

Book Review
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The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel, published by Zondervan Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998, 303 pp., \$10.99, ISBN: 0-310-20930-7 (pbk.)

Lee Strobel is both an award winning journalist (*Chicago Tribune*) and a law student (Master of Studies law degree from Yale law School). In *The Case For Christ*, he blends both talents to uncover the evidence that proves that Jesus Christ really lived, died and was resurrected.

To accomplish his mission, Strobel interviews thirteen different scholars from various backgrounds in New Testament studies. In each interview, he questions the scholar from the standpoint of the skeptic/critic and demonstrates a broad knowledge of the arguments used by them to attack credibility in the basic facts about the life of Jesus Christ. He searches for answers to the critics through knowledgeable scholars who do not fail to defend the truth concerning Jesus.

The book is set out in three parts: (1) Examining the Record; (2) Analyzing Jesus; and (3) Researching the Resurrection. Altogether there are fourteen chapters along with an Introduction and Conclusion that summarizes the arguments set forth in the book. A bibliography is included along with Endnotes for each chapter and there is a topical index at the back of the book.

In chapter one, Strobel takes up the question of the reliability of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He interviews Craig Blomberg. Blomberg's credentials are given as Strobel does with each of the scholars he chooses to question. Blomberg affirms that the Gospels are reliable. He relates that the authorship of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is confirmed by historians Papias (A. D. 125) and Irenaeus (A.D. 180) (p. 24). These four men are direct and indirect eyewitnesses to the historical events they relate in their writings. The Gospels can be dated to within 30 years of the events they record. But, some of Paul's writings can be dated to within a few years of the events themselves. This fact destroys the notion that the Gospel accounts are Christian myths that developed over long periods of time.

Chapter two addresses the credibility of the eyewitness evidence. Eight tests are considered: (1) the intention test; (2) the ability test; (3) the character test; (4) the consistency test; (5) the bias test; (6) the corroboration test; (7) the cover-up test; and (8) the adverse witness test. Each of these tests is explained and applied to the writers of the Gospels. The authors pass each test!

In chapter three, Strobel interviews Bruce Metzger concerning the preservation of the texts themselves. The manuscript evidence for the Gospels is overwhelming. There are, according to Metzger, 5,664 manuscripts in uncials (306), minuscules (2,856), and lectionaries (2,403) (p. 63). By comparison, the *Iliad* (Homer) has fewer than 650 Greek manuscripts today. Some fragments date to the 2nd or 3rd century A.D. Homer wrote this epic about 800 B. C. This represents a very lengthy gap. In contrast, the oldest Greek manuscript of the New Testament is a fragment of the Gospel of John dating to 100 to 150 A.D. Metzger shows the comprehensive evidence for the text of the Gospels and that these documents are dated very close to the time of the original writings. This is strong evidence for the text.

The third scholar interviewed by Strobel is Edwin M. Yamauchi. The focus of the fourth chapter is the corroborating evidence. Is there credible evidence for Jesus outside of His

biographies? Yamauchi relates that Josephus, an important Jewish historian of the first century, mentions James, the brother of Jesus and also mentions Jesus. The passage referring to Jesus is called the *Testimonium Flavianum*. It references Jesus' miracles, teaching, death and resurrection. Yamauchi also mentioned the important statements of Tacitus, a Roman historian, and Pliny (the younger) who became the governor of Bithynia in northwestern Turkey. Both of these men corroborate Christianity.

John McRay is interviewed in chapter 5. John gives the scientific evidence from archaeology for the New Testament. Strobel mentions that one prominent archaeologist carefully examined Luke's references to thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands, finding not a single mistake (p. 98). In contrast, not a single item mentioned in the Book of Mormon (people, places, etc.) can be verified. McRay states, "archaeology has not produced anything that is unequivocally a contradiction to the Bible" (p. 100).

Chapter six contains an interview with Gregory Boyd who wrote, *Cynic, Sage, or Son of God?* Boyd refutes the liberal *Jesus Seminar* scholars stating that they have no basis for their claims. These scholars maintain that only 2 percent of Jesus' sayings confidently could be determined to be authentic.

With chapter seven, Part 2 of the book, *Analyzing Jesus*, begins. This chapter contains an interview with Ben Witherington III. It examines the question, *Was Jesus really convinced that He was the Son of God?* Witherington refutes the notion that Jesus never thought of Himself as the Son of God. He states that Jesus affirmed transcendence. He used the intimate term 'Abba' of God. Jesus and His followers were the only one praying to God in this fashion. Jesus' repeated use of the phrase *Son of Man* denotes His deity. *Son of Man* is a phrase closely connected with the prophecy of Daniel 7:13, 14. It affirms the humanity of Jesus and also His deity.

In chapter eight, Gary R. Collins, psychologist, is interviewed. Collins explores the mental state of Jesus. Was He crazy for affirming that He was the Son of God? This expert states, "All in all, I just don't see signs that Jesus was suffering from any known mental illness" (p. 147).

The eighth interview is found in chapter nine. Strobel interviews Donald A. Carson concerning the attributes that show Jesus was the Son of God. Carson states the following as proofs: (1) He forgave sin; (2) He was sinless; (3) the mystery of the incarnation—God becomes flesh; (4) He was the creator; (5) He is the 'only begotten Son' which Carson believes refers to the "unique and beloved" Son; and (6) He is referred to as the 'firstborn' an indication of a position of authority.

Every attribute of God is found in Jesus Christ. Some of these are: omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, eternity and immutability.

Louis S. Lapidés is interviewed in chapter ten concerning whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. Lapidés states, "God has to be an objective reality if he's going to have any objective meaning beyond my own imagination" (p. 177). The objective reality for Jesus being the Messiah is found in the prophecies from the Old Testament. Moses prophesied of Christ (Deut. 18:18); Isaiah did (Isa. 53); Micah prophesied of His birthplace (Micah 5:2); the books of Genesis and Jeremiah give His ancestry; and the book of Psalms states details concerning His betrayal, manner of death and resurrection.

Chapter eleven makes the transition to the third part of the book which analyzes the reality of the resurrection. Strobel interviews Alexander Metherell, M.D. Ph. D. The question examined here is: Did Jesus really die upon the cross? Metherell gives some remarkable medical

information about the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; the Roman flogging of Jesus; and the crucifixion itself. The pain Jesus suffered on the cross was excruciating—a word meaning “out of the cross.” Jesus’ death was certain. The physical condition He suffered and the examination of the Roman soldiers at the cross confirm it.

The eleventh interview Strobel conducts is with William Lane Craig. Chapter twelve looks at the evidence for the empty tomb. Paul’s record, I Cor. 15:1-3, is very early and consequently, not enough time would have elapsed to develop a myth about Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. Joseph of Arimathea was a historical character mentioned by all four Gospel writers. The tomb was secured by order of Pilate and a large stone was rolled by means of a groove to seal it. Roman soldiers guarded it (Matt. 27:64-66). Women discover the tomb is empty. Early Christians cite the empty tomb as evidence of the resurrection of Jesus (Peter, Acts 2:24 and Paul, Acts 13:29-31).

Chapter thirteen examines the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Gary Habermas is interviewed by Strobel for this purpose. Habermas debated Antony Flew in 1987 which produced the book, *Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?* No one actually saw the physical resurrection of Jesus. Eyewitnesses saw Jesus alive after His death. Paul’s language in I Cor. 15:1-4 is dated within 2 years of the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus appeared to many of His disciples reaching easily above 500 altogether at different times and on different occasions.

The final chapter in the book looks at the circumstantial evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. The thirteenth interview is conducted with J. P. Mooreland. Mooreland gives the following evidence: (1) the disciples died for their beliefs; (2) the conversion of skeptics like James the brother of Jesus and Saul (Paul) of Tarsus; (3) changes to key social structures among Jewish conversions; (4) communion and baptism; (5) the emergence of the church of Christ; and (6) the ongoing influence of Jesus in the lives of people all over the earth (pp. 246-257).

Strobel’s book is packed with good information that would help supply answers to sincere individuals who are seeking to resolve questions about Jesus Christ. I enjoyed the interview method and found the book easy to read.