history of the early church. His purpose goes beyond being a historian. He writes as an apologist to defend Christianity as the only true faith. The following are the major defenses that I believe Luke made in Acts in order to defend Christianity on behalf of Paul.

## Chapter 1

### The Proof Of Answered Accusations

#### THE TRIAL BEGINS

We would assume that the world would launch countless accusations against the church in its early beginnings. False accusations were made against Jesus. We would not consider it strange, therefore, to assume that false accusations would be made against His body. One of Satan's clever attacks against the work of God has always been to raise up those who would blaspheme both the name of God and the work of God. When the church was established and began its early spread across the Roman Empire, we would assume that Satan would work so as to distort and twist reports concerning the nature of Christianity. We could certainly assume that these reports had reached Rome long before Paul's arrival. Therefore, in his preparation for Paul's defense, Luke wrote his defense so as to answer false accusations that had been made against Christianity. The contents of this chapter give a brief summary of these defenses that Luke makes in order to answer the accusations that were made against the church in its early growth throughout the Roman Empire.

#### A. Christianity is not a sect of Judaism.

Luke assumes that the Roman court would question, "*We have heard that Christianity originated from Judaism.*

*Therefore, why should we not believe that Christianity is just another sect of Judaism as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and especially, the militant Zealots who seek to rebel against Rome?"*

The Jews in Rome were far removed from the events of Christianity in Palestine. Therefore, when Paul arrived in Rome, they were interested in what he had to say. They said, "*But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere*" (At 28:22). On the other hand, the Jews in Palestine who knew Paul, accused him of being a ringleader of the "Christian sect." Tertullus falsely accused Paul before Felix, "*For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*" (At 24:5). It seems that the farther one was from Rome the more distorted the information became. One can only imagine the misconceptions that were in the minds of the Roman Court before whom Paul would have his case presented. Everything they had heard about Christians was certainly a distortion of what was actually true.

It was Luke's task, therefore, to present to the Roman Court adequate information that would clarify Paul's Christian beliefs, as well as, the belief and behavior of all Christians. It was a

common misconception among Roman rulers that Christianity was only a sect of Judaism. To such uninformed rulers this would be a natural misconception. They knew little or nothing about Jesus or Christianity. Throughout Luke's defense, therefore, a clear statement is made that Christianity was not a subversive or heretical split from the Jewish religion. Though Jesus and Christianity arose out of the Jewish nation, it was a prophesied movement that was based upon a prophesied Messiah. The church, therefore, was not the invention of men, but the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

**1. *The Old Testament Scriptures prophesied of the Messiah.*** Jewish Scripture (the Old Testament) prophesied that the light of the gospel should go to all nations. This would include the Gentiles. In quoting Isaiah 42:6 (see Is 49:6), Paul stated, "*I have set you to be a light to the Gentiles ...*" (At 13:46,47). The early Jewish Christian evangelists, as Paul, turned to the Gentiles, not only because of prophecy, but also because of Jewish opposition to the gospel event. Paul quoted Old Testament prophecy to the Jews in Rome concerning Israel's rejection of the gospel. "*Go to this people and say: 'Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull.'*" (At 28:25-27; see Is 42:1,6; 49:6). Since prophets prophesied that Christianity would bring hope to all nations, it cannot be said that Christianity was a sect of Judaism.

The concept of a sect assumes that there was dissension among those of the group from which the sect has divided. However, Christianity cannot be a sect simply because it was in the plan of God to build the church upon the messiahship and sonship of Jesus (Mt 16:13-19).

Luke argues that Christianity was a prophesied movement that would originate from the Jewish nation because the Messiah would come from Israel. However, it was a movement to all nations of the world. Paul's calling and life only manifested what God had always intended. And what God intended to happen was that the apostles be witnesses of Jesus "*in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the world*" (At 1:8; see Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15).

**2. *The Jews opposed the church.*** The early disciples were regularly opposed by the Jews. Luke records that, "*they opposed the things spoken by Paul*" (At 13:45). Paul said that since "*you reject it [the gospel], and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles*" (At 13:46). In fact, the Jews "*raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region*" (At 13:50). In Corinth also, the Jews "*opposed him and blasphemed*" (At 18:6). Again Paul said, "*From now on I will go to the Gentiles*" (At 18:6). The synagogue of Jews in Ephesus was no different. Luke recorded that "*some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude ...*" (At 19:9).

Christianity was not a part of Judaism as the sect of Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes or Zealots. The vast majority of national Israel, or Judaism, totally rejected Jesus as their Messiah. They crucified Jesus (At 2:36; 3:14,15). In fact, the religious rulers of Jerusalem commanded the apostles “*not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*” (At 4:17). Luke thus argues, How could Christianity be a sect of a religion that so vehemently fought against it? Christianity, therefore, was not just another sect of Judaism. Christians, including Paul, believed what they did because of the fulfillment of prophecy and the miraculous events surrounding one called Jesus.

## **B. Christianity is not an insurrectionist movement against Rome.**

Luke assumes that the Roman court would question, “*There are many Jews who are creating insurrectionist movements in Palestine. Christians are said to be causing havoc throughout the Empire. Therefore, are not Christians just another group of insurrectionists?*”

Luke knew the emotions of the Romans against insurrectionist Jews. Rome had put down numerous Jewish rebellions in the years preceding the coming of Jesus. There were the two cases of Theudas and Judas. Theudas led a group of four hundred men in rebellion (At 5:34-36). The Romans killed him and all his followers. There was also Judas who rose up during the Roman census in Galilee (At 5:37). He and his

followers were also dispersed. Then there was “the Egyptian” who led a group of four thousand insurrectionists out into the wilderness (At 21:38).

Jewish defiance of Roman law permeated the Empire, especially the region of Palestine where the Jews despised Roman occupation. Luke assumes, therefore, that Paul’s Roman Court would be viewing him as just another Jewish zealot as Theudas, Judas, or “the Egyptian” who sought rebellion against Roman law. Throughout the book of Acts, therefore, he is careful to show that Christianity was not a sect of Judaism. He proves this point with several defenses that manifest that Christians were good citizens of the Roman Empire.

In Acts 3:13 Luke reminded the world that even the Roman appointed governor in Palestine, Pilate, sought to release Jesus during the trials of Jesus. Luke recorded, “*The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.*” Jesus did not die on the cross because He had committed a crime against the Roman Empire. He died because of a political move of Pilate who bowed to the pressure of a riotous mob of Jews in Jerusalem. Therefore, Luke wants to remind us that Jesus and those who followed Him were good citizens. They were good citizens, and thus, not insurrectionists against the Roman government or any other government of the world.

### 1. *Paul was an obedient citizen.*

Luke defends Paul as an obedient Roman citizen. He contends that Paul did not break any Roman law. The accusations against him which eventually landed him in Rome was the result of antagonistic Jews who falsely accused him. On behalf of Paul, Claudius Lysias, Rome's commander in Jerusalem, wrote to Felix, Rome's appointed governor in Caesarea, "*I found out that he [Paul] was accused concerning questions of their [Jews'] law, but had nothing charged against him worthy of death or chains*" (At 23:29). Before Festus, Paul maintained, "*Neither against ... Caesar have I offended in anything at all*" (At 25:8). Festus thus said to King Agrippa concerning Paul, "... *I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death ...*" (At 25:25). Felix even confided in King Agrippa concerning Paul, "*When the [Jewish] accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed*" (At 25:28). After Agrippa had heard Paul's defense, even he said, "*This man is doing nothing worthy of death or chains*" (At 26:31). Felix had assumed that Paul had broken Roman law. But such was not the case. In Rome Paul affirmed to the Jews that the Romans had found no fault in him. When the Roman Court in Palestine examined him, Paul said, "*They wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death*" (At 28:18).

Luke's argument is that Rome's highest courts in Palestine could find no valid case where Paul had broken Roman

law. Luke argues that Paul is now in Rome in Acts 28 without having any valid accusation made against him for violating Roman law. Paul's custody by Rome, therefore, is not based on violation of Roman law, but is the result of antagonistic Jews who falsely accused him.

### 2. *Paul was obedient to Jewish customs.*

Though Paul taught that the Old Testament law was fulfilled in Christ, He did not teach against Jewish customs and traditions. He did not so teach as long as those customs and traditions were not made a religious matter to be bound upon either Jews or Gentiles.

Paul affirmed to the Jews in Rome, "*Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans*" (At 28:17). Luke quoted the scribes' statement concerning Paul while he was before the Sanhedrin in Palestine. "*We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God*" (At 23:9). Paul had always maintained, "*Neither against the law of the Jews nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all*" (At 25:8).

Even the Roman rulers in Palestine recognized that the accusations against Paul had originated from the Jews' opinion that Paul was teaching against Jewish customs and their law. When Festus laid Paul's case before Agrippa, he informed Agrippa that the Jews had

questions against Paul ***“about their own religion and about one, Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive”*** (At 25:19). It took false witnesses by the Jews to bring accusation against Stephen concerning his breaking of Jewish law. The Jews accused, *“This man [Stephen] does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law”* (At 6:13). In the same way the Jews falsely accused Paul. But Paul said to Felix, *“And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. **Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me”*** (At 24:12,13). Paul stood innocent concerning the accusation that he taught Jews to forsake their customs. He and the early church only taught that such customs could not be bound as religious law (See At 15:24,28).

Luke’s defense is to explain Paul’s behavior in ministering to the Gentiles. He presents the words of Paul who gives the real reason why the Jews are so against him. Paul had preached to the *“Gentiles that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me”* (At 26:20,21). The root of the problem, therefore, was the Jews’ disgust against Paul for his ministry to the Gentiles. For this reason they opposed him everywhere he went. They have opposed Christianity throughout the world. When men are prejudiced against a religious belief, their opposition is manifested not by resorting to the Scriptures, but by

lodging false accusations against those they oppose. It is not an uncommon thing for God’s evangelists to be accused of violating customs of a particular country in which they are working. The religious leaders of such countries often bring false accusations against those they oppose. It is not their purpose to use their Bibles, but to use false accusations against those they oppose.

### **C. Christianity is not a political movement.**

Luke assumes that the Roman court would question, *“We hear that some say Jesus is the ‘King of the Jews.’ Jews are seeking independence from Roman occupation of Palestine. Is not this Christianity, therefore, another political movement with Jesus as king to free Palestine of Roman control?”*

Luke assumes that it had surely been rumored in Rome that one called Jesus among the Jews had claimed to be “a political king of the Jews.” One could imagine Rome’s apprehension about such an earthly king leading another group of insurrectionists in Palestine. Even Claudius Lysias, who was Rome’s commander in Palestine, was paranoid about insurrectionist political groups. He had presumed that Paul was an Egyptian who had led four thousand Jews into the wilderness (At 21:38). However, Paul was not the leader of such a group.

The King of Christianity, Luke defended, had ascended to the right hand of God in heaven (At 2:25). This was

according to God's promise to Israel in the Old Testament (Ps 16:8-11). This promise was fulfilled in Jesus who never intended to rule on earth. Heaven would be and was His throne (At 2:30-35; Hb 8:1).

Luke's defense is that the "kingdom of heaven," as opposed to the nationalistic desires of the Jews, **was not of this world** (Lk 17:20,21; Jn 8:36-38). When Paul preached concerning the "kingdom of heaven," therefore, he was not talking about an earthly uprising against Roman authority (See 28:23,31). The kingdom reign of Jesus was within the hearts of men who had submitted to the lordship of Jesus (2:36).

Since the kingdom was not of this world, but in the hearts of man, Rome should not be concerned about Christians leading a Jewish movement to liberate the Jewish nation from Roman domain. Any insurrectionist movements that might occur in Palestine would originate from nationalistic Jewish extremists. Such movements would not come from Christians who promoted submission to civil law in order that they live in peace (See Rm 13:1-6).

We could certainly make some most reasonable postulations here. It was God who worked in the life of Paul so as to get Christianity on trial before the Roman Court (At 23:11). It was God who also knew the coming destruction of national Israel in A.D. 70 by Roman armies. Before this final devastation of Rome upon Jerusalem and the Jewish insurrections, God wanted Rome to know where Christians stood. They had

no part with liberationist Jewish zealots who sought to militarily take up arms against Rome. This was not the nature of Christianity.

In the decade or so before A.D. 70, Palestine was rife with Jewish insurrectionist movements. God, therefore, wanted the case of Christianity made known before Rome in order that Rome's devastation of national Israel not spill over against Christianity. Paul's trial takes place around A.D. 61 or 62. We could assume, therefore, **that Luke has the task of separating Christianity from Judaism in the minds of the Roman Court.** When the day of doom finally came on Israel at the end of the decade, at least Christianity would not at that time suffer the rage of the Roman army which would put down Jewish rebellion once and for all. Christians would escape the destruction of the Jewish State by turning from Jerusalem and Judaism.

#### **D. Christianity is not a fable, legend or myth.**

Luke assumes that the Roman Court will question, "*The Roman Empire encompasses hundreds of religions. Is not this Jesus and Christianity just another fable, myth or legend which men have developed throughout the decades?*"

Luke now assumes that his Roman Court will pass Christianity off as just another mythical religion which was started among Roman subjects somewhere in the Empire. He counters

the possibility of such thinking by presenting those facts about Christianity that prove its origin and existence to be contrary to the natural origin and development of fables, myths and legends.

In order to better understand Luke's arguments, we must understand the definition of fables, myths and legends. Though the definitions of these words may overlap, it is quite interesting to give the definitions of such, and then compare Luke's arguments in both the documents of Luke and Acts concerning his explanation of the origin and development of Christianity.

We must keep in mind that there are those who would affirm that Christianity is simply some fable, myth or legend. Luke defends Christianity against such accusations simply by proving that the origin and development of Christianity did not occur as the origin and development of mythical or legendary religious beliefs of men. **Luke's conclusion will be that since Christianity cannot be explained by the ordinary means by which mythical or legendary religions originate and develop, then it must be the result of supernatural revelation in the lives of men.**

Since the Roman Court lives in an empire of numerous religious people, Luke is assuming that the judges will be asking some of the following questions:

1. *"Is Christianity a fable?"* A fable, according to *Webster's Dictionary*, is "a story or legend **invented** and

**developed by imagination or superstition ...."** The *World Book Encyclopedia* states that a fable is "a special kind of story. It is short, usually has animal characters, and teaches a lesson."

From the above definitions we would conclude the following possible thinking on the part of the Rome Court before whom Luke seeks to defend Christianity. In reference to Christianity, therefore, Rome's Court would possibly be thinking that ...

- a. "... Christianity, as fables, was an invented religion."
- b. "... Christianity, as fables, was developed over years by the religious imaginations of men."
- c. "... Christianity, as fables, has no supernatural foundation, and thus, is a superstition."
- d. "... Christianity, as fables, is simply a collection of stories about lessons for humanity."

## 2. *"Is Christianity a legend?"*

Webster defines a legend to be "a story of some wonderful event, **handed down for generations among a people and popularly believed to have a historical basis, although not verifiable ...."** The *World Book Encyclopedia* defines a legend as "**any improbable or fanciful story handed down from the past.** Legends often contain an element of fact, but sometimes they are totally untrue. **Legendary tales often are interwoven with the history of a people or nation.**"

Luke also covers the main arguments of those who would accuse Christianity of being a developed legend. He assumes that the Court will be thinking that ...

- a. "... Christianity, as legends, was handed down from generation to generation."
- b. "... Christianity, as legends, was unique among a particular group or culture of people."
- c. "... Christianity, as legends, was believed to have a historical foundation because of the popular belief of the general public which accepted the legends."
- d. "... Christianity, as legends, cannot be historically verified."
- e. "... Christianity, as legends, is interwoven with the history of the Jewish people."

**3. "Is Christianity a myth?"** The belief that Christianity is a myth may be the most common accusation against its validity. Luke assumes the Roman Court might be thinking that Christianity is just another myth. The Court would thus believe that Paul's defense should not receive any particular attention. At least Paul should not be considered a special case above any other religious fanatic of the Empire.

*Webster's Dictionary* defines a myth as a **"traditional story of unknown authorship, ostensibly with a historical basis, but serving usually to explain some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man, or the customs, institutions, religious rites, etc. of a people: myths usually involve the**

**exploits of gods and heroes."** The *World Book Encyclopedia* gives more detail which leads us to understand why the accusation that Christianity is a myth would be one of the stronger arguments against it. The *World Book Encyclopedia* states that "people have always tried to understand why certain things happen." People have always wanted "to know how the earth was created and how and where man first appeared." To answer such inquiries, myths were constructed to explain "natural events in terms of stories about gods, goddesses, and heroes." In early times, every society developed its own myths, which played an important part in the society's religious life." "The people of a society may tell folk tales and legends for amusement, without believing them. But they usually consider their myths sacred and completely true." Therefore, "we study myths to learn how a people developed a particular social system with its many customs and ways of life. By examining myths, we can better understand the feelings and values that bind members of society into one group." "We can also study myths to try to understand why people behave as they do."

Luke assumes that some in the Roman Court would be classifying Christianity as just another myth of the many cultures of the Roman Empire. Some of Paul's judges might be thinking that ...

- a. "... Christianity, as myths, was a collection of traditional sayings of

*religious folklore.”*

- b. “... Christianity, as myths, was originated by an unknown person or persons.”
- c. “... Christianity, as myths, was assumed to have a historical foundation.”
- d. “... Christianity, as myths, was developed in order to substantiate and explain the behavior of the disciples of Jesus.”
- e. “... Christianity, as myths, was a religion that developed to explain the origin and behavior of the gods or heroes of its believers.”

Throughout the arguments that Luke presents in the documents of Luke and Acts there are many defenses that answer the preceding questions the Court, or any skeptic might have in mind concerning Paul and Christianity. Luke answers the assumptions of the Court that Christianity cannot be a man-made religion that is based upon either fable, legend or myth. Luke’s arguments prove beyond doubt that Christianity did not originate or develop as the result of men who were seeking to be religious or to continue the religion of their fathers.

Through the Holy Spirit, Luke knew that not only the Roman Court, but the whole world, wants a definition or explanation of Christianity. Paul was personally on trial. But more important, we must remember that Christianity was on trial before all history. Therefore, as we survey Luke’s defense in both Luke and Acts we follow his answer to the above accusations that the world might offer to explain away the Christian religion.

Luke clearly answers all such

accusations against Christ and Christianity. When the arguments are answered, one must make a decision concerning this Jesus. Either this Jesus was who He said He was or He was the greatest deceiver that ever lived. If He were who He said He was, then we have no choice. We must hear what He says because our eternal destiny depends upon obedience to His message. In the document of Acts Luke presents a historical accounting of what people did when they believed that this Jesus was actually the Son of God. In the remaining arguments, Luke will answer every accusation by those who would classify Christianity to be either a fable, legend or myth.

### **E. Christianity is not an accumulation of religious beliefs.**

Luke assumes that the Roman court will question, “*Fables, myths and legends develop over decades of history. Is not this Jesus an imagined hero of the Christian religion which has been constructed by progressive development throughout history?*”

Fables, myths and legends are usually the accumulation of religious beliefs over many years. These beliefs are brought together in the minds of men throughout the religious history of a particular group of people. Those from any given tribe, clan or nation of the world develop their fictitious religious beliefs throughout the decades of their history. Therefore, at any one time in history any particular group will have a

religious belief that was assembled from fables, myths or legends of their past.

The development, or better, “birth” of Christianity was different than fables, myths or legends. In comparison to the evolutionary development of man-made religions, Christianity was instantaneous in origin. Luke’s arguments on this point are the following:

**1. Christianity was born in three years.** Luke had written an earlier defense to Theophilus “*of all that Jesus began both to do and teach*” (At 1:1). That earlier defense was the document of Luke. Jesus’ ministry began when He returned from the wilderness where He had fasted forty days and was tempted by the devil (Lk 4:14,15). He was about thirty years old at the time (Lk 3:23). This was the beginning of His ministry which He continued until His ascension (At 1:2). At the most, His ministry was **three and a half years. It was in this short term of three and a half years that Christianity was “born.”**

Jesus’ disciples were disappointed over the crucifixion, though their “hope” was reborn with His resurrection (See 1 Pt 1:3). They were disappointed because they had hoped, as all Jews, that there was going to be some kind of a national restoration of Israel to her former glory (At 1:6). The two men on the road to Emmaus expressed the thoughts of the Israelites when they unknowingly said to the resurrected Jesus, “*We were hoping that it was He [Jesus] who was going to redeem Israel*” (Lk 24:21). The disciples saw in Jesus the fulfillment of

the nationalistic hope that Israel would be restored to her former glory.

In the few hours Jesus spent with the disciples immediately before His resurrection, they asked Him, “*Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*” (At 1:6). This most interesting statement leads us to believe that the apostles were hoping for a physical restoration of the nation of Israel during Jesus’ ministry. This statement seems to indicate that they maintained this belief even to the time of His ascension. However, things were going to be much different than their expectations. If they maintained this hope, they were again going to be very disappointed.

Regardless of the nationalistic hopes of the apostles during the earthly ministry of Jesus, Jesus knew that they would eventually come to a complete understanding of the kingdom. National Israel would not be restored as it was in the days of David and Solomon. Nevertheless, Jesus was patient with their false expectations. He simply told them to “*... tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high*” (Lk 24:49; At 1:8). Jesus knew that with one “experience” from “on high” they would have their minds changed.

While waiting in Jerusalem, something marvelous did happen to the twelve apostles. The Holy Spirit came upon all of the apostles in a moment while they were assembled in a small upper room in Jerusalem (At 1:1-4). Their hopes for a physical restoration of

Israel were immediately transformed into the preaching of a spiritual kingdom within the hearts of men. Because of this kingdom reign of Jesus they asked people to submit to the lordship of Jesus who was reigning on David's throne in heaven, not on earth (At 2:29-36).

Luke's argument, therefore, is based upon this spontaneous change of belief in the minds of the disciples. It was not a change of belief that would be characteristic of people who believed in myths, fables and legends. The change in the lives of the disciples was instantaneous. Jesus had ministered in teaching for only three to three and a half years. The fundamentals of the entire body of belief of the early Christians was preached in this brief period of time. How can we explain this immediate and spontaneous birth of Christianity without the presence of something that was truly miraculous and from above?

**2. Christianity was immediately accepted by thousands of people.** On the very day that Luke states the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, he also gave testimony that over three thousand people accepted the teachings of Jesus and the apostles (At 1:41). The acceptance of the teaching of Jesus and the apostles was phenomenal. After the initial explosion of belief by those in Jerusalem, "*many of those who heard the word believed, and the number of men came to be about five thousand*" (At 4:4).

Luke's evidence is overwhelming. Christianity grew like wild fire blown by the wind. "*And believers were*

*increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women*" (At 5:14). Those who first experienced this phenomenal growth "*wondered what the outcome would be*" of the tremendous things they were experiencing (At 5:24).

Regardless of the opposition of the religious leaders in Palestine, "*the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith*" (At 6:7). When persecution arose, "*those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word*" (At 8:4). Therefore, the number of disciples multiplied (At 9:31). Many believed (At 9:42). The disciples traveled to the far ends of the Roman Empire preaching and teaching. Thousands upon thousands heard and believed this new faith (See 8:12; 11:19; 12:24; 13:49; 14:27; 15:35; 19:20).

Luke's argument for the case of Christianity is overwhelming on this point. No fable, myth or legend of man-made religions originates or develops as the above case history of Christianity. **One cannot categorize the history of Christianity with the gradual development of man-made religious beliefs.** Luke's case is so firm that it goes beyond question. Only those who would be ignorant of Christianity's origin and development would place it among the man-made religions of the world.

Luke's argument again is a challenge to the Roman Court and the World Court. How can we explain this wide acceptance of this faith if it were the invention of man? The fact that the

gospel went into all the world in such a short a time is evidence that it had Divine origins.

## **F. Christianity is not the result of an influential rabbi.**

Luke assumes that the Roman Court will question, “*Judaism has many influential rabbis. Some of them have claimed to be prophets. Did not Christianity develop as the result of the influence of one called Jesus, a supposedly great teacher of Israel?*”

Luke assumes that the Roman Court will believe that Christianity developed from the influence of some great Jewish rabbi or religious fanatic who supposedly experienced a hallucination in a cave in some desert. As man-made religions, Luke assumes that the Court will charge that Christianity originated and developed from the lifetime influence of a prominent religious leader of Palestine.

Luke assumes that the Court might believe that either Jesus or Paul was the “founding father” of this faith. In order to answer these charges, Luke includes in his defense several evidences that adequately answer all charges that would be based on the above misunderstanding of the origin of the church.

**1. Christianity developed too rapidly to be a man-made religion.** Though the origin and development of man-made religions usually occurs over the lifetime of a prominent religious leader, Christianity originated and developed over a period of about three

and a half years. Great religious leaders as Mohammed, Confucius, Buddha and Baha’u’llah had a lifetime to influence their followers to believe in their teachings. But this is not the case with Christianity. Jesus had only three and a half years. **This is not long enough for the development of such a powerful religious belief as Christianity if such were simply based upon the personality of an influential person.** How can we explain the rapid development of Christianity by comparing it with the historical facts of how man-made religions have developed throughout the world? The fact is that we cannot explain the phenomenal origin and expansion of Christianity without the miraculous work of Jesus. As Nicodemus, thousands of people understood from the miraculous works of Jesus that He was sent from God. Nicodemus said, “*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*” (Jn 3:2). Jesus was a most influential personality. However, we cannot explain the impact of His life without the miraculous witness of God through miracles. Peter affirmed that Jesus was “*attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know*” (At 2:22).

As stated in the preceding argument, Christianity began with the ministry of Jesus. The disciples came to believe in those three and a half years that Jesus was “*Lord and Christ*” (At 2:36). They believed, “*This Jesus God has raised up,*

*of which we are all witnesses*" (At 2:32; 3:15; 4:10). The disciples believed that God had exalted Him to "*His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins*" (At 5:30-32). How could the disciples naturally come to such a conclusion concerning Jesus in the brief association they had with Him for three and a half years? The only answer to this question lies in the fact that they actually experienced the supernatural as it was revealed through the miraculous works of Jesus.

If Christianity were a fable, myth or legend, we could understand how followers might exalt the hero of the religion to the status of "Son of God," "Savior," or "Prince." But it is not natural for thousands of people to believe such in such a short time as in the case with thousands of people who accepted Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world. Luke's argument is that this phenomenon of belief can be answered only on the basis that Christianity had a supernatural origin.

**2. Christianity exploded in growth from twelve men.** After the three and a half year ministry of Jesus, the foundation of Christianity was continued by twelve men to whom Jesus, "*presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*" (At 1:3). Jesus stated that these men would be witnesses of Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the far corners of the world (At 1:8).

Therefore, these twelve men stood up before the multitudes of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 and proclaimed, "*This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses*" (At 2:32). From the moment of this testimony, the church grew like wild fire throughout the Roman Empire.

Luke's defense, therefore, is that Christianity was not based upon the lifetime influence of just one man. It was based upon the three and a half year ministry of One who greatly impacted the beliefs and behavior of twelve disciples who gave witness to His resurrection. After the initial ministry of Jesus, the explosion of growth of Christianity was based upon the foundation of the apostles who witnessed to the resurrection of Jesus. Upon the authority of their word (At 2:42), the movement spread throughout all the world. The Holy Spirit continued to give miraculous witness to the apostles, as well as thousands of other Christians, through the working of miracles (At 3:6,7; 4:10,33; 5:12; 8:6,7).

**3. The early Christian leaders refused the worship of men.** The early leaders of the church refused to accept the reverence or worship that is usually accepted by those who originate and develop man-made religions. For example, a Roman Centurion by the name of Cornelius fell at the feet of Peter and worshiped him (10:25). However, Peter lifted him up and said, "*Stand up; I myself am also a man*" (10:26). This is not what is common among those who would start man-made religious beliefs

and movements. Men seek exaltation by others. Egocentric men often use religion as an occasion by which they can gain the admiration of others. In man-made religions of the world, this is a common practice of those who seek to exalt themselves over others. In the church, however, those who would be leaders among the people are those who are the servants of all the people (Mk 10:35-45; Jn 13:1-17).

When Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra the residents sought to worship them as gods. The people of the city said of the two evangelists, *"The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men"* (At 14:11). However, Paul and Barnabas flatly refused their worship. In fact, the evangelists tore their clothes and ran among the crowd saying, *"Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you ..."* (At 14:14,15).

The reason why these disciples would not accept the worship of men was illustrated in Luke's record of what happened to King Herod. Herod had arrayed himself in royal apparel and sat before the people with all his pomp (At 12:21). He gave a great speech. The people cried out, *"The voice of a god and not of a man"* (At 12:22). Luke then records, *"Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died"* (At 22:23).

Luke's defense on behalf of Paul in reference to this point is the fact that Paul, as well as the other apostles, refused to accept the worship or

exaltation that is so common of those who originate man-made religions. These early leaders did not seek a following. They sought to humbly follow God through Jesus Christ. They sought to communicate to the world those things they had seen and heard from One they had personally encountered.

### **G. Christianity is not the simple result of Jesus as a good teacher.**

Luke assumes that the Roman Court will question, *"We will accept the existence of Jesus, that He was a good teacher. However, why must we accept Jesus as more than just another one of the Jewish rabbis or prophets of Israel?"*

We must understand the nature of this argument since those looking from outside Christianity into the person of Jesus confuse the force of the argument. Man-made religions often center around and are based upon the teachings of one man. Christian Science, Confucianism, Islam and Mormonism are examples of religions that were initially based upon the proclamations of one individual. The followers of these religions have drawn their fundamental doctrines for their beliefs from the teachings of the founder of the religious movement. But the origin of Christianity was different. Luke wants the World Court to understand that the nature of the origin of Christianity was different than man-made religions.

Jesus initiated the teaching of Christianity, but the teaching was

expanded through the apostles. It was through the inspiration of the Holy spirit that all truth was eventually delivered to the church (Jn 16:13,14; Jd 3). The foundation, of the church, therefore, was established in a different manner that the origin of religions of men.

**1. Christianity is based on Jesus as the Son of God.** Upon close examination, Christianity is different in its foundation than the religions of man. Christianity is based more upon **what Jesus is**, not initially upon what He taught. Because the early disciples believed that He was the Son of God, they believed what He taught. No other religious leader has been so bold as to proclaim himself to be the “Son of God.” But Jesus did. And because He did, forces us to investigate His claim. If He was what He said He was, then we would be forced to believe what He taught. If He was the Son of God, then His teachings would be more important than any teachings of the world.

To support this claim of Sonship, Luke presents the testimony of those who claimed to have personally seen Jesus after His resurrection. The twelve apostles were witnesses to this resurrection (At 1:8; 2:32). On two different occasions Paul reported before courts of men that He had seen the resurrected and living Jesus (At 22,26). Stephen affirmed that He saw Jesus standing by the right hand of God (At 7:55).

Luke’s argument in Acts is based on the person of Jesus, not on the quality of

His teachings. Other religions can produce good teachings. Those teachings can be consistent and for the betterment of humanity. However, with Christianity it is different. Early Christians believed in Jesus to be the Son of God, and thus, behaved accordingly. They were moved to obedience by the fact that Jesus was “*Lord and Christ*” (At 2:36). When they heard such proclamations, “*they were cut to the heart*” (At 2:37). This is why they said to those who wanted to be saved, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ...*” (At 16:31). For this reason the early evangelists preached Jesus (At 8:5,35). Disciples followed the teachings of Jesus because they believed that He was the Son of God.

**2. Christianity is based on the inspired teaching of twelve men.** During His ministry, Jesus did not deliver to His disciples the totality of teaching that they were to follow. He had promised the twelve that they would receive the Holy Spirit who would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance all that He had taught them (See Lk 24:44-49; Jn 14:26; 16:13,14). These twelve would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (At 1:5). This baptism would enlighten them concerning all truth that they must deliver to the church.

The apostles were subsequently baptized with the Spirit (At 1:1-4). They received all truth, and thus, delivered to the church of believers the “*whole counsel of God*” (At 20:20,27). The disciples “*continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship*” (At 2:42).

Luke's argument is that these twelve men preached a unified message to the world. They did not teach a mixture of their own opinions. They proclaimed the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (At 2:30-33), baptism in the name of Jesus (At 2:38), and the gift of the Holy Spirit (At 2:38,39; 11:16,17). This all happened in one day, the day of Pentecost.

In the document of Acts the apostles added to the teachings of Jesus as they were guided by the Holy Spirit to preach and teach the early disciples. However, as opposed to the normal procedures of man-made religions, we do not see the apostles contradicting or revising any teaching of Jesus. They simply carried on the fundamental teachings of Jesus with the added truth the Spirit revealed to them.

Christianity was based upon the person of Jesus, that He was Deity, the Son of God. The church of believers was based upon the continued and harmonious teaching of over twelve men. This all took place in the period of about three and a half years. Luke's defense, therefore, is that such things do not happen among men whose work is based on their own personalities or teachings. In the case of Christianity, something greater had to be working in the lives and teachings of those on whom the Christian movement was founded.

One must not approach Christianity on the basis of accepting Jesus as simply a good teacher with profound personal charisma. He did not leave us with that option. He must be accepted as the One

He claimed to be. He claimed to be God on earth. This is the only option He left us. **Luke argues that the behavior of the early Christians can be explained only in the fact that they witnessed evidence that proved beyond doubt that Jesus was Deity.**

## **H. Christianity did not develop in response to a martyred saint.**

Luke assumes that the Roman Court will question, "*We have heard that Jesus was executed on a cross in Palestine. Did not Christianity result from the followers of Jesus who claimed that He was martyred, and thus, desired to carry on His cause?*"

Religions which are developed among men often result from the martyr of a great religious leader. Just in case the Roman Court might be thinking such, Luke brilliantly reveals the facts of how Jesus went to the death of the cross. His death was not an accident. **It was in the plan of God.**

**1. Jesus' death was foreplanned.** Jesus did not suffer martyrdom by the hands of a reckless riot in Jerusalem. He was delivered up "*by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God ...*" (At 2:23). The crucifixion of Jesus was in God's plan. Luke records concerning the actions of those who participated in the execution that they did what God had foreplanned. "*For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were*

*gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done”* (At 4:27,28). Though God used the unbelieving mob of Jewish leadership in Jerusalem to instigate the sentence and death by Roman consent and order, it was always God’s plan that Jesus die on a cross. The apostles said that the Jews murdered Jesus (At 5:30). The actual guilt of Jesus’ death was a murder on their part, for Jesus was innocent (At 2:23; 3:13,14; 5:30). However, from God’s point of view, and the belief of Christians, **Jesus’ death was necessary for the forgiveness of the sins of the world** (At 5:31; see Lk 24:47).

**2. Christianity is based on a raised Savior.** The death of Jesus for the sins of the world was a part of Christian teaching from the church’s very beginning in Acts 2. However, this was not the totality of the Christian belief. Luke wants his Roman Court to know that Christianity is based also upon the verifiable fact that Jesus is still alive. He “*presented Himself alive*” for forty days after His resurrection (At 1:3). The disciples are valid witnesses that Jesus lived again after His death (At 1:8; 2:32; 3:15). Paul also witnessed this living Founder of the Christian faith (At 9:1-9; 22:6-10; 26:12-16). Jesus is alive and ruling over all things from a heavenly throne (Ep 1:20-22). Any of these witnesses could be called to Rome to give their testimony of the risen Jesus.

Though man-made religions may be based upon the martyrdom of a famous religious leader, **Christianity is founded**

**upon the claim that the leader lives.** The faith of Christians is not based solely in the fact of the death of Jesus. The faith of Christians is also based in the fact of His resurrection. Christianity, therefore, is not founded upon the martyr of an influential religious leader. It is founded upon the Master of heaven and earth who is now reigning supreme over all things.

### **I. Christianity was not propagated by unlawful fanatical followers.**

Luke assumes that the Court will question, “*We have many religious fanatics in the Empire. Christianity is just one group of these fanatics. Is not the belief of Christians simply carried on by the fanaticism of those who initiated and now lead the movement?*”

In hearing rumors about a religion that had turned the world upside down (At 17:6), those who would be uninformed might conclude that Christians were a group of fanatics as the Jewish Zealots who sought to liberate Palestine from Roman occupation. Luke thus prepares his case for Paul and Christianity by giving the following information to dispel all doubt on the part of the Roman Court that Christians were a group of fanatics who cared little for the laws of the land. Luke answers the accusations that Paul taught against the keeping of Jewish customs. Such charges were unfounded and came only from those who were enemies of what was actually the case.

Fanatics, whether military or

religious, often violate law in order to manifest their contempt for the established government authorities. Luke is redundant in his defense in order to make it clear that Christians were law-abiding citizens. Throughout his defense document he repeats and emphasizes the obedience of Christians to rational law. He specifically clarifies Paul's encounters with both civil and religious authorities.

**1. Paul did not teach Jews to violate Jewish customs.** Paul did teach that the Old Testament law that God had given to the Jews was ineffective to justify one before God. Roman citizens, as well as the entire world, were not subject to the Old Testament law or Jewish religious customs. Luke's defense for Paul is based on the fact that Paul **did not teach against either Jewish or Roman customs.**

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem after his last missionary journey, the elders informed him that the believing Jews in Jerusalem had been informed "*that you [Paul] teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs*" (At 21:21). It had been rumored that Paul was the man "*who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place [the temple]*" (At 21:28).

The charge that Paul taught Jews to forsake Jewish customs was unfounded. He did not teach Jews to forsake their customs. He only taught that such

customs were not requirements for salvation. Neither could such customs be bound upon Gentiles as requirements for salvation. During the Jerusalem meeting of Acts 15, the church had written that the Gentiles should not keep Jewish customs or religious laws as a matter of salvation (At 21:24-28). This stand by Christians created great animosity among the Jews against Christianity. This animosity, therefore, was not the result of Christian teaching against something, but the result of their stand for something.

**2. Paul did not teach the Gentiles to violate Roman customs.** It had also been rumored that Paul had taught that Romans should keep customs that were not lawful for them to keep. Accusers in Philippi falsely acclaimed, "*These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe*" (At 16:20,21). The accusers did not identify what law Paul was binding on the Romans which was unlawful. Nevertheless, the magistrates of the city had Paul and Silas unjustly beaten as a result of the false accusation (At 16:23). But the magistrates of the city had beaten and imprisoned Roman citizens who had not been tried and condemned (At 16:37). Such was a serious mistake on their part, for they could be severely punished themselves for doing this unjust deed. When the magistrates finally decided to release Paul and Silas, Paul demanded that they personally come and release them from prison in order to manifest to all in

Philippi that He and Silas were innocent of the crimes for which they had been charged (At 16:37-40).

### **3. Paul did not break Roman law.**

While Paul and Silas were unjustly held in prison in Philippi during the preceding incidents, an earthquake shook the prison and opened the prison doors. They could have escaped if they were common criminals or had been justly thrown in prison for breaking Roman law. In fact, the prison guard had assumed that all the prisoners had escaped when the prison was shaken. He had drawn his sword and was about to kill himself (At 16:27).

If Paul were a common criminal, one would assume that he would have taken the situation of the earthquake in Philippi as an occasion to escape. But such was not the case. He and Silas had been unjustly imprisoned. They were innocent of all charges. They had not broken Roman law, neither had they taught Romans to do things that were unlawful.

On another occasion a Roman centurion in Jerusalem was about to make the same mistake as the Philippian officials. Paul was about to be beaten in Jerusalem because Claudius Lysias assumed that he was an Egyptian insurrectionist. But Paul stated, *“Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?”* (At 22:25). Paul was a Roman citizen. He had done nothing against the laws of Rome. After Claudias Lysias had examined Paul, he wrote to Felix that Paul had *“nothing charged against him worthy of death or*

*chains”* (At 23:29; see 24:12,13; 26:31).

In Corinth, Gallio, the Roman proconsul of Achaia, became irritated with the Jews who sought to have Paul accused and tried by Roman rulers when actually their dispute was over religious matters. They had brought Paul before the Roman judgment seat in order to have him tried and condemned. But Gallio was aware of their nonsense and evil intentions. He said, *“If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters”* (At 18:14,15).

Gallio knew that Paul was innocent of any crimes against Rome. He also knew that the Jews were simply arguing with Paul about their own law and customs.

Throughout the ministry of Paul, no one was able to prove that he had violated either Roman law or the customs of the Jews. When He arrived in Rome, he called the leaders of the Jews together and stated, *“Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death”* (At 28:17,18).

Luke’s defense for Paul on this matter is firm. Paul had not taught Jews to stop practicing their customs. He had

not taught Romans to do that which was unlawful for them to do. He had not violated any Roman laws. In fact, Roman laws were violated by those who beat and imprisoned him. Paul was not an unlawful religious fanatic who sought to disrupt society by promoting those things that were unlawful.

**4. The apostles promoted obedience to rational law.** On two different occasions the apostles' resolve to be obedient to law was thoroughly tested. Upon close examination, however, their determination to not break law or Jewish custom was actually their refusal to obey the orders of unjust enemies of righteousness.

**a. The occasion of Peter and John:** The first occasion involved Peter and John. It involved the healing of a crippled man who had begged on the doorsteps of the temple for many years (At 3:1-10). The healing created great excitement in Jerusalem (At 3:9-11). However, the priests, captain of the temple, and Sadducees were "greatly disturbed that they [Peter and John] taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (At 4:1,2). They thus laid hands on Peter and John and put them in custody (At 4:3). The reason for the arrest was not that the apostles had broken some law. The Jewish religious leaders were simply agitated that the apostles persistently preached the risen Jesus.

During the trial, they "commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (At 4:18). But such an

edict was the opinion of religious leaders with closed minds who were dead set on opposing that which was true. **This was not an official law of the Jews. It was not a Roman law.** It was not any law of the Old Testament. Therefore, to such ridiculous proclamations, Peter and John rebuked, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (At 4:19,20). Peter and John were not refusing to obey law. They were refusing the obnoxious opinionated dictates of those who could not even deny that the miracle of healing the crippled man had occurred (At 4:14-16).

**b. The occasion of the apostles:** The second occasion of the apostles' defiance of the ridiculous proclamations of the jealous Jewish leadership came when the apostles were again on trial before the Sanhedrin. The high priest questioned, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" (At 5:28). But again, the occasion was a situation where arrogant self-righteous men sought to bind religious dictates on men. So Peter and the other apostles simply answered, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (At 5:29). In other words, they would obey what God had clearly revealed. They would not yield to the wishes of those who had willfully discounted all evidence of the truth of Jesus. Luke wants the Roman Court to know that when the Jewish

leaders heard the position of the apostles, they acted in an irrational manner. Luke records for the Court the reaction of the Jewish leadership to the determination of the apostles to continue to speak of Jesus. He records, “*When they heard this, they [the religious leaders] were furious and took counsel to kill them*” (At 5:33).

Luke’s case on this point is closed. Christianity was not based upon the beliefs of fanatics who had no regard for law and order. Disturbances were

caused, not by any fault of Christians, but by those whose positions and pride had been hurt when their followers turned to Jesus. The furious irrationality of the enemies of Christianity should not be turned against either Paul or Christians. Social disturbances should be placed squarely upon the shoulders of those who caused the problems. And in cases of disturbances in the life of Paul, the responsibility for riot and social chaos must be placed upon the shoulders of the Jews who caused such.

## Chapter 2

### The Proof Of A True Foundation

God created man with a religious nature. Because of his nature, therefore, man will invent all sorts of religious beliefs when he gives up a knowledge of God. When Jesus came into the world, an assortment of religious beliefs were scattered throughout the world that had been created after the desires of man. Jesus came into a world of Judaism, a religion that the Jews had created after their own traditions (Mk 7:1-9). However, He sent the disciples into a world of idolatrous religions whose adherents practiced every imaginable fantasy.

In view of the religious environment into which the gospel would go, God established a firm foundation upon which Christianity was built. God miraculously unveiled the realm of the supernatural in order to confirm both the messengers and message (Mk 16:17-20;

Jn 20:30,31). In order to test the power of the confirmation, Luke has recorded the historical work of the early disciples as they went forth with the gospel to all the world. He has recorded God’s confirming evidence in order that such evidences be examined in a court of law. In reference to Paul’s case, Luke has recorded for the Roman Court the truth of the foundation upon which Christianity is based.

#### **A. Christianity is the result of man’s response to the one true God.**

Luke assumes that the Roman Court will question, “*Men have always been religious, and thus, formed some type of religion. Is not this Christianity just another man-made religion which men have created to please their own desires and soothe their own consciences? Do*

*not Christians believe in a God which they have constructed after their own image?"*

Man-made religions are often developed as a result of the desires of men who often seek to live according to their own pleasures. When this desire is strong enough, men will gradually create a god after their own image and a religion that will conform to their own worldly desires or misconceptions of Deity. Luke wants to make it clear to the Roman Court that Christianity was not a religion that was formed in the minds of men in order to consciously justify the base desires of those who seek worldly living. He wants to make it clear that Christianity is not the accumulation of man's misguided desires to be religious. Notice the following arguments that Luke presents to prove this point.

**1. Men responded to the one true God.** The Roman Court knew of the multiplicity of gods that were created in the minds of the Athenians. The Athenians had created a god for every occasion and almost every thing or activity of man and the material world. In order to discuss the function of these idolatrous gods, they would often assemble at the Areopagus in Athens in order to "hear some new thing." Luke recorded, "*For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there [in Athens] spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing*" (At 17:21). The Roman Court knew this about the Athenians.

When Paul went to Athens, the

Athenian philosophers were very curious concerning his teaching which he had proclaimed in the marketplace of the city. Luke again recorded, "*And some said, 'What does this babbler want to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,' because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection*" (17:18). As a result of this religious/philosophical encounter, they requested that Paul meet with them at the Areopagus in order that he fully present his views.

Paul subsequently met at the Areopagus and made his argument to the Athenian philosophers clear. He first complemented them by saying, "*I perceive that in all things you are very religious*" (At 17:22). The Athenians were religious in the sense that they had not neglected their religious inclinations. They maintained religious beliefs, though their beliefs were founded upon their own imaginations. **In ignorance of God's revelation, religiously ignorant men will create some concept of a god.** They will seek a higher power, something that is above their own being. They will convince themselves that this god is satisfied with whatever behavior they desire to have in their personal lives. They will thus form a religion after their own desires.

The Athenians had created many gods in their minds. However, they were intelligent enough to figure out that there must be a God out there somewhere who was greater than the gods they could conceive and manipulate in their own minds. There must be a God somewhere

that was greater than their ability to figure out. Therefore, they made an altar with this inscription, **“TO THE UNKNOWN GOD”** (17:23). Just in case they left some god out, and thus offended this god, they made this altar in order to pay homage to the God they knew was there but could not discover by the means of their own thinking.

The Athenians were intelligent enough to know that any god that could be figured out could not be a real god at all. If the minds of men can determine the total behavior of any god, then the work of this god is confined to the limits of man’s imagination. Such a god that is regulated by what men can conceive is not a real god at all. Luke argues, therefore, that the Athenians had determined that man-made gods are confined to the intelligence of men. Therefore, if there is a true God, that God must be beyond their imaginations. He must be a God whose workings are above the understanding of man. This God was unknown to them because He had not revealed Himself in a special way to them.

When Paul came to Athens preaching the resurrection of Jesus, the Athenians knew immediately that something was different about this new religion. If one did rise from the dead, as Paul so claimed, then the religion which he preached was indeed a religion that was based upon the supernatural revelation of a God beyond this world and their own imaginations. It was this God that Paul proclaimed to the Athenians. He was the God that created heaven and earth (At

17:24). He was the God that created man with a religious nature *“so that they [men] should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us”* (At 17:27). Epimenides, a well known poet of the world, had said, *“For we are also His offspring”* (At 17:28).

The Athenians knew that there was a God who was beyond their imagination. They knew that they had a religious nature that drove them to seek a God that was greater than their own existence. They also knew that if this God was greater than their own existence, then they could not build a temple in which He could dwell. They could not form an idol that would be a representation of His likeness.

When Paul talked about the resurrection of the dead, some mocked at such a concept. However, some of these philosophers wanted more information and time to think. They said, *“We will hear you again on this matter”* (At 17:32). *“However, some men joined him and believed ...”* (At 17:34). These philosophers had found in the resurrected Jesus the revelation of the “unknown God” for which they had been seeking. They found the God who could not be formed after the imagination of men.

**2. Christianity is the result of a response to Jesus’ sonship.** In Athens Paul had preached Jesus and His resurrection. This is Luke’s principal argument to the Roman Court on behalf of Christianity and Paul. If this Jesus was resurrected, then the behavior of Paul and the early Christians can be

explained. If He was not resurrected, then Christianity can be classified with all the other man-made religions of the Roman Empire because it would have no greater support than another other religion of man. However, it was because Christians believed in this resurrection that they behaved as they did.

**a. The resurrection of Jesus was witnessed by several different people.** After His resurrection, Jesus had showed Himself alive to the disciples for forty days (At 1:3). All of these men were credible witnesses to the fact that Jesus arose from the dead (At 1:8). Peter stood before the multitudes of Jerusalem and affirmed that at least the twelve were valid witnesses to the resurrection of this Jesus (At 2:32). If the Jews did not believe such, they could have produced the body of Jesus at that time, for it had been buried in a Roman-sealed tomb. But the body could not be produced. The enemies of Christianity could not produce the body of Jesus in order to disprove the public claim of the apostles that Jesus had actually been raised from the dead. The conclusion to Luke's argument is that Jesus was actually raised from the dead.

**b. In the beginning of the church, thousands of people responded to the resurrection of Jesus.** Since Jesus was raised, then He was what He claimed to be, the Son of God. Peter proclaimed, "*This Jesus God has raised up*" (At 2:32). He is now Lord and Christ (At 2:36). "*Now when they heard*

*this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'*" (At 2:37). This was the response of thousands of people throughout the Roman Empire. Could so many people respond to the concept of the resurrection if it did not actually occur? Luke argues persuasively that multitudes believed on Jesus as the resurrected Christ. The belief of these multitudes is evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead.

Every major speech in the defense of Acts contains this same message. In Acts 2 Peter proclaimed that this Jesus had been raised (At 2:32). In the temple, the disciples proclaimed that the Jews "*killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses*" (At 3:14,15). Before the Jewish Sanhedrin they proclaimed, "*Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole*" (At 4:10). Stephen proclaimed to a mob that was about to stone him, "*Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!*" (At 7:56). He is alive! The early Christians preached this living Jesus throughout the Roman Empire (At 8:5,12,35; 11:20). Paul had testified that he saw Him on the road to Damascus (At 9:1-9; 22:6-10; 26:12-16). He subsequently "*preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus*" (At 9:27). In Antioch of Pisidia Paul and Barnabas preached the death and burial

of Jesus. But they added, “**God raised Him from the dead**” (At 13:30). As a result, “*The word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region*” (At 13:49).

Luke’s argument was conclusive. If Jesus was raised from the dead, then His claim to Sonship is true. The disciples claimed that they stood with the resurrected Jesus. Therefore, they had to speak what they had seen and heard (At 4:20). Thousands of others also responded to the resurrected Jesus. In fact, Luke argues **we can explain the rise and growth of Christianity only on the basis that this Jesus actually arose from the dead**. There is no other valid explanation.

Christianity, therefore, is not a man-made religion which was conceived in the minds of men who were seeking to form a religion after their own desires. It is not a religion with a god that has been created after the image of man. It is a religion with a Son of God that revealed the one true God to man. It is a religion that is based upon the fact that Jesus was truly resurrected from the dead. Luke affirms before the skeptics of the world that his document of Acts is a valid testimony to the witness of those who said that they talked with the resurrected Jesus.

## **B. Christianity is based upon true miracles.**

Luke assumed that the judges would question, “*Men have always claimed to work “miracles” in order to confirm their religions. Have not Christians also*

*professed questionable “miracles” in order to prove their religion?”*

Man-made religions are often based upon the claim of a few spurious or non-public happenings that are claimed to be miracles of God. On this point Luke presents to the Roman Court an overwhelming document of defense that gives an adequate answer for the origin and growth of Christianity. It is not a religion that was based on the “claimed” miracles of a few believers. It is not a religion that is based on the secret performing of supposed miraculous works of a few early fanatics. The nature and demonstration of the Supernatural that surrounds the early beginning of the church is overwhelming. The miracles surrounding Jesus and the early work of the disciples were not done in secret. Before King Agrippa Paul affirmed, “*For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner*” (At 26:26).

Luke rests his case on the fact that the miracles were true and public. Neither the miracles of Jesus nor the miracles of the early evangelists were done in secret. Therefore, these miracles confirmed the messengers of this belief (Mk 16:17-20; Hb 2:3,4). Such miraculous works were beyond denial. Therefore, we must make a decision concerning this Jesus and the response He stimulated among so many people. If we accept Him for who and what He said He was, He will generate the same response in our lives.

**1. *The miracles of Jesus were witnessed by all men.*** In the very beginning of the church, the disciples affirmed that the foundation of Christianity was Jesus. This Jesus was proved to be of God by the miraculous works that came from God (Mt 16:13-19; Jn 3:2). Peter proclaimed, “*Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know*” (At 2:22). Those to whom Peter was speaking in Jerusalem could not deny that Jesus had worked wonderful deeds among them. God had “*anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him*” (At 10:38).

**2. *The miracle of Pentecost was manifested to the entire city of Jerusalem.*** On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, “*suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they [the apostles] were sitting*” (At 2:1-4). “*And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them [the apostles] speak in his own language*” (At 2:6). The great sound was heard by many in Jerusalem. The multitudes heard the apostles speaking in languages which they had never before studied (At 2:7,8). This miraculous beginning, therefore, was not something that was secret. It was known to all.

**3. *The miraculous healing of the***

***crippled man in Jerusalem was known by all.*** Jesus visited in Jerusalem on possibly three occasions during His ministry. He had been to the temple. However, after His resurrection and ascension, there was still a crippled man begging daily at the gate called Beautiful in front of the temple. Why had Jesus not healed this man? Surely He had passed by the cripple on different occasions. But He did not heal him. Why? The answer may be in the purpose for which Luke is writing the document of Acts.

Miracles were manifested for specific purposes. We do not know the reason the crippled man at the gate Beautiful was left unhealed by Jesus until Acts 3 when Peter and John went up to the temple for the “hour of prayer.” However, we do know the result of the healing. The result was that the healing had a tremendous impact on the people who knew the man.

On the occasion of the healing, Peter said to the cripple, “*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk*” (At 3:6). The man arose, walked and leaped while praising God. “***And all the people saw him walking and praising God***” (At 3:9). “*They knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him*” (At 3:10). They all ran together in order to find some explanation for what had happened. From this miracle, therefore, Peter had an audience for preaching that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God. Peter and John are thus confirmed to be valid speakers for Jesus (See Hb 2:3,4).

This miracle was so public and convincing that even the unbelievers and enemies of Jesus could not deny its occurrence. Luke recorded, ***“And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they [the religious leaders] could say nothing against it”*** (At 4:14). For the Roman Court, Luke even records what the enemies of Christianity said about the healing. They had said, ***“For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them [Peter and John] is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it”*** (At 4:16). The miracle was first public. Second, it was so convincing that even the enemies of the disciples could not deny that it had occurred. True miracles, therefore, must have public confirmation. They cannot be denied even by unbelievers. This is Luke’s argument. Paul and all Christians believed and behaved in the manner they did because of the public confirmation of both Jesus and the Christ-sent apostles.

**4. *Miraculous works publicly proved to all men the Divine witness of the apostles.*** The apostles had been promised the authority to command the supernatural power of God. Jesus had promised, ***“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you”*** (At 1:8). As Luke’s defense of Christianity unfolds, the working of this power in the lives of the apostles is most evident. From the very beginning of the church the apostles were proved to be God’s messengers. From that historic day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 ***“fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and***

***signs were done through the apostles”*** (At 2:43). ***“And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people”*** (At 5:12). ***“Yet none of the rest [of the disciples] dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly”*** (At 5:13). As a result of this great miraculous testimony of God, ***“believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women”*** (At 5:14). The people ***“brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them”*** (At 5:15). Many from the surrounding cities of Jerusalem brought their sick to the city ***“and they were all healed”*** (At 5:16).

These events did not happen as a result of clever men who had the gift to deceive through psychosomatic “healings” those who trusted in them. People with true diseases and crippled arms and legs were actually healed. The masses of those who were healed is forever evidence that something out of the ordinary happened. The multitudes of the healed will forever be a testimony to the fact that something marvelous happened in those early days of the beginning of the church. The early spontaneous growth and mass conversion of thousands can be answered only in the fact that they experienced the real and actual unveiling of the supernatural realm of God. There is no other answer. Masses of people do not respond in such a short time to clever men as the people did in the first century to the apostles.

**5. *Miracles publicly proved that the***

**evangelists were messengers sent from God.** Luke recorded, “*And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people*” (At 6:8).

Philip went to Samaria and preached Jesus. “*And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed*” (At 8:5,6). The entire city of Samaria witnessed these miracles. Even Simon, a sorcerer, believed when he saw the miracles of Philip (At 8:13).

In the city of Joppa a certain woman named Dorcas had died (At 9:36-42). Peter was summoned and subsequently raised her from the dead (At 9:40). “*And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord*” (At 9:42).

In Lystra there was a crippled man who could not walk since he was born (At 14:8). Paul healed this man before the whole city. The people unfortunately assumed, “*The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!*” (At 14:11). Throughout much of the Roman Empire “*God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul*” (At 19:11). In Ephesus people were so convinced by the miracles of Paul that they burned their magical books (At 19:18,19). “*So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed*” (At 19:20).

Even on his way to Rome under Roman custody Paul miraculously survived a public snake bite (At 28:3-6). While stranded on the island of Malta

Paul went into Publius who was a leading citizen of the island. Paul “*laid his hands on him and healed him*” (At 28:8). “*So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed*” (At 28:9).

Luke’s defense is conclusive. **Any who experienced these miracles could be called to Rome and before the Court in order to testify on behalf of Paul and Christianity.** Luke knew that Rome could call representatives from the city of Jerusalem, Samaria, Joppa, Lystra, Ephesus, Philippi and a host of other cities and locations. All would testify to the public miracles that had occurred in the lives of men. He thus challenged the Court to call any member of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem who could not deny the healing of the crippled man of the temple. They could call Dorcas and the citizens of Joppa. They could call on the citizens from the vast distances of the Roman Empire. Thousands of witnesses could be called to give their personal testimony on behalf of Paul.

Those who believed the message of the evangelists were only following through with their personal witness of the miracles. They could not deny what they had personally experienced. They could not disbelieve what they heard from the evangelists. Luke asks the Roman Court not to hold Paul or any Christian responsible for believing and teaching what he or she had actually experienced in his or her own life. They could not but speak those things that they had seen and heard.

Though we do not have the personal experience of miracles today, our faith is based upon the testimony of those who personally saw and heard. The Bible was written as a record of the testimony of others who actually experienced the supernatural unveiling of God (Jn 20:30,31). It is for this reason that Luke wrote this defense to Theophilus on behalf of all Christians (See 1:1-3; Lk 1:1-4).

### C. Christianity is true because Jesus fulfilled prophecy.

Luke assumes that the Court will question, “Christianity *has come from Judaism. Is it not just another sect that spontaneously developed out of the Jewish faith?*”

Luke has argued that Christianity was not a sect of Judaism (See ch 1,A). Though the movement of the church did come out of the Jewish nation, his argument here is that Jesus, as the Messiah, was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Jesus was the Prophet for which Israel had been waiting.

The Jewish Scriptures foretold the coming of the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. Those who might question this argument can turn to the more than three hundred Old Testament prophecies which point to Jesus. This was a principal argument of the early disciples to prove to the Jews and to the world that what they believed was not from the religious imagination of the apostles’ minds.

**1. Paul believed in the “hope of Israel.”** It was the “hope of Israel” that the Messiah would come. Though the nationalistic Jews of Palestine had a false concept of the Messiah’s kingship, they were right in their interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures that a prophesied Messiah would come. Paul affirmed that he believed in this hope and that it was on the basis of this belief that the Jews were against him. He believed that the hope was fulfilled in Jesus. However, the Jews could not accept Jesus as the fulfillment of this hope.

Israel not only hoped for the Messiah, all Israelites hoped for the resurrection of the body. Jesus was the fulfillment of both. He was the Messiah. He was the Messiah who was resurrected never to die again, and thus through His resurrection gave hope that all believers will be raised to never die again (Jn 5:28,29). Therefore, Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s Messianic promises to Israel.

#### a. Hope for the Messiah:

Before King Agrippa Paul affirmed his belief in the Old Testament prophecies. “*Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come – that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles*” (At 26:22,23). The problem with the Jews was that they could not accept a crucified carpenter as their

Messiah. They were looking for deliverance from foreign occupation and a national restoration of Israel. Jesus did not fit into this mental picture of what their hoped for Messiah would be. And because He did not fit, they could not accept Him as Messiah.

#### **b. Hope for the resurrection:**

Paul defended himself upon the basis of believing in the fulfillment of the hope of the resurrection. Luke recorded the following words of Paul when he was in judgment before King Agrippa, *“And now I stand and am judged for the **hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope’s sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews**”* (At 26:6,7). To the Jews in Rome Paul affirmed that *“for the **hope of Israel I am bound with this chain**”* (At 28:20). Before the Sanhedrin he proclaimed, *“... concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!”* (At 23:6). He explained more of his hope in his defense before Felix. *“I have hope in God, ... that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust”* (At 24:15).

**2. Paul believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of the hope of Israel.** Immediately after his conversion, Paul began preaching that Jesus was both the Son of God and the Christ (Messiah) (At 9:20,22). Luke records one of Paul’s synagogue speeches in Acts 13:16-41. In this speech he stated that the Jews crucified Jesus (1) **because**

**they did not know Him, and (2) because they did not understand the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah** (At 13:27). In other words, because the Jews had a misunderstanding of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, they could not associate the life of Jesus, of whom they were ignorant, with the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. If they had known the life of Jesus and the true nature of the Old Testament prophecies, they would not have crucified Him (At 3:17). They would have accepted him.

It was Paul’s custom to reason from the Old Testament Scriptures in order to prove to the Jews that this Jesus was the Messiah. In Thessalonica Paul *“went in to them [the Jews], and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘**This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ**’”* (At 7:1-3). In Corinth Paul *“reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks”* (At 18:5). In Ephesus *“he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, **reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God**”* (At 19:8).

When Luke concluded Acts he left Paul in Rome reasoning from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. A special day had been appointed for a meeting with the Jews. During the meeting Paul *“explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from*

*both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening” (At 28:23).*

**3. All the disciples reasoned that Jesus was the Christ.** The early evangelists reasoned from the Old Testament that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. They reasoned that Jesus was now King and that His kingdom reign was presently in existence. Jesus had affirmed that He had fulfilled all prophecies concerning Himself as the Messiah (Lk 24:44). The disciples affirmed that this was true.

On the day of Pentecost Peter stood up and proclaimed that God had promised David that One would sit upon his throne (At 2:25-28; see Ps 16:8-11). Jesus was the One who sat upon David’s throne and is presently reigning. *“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses” (At 2:32).* Peter proclaimed, therefore, that this Jesus is now exalted to the right hand of God (At 2:33). He has now ascended to the right hand of God and is both **Lord and Christ** (At 2:34-36). The apostles unanimously affirmed, *“Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior ...” (At 5:31).* The promise and prophecy that One would sit upon the throne of David was fulfilled in Jesus.

The disciples persuasively argued from the Old Testament Scriptures that this Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy. Evangelists, as Apollos, ***“vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (At 18:28).***

Though the Roman Court may not have been knowledgeable of Jesus and the kingdom of God as was King Agrippa, Luke and Paul expected them to at least accept Agrippa’s testimony. Luke recorded Paul’s words before Agrippa, *“For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner” (At 26:26).* Paul then asked, *“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe” (At 26:27).*

Agrippa was familiar with the Jewish Old Testament prophets. He had studied them. He also knew of the life of Jesus, for Jesus had not worked in secret. Agrippa’s uncommitted statement to Paul, therefore, was, *“You almost persuade me to become a Christian” (At 26:28).* If it were not for the tremendous pomp and pride associated with being a king, we are persuaded that Agrippa would have become a Christian also. The proof of Jesus’ messiahship is so convincing that it has this effect upon even the highest rulers of government.

**4. Jesus was the Prophet for which Israel hoped.** Not only was Israel looking for the Messiah, she was also looking for the Prophet about whom Moses had prophesied. Peter stood before the Jews and quoted Moses’ prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:15,18,19. *“For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you’” (At 3:22).*

Peter stated that all the prophets looked forward to and foretold “*these days*” (At 3:24). This Prophet was of the seed of Abraham that would teach all nations “*in turning away every one of you from your iniquities*” (At 3:25,26; see Gl 3:16). This was the Prophet through whom the world would be saved. This was Jesus.

Stephen also proclaimed Jesus as this Prophet for which Israel hoped. He also quoted Deuteronomy 18 and applied the prophecy of Moses to Jesus (At 7:37). This Prophet (Jesus) “*was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us*” (At 7:38). The Jewish fathers rejected Jesus when they came out of Egyptian captivity. They wanted to return to Egypt. In fact, Stephen stated that they turned back to Egypt in their hearts (At 7:39,40). When Jesus came in the flesh they again rejected Him. Nevertheless, God proved Jesus to be the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah and the Prophet for which Israel hoped. Those who walked by faith received Jesus as the Messiah and the Prophet. However, those who were entangled in their own religious traditions rejected Him.

#### **D. Christianity is true because Christian prophecies were fulfilled.**

Luke assumes that the Court will ask, “*We have heard that some Christians have prophesied future events. How can this be true?*”

Luke does not place much emphasis on this aspect of the Christian movement. Christianity is not a religion that is based upon the continual pronouncement and fulfillment of prophecy. **It is a behavioral pattern of life that is based on the fulfillment of prophecy in the life of Jesus.** Christians behave as they do because of their belief in Jesus, not because of the practice of prophecy. They believe and behave because prophecy has already been recorded and fulfilled. However, when an early Christian prophet made a prophecy, that prophecy came to pass. Such prophets thus confirmed the validity of the Christian faith.

Emphasis is placed upon the fulfillment of prophecy in the defense which Luke made in the document of Luke. Jesus fulfilled all prophecies of the Old Testament which applied to Him (Lk 24:44). In the defense of Acts, Luke’s emphasis is on the effect of the Christians’ belief in Jesus who fulfilled Old Testament prophecies. Nevertheless, Luke does add a few proofs of prophecy in the defense of Paul and the church.

**1. Agabus was a true prophet of the church.** Luke wanted the Court to remember the great famine which occurred during the days of Claudius Caesar who was Caesar of Rome from A.D. 41 to 54. The Court knew that the famine occurred. According to the historian Josephus it occurred from A.D. 44 to A.D. 48. Therefore, Luke reminded the Court of the following words of the Christian prophet, Agabus,

who foretold this historical event. *“And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar”* (At 11:27,28).

This prophecy was not a prediction which was based upon present historical happenings that would give hints to its fulfillment. It was a prophecy of an event that affected thousands of people in a large geographical area. The Roman Court could not discount this prophecy and fulfillment. The famine was a historical event that occurred throughout the area of Palestine.

**2. Paul was a true prophet of the church.** On their way to Rome and during the end of the storm at sea, Paul affirmed to the weary sailors who were on a doomed ship, *“And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve”* (At 27:22,23). Paul prophesied that there would be no loss of life during the shipwreck that was about to happen (At 27:24). He also said, *“We must run aground on a certain island”* (At 27:26). Such occurred just as Paul had said (At 27:39-44). How could he have known

this? Luke challenges, *“Did this angel, therefore, appear to Paul?”* In view of the fulfillment of the prophecy, we must say yes. And if Paul truly spoke by prophecy, then we must assume that God worked through him for only God can know and reveal the future.

Luke does not emphasize the foretelling of the future as a major proof of the first century church. Miracles were the major confirming work of God for the early evangelists. However, when these early evangelists did speak of the future, their prophecy was fulfilled. Just in case the Court might need this added proof, Luke presented it for their consideration.

The emphasis of prophecy surrounding the early church was in Jesus’ fulfillment of Messianic prophecies. Once these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus, no more proof was necessary that He was the prophesied Messiah. The church is a group of people who have accepted and believed that all Old Testament prophecies confirm Jesus to be the Messiah and Son of God. It is upon this foundation that the church exists. If Jesus were neither, then there would be no right for the church to exist as the unique people of God on earth. This belief is what separates the church from all false religions.

## Chapter 3

### The Proof Of Changed Lives

When we study through the New Testament, one of the most evident confirmations of Christianity is the changed lives of those who were affected

by the risen Christ. In fact, we cannot answer the radical change in human lives without the fact that people actually experienced something unusual in their lives. When Luke wrote this document to Theophilus, he set forth the radically changed lives of specific individuals as evidence that they had experienced something unusual in their lives.

Changed lives can occur in any religion. However, when studying the case of different people in the New Testament, it is difficult to explain the nature of the change in their lives without them having experienced something very unusual. This is particularly true of the life of the apostle Paul. The radical nature of the change in his life can be explained only if he actually experienced something on the Damascus road. In reference to those to whom He and the other evangelists, who also experienced the miraculous firsthand, the receptivity of their preaching was phenomenal. It was phenomenal because those to whom they preached accepted them as true witnesses of the personal experience with the supernatural work of God.

The force of this evidence for Christianity is compounded when we consider the fact that thousands of changed lives happened at the same time in history. If only a few people had radically changed lives, then we would wonder concerning the authenticity of the testimony of their lives. In the case of Christianity, however, there were thousands of people throughout the land of Palestine and the Roman Empire who

radically changed to a committed life of faith because they believed in Jesus. This great change in only one or two decades cannot be explained without the fact that something very unusual happened in the first century. It happened in a manner that gave evidence to the sonship of Jesus of Nazareth and the evangelists who were sent forth by Him.

With the above in mind we must seriously consider some of the lives that Luke presents as evidence for the confirmation of the message that Paul and others preached through the world.

#### **A. Christianity was proclaimed true by the conversion of sorcerers.**

Luke assumes that the Court will question, "*Christianity is just another sect of sorcery which is typical of the numerous religious sorcerers throughout the Roman Empire. Why should we not consider Christianity just another sect of sorcerers?*"

Luke not only affirmed the argument that the miraculous works of those who proclaimed the Christian faith were actually true, he added the testimony of those who were masters of professional trickery. These master sorcerers had constructed their own followings and cults. They showed in their lives the desire to have a following. They maintained a following by controlling people by fear. These witch doctors, therefore, captured the imagination of entire villages, towns and cities. They maintained control over the citizens of

cities by the supposed magical spells which they claimed to be from the unseen supernatural world. Luke uses this group of characters in a way that they give one of the greatest testimonies to the truth of miracles.

Man-made religions of many ancient people are often based on the self-claimed miraculous wonders of those who seek position in a particular tribe, clan or society. Luke, however, sets out to use these sorcerers and witch doctors as witnesses for Christianity. In doing so, he uses their testimony of the true miracles they saw Christians work as a witness against their own trades of deception. Luke's defense is based on the logic that even those who were involved in magical trickery in local communities give their testimony to the validity of true miracles. By their testimony they deny their own so-called miracles.

Luke wants those who would judge Paul to know that true manifestations of the supernatural were not magical tricks. Those who were masters of magical tricks give witness to the fact that what these early Christians were doing was commanding the environment of the supernatural by the will of God. The following are three cases where true miracles were proved to be more than magical tricks of master sorcerers. These cases affirm that the miracles recorded in the New Testament were true. They also affirm that the works of the sorcerers were not miraculous.

### 1. *The testimony of Simon of*

**Samaria:** Philip, the evangelist, went to the city of Samaria and "*preached Christ to them*" (At 8:5). Many in Samaria believed his message because they were "*hearing and seeing the miracles which he did*" (At 8:6). They **heard** the unclean spirits cry out when they were cast out by Philip. They **saw** the sick healed (At 8:7). There was no question, therefore, that something miraculous occurred.

In Samaria there was a sorcerer by the name of Simon. Luke records that he "*practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, 'This man is the great power of God'*" (At 8:9,10). "*They heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time*" (At 8:11). For a long time Simon had amazed the entire city with his magical tricks. He had amazed every citizen from the youngest to the oldest. However, Philip came to the city working true miracles that they could see and hear. The citizens of Samaria saw and heard that there was a difference between what Philip was doing and what they had seen Simon do. They recognized that Philip's miracles were true manifestations of the supernatural.

Even Simon gave his testimony to the truthfulness of the miraculous works of Philip. Luke recorded, "*Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done*" (At 8:13). This

master of sorcery in Samaria recognized and witnessed to the truth of Philip's miracles. Simon was **amazed** at what Philip did. If he had performed miracles himself he would have had no reason to be amazed at what Philip did. Therefore, Simon witnessed that the miracles of Philip were not the magical tricks that he had done in order to gain a following from the people. He thus gave his testimony that Philip worked true miracles. In giving this testimony, he at the same time gave a testimony that what he was doing as a sorcerer was only deceptive works.

**2. The testimony of Bar-jesus in Paphos:** Paul and Barnabas traveled to the island of Cyprus where they preached the gospel event in the city of Paphos (At 13:4-12). There they encountered a sorcerer by the name of Bar-jesus. This man was full of all deceit, fraud and an enemy of all righteousness, never ceasing to pervert the right ways of the Lord (At 13:10). He withstood the teachings of Paul and Barnabas and worked to turn the people away from what they were preaching (At 13:8).

As Simon of Samaria, Bar-jesus had also deceived the people with his magical tricks. Sergius Paulus was the Roman proconsul of the area. He was an intelligent man (At 13:7). However, even he, as well as many others on the island, gave heed to the magical trickery of Bar-jesus. Nevertheless, Sergius Paulus called for and listened to the preaching of Paul and Barnabas. He did so because he wanted to hear the word of

God (At 13:7). But Bar-jesus sought to turn Sergius Paulus away from the preaching of these two evangelists.

Because Bar-jesus was an enemy of the truth, Paul called down the power of the supernatural upon him in order to inflict physical punishment on him for his deeds. Paul said before all, "*And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time*" (At 13:11). Bar-jesus was subsequently blinded and went about seeking someone to lead him. Luke records that when the proconsul "*saw what had been done,*" he believed (At 13:12). He was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Luke's argument is twofold with this case. First, though Bar-jesus was supposedly to have miraculous power, he could not miraculously work against Paul. He could not undo his blindness which had been brought down upon him by Paul. If he had miraculous power, certainly he could have miraculously opposed the teaching and work of Paul.

Secondly, the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus, gave his testimony to the truth of what occurred. He could be summoned to the Roman Court in order to give testimony for what had actually happened. Since what actually took place was true, Paul could not be accused of being one of the sorcerers of the religions of the Roman Empire. His work was against those who practiced sorcery.

**3. The testimony of the Ephesians:** Luke recorded the marvelous events that took place in the city of Ephesus. "**God**

*worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and evil spirits went out of them*" (At 19:11,12). There were some fake Jewish exorcists in Ephesus who had never before exorcised an evil spirit from anyone. The fact that they had not is seen by their efforts to cast out evil spirits "by the Jesus whom Paul preaches" (At 19:13). If they had been able to cast out evil spirits with their own incantations before Paul came to the city, then why would they seek to do so by the name of Jesus which Paul proclaimed?

As a result of the Jewish exorcists' counterfeit attempt to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, the one in whom the evil spirits dwelt, leaped on them, stripping them of their clothes. The Jewish exorcists then "fled out of that house naked and wounded" (At 19:16). "This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (At 19:17).

Here is Luke's defense. "Many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds" (At 19:18). **They were confessing and telling about their evil deeds of deception which they had formerly practiced.** "Also, many of those who had **practiced magic** brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all" (At 19:19). They had not been "practicing" true miracles. **They had been practicing magical tricks so as to deceive the people into believing that they were actually**

**working miracles.** But when they saw the "unusual miracles" worked by the hand of Paul, and believed his message, they confessed their deception. These workers of deception gave their testimony that what they were doing in Ephesus was false and deceptive. Their confession was a witness that what Paul was doing was true and supernatural. As a result of Paul's work, Luke recorded, "the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (At 19:20). The word of God prevailed over the false miracles and deceptive lies of man-made religions.

Luke's defense of the early Christians on this point is impeccable. The change in the city of Ephesus is a testimony to the truth of the miraculous works of Paul. Luke challenges by inferring that the city of Ephesus could be called to Rome in order to testify on behalf of Paul. The citizens of Ephesus could be gathered with the citizens of Paphos and Samaria.

The sociological religious change that took place in these three cities give testimony to the fact that Christianity was not just another man-made religion which was based upon the self-acclaimed magical tricks of witchdoctors and sorcerers. On the contrary, those sorcerers who practiced their trade witnessed to the fact that the miracles of the messengers of Christianity were different than their magical tricks. They thus affirm the validity of the disciples' miracles. And since the belief of Christians were proved true by miracles, the Court must not blame Christians for

maintaining their belief that Jesus was real and that His message must be heard and believed.

Luke asks all to believe as those who once practiced or believed in the magical tricks of witches and witchdoctors. Christianity is true because it is above the deceptions of those who seek a following by deceiving men. Christianity is based upon the fact of the supernatural.

## **B. Christianity is true because of the belief of credible witnesses.**

Luke assumes that the Court will question, *“Is not Christianity just another religious belief of the poor and oppressed?”*

Christianity was believed by the poor and oppressed, as Luke assumes the Roman Court might believe. However, it was also believed by reliable government officials and prominent community leaders throughout the Roman Empire. We must not assume that the cases of conversion that Luke records in Acts were simply recorded for the purpose of illustrating cases where people were immersed upon believing in Jesus. The cases of conversion had a greater purpose. That purpose was to give evidence that the gospel was believed by all groups of people throughout the Roman Empire. Any of these people could be questioned concerning their conversion. The following are individuals Luke would challenge the Court to call to Rome and question.

### **1. Call on the priests of Jerusalem.**

Luke records that the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem greatly opposed Christianity. However, he also makes it clear that not all the Jewish leadership was of this persuasion. He records, *“And the word of God spread ... and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith”* (At 6:7). Luke makes this special mention of this special group of converts for the purpose of letting it be known that not all the Jewish leadership opposed Christianity.

### **2. Call on the Ethiopian eunuch.**

The eunuch from Ethiopia had charge of all the treasury of Ethiopia. He was an honest man of great integrity. He had *“great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians”* (At 8:27). After Philip had preached Jesus to him, he stated, *“What hinders me from being baptized?”* (At 8:36). This government official was obedient to the gospel. Can we question his integrity?

**3. Call on Paul himself.** Paul was before the Court for his own defense. Nevertheless, he is a testimony and defense for himself. After all, he was formerly a man of great authority among the Jewish military. He was a former Pharisee, having studied at the feet of the great Jewish teacher Gamaliel (At 22:1-5). He had received full authority from the chief priests and elders of Jerusalem to persecute the church (At 8:3; 22:5). However, he believed as a result of his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road. Why did Paul make such a radical change of life? Can we explain this

radical change without the Damascus road experience?

**4. Call on Cornelius, a Roman centurion.** Cornelius was a Roman centurion who was stationed in Caesarea. He was a devout man “*and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always*” (At 10:1,2). He was a man of great integrity and a good spiritual leader in the community. He had “*a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews*” (At 10:22). And yet, he and all his household were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (At 10:44-48). He was a Roman government official who believed the message that was preached by Peter. Since he lived in Caesarea, we would assume that he had heard of Jesus, and possibly, experienced the teaching of Jesus. At least in this case, he experienced the appearance of an angel. He was an official that could be summoned to Rome to give testimony concerning what he saw and heard.

**5. Call on Sergius Paulus of Paphos.** Sergius Paulus was Rome’s proconsul of Paphos on the island of Cyprus. He was an intelligent man (At 13:7). Though he was influenced by a sorcerer, he desired to hear what the evangelists Paul and Barnabas had to say (At 13:7). After he heard the evangelists, Luke records, “*Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord*” (At 13:12).

**6. Call on the leading women of the city of Thessalonica.** In Thessalonica Paul and Silas preached Jesus. As a

result, Luke records, “*... a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas*” (At 17:4). These women of social standing were credible witnesses to what Paul and Silas had to say. Surely, they would not have been fooled by the deceptions of two opportunists who were seeking a following.

**7. Call on Crispus.** Crispus lived in Corinth. Paul also went there and preached Jesus as the Christ. As a result, Luke records, “*Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized*” (At 18:8). This religious man was respected by the community so as to be placed in a position as the ruler of the synagogue. He believed. He could be called to Rome to give testimony concerning the message and works of the apostle Paul.

**8. Call on King Agrippa.** Though there is no record of Agrippa’s positive response to the gospel, Luke records his reaction to the questions of Paul during Paul’s hearing in Palestine. Paul questioned, “*King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe*” (At 26:27). Agrippa did believe the prophecies of the Jewish prophets. He seriously considered their fulfillment in the one called Jesus. He responded to Paul, “*You almost persuade me to become a Christian*” (At 26:28).

**9. Call on Julius.** Julius was the centurion of the Roman Augustan Regiment who had the responsibility of taking Paul to Rome to stand before

Caesar. He was a valid character witness to Paul. During the voyage to Rome, Paul gained the respect of Julius to the point that Julius began listening to Paul's counsel. As the ship approached the island of Malta after the storm at sea, Julius followed Paul's instructions that were based upon Paul's claim that an angel had stood before him during the night (At 27:23). When they were about to wreck the ship on the shore of Malta, the soldiers wanted to kill all the prisoners. However, Julius, "*wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose ...*" (At 27:43). Julius was now in Rome. Luke would ask the Court to call on him to testify on behalf of Paul.

#### **10. Call on the father of Publius.**

Publius was a "leading citizen" of the island of Malta (At 28:7). Paul healed his father while he was shipwrecked on the island (At 28:8). The Court could call on Publius, his father and all the citizens of Malta in order to testify concerning the miracles which Paul worked.

Luke's argument is that Christianity was believed by those who could make a rational decision according to the thinking of the Roman Court. Those in high positions would have nothing to gain for their decision to follow Jesus. They would have no ulterior motives. They would have no hidden agenda. If they believed, Luke argues, then there is something to that which they believed. Rome could call these witnesses to the Court in order to testify. Those of the world and throughout history can also

call them since their conversion is reported by Luke for all history. These are reliable witnesses who can affirm that this Jesus must be believed. They are witnesses to the fact that as rational people they believed in the message that was preached by evangelists who personally experienced the unveiling of the supernatural work of God. As the people of God we accept their witness as true, and thus we are justified as the only people of God in the world. The church is of God because the members believe.

#### **C. Christianity is true because men risked their lives to preach.**

Luke assumes that the Court will question, "*If the leaders and followers of this Jesus were placed under severe persecution and trials, would they not forsake this Jesus and His religion?*"

It is true that many valiant men have given their lives for great causes. Too often, men give their lives for false beliefs that are based on superstitions or traditions. We would say, therefore, that Luke's argument here is not a final confirmation of the truthfulness of the Christian religion. However, if Christianity were true in the sense that men actually experienced the transcendent God, then we would expect men to give their lives for it. We would expect men to be martyred because they refused to either deny Jesus or quit their God-ordained mission. To the Roman Court, therefore, Luke presents the life consequences of those who firmly maintained that they had personally

encountered the supernatural work of God.

As those on the Roman Court in the time of Paul, we today have not personally experienced Jesus or the confirming miracles of the earthly disciples. We are “more blessed” because we believe, and yet, have not seen (Jn 20:29). However, the early evangelists often worked from personal experience. The Roman judges had not personally seen Jesus. Neither have we. However, Peter, John, Stephen and a host of other disciples, personally walked with Him. The existence and person of Jesus was not a matter of belief to them. **He was a matter of fact.** Peter proclaimed, “*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard*” (At 4:20). The apostles were the original witnesses to both Jesus and His resurrection. They thus affirmed what they had personally seen and heard. Therefore, they were motivated by fact, whereas, we are motivated by belief in their personal testimony.

We must understand this point in order to understand the witness of the early disciples. We examine their testimony, as the Roman judges. Did the early disciples suffer for that which they knew as fact? Had they actually experienced something in their personal lives that made them behave in a different manner than those who simply die “for their faith”? **The nature of Luke’s defense is that he records the unique behavior of those who had actually experienced the fact of Jesus and His resurrection and the fact of**

**God’s miraculous work among the disciples.** He gives a historical account of the behavior of men who actually experienced that which we accept by faith. These early disciples, therefore, had to speak that which they personally experienced. And because they had personally experienced the transcendent God, they were willing to commit their lives to what they believed, even if it meant death.

**1. They endured great hardships for their beliefs.** The hardships which the early disciples commonly endured is brought out by a statement that Paul and Barnabas made to new Christians in Asia Minor. They stated what seemed to be a principle of early Christian life. “*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*” (At 14:22). We could say that Paul reaped what he had sown in this matter. After his conversion and while he was in Jerusalem, the Lord appeared to him. The Lord told him to leave Jerusalem. But Paul answered, “*Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You*” (At 22:19). Paul did the same to the church in his work before he was converted. After Stephen was stoned, “*a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem ...*” (At 8:1). “*As for Saul [Paul], he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison*” (At 8:3). He breathed “*threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*” (At 9:1).

Christians throughout the first century world suffered for their faith. In fact, one of the common teachings of exhortation that was taught among the churches was what Paul and Barnabas taught the Christians of their first missionary journey. *“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”* (At 14:22). After the conversion of Paul, the Jews continued their persecution of the church. They brought great hardship upon the early disciples throughout the Roman Empire until God put a stop to the Jewish State through the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

**2. They endured great persecutions for their faith.** Persecution was the furnace of purification through which the faith of all the early disciples went.

**a. Peter and John were arrested and threatened.** Peter and John did a good work by healing a crippled man at the temple in Jerusalem (At 3:1-10). They proclaimed that the healing was done by the power of God (At 3:11,12). Nevertheless, the Jewish leadership was greatly distressed that they taught in the name of Jesus (At 4:1-4). The apostles were subsequently arrested and placed under custody. They were commanded *“not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus”* (At 4:18). But such threats meant nothing to Peter, John and the other apostles. It was as Peter said. *“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”* (At 4:20).

**b. The apostles were arrested and beaten.** The Jewish leadership

continued to persecute the church after the initial arrest and threatening of the apostles. They *“laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison”* (At 5:18). They beat the apostles and commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus (At 5:40). But the apostles *“departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”* (At 5:41). And every day *“in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”* (At 5:42).

**c. Paul and Barnabas were persecuted.** After Jesus had appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, He showed Paul all the persecutions that he would have to endure during his ministry of preaching the name of Jesus. Jesus said to Ananias in reference to Paul, *“For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake”* (At 9:15). The courage of Paul is seen in the fact that he knew what he was getting himself into when he went to the waters of baptism.

As Paul went from city to city preaching the name of Jesus, he was continually persecuted by the Jews. When the Jews saw the multitudes that gave attention to the things he said, *“they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul”* (At 13:45). In Antioch of Pisidia *“the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region”*

(At 13:50). Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium. *“But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren”* (At 14:2). Paul and Barnabas fled over to Derbe. However, the *“Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead”* (At 14:19). Paul and Barnabas went from city to city, hazarding their lives for the purpose of preaching Jesus. It was said of them throughout the church that they were *“men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (At 15:26).

The Lord had told Paul that in every city persecutions awaited him (At 20:23). He traveled under the threat of death. He said, however, *“None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God”* (At 20:24). To the Caesarean brethren he stated, *“For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus”* (At 21:13). Such faith surely came from a man who personally had an encounter with Deity.

**3. They endured plots to harm and murder them.** Numerous plots were made against Paul and the early Christians. The Jews tried to murder him on more than one occasion. Luke’s argument for tracing the ministry of Paul after his conversion is to draw the

conclusion that such a life would not have been lived by a man who did not actually experience the revelation of God in his life. The amount of tribulation and persecution through which Paul went in his ministry can be understood only if we believe that he personally saw Jesus on the Damascus road.

**a. Plot of murder in Damascus:**

Immediately after his conversion, Paul preached Jesus as the Christ in the synagogues. He preached that He was the Son of God (At 9:20). *“Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him”* (At 9:23).

**b. Plot of murder in Jerusalem:**

Paul fled Damascus and went to Jerusalem. *“He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him”* (At 9:29).

**c. Plot of murder in Iconium:**

Paul and Barnabas preached Jesus in the synagogue of the Jews in Iconium. Many of the Jews and Gentiles believed (At 14:1-4). However, *“a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them”* (At 14:5).

**d. Plot of murder in Greece:**

When Paul came to Greece after leaving Macedonia, he stayed three months with the churches. *“And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia”* (At 20:3).

**e. Second plot of murder in Jerusalem:** When Paul eventually

returned to Jerusalem, he was taken into custody by the Roman guard in order to protect him from a Jewish mob. However, *“some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul”* (At 23:12). The Roman commander, Claudius Lysias, learned of the plot. He had Paul taken by night to Caesarea.

**f. Plot of murder by ambush:**

While Paul was in Roman custody in Caesarea, the Jews again schemed. They asked Festus if he would have Paul brought again to Jerusalem for trial. However, they wanted to *“lay in ambush along the road to kill him”* (At 25:3).

No ordinary person would undergo what Paul did in order to proclaim his beliefs. Luke is asking that we examine this man simply because of the great trials he had to endure in order to proclaim his belief in the gospel. The conclusion to which Luke wants us to come is that for one as Paul to undergo such tribulation and trial during his life, he must have had some experience that firmly convinced him that Jesus was the Son of God.

**4. They lived in the shadow of death.** The enemies of Christianity were successful on more than one occasion in their attempts to discourage or murder the disciples. They murdered both Jesus and some of those who preached in His name. Therefore, when one became a Christian he knew that he might be in a

situation where he would have to give his life for his faith (See Rv 2:10).

**a. Murder of Jesus:** The Jewish religious leadership had, according to their law, murdered Jesus (At 2:23). They had killed the Prince of life (At 3:14). They had murdered Jesus by hanging Him on the cross (At 5:30). We would expect, therefore, that they would do no less to those who claimed to be the disciples of Jesus.

**b. Murder of Stephen:** Stephen proclaimed to the same mob that had murdered Jesus, *“Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayer and murderers”* (At 7:52). *“When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth”* (At 7:54). Therefore, they cast Stephen *“out of the city and stoned him”* (At 7:58). Stephen was murdered simply because the Jews could not defend themselves against his arguments.

**c. Murder of James:** King Herod also *“stretched out his hand to harass some from the church”* (At 12:1). He murdered James who was one of the apostles and brother of John (At 12:2). He also sought to murder Peter in the same manner because the murder of James pleased the Jews (At 12:3). However, God sent his angel to release Peter from Herod’s prison (At 12:5-11). Peter was delivered and Herod’s plan was spoiled.

**d. Attempted murder of Paul:**

When Paul preached in Derbe the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came over and stirred up the people against him (At 14:19). They subsequently stoned Paul and cast him out of the city. They evidently thought that he was dead.

On another occasion Paul was in Jerusalem. He was in the temple. When he came out, false accusations were made against him. The Jews seized him and tried to kill him on the spot (At 21:26-28,32; 26:21).

Luke gives to the Roman Court case after case of persecution, harassment, plots and murders. If Christianity was a man-made religion, he argues, would these people suffer so much for something that was of human origin? If this Jesus had not been raised from the dead, would not just one disciple have broken down under persecution and confessed that it was all a hoax? If Paul had not actually seen Jesus on the Damascus road, would it be reasonable to believe that he would endure such a life of persecution for a lie, or hallucination, or something he had dreamed up in Arabia? Luke expects the Court to be reasonable and fair. His appeal is that the sufferings of the early disciples cannot be explained if the disciples did not personally experience Jesus and the manifestation of God through miracles.

#### **D. Christianity is true because of the self-denial of believers.**

Luke assumes that the Court will question, “*As other religions of the*

*Empire, is not Christianity just another money-making scheme of religionists who seek to live off the religious desires of men?”*

Luke knows that the Roman judges might be thinking that Paul and other evangelists went forth on a religious money-making scheme throughout the Empire. They might believe that the early evangelists preached this Christianity for the purpose of enlarging their coffers. After all, such was a common practice of the day among other religious groups. The Corinthians were known for such hireling practices. Even in Athens, philosophers proclaimed philosophies for profit. Throughout the defense of Acts, therefore, Luke mentions on more than one occasion the sacrificial-sharing attitude of these “Third World” preachers who denied themselves and committed their lives to the preaching of the gospel.

Luke makes it known, however, that the Christian community did help in sending these evangelists forth. The church in Antioch sent forth Paul and Barnabas (At 13:1-4). The church in Thessalonica sent Paul and Silas to Berea (At 17:10). But such support was usually not sufficient, for as Luke records, Paul had to work with his hands in order to survive (At See 20:33-36). The support that was given to the evangelists lasted only for a short time after leaving their home. There were no bank drafts. There were no wire transfer of funds. The evangelists had to live by supporting themselves throughout their journeys (2 Th 3:8). The fact that they

did is evidence that they went forth with the message of the gospel on their hearts. They were willing to undergo great poverty in order to preach the gospel to the world (Ph 4:10-12).

**1. *The church had a spirit of sacrificial sharing.*** Luke affirmed that the Christian community in general was not composed of a group of wealthy citizens. In fact, even in the beginning of the movement they “*sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need*” (At 2:45). As the community progressed, things did not get much better. These early believers did not covet one another’s possessions. They did not covet the possessions of the world. Loving the things of the world was not in their nature (See 1 Jn 2:15). Even after the movement had grown, they still manifested the commonality of possessions. Luke recorded, “*Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common*” (At 4:32). “*Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold*” (At 4:35). The proceeds of the things that were sold were distributed to anyone who had a need (At 4:35).

Luke’s argument is that the nature of the teaching and behavior of the community of believers was sharing, not hoarding. They shared among

themselves, and especially, they took care of their widows (At 6:1-7). When one of the prophets, Agabus, prophesied a great famine, “*the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea*” (At 11:27-30). Sharing, therefore, was one of the teachings of the evangelists, including Paul. Sharing was taught and practiced in the personal lives of the evangelists.

**2. *Peter and John manifested sacrificial sharing.*** Peter and John manifested the sharing teaching of Christianity in their own lives. They had every opportunity to possess great wealth because the people esteemed them highly in Jerusalem (At 5:12,13). However, when a poor cripple asked them for money, Peter responded, “*Silver and gold I do not have ...*” (At 3:6). If they had been preaching for money, surely they could not have said this. Even when the apostles were offered money, their principles of teaching were too great to allow them the privilege of selling their gift to lay hands on disciples and impart the miraculous gifts. In Samaria, Simon offered them money for the authority to lay his hands on people in order that they receive the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (At 8:18,19). But Peter responded, “*Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!*” (At 8:20).

**3. *Barnabas manifested sacrificial sharing.*** Barnabas had accompanied Paul on many journeys. He would be a valid witness to the nature of those who

went forth to preach Christianity. In his life he manifested the nature of those evangelists who preached this sharing community of God. He was one who had land, but sold it in order that the proceeds be distributed to the needy of the community of believers (4:36,37).

**4. Paul manifested sacrificial sharing.** In his life before becoming a Christian, Paul had all the power, possessions and position any person could possibly want. However, this all changed on a road to Damascus. After his conversion, Paul went forth preaching Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection. In order to do this, some churches and individuals did support him (At 13:1-4). However, on many occasions he had to work with his own hands in order to survive. In fact, his working as a tentmaker was probably the main source of his income. When he went to the city of Corinth, Paul stayed with two tentmakers named Aquila and Priscilla. *“Because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers”* (At 18:1-3). While in Ephesus, he worked to support himself and those who were with him. Luke records his words to the Ephesian elders. *“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’.”* (At 20:33-35).

Luke thus argues that the integrity of the evangelists’ hearts cannot be questioned on this matter. They did not preach for money. Christianity was not a money-making scheme. The sincerity of the messengers of Christianity is upheld on the basis that they did not go forth for the purpose of making a living. The opposite is true. They often lost their living when they went forth.

**5. The evangelists exposed and disposed religious money-making schemes.** Luke includes the fact that evangelists often exposed and disposed the money-making schemes of those who took advantage of the religious nature of men. The following are two cases that Luke presents to the Roman Court.

**a. Religious money-making was exposed and disposed in Philippi.** When Paul and Silas arrived in Philippi, they encountered *“a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination”* (At 16:16). The religious practices of the girl *“brought her master much profit by fortune-telling”* (At 16:16). After she had agitated Paul and Silas for many days, Paul cast an evil spirit out of her. *“But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities”* (At 16:19). It was on this occasion that the evangelists were accused of troubling the city and teaching *“customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe”* (At 16:20,21). To the Roman Court, however, Luke wants

the real reason to be known for the trouble in Philippi. Those whose money-making scheme of using a poor slave girl had actually caused the disturbance because their means of profit was lost.

**b. Religious money-making was exposed and disposed in Ephesus.**

In Ephesus another great commotion arose concerning Christianity (At 19:23). Again, the problem dealt with religious money-making schemes of those who would live off the religious nature of people.

The disturbance was started with “*a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana*” (At 19: 24). He and others made no small profit from the sale of these shrines to those who traveled to Ephesus to worship Diana (At 19:24). However, a great number of people in Ephesus turned to Jesus (At 19:11-20). Demetrius thus said to his fellow craftsmen, “*Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship*” (At 19:26,27). As a result of Demetrius’ speech, a great protest was created in Ephesus concerning Paul and the gospel he proclaimed.

Luke wants the Roman Court to

clearly understand that some major disturbances were caused in the Roman Empire because the pocketbooks of those who had used religion for money-making schemes had been greatly threatened. Christianity was not a religion of money-making. It could not be used to make money. Such a practice was contrary to the sharing nature of the religion. When its true nature is practiced in the lives of men, religious-money making schemes are attacked. And when the profit of men is attacked, they attack those who preach the truth.

The early evangelists went forth because of their sacrificial commitment to the gospel of Jesus. Their Savior had left heaven for earth in order that men might be saved. They could do no less in leaving the things of the world in order to take the gospel to the world. They were willing, therefore, to make all necessary sacrifices in order to preach the gospel to the world.

**E. Christianity is true because of bold leadership.**

Luke assumes that the Court will question, “*Other religious leaders have been bold in their proclamations of their faiths. Christians are no different from them. Why should we believe Paul and others simply because they are bold in their beliefs?*”

Luke again states that the truth of Christianity is not necessarily proven true simply because the disciples were bold in their affirmation of its facts. Many religions of the world are boldly

affirmed to be true by the supporters. However, Luke challenges us with two things. First, the early disciples did exert a true boldness in proclaiming their religious belief. This fact is reported by Luke throughout the defense.

Secondly, the nature of the early disciples' boldness is the nature of those who were proclaiming something they had not simply believed, **but something that they had actually experienced.** Peter and John expressed this feeling when they answered the Sanhedrin, *"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"* (At 4:20). Their boldness in the face of death was certainly noble. But the nature of their boldness expresses something that is beyond the simple boldness of the nobility of men who firmly believe their faiths. Luke's argument, therefore, is that **this boldness cannot be explained without the actual personal experience of those things that the disciples claimed to have personally seen and heard.**

**1. The boldness of the disciples was unique.** When the Jewish religious leaders commanded Peter and John *"not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus"* (At 4:18), they answered, *"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard"* (At 4:20). The nature of this confidence and boldness was typical of all the disciples. Peter, John and the other apostles were bold because they were not simply stating a belief that Jesus was real and that He had been resurrected. They were stating

**their actual personal contact with Him for over three years.** In fact, the Jewish counsel *"saw the boldness of Peter and John"* (At 4:13). Such boldness could be manifested only by those who had actually been with Jesus. Luke records the impression the counsel had of Peter and John. *"And they realized that they had been with Jesus"* (At 4:13). The apostles were bold because of what they had personally **seen and heard.** (Luke would later use this defense on behalf of Paul in At 22:15.)

After Peter and John were eventually released from the Jewish trial of the Sanhedrin, they met with the disciples and together prayed, *"Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word"* (At 4:29). God answered their prayer *"and they spoke the word of God with boldness"* (At 4:31).

When all of the apostles were on trial before the Sanhedrin, they could not be silenced from speaking those things which they had seen and heard. The counsel had strictly commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus. However, the apostles answered, *"We ought to obey God rather than men"* (At 5:29). They were beaten by the Jews. But they rejoiced *"that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name"* (At 5:41). They continued teaching daily in the temple in Jerusalem and from house to house (At 5:42; see 20:20). They could not be silenced because they had to speak those things

which they had personally seen and heard.

In order to generate this unique boldness in the life of the apostles, Jesus “*presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days ...*” (At 1:3). The apostles became bold witnesses of the resurrection as a result of their personal encounters with Jesus after He was raised (At 1:8). “*This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses*” (At 2:32; see 2:24; 3:15). **The unique boldness of the disciples is understood only on the basis that they personally experienced a resurrected Jesus.** Nothing else adequately explains their behavior.

**2. Paul expressed a unique boldness.** Luke’s defense turns to Paul in the last part of his record of the church. On the Damascus road Jesus **personally appeared to and spoke with Paul.** These were things which Paul **saw and heard.** He could not deny that he had this personal encounter with God. On at least two different occasions Paul used this experience as a testimony and proof for his own defense (At 22:6-10; 26:12-18). We do not know how many other times He mentioned this personal experience to disciples or enemies of Christianity. Luke realized the significance of the experience in Paul’s defense for he records the actual historical happening (At 9:1-6), plus the two times when Paul brought up the experience before the courts in Palestine.

Paul’s divine commission was to take the name of Jesus “*before Gentiles,*

*kings, and the children of Israel*” (At 9:15). In order to have the boldness that would be needed to endure the ordeals through which he would go, the Lord personally appeared to Paul. Paul’s boldness was unusual. Luke has taken the Roman Court through the ministry of Paul. He has shown them the persecution and plots of murder. Through all these trials Paul maintained a boldness that is not usual.

Some men will exercise great boldness on a particular occasion which demands the strength of the individual. Few men will maintain boldness over a brief period of time. Very few men will maintain the type of boldness we see in Paul over two decades of suffering and persecution. Luke challenges, therefore, that the Court consider that this man Paul must have experienced in his personal life something that was beyond the normal beliefs of men. Paul’s boldness in life was more than nobility. **It was something that could be explained only if he had personally encountered the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus road.**

Thus Luke leads the Court through the trail of Paul’s trials. After his conversion, Paul immediately “*preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God*” (At 9:20). He “*increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus*” (At 9:22). He spoke **boldly** to the Jews about His belief (At 9:27). From Damascus he went to Jerusalem. There he “*spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus ...*” (At 9:29). In Antioch

of Pisidia, both Paul and Barnabas “grew **bold** ...” and spoke the word of God in the face of hostile Jews who contradicted and blasphemed (At 13:45,46). In Iconium “*the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren*” (At 14:2). However, Paul and Barnabas “*stayed there a long time speaking boldly in the Lord ...*” (At 14:3). In Ephesus Paul “*went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God*” (At 19:8). While in Ephesus, a furious mob of religionists who worshiped Diana rushed to the Ephesus theater. They cried out, “*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*” (At 19:28). Luke records, “*And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him*” (At 19:30). Even the officials of the city who knew the uncontrollable nature of the Ephesian religious fanatics, pleaded with Paul that he not enter the theater. They knew that they would beat Paul to death. In this whole ordeal, we see a tremendous boldness on the part of Paul. He believed so firmly those things which he had

experienced that he was willing to risk his life on more than one occasion to tell men that Jesus was Lord.

Luke asks the Roman Court to decide on this point. If Paul was a madman as Festus proclaimed in the Caesarean court (At 26:24), then we could explain the exceptional boldness and courage of Paul. However, if Paul was not mad, then no normal person would behave in such a manner over an extended period of time without having personally experienced the powers of the supernatural. We are thus left to judge the sanity of Paul. But in judging his behavior and speeches, we do not see the mind or manner of a madman. The Roman Court had at hand too many valid character witnesses to so judge Paul. Our only conclusion, therefore, is to believe that this man Paul encountered God. And if he so encountered God, then we must make a decision about what he said. He is either the idiot of the Appian Way, or a messenger commissioned by God Himself. We must make a decision. Our decision is that he actually experienced something on a road outside Damascus that cannot be explained with words of this world.

## Chapter 4

### The Proof Of Global Expansion

The expansion of Christianity throughout the Roman world was exceptional. It was not the normal expansion of religions that are man-made. Neither to fables, myths or legends expanded in growth as the church which swept across

the world after A.D. 30. How can one explain such growth?

The answer to the question is one of Luke’s most powerful arguments concerning the divine origin of Christianity. In fact, there is no logical answer to the

rapid growth of the church throughout the world than to affirm that God was behind the movement. Luke's defense of Christianity in the book of Acts, therefore, focuses on the matter of the growth of the church.

### A. Christianity is proven true by the nature of its rapid growth.

Luke assumes that the Court will question, "This *Jesus has many followers. However, other religions have the same. Has not this church of disciples sprung up and grown in numbers just like any other religion of the Empire?*"

Throughout Luke's defense he records the phenomenal growth of the Christian movement. His argument is that man-made religious movements do not grow with such rapid expansion. Man-made religions of which the Roman Court would be familiar developed in growth over decades. In contrast, the church exploded out of Jerusalem with volcanic force after A.D. 30. It spread throughout the Roman Empire in a period of about thirty years. Luke argues, "How can we explain such phenomenal growth without intervention of the supernatural work of God?" And if God was involved in the growth, then we cannot accuse those who believed for being misled by the deceptions of men.

Luke begins the record of phenomenal church growth at the very beginning of the Christian movement. On Pentecost, "*those who gladly received his [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day about **three thousand** souls were*

*added to them*" (At 2:41). "*And the Lord **added to the church daily** those who were being saved*" (At 2:47). The movement expanded. "*Many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about **five thousand***" (At 4:4). "*And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, **multitudes of both men and women***" (At 5:14). They kept preaching and teaching Jesus everywhere (At 5:42). "*And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples **multiplied greatly in Jerusalem**, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith*" (At 6:7).

The Christians were then scattered everywhere (At 8:4). In Samaria "*multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip*" (At 8:6). "***They were multiplied***" (At 9:31). In Joppa, "*many believed on the Lord*" (At 9:42). After Herod died, "*the word of God grew and multiplied*" (At 12:24). Around Antioch of Pisidia, "*the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region*" (At 13:49). After the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, "*they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*" (At 15:35).

The disciples continued "*teaching and preaching the word of the Lord*" (At 15:35). In Thessalonica "*a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas*" (At 17:4). In Corinth, "*many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized*" (At 18:8). Out of Ephesus "*the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed*" (At 19:20).

Luke's argument is clear and his defense is unquestionable. How would the Roman Court answer the phenomenal growth of Christianity by using the measuring statistics of how ordinary man-made religions have developed throughout the years? **We cannot explain the growth of Christianity by applying the methods of growth that are used to measure man-made religions.** Luke's challenge, therefore, is that we cannot answer the argument for the rapid growth of Christianity without the direct intervention of God in the lives of men.

## **B. Christianity is true because the gospel is for all cultures.**

Luke assumes that the Roman court would question, "*We have heard that Christians preach their gospel only to the Jews. Is this not proof that Christianity is just another sect of the Jews that fulfills the religious needs of a particular group of the Jews?*"

A major truth concerning the nature of Christianity as opposed to religions that are the invention of men is the fact that the gospel is applicable to all cultures of the world. Luke informs the Court that the early disciples went first to the Jews, and then to all the cultures of the Gentiles. After the initial establishment of the church, the disciples preached to the Jews only (At 11:19). Jesus, however, stated that the gospel would be preached to all nations (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:47). In Luke's defense, he proves that this was carried

out in the lives of the disciples. He presents cases of how this mission was accomplished. He records evidence of how God miraculously communicated to the disciples that the Gentiles should receive the message of the gospel.

A God that would be the one true God of all humanity would reveal Himself so as to establish a religion that was applicable to all men for all time. This is the very nature of true Christianity. Because it is applicable to all men is proof that it has been truly revealed from the one true God.

Luke's central argument is to uphold Jesus and the church as the means by which the brotherhood of humanity can be accomplished. The fact that there is one God who has manifested Himself through one Lord Jesus Christ establishes a foundation upon which all men can be religiously one. The church, therefore, is a brotherhood into which all cultures of the world can come and serve the one true God. Christianity is a brotherhood that will establish peace between men of all cultures of the world. Only the God of heaven could have established such a community. This is Luke's argument.

**1. *The gospel went to the Samaritans.*** Luke first records how the gospel went to the Samaritans whom the Jews socially rejected. "*Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them*" (At 8:5). As a result, "*multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip*" (At 8:6). "*When they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the*

*kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized” (At 8:12).*

**2. *The gospel went to the Gentiles.*** In Acts 10 and 11, Peter and six Jews went to the house of a Gentile named Cornelius. While they were in the house of Cornelius, God poured out on this Gentile household, the gift of the Spirit (At 11:15-17). When Peter and his witnesses returned to Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem first contended with Peter about his going into the house of a Gentile. They protested, “*You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them*” (At 11:3). However, Peter explained to them the vision that he had where God told him that He made all things clean (At 10:9-16). The voice of the vision stated, “*What God has cleansed you must not call common*” (At 10:15). Peter followed the instructions of the vision. He went to the house of a Gentile and preached the gospel. When the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem heard Peter’s defense, they said, “*Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life*” (At 11:18).

**3. *The gospel went to the Gentile world through Paul.*** Paul was personally called by Jesus on the Damascus road. The purpose of the calling was to send Paul to the Gentiles with the message of the gospel (At 9:15). Throughout his ministry, therefore, Luke records incidents where he fulfilled this special ministry.

When the unbelieving Jews rejected the gospel in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul and

Barnabas told them that in the city they were turning to the Gentiles. He said to the Jews, “*It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles*” (At 13:46). Luke also records, “*Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord*” (At 13:48).

The same thing as the above happened in Corinth. When the unbelieving Jews opposed Paul and blasphemed, “*he shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles’*” (At 18:6). As a result, many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized (At 18:8).

When the Jews in Rome rejected the gospel, Paul said to them, “*Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it*” (At 28:28).

Luke’s argument on behalf of Paul and Christianity was that the gospel was for all the world. It was not for the Jews alone. In fact, the Old Testament prophets prophesied that the Jews would harden their hearts against the gospel (At 13:47; 28:26,27; see Is 6:9,10; 42:1,6; 49:6; Jr 5:21; Ez 12:2). This hardening of hearts would spur the gospel on to the Gentiles throughout the world.

The fundamental truths upon which Christianity is based are necessary for salvation. Such truths are applicable to all cultures of the world. They are truths which are not culturally linked, that is, **they are not truths which are**

**identified by or characteristic with any one culture of the world.** Because the fundamental beliefs of Christianity are such is evidence that Christianity was revealed by the one true God. The fundamental beliefs of Christianity which are revealed in Luke and Acts are those truths that are necessary for salvation. They make up the simplicity of the Christian faith. They are God's directions for godly living and holiness that are applicable to all cultures of the world for all history. No religion of man could have such cultural applicability.

### **C. Christianity is true because the church was united as one.**

Luke assumes that the Court will question, "*Division among Christians will prove that Christianity is a man-made religion. This is true, for all human influence in religion causes division. We hear of divisions in this Christianity. Therefore, is it not a man-made religion?*"

Luke answers the preceding question with one of the strongest arguments that can be launched against man-made religions. If religions are man-made, then any man that comes along can add to the teaching, and thus, cause division among the followers. If the followers of any particular religion cannot find divine authority for the teachings of the religion, then they will divide over the pronouncements of great teachers of that religion.

Any religion that is closely linked to any particular culture is subject to

isolation and division, and thus, it will not freely grow throughout the world. Its own cultural orientation makes world propagation very difficult. Man-made religions are often tied to the culture from which they spring. Because they are culturally linked, it is most difficult for such religions to be propagated to other cultures.

The problem also arises with the culture from which a particular religion may have arisen. If the culture changes – and all cultures do change with time – the religion is often divided from within because of struggles between conservatives and liberals within the religion and culture. Luke argues that Christianity is above the culture of man. And by being above the culture of man, it is applicable to all cultures of the world. This is a most convincing argument to prove that Christianity is the revelation of the one God of heaven who is the Father of all humanity.

Luke seeks to prove that Christianity is a God-revealed religion simply because the foundation principles of Christianity were based upon the simplicity of one gospel message and the few fundamental beliefs and moral standards that Christians must maintain in order to be saved. That one gospel message, he affirms, originated from God and not man.

**1. *The disciples preached one gospel.*** The central message of the disciples was the coming of Jesus to die for man's sins, His burial, resurrection to give hope, and reign over all things at the

right hand of God. Men must obey this gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (See At 2:38; 8:12,38; 10:47,48; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16). Jesus is also coming again and will judge the world (At 17:30,31). Because Jesus is coming again to judge all, men must maintain a moral life of integrity and righteous living (See At 24:25).

The message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus permeates the preaching of the disciples. Luke records several major sermons which include these central events of the gospel. Peter preached the death, burial and resurrection on Pentecost (At 2:22-32). He preached the same in the temple (At 3:14,15). Peter and John preached this good news to the Sanhedrin (At 4:10). The apostles preached the same message every day in the temple and from house to house (At 5:42). The disciples' belief in and preaching of the gospel united them in their outreach to the world.

**2. *The disciples preached Jesus as the Messiah.*** Luke establishes the foundation of his defense for Christians on the fact that they believed Jesus fulfilled all Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah (the Christ). The apostles preached "*Jesus as the Christ*" (At 5:42). Paul preached "*Jesus is the Christ*" (At 9:22; 17:3; 18:5). Apollos also preached that "*Jesus is the Christ*" (At 18:28). The disciples' stand on this belief united them into one body of believers. They maintained their unity because they believed that this Jesus fulfilled all prophecies about the Messiah.

**3. *The disciples continue together and expressed unity on fundamental teachings.*** After Jesus had ascended, the apostles returned to Jerusalem. "*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication ...*" (At 1:14). On the day of Pentecost "*they were all with one accord in one place*" (At 2:1). Those who were baptized "*continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship ...*" (At 2:42). "*Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common*" (At 2:44). The "*multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul ...*" (At 4:32). "*And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch*" (At 5:12). In Samaria, "*the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip*" (At 8:6). Luke's defense on this point is clear. The community of disciples throughout the Roman Empire was united as a group. The Christians came from many different cultures. However, they were united by one gospel into one church.

When unconverted and legalistic Jews attempted to destroy the united fellowship of the disciples by binding Old Testament laws on the church, the church rose up as one to rid itself of this divisive influence. Thus in Jerusalem "*the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter*" (At 15:6). They made a decision to send a letter to the Gentile churches in order to inform them that those who went out from Jerusalem to bind circumcision on the Gentiles, had received no such commandment (At 15:24). "*Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to*

*send chosen men*” to Antioch to deliver this letter (At 15:22). One of these men was Paul who labored in agreement with all the disciples.

Upon the basis of fundamental doctrines concerning salvation, the disciples were united as one. They were united on fundamentals by allowing liberty in matters of opinion. The following is a list of those fundamental beliefs which Luke presents in the book of Acts that united the early disciples. The oneness of the disciples’ belief on these matters is expressed throughout the defense of Acts in order to present the fact that the beliefs of Christians did not originate with man, but with God.

#### FUNDAMENTAL TEACHINGS OF ACTS

1. **ONE GOD:** At 2:47; 3:8,9,13; 4:24; 5:29,30; 7:2,32,46; 13:16,17,26; 15:8,14,19; 16:14,17,34; 17:24,29; 18:7; 20:32; 22:14; 24:14; 26:20
2. **ONE LORD:** At 2:34,36; 3:19; 4:33; 7:59; 8:16; 9:5-42; 10:36,48; 11:17; 14:23; 15:11,26; 16:31,32; 17:24; 19:5,10,13,17; 20:21,24; 21:13
3. **ONE SPIRIT:** At 2:4,17,18; 5:9; 6:10; 8:29,39; 10:19; 11:12,28; 16:7; 21:4
4. **ONE FAITH:** At 3:16; 6:7; 13:8; 14:22,27; 15:9; 16:5; 24:24
5. **ONE BAPTISM:** At 2:38,41; 8:12,13,16,36; 9:18; 10:47,48; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:3,5; 22:16
6. **ONE BODY, THE CHURCH:** At 5:11; 7:38; 8:1,3; 9:31; 11:22,26; 12:1,5; 13:1; 14:23,27; 15:3,4,22,41; 16:5; 18:22; 20:17,28
7. **ONE HOPE:** At 23:6; 24:15; 26:6,7; 28:20

Luke had already written to Theophilus concerning fundamental

moral teachings in the document of Luke. In Acts he shows the difference between the unifying fundamentals of the church as opposed to the diversity of beliefs that are so characteristic of man-made religions.

Luke unceasingly delivered to the Roman Court the argument that the one church was unified in its struggle against Jewish persecution. The church was unified in its evangelistic outreach to the world. It was unified on the fundamental doctrines concerning salvation.

#### D. Christianity is true because it can endure false accusations.

Luke assumes that the Court will question, “*Many have accused this Paul of various things. Many accusations have been made against Christianity. With so many accusations against Christians, should we not believe that there is something erroneous about this religion?*”

One of the phenomenal things concerning the growth of the church in the first century is the fact that it grew regardless of all the false accusations that were made against Jesus and the church. When men and women were faced with the truth of Jesus, they submitted, regardless of false reports they had heard. The church thus grew beyond and through the false accusations of evil men who cared nothing for the truth.

Luke realized that the judges in Rome may have heard numerous accusations against Christianity. The

farther away from the actual happening of something, the more distorted the stories become. Rome was a long way from Jerusalem and the areas where Paul labored. When Paul arrived in Rome, the first Jews with whom he met stated that Christianity was spoken against everywhere (At 23:22). Luke assumed, therefore, that there were many tales that had been spread throughout the Empire concerning what the disciples actually believed or did. With this in mind, he sought to clear up some of the misunderstandings concerning troubles and accusations that had been associated with Christians, and Paul in particular.

**1. Accusations against Jesus and Christians have been false.** Luke makes it clear that false witnesses and accusations were launched against the church by its enemies. “*By lawless hands*” the Jews had Jesus crucified (At 2:23). They had “*denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted*” freedom (At 3:14).

This same fury was unleashed against the disciples of Jesus. When the Jews could not withstand the wisdom and spirit by which Stephen spoke, “*they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God’*” (At 6:10,11). They thus “*stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes ...*” (At 6:12).

Paul and Silas were falsely accused in Philippi. Those who opposed them accused, “*These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for*

*us, being Romans, to receive or observe*” (At 16:20,21).

In Thessalonica the story was the same. “*The Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them [Paul and Silas] out to the people*” (At 17:5).

Before Felix Paul was falsely accused by Tertullus who represented the Jews. Tertullus accused, “*For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes*” (At 24:5).

Those who cannot answer the arguments of their enemies will often resort to false accusations in order to destroy the character of their opponents. This evil tactic was used against Jesus, the apostles and the church as a whole. Luke points out this most common problem which is often used by wicked men to destroy that which is good.

**2. The Jews were the trouble makers.** Luke also wants the Court to know that it was the Jews who created social disturbances concerning Jesus. They were the ones who also “*laid hands on them [Peter and John], and put them in custody ...*” (At 4:4). It was the Jews who “*laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison*” (At 5:18). It was the Synagogue of the Freedmen who “*stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes: and they came upon him [Stephen], seized him,*

and brought him to the council” (At 6:12). It was a Jewish mob that “cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at [Stephen] with one accord” (At 7:57). And it was Saul before his conversion who “made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison” (At 8:3). He did such with the consent of Jewish religious leaders (At 9:1,2).

Luke also wants the Court to know of the unlawful behavior of Herod. He had murdered James (At 12:1). “*And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also*” (At 12:2).

After his conversion, Paul set out on his God-commissioned work to evangelize the world. However, the Jews stirred up the multitudes almost everywhere he went. In Iconium “*the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren*” (At 14:2). In Thessalonica “*the Jews who were not persuaded ... set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason ...*” (At 17:5). In Berea, the Jews from Thessalonica came and “*stirred up the crowds*” (At 17:13). In the temple at Jerusalem “*the Jews from Asia ... stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him [Paul]*” (At 21:27). When Paul defended himself before this mob, they listened until he told them of his mission to the Gentiles. Luke then recorded, “*And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to*

*live!’ Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks ...*” (At 22:22-24). Subsequently, some Jews in Jerusalem banded together with a plot to murder Paul (At 23:12-22). In order not to create a public riot, Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, had Paul immediately moved to Caesarea.

Throughout the defense of Luke, the theme of Jewish trouble making and false accusations is highlighted by Luke. He wants the Court to completely understand that all references to social disorder that might have come to the ears of the judges was not instigated by Christians.

**3. Greedy men were the trouble makers.** Luke adds the problems that were created in Ephesus by greedy men who used the religious inclinations of those in Asia Minor to make money for themselves. A great many people were converted in the area, and thus, the shrine-making business declined. Those who made the shrines were in trouble of losing their businesses. As a result, “*there arose a great commotion about the Way*” (At 19:23). Demetrius called a meeting of the craftsmen who were involved in the shrine-making business and accused the disciples of creating the problem. “*And when they [the craftsmen] heard this, they were full of wrath .... So the whole city was filled with confusion ...*” (At 19:28,29).

The movement of Christianity had been strong throughout the Roman Empire. It had been strong because of

belief in Jesus, that He was proved to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead (At 2:23-32; 10:39-41). This belief among the disciples was so strong that nothing would contain them. Peter and John expressed it correctly. *“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”* (At 4:20). Religious leaders tried to stop the movement of believers by threatening them about preaching Jesus (At 4:18). Kings tried to discourage the movement by murdering the leaders (At 12:1,2). They threw the disciples in prisons (At 8:3). But even the prisons of Palestine could not contain them nor quiet their voices (At 12:5-19). The very foundations of Roman prisons were shaken for the sake of the movement (At 16:23-27).

Luke asks us to make a decision concerning Paul who was just one of the thousands of disciples who had gone forth with the message of Jesus on their lips. This man Paul cannot be blamed for what he had personally experienced. He cannot be blamed for testifying that he had seen the resurrected Son of God.

### **Epilogue**

Luke’s defense to or for Theophilus on behalf of Paul through the treaties of

Luke and Acts was apparently successful. Paul had prayed and hoped for release from his first imprisonment in Rome (Ph 1:25; 2:23,24; Pl 22). After his release he evidently journeyed on to Crete where churches were established (Ti 1:5). From Crete he possibly went on to Ephesus (Ep 1:), Miletus (2 Tm 4:20), Troas (2 Tm 4:13), Dalmatia (2 Tm 4:10), Nicopolis (Ti 3:12), and Corinth (2 Tm 4:20). From Corinth he possibly went on to Spain (Rm 15:24,28).

It is believed that Paul was later arrested again by Nero in A.D. 67 and taken to Rome. It was then that he wrote to Titus and his final letter to Timothy, where he stated, *“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”* (2 Tm 4:6-8).

Historians have affirmed that Paul was probably beheaded in Rome around A.D. 67,68. Thus ended God’s work to prove through him that Christianity is true.