

The Case for Christ Study Guide

The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel

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Plot Summary

The Case For Christ is written with a touch of wit and elements of a fast-paced fictional thriller, along with the exacting detail of an investigative scholar-reporter. Lee Strobel chronicles his 2-month spiritual journey as he seeks to learn the truth about the case for Christ. He pulls in rich, relevant detail from his crime reporting background to lay the foundation of how a case is presented in court and builds from there with pertinent historical proofs and interviews with thirteen highly-qualified experts to understand how the court systems work and how evidence is used to make a case. With his investigative reporter background, Strobel searches for truth based on historical evidence. In fact, "evidence" is an overall theme that runs the course of the book and supports the other general themes: a "case for Christ" and "reliability of the bible." Strobel handles the information as if addressing a jury and asks direct questions of his expert witnesses such as: how reliable is the New Testament? Evidence admitted addresses both sides of every issue and is presented in a way that allows readers to draw their own conclusions as if they are the jury determining the verdict.

While living life as a highly successful investigative reporter for the Chicago Tribune, Strobel's life changes when his wife becomes a Christian. He fears he will lose the fun-loving companion and friend he has known for years, but instead he is mildly surprised by subtle changes in her character. This not only intrigues him but prompts him to learn more about the Jesus of the Bible using the same logical and factual approach followed in a courtroom. He challenges readers to take an active role in weighing the evidence as members of the jury. All preconceived notions are to be set aside and the evidence presented is to be considered thoughtfully. Can a case for Christ be made beyond a reasonable doubt? His skills in investigative reporting help uncover the truth regarding the reliability of the gospels based on evidence that stands the test of time.

Strobel's approach is balanced. He not only presents evidence supporting the reliability of the gospels, but he also enters evidence that tries to disprove or color the accuracy of the bibliographical details found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He questions experts regarding all the evidence, extruding conclusions based on facts. As he concludes each interview, one question he asks of his experts is what difference their research has made in their own personal faith. Across the board, researching the historical accuracy of the gospels and New Testament has strengthened their faith. This is another factor taken into consideration in the deliberation process because personal experiential testimony holds credence along with other evidence presented.

Following the standard courtroom pattern, Strobel concludes the book with a closing argument. At the end of his 21-month long search, he sits at his desk and writes out his questions and the evidence he has collected. It brings him to a point where he not only has to accept the proofs intellectually, but it is time to cross the line to receive Jesus experientially. He lists his insights as if it is a closing argument, and turns to his jury and asks them to come to a verdict based on the facts. He even takes it a step further and tells them to write down any unanswered questions they may have, to seek out experts of their own, and to do the work necessary to come to reach a verdict.



Introduction: Reopening the Investigation of a Lifetime

Introduction: Reopening the Investigation of a Lifetime Summary and Analysis

The Case For Christ is written with a touch of wit and elements of a fast-paced fictional thriller, along with the exacting detail of an investigative scholar-reporter. Lee Strobel chronicles his 2-month spiritual journey as he seeks to learn the truth about the case for Christ. He pulls in rich, relevant detail from his crime reporting background to lay the foundation of how a case is presented in court and builds from there with pertinent historical proofs and interviews with thirteen highly-qualified experts to understand how the court systems work and how evidence is used to make a case. With his investigative reporter background, Strobel searches for truth based on historical evidence. In fact, "evidence" is an overall theme that runs the course of the book and supports the other general themes: a "case for Christ" and "reliability of the bible." Strobel handles the information as if addressing a jury and asks direct questions of his expert witnesses such as: how reliable is the New Testament? Evidence admitted addresses both sides of every issue and is presented in a way that allows readers to draw their own conclusions as if they are the jury determining the verdict.

The introduction not only presents the author's background as a crime reporter and agnostic, but also sets the foundation for the premise of this book. In it, Lee Strobel introduces the reader to a slam-dunk murder case he covered earlier in his career. The defendant pleads guilty to shooting a cop. All the evidence points that direction, until an informant introduces one more piece of evidence. A pen gun. An illegal weapon owned by the cop. This one variable changes everything because it, too, fits with the other submitted evidence. Using this example as a springboard, Strobel compares his willingness to accept the bogus guilty plea based on evidence and condemning testimony to his experience with Christianity. As an agnostic he knows enough history and philosophy to bolster his skepticism and ignore inconsistencies, that is, until his wife becomes a Christian. At first he fears losing the fun loving wife of his youth, but instead over time he is fascinated with subtle changes in her character. He decides to set aside his prejudices and take a closer look at the evidence in the case for Christ which is one of the major themes running throughout this book. As he does, he challenges readers to take the role of juror, reminding them that they must set aside all preconceptions and prejudices to reach a verdict based on the evidence. He breaks the book into three parts: 1) Examining the Record, 2) Analyzing Jesus, and 3) Researching the Resurrection.



Part 1: Chapter 1, The Eyewitness Evidence

Part 1: Chapter 1, The Eyewitness Evidence Summary and Analysis

Strobel starts this chapter with a story of another case he covered as a reporter in which he introduces Leo Carter, whose testimony puts three people in jail for murder. Leo witnessed the murder of the local grocer—a man who provided food for his family when there was none. As an eye witness, he knows he has to testify, but the killer knows this too and finds Leo as he walks along with his brother and a friend. All three are shot. Leo's brother and friend are dead, but Leo survives with a bullet in his head. He watches his brother and friend get shot as he pretends to be dead. His testimony puts the murderers away for the remainder of their lives. The point is this: they were convicted on the evidence of one eye witness. Strobel ties the importance of eye witness accounts to investigating historical matters as well and asks if there is testimony of people who interacted personally with Jesus.

With this question in mind, he flies to Denver and interviews Dr. Craig Bloomberg who is the author of *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, which introduces the theme of the same name—reliability of the Gospels. Bloomberg is an easy going biblical scholar with the knowledge and credentials Strobel is seeking to make his case for Christ. He first questions the reliability of the authorship of the gospels. Bloomberg reminds him that in fact the gospels' authors are anonymous. "But the uniform testimony of the early church was that Matthew, also known as Levi, the tax collector and one of the twelve disciples, was the author of the gospel in the New Testament; that John Mark, a companion of Peter was the author of the gospel we call Mark; and that Luke, known as Paul's 'beloved physician,' wrote both the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles," (p. 22). Strobel's skepticism is not waylaid. He asks if these same men might not have another motive for writing the gospels, but Bloomberg says no. He builds a case based on historical evidence that shows the authorship of Matthew, Mark and Luke are undisputed. The exception of the Gospel of John is based on one man's reference to the Apostle John and John the elder. This raises disputes among some scholars whether or not this refers to the same person or two different people. However, the early church leaders were unanimous that it was John the Apostle. Bloomberg concludes by stressing that the gospel is based on eyewitness material just like the others.

Strobel drives on to uncover specific evidence that shows they are the gospel authors. He refers back to Papias who recorded that Mark had accurately recorded Peter's first hand accounts as to what he witnessed. This was around A.D. 125. He also attributed Matthew with preserving Jesus' teachings. Writing by the historian Irenaeus additionally confirms these men are the authors of the four gospels. In further discussion Strobel



asks why these ancient biographies are so different from what is written today. Bloomberg says there are two reasons: literary and theological.

As for literary style, the gospels follow the style used by the ancients. Based on these accounts, theologically, Christians believe that Jesus' life was meaningless unless they also believe in the historical facts: Christ died and was raised from the dead. In this way he provided atonement for the sins of all mankind. Strobel also questions why some gospel writers borrowed from others, but Bloomberg dispels this by explaining the "Q" source. This hypothetical document was a collection of Jesus' sayings and teachings. Strobel relates to this method of recording the facts because as a reporter there are times he double checks with someone else closer to the source to get an accurate quote.

Strobel addresses the Gospel of John because it differs from the other three which follow a similar methodology with similar outlines and content. John only shares a few of the same stories found in the other three gospels. "In John, Jesus uses different terminology, he speaks in long sermons, and there seems to be a higher Christology—that is, more direct and more blatant claims that Jesus is one with the Father; God himself; the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the Resurrection and the Life," (p. 28). Along with this, Strobel asks about differences and whether they are distinct enough to be called contradictions. Bloomberg points out that for every distinctive found in John you can find parallels in one of the other gospels. Strobel does not just accept this statement but presses for examples which Bloomberg provides. With that cleared up, Strobel moves on to ask: because John is written later and with more of a theological bent could not there be more opportunity for his historical information to be tainted? Bloomberg reminds Strobel that the very ideology of the early Christians supported required a careful and accurate portrayal of historical events or it would negate their message. Additional credence is given to the gospels because they were written closer to the time of Christ than any other historical works depicting other historical figures such as Alexander the Great which were written 400 years or longer after his life. The core beliefs in the Bible can be traced back to within two years of Christ's death.



Testing the Eyewitness Evidence

Testing the Eyewitness Evidence Summary and Analysis

Michael McCullough is only 16 and the witness to three murders. First, he saw his grocer gunned down on the street. As the only eye witness, the murderer goes after him and finds him, his brother and a friend. All three are shot, but Michael lives with a bullet lodged in his head for the rest of his life. Strobel uses this example of eyewitness testimony to reveal the role defense attorneys play in the litigation process. They are to generate doubts. With testimony like Michael's, that is pretty hard. With that point made, he returns to the investigation regarding Jesus and decides he will test Dr. Bloomberg's testimony the same way it would be handled in court. One way or another it will either reveal weaknesses or strengths. The first test is the Intention Test which works to decide whether it is the gospel writers' intention to preserve history accurately.

The first Scripture Bloomberg points to is found at the start of Luke where the writer says he intends to write "accurately" about all the things he "investigated" and that these very things are backed up by witnesses. Strobel accepts that but questions Matthew and Mark because they make no such statement up front. Bloomberg points out that Luke is similar to Matthew and Mark, so his statement covers the purpose of those gospels as well. In John, 20:31 the purpose for John is clear too: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name," (p. 40). The purpose of the gospel writers was to try to capture for history what actually happened. Strobel moves on to the Ability Test and asks if the gospel writers were really able to do this. He questions their memories. Are they able to accurately recall details after so much time had passed? Bloomberg brings up examples of Rabbis from the same time who memorized the entire Old Testament, and how in a society where history is passed down in oral tradition this capability is not uncommon. This memorization was not necessarily word for word, which may account for some of the differences between the synoptic gospels. Strobel compares it to the child's game of Telephone where the original message is garbled. Bloomberg tells him that the two do not compare, because historically if an error was made when reciting history, someone would correct the mistake and preserve the truth. Of the disciples, ten out of the remaining 11 willingly met torturous deaths rather than recant their beliefs. This reveals great character and strong beliefs.

When Strobel asks about irreconcilable discrepancies within the gospels, Bloomberg agrees that there are a good number of places where it appears that the gospels are in disagreement. "My own conviction is, once you allow for the elements I've talked about earlier—of paraphrase, of abridgment, of explanatory additions, of selection, of omission—the gospels are extremely consistent with each other by ancient standards, which are the only standards by which it's fair to judge them," (p.45). These same inconsistencies also ensure their authenticity.



The last test put to the gospels in this chapter is the "adverse witness test." The basic question asks if there were other witnesses who contradict what is written. Bloomberg reminds Strobel of how vulnerable the early church was and that if the disciples were exaggerating or misconstruing the facts, it would have been the perfect opportunity to bring the movement down. However, that did not happen. This evidence further supports the reliability of the Gospels.

Before Strobel leaves Bloomberg's office he asks the man about his own faith. Bloomberg admits that all of his research and investigating has led him to a stronger faith.



The Documentary Evidence

The Documentary Evidence Summary and Analysis

Strobel opens the chapter talking about documents he used for research as a reporter. The most significant find of documents he ever came across dealt with the Ford Motor Company's foreknowledge of the defect in the Ford Pinto and the increased chances it would explode into a fiery ball if hit from behind. From here, he makes the point that none of this would have meant anything if the copies of these documents were not authentic. The same holds true for the Bible. It also raises questions whether or not there are other equally authentic biographies of Jesus that should be included in the Bible. Again, Strobel turns to an expert witness in the case for Christ, which is not just the title of this book but a major theme running throughout this book.

The first issue addressed is the fact that the current Bible is based on copies of copies of copies, and Strobel is skeptical. Is there any chance that the current gospels are anything close to the originals? Metzger reminds him that this is not unique to the Bible, but is true of all ancient writings, but for the New Testament there is the advantage of an unprecedented number of copies. These copies come from various places and sources and work in a way that verifies the others, along with secondary manuscripts written in languages including Armenian, Gothic, Georgian, Ethiopic which further back up the authenticity and reliability of the gospels of today. "Because even if we had no Greek manuscripts today, by piecing together the information from these translations from a relatively early date, we could actually reproduce the contents of the New Testament," (p. 59). Further, even if these early translations are lost there is enough existing text that the content of the New Testament could still be reproduced.

Strobel questions how this compares to other works of antiquity. The answer astounds him. Most works are supported by few early manuscripts while the New Testament has more than 5,000 with the earliest fragment dating back to 100-150 A.D. This evidence silences many theologians who try to date John's Gospel to the year 160 or later. This is a perfect example of how the theme of "evidence" builds the "case for Christ" one fact at a time. However, even this evidence falls into question. What about discrepancies? Did copying mistakes fill the current New Testament with inaccuracies? Though there are differences, Metzger explains them away as inconsequential. None of them affect doctrine, but are things like a change in word order or spellings.

Once the purity of the manuscripts is established, Strobel presses to learn why some books were accepted into the canon while others were rejected. Metzger puts forth three items—the criteria designed to measure a manuscript's appropriateness for inclusion. These include: 1) apostolic authority, which means written by an apostle or followers of the apostles; 2) conformity to the rule of faith—the document had to line up with "basic Christian tradition"; and 3) had the document been accepted and used by the early church at large? Among the early believers of the first two centuries there was a great degree of unanimity as to which books to incorporate. At this point all serious

doubts as to the handing down of the New Testament from generation to generation are waylaid. In this area reliability is established with extensive evidence. Strobel even goes as far as reading some of the works which have been excluded from the New Testament and found them to be too far removed from the time Jesus actually lived and walked the earth.

This raises a new question for Strobel. Jesus is known as a miracle worker and he wonders if there is corroborating evidence to support these claims. He is on his way to Ohio to interview his next witness and to learn the answer to his question.



The Corroborating Evidence

The Corroborating Evidence Summary and Analysis

Strobel tells the story of a Chicago crime syndicate hit man in the 1970s, Aleman, who is brought to trial when one of his people is arrested and makes a plea bargain. He turns states evidence, and his account is backed by the corroborating evidence of an eyewitness who had been out walking his dog and saw the murder. Even with this strong case, Aleman is not convicted because he requests that the judge hear the case and not a jury. At that time, corruption led all the way to the bench, and Aleman had paid the judge a bribe and was found not guilty. Years later, when the law changed, he was retried and found guilty based on the corroborating evidence. Strobel wants to apply this same test to the eye witness claims in the New Testament regarding Jesus' life, teaching, death and resurrection. This time he goes to the office of Edwin Yamauchi where Strobel opens the discussion by asking for Yamauchi's expert appraisal of the historical reliability of the gospels.

The scholarly historian explains why they are an excellent historical source and supports his attestation with corroborating facts. This line of questioning adds to the ongoing theme of "evidence" as Strobel makes his case proving the gospels reliable. Eyewitness evidence already collected needed to be corroborated to be deemed admissible. Strobel builds the case for Christ by substantiating the eye witness accounts with supporting evidence that backs up the accounts of the gospel writers as accurate and authentic. Beyond this, the author also looks to prove the historical reliability of the gospel based on corroborating evidence outside of the Bible. This includes testimony by the ancient historian Josephus in his writings, *The Antiquities*. These writings corroborate not only the fact that Jesus lived, but that he performed wondrous feats, taught and won many of the Jews to his way of thinking and mentions Jesus' trial and crucifixion and even his resurrection. "[...] Josephus corroborates important information about Jesus that he was the martyred leader of the church in Jerusalem and that he was a wise teacher who had established a wide and lasting following, despite the fact that he had been crucified under Pontius Pilot at the instigation of some of the Jewish leaders" (p. 80). Because Josephus' works regarding the Jewish wars have been proven historically accurate through archeology, his reputation lends credence to his writings about Jesus as well.

Strobel also questions Yamauchi about another ancient Roman historian by the name of Tacitus. What did he have to say about Jesus? Yamauchi credits Tacitus with the most important reference to Jesus outside of the New Testament. It talks about how Jesus dying at the hands of Pontus Pilot put the Christian movement in check, but that it broke out again thus providing an indifferent witness to the spread of Christianity and how the followers of Christ willingly gave their lives rather than recant their beliefs.

Along with corroborative evidence supporting the existence of Christ, his miracles, his teachings, death and resurrections, historical facts also support things like the fact that



the sky turned dark during the time of the crucifixion, Pilot's behavior and the historical reasoning that influenced him, as well as other historical accounts based on traditional Jewish literature. The writings of the Apostle Paul also corroborate the New Testament accounts. Paul's letters were written well before any of the gospels.

When the interview concludes, Strobel asks Yamauchi how 40 years of researching this topic has affected his own faith. Without hesitating, he admits that it has strengthened his spiritual life.



The Scientific Evidence

The Scientific Evidence Summary and Analysis

Dr. Jeffry McDonald was an ex-marine standing trial for the murder of his family. He did not think the jury would find him guilty because he had an alibi. However, his alibi did not stand up to scientific evidence, and he was sentenced based on blood and trace evidence that did not back up his alibi. In the same way, the theme of evidence—in this case scientific evidence is introduced to prove or disprove the reliability of the gospels based on the discipline of archeology. Strobel turns to an archeological expert who has personal experience working digs in the Middle East. His name is John McCray. As Strobel seeks to stay objective in gathering the evidence, he leads with a question to help him determine if McCray will overstate the role of archeology when it comes to determining the reliability of the gospels. McCray points out that archeology can prove historical aspects true, but it cannot prove that the Bible is the word of God. Strobel uses his experience as an investigative journalist to test the elements of "testimony" recorded in the gospels to help determine if the evidence found in the gospels is reliable. Scholars in both liberal and conservative camps agree that Luke is an accurate historian. At times archeology has even corrected scholars' thinking to line up with what Luke recorded. His painstaking accuracy lends credibility to his account of the eyewitness reports and convincing proofs of Jesus' resurrection as mentioned in Acts 1:3. With this credibility established, Strobel moves on to discuss the reliability of the gospels of John and Mark. John's accuracy has been questioned over the years leading experts to say it was written later in the second century and time had dimmed the accounting of facts. However, archeological evidence refutes that belief. A manuscript fragment dating back to around 125 A.D. confirms that copies of John had been distributed to as far away as Egypt.

On the negative side for establishing the case for Christ, Strobel asks what evidence has been unearthed that disputes the gospels' claims. He learns that the science of archeology does not contradict the Bible but instead has confirmed its reliability. To test that statement, Strobel brings up three issues unresolved in his mind: the Census taken at the time of Jesus' birth, the existence of Nazareth, and the slaughter of the baby boys when Herod the Great tries to eliminate Jesus as a potential threat to take away his throne. McCray uses archeological insights to cast new light on these subjects which establishes a reasonable doubt that these are contradictory issues. With these issues settled, Strobel turns to the Dead Sea Scrolls and asks his expert witness if they shed any light on the life of Jesus. Directly, they do not, however McCray is quick to point out that they do give a wealth of information dealing with Jewish culture and customs. He refers to a non-biblical manuscript known as 4Q521 which is part of the collection known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is dated 30 years prior to Christ's birth and is written in Hebrew. Content includes descriptions of the wondrous things the Messiah will do when he comes to earth. This manuscript refers to Isaiah 61, and Jesus used the exact same phrasing found in this text to make it clear he claimed to be the Messiah when answering John the Baptist's question of whether or not he was the one they were

waiting for. Archeology confirms the New Testament's reliability. It does not do this for other books making similar God-inspired claims.



The Rebuttal Evidence

The Rebuttal Evidence Summary and Analysis

Rebuttal evidence is presented to either explain or disprove evidence presented. Strobel dedicates this chapter to searching out opinions contrary to those he had already collected, including those of the Jesus Seminar, a self-selected group representing a small fraction of New Testament scholars who believe Jesus did not say 82 percent of what is attributed to him in the gospels. They also published *The Five Gospels* which include the traditional four plus a manuscript titled the Gospel of Thomas which was written in the second century. Strobel investigates their claims to see if he can find credible rebuttal evidence to disprove these disconcerting opinions. To find answers, he visits Dr. Gregory Boyd to gather rebuttal evidence to the Jesus Seminar's widely publicized views. Boyd is the author of a 416-page book titled, *Cynic, Sage or Son of God? Recovering the Real Jesus in the Age of Revisionist Replies*, a similarly themed book called *Jesus Under Siege* as well as other books dealing with difficult Christian issues. Along with his position as professor at Bethel College, he also pastors a church and enjoys debating atheists when time allows.

Strobel starts the interview by discussing the perceived persona behind the Jesus Seminar—that they represent all biblical scholars. Boyd admits this is frustrating, but it is the way the Seminar portrays itself in their book *The Five Gospels* which offers 7 pillars to follow if you want to be a biblical scholar. However their stated goal is to, "[...] rescue the Bible from fundamentalism and to free Americans from the 'naïve' belief that the Jesus of the Bible is the 'real' Jesus" (pp. 114-115). One of their main claims is that Jesus did not declare to be God or see himself as the Messiah—that he was not supernatural. Strobel says that the Seminar considers themselves unbiased, but Boyd tackles that claim head on establishing that not only are they as biased as evangelicals, but possibly more so as their beliefs are not based on unbiased scholarly research. Instead they are founded on a faulty premise which rules out the supernatural before making a determination that miracles never occurred. They make the same kind of presuppositions to rule out most of what Christ said based this same assumption that the supernatural does not exist. Strobel asks for the criteria used to make these determinations. Boyd introduces the criterion of "dissimilarity" and "multiple attestation" which establishes that their methods are loaded and can only provide one outcome.

Naturalistic scholars who negate the supernatural also search for parallels between Jesus and other historical figures to prove his acts or sayings are not unique. However, Boyd points out that Jesus' miracles go well beyond anything done by other historic rabbis. Jesus cured blindness, deafness and raised the dead and any comparison would have to stretch to make Jesus anything but unique. Strobel pushes past Boyd's excellent debating skills and asks about the historical figure Apollonius. Legendary claims say that he healed and even raised a girl from the dead. The question is if this Apollonius is considered nothing more than legend or myth, then why should Jesus' miracles be accepted as fact? Boyd goes on to show that stories about Apollonius were



written a century and a half after the man lived which increases the likelihood of legendary development and errors, whereas the life of Jesus found in the gospels is corroborated by Paul's writings as well as a number of non-biblical authors.

Strobel decides to tackle another popular view—that what Jesus is accredited with doing is nothing more than a repeat of other ancient "mystery religions" which also have themes of dying and coming back to life. Boyd explains that this theory was introduced around the turn of the 20th century but gradually weakened because it was thoroughly disproved, and he explains why as he goes on to make clear how the Jesus of history and Jesus of faith must be recognized. He is more than a feel-good symbol. "If you discredit everything that says Jesus is divine and reconciles people with God, there's an outright contradiction between the two" (p. 124).



The Identity Evidence

The Identity Evidence Summary and Analysis

Strobel introduces information on the original psychological profiler employed by the FBI. His name is John Douglas. He gathered information at crime scenes and used it to get inside the head of the perpetrator to help create a profile. He has a doctorate in psychology and a natural ability to understand human behavior. Along with examining the crime scene, Douglas also interviewed victims when possible. From the clues left behind, he determined the criminal's psychological makeup. In the case for Christ, can evidence left behind by Jesus help us today to better understand what Jesus thought of himself. Did he believe himself to be God?

To answer this question, Strobel interviews a man named Ben Witherington III. Witherington is an expert on Jesus' claims and has written books including: *Jesus the Sage*; *The Many Faces of the Christ*; *The Jesus Quest*; *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World*; and *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*. He holds a master of divinity degree, and a doctorate in Theology with an emphasis on New Testament. Strobel opens the interview by noting that Jesus tended to shy away from claiming outright that he was the Son of God. Was it because he did not think of himself in that light?

Witherington puts things in cultural context. If Jesus claimed outright to be God, the Jews would have declared it blasphemy. Plus they only knew of God the Father and had no understanding of God the Son or the Holy Spirit. Making outright claims would have worked against him. His public statements were careful, but during private time with his disciples he was clear. Witherington uses relationships in Jesus' life as one window to view the claims of Christ. For instance, even the fact that the sign above his head on the cross said he was the King of the Jews means that he had to have made that claim some time within his public ministry or someone thought he did. Next, Witherington points to Jesus' miracles— not the acts themselves, but how Jesus interprets them. For Jesus, his miracles foreshadow the coming of the Kingdom of God giving a preview of what the kingdom will be like for those who reside there. It is through him that the promises of God pass. His teaching was radical because he claimed God-given authority, and when he called his Father Abba, this shows a personal relationship with God unlike that available to any of the other religious authorities at that time. Instead of ambiguity, Witherington points to passages where Jesus confirms his identity as God such as his baptism, temptation in the wilderness, the transfiguration and of course his resurrection and that the crux of the issue is to learn what made the disciples change their minds after the crucifixion. Something confirmed to them that Jesus was who he said he was and that his mission was to come to save mankind. He not only saw himself as the Messiah, but as the Son of God as well as the Son of Man.



The Psychological Evidence

The Psychological Evidence Summary and Analysis

Among Strobel's expert witnesses, Gary Collins holds a master's degree in psychology and a doctorate in clinical psychology. He has taught, studied and written in his field for more than 35 years. In fact, he has written almost 150 articles and authored 45 books including *The Magnificent Mind*; *Family Shock*; *Can You Trust Psychology?* and more. The leading question Strobel asks of this witness is whether or not Jesus was crazy for claiming to be God. The short answer is "no," but Collins goes on to explain. While it is true that people who suffer from delusional psychosis might exhibit grandiose ideas of who they are and yet appear to be rational most of the time, Collins points to not just what Jesus says but instead suggests a deeper look at his emotions. People suffering from psychosis display inappropriate emotions such as anxiety, depression or even anger. Jesus did not display any such emotions nor did he exhibit the misperceptions that plague people suffering from psychosis. Jesus does not show any symptoms of mental illness.

Even when the Jewish religious leaders try to discredit Jesus' teachings about himself as the Good Shepherd, their claims that he is demon possessed are challenged by all the others there. Additionally, Jesus supported what he said by his actions—healing, raising people from the dead and the casting out of demons. This leads to another question on whether or not Jesus exhibited the attributes of God.



The Profile Evidence

The Profile Evidence Summary and Analysis

Donald Carson is Strobel's next expert witness in the case for Christ. This witness holds a bachelor of science degree, but is also a research professor of New Testament who can speak 12 languages. He has authored or edited 40 books on the New Testament including: *The Sermon on the Mount*; *Exegetical Fallacies*; *The Gospel according to John*; and *The Gagging of God*, but his expertise lies in the areas of the historical Jesus, and Greek grammar among others. Using techniques similar to those used by forensic artists, Strobel plans to create a profile based on Carson's New Testament expertise. This profile will present evidence to see if Christ exhibits the attributes of God.

Strobel asks Carson why he thinks Jesus is God. Carson speaks of Jesus' miracles including the resurrection but points to Jesus forgiving sin as evidence of his divinity. Moral perfection and the ability to forgive sin are both characteristics of Christ's deity. Other attributes like omnipresence and omniscience seem to be contradictory because Jesus in his human form cannot be two places at once and he even admitted that he did not know the hour of his return. Carson presents the historical approaches taken to address these issues. One approach separates Christ's characteristics as either human or those attributed to his deity. However, this approach leads to problems because Jesus is both at the same time. Another approach is based on, "[...] Philippians 2, where Paul explains that Jesus 'being in the form of God, did not think equality with God was something to be exploited'—that's the way it should be translated—but emptied himself.' He became a nobody" (p. 159), and yet even in this part of who he is must match being an eternal being that has always existed and who will always be. Strobel questions the fact that John 3:16 calls Jesus the "only begotten Son," which infers a beginning—a creation. Carson corrects the translation pointing out that the word used there really means "unique one" so that it reads that he is the "unique and beloved" Son—with no mention of being created. While some Scripture may seem to say he is not God, with closer inspection of the original text, it is clear that Jesus never denied being God and even claimed to be God while with his closest followers.

With that question answered, Strobel asks about hell, because Jesus taught about hell more than anyone else in the Bible. Strobel presents this as a contradiction to the profile. People hold a view of Jesus as the kind and compassionate teacher. Carson explains that sin is disgusting to God and hell is reserved for people who have not repented and still think they are the center of the universe. In the end, justice will be witnessed by all.

The evidence found in the New Testament shows that God's attributes are found in Jesus, but also that the attributes in the Old Testament apply to him as well.



The Fingerprint Evidence

The Fingerprint Evidence Summary and Analysis

Fingerprints became an accepted form of scientific evidence in 1910 when Thomas Jennings was convicted of murder based on four clear prints he left in fresh paint. Strobel ties in the uniqueness of individual fingerprints to specific evidence that only points to Jesus as the Christ. This time he interviews Louis S. Lapidés, a Jewish convert to Christianity who now serves as a pastor. His spiritual background is checkered. He grew up attending a conservative Jewish synagogue to prepare for his bar mitzvah. However, his family's faith had no place in everyday life, and they never even mentioned the Messiah. Any mention of Jesus was more derogatory than anything else. He was cautioned to stay clear of the Gentiles and Christians because of anti-Semitism. In fact, he thought of the New Testament as more of a guide book for the American Nazi Party.

His journey from Judaism to Christianity took a circuitous route which started when his parents divorced when he was 18-years-old. It made him question what role God plays and what good religion is if it cannot even save a marriage. Plus, the God of Judaism for him is far away—like the God atop Mount Sinai with no aspect of a personal relationship. In rebellion, Lapidés turns to music, the writings of Jack Kerouac and Timothy Leary and ends up getting drafted into the Vietnam War. During his orientation they tell him twenty percent of them standing there will be killed and the other eighty percent will be hooked on drugs, alcoholics and more. He delves into the Eastern religions, lives through Viet Nam, but as a returning soldier, he indulges his flesh, smokes pot and sets his goals on becoming a Buddhist priest. When he realizes that good works are not able to erase all the bad he has done, depression sets in. He sets out for California hoping for a fresh start, and tries several different religions, but they all leave him empty. He even goes with friends to some meetings with Satanic undercurrents, but he recognizes the power of evil and steers clear of it.

In 1969 while visiting the Sunset Strip, Lapidés meets a Christian who starts an impromptu debate regarding spiritual matters. Lapidés shoots back with his Eastern philosophies. He argues that there is no God other than man. The street preacher holds out his hand and tells Lapidés to create a rock. This one incident sparks deeper thinking within the disillusioned young man. He decides that if he does find God that he will have to be an objective God. It is in these same kinds of circumstances that Lapidés first learns that there are prophecies in the Old Testament that pertain to Jesus. He starts reading everyday and one at a time the prophecies astonish him. Isaiah 53 paints a clear image of the messiah who suffered and died for the sins of Israel and the rest of mankind. Seeing how Jesus fulfilled a dozen major prophecies and hundreds of minor prophecies, Lapidés becomes a Christian who now hopes to help others who are as skeptical or misguided as he had been.

"Isaiah revealed the manner of the Messiah's birth (of a virgin); Micah pinpointed the place of his birth (Bethlehem); Genesis and Jeremiah specified his ancestry (a



descendent of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the tribe of Judah, the house of David); the Psalms foretold his betrayal, his accusation by false witnesses, his manner of death (pierced in the hands and feet, although crucifixion hadn't been invented yet), and his resurrection (he would not decay but would ascent on high); and on and on" (p. 179). These convincing proofs and others work like fingerprint evidence in the case for Christ and confirm the reliability of the Bible. Lapidés goes on to earn a bachelor's degree in theology and a master of divinity of theology. Along with this, he works with various Christian organizations to help people understand the Bible. For the case for Christ, he uses his expertise to prove that Jesus fulfilling the prophecies is no coincidence and that historically and archeologically the evidence backs up the gospels to show that they were not altered to make it look like Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.



The Medical Evidence

The Medical Evidence Summary and Analysis

Strobel's next expert examines medical evidence to determine whether or not Jesus' death was a sham. If it was, then that means the resurrection is a hoax. For this interview, Strobel visits Alexander Metherell. First, Strobel establishes that medical evidence can determine whether or not a victim died of natural causes, can be used to reconstruct a victim's violent death and can scientifically establish the time of death. Medical evidence can also be used to establish the case for Christ who was executed on a Roman cross more than two millennia ago in an effort to thwart the theory that Jesus did not really die on the cross. This idea can be found in the Koran and is known as the "swoon theory." Strobel chooses Alexander Metherell as his forensic medical expert as he makes his case for Christ that proves without a doubt that Christ died on the cross. Metherell holds a medical degree and a doctorate in engineering. He methodically builds his case point by point starting with the severe beating Jesus received and how that would bring about hypovolemic shock due to loss of blood based on not only medical evidence but also the historical accounts in the New Testament and the symptoms Jesus exhibited. He goes on to explain the agony Christ experienced on the cross including nerve damage, dislocated shoulders, and asphyxiation. He also points out that details like the dislocated shoulders fulfill prophecy which declare the Messiah's bones will be out of joint. On top of this, when the guard thrusts the spear into Jesus side, the medical evidence of blood and water confirms he is dead. "Even before he died—and this is important, too—the hypovolemic shock would have caused a sustained rapid heart rate that would have contributed to heart failure, resulting in the collection of fluid in the membrane around the heart called a pericardial effusion, as well as around the lungs, which is called a pleural effusion" (p. 199). These fluids are what John saw when the guard pierced Jesus with his spear. Metherell appeals to history, medicine, archeology and even Roman military rules to make his case that Christ died on the cross.

At the conclusion of the interview, the evidence proves beyond a reasonable doubt that Christ died on the cross, but Strobel digs deeper and more personally and wants to know why Jesus did this—not medically or scientifically but personally. The bottom line, Stroebel believes, is that Jesus did it for love.



The Evidence of the Missing Body

The Evidence of the Missing Body Summary and Analysis

The empty tomb, a symbol of Jesus' resurrection, provides further evidence supporting his claim to be God, and offers the promise of resurrection to his followers. For various reasons, skeptics try to say Jesus did not rise from the dead and that the tomb is not empty, so Strobel visits William Craig who is a master debater who holds a master of arts degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity school as well as a doctorate in philosophy. He is also an internationally known author of several books including: Reasonable Faith; No Easy Answers; Knowing the Truth about the Resurrection and others. His specialty is writing about the intersection of science, philosophy and theology. Strobel goes to him as his expert witness regarding the evidence of the missing body.

The questions Strobel raise deal with theories skeptics have raised over the years. For example, was Jesus really buried in a tomb, because historically he would have been buried in a mass grave or fed to dogs? Craig refutes all the skepticism by going back to the earliest evidence that remains unadulterated by legendary corruption. He uses the same creed Bloomberg pointed out in his interview. "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..." (p. 209). This creed lists sightings of Jesus after he was raised from the dead and even names some of the people to whom he appeared. Due to its early date, when this creed was circulating, the people were still alive and could have refuted it and skeptics could ask them if it was true.

He also addresses whether or not Joseph of Arimathea actually existed, whether or not the tomb was secured adequately and whether or not a guard was really present. If so was it a Roman guard or Jewish temple guards? The real crux of the case deals with contradictions of the accounts of the morning the empty tomb is found. "The core of the story is the same: Joseph of Arimathea takes to body of Jesus, puts it in a tomb, the tomb is visited by a small group of women followers of Jesus early on the Sunday morning following his crucifixion, and they find that the tomb is empty. They see a vision of angels saying that Jesus is risen" (p. 215). Craig's approach is to prove this core reliable by applying the same type of criteria applied to any ancient literary source and in doing this he concludes that the tomb was empty. Along with this he is able to harmonize some of the secondary discrepancies, like one account saying it was still dark while another says it was morning. Craig points out that it depends on the person's point of view, as with looking at a glass as half full or half empty.

Another factor they address is the reliability of the women as eyewitnesses. Historically at that time, women did not hold a prominent place in society and their testimony was considered worthless. This fact points to this tradition's historicity. He goes on to make six arguments that support the fact that the tomb was empty.



The Evidence of Appearances

The Evidence of Appearances Summary and Analysis

Strobel looks at the evidence regarding the resurrection, because a missing body does not necessarily mean that Jesus rose from the dead. For this aspect of expert testimony, Strobel visits Gary Habermas who is a master debater regarding the resurrection of Christ which he bases on historical evidence. He holds a doctorate from Methodist Southern University where his dissertation was written on the Resurrection. Other credentials include his degree from Emmanuel College in Oxford, England and the numerous books he has authored including: *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry*; *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic*; *This Historical Jesus*; and *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?* and others.

Strobel's first question to this witness addresses the fact that there are no eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Habermas affirms that fact. No one was in the tomb to witness the resurrection while it happened. He explains that the scientific aspect relating to this event is based on cause and effect. Just as archeologists study fossils but do not witness dinosaurs walking the earth, in the case of the resurrection the evidence surrounding the event is studied. It has been established that Jesus died on the cross. If it can also be established that he appeared to people after his death you can prove the resurrection occurred. He turns first to 1 Corinthians where the Apostle Paul mentions two personal encounters with the risen Christ. The reference found in 1 Corinthians 15:8 is part of an early church creed mentioned earlier by expert witness Craig Bloomberg. In this portion of Scripture, the post-resurrection Jesus is said to have appeared to Peter, the twelve, plus more than five hundred people some of whom were still alive at the writing of this epistle. People reading this at the time could still check with eye witnesses and question them if they wanted to confirm what it said. This creed can be traced back to about A.D. 32 to 38 which means it lends it credence as primitive, unembellished testimony about Jesus appearing to skeptics like Paul and James. Then they go on to cover the numerous sightings by other eye-witnesses mentioned in the gospels and the book of Acts. "The key," Habermas said, "is that a number of the accounts in Acts 1-5, 10 and 1 also include some creeds that, like the one in 1 Corinthians 15, report some very dearly data concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus" (p. 235). This evidence comes from very early sources which erodes the legendary-development theory.

Habermas also refutes the theory that the appearances were hallucinations because a hallucination is an individual experience that happens to one person at a time. The case for Christ is coming together. The evidence supports the bible is reliable and that Jesus died on the cross and that the tomb was empty on that first Easter morning.



The Circumstantial Evidence

The Circumstantial Evidence Summary and Analysis

The author builds his case for circumstantial evidence by pointing to the Timothy McVeigh case and how no one saw him put explosives in the Ryder truck or drive it to the federal building that blew up in Oklahoma City, and yet on the carefully presented circumstantial evidence he was convicted. To weigh in on circumstantial evidence supporting the resurrection, Strobel interviews J. P. Moreland, a renowned philosopher who is a highly-organized witness with a systematic logic which does not dwell in the abstract. His science background includes a degree in chemistry, and he also has a degree in theology which he uses in his position as professor at Talbot School of Theology. He is the author of a book titled *Scaling the Secular* and has articles published in over 30 professional journals. Strobel begins the interview with a challenge, asking Moreland to provide five pieces of circumstantial evidence supporting the resurrection.

The first evidence he points to is the fact that the disciples willingly died for their beliefs which were based on what they actually witnessed with their own eyes. "And when you've got eleven credible people with no ulterior motives, with nothing to gain and a lot to lose, who all agree they observed something with their own eyes—now you've got some difficulty explaining that away" (p. 247). They went to their deaths with no doubt that the resurrection happened.

Secondly, Moreland points to the conversion of skeptics like Paul and Jesus' brother James. Paul does not just change, he explains why he changed. He met the risen Jesus. The third exhibit of circumstantial evidence deals with change in social structures as the resurrection radically changed the lives of Jewish believers. These social changes included things like the fact that early Jewish believers no longer had to sacrifice animals for forgiveness of their sins; they worshipped on the first day of the week rather than the Sabbath and taught that keeping the law did not make you good enough to go to heaven. They even moved beyond a monotheistic view of God to include the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These were huge adjustments to the Jewish culture.

The fourth exhibit includes Communion and baptism. Communion in the early church was celebrated as believers gathered for a meal to remember that Jesus had died for them and rejoice in the fact that he was still alive. Baptism, too, was a celebration of Jesus' death. "By going under the water, you're celebrating his death, and by being brought out of the water, you're celebrating the fact that Jesus was raised to newness of life" (p. 253). The fifth exhibit of circumstantial evidence Moreland lays out in his case for Christ is the coming about of the church.

Following the interview, Moreland tells Strobel there is evidence he has not asked about—evidence of ongoing encounters with the risen Jesus. Moreland points out that these

occurrences happen all over the world, across social, cultural and economic differences. Experiencing a relationship with Jesus Christ is the final confirmation of the evidence.



The Verdict of History

The Verdict of History Summary and Analysis

In this final chapter, the author chronicles his own 21-month spiritual journey. He lists questions and key facts to bring together the substance of the evidence under examination. The evidence proves beyond a reasonable doubt that the biographies of Jesus known as the gospels can be trusted. Strobel entered this investigation believing the case for Christ was legendary, but the evidence proved that not to be so.

"Historically speaking, the news of his empty tomb, the eyewitness accounts of his post-Resurrection appearances, and the conviction that he was indeed God's unique Son emerged virtually instantaneously" (p. 264).

To further build the case for Christ he establishes that the evidence collected has been thorough. As Strobel looks over this evidence, his atheism crumbles. It leads him to the question of what he is supposed to do with this information. The evidence challenges him to go beyond an intellectual knowledge and to take the step of faith the people he interviewed talked about. Not only does he believe intellectually, but he takes the step to "receive." He receives the grace of God through what Jesus did on the cross and accepts it. Jesus did what Strobel cannot do for himself. In accepting this gift of grace, Strobel is reconciled with God. In doing this, he becomes a believer.

He then moves back to the reader who is playing the part of juror and challenges them to come to their own verdict based on the evidence. He challenges those who do not yet believe to sort out what exactly they still question. What evidence needs to be shored up? Zero in on it and seek out your own experts and use the resources listed in the book. Plus he recommends a study Bible known as The Journey which is written specifically for people with questions.



Characters

Lee Strobel

A highly successful investigative reporter for the Chicago Tribune, Lee Strobel's life changes when his wife becomes a Christian. He fears that he will lose the fun-loving companion and friend he has known all these years, but in fact is mildly surprised by the subtle changes in her character. This leads him to learn more about the Jesus of the Bible using the same logical and factual approach that would be used in a courtroom. He challenges the readers of this book to take part in the case for Christ as a member of the jury. All preconceived notions are to be set aside and the evidence presented to be considered thoughtfully. Can a case for Christ be made beyond a reasonable doubt?

He uses his years of investigative reporting to uncover the truth regarding the reliability of the gospels based on evidence that stands the test of time. Strobel's approach is balanced as he not only presents evidence supporting the reliability of the gospels, but he also enters evidence that tries to disprove or color the accuracy of the bibliographical details found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He questions experts regarding all the evidence, reaching conclusions based on facts. As he concludes his interviews, one question he asks of his experts is what difference their research has made in their own personal faith. Across the board, researching the historical accuracy of the gospels and New Testament has strengthened their faith. This personal experiential testimony holds credence as evidence too. By the end of the book, he makes his own determination that the Bible is reliable; the evidence proves that and the case for Christ is made. He then takes the step of faith to move beyond intellectual knowledge and to experience a relational faith with Jesus.

Edwin Yamauchi

Born in Hawaii in 1937, Edwin Yamauchi's office is at the Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. His parents were immigrants from Okinawa, and his father passed away just before Pearl Harbor was bombed. This unassuming scholar has accomplished much since those humble beginnings. As a historian and expert witness in the case for Christ, he holds a bachelor's degree in Hebrew and Hellenistics, and master's and doctorate degrees in Mediterranean studies. His list of accomplishments is long, but what Strobel is looking for in a witness is someone who not only has head knowledge, but experiential knowledge, too. Yamauchi fits the bill. He took part in the first excavations of the Herodian Temple in Jerusalem and has even written several books on archeology including: *The Stones and the Scriptures*; *The Scriptures and Archeology*; and *The World of the First Christians*. Though brought up with a Buddhist background, Yamauchi became a Christian in 1952. Strobel arrives at his book-cluttered office to interview him and, "He provides thorough and detailed answers to questions, often pausing to supplement his verbal response by offering photocopies of scholarly articles he has written on the topic" (p. 76). The soft-spoken man thoroughly enjoys discussing the facts



and how archeology backs up the New Testament, even after all these years conducting research. Strobel opens the discussion by asking for Yamauchi's expert appraisal of the historical reliability of the gospels. He declares them to be an excellent historical source and supports his attestation with facts.

Louis S. Lapidés, M.DIV., TH.M.

Louis Lapidés is a Jewish convert to Christianity who now serves as a pastor. His spiritual background is checkered. He grew up attending a conservative Jewish synagogue to prepare for his bar mitzvah. However, his family's faith had no place in everyday life and they never even mentioned the Messiah. Any mention of Jesus was more derogatory than anything else. He was cautioned to stay clear of the Gentiles and Christians because of anti-semitism among Gentiles. In fact, he thought of the New Testament as more of a guide book for the American Nazi Party.

His journey from Judaism to Christianity takes a circuitous route which starts when his parents divorced when he is 18-years-old. It makes him question what role God plays and what good religion is if it cannot even save a marriage. Plus, the God of Judaism for him is far away—like the God atop Mount Sinai with no aspect of a personal relationship. In rebellion, Lapidés turns to music, the writings of Jack Kerouac and Timothy Leary and ends up getting drafted into the Vietnam War. During his orientation they tell him twenty percent of those standing there will be killed and the other eighty percent will be hooked on drugs, become alcoholics and more. He delves into the Eastern religions, lives through Viet Nam, but as a returning soldier, he indulges his flesh, smokes pot and sets his goals on becoming a Buddhist priest. When he realizes that good works are not able to erase all the bad he has done, depression set in. He sets out for California hoping for a fresh start, and tries several different religions, but all of them leave him empty. He even goes with friends to some meetings with Satanic undercurrents, but he recognizes the power of evil and steers clear of it.

In 1969 while visiting the Sunset Strip, Lapidés meets a Christian who starts an impromptu debate regarding spiritual matters. Lapidés shoots back with his Eastern philosophies. He argues that there is no God other than man. "We're God. I'm God. You're God" (p. 176). The street preacher holds out his hand and tells Lapidés to create a rock. This one incident sparks deeper thinking within the disillusioned young man. He decides that if he does find God that he will have to be an objective God. It is in these same kinds of circumstances that Lapidés first learns that there are prophecies in the Old Testament that pertain to Jesus. He starts reading everyday and one at a time the prophecies astonish him. Isaiah 53 paints a clear image of the messiah who suffered and died for the sins of Israel and the rest of mankind. Seeing how Jesus fulfilled a dozen major prophecies and hundreds of minor prophecies, Lapidés becomes a Christian and now hopes to help others who are as skeptical or misguided as he had been.



Dr. Craig Bloomberg

Dr. Bloomberg is the author of *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*. This tall, lanky biblical expert, sports a beard, drinks coffee and lives in Denver, had been valedictorian of his High School class, National Merit Scholar and graduated magna cum laude from the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Though a biblical expert, he does not ignore Scriptural nuances or casually set aside challenges to the biblical text. He is down-to-earth, yet speaks with authority and is a foremost authority on the biographies of Jesus. He is exactly the type of expert Strobel is looking for. He does not balk at the questions he is asked but confronts them directly with measured words focused on answering the question directly without beating around the bush. The first question Strobel asks, "[...] is it really possible to be an intelligent, critically thinking person and still believe that the four gospels were written by the people whose names have been attached to them?" (p. 22). Bloomberg is able to answer each question with the facts that make the case for Jesus. Strobel admits the man impresses him. He is informed, articulate and convincing—just what is needed to sway the jury reading *The Case for Christ*.

Michael McCullough

Sixteen-year-old eye witness to the murder of his neighborhood grocer; he knows he has to testify for the murdered man was kind to his family giving them food when they had none. However, the murderer catches up with Michael, his brother and a friend and guns them all down. Michael is the only survivor and becomes the single eyewitness in all three murder cases that puts the defendant in jail for the rest of his life. Strobel uses this evidence to point out that one credible eyewitness's testimony carries a lot of sway.

Bruce Metzger

At 84-years-old, Bruce Metzger is still a bright-eyed, vibrant scholar and author of several books on the New Testament. Among them are: *The New Testament*; *The Canon of the New Testament*, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible*, and many more. Along with these credentials, he has worked as the general editor on more than 25 volumes in various series providing New Testament tools and studies. In 1969, Metzger worked as the "resident scholar" for Tyndale House in Cambridge, England. From there his resume expands to include honorary doctorates from five colleges and universities and much more. Strobel goes to him as an expert witness, and is delighted to find the man has a sense of humor. Though age has slowed his speech a bit, what he has to stay is still on the cutting edge of biblical expertise. Strobel sits in the man's unpretentious office and appreciates this kind and charming man as he addresses the authenticity of the biographies of Jesus known as the four gospels.



Harry Aleman

A Chicago crime syndicate hit man in the 1970s. He is brought to trial when one of his people is arrested and makes a plea bargain. He turns states evidence, and his account is backed by the corroborating evidence of an eyewitness who had been out walking his dog when he saw the murder. Even with this strong case, Aleman is not convicted because he requests that the judge hear the case and not a jury. At that time, corruption led all the way to the bench, and Aleman had paid the judge a bribe and was found not guilty until 20 years later when the law changed and he was retried. Based on corroborating evidence, he was found guilty and sentenced to jail for the rest of this life.

Josephus

Josephus had been a Pharisaic priest and is a noted Jewish historian. His work is an ambitious compilation of Jewish history from creation up until his own lifetime which is approximately 93 A.D. His writings regarding the Jewish wars has been proven very accurate through archeology. This established reputation lends credence to his recordings regarding Jesus.

Dr. John McRay

Dr. McRay authored the 432-page textbook titled Archeology and the New Testament and is called on regularly as a biblical expert for such projects as the Arts and Entertainment Network's Mysteries of the Bible and has been consulted by National Geographic for his scientific expertise. Along with his background as a student at Hebrew University École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jersuaem, Vanderbilt University Divinity School, and University of Chicago, McRay has taught New Testament and archeology at Wheaton College located in the suburbs of Chicago. His academic credentials go even deeper but what he really enjoys is the practical application of knowledge. "He supervised excavating teams at Caesarea, Sepphoris, and Herodium, all in Israel over an eight-year period" (pp. 94-95).

Dr. Gregory Boyd, PH.D.

Strobel visits Boyd to gather rebuttal evidence to the Jesus Seminar's widely publicized views that refute the reliability of the gospels. He is the author of a 416-page book titled: Cynic, Sage or Son of God? Recovering the Real Jesus in the Age of Revisionist Replies, a similarly themed book called Jesus Under Siege as well as other books dealing with difficult Christian issues. He is an energetic man who holds a master of divinity degree from Yale University Divinity School, and a doctorate from Princeton Theological Seminary. Along with his position as professor at Bethel College, he also pastors a church and enjoys debating atheists.



Ben Witherington III, PH.D

Witherington is an expert on Jesus' claims and has written books including: Jesus the Sage; The Many Faces of the Christ; The Jesus Quest; Jesus, Paul and the End of the World; and Women in the Ministry of Jesus. He holds a master of divinity degree, and a doctorate in Theology with an emphasis on New Testament.

Gary R. Collins, PH.D.

Among Strobel's expert witnesses, Gary Collins holds a master's degree in psychology and a doctorate in clinical psychology. He has taught, studied and written in his field for more than 35 years. In fact, he has written almost 150 articles and authored 45 books including The Magnificent Mind; Family Shock; Can You Trust Psychology? and more.

Donald A Carson, PH.D

Donald Carson is one of Strobel's expert witness in the Case for Christ. He holds a bachelor of science degree, but is also a research professor of New Testament who speaks 12 languages. He has authored or edited 40 books on the New Testament including: The Sermon on the Mount; Exegetical Fallacies; The Gospel according to John; and The Gagging of God, but his expertise lies in the areas of the historical Jesus and Greek grammar. Using techniques similar to those used by forensic artists, Strobel plans to create a profile of Jesus based on Carson's New Testament expertise.

Alexander Metherell, M.D., PH.D

Strobel chooses Alexander Metherell as his forensic medical expert in relation to Christ's death on the cross versus the swoon theory. He holds a medical degree and a doctorate in engineering.

William Lane Craig, PH.D., D.TH.

William Craig is a master debater, has a master of arts degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity school as well as a doctorate in philosophy. He is also an internationally known author of several books including: Reasonable Faith; No Easy Answers; Knowing the Truth about the Resurrection and others. His specialty is writing about the intersection of science, philosophy and theology. Strobel goes to him as his expert witness regarding the evidence of the missing body.

Gary Habermas, PH.D, D.D.

Habermas is a master debater regarding the resurrection of Christ who bases his arguments on historical evidence. He holds a doctorate from MSU where his



dissertation was written on the Resurrection. Other credentials include his degree from Emmanuel College in Oxford, England and the numerous books he has authored including: *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry*; *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic*; *This Historical Jesus*; and *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?*

J. P. Moreland, PH.D.

A renowned philosopher who is a highly-organized witness with a systematic logic that does not dwell in the abstract. His science background includes a degree in chemistry, and he also has a degree in theology which he uses in his position as professor at Talbot School of Theology. He is the author of a book titled *Scaling the Secular* and has articles published in over 30 professional journals.



Objects/Places

Q

The Q stands for the German word Quelle which means "source" and is a hypothesis that at one time there was a collection of Jesus' sayings and teachings created as a separate document.

Synoptic Gospels

Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the synoptic gospels because they follow a similar outline and their content is related.

Uncial Manuscripts

Greek manuscripts written in all capital letters, the most important of which are the Codex Sinaiticus. This is the only complete manuscript of the New Testament written in uncial letters.

Pseudepigraphia

The proliferation of gospels, epistles, and apocalypses in the first few centuries after Jesus lived on earth. These include: The Gospel of Nicodemus, Gospel of Barnabus, Gospel of Bartholomew, Gospel of Andrew, the Epistle of Paul to the Laodiceans, the Apocalypse of Stephen and other works of antiquity.

The Antiquities

A collection written by the noted ancient historian Josephus. It covers the history of the Jews from the time of creation up through Josephus' lifetime around 93 A.D.

Testimonium Flavianum

A lengthy section found within Josephus' The Antiquities. It deals with the life of Jesus and corroborates his life, death and resurrection. This entry has been debated among scholars, but today is widely accepted by most.

4Q521

A non-biblical manuscript which is part of the collection known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is dated 30 years prior to Christ's birth and is written in Hebrew. Content includes



descriptions of the wondrous things the Messiah will do when he comes to earth. This manuscript refers to Isaiah 61, and Jesus used the same phrasing to make it clear he claimed to be the Messiah when answering John the Baptist's question of whether or not he was the one they were waiting for.

Jesus Seminar

A self-selected group representing a small subsection of New Testament scholars who believe that Jesus did not say 82 percent of what is attributed to him in the gospels. They also published *The Five Gospels* which includes a manuscript titled the Gospel of Thomas which was written in the second century. "They're explicit in saying they want to rescue the Bible from fundamentalism and to free Americans from the 'naïve' belief that the Jesus of the Bible is the 'real' Jesus" (pp. 114-115).

The Five Gospels

A book published by the Jesus Seminar which includes the four traditional gospels as well as the Gospel of Thomas. In it, they teach that only two percent of what is attributed to Jesus' sayings in the gospels are indeed his words and that the Gospel of Thomas is a legitimate gospel.

Medical Evidence

Medical evidence can determine whether or not a victim died of natural causes or can be used to reconstruct a victim's violent death and establish the time of death. It can even be used to establish the case for Christ who was executed on a Roman cross more than two millennia ago.

Intention Test

A test used to determine whether or not it is the stated or implied intention of an author to write a text in order to record history accurately.



Themes

The Case For Christ

While this is the title of the book, it is also Strobel's overall theme. The other themes, the "reliability of the gospels" and "evidence," are intrinsically tied in with the case for Christ, because the reliability of the gospels is based on evidence. It is this collection of evidence that proves the reality of Christ in his deity and humanity. Step by step, Strobel approaches the case for Christ as if presenting evidence to a jury sitting in a courtroom. He interviews expert "witnesses" to not only reveal evidence, but takes the time to test and examine it according to legal standards. His approach is balanced as he not only looks at popular Christian perspectives but also takes into consideration views that do not support the case for Christ such as those held by the Jesus Seminar. His measured approach to all the evidence, takes the time to make a case based on historical, documentary, archeological, scientific evidence and more. Each step along the way, he offers differing viewpoints but always returns to what the evidence points to rather than drawing his own conclusions based on preconceptions or feelings. In this way, the reader as a juror is able to make their own determinations to come up with a valid verdict based on facts.

Strobel interviews thirteen experts asking them questions based on their areas of expertise. His questions are designed to examine all aspects of the evidence, whether for or against the case for Christ, in order to present all the facts and establish a case for Christ beyond a reasonable doubt.

Evidence

The case that is built for Christ within this book is not based on feelings or theology but on evidence that allows for the "jury" to come to their own verdict. Evidence presented begins with eye witness reports, but before evidence is deemed admissible, it must be corroborated. Strobel builds the case for Christ by substantiating eye witness accounts with other evidence that supports the accounts of the gospel writers as accurate and authentic. Beyond this, the author also proves the historical reliability of the gospel based on corroborating evidence outside of the Bible. This includes testimony by the ancient historian, Josephus, in his writings *The Antiquities*. These writings corroborate not only the fact that Jesus lived, but that he performed wondrous feats, taught and won many of the Jews to his way of thinking.

Archeological evidence backs up geographical details recorded in the bible, but even Strobel's expert witness, McCray, admits, "Spiritual truths cannot be proved or disproved by archeological discoveries" (p. 95). Using his experience as an investigative journalist, Strobel decides to test the elements of the "testimony" that can be tested to help determine if the biographical evidence recorded in the gospels is reliable. Archeology repeatedly affirms the New Testament's accuracy along with the reliability of



the gospels. Eyewitness testimony, documentary, corroborating, and scientific evidence all support the New Testament claim that Jesus is God incarnate, and identity evidence leaves little doubt that Jesus considered himself to be more than a doer of great deeds or a moral teacher or even a prophet. Psychological evidence supports that Jesus was mentally stable and not a crazy man claiming to be the Son of God; medical evidence establishes that Jesus died on that Roman cross more than two millennia ago; but it is the evidence that supports the resurrection as a historical event that makes the case for Christ complete.

Reliability of the Gospels

The first question Strobel tackles in his gathering of evidence is whether the gospels are reliable. In his interview with Bloomberg, he tests historical eyewitness testimony and whether or not the gospels were really written by those credited with their authorship and if so whether or not the authors would have some ulterior motive for writing them. Bloomberg establishes that though the gospel writers did not claim credit for writing the documents, their anonymity is stripped away based on the uniform testimony of the early church. No one else competed to take credit for their authorship, which points to the fact that authorship was not in dispute among early church leaders. This stands in stark contrast to the later apocryphal writings. Due to the fact that Mathew, Mark and Luke were no one special, there would be no reason to attribute authorship to them other than the fact that they actually wrote them. John's Gospel is the only exception. It is clear that the author's name is John, but whether or not it is John the Apostle is disputed by some because, "[...] the testimony of a Christian writer names Papias, dated about A.D. 125, refers to John the apostle and John the elder, and it's not clear from the context whether he's talking about one person from two perspectives or two different people" (p. 23) However, this is the only exception to the belief that the gospel is written by the Apostle John.

Strobel takes an approach that not only tackles the gospel manuscripts but other popular scholarly beliefs that run contrary to them, weighing that evidence as well. For example, the Jesus Seminar believes that the Gospel of Thomas should also be included in the New Testament. However, Strobel takes the time to uncover evidence regarding this apocryphal gospel and it does not stand up to the same rigid scrutiny for reliability that the gospels do. It is through the use of factual historical, documentary evidence that this gospel is dated back to the 4th century making it much less reliable. This approach not only proves the reliability of the gospels, but also disproves the reliability of many other documents based on the same criteria.

Style

Perspective

The author's background as a highly successful investigative reporter for the Chicago Tribune provides insight into the judicial process and a deeper understanding of how evidence must be viewed impartially. As an agnostic, Lee Strobel's life changes when his wife becomes a Christian. He fears that he will lose the fun-loving companion and friend he has known all these years, but in fact is mildly surprised by the subtle changes in her character. This leads him to want to learn more about the Jesus of the Bible using the same logical and factual approach that would be used in a courtroom. He challenges the readers of this book to take part in the case for Christ as a member of the jury. All preconceived notions are to be set aside and the evidence presented to be considered thoughtfully. He sets out to see if a case for Christ can be made beyond a reasonable doubt.

He uses his years of investigative reporting to uncover the truth regarding the reliability of the gospels based on evidence that stands the test of time. Strobel's approach is balanced. He considers all the evidence, both supporting the reliability of the gospels, as well as evidence that tries to disprove or color the accuracy of the bibliographical details found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He questions experts and reaches conclusions based on facts. As he concludes his interviews, one question he asks of his experts is what difference their research has made in their own personal faith. Across the board, researching the historical accuracy of the gospels and New Testament has strengthened their faith. By the end of the book, he makes his own determination that the Bible is reliable based on the evidence. The case for Christ is made and Strobel must come up with his own verdict. He takes the step of faith to move beyond intellectual knowledge and to experience a relational faith with Jesus and challenges his readers to consider the evidence which has proven beyond a reasonable doubt that the bible is reliable, and which supports the fact that Jesus is the Son of God who not only died for the sins of mankind, but also rose from the dead. He leaves the final verdict in the hands of each individual reader. He asks them to make their determination of the facts.

Tone

Although Strobel uses an objective courtroom tone to convey deep theological and historical data, his experience as an investigative reporter provides contemporary examples of how evidence works to build a case beyond a reasonable doubt. He peppers the text with anecdotes of high profile murder trials he covered as a journalist. The insider glimpse of how the testimony of a single eyewitness can convince the jury beyond a reasonable doubt that a defendant is guilty as well as examples of how new evidence can clear a man of murder charges, lays a foundation for the reader to gain a better grasp of the logic and reality of how evidence works beyond preconceptions and



emotional ties. This helps put the reader in the right frame of mind and better enables them to see the value of the evidence in relation to the life of Christ no matter what they thought prior to the "trial" in the case for Christ.

Strobel's own spiritual journey from a skeptic agnostic to a believer in Jesus Christ not only helps others through the maze of commonly held misconceptions but strengthens and builds a faith that is founded on facts backed by well-supported eyewitness accounts, documentary, corroborating, and scientific evidence. Expert witnesses address every question Strobel throws their way as he tries to not only prove but also disprove commonly held views regarding the reliability of the gospels. He has set aside his own preconceptions and seeks the truth based on the evidence. By the end of the book, he is challenged to accept the facts but to also move from an intellectual knowledge of the accumulated evidence to an experiential relationship with the risen Messiah. He challenges his readers to consider the evidence and to come up with their own verdict.

Structure

The book opens with the story of James Dixon's attempted murder case. It is a slam-dunk case. Dixon got into an argument with a cop and shot him. The defendant enters a guilty plea before he is tried in hopes of getting a lighter sentence. His fingerprints are on the weapon, eyewitnesses put him at the scene, and the witnesses testify that they saw him shoot the cop. This story pulls the reader in with the fast-paced making of a murder thriller, and then Strobel introduces a surprise. New evidence—evidence that fits the scenario and the evidence that convicted Dixon, only this time the new evidence clears Dixon. It just so happens that this new evidence is the truth. The cop owned an illegal pen gun which went off. Dixon pleaded guilty as part of a plea bargain. This approach sets the reader up to accept new evidence, to give it a chance even if it goes against what they believe.

In Strobel's own spiritual journey, he is not setting out to reach a specific conclusion other than to find the truth in the case for Christ. He wants the facts—substantiated, corroborated facts. This is never more evident than when he brings in rebuttal evidence that goes against what most evangelical scholars believe. Instead of telling his readers what to think, he presents evidence one piece at a time and builds a case for Christ by proving the gospels are reliable. His use of modern-day murder trials and how evidence was used to make a case keeps his approach fresh and relevant for the reader.

Quotes

"Do we have any records from first-century 'journalists' who interviewed eyewitnesses, asked tough questions, and faithfully recorded what they scrupulously determined to be true?" (p. 20).

"[...] is it really possible to be an intelligent, critically thinking person and still believe that the four gospels were written by the people whose names have been attached to them?" (p. 22).

"But the uniform testimony of the early church was that Matthew, also known as Levi, the tax collector and one of the twelve disciples, was the author of the gospel in the New Testament; that Jon Mark, a companion of Peter was the author of the gospel we call Mark; and that Luke, known as Paul's 'beloved physician,' wrote both the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles," (p. 22).

"Christians believe that as wonderful as Jesus' life and teachings and miracles were, they were meaningless if it were not historically factual that Christ dies and was raised from the dead and that this provided atonement, or forgiveness, of the sins of humanity," (p. 26).

"In John, Jesus uses different terminology, he speaks in long sermons, and there seems to be a higher Christology—that is, more direct and more blatant claims that Jesus is one with the Father; God himself; the Way, the Truth, and the Life; the Resurrection and the Life," (p. 28).

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name," (p. 40).

"They were willing to live out their beliefs even to the point of ten of the eleven remaining disciples being put to grisly deaths, which shows great character," (p. 45).

"My own conviction is, once you allow for the elements I've talked about earlier—of paraphrase, of abridgement, of explanatory additions, of selection, of omission—the gospels are extremely consistent with each other by ancient standards, which are the only standards by which it's fair to judge them," (p. 45).

"These two issues—whether Jesus' biographies were reliably preserved for us and whether equally accurate biographies have been suppressed by the church—merited careful consideration," (p. 56).

"Because even if we had no Greek manuscripts today, by piecing together the information from these translations from a relatively early date, we could actually reproduce the contents of the New Testament," (p. 59).

"So rare that scholars Norman Geisler and William Nix conclude, the New Testament, then, has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity, but



it has survived in a purer form than any other great book—a form that is 99.5 percent pure," (p. 65).

"[...] Josephus corroborates important information about Jesus that he was the martyred leader of the church in Jerusalem and that he was a wise teacher who had established a wide and lasting following, despite the fact that he had been crucified under Pontius Pilot at the instigation of some of the Jewish leaders," (p. 80).

"Spiritual truths cannot be proved or disproved by archaeological discoveries," (p. 95).

"The general consensus of both liberal and conservative scholars is that Luke is very accurate as a historian,' McRay replied," (p. 97).

"They're explicit in saying they want to rescue the Bible from fundamentalism and to free Americans from the 'naïve' belief that the Jesus of the Bible is the 'real' Jesus." (pp. 114-115).

"I had already heard well-supported eyewitness, documentary, corroborating, and scientific evidence supporting the New Testament claim that he is God incarnate, and I was getting ready to hit the road again to dig out even more historical material about his character and resurrection." (p. 127).

"Jesus sees his miracles as bringing about something unprecedented—the coming of God's dominion,' replied Witherington." (p. 135).

"There seemed little question, based upon the earliest evidence, that Jesus considered himself to be more than a doer of great deeds, more than a teacher, more than another prophet in a line of many," (p. 137).

"The real issue is, what happened after the crucifixion of Jesus that changed the minds of the disciples, who had denied, disobeyed, and deserted Jesus?" (p. 140).

"The only person who can say that sort of thing meaningfully is God himself, because sin, even if it against other people, is first and foremost a defiance of God and his laws," (p. 157).

"[...] Philippians 2, where Paul explains that Jesus 'being in the form of God, did not think equality with God was something to be exploited'—that's the way it should be translated—'but emptied himself.' He became a nobody," (p. 159).

"But in principle, if he's the sort of God who has moral judgments on those matters, he's got to have moral judgments on this huge matter of all these divine image bearers shaking their puny fists at his face and singing with Frank Sinatra, 'I did it my way,'" (p. 165).

"Isaiah revealed the manner of the Messiah's birth (of a virgin); Micah pinpointed the place of his birth (Bethlehem); Genesis and Jeremiah specified his ancestry (a descendent of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from the tribe of Judah, the house of David);



the Psalms foretold his betrayal, his accusation by false witnesses, his manner of death (pierced in the hands and feet, although crucifixion hadn't been invented yet), and his resurrection (he would not decay but would ascent on high); and on and on," (p. 179).

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..." (p. 209).

"The core of the story is the same: Joseph of Armathea takes the body of Jesus, puts it in a tomb, the tomb is visited by a small group of women followers of Jesus early on the Sunday morning following his crucifixion, and they find that the tomb is empty. They see a vision of angels saying that Jesus is risen," (p. 215).

"Then I realized what he was saying: nobody was sitting inside the tomb and saw the body start to vibrate, stand up, take the linen wrapping off, fold them, roll back the stone, wow the guards, and leave," (p. 228).

"The key," Habermas said, "is that a number of the accounts in Acts 1-5, 10 and 1 also include some creeds that, like the one in 1 Corinthians 15, report some very dearly data concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus," (p. 235).

"And when you've got eleven credible people with no ulterior motives, with nothing to gain and a lot to lose, who all agree they observed something with their own eyes—now you've got some difficulty explaining that away," (p. 247).

"By going under the water, you're celebrating his death, and by being brought out of the water, you're celebrating the fact that Jesus was raised to newness of life," (p. 253).

"Historically speaking, the news of his empty tomb, the eyewitness accounts of his post-Resurrection appearances, and the conviction that he was indeed God's unique Son emerged virtually instantaneously," (p. 264).



Topics for Discussion

Do ancient historians support or disagree with the New Testament's claims about Jesus' life, teachings, and miracles? Provide at least two or three examples to support your answer.

How did the early church decide on which books to include in the New Testament? What criteria were followed and why were other ancient gospels excluded?

How does Josephus' writing found in *The Antiquities* corroborate what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote in the gospels bearing their names regarding the life and times of Jesus?

How do the teachings of the Jesus Seminar conflict with the evidence Strobel collects in his case for Christ?

Others besides Jesus have performed miracles. What is the difference, not just in the miracles but in the way Jesus interprets the miracles he performs?

Name at least three major Messianic prophecies which Jesus fulfilled and how they prove Jesus is the Christ.

Does the fact that there is no descriptive account of the resurrection, no eyewitnesses to Jesus resurrection, (the actual event) hurt the efforts to establish the resurrection as a historical event? Why or why not?