

The Apologetics of Jesus: Survey and Significance

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If apologetics is defined broadly as providing evidence and arguments for the truth of the Christian Faith, then Jesus was an apologist since He used many different kinds of evidence in presenting His message. And if apologetics is divided into two broad categories of evidential and non-evidential apologetics, then Jesus was an evidentialist for the same reason. He definitely was not a fideist since He did not simply call on people to believe without evidence. In fact, He provided very persuasive arguments in support of His truth claims. Further, within the two overall classifications of rational and non-rational apologetics, Jesus was on the side of reason. As for more precisely which particular contemporary classification of apologetics Jesus would fit into, such as presuppositional or classical apologetics, that must await the analysis below to determine more specifically how He argued apologetically.

The Various Ways in Which Jesus Used Apologetics

Jesus engaged people apologetically in at least nine different ways.¹ Each way fit the occasion and audience. It was contextualized apologetics. He knew precisely what would be effective with His listeners, and He used apologetics masterfully to persuade them of the truth He was presenting.

Jesus' Use of Testimony (Witness) as an Apologetic

In John 5, Jesus presented five credible witnesses: John the Baptist, His works, the Father, the Old Testament, and Moses. In John 8, Jesus points to the testimony of His heavenly Father and added the testimony of Abraham and of His own sinless life. The power of Jesus' argument rested in the integrity and credibility of His witnesses. Not only did He present forceful witnesses, but in the process of defending Himself, He turns the tables on His accusers. No reasonable Jew had any valid grounds on which to reject Jesus' witnesses. His apologetic use of witnesses relevant to the hearers was both comprehensive and compelling.

From these examples of Jesus we learn several key lessons. First, in making His case, Jesus gave reasons and evidence for His claims. He did not expect His listeners simply to believe or make a blind leap of faith. Second, the evidence Jesus gave included first-hand, eyewitness and supernatural events. Third, Jesus provided multiple witnesses in defense of His claims. This was a key part of Jesus' apologetics which included the testimony from credible witnesses. Thus, given His monotheistic context, Jesus was an evidentialist, not a fideist, in that He believed in the use of evidence to convince others of the truth of His claims.

Jesus' Use of Miracles as an Apologetic

The monotheistic Jews to whom Jesus spoke understood miracles as divine confirmations of truth claims. The Jewish Rabbi Nicodemus said: "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs [miracles] that You do unless God is with Him" (Jn. 3:2). It was customary for God to validate His spokesperson in this way. Both Moses (Ex. 4) and Elijah the prophet (1 Kings 18) were confirmed by miracles. Indeed, the Jews of Jesus day sought for a sign from God (Mt. 12:39).

Professor Blomberg correctly states that "The purposes of Jesus' miracle-working ministry have been described as 'evidential, evangelistic, empathetic, and eschatological. . . . But the primary focus is Christological—to demonstrate that Jesus is the divine Messiah and that the

kingdom of God is now breaking into human history with new force (Matthew 11:2-6, Luke 11:20).”²

In Deuteronomy 18:14-20, God promised that He would one day raise another prophet like Moses through whom He would speak. The miracles of Christ were signs that He was that prophet and more. The Jews seeing the signs should have made the connection. Although not everyone was convinced, many saw the connection. In John 2, it was His miraculous work of turning water into wine that caused His disciples to place their faith in Him. The text reads, “This was the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed His glory and His disciples put their faith in Him.” In John 3 the Jewish leader Nicodemus recognized miracles as a confirmation of God (Jn. 3:2).

Several words are used for miracle in the gospels.³ *Teras* occurs sixteen times in the New Testament and never appears alone but is used in combination with *semeion* or “signs.” It stresses the startling, imposing and amazement-waking aspect of the miracle. *Dynamis* emphasizes the power revealed in the miracle and the spiritual energy behind it. *Endoxos* emphasizes miracles as being works in which the glory of God and the Son is revealed. *Paradoxos* is used only in Luke 5:26 and it is translated “remarkable things.” It emphasizes that a miracle is contrary to the natural order of the world. *Thaumasios* is used only in Matthew 21:15 and is used of something that provokes wonder. *Semeion* is used to point to the power or meaning behind the miracle, and it is the word most often used as “sign” in the Greek. It is used seventy-seven times in the New Testament and primarily in the Gospels where it is used forty-eight times. The basic meaning of *semeion* is a sign by which one recognizes a particular person or thing and serves as an authenticating mark or token. When associated with the miraculous, it can indicate a miracle accomplished by divinity or a miracle-worker which goes against the natural course of things.⁴

The terms used for miracle in the New Testament lead us to conclude that miracles are a unique and extraordinary event awakening wonder (*teras*), brought about by divine power (*dynamis*), accomplishing

some practical and benevolent work (*ergon* and *endoxos*), and authenticating the message and messenger as coming from God (*semeion*).⁵

However, there is greater meaning to miracles than just the event itself. Five dimensions to biblical miracles can be listed.⁶ First, miracles have an unusual character. As a wonder they attract attention. Second, miracles have a theological dimension. God who created and sustains the universe can intervene when He chooses to. Third, there is a moral dimension. Miracles reflect the character of God and bring glory to God. Fourth, miracles have a doctrinal dimension. They are often connected to truth claims and confirm God's message and messenger. Fifth, miracles have a teleological dimension. They are never performed to entertain but to glorify God and provide evidence for people to believe that God's authority was upon the messenger.

The miracles of Christ are unique. Not only did He perform many miracles, but there were many witnesses of them. And the nature of many of the miracles He performed placed them beyond reasonable question. He not only cured otherwise incurable diseases, but He multiplied loaves, walked on water, and raised the dead. These miracles serve as the crowning confirmation of the truth claims Christ made. Along with His resurrection, they provided "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3) of His claims to deity.

Jesus' supernatural power over the cosmos was seen by the fact that He manifested control over every category of the cosmos as listed by the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle in his *Categories*.⁷ Note Jesus' power over:

Substance (what?) - Turning water into wine

Quantity (how much?) - Feeding 5000

Quality (what kind?) - Blind man gets quality of sight

Relation (to what?) - Raising Lazarus to his relationship

Space (where?) – Healing nobleman’s son from a distance

Time (when?) – Healing an invalid of 38 years of time

Position (on what?) – Walking on water, an unnatural position

Action (from what?) – His Victorious Death

Passion (on what?) – His Triumphant Resurrection

State or Habit (under what condition?) – Catching a batch of fish under unusual conditions

When Christ establishes His kingdom on earth, all creation will be subject to Him. Sin, sickness, death, and disease will ultimately be overcome (1 Cor. 15:25-26; Rev. 21:4), and the subjects of the kingdom will never be in want. The king will supply all their needs. The miracles of Christ reflect His divine character and demonstrate His authority over creation.

Jesus’ Use of the Resurrection as an Apologetic

As the crowning miracle of His ministry, the resurrection deserves special attention. In John 11:25 Jesus stated, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.” Jesus claimed to be the source of life and the victor over physical death. Many “saviors” have made this claim, but in the unique event of His resurrection, Jesus alone confirmed it. The resurrection affirms that Jesus is unique among all people. He alone predicted His death, burial, and resurrection and accomplished this feat. The founders of all religions have died but Christ alone predicted and accomplished His resurrection from the dead. Jesus used evidence to support His claims to be the Son of God. His most powerful evidence was miracles. Miracles confirm God’s message and His messenger (Heb. 2:2-4). And the most important miracle was His

resurrection from the dead. Given a theistic context wherein miracles are possible, this remains to this day the best apologetic for the truth of Christianity.

Unlike Jesus, however, we have an added burden, namely, to show the historicity of these events.⁸ But since there is overwhelming evidence for that, the defense of and appeal to Jesus' miracle of the resurrection remains to date the most effective evidence for the deity of Christ.⁹

Jesus' Resurrection as a Fulfillment of Prophecy

Jesus' resurrection proved to be a powerful apologetic for another reason. It was a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Isa. 53:8-10 states, "By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand." He adds that the Messiah will be "cut off from the land of the living. . . ." In other words, the Messiah would be killed. However, the Messiah will also "see his offspring and prolong his days," which indicates He will be raised to life. Psalm 16:10 states that God's "Holy One" will not remain in Sheol, nor will He see "decay." In addition, Psalm Two predicted the resurrection, saying, "I will proclaim the decree of the Lord; He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession'" (Psa. 2:7-8 cf. Acts 13:33-34). Not only did Jesus claim to be the Messiah (Jn. 4:25; Mk.14:61-62), thus fulfilling the Old Testament predictions about the Messiah's resurrection, but He too predicted and accomplished it. This is unprecedented in the annals of religions.

Jesus' Use of Reason as an Apologetic

A major component of Jesus' mission was to teach and defend truth, and to correct error (Jn. 8:32). Through this process, Jesus showed Himself to be a brilliant philosopher who used the laws of logic to reveal truth, demolish arguments, and point out error. When we analyze the arguments of Jesus, we soon realize that He was the greatest thinker who ever set foot upon the earth. Contemporary philosopher Dallas Willard states, "We need to understand that Jesus is a thinker, that this is not a dirty word but an essential work, and that his other attributes do not preclude thought, but only insure that he is certainly the greatest thinker of the human race: 'the most intelligent person who ever lived on earth.' He constantly uses the power of logical insight to enable people to come to the truth about themselves and about God from the inside of their own heart and mind. Quite certainly it also played a role in his own growth in 'wisdom.'"¹⁰

Jesus used logic to expose the errors of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. While He did not articulate the laws of logic as the first principles of all thought, Jesus certainly understood them and applied them when He debated the Jewish authorities. First principles of knowledge are self-evident truths, that is, their truth is obvious and undeniable.¹¹ Since a first principle is that from which everything else in its order follows, first principles of knowledge are those basic premises from which all else follows in the realm of knowing.¹²

The use of reason and logic were essential to the apologetics of Jesus. Using carefully reasoned arguments, He dismantled the arguments of His opponents and pointed out their errors in thinking. Pointing out contradictions and fallacies in logic were methods He employed to establish His view. He also used categorical and hypothetical syllogisms. One of Jesus' favorite logical device was an *a fortiori* (with the greater force) argument.¹³

This does not mean that Jesus excluded the work of the Holy Spirit and relied exclusively on logical reasoning. The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit works with man's reasoning and rational capacity. Dr. James Sire stated that understanding God's truth comes to the *mind* — "not to

some nonrational faculty like our 'emotions' or our 'feelings.' To know God's revelation means to use our minds. This makes knowledge something we can share with others, something we can talk about. God's Word is in words with ordinary rational content."¹⁴ The Holy Spirit reveals truth to the mind of men and women before they respond to these truths with their emotions and wills. God want's to reach our hearts, but He does not bypass the head on the way to the heart.

Related to this, Dr. Roy B. Zuck reminds us that "...the Spirit is 'the Spirit of truth'" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), and that "He would not teach concepts that failed to meet the tests of truth.... The Spirit seeks to aid the Spirit-filled learner to think clearly and accurately. The interpreter must employ principles of reasoning in making inductions, deductions, analogies, and comparisons."¹⁵

Truth corresponds to reality, and it is internally consistent. Therefore, logic and reason must be used to interpret and discern truth from error. Jesus demonstrated this as He used reason to expose error and present truth. So, the use of the basic principles and procedures of reasoning were an essential part of Jesus' apologetic. All men, even in their fallen state, have this ability, and Jesus used it in attempting to help them see the truth. Fallen as they are, they are still in God's image (Gen. 1:27; 9:6)—so much so that God's general revelation is said to be "manifest" to them and "clearly seen" by them so that they are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:19-20). For God's image in fallen humanity is effaced but not erased. If sin had destroyed fallen man's ability to see the truth of general revelation, then he would not be accountable.

Jesus' Use of Parables as an Apologetic

Jesus' use of parables demonstrates the value of stories to convey a message and persuade an audience which cannot always be achieved by direct discourse. Perhaps this is part of the reason for Jesus' reluctance to be more forthright in His claim to deity. As a direct claim, this is too much for most people to swallow. However, direct admissions that He was the Messiah were made in private, one to a Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:25) and the other to the high priest at His trial (Mk. 14:61-62). And

even His admission in the later case drew a violent reaction and the charge of blasphemy (Mk. 14:64). Indeed, even more covert claims to deity evoked a strong response (Jn. 10:30-33; Mk. 2:5-7). Little wonder that Jesus used parables to lessen the offense of more overt claims.

Jesus' apologetic technique was simple but powerful. Relying on their knowledge of the Old Testament, Jesus argued as follows: 1) In the Old Testament God is portrayed as the Rock, Shepherd, Master of the Vineyard, etc. 2) I am all of these. 3) Therefore, I am God. A scholarly discussion of Jesus' use of parables to show His deity was set forth by Dr. Philip Payne in his Cambridge dissertation.¹⁶

The indirect method of claiming deity through story has the added value of eliciting self discovery. It was only after Jesus had taught His disciples in parables that He asked them who they thought He was which elicited that great confession of Peter: "You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God!" (Matthew 16:16) So, by adding the interrogative "Socratic" method to the parabolic method, Jesus was able to persuade His followers of the most outlandish claim any human being has ever made—"I am God almighty in human flesh!"¹⁷ This was an incredible apologetic technique whose value needs to be exploited as we do pre-evangelism in this post-modern world that is so opposed to the claims of Christ.

Jesus' Use of Direct Discourse as an Apologetic

In addition to Jesus claim to be the "I am" (God) who existed before Abraham (Jn. 8:58), John alone contains the famous seven "I am" statements of Christ. Jesus claimed: 1) "I am the Bread of Life" (6:35); 2) "I am the Light of the World" (8:12); 3) "I am the Gate for the sheep" (10:7, 9); 4) "I am the Good Shepherd" (10:11, 14); 5) "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (11:25); 6) "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" (14:6); 7) "I am the true vine" (Jn. 15:1). He also used direct discourse with both individuals, like Nicodemus (Jn. 3) and the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4), as well as many groups, including the Pharisees, Sadducees, lawyers, and politicians of his time (see Mt. 22).

Since Jesus' claim to be God is crucial to both the uniqueness and

truth of the Christian religion, it is of great apologetic importance to establish this claim. Jesus did this in His discourse in numerous ways, both direct and indirect. For He claimed to be and to do what only God can be and do, and in many ways, including the outright claims to be Yahweh, the Great I Am (Jn. 5:58) who revealed Himself to Moses. On many occasions those to whom He spoke recognized His claim to be God (Mk. 2:10; Jn. 8:59; 10:33; Mat. 26:65). Thus, this pillar of Christian apologetics was firmly established by Christ. For in a Jewish monotheistic context (where a theistic God exists and miracles are possible), Jesus not only claimed to be God in human flesh, but He also proved to be God by numerous supernatural events done in connection with His claims to be God. Thus, these direct discourse claims form an essential link in the apologetic of Jesus.

Jesus' Use of Prophecy as an Apologetic

Deuteronomy 18 provides a crucial test for a false prophet: "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken." In short, a false prophecy is indication of a false prophet of which Jesus said we should "beware" (Mt. 7:15 cf. 24:11). Further, the sign of a true prophet is that he can unerringly predict the future. The true God said through Isaiah, "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me; declaring the end from the beginning. . . . Indeed I have spoken it; I will bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isa. 46:9, 11). God said to Isaiah, "Even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass, I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, 'My idol had done them' (Isa. 48:5). "Besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do the things that are coming and shall come?" (Isa. 44:6-7). In brief, only God can accurately and repeatedly predict the future, particularly the distant future.

Given this background, Jesus' use of prediction takes on a special apologetic value. He was personally aware of the apologetic value of prophecy. Jesus said, "See, I have told you before hand," implying that this would add to its credulity (Mt. 24:25). In John 14:29 He said explic-

itly, "I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe."

Jesus' Use of the Old Testament Prophecies about Himself

Jesus was conscious that He was fulfilling Old Testament prophecies about Himself. He said so on a number of occasions. For example, knowing about the prediction in Zechariah of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus instructed two disciples to get the donkey He would need to ride on into the city (Mt. 21:1-3). In the very next verse it says, "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'Tell the daughter of Zion, "Behold your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey"' (v. 4). Even more explicitly, Jesus Himself said of those who came to seize Him to crucify Him, "but all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Mt. 26:56).

Of course, there were predictions about Himself of which He was conscious but over which He could have no control.¹⁸ These include what tribe He would come from (Gen. 49:10); whose dynasty He would come from (2 Sam. 7:12f); what city He would be born in (Micah 5:2); and that He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14), to name only a few. More are listed below. But conscious or not, these prophecies played a significant apologetic role in the life of Christ. Indeed, they are unprecedented and unparalleled, for no other religious leader had any significant and long-range group of predictions which were made hundreds of years in advance and all of which were fulfilled. This is truly supernatural.

Jesus' Personal Prophecies about Himself and Others

In addition to knowing that He was fulfilling Old Testament prophecies, Jesus also made predictions Himself. Some of these predictions were fulfilled in His lifetime, others were fulfilled later, and some are yet to be fulfilled at His second coming. These many predictions of Jesus are one of the reasons critical scholars are anxious to give a late date for the Gospels (between 70 and 100 A.D.). Dates prior to A.D. 70 would

make his predictions about the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem look supernatural (see Mt. 24), and their anti-supernatural bias would not allow this. However, there is good evidence for the synoptic Gospels being written in the late 50s and early 70s.¹⁹ If Jesus actually made these predictions before they happened, then it is truly an apologetic for His deity.

Predictions in Matthew

Just the Gospel of Matthew alone lists 58 predictions made by Jesus.²⁰ Professor Barton Payne noted that “the Gospel of Matthew contains more predictions than any other book of the New Testament. Within the whole of Scripture, indeed, the number is exceeded only by the major prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah in the OT.”²¹ Indeed, this is “26% of the [Gospel of Matthew]. A truly high figure for historical narrative. . . .”²² Some of the 58 predictions of Jesus in Matthew’s record include the following:

1. The Word of God will abide forever (5:18)
2. Some unbelievers will protest on judgment day (7:19-23)
3. Abraham, Isaac, and others will be in the kingdom on judgment day (8:11)
4. The day will come when Christ will be taken away (9:15)
5. There will be degrees of punishment on judgment day (10:15)
6. The apostles will be persecuted (10:17-23)
7. Jesus will reunite with the apostles before the preaching tour ended (10:23)
8. Jesus will ascend into heaven (10:32-33)

9. Jesus will die and rise three days later (12:40)
10. There will be a resurrection of believers in the end time (12:41)
11. The saved will be separated from the unsaved in the end time (13:30)
12. The kingdom of heaven will experience great growth (13:31-32)
13. The Church Christ will build will never be destroyed (16:18)
14. Christ will return in glory with His angels and reward His followers (16:27)
15. The twelve apostles will reign with Christ over the tribes of Israel (19:28)
16. James and John will undergo suffering for Christ (20:23)
17. Christ will be rejected by His people and Gentiles brought in (21:42-41)
18. There will be a resurrection and no marriage in heaven (22:30)
19. Jerusalem will reject Christ and become desolate (23:38)
20. Jerusalem will be destroyed and the temple destroyed (24:2)
21. Mary's act of anointing Jesus will be remembered throughout the world (26:13)

22. Jesus' betrayer Judas will be doomed (26:24)

23. Jesus' disciples will flee at His death (26:31)

24. Peter will deny Christ three times (26:34)

Other Predictions by Jesus

Mark records 47 predictions made by Jesus, almost all of which are the same as those recorded in Matthew. Some 22% of the narrative of Luke is predictive.²³ Twenty-six of these passages come in the first two chapters before Christ's birth. Most of the rest were made by Christ. John contains 45 predictions, which is 20% of the entire book. Again, most of the predictions were made by Christ. Since John offers a fresh approach, not following that of the synoptic Gospels, it contains some predictions not found there. These include:

1. Jesus had another group of sheep to bring into His fold (10:16)
2. Lazarus would be raised from the dead (11:4, 11, 23, 40)
3. The Holy Spirit would come and teach the disciples (14 and 16)
4. Those who reject Jesus' words will be judged by them in the last day (12:48)
5. The disciples would do greater works than Jesus did (14:12)
6. The disciples would get a great catch of fish when they cast their net on the other side of the boat (21:6)
7. John would live to an old age (21:18)

Matthew's Record of "Fulfillment"

Of course, not all prophecies are strictly predictive. Some are typo-

logical, awaiting a higher completion in the future. The word “fulfill” (Greek: *plerotha*), as used by Matthew (cf. 1:23), means to fill completely, to accomplish, to make full, to complete, to end. Matthew uses this fifteen times of Christ (Matt. 1:23; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-15; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17-18; 13:14; 13:35; 21:4-5; 26:54; 26:56; 27:9; 27:35). Even though these are not all strictly predictive, nonetheless, all of them are anticipatory and find their fulfillment in Christ. Likewise, the Passover Lamb pointed forward to a future fulfillment of its type in Christ. For Paul said, “Even Christ our Passover Lamb is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). In this sense, Christ is the fulfillment of all these kinds of Old Testament typological references.

Old Testament Texts That are Predictive

However, many Old Testament texts are truly predictive. That is, they were specifically about the coming Messiah and, hence, their fulfillment has clear apologetic value. As the above discussion indicates, Jesus was not only aware of these predictions but, as the Messiah, He was conscious that He was the fulfillment of them. Most, if not all, of the following texts fit into this category.

The prediction that the Messiah would be:

1. *The Seed of the Woman*: “I will put enmity between you [the Serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:15)
2. *The Line of Seth*: “And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.” (Gen. 4:25)
3. *A Descendent of Shem*: “And he said, Blessed [be] the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.” (Gen. 9:26)
4. *The Seed of Abraham*: “I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you: and in you shall all families of the earth be

blessed.” (Gen. 12:3; cf. Gen. 15:5)

5. *The Tribe of Judah*: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” (Gen. 49:10)

6. *From the House of David*: “And when thy days be fulfilled, and you shall sleep with your fathers, I will set up thy seed after you, which shall proceed out of your body, and I will establish his kingdom.” (2 Sam. 7:12,16). “The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King, who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. . . . This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.” (Jer. 23:5-6)

7. *Conceived of a Virgin*: “So, the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bring out a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel. (Isa. 7:14)

8. *Born in Bethlehem*: “And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, you being least among the thousands of Judah, out of you He shall come forth to Me, to become Ruler in Israel, He whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity.” (Micah 5:2)

9. *He Would Die About A.D. 33*: “Seventy sevens are divided as to your people and as to your holy city, to finish the transgression and to make an end of sins, and to make atonement for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going out of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem [444 B.C.], to Messiah the Prince, shall be seven sevens, and sixty-two sevens” [= 483] (Dan. 9:24-25).²⁴

Seven sevens and sixty two sevens are 69 sevens or 483 lunar years

of 360 days each by the Jewish lunar calendar. Add to this 6 more years for the five extra days times 483 years, and it makes exactly 483 years (477 + 6) from 444 B.C. to 33 A.D. Add to this the fact that, even by the critics' late date for Daniel (c. 165 B.C.), nearly 200 years in advance Daniel predicted the very time the Messiah would die. This is an amazing prediction.

10. *He Would be Heralded by a Forerunner*: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" (Isaiah 40:3)

11. *He Would be Proclaimed as King*: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold your king is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9)

12. *He Would Suffer and Die for our Sins*: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.... The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.... He was led as a lamb to the slaughter.... For the transgression of my people He was stricken. And He made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death.... Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.... He bore the sins of many and made intercession for the transgressors." (Isa. 53).

13. *His Side Would be Pierced*: "They will look on me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn." (Zech. 12:10)

14. *He Would Rise From the Dead*: "For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will

show me the path of life” (Psa.16:10; cf. Acts 2:30-32). “When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days.” (Isa. 53:10). “The rulers take counsel against His Anointed.... Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.... The Lord said to Me, You are My son, Today I have begotten You [from the dead].” (Psa. 2:2, 6-7; cf. Acts 13:33-35).

Given the theistic context, the use of predictive prophecy by Jesus and His disciples in the New Testaments places it beyond the realm of reasonable human possibility that these can be explained naturally for several reasons. First, unlike the vague prognostications of Nostradamus or many contemporary prognosticators, these are specific and verifiable predictions. Second, unlike most psychic predictions,²⁵ these were long range, made hundreds of years in advance, and have been fulfilled as predicted.

The numerous, specific, and long-range predictions about Christ’s first coming are beyond the realm of human projections. And there is nothing really supernatural about human prognosticators getting a small percentage of short-term predictions correct. This can be done by reading personalities, inside information, trickery, and luck. But the repeated, long-term, specific and highly accurate predictions about Christ place them in the category beyond the natural course of events.

Jesus’ Use of Arguments for God as an Apologetic

Jesus never directly spelled out any arguments for the existence of God. He did not need to do so. His primary audience already believed in God—they were monotheistic Jews. However, both by the teachings of the Old Testament which Jesus embraced, as well as the New Testament disciples of Christ who reflected the views of their Master, we can piece together the kinds of arguments Jesus would have used or approved of using in defending theism against any non-theisms He would have encountered. For example, Jesus would have agreed with Solomon’s implied argument from the existential need for God which can be stated as follows: 1) Whatever a person really needs, really exists. 2) Everyone

needs God. 3) Therefore, there is a God. So strong is the instinct for God that the Old Testament calls atheists “fools.” David said, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1). His son Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, observed that a life without God is meaningless: “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity’” (Eccl. 1:2). It is absurd to believe that if we really need water there is no water anywhere. All of nature rushes to fill a vacuum. And if there is a God-sized vacuum in the human heart, then there must really be a God who can fill it.

Also, Jesus would have concurred with David’s evidence for God (which is an implied teleological argument): The psalmist said, for example, “He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see?” (Psalm 94:9) This implies that every effect not only has a cause but one that is similar to it. Also in the Psalms, David declared: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psa. 19:1). The argument can be spelled out this way: 1) The heavens show intelligent design. 2) But all intelligent design has an intelligent designer. 3) Therefore, the heavens have an intelligent Designer. Even the anthropic principle argument from the preplanned tuning of the universes has echoes in Psalm 8.²⁶

What we have found in pursuing these inferences and implications is that Jesus was a rational theist who would have appealed to the cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments for God’s existence. Indeed, He would have agreed with the argument for the existential need for God as well.

Jesus’ Use of His Sinless Life as an Apologetic

Knowing that Christ was thoroughly and utterly human in every respect makes His sinlessness all the more amazing. His impeccable character is confirmed by both friend and foe who were His contemporaries. Jesus’ sinlessness was confirmed by those who knew him best. The apostles and immediate disciples of Christ affirmed His sinlessness. The writer of Hebrews who knew the twelve apostles (Heb. 2:3-4) declared: “For we . . . have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet

was without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Peter, a leader among the twelve apostles said, “Christ [is] a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19). “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22). He added, “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous...” (1 Peter 3:18). John, Jesus’ “beloved” disciple said, “He is righteous” (1 Jn. 2:29) and “He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3).

Jesus’ flawless character was also confirmed by His enemies and others. Jesus challenged His enemies, saying, “Which of you convicts me of sin?” (Jn. 8:46). His betrayer Judas confessed: “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood” (Mt. 27:4). Governor Pilate who tried Jesus declared: “I am innocent of the blood of this just person” (Mt. 27:24). Pilate’s wife told him: “Have nothing to do with that just man. . .” (Mat. 27:19). A centurion who helped crucify Jesus exclaimed: “Certainly this was a righteous man” (Lk. 23:47). Again, a centurion said: “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Mt. 27:54). The thief on the cross was so impressed by Jesus that he requested: “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk. 23:42). Even the Herodians who opposed Jesus admitted: “Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God in truth: nor do you care about anyone, for you do not regard the person of men” (Mt. 22:16).

So, both friend and foe attested to Jesus’ flawless character. No one successfully met His challenge to accuse Him of sin (Jn 8:46). In addition, what we know of Christ’s enemies outside the New Testament does not contradict what we have from His direct contemporaries. Jesus not only had an apologetic; He was an apologetic. He not only persuaded people with His arguments, He also persuaded them with His life. Indeed, Jesus’ life of sacrificial love was His greatest apology for the Christian Faith. There is something about an act of sacrificial love that has the ability to persuade people of its genuineness. Without a doubt, love is a great apologetic. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). Love and truth are the two great weapons in the war for the souls of men. Love attracts them and truth enlightens them. The cold truth often repels people. And fuzzy love can make people *feel* better, but without truth it

cannot make them *be* better. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32). But Paul reminded us that we should always be engaged in “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). The wedding of the two make a powerful apologetic.

Jesus and World View Apologetics

Jesus never had a direct conflict with pantheist or atheist, so we have no direct evidence of how He would have handled this apologetic task. Nonetheless, we have two very good indirect sources to draw from in determining how He would have approached this subject. First, Jesus was completely familiar with the Old Testament. Indeed, He claimed to be a fulfillment of it (Mt. 5:17-18). So, we can correctly infer that Jesus would have approached other world views with a similar apologetic as the Old Testament prophets did. Second, Jesus trained the apostles and promised the guidance of His Spirit in their teaching (Jn. 14:26; 16:13). Given this, we can infer several things about Jesus’ apologetic approach to other world views. For one, it means that He would have approached “heathen” the way Paul did (in Acts 14) by appealing to general revelation. Likewise, educated unbelievers would have been approached much like Paul did in Romans 1:19-20 (cf. Acts 17), arguing from creation to Creator (which is a cosmological type argument).

Given the soundness of this discussion, it seems that Jesus would have preferred the classical apologetics approach. For all his use of evidence, testimony, miracles (including the resurrection) is in the context of those who already believed in God (Jewish monotheists). But given His background in the Old Testament and His teaching to the apostles, both of which implied theistic argumentation, Jesus would have embraced the classical apologetic approach of establishing the existence of God (which then makes miracles possible) and then using the latter to establish His claims to deity, as indeed He did in the Gospels.

Several things are certain: One, Jesus was not a fideist. Two, He believed it was necessary to use evidence to support His truth claims. Three, given His deep commitment to Scripture (which employs forms of the standard arguments for God), the picture emerges of Jesus as one

who could be classified as a classical apologist.

Conclusion

Of course, Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit to convict (Jn. 16:7) and convince His hearers of the truth. He knew that the Holy Spirit not only inspired the truth (2 Tim. 3:16), but that He alone could illuminate their minds to its significance for their life. Indeed, those who finally and irrevocably rejected the truth were said to “blaspheme” the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:28-30). He knew no one could come to God unless drawn by the Father (Jn. 6:44) through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, Jesus realized the limits of apologetics when He said of some closed-minded and hard-hearted rejectors: “Neither would they believe though one were raised from the dead” (Lk. 16:31). As a matter of fact, after Jesus had done a series of indisputable miracles climaxed with the raising of Lazarus, John records: “but although He [Jesus] had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him” (John 12:37). Jesus knew that you can lead the apologetic horse to the water by evidence and reason, but only the Holy Spirit can persuade him to drink. He was aware that apologetics may be able to show the mind that He spoke the truth, but that it was still necessary for the will to believe. For Jesus lamented, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. . . . How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Mt. 23:37). Jesus knew that in the final analysis one could see the truth provided by apologetic evidence and argument and still stubbornly refuse to believe in the Christ to whom it pointed. Further, He knew that apologetics can only lead the horse to the water, only the Holy Spirit can persuade him to drink. And those who, by their stubborn will refuse to accept the evidence, Jesus knew that “neither would they believe though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

Notes

1. This article is based on research for a forthcoming book by Pat Zukeran and me on *The Apologetics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, late 2008). There will be a chapter on each of the main points in this article.
2. Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 275.
3. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing, 1981), 117.
4. Collin Brown ed., *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume II (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 629 & 626.
5. John Witmer, *Immanuel* (Nashville, TN.: Word Publishing, 1998), 97-98.
6. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1999), 451.
7. Norman Geisler, *Survey of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 2007).
8. See Craig Bloomberg, *ibid.*; F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable* (Downers Grove, IVP, 1960), and Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1989).
9. See Gary Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1980).
10. Dallas Willard, "Jesus the Logician," *Christian Scholars Review* (Summer 1999): 610.
11. See my treatment of the need and use of reason in theology in *Systematic Theology* (St. Paul, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002), Vol. I, Chap. 5
12. See Norman Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1991), 73.
13. Jesus argued that if it is permissible to do the good of circumcising on the Sabbath, then (with the greater force) it is good to heal a man on the Sabbath (Mark 3).
14. James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 17.
15. Roy B. Zuck, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (April-June 1984): 126.
16. This approach of Jesus' use of parables in support of His deity was set forth in the excellent presentation by Dr. Philip Payne titled, "Interpreting Jesus' Parables," (Ph.D. dissertation) Cambridge University, 1980.
17. Over 200 of the questions Jesus asked are recorded in the Gospels. Many of them reveal His indirect apologetic message. This is a relatively unexplored area of Jesus' apologetic.

18. This refutes the old "Passover Plot" thesis that Jesus was a Messianic pretender who connived to make it look like He had fulfilled the Old Testament predictions about the Messiah. See H. J. Schonfield, *The Passover Plot: New Light on the History of Jesus* (NY: Bantam, 1967).
19. Roman historian Colin Hemer demonstrated that Acts was written before A.D. 62 in his landmark work entitled, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1960), Chap. 9. This would place the other two synoptic Gospels (Matthew and Mark) before that, say, no later than the late 50s. One critical New Testament scholar, the late "Death of God" theologian, Bishop Robinson, placed some of the Gospels as early as the 40s! (See his *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).
20. See Barton Payne in *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 477-493.
21. Ibid., 477.
22. Ibid., 477.
23. Payne, *ibid.*, 501.
24. See Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978).
25. Note, for example, the failed psychic predictions about the next year which were 92% wrong! Among the failed predictions were 1) all three news anchors would be replaced; 2) the Queen of England would abdicate; 3) Kathie Lee Gifford would replace Jay Leno; 4) Cindy Crawford would have triplets; 5) Hillary Clinton would plead guilty for shoplifting; 6) Charles Manson would get a sex-change operation; 7) Whitney Houston would marry Mike Tyson; 8) an African plant would cure aids; 9) Volcanic action would make a land bridge to Cuba; 10) Madonna would marry Boy George; 11) the Sears Tower in Chicago would lean like tower of Pisa; 12) a national lottery would cut taxes in half; 13) a teenager would build and detonate a nuclear bomb in South Carolina; 14) Madonna would marry a sheik and become a house wife; 15) scientists would build a car that runs on tap water. See Andre Kole and Al Jansen, *Miracles and Magic* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1984).
26. See Hugh Ross, *The Fingerprints of God* (Orange, CA: Promise, 1989) for a contemporary statement of this argument for God.