

# EVIDENTIAL APOLOGETICS

## INTRODUCTION

The proponents of evidential apologetics state that there is evidence which demonstrates God's existence. The evidence referred to includes:

- Historical accounts – references to Jesus in the Bible and other contemporary accounts
- Growth of the church
- Personal accounts – conversion experiences, answers to prayer, miracles of healing

## HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

Much is written about Jesus in the Bible, which is seen by many as not just a book for spiritual guidance but as a record of real events.

### 1. The Bible

The Bible records Jewish history along with the major events of Jesus' life and teachings. Many of the details of Jesus' life, for example his parent's travel for a census just before he was born, have been corroborated through modern historical research. In this example, the Gospel of Luke (Chapter 2) connects the date of the nativity of Jesus to the Census of Quirinius. At the time the Roman Emperor Augustus ordered that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. This census is a historical fact; a census which required people to return to their hometown to register their families, hence Joseph and Mary travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, his ancestral town.

It is fair to state that many of the Bible's events are rooted in firm, verifiable history.

### 2. Historians

Within a few decades of his lifetime, Jesus was mentioned by Jewish and Roman historians. These texts match the Biblical accounts of the life and death of Jesus. It is clear that Jesus was known by historians. Nobody doubted his existence.

#### *Flavius Josephus*

The first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus is seen as the best source for information about the Israel of Jesus' lifetime. Around 93AD he wrote a 20-volume history of the Jewish people.

Although Josephus was not a follower of Jesus, he was around when the early church was getting started. He would have known people who had seen and heard Jesus.

In one passage of '*Jewish Antiquities*', he wrote about an execution. Josephus identifies the victim, James, as the 'brother of Jesus-who-is-called-Messiah.' He also wrote about Jesus, describing a man 'who did surprising deeds', who was condemned to be crucified by Pilate.

### *Tacitus*

Tacitus was a Roman senator who wrote *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, a first-century history of the Roman Empire written around 116 AD.

He wrote about the burning of Rome in 64 AD. Tacitus mentions that Emperor Nero falsely blamed 'the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius.'

This is a clear connection to the version of Jesus' execution by Pontius Pilate in the Bible.

### *Pliny*

Pliny was a Roman governor who lived around the same time as Tacitus. He wrote to the Emperor Trajan often, informing him of the early Christian practices. In one of these letters he reported that early Christians would *'sing hymns to Christ as to a god.'*

## TASKS

1. Research each of these historical accounts.
2. Bullet point the key points of each.
3. Do they lend support for God's existence? Explain your answer.
4. Do they lend support for Jesus being the Son of God? Explain your answer.

## GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

Despite persecution over the centuries, the Christian Church has grown exponentially since its early start in first-century Israel. Indeed *'exponentially'* might be an understatement. From the early days, 2000 years ago, when c. 3000 accepted the Gospel (Acts 2:41), the Church has not stopped growing.

The book of Acts is clear that many people became believers in these early days: *'Believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.'* (5:14). Within less than 30 years, the Church had increased to include many tens of thousands of Christians.

Despite the many times the Church has been repressed, or sometimes actively persecuted, it has continued to grow. A 2015 report showed that the biggest faith group was Christianity. Across the world, with 2.3 billion adherents or 31.2% of the total world population of 7.3 billion.

Further to this, the researchers estimated that the world's Christian population is expected to grow to 2.9 billion in 2050. Nearly one-in-three people worldwide (31%) are expected to be Christian at mid-century, the same share as in 2010. (Pew Research Center, *'The Changing Global Religious Landscape'*)

### TASK

How does the growth of the Church present evidence for the existence of God?

Conduct some independent research around this topic to answer the topic more fully.

## PERSONAL ACCOUNTS

Christians don't just believe in God because of intellectual arguments. Rather, they believe in God because many of them would say that they have had a personal experience of Him. There are millions of Christians across the world who testify to having encountered God.

### *Conversion Experience*

When an atheist or agnostic becomes a Christian, they are said to have had a conversion experience. These experiences can take many forms. Some have a quiet conviction that God exists and decide to follow Him. Others have been brought up in a household which practices Christianity, and one day decide that they too would like to follow God. Still others have very dramatic, sometimes supernatural conversion experiences.

For instance, take the apostle Paul - known as Saul before his conversion - from the Bible. He was busy minding his own business on his way to persecute and kill more Christians in Damascus, when he was blinded by a heavenly light. God spoke to him audibly, asking why he was persecuting Him, before telling him to go to Damascus. After this, Paul was blinded for three days. In the meantime, Ananias of Damascus had been told by God to visit Saul's house, to lay hands on him and heal him. He was healed, the scales fell off - spiritually as well as physically - and he saw again. He was baptised straight after this event and became Paul. The rest is Church history...

### *A Glimpse of Eternity*

A modern-day conversion experience is that of Ian McCormack. Ian was busy night diving off the coast of Mauritius when he was stung by a box jelly fish. You only need one sting to kill you; he was stung five times.

In the ambulance, en route to the hospital, he knew he was in trouble. He remembered his mum praying the Lord's Prayer when he was little and so started to pray. When in hospital he was given an antidote to the poison before being left in bed and told to stay awake. He struggled and ended up, as you might expect, dropping off to sleep.

His story from here involves an experience of visiting hell, followed by heaven where he talked to God and was given the chance to return. He returned and was completely healed. He was told that he had been clinically dead for fifteen minutes, giving the nurses a shock when he came round!

You can read more about his story at [aglimpseofeternity.org](http://aglimpseofeternity.org).

## **ANSWERS TO PRAYER & HEALING**

Across the world Christians pray. They talk to God, tell Him about their worries and needs. They believe that if it is in God's will to have something then He will provide.

There are many examples of people receiving answers to prayer and healing across the world. These accounts are known as testimonies.

Here are just a few examples...

### *Lauren's Testimony*

'My husband and I had been trying to have a baby for a year, but nothing happened. Then, one Sunday in December we were in church. They were interviewing a pregnant lady about what it was like to be pregnant in order to help us understand what it was like for Mary to be pregnant with Jesus. It was really heart-breaking for me to hear as I really wanted a baby so badly.

That evening, we went to another church in a different area and at the end someone came up to me and said they felt they had a message from God for me. The message was that God knows my child's name, God knows my child's year of birth and that God knows my child; that his birth will be in His time and not mine. I was blown away by hearing this promise from God for me, just at the right time.

That was December 2006. We prayed and waited for five long years, and kept hold of God's word to us, choosing to believe and have faith. Throughout this time, He kept reminding us of his promise to us - we turned away from medical treatment and adoption and waited.

In November 2011, our son was born. God keeps His promises to us, and I know God is real and is at work every time I look at my son.'

### *Laura's Testimony*

I was leading at a youth event; we were moving into a time of prayer when we felt God say He wanted to heal people, especially those with skin complaints. We started praying for a teenager who had severe eczema. He lifted his top a little so that we could see it was all over his torso. Having prayed for him, we checked again, and the eczema was visibly reduced. We continued to pray for him - three times in total - each time it visibly reduced, until it completely disappeared!

### Bev's Testimony

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2016. Walking into the hospital to find out if I was having chemotherapy, I was terrified. As I walked into the reception area, these words entered my mind, *'Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God.'*

I signed in and sat down, using my phone to check my emails. One of my daily emails contain a Bible verse, changing each day. This day the verse was:

*'Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.'* Isaiah 41:10 (NLT)

The words were exactly the same: there are so many different translations of the Bible, that even this convinced me God was speaking to me, reassuring me that He was with me, not to be scared, that all would be OK because He would give me strength to get through the trials ahead and I was coming out of it in one piece!

The comfort this brought was immense.

Three chemotherapies later, I was in agony with the havoc it was wreaking on my body. I was crying and upset with God for making me go through it: I have known people who were supernaturally cured of cancer, why couldn't He do the same for me? During my self-pity session, I received a message from a Christian friend. She said she felt she needed to send me a verse. It was:

*'Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.'* Isaiah 41:10 (NLT)

She had no idea God had used this verse to bring comfort earlier. It was a timely reminder that God was with me, and certainly helped me get through one of the most difficult times of my life.

## TASKS

1. What is a *'conversion experience'*?
2. Watch the video ['A Glimpse of Eternity'](#). Write a paragraph, summarizing Ian McCormack's testimony.
3. Does Ian's testimony lend support to the argument that God exists? If not God, what alternative explanation could there be?
4. How do you explain that Ian went from a complete atheist to a Christian, plus, has lived his life serving God ever since? Does this fact lend support to the idea that God exists?
5. Research at least 3 other Christian testimonies of healing. Make notes about the specifics of their testimonies.
6. How far do the testimonies given within this resource, and the ones you have researched, go towards supporting the idea that God exists?
7. Do you know anyone who is a Christian? Ask how God has made difference in their lives.