

My Testimony

What I believe and a summary of some of the spiritual milestones that prove God's activity in my life.

The following was structured according to a talk show format where I'm fielding some direct questions that compel me to explain what I believe, but also why.

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Outline

Why are you a Christian?

- He died and came back to life thus validating everything He ever said as being true.

There are a lot of options out there. What makes you so certain that Jesus is the right choice?

- Jesus proclaimed He was God as opposed to a messenger or a great teacher.
- His emphasis on believing as opposed to doing, thereby eliminating the impossible scenario of trying to earn your way into Heaven.

Everything you believe in is based on Christ's death and resurrection. What makes you so sure that actually happened?

- I don't have to witness an event in order to believe that it happened based on the results of that event, those results being Purpose, Peace and Power.

Purpose

- My purpose is to do my Father's bidding. I don't have to be intimidated by the possibility of "failure" as long as I'm being obedient.
- His Purpose is manifested in His Plan for my life which He communicates to me by guiding me in my decision making.
 - The choice between Naval Academy vs. School of Music...

Peace

- I can be at ease because of the Peace He gives to me. His Peace is based on His Character and not on my circumstances.
 - Dad's illness and death
 - Young Messiah, Western Flyer, drums being stolen
 - Western Flyer comes off the road
 - New house, new home, new job

Power

- ❑ Creation
- ❑ God's Power manifests itself in the fact that I can make decisions based on a resolve that goes beyond what I'm capable of from a human standpoint.
 - Healing of my arthritis
 - Rescue of Michelle and my baby boy.
 - His Provision which I've seen in the way He has taken care of my Mom.

What you're describing doesn't sound especially supernatural. I could get the same thing from a motivational speaker.

- ❑ The motivational speaker is going to encourage me to draw from within myself those things that will supposedly make me a "winner". The Resources I'm drawing from as a believer come from Christ, which are infinitely beyond whatever I could muster up from a human standpoint.

You've quoted the Bible more than once so far. You're basing a lot of your belief on a book that's been criticized as being less than accurate and reliable.

- ❑ Many of those same criticisms have been effectively refuted.
- ❑ You don't look at a car that's running and insist that something's wrong with it just because you don't understand why it's running. Oftentimes the place where the bible appears to be flawed is due to the unwillingness of the critic to look beyond the surface. They'll maintain their own powers of reason as being the final authority rather than allowing the bible to be the authority and their perspective as that which needs to be reevaluated.
- ❑ The critique of the finer points of doctrine, or the emphasis upon various details of Scripture is secondary to the consideration of Christ; His death and Resurrection.

You seem so certain. Why is it so seemingly illusive for those who are on the outside looking in?

- ❑ Every other religion maintains that you as a human being can earn God's favor. Christianity insists on total surrender and that you admit that you're incapable of earning God's favor. We don't like to be told that we can't or that we won't and that is why Christianity is difficult to accept.
- ❑ God's Message is spiritually revealed. It is not something a human being is going to deduce on their own. To seek after God while simultaneously refusing Him results in a mere academic evaluation where a Divine Revelation is necessary.

Your perspective on some controversial issues seems dogmatic at times. What makes you think you're right and how can you be so close-minded?

If the bible says that something is wrong, then it's wrong. There is no controversy unless someone wants to question the bible, which is pointless.

All verses and graphics are located at the end of the testimony

My Testimony

Why are you a Christian?

I'm a Christian because of Jesus Christ. He died and rose again and in so doing validated everything He ever said as being True. I'm convinced. Therefore, I follow Him.

There are a lot of options out there. What makes you so certain that Jesus is the right choice?

Every other "option" is based on either a human character or a human performance. Muhammad, Buddha, Joseph Smith – all had some enticing things to say, perhaps, but they all fall short of Jesus Who went as far as to say that He was God (Jn 10:30-33). He did more than just teach or claim to be a messenger sent from God, He made it clear that when you saw Him, you saw the Father (Jn 14:8-9) and then proved it by His death and resurrection.

The other thing about Jesus' message that makes it unique and far more compelling is that He shifts the emphasis from doing to believing. However noble and impressive humanity may appear, we are both limited and flawed. Subscribing to the idea that we are capable of performing in way that merits God's grace is pointless because even if things appear noteworthy on the surface, things are never as they should be on the inside. Divine Perfection is a standard that is impossible to achieve from a human standpoint, yet it is a status that can be awarded by believing that Christ took upon Himself the penalty for my wrongdoings. It makes sense that the One Who sets the standard, provides what is necessary to meet the standard, especially when it's so obviously beyond what can be accomplished based on human resources alone.

Everything you believe in is based on Christ's death and resurrection. What makes you so sure that actually happened?

Well, I wasn't there to shake His hand when He came out of the tomb and I didn't actually see Him die on the cross, but I don't necessarily have to witness something to believe that it actually happened. I can believe based on the results of that event, the results in this case being purpose, peace and power.

Purpose

My purpose is to do my Father's bidding that results in rewards that are both eternal and gratifying. And regardless of the apparent outcome, I can rest assured that it's a Divine Agenda that I'm accomplishing; therefore the final outcome is not in my hands. That's not only comforting, it is inspiring to know that I cannot fail as long as I'm obedient.

Plus, while I'm biblically encouraged to make plans and set goals (Prov 14:22; 15:22; 16:3; 20:18), my life is ultimately guided by the Lord according to His Purpose (Jer 29:11; Eph 2:10). There isn't a single day that isn't already organized according to God's Daytimer (Ps 139:16). Therefore, I can approach each day with peace and confidence knowing that the One Who created me, died for me and loves me more than I can begin to comprehend, is guiding my every footstep.

I can look back over my life and see examples of God guiding me. As I was getting ready to graduate High School, I wanted to go to the Naval Academy, but despite a congressional endorsement and a lot of hard work on the part of both my parents and myself, it never happened. Instead, almost as an afterthought, I auditioned for the Marine Corps Band. That set me on a path that resulted in a nine-year military career, some unbelievable opportunities and some very rewarding experiences. None of this can be written off as coincidental. Jesus made it clear that the Holy Spirit is my Counselor and it is His Guidance that is moving me forward (Jn 16:13).

**See "Life Graphic"
at the end of this
Testimony**

Peace

Christ's death and resurrection make available several things that cannot be explained by anything other than the fact that He did, in fact, die and come back to life. Besides a sense of Divine Purpose, I also have a peace concerning both the direction and the conclusion of my life. A Christian can approach their own death knowing that they're going to be with Jesus immediately after they draw their last breath (Lk 23:42-43). While my death is not imminent, as far as I know, I have seen first hand the confidence that is enjoyed by the person who trusts in Christ at the moment of their death.

My Dad lived with the knowledge that he was dying for the better part of a year. He had suffered a severe heart attack and had to wait in the hospital for a new heart. At one point he had three open-heart surgeries in the course of 36 hours. In the aftermath he was in a drug-induced coma for more than a month. He recovered to the amazement of all the medical staff, although his situation was still very fragile. At one point his doctor came into the room and asked Mom and Dad if they would be willing to give up their spot in line in order to allow a man who had only days to live to have the heart that was on its way. My Dad was on a machine that kept his heart beating. He was in no position to be casual about the arrival of heart that could save his own life. But my Mom and Dad didn't hesitate. They looked at one another and replied, "Sure!" The surgeon wept. He was so amazed by my parents' generosity and overall disposition in the face of such urgent and lethal circumstances. But that's not uncommon among those who trust in Christ for their salvation (1 Jn 5:13). I have that same peace as far as my own mortality.

His Peace goes beyond a mere human disposition. I'm going to be at ease based on what I can see. If things are going well, then I'm feeling good. If things aren't going well, then I'm prone to worry. His Peace is based on His Character and I can rest assured that regardless of how things appear, He's in control and everything will work out according to His Plan, which is always good (Rom 12:2).

When I was discharged from the Marine Corps, while I had a job waiting for me (Young Messiah Tour), it was temporary and I was resolved that I would attempt to pursue a career in music. A national recording act would materialize, but it would take the better part of two years. During that time, money was extremely tight. I was working at a fast food restaurant and supplementing my income as best as I could with occasional gigs. The lowest point came when my drums and the majority of my gear was stolen. Again, not only His Peace, but His Provision (Phil 4:19) was made evident through the contributions of my church and, in time, all my gear would be restored along with an opportunity to enjoy the experience of a record deal and all the perks that go along with being a part of a national recording act. While I had every reason to quit and despair, God was there to encourage me and keep me pointed in the right direction.

In 1997, despite the fact that “Western Flyer” was being regarded as something noteworthy by both critics and audiences around the country, we came off the road and I went to work for LifeWay. After having labored and prepared for a career in music, to shift my focus wasn’t easy let alone comfortable. Yet, it’s something I could embrace due to my belief that God was the One Who guiding me. Instead of constantly asking, “What if?” I could be looking ahead and asking “What’s next?” Not only was I experiencing the advantages of believing that there was a Divine Purpose to all of what was going on, I could be at ease knowing that even if things seemed to be unraveling, He still had the wheel and we were headed in a positive direction.

God doesn’t always answer some questions quickly. Even when you’re in a place when you can be comfortable asking “What’s next?” God doesn’t always respond with an answer right away. Working at LifeWay began with a tele-sales position. When Michelle and I learned we were pregnant, we both wanted Michelle to be able to stay at home. We were also concerned about our current living arrangement in that it didn’t offer us enough space to accommodate another person. We prayed and prayed some more. In the space of three months, God provided me with a new job, we moved into a new house and we welcomed Jorja Faith into the world on October 20th.

God came through in big way. But, again, more than His Provision, it was His Peace that allowed us to remain hopeful and confident in the midst of a situation that didn’t justify feeling anything other than frustration and defeat. His Peace is real and powerful.

Power

God’s Power registers on several levels. Romans 1:20 refers to His Power being evident in creation which strikes a real chord within me in that I find myself both awestruck and humbled when I consider things like the birth of my children, the stars on a clear night or the roar of the ocean. Even something as seemingly insignificant as a blade of grass represents some truly impressive complexities that blatantly point to a Powerful Creator.

On a more personal note, His Power allows me the ability to make decisions based on a Strength that goes beyond what I'm capable of. Things like jealousy, bitterness, temptation and anger are all very natural and even unavoidable. Unavoidable, that is, unless I allow His Power to affect my disposition. When I do, vice is replaced with virtue and while it might appear to be self-control, it is God's Power in me producing the behavior. One might argue that humans are capable of demonstrating noble characteristics, but it's the difference between appearing a certain way and actually being a certain way. I can appear to be at peace, but inside be upset. Christ's Peace goes beyond what I can justify or manufacture on my own, thus it isn't subject to those things that would otherwise compromise it, however normal or understandable those things might be. That's the Power of God.

If a miracle is defined as something that God has done, than everything, regardless of how seemingly commonplace must be evaluated through the lens of God's constant activity and intervention. I was diagnosed with oesto-arthritis and was told that I would need both of my hips replaced when I was 38 years old. I prayed for healing and while God didn't heal me the way I had hoped, He healed me nevertheless. Rather than doing something that didn't involve surgery, He did use a scalpel and my recovery was so complete, I was able to run the Marine Corps Marathon. Again, that's the Power of God.

Also, in the aftermath of my Dad's yearlong stay at the hospital, my Mom was confronted with some medical bills that could only be described as enormous. She had been out of work for several months and God's Power was displayed in the way He provided for her. People she didn't even know sent her money and collectively it was enough to pay the bills. Still, the hospital bills were incalculable. In what can only be described as miraculous, the hospital simply forgave the entire debt. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were simply eradicated from the record. And He continues to take care of her even to this day. That's the Power of God.

What you're describing doesn't sound especially supernatural. I could get the same thing from a motivational speaker.

The motivational speaker is going to point you to your own reflection in the mirror. They're going to tell you that you can do it, that you've got what it takes to succeed. The emphasis is on you. With Jesus, the emphasis is on Him. My resources are drawn not from within, rather they come from above and where human attributes are prone to falter, God's Power and Wisdom is perfect (Ps 18:30; Phil 2:13).

You've quoted the Bible more than once so far. You're basing a lot of your belief on a book that's been criticized as being less that accurate, let alone reliable.

The Bible has been criticized, but it's also been validated through both science and archeology.

There are situations where the bible does appear mistaken, but oftentimes it's just a matter of looking beyond the surface in order to find a plausible explanation. For

example, the accuracy of the book of Luke has been called into question because it references a time frame that doesn't line up with what contemporary archeology suggests. Luke mentions a tax dictated by Caesar Augustus during the time that Quirinius was governor of Syria, yet, according to Josephus, a Jewish historian, Quirinius was governor in 6AD. Luke mentions him as being governor during the reign of Herod the Great who passed away in 4 BC. Some would say that this discrepancy proves that the bible is flawed and less than trustworthy. But an ancient manuscript was found that mentions a prominent Roman soldier who served as the governor of Syria twice. The manuscript could be referring to Quirinius or it could be referring to Quintilius Varus who served from 6 – 4 BC and again from 2 BC – 1 AD. Between his two governorships was Senitius Saturninus, whose tenure lasted from 4 to 2 BC. Tertullian refers to Imperial records that document a census was taken during this time. The New Testament word for “governor” (hegemon) could actually be any one of a number of civil positions so Quirinius could very well have been an assistant to Saturninus. The fact that Quirinius was a very accomplished soldier as well as a capable administrator makes him an obvious choice as far as someone who Augustus would've chosen to help raise the tax dollars necessary to fund the military maneuvers that had been going on in the Pisidian highlands since 12 BC. Whether Quirinius was governor twice or someone else was governor twice, in either scenario Quirinius could very well have been the Imperial authority responsible for the tax.

To see more about Quirinius and the apparent discrepancy in the book of Luke, refer to the end of this Testimony and see the attached article entitled “On an objection about Luke, Quirinius, and Herods.”

The bible is so utterly amazing. In its pages you find wisdom that transcends anything a mere human being could possibly come up with. The Word of God is just that. The words in Scripture are the Words of God. To read them, and even more importantly apply them, is to realize a life that goes beyond merely existing. To truly live, to be genuinely wise, begins exactly where Scripture says it begins: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...” (Prov 1:7). To criticize the Bible and hurl accusations at it requires an arrogance that is willing to scowl at the 2000 years worth of Peace and Redemption it has revealed to countless millions of people. To adhere to the Word of God is to both enjoy and personify Divine Love and Grace. While there may be some questions concerning the bible's content, the logical starting point is the one where the human powers of reason and observation are first called into question, and not the accuracy of the Scriptures. It's like looking at a car that's running like a top and being skeptical of it's performance simply because you don't understand how it works. That's not only illogical; it's ridiculously prideful and immature.

But even where there are some legitimate questions, everything must be subordinated to the question of, “Who is the Christ?” Eternity is going to be determined by your answer to that question. Being able to figure out whether Cornelius approached Jesus in person as opposed to sending a messenger is infinitely inferior to the consideration of Christ and did He die and come back to life. Everything else pales in comparison.

You seem so certain. Why is it so seemingly illusive for those who are on the outside looking in?

Christianity, though it is everything we need, requires us to do the very thing we as humans balk at. We must admit that we cannot do it ourselves. Every other religion offers a program where through discipline and resolve we can earn our way into Heaven. We like to hear that we're capable. The Jews are legendary for their codes and regimens. A Muslim is expected to pray five times a day after first going through a very thorough cleansing that includes cleaning your nostrils by sniffing water three times. Not only are these rites exhausting, they are powerless to change our human nature and alter nothing as far as our eternal status in the eyes of a Perfect God. Still we would rather cling to the notion that we can merit Divine Favor than accept Jesus' gift of grace and atonement. The fact is Christianity isn't at all illusive. But while it is simple and easy to understand, it is difficult for many because it insists upon surrender and the acknowledgement of our incapability, and we as human beings don't want to admit to any of that.

In First Corinthians 2:12 where it says, "For we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." This would be the one aspect of the gospel message that does pose a challenge to the human intellect. We are limited in what we can understand let alone perceive. The Spirit of God must enable us to understand our need as well as His Solution. Paul freely admits that the cross is utter foolishness to the majority of people who hear it (1 Cor 1:20-25). The Spirit must reveal it. If you limit your exploration of Jesus to a mere academic analysis, you're going to come up short because the mind is incapable of absorbing all that is necessary. Unless the Holy Spirit cuts in, we're dancing with a perspective forever out of step. We may hear the music but it doesn't make sense and we want to insist that we're the ones who set the tempo. We allow God to lead, however, and suddenly we're waltzing with grace. That's the role of the Spirit and without Him we regard His Orchestra as unintelligible when in fact it's the sweetest music we'll ever hear.

Your perspective on some controversial issues seems dogmatic at times. What makes you think you're right and how can you be so close-minded?

Should you come to a busy intersection, you're not being close-minded by not crossing. By waiting until there's no cars coming, you guarantee yourself a safe walk across the street. Some people look at an issue and they ignore the biblical absolutes that apply. They step in front of an oncoming car believing they've got the right of way and wind up hurt or worse.

I am dogmatic as far as whether or not I believe the bible is True. There are far too many examples of Scriptural guidelines that have been proven right down through the ages. These same things can be scientifically and logically validated apart from the bible so even if you're skeptical of whether or not the bible is the Word of God, you can still regard it as being an accurate source of moral guidance.

So I choose to look both ways before I cross the street. I do so for a number of reasons, but certainly at the top of the list is that it just makes sense. The reality of an oncoming car is not hard to appreciate, unless you're bound and determined to interject your own reality and disregard the obvious. Those who do scoff at Scripture reinforce the logic of adhering to biblical guidelines by virtue of the consequences they are inevitably confronted with.

The thing is, "controversy" surfaces only if there are no Absolutes that apply. Many of the controversial issues that permeate our culture are specifically addressed in Scripture. There are bottom lines, thus there is no real controversy, it is merely the dialogue that occurs between two parties when one side refuses to accept the bible as being Authoritative. The debates become prolific and complex in the absence of Absolutes. But when they are acknowledged, the issue in question becomes far easier to process and resolve.

Verses

I and the Father are one." ³¹Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, ³²but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" ³³"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." (Jn 10:30-33)

⁸Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

⁹Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (Jn 14:8-9)

Do not those who plot evil go astray? But those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness. (Prov 14:22)

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. (Prov 15:22)

Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. (Prov 16:3)

Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance. (Prov 20:18)

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer 29:11)

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph 2:10)

¹⁶your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. (Ps 139:16)

But when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth... (Jn 16:13)

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Lk 23:42-43)

¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 Jn 5:13)

²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:2)

¹⁹And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:19)

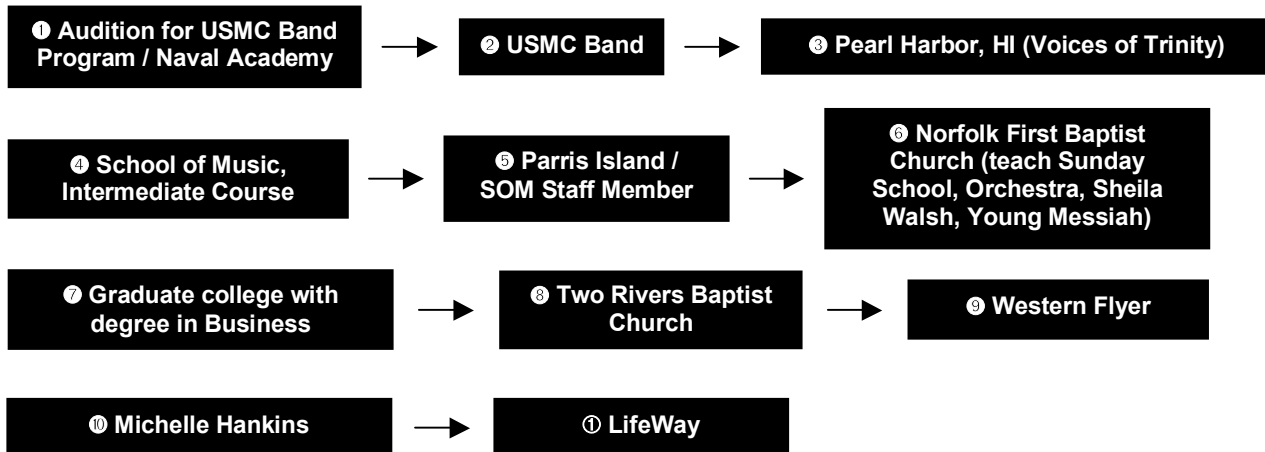
²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Rom 1:20)

³⁰ As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. (Ps 18:30)

¹³for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Phil 2:13)

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (1 Cor 1:20-25)

Life Graphic



❶ I took the SATs twice and the ACT exams once. I was bound and determined to get into the Naval Academy. It wasn't until I was in Boot Camp that I realized just how much a part music played in my life and I was grateful that God put a loving Hand in front of me that prevented my being admitted into the Naval Academy. It showed me that when you're committing your way to Him, even when something looks really good, I can rest assured that if it doesn't work out, He's got something better in store.

❷ I graduated in the top 15% of my class at the School of Music which gave me the opportunity to choose where I wanted to serve. I asked for Hawaii which was only available for those who had a minimum of three years left in their enlistment. Nevertheless, because of it being a reward for having graduated at the top of my class, I reported to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii and had a great tour of duty. Had I not been given Hawaii, I would've reported instead to Camp Pendleton.

❸ While serving in Hawaii, I got involved with a local choir which served in a church just outside the gates of Pearl. I was the only white person in the congregation and it was a wonderful experience both musically and spiritually. It was at Trinity Missionary Baptist Church I learned how to participate at church, as opposed to merely showing up.

❹ - ❺ I had harbored a dream to be an Instructor at the Armed Forces School of Music for some time. I had actually considered it prior to Hawaii, but I was encouraged to get some Fleet experience first, and I'm glad I did. When I reported back to the School of Music for the Intermediate Course, I wanted very much to remain at the School on Staff. I learned later that I would've been stationed at Parris Island had orders not been cut to remain at the School. Once again, God opened the door and His Plan proved to be infinitely superior to anything I could've anticipated.

⑥ Besides the School of Music, I encountered an entire new world of opportunity at Norfolk Baptist Church. There I met Larry White, Ken Hemphill and Richard Kingsmore – all of whom would go on to become prominent personalities in Southern Baptist life. I also met Norman Miller who would later give me my first gig outside the Marine Corps – the Young Messiah Tour. All of these opportunities can be traced back to some seemingly insignificant decisions surrounding either the Naval Academy or auditioning for the Marine Corps Band.

In addition to the musical opportunities, it was at Norfolk First Baptist that I began to teach Sunday School. “Teaching” would be revealed as something that God had gifted me for and would later become that basis for my career at LifeWay.

⑦ Being at the School of Music provided me with a consistent schedule which allowed for being able to maintain a consistent college class load. I graduated with a degree in Business in 1990.

⑧ I had tried repeatedly to get the Youth Minister from Two Rivers Baptist Church on the phone while I was still stationed in Virginia. I had gotten a copy of the Nashville Yellow Pages and had decided that Two Rivers might be a good place to start pursuing gigs just because it had one of the largest ads in the phone book.

While I never did get Med Skeens on the phone, I visited Two Rivers first once I actually got settled in town. That church would become my church home and I would meet several people who would establish themselves as prominent personalities in my life, some of which I would receive an invitation from to become part of a Country Band.

⑨ “Western Flyer” began with Chris Marion, Danny Myrick and Brent Lamb – all of whom attended Two Rivers Baptist Church. We would get a record deal and tour all over the country. It was a dream come true. It would also lead to a gig in Chattanooga where I would meet Michelle Hankins.

⑩ I had been told that my standards were too high and that I might have to settle for something less than what my fantasies commanded. Nevertheless, I met and married Michelle Hankins and my life with her has been nothing short of amazing.

⑪ While I had assumed that my life’s work would be centered around music, God allowed me the opportunity to pursue it along with something more stable and something that involves front line Kingdom work. LifeWay has been a great place to work and has been a place where my marketable talents have been both honed and increased.

On an objection about Luke, Quirinius, and Herods:

[Updated Sept 1, 1999]

Robin Lane Fox, *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible*, p. 28-29. (cited in Lowder's pages on *The Jury is In*) writes ...

"The difficulty begins on one small point but spreads from it, like dry rot, to bring larger constructions to the ground.

Why do I all of a sudden smell polemic? ;>) ...would you consider 'dry rot' a 'value laden' term? hmm...

Quirinius, the governor of Syria whom Luke's Gospel mentions, is known from a careful history of affairs in Judea which was compiled by Josephus, an educated Jew, writing in Greek at Rome between c. 75 and c. 80. Josephus had his own prejudices and areas of interest, but he worked with a framework of hard facts which were freely available for checking and which he had collected responsibly. According to Josephus, Quirinius was governor of Syria with authority over Judea in AD 6, when the province was brought under direct Roman control. The year was a critical moment in Jewish history, as important to its province as the 1972 to Northern Ireland, the start of direct rule. On such a fact, at such a moment, Josephus and his sources cannot be brushed aside. There is however, an awkward problem. Luke's Gospel links Jesus's birth with Quirinius

I may have a problem with the word 'with' but keep going....

and with King Herod, but in AD 6 Herod had long disappeared. He had died soon after an eclipse of the moon which is dated by astronomers to 12-13 March 4 BC, although a minority of scholars have argued for 5 BC instead.

So far, so good....

The Gospel, therefore, assumes that Quirinius and King Herod were contemporaries, when they were separated by ten years or more.

I assume you mean contemporaries in office--they were certainly contemporaries in life...Quirinius, at the time of King Herod's death was doing military expeditions in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire (Tacitus, *Annals* 3:48; Florus, *Roman History* 2:31), with some evidence indicating that he either was a co-ruler with the governor of Syria (the somewhat inept Quintilius Varus) or at least placed in charge of the 14-year census in Palestine. Varus was famous for the later fiasco at the Teutoburger forest in Germany (9 ad) and at his appointment as Gov.. of Syria in 7 BC was largely 'untested'.

The census was due in 8-7 BC, and Augustus could easily have ordered his trusted Quirinius (fresh from subduing the Pisidian highlanders) to assist in this volatile project. Herod I had recently lost favor of the emperor and was probably dragging his feet on taking the census--a process with always enraged the difficult Jews! This would have pushed the timeframe into the 5 BC mark, which fits the general data.

There is no doubt about the Herod in question. When the great King Herod died, his kingdom was split between his sons, two of whom did add Herod to their names. Herod Antipas locally in Galilee as a tetrarch until 39, but Luke 1:5 connects the Annunciation with Herod `king of Judea':

This is correct...the Annunciation occurred around the census point, under King Herod--the reference in 1.5 is correct...so why did you use the word 'but'? Did you think the annunciation was under Antipas? King Herod (I) was 'king of Judea' but was also 'king of galilee'..the terms would not have been understood as restrictive (king of 'only') BEFORE the kingdom divided...

When he refers to Herod Antipas at 3:1, he correctly calls him tetrarch, not king. Herod Archelaus ruled Judea until AD 6, but only as an ethnarch: like Matthew 2:22, Luke might have misdescribed him as king, but, like Matthew, he would have called him Archelaus or Herod Archelaus.

You have confused something here. Both Luke 1.5 and 2.2 BOTH refer to King Herod the Great...3.1 refers to Antipas...no problem so far

At 1:5 the Herod must be the great King Herod, just as Matthew's Gospel describes. In Matthew the Nativity coincides with the great Herod, Massacrer of the Innocents, whose death is a reason for the return from the Flight into Egypt.

Correct.

Luke's Gospel, therefore, assumes that King Herod and the governor Quirinius were contemporaries, but they were separated by over ten years or more. The incoherent dating is only the start of the problem.

I think I already explained this above.

Also, it is worth noting that we have a MS that describes a soldier who was 'legate of Syria' TWICE during this timeframe.

There are two main interpretations of this MS: one is that it refers to Q. Varus (placing Quirinius as a procurator during the birth of Christ), and the other that it refers to Quirinius himself.

The first option is defended by Ernest Martin in [CKC:90](#):

" A Latin inscription found in 1764 about one-half mile south of the ancient villa of Quintilius Varus (at Tivoli, 20 miles east of Rome) states that the subject of the inscription had twice been governor of Syria. This can only refer to Quintilius Varus, who was Syrian governor at two different times. Numismatic evidence shows he ruled Syria from 6 to 4 B.C., and other historical evidence indicates that Varus was again governor from 2 B.C. to A.D. I. Between his two governorships was Sentius Saturninus, whose tenure lasted from 4 to 2 B.C. Significantly, Tertullian (third century) said the imperial records showed that censuses were conducted in Judea during the time of Sentius Saturninus. (*Against Marcion* 4:7). Tertullian also placed the birth of Jesus in 3 or 2 B.C. This is precisely when Saturninus would have been governor according to my new interpretation. That the Gospel of Luke says Quirinius was governor of Syria when the census was taken is resolved by Justin Martyr's statement (second century) that Quirinius was only a procurator (not governor) of the province (*Apology* 1:34). In other words, he was simply an assistant to Saturninus, who was the actual governor as Tertullian stated."

The second option is favored by William Ramsey (NBD, s.v. "Quirinius"):

"The possibility that Quirinius may have been governor of Syria on an earlier occasion (*Chronology of the NT) has found confirmation in the eyes of a number of scholars (especially W. M. Ramsay) from the testimony of the *Lapis Tiburtinus* (CIL, 14. 3613). This inscription, recording the career of a distinguished Roman officer, is unfortunately mutilated, so that the officer's name is missing, but from the details that survive he could very well be Quirinius. It contains a statement that when he became imperial legate of Syria he entered upon that office 'for the second time' (Lat. *iterum*). The question is: did he become imperial legate of Syria for the second time, or did he simply receive an imperial legateship for the second time, having governed another province in that capacity on the earlier occasion?...The wording is ambiguous. Ramsay held that he was appointed an additional legate of Syria between 10 and 7 bc, for the purpose of conducting the Homanadensian war, while the civil administration of the province was in the hands of other governors, including Sentius Saturninus (8-6 bc), under whom, according to Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.* 4. 19), the census of Lk. 2:1ff. was held.

Under either of these scenarios, SOMEONE served twice, and under either of these scenarios, Quirinius could EASILY have been responsible for the census.

And curiously enough, even if that were NOT the case somehow, the linguistic data of the last few decades indicates that Luke 2.1 should be translated 'BEFORE the census of

Quirinius' instead of the customary 'FIRST census of Quirinius'--see Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament*, T&T Clark: 1966, pp. 23,24 and *Syntax*, p. 32. This would 'solve the problem' without even requiring two terms of office for Q.

And, while we are talking about Greek here...the term Luke uses for Quirinius' 'governorship' is the VERY general term *hegemon*, which in extra-biblical Greek was applied to prefects, provincial governors, and even Caesar himself. In the NT it is similarly used as a 'wide' term, applying to procurators--pilate, festus, felix--and to general 'rulers' (Mt 2.6). [*The New Intl. Dict. of New Test. Theology* (ed. Brown) gives as the range of meaning: "leader, commander, chief" (vol 1.270)...this term would have applied to Quirinius at MANY times in his political career, and as a general term, Syria would have had several individuals that could be properly so addressed at the same time. Remember, Justin Martyr called him 'procurator' in *Apology* 1:34, which is also covered by this term.] My point is...nothing is really out of order here...

Luke's Nativity story hinges on its `decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.' `Caesar Augustus' was the Roman Emperor, but if the Nativity took place in the reign of the King Herod the Great, the Jews were still Herod's subjects, members of a client kingdom, not a province under direct Roman rule.

You are somewhat mistaken here. It is true that Judea did not technically become a Roman province until 6 AD, but the facts prior to that indicate much tighter authority and control than your statement might lead one to believe. Rome did a military conquest before Herod the Great was even born. Pompey attacked Jerusalem and even invaded the Temple. was made a tributary (read: PAID TRIBUTE\$) to Rome until Caesar defeated Pompey in Egypt around 48 BC. Herod the Great's dad had aided Caesar in that endeavor and so won the favor of Julius Caesar (and with it a procuratorship of, plus Roman citizenship and exemption from taxes.) Then in 47 BC, the daddy Herod appointed the son Herod to be governor of Galilee...still completely under Roman rule. He still had to be appointed tetrarch by Antony-- still a thrall, eh?!. He was also proclaimed 'king' by the Roman leaders (Octavius and Antony) in 40 bc--but he had to re-conquer the land from the Parthians, which he did in 37bc. As a 'client kingdom', they were still under the authority of Rome (all of the rulers, for example, were appointed--including ALL the Herods--and ratified by Rome.)

Actually, when I keep reading your paragraph, it sounds like you are calling Luke mistaken in referring to Rome as 'driving the issue' of the census. He is INDEED making that point, but HE is correct in that...The client-kings WERE still subject to Roman enrollment decrees. [see Blaiklock, *The Century of the New Testament*,(1962) and *The Archeology of the New Testament* (1970)]

The status of client-kings in the Roman Empire left them responsibility for their subjects' taxation.

Not decision-making authority--they couldn't say 'no', but local execution of the enrollment process--"yes".

Relations between the Emperor Augustus and King Herod had often been stormy and had even led to threats of Roman interference which Herod and his envoys had to avert. However, their conflicts never caused the removal of Herod's royal status, although this was the only way in which his kingdom could have been taxed on the Roman model in accordance with orders from the Roman Emperor. It is not just that Herod the Great never coincided with Quirinius the governor: he never coincided with a Roman taxing of."

The relationship between Augustus and King Herod had its ups and downs, indeed, but the argument that his Roman-granted title of king meant that his nation was exempt from taxes/tribute/census is just flat wrong. As I hinted at up above, it had become a tribute-paying tributary since its conquest by Pompey LONG BEFORE King Herod gets his title! (more below on this).

Augustus never issued a decree to tax the whole world.

Robin Lane Fox, *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in the Bible*, p. 29.

"It is even doubtful if the Emperor Augustus ever issued a decree to Rome's provinces that `all the world should be taxed.' Certainly, Romans did take censuses in individual provinces which were ruled directly by their governors. They were not, however, co-ordinated by an order from Augustus to all the world, at least so far as our evidence goes.

Read: argument from silence! (see below the points from *Historian's Fallacies*)

As that evidence extends through histories, local inscriptions and the papyrus returns of tax-payers in Egypt, it is immensely unlikely that a new edict of such consequence has escaped our knowledge.

Who are you trying to kid? You and I are looking at the same sources, no doubt, and there are HUGE, HUGE, HUGE gaps in the records! 'immensely unlikely'?!

In AD 6 we do know that Augustus was enacting a new tax on inheritance to help pay for his armies;

BTW, the taxation to support his army, is the main reason it is believed that Quirinius assisted in the taxing of 8-5 BC...his extended military maneuvers on the Pisidian highlands (dating from around 12 BC) would have required additional financing...

however, the tax affected only Roman citizens, not Jews of Nazareth, and there was no need for a worldwide census to register their names.

Remember, the census in AD 6 is NOT the one of Luke 2.2 (of 8-6 BC.)...but the census of AD 6 DID hit the Jews pretty heavily...at least 600 talents as a nation acc. to Josephus (*Antiq.* 17.320; *Jewish War* 2.97--cited in Jeremias' *Jerusalem in the Times of Jesus: An*

investigation into the economic and social conditions during the New Testament period, Fortress: 1969). As a national tax, it DID effect the Jewish folk--loads like this are ALWAYS 'distributed to the people'(!) in addition to the already oppressive tax structure of the Herods...

And Luke does NOT place the 'worldwide census' at the time of the AD 6 tax...but rather puts it some time BEFORE the Syrian-based one in 7-5 BC...

But more accurately, Luke was probably not referring to a taxation census at all--simply a "registration". Registrations were normally associated with (1) taxation (above discussion); (2) military service (Jews were exempt) and (3) special government "ballots". We have conclusive evidence that an empire-wide (in decree, not necessarily execution, of course) registration occurred in the time frame described by Luke! Martin [[CKC:89-90](#)] summarizes the literary, archeological, and iconographic evidence for this:

" A sixth reason for placing the nativity of Jesus in 3 or 2 B.C. is the coincidence of this date with the New Testament account that Jesus was born at the time when a Roman census was being conducted: "There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the [Roman] world should be registered" (Luke 2:1). Historians have not been able to find any empire-wide census or registration in the years 7-5 B.C., but there is **a reference to such a registration of all the Roman people not long before 5 February 2 B.C. written by Caesar Augustus himself**: "While I was administering my thirteenth consulship [2 B.C.] the senate and the equestrian order **and the entire Roman people** gave me the title Father of my Country" (*Res Gestae* 35, italics added). This award was given to Augustus on 5 February 2 B.C., therefore the registration of citizen approval must have taken place in 3 B.C. Orosius, in the fifth century, also said that Roman records of his time revealed that a census was indeed held when Augustus was made "the first of men"--an apt description of his award "Father of the Country"--at a time when all the great nations gave an oath of obedience to Augustus (6:22, 7:2). Orosius dated the census to 3 B.C. And besides that, Josephus substantiates that an oath of obedience to Augustus was required in Judea not long before the death of Herod (*Antiquities* 17:41-45). This agrees nicely in a chronological sense with what Luke records. But more than that, an inscription found in Paphlagonia (eastern Turkey), also dated to 3 B.C., mentions an "oath sworn by all the people in the land at the altars of Augustus in the temples of Augustus in the various districts." And dovetailing precisely with this inscription, the early (fifth century) Armenian historian, Moses of Khoren, said the census that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem was conducted by Roman agents in Armenia where they set up "the image of Augustus Caesar in every temple.". The similarity of this language is strikingly akin to the wording on the Paphlagonian inscription describing the oath taken in 3 B.C. These indications can allow us to reasonably conclude that the oath (of Josephus, the Paphlagonian inscription, and Orosius) and the

census (mentioned by Luke, Orosius, and Moses of Khoren) were one and the same. All of these things happened in 3 B.C."

What this means is that we have *very, very clear evidence of an empire-wide registration* in the time frame required! (How much more data do you need?!)

In Judea under Quirinius, we know from Josephus's histories of something more appropriate, not a worldwide decree but a local census in AD 6 to assess Judea when the province passed from rule by Herod's family to direct rule by Rome. Although this census was local, it caused a notorious outcry, not least because some of the Jews argued that the innovation was contrary to scripture and the will of God. According to the third Gospel, the census which took Joseph to Bethlehem was 'the first while Quirinius was governor of Syria.'

I have already pointed out that 'first while' is probably a mistranslation of the text -- 'before' is more in line with *koine* idiom (see the reference of N. Turner, above)

Quirinius's census was indeed the first, but it belonged in AD 6 when King Herod, the story's other marker, was long since dead."

A couple of concluding points:

- That Augustus MIGHT HAVE issued a world-wide census decree (a record of which is only preserved in Luke's gospel) is ALTOGETHER reasonable and plausible. The data about Augustus' 'propensity' to count and tax is well known. For example, he documents, in his own records, how he counted the Roman nation some three times (*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 8--from *Roman Civilization--SourceBook II: the Empire*, eds. Lewis and Reinhold, p 12)., and increasingly levied detailed taxes throughout his reign--with the attendant increase in bribery and vice (see Gibbons' *Rise and Fall*). As vain as he was, it would not be surprising at all for this to have occurred.
- It was also customary for the Roman empire to take a census when there was a change of local government (e.g. when Archelaus was deposed in AD 6, one of Quirinius' first tasks was to liquidate his estate and hold a census to determine the tribute load.) The implication of this pattern for our discussion is that when Varus became governor of Syria in 7 BC, one of his first acts would have been to take a census (the one which would have produced the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem for Joseph/Mary.)
- We KNOW Augustus instituted a 14-year census-cycle for EGYPT in 10/9 BC...(*SourceBook II*, above, p. 388)...Not only does this give us more confirmation that Augustus was a "countin' sorta guy" but it may reflect a local execution of a 'worldwide decree' of Augustus.
- To assert that Augustus did not make such a decree is an affirmative historical statement. And, "the burden of proof, for any historical assertion, always rests upon its author" (Hackett, *Historians' Fallacies*, Harper: 1970, p 63.).

- And to argue that Luke was wrong because there was NO worldwide decree (because we don't have a record of the specific decree) is to make a common mistake in historical method--arguing from 'silence' (some silence-arguments can be made to work, though). Hackett again:

"evidence must always be affirmative. Negative evidence is a contradiction in terms--it is no evidence at all. The nonexistence of an object [read: "worldwide decree"-gmm] is established not by nonexistent evidence [read: "we can't find the decree so far"-gmm] but by affirmative evidence of the fact that it did not, or could not exist [e.g. a document that says it did not happen--gmm]" (above, p62)

- And, in spite of the above methodological and background problems, we DO HAVE CONCRETE EVIDENCE of an empire-wide Augustian registration--literary, archeological, iconographic.
- To summarize this section on the 'the missing census of 7/5 BC': I HAVE affirmative evidence and good arguments for such a census--
 - Luke, a very, very, very reliable historian SAYS SO!
 - Augustus was this 'type of person' with repeated, known actions along this line.
 - These kinds of events occurred at major changes in ruling personnel--a situation that obtained in Palestine at the time Luke indicates.
 - Parallel events occurred in other Roman-controlled areas, in roughly the same time (i.e. Egypt 10/9 BC).
 - There is not a scrap of contrary data.
 - Quirinius' participation is such an event (along with Varus) is not only possible, but highly likely.
 - We have positive evidence of an empire-wide decree of Augustus within a year or two of the required date.

Glenn M. Miller, 2/24/95 (updated 5/26/97)



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