

IS7950 – Introduction to Apologetics: Four common topics and how to discuss them

Apologetics:

Apologetics is the sharing and defending of one's faith, which stems from the Greek word **apologia**, meaning "speaking in defense of." Apologia, or ἀπολογία in Greek, often does not come easy to most people. Talking about spiritual matters can lead to confrontation, anger, or a desire to 'win.' This often produces the opposite effect of what the Christian intended. This often leaves people feeling overwhelmed at the thought of sharing their faith. To address this, the following curriculum introduces four common topics. Each lesson equips Christians with solid information so they can confidently dive deeper on their own.

What this curriculum is (and what it isn't):

This document will introduce the reader to four topics, one lesson per topic. Each lesson is designed to broadly cover a topic, so the Christian has the information needed to dive deeper on their own. Because each lesson is covered broadly, it is not designed to answer every question a person may ask, and that is OK. The curriculum serves as a starting point for further study.

When a person plans to study so they can more confidently share their faith, it is important to remember 1 Peter 3:15, "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you – but do so with gentleness and respect!" The goal is not to win an argument, but to share the love God has for us and the love we have for God.

Curriculum:

Each of the four topics covered in this curriculum are designed to be studied within a small group setting over the course of two hours. Because of this, I have divided each lesson into sections and suggest an amount of time to allocate to each section. These are only suggestions, as the topics are broad and each could be expanded into a whole series of lessons. I will give a recommendation at the conclusion of each lesson how a study group can expand the two-hour lesson into multiple sessions.

Detailed below is a curriculum template covering the sections, the suggested times, and comments / recommendations that can apply to each lesson. The suggestions within each lesson are just that, suggestions. If you, or your group, changes the order listed, or if content is skipped due to being covered previously, no worries! They are only recommendations. Some groups prefer covering all the information before having a conversation, but others prefer to ask questions and discuss along the way. It is my recommendation that you allow the group to dictate the method that best suits them, so long as the discussion stays on topic. It is easy, in small group

settings, for discussions to go off topic. While that can be enjoyable for a short time, remember that the group gathered to study the topic listed. Because of this, as discussions take place, try to guide the discussion towards the topic and bring the focus back to the material.

If the lesson includes references to Scripture, have the group pause, open their Bibles to the passage referenced and read it aloud. Depending on the lesson, it is often beneficial to pause and spend time discussing the passages and how they apply to the topic. During group study, use questions to prompt responses. This is a tactic that is very effective for apologetics, as well as group study. If people are prompted to answer and contribute, it allows them to think through the topic more thoroughly and develop a better understanding of the subject matter.

When talking to a person who is hostile and does not believe the facts, it is a good tactic to ask them questions and guide them to the answer. If they come to the truth through their own reasoning, it forces the person to acknowledge the issue and either change their viewpoint or defend a stance that is not built upon facts and logic. When talking to people of other faiths about the Gospel, it is not uncommon for them to change the focus of the discussion. It is a common tactic to confuse the Christian and allow them to change the focus. As you study and have group discussions about the following topics, keep this in mind. Discuss with one another how to avoid falling for this tactic and work with one another on how to direct the conversation back to God and the Gospel.

Curriculum Template:

Introduction: suggested time – 15 minutes.

- Invite new members to introduce themselves, then ask existing members to briefly reintroduce themselves. Give the group time to participate in general chit chat. This will allow everyone to get comfortable with one another and get in the correct mindset for studying and discussing the lesson.
- Ask for prayer requests. This is a time for each member of the group to mention any prayer requests they may have, be it personal, family, friends or anything they want to pray about. Do not force anyone to contribute during prayer time, or in general, as they may be shy and not comfortable talking in front of others. Once everyone who wants to share a prayer request has shared, start with the person to your right and go around the group asking if anyone would like to pray aloud. Let them know they may pray aloud or just say “pass.” Once it gets back to you, try to pray for the study group and the prayer requests mentioned.
 - A suggested prayer might sound like the following: “Lord, thank you for allowing us to gather today for fellowship and the studying of your word. Please bless us with discernment and understanding as we study and share with one another. (pray about people mentioned by the group) Thank you Lord for all you do and for loving us so we can love you. In Jesus name, amen.”

Primary Topic: suggested time – 60 minutes.

- To start, remind the group for the reason you all are gathered today, for the glorification of God, to read and study His word and to get better at sharing the Gospel. Remind them, when sharing the Gospel, that it is important to do so with love and gentleness. We are here to spread seeds of our faith; it is up to the Holy Spirit to water the seeds and soften a person's heart. When discussing topics with others, they may not react with kindness, but that is OK.
 - If this is the first session for the group, take time and have them open their Bibles to John 15:18-21 and have someone read it aloud. These passages tell us, as Christians, that those who are not in Christ will have hostility toward us. This is not to scare the group, but to inform them that they can expect hostility when they defend the faith.
- Remind the group that if they encounter hostility, along with an unwillingness to have an honest good-natured dialog, it is OK to pray for those that are hostile and move on.
 - If this is the first session, flip to Mark 6:11 and have someone read it aloud – “if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” This passage is a good reminder that when people will not listen to the Gospel, it is fine to move on and trust the Lord to do the work.
- The primary topic has 60 minutes allocated for the lesson, but depending on the topic and the discussion, the time needed might be longer than one hour.
- If you prepare beforehand and use the extra resources to add to the topic, remember to adjust the time needed for the new material.

Follow-Up Questions: suggested time – 15 minutes.

- This section and the following one are separated from the primary topic, but depending on the preference of the group, these sections may be combined with the primary section. If so, use the time allocated for these sections to be added to the primary lesson. While sticking to a schedule and a set regimen can be important, when it comes to apologetics and discussing topics of faith with others, the ability to have an organic discussion with another person is key. Non-Christians will notice if a Christian is unable to remain comfortable during a discussion and they will latch on and use that as an opportunity to fluster the Christian or change the topic entirely. Allow the group to practice communicating with one another about these topics and get comfortable doing so.
- Suggested questions pertaining to the primary topic will be listed in this section.

Non-Topic Q/A: suggested time – 30 minutes.

- If the study group is sticking to one topic per session, attempt to give the group time to discuss topics that are not part of the curriculum. This will allow members to ask questions while allowing other members to help answering those questions.
- Remember that it is OK to say, “I do not know.” Remind the group of this as well. It is common for people to struggle with saying they do not know the answer to a question, as this can be viewed as a weakness. Remember what was mentioned earlier, it is more important to spread seeds than win an argument. It is better to admit you do not have an answer than to give an answer that is incorrect. When people give incorrect answers concerning Scripture and the Gospel, that can snowball into false theology and incorrect understanding.
- Keep the group focused on Biblical topics! Do not let your study group turn into a social group that fails to spend any time studying.

Conclusion:

Wrap up each session by setting up a date and time for the next meeting. If this is the last session for the topic, share any additional resources with the group. Each lesson will have additional resources / links, but if you add any others, it is good to include them in what you share with the group.

Session I – Reliability of Scripture

Introduction:

This lesson will focus on the reliability of Scripture. While this topic can lead to further discussion for topics like textual criticism, original manuscripts, original languages, etc., the lesson will limit focus to two historical sources: P52 and Codex Sinaiticus. The lesson will look at the Greek used for these two sources, along with an English translation for each, and finally wrap up by allowing the group to compare their modern-day translation with the translations of those two early sources. The hope is that the group will be able to compare three sources, from three time periods, all having a reliable and similar translation.

Primary Topic:

A common argument against Scripture is that it was passed down like the game of “Telephone.” This game assumes there is only one line of transmission, and each time it is passed along, no previous source is accessible. The game of telephone often starts with one message, and the message is distorted, incorrect and garbled by the end. Fortunately, the transmission of Scripture is nothing like the game of telephone. There are thousands of lines of transmission and those scribes who are passing along the message can access past lines of transmission, if available. To help show the reliability of transmission and give the group confidence that the Scripture they are reading is what was originally written, this lesson will look at a first century source, a fourth century source and their modern-day source. Time to dive in and see if they line up!

Papyrus 52:

Since we cannot possibly review the whole of Scripture, we will focus on the Gospel of John. More specifically, John 18. The earliest known fragment from the Gospel of John is Papyrus 52, abbreviated P52. The lesson will start by learning a little about this fragment, looking at the Greek and then reading its translation in English. Start by showing them the image I.1 and sharing the following information:

- Dating puts P52 between A.D. 100 – A.D. 150.
- P52 is currently housed in John Rylands University Library in Manchester, UK.
- This fragment was discovered in Egypt in A.D. 1920 and was believed to have been found in Oxyrhynchus, which is modern-day el-Bahnasa.
- P52 is roughly credit card in size.
- The front (recto) of P52 contains John 18:31-33.
- The back (verso) of P52 contains John 18:37-38.

Prior to discovering P52, critics had thought the Gospel of John was a late addition, placing its dating between A.D. 130 – A.D. 170. Since P52 is dated between A.D. 100 – A.D. 150, that tells us the original Gospel was written years prior. That puts the Gospel of John well

within the lifetime of the first disciples of Jesus. An argument against the Bible is no original documents exist and all we have are copies of copies. This is true! This may come as a shock to some, but despite not having any of the originals, we can still have confidence that we have the text that the original authors wrote.

Show the group figure I.7. If P52 is from A.D. 100 – A.D. 150, when was the original Gospel of John written? We know, from scholarly consensus, that the Gospel of John was likely written in Ephesus, modern-day Turkey. We know, from above, that P52 was found in Oxyrhynchus, modern-day el-Bahnasa. Scholarly consensus tells us that John likely wrote his Gospel towards the end of his life, sometime between A.D. 85 – A.D. 90, since he died around A.D. 100. When we see the figure in I.7, we can imagine the path and line of transmission between the copies of John's Gospel. It was written by John, then copied by one church or scribe to then be copied by another church or scribe, until a copy finally reached a church near Oxyrhynchus.

Critics might say, "How do we know the Gospel wasn't corrupted from the time it was written to the time P52 was created?" That is a valid and good question. To answer this, we will look to see if the Greek was corrupted between the time of P52 to the next source, Codex Sinaiticus. Now, as a group, we will look at the Greek used for P52 and see how it is translated into English.

Show the group figure I.1 along with figure I.2. Figure I.2 contains the Greek around the fragment of P52, from John 18. When we superimpose the P52 fragment overtop this Greek, we can get a sense of what the original papyrus may have looked like. Show them figure I.3. Now, have the group take the time to look at figure I.4 and I.5. These two figures contain the Greek as well as an English translation of the Greek. While the Greek may not make sense to the group, if they do not speak Greek, it will be useful later when Codex Sinaiticus is reviewed. After the group gets done discussing the Greek and English translation, have them open their Bible to John 18:31-33, 37-38. Have someone read the passages aloud, one grouping at a time, and spend time comparing the translation from figure I.4 and I.5 with their modern-day translations. The group should be able to tell how the translations are very similar, perhaps differing in exact wording, but the meaning and thought should be the same.

Codex Sinaiticus:

Once the group wraps up their conversation and discussions concerning P52, share with them information about Codex Sinaiticus. Codex Sinaiticus is one of the oldest surviving Bibles with a nearly complete copy of the New Testament. It also contains most of the Old Testament. Show the group figures I.8 and I.9. If the group members are using electronic devices, or if you are using an overhead display, you can pull up Codex Sinaiticus from the following url:

<https://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/>

As the group is looking over figures I.8 and I.9, share with them the following details. Codex Sinaiticus is written in a four-column format known as vellum. Scholarly consensus tells that it was created between A.D. 330 – A.D. 360. Creation is placed during the time of Constantine the Great. This Bible was created after Christianity was made legal in A.D. 313 during the Edict of Milan. Contrary to a popular argument made by non-Christians, Codex Sinaiticus was not made by Rome as a way of controlling Scripture or dictating what books of the Bible were made official. When Codex Sinaiticus was created, Rome was still a pagan empire. Christianity did not become the official religion of Rome until A.D. 380 during the Edict of Thessalonica, under Emperor Theodosius.

This is a common argument that Christians will encounter as they talk to non-believers. There is a lot of confusion about early Christianity, the Bible, Rome and control. The Council of Nicaea was made popular by the Da Vinci Code, a book, and later movie, by Dan Brown. Unfortunately, due to works like the Da Vinci Code, a lot of fiction has been associated with the Council of Nicaea. This leads non-believers, and some believers, to think Rome's influence made Scripture unreliable and Christianity untrue. As followers of Christ who want to spread the Gospel, it is important to realize some people believe these things, but it is also important to remember, we can tell people the truth, but we cannot force them to believe it. No matter how much we share the Gospel or correct their incorrect beliefs, they may not believe it. That is OK. Remember, share the truth and if they do not accept it, shake the dust off and move on.

Figures I.8 and I.9 contains screenshots from codexsinaiticus.org, allowing the group to see John 18:31-33, 37-38. The scholars involved with the project to scan Codex Sinaiticus have translated the Greek. As with P52, have the group look over the Greek, read the English translation and compare it with their modern translations. As with P52, it may differ in exact wording, but the meaning and thought should be the same.

Now that the group has looked at P52 and Codex Sinaiticus, and compared them with their modern translations, have them compare those two sources. To do this, they can compare both the Greek and the English translations of each. The group may find this comparison redundant, but I suggest they do it, nonetheless. It is important for the group to see that the Greek used in the first century is the same Greek that is used in the fourth century, which is then the same Greek used for their modern translations. They may notice that some Greek letters look different between P52 and Codex Sinaiticus, which is true. I included documentation for this in figure I.6. The differences come from changes in style and developments of the language, not due to purposeful manipulation to change the meaning of the source.

To conclude the lesson of the primary topic, if there is time, it would be good to discuss the topic of translations. This may have come up organically, but if not, point out that different translations might use different words, but the meaning remains the same. Translations are often done by committees of scholars, some focus on thought for thought, while others focus on word

for word. These can vary in wording used, but all should retain the meaning of Scripture while using reliable Greek.

Follow-Up Questions:

Question: Now that we have examined three translations from three different time periods, does anyone have any questions or doubts about the reliability of Scripture?

Question: Does the reliability of the Greek, and English translations, between the three sources give you confidence that Scripture is reliable, regarding its preservation?

Question: Despite not having the originals, how do we feel about the preservation of Scripture? Does anyone feel that we cannot say, with a high degree of confidence, that we have what the original authors wrote? If not, why?

Conclusion:

If you decide to teach this lesson over 2+ sessions, I recommend spending more time reading the referenced Scripture and studying those passages. The more confident the group is regarding the meaning of the passages, they will be able to study the passages using various translations and feel confident that they mean the same thing, despite differences in the wording used. My last recommendation is to find information regarding translations and discuss how committees decide to translate the Greek. Wesley Huff has useful information about this topic and has a useful infographic on his website: <https://www.wesleyhuff.com/> - while there are a lot of scholars that talk about this topic, I find Wesley Huff easy to understand and relatable to everyone.

Session II – Scriptural Evidence of the Trinity

Introduction:

This lesson will focus on the scriptural evidence for the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity can be confusing because we will never fully understand the Trinity this side of Heaven, as it is unique to God. Three persons identified as God, but God being defined as unique. How can something that is unique and singular be three persons, and how can three be one? Despite not fully understanding the Trinity, that does not mean we cannot know anything about the doctrine. We know what God has revealed, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each identified, either implicitly or explicitly, as God. This lesson will focus on a way to identify each person of the Trinity, with a specific focus on Jesus.

Primary Topic:

A common argument that non-believers and believers of non-Trinitarian religions will make is the word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible. This is true, and to new believers, that argument can be difficult to defend. While it is true that the word Trinity does not appear in Scripture, that does not mean the Trinity is not written about, described and revealed in God’s word. The Trinity is a word that developed in the early Church as a way of giving a label to the properties of God, that God is unique, yet three distinct persons in Scripture are referenced with the properties unique to God. Another common argument by those same groups is that the Trinity is a concept that only appears in the New Testament. Using Jesus as an example, we will look at both New and Old Testament passages. When it comes to the topic of the Trinity, but for Scripture in general, it is important to remember that Scripture does explicitly detail concepts and ideas, but some are implicit. Scripture implying concepts and ideas reminds us of the importance of context.

Context is key. That is one of the primary themes of this lesson. Context, context, context! Another theme would be that struggle is OK. Concepts like the Trinity can be a struggle, which is OK, so long as we hold to God’s word being truth and follow where it leads.

Since the concept of the Trinity is unique and this lesson is designed around a two-hour session, we will focus on an acronym and method developed by Bowman and Komoszewski. Bowman and Komoszewski detailed in their book, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ*, the acronym of H.A.N.D.S., standing for Honor, Attributes, Names, Deeds, and Seat. We see all throughout Scripture that the five aspects of H.A.N.D.S., Honor, Attributes, Names, Deeds, and Seat, all aspects of God, are also attributed to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Another common argument people make opposing the idea of the Trinity is that Judaism and Christianity are monotheistic, meaning there is only ONE God, yet they claim the Trinity claims three God’s. The issue with that argument is Christianity is monotheistic, and the claim

that the Trinity points to polytheism, meaning many gods, is a misunderstanding of the Christian position on the Trinity. The Trinity is not saying each person of the Trinity is a separate God, it is reiterating that Scripture tells God is one, that God is unique, and there have been no other gods, yet three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all have aspects unique to the one God. With using the H.A.N.D.S. acronym while discussing the Trinity, the hope is it will provide a way to explain Christianity holds to being monotheistic while raising the persons of the Trinity to their proper status and standing. Unfortunately, there are people who will still claim Trinitarians are not monotheistic, or they are giving a status to the person of the Trinity that they should not have. This is a good time to remind the group that they cannot change a person's heart or force them to believe, only God can do that, so in cases when a person remains hostile or unwilling to listen to truth, shake the dust off your feet and move on.

Breakdown of the acronym H.A.N.D.S.:

- H – Honor: We see throughout Scripture that each person of the Trinity receives the honor of God. Faith, worship, prayer, love and glory are examples of this honor. God does not share His glory with any other (Isaiah 42:8).
 - Example (Jesus): Angels worship Jesus (Hebrews 1:6). People worship Jesus (Matthew 28:17). Jesus accepts worship (2 Corinthians 12:9).
 - Example (Holy Spirit): Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14.
- A – Attributes: We see throughout Scripture that each person of the Trinity shares attributes that are for God alone.
 - Example (Jesus): We see attributes associated with God in John 1:1-3, and they are attributed to Jesus (John 1:17), such as eternity, “In the beginning.” It shows a personal distinction in John 1:2, “He was in the beginning with God.” Jesus is associated with omniscience (Revelation 2:23). Jesus is given the fullness of deity (Colossians 2:9).
 - Example (Holy Spirit): Hebrews 9:14, 1 Corinthians 2:10-11.
- N – Names: Titles are applied to the three persons.
 - Example (Jesus): Jesus is given the title of God (John 1:1). Jesus' lordship (Philippians 2:10-11). Alpha and Omega, First and the Last (Revelation 1:17 points to Isaiah 44:6).
 - Example (Holy Spirit): Genesis 1:2, Isaiah 11:2.
- D – Deeds: Applies to the actions exclusive to God.
 - Example (Jesus): Jesus forgave sin (Mark 2:5). Jesus knew the hearts of man (Mark 2:8). Jesus has authority over nature (Matthew 8:23-27). Jesus raises the dead (Luke 8:49-56).
 - Example (Holy Spirit): Genesis 1:2, John 3:5-8.
- S – Seat: Applies to the throne of God.

- Example (Jesus): Jesus sits at the throne of God (Revelation 3:21). Jesus is at the right hand of God (Romans 8:34). Jesus is in Heaven, at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56)
- Example (Holy Spirit): Acts 13:2, Acts 2:33.

Follow-Up Questions:

Activity: If the group would like more examples within Scripture, ask the group for a few of their favorite passages. This is a good way to look at various Scripture and work together to identify the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit throughout the Bible. If anyone has a study Bible, it may supply an indicator of which person of the Trinity is referenced in the passage.

Conclusion:

If you decide to teach this lesson over 2+ sessions, I recommend spending more time reading through the referenced Scripture and studying the context of those passages. The baptism of Jesus is an event that appears in all four Gospels. My recommendation is to read through the baptism event with the group and spend time differentiating the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This will allow the group to see each person of the Trinity within Scripture while also seeing aspects of God applied to them.

Session III – Evidence for Jesus’ life, death and resurrection

Introduction:

This lesson will focus on evidence for Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. While this topic may initially sound like a waste of time for Christians, as they already believe in Christ, this topic comes up often with non-believers and Muslims. It is not uncommon for non-believers to question if Jesus ever existed. For Muslims, they believe Jesus was a prophet, but they do not believe He was crucified. The hope is that this lesson will teach members how to give a defense for Jesus’ life, death and resurrection using a scholar popular among both Muslims and non-believers.

Primary Topic:

For this lesson, we will cover both biblical and non-biblical sources. Despite what someone’s views are of God and Christianity, the writings that make up the Bible are also historical documentation. The first two sections, Life and Death, we will look at evidence for Jesus’ life. The section titled Resurrection will briefly address miracles. The lesson will attempt to answer the following questions: Was there a first century Jewish man named Jesus? Was this man, Jesus, killed by order of Pontius Pilate? What evidence is there for the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth?

For the first two sections, Life and Death, we will be focusing on arguments from Bart Ehrman, a New Testament scholar with a focus on textual criticism. The reason we are focusing on Bart Ehrman for this study is his scholarly work in this area is good, but he is also a non-believer. He considers himself both an agnostic in that he cannot prove God does not exist, but also an atheist because he sees no evidence of God’s existence. It may come across as strange to focus on an atheist leaning agnostic for a Christian focused group study, but his unbelief helps the arguments for Jesus’ life and death, as we will see below.

Nonbelief in Jesus is known as mythicism, which is a fringe scholarly argument that Jesus of Nazareth never existed as a historical person. I find Bart Ehrman as a great resource to counter mythicism, as vocal proponents of mythicism who also argue against Christianity often quote Ehrman for their non-Christian viewpoints.

Life of Jesus:

According to Bart Ehrman, Jesus is the best attested Palestinian Jew of the first century if we look at external evidence. When we add the Gospel sources, Paul the Apostle, and other independent sources, Ehrman claims the existence of Jesus is not an issue for scholars of antiquity. Ehrman, in a 2017 interview, says, “the reason for thinking Jesus existed is because he is abundantly attested in early sources.” He goes on to say, “Atheists have done themselves a disservice by jumping on the bandwagon of mythicism, because frankly, it makes them look foolish to the outside world.”

There are many non-Christian sources from antiquity that referred to the life of Jesus. Those include the following:

- Flavius Josephus provides some of the earliest and most substantial references to Jesus' existence. These include an acknowledgement that he was referred to as "Christ," and he had a brother named James, who was later martyred for his beliefs.
- Testimonium Flavianum tells of Jesus being referred to as a "wise man" and refers to "surprising deeds" he performed. It tells that Jesus was killed by Pilate at the suggestion of Jewish leaders.
- Tacitus, a Roman historian, tells that Jesus suffered an extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hand of Pontius Pilate. Tacitus views Jesus as the historical founder of his followers, Christians.
- Pliny the Younger describes interrogating Christians who would sing hymns to Jesus, the Christ, as their God. This helps to point to the existence of Jesus, plus adds weight to the argument that Jesus' divine nature.

Christian sources for Jesus include authors of the New Testament, such as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Bart Ehrman holds to the scholarly consensus that the Apostle Paul is historical and that he knew James, the brother of Jesus, the Apostle Peter and the Apostle John. Bart Ehrman points out that arguments making claims we cannot trust the Gospels because they are part of the Bible are "nonsense." Ehrman points out that the writers did not know they were writing the Bible, they were merely documenting the accounts of Jesus. He points out that a reader can question the truth of claims made, but they are as viable as any other historical sources. The last point about regarding the documentation for the life of Jesus, Ehrman points out that the Gospels were based on nearly twenty-five authors apart from the writers / contributors, plus Acts has a whole list of contributors separate from those used in the Gospels.

Death of Jesus:

When talking about the death of Jesus, it is good to refer to the evidence from above. Many of the sources from above that refer to Jesus' life, including the non-Christian sources, also refer to his death. Many of the sources, Christian and non-Christian, refer to Pontius Pilate being the one who ordered his execution. Bart Ehrman made a great point during one of his presentations about historical events, he points out that historical events from antiquity cannot be proven, but we must follow the evidence. For the topic of Jesus' death, Bart Ehrman is confident that Jesus both lived and died via crucifixion.

Resurrection of Jesus:

This section is where the topic of miracles comes into play. Bart Ehrman does not believe the resurrection took place, so when it comes to proving the resurrection, I find it best to look beyond Ehrman's arguments. Like Ehrman said in the section covering Jesus' death, we can only evaluate the evidence. For Ehrman, he holds to the belief that Jesus' body was most likely left

dead on the cross and never buried. He likely holds this view because he is a naturalist, which leaves no room for miracles. If someone leaves room for miracles in their worldview, then following the same evidence Ehrman uses, his conclusion may be different.

I like to make the case for the resurrection by following the logic below:

- First, make the case that the writings telling of Jesus' life and death are reliable. If those can be made, as we attempted to do above, they add weight to the reliability of his resurrection.
- Acknowledge that the resurrection is a miracle and does not happen naturally. It is a unique event, which means, by the nature of it being unique, it is an event we cannot scientifically repeat. Since Christians defend the view of the resurrection, we must be ready when skeptics say, "but there is no evidence anywhere throughout history of this ever happening to anyone else." To that I say, correct! That is what makes the event miraculous. If it was a common event that happened throughout history, it would neither be miraculous nor unique.
- Lastly, discuss the change of heart and attitude of Christians before Jesus' death, during his crucifixion, prior to Jesus returning, and then ultimately their heart after Jesus' ascension.

Scripture tells us that Jesus' disciples fled upon His death. The Apostles were scared and hiding, and some resumed their jobs. This evidence is significant and the eventual change in His followers gives weight to the resurrection being true. It is important to point out that history is full of people who die for their belief. That is not up for debate. What is different about Jesus' story and what is important to realize, people rarely die for a lie. If the disciples of Jesus knew he lived and died, but was not resurrected, then why did they have a change of heart? It is more likely that their change of heart comes from seeing a resurrected Jesus, and because of this, they were willing to dedicate their lives to spreading the Gospel, and in some cases, be martyred for their belief.

Follow-Up Questions:

Question time: This is one of the sessions that has a lot of information packed into a lesson for 1-2 hours. Because of this, give the group time to ask questions and have discussions, giving them opportunity to work out answers among themselves before directing the conversation.

Question: If anyone is doubting Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, ask them what type of evidence they would need before believing it is true? Take this time to discuss belief does not necessarily imply 100% certainty. Life choices aren't decided on absolute certainty; they are decided on probability. When viewing the evidence of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, can we believe, with a high percentage of probability, that it is true? If not, what additional evidence would it take?

Conclusion:

If you decide to teach this lesson over 2+ sessions, I recommend spending one session on the life and death evidence and then cover the resurrection and reliability the next. I have found with apologetics, once a person is able to change another person's viewpoint on one topic, it has a cascading effect for related topics. That might be the case with the resurrection. If a Christian can successfully defend the life and death of Jesus, that may open the skeptic up to evidence for the resurrection. Remember, as with all historical evidence from antiquity, it is important to point out that we must follow where the evidence leads, and it is not about absolute certainty, but what is the likelihood of an answer being true.

Session IV – Not all Jesuses are the same: The Jesus of Christianity VS other religions

Introduction:

This lesson will focus on Jesus, but not only according to Christianity, but Jesus according to Mormonism, Jehovah's Witness and Islam. Because of this, it only serves as a starting point to introduce the group to the belief systems and their view of Jesus. There might be a lot of follow-up questions from this lesson, so links will be provided below to a few people who dive deeper into this topic. To start, it is important to know that Jesus is a name and character in all four religions mentioned, but the details of who Jesus is differs between all of them. This lesson will cover some of those differences and look at how they are each talking about a Jesus, but not the same Jesus. Either one is correct or none are correct, but all cannot be correct.

Primary Topic:

To start, we will look at the Jesus of Christianity. Afterward, we will discuss the Jesus as defined in Mormonism, Jehovah's Witness and Islam. Afterward, we will discuss the differences.

Christianity:

- Birth and Earthly Parents: With Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth was born of a virgin. Joseph was his earthly father, though not by blood, and the virgin Mary was his mother. Scripture explains she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.
- Divinity: Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, the Son, fully divine and fully human. He is eternally begotten (not created) and the redeemer of the world.
- Trinitarian View: The doctrine of the Trinity holds to there being one God, but three in person. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, the eternal son who died on the cross. Jesus paid our debt and whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)
 - It is important to point out, within the doctrine of the Trinity, Jesus is not A god, but He IS God. He is the Son who took on flesh. He is fully God and fully man. His divine nature is the same substance as the Father and the Holy Spirit.
 - To help the group understand the Trinity, show them the infographic in figure IV.1.

Mormonism:

- Birth and Earthly Parents: With Mormonism, the view has changed throughout the years as the Mormon church evolved its stance. The current view holds that Jesus was a child conceived between the virgin Mary and God the Father. The current view does not push the idea that God the Father had physical sex with Mary, but previous prophets, such as Brigham Young, taught Jesus was conceived through physical relations between Mary and God the Father.

- Divinity: Mormons hold to the divinity of Jesus, but the details of that are a lot different , and often in direct contradiction, to the traditional Christian views and teachings.
 - The Jesus of Mormonism is the spiritual brother of Lucifer (Satan).
 - The divine nature of Jesus is a created being.
 - Jesus is a god among many gods, and according to Mormonism, every Mormon has the potential to reach godhood one day.
 - The following helps illustrate the difference in doctrine between Christianity and Mormonism, taken from the Church of Jesus Christ (Mormon) website: The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.
- Trinity: Mormon teachings adopt the term Trinity, but like the divinity of Jesus, their teachings on the Trinity are at odds with the traditional Christian view. Mormons hold to the belief that the Trinity consists of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but each person of the Trinity are separate beings.
 - This is at odds with the traditional Christian view of God as singular, but three in person. One being, but three distinct persons.

Jehovah's Witness (JW):

- Birth and Earthly Parents: JWs believe that God (Jehovah) created Jesus and everything else was created through Jesus. This explains why JWs call Jesus, "the firstborn of all creation."
 - JWs hold to the belief that God (Jehovah) miraculously transferred his son's life from Heaven to the womb of the virgin Mary.
- Divinity: JWs believe that Jesus is divine, but in a way that is different from the traditional Christian view.
 - JWs believe Jesus is the only one created by Jehovah directly.
 - JWs believe that Jesus was created and had a beginning.
 - JWs believe that Jehovah is "God Almighty." The greatest in the universe.
 - JWs hold to the belief that Jehovah and Jesus worked closely together for billions of years before heavens and the earth were created.
 - JWs hold to the belief that Michael the Archangel is Jesus, as explained by the following from their website: Michael, referred to by some religions as "Saint Michael," is evidently a name given to Jesus before and after his life on earth.
 - This can also be viewed that Jesus is Michael, or Michael is Jesus. The latter is likely the best way to explain it since Michael is first.
- Trinity: JWs are not Trinitarian. They believe that "the doctrine of the Trinity developed gradually over several centuries and through many controversies."
 - According to the JW website: "In fact, the God of the Bible is never described as being part of a Trinity."

- As a note related to that comment, this is true. The word Trinity does not appear in the Bible, but the doctrine behind it appears throughout Scripture.

Islam:

- Birth and Earthly Parents: Born of a virgin, which Islam views as a miraculous sign.
- Divinity: Islam does not view Jesus as divine, but they view him as one of the greatest prophets. In their view, Jesus was not crucified but was raised to heaven. They believe he will return. Salvation for a Muslim comes through submission to God, their deeds, and ultimately God's mercy. Since Jesus is not God, He does not play a role in salvation like He does in Christianity that claims Jesus was the propitiation for our sins.
- Trinity: The Quran rejects calling Jesus God, Son of God or part of a Trinity.

Comparison:

It is important to remind the group that if multiple belief systems refer to Jesus, that does not mean they are referring to the same Jesus. Throughout history, many claims have been made about Jesus, but if those claims do not align with Scripture, which Christians believe is God's revealed word, then the burden of proof is on those who are making the claims. The above details ways that the Jesus of Islam, of Mormonism and of Jehovah's Witnesses is different than the Jesus of Christianity. Now a few comparison points will be made that can be discussed with the group.

- Christian vs Mormon:
 - Birth and Earthly Parents: While the Mormon religion holds to the thought of a virgin Mary, we see from above that the method of inception and the nature of the child is quite different from traditional Christian views.
 - Divinity: We can see that the Jesus of Mormonism is not the same Jesus of Scripture. While both can sound divine on the surface, the Jesus of Christianity is fully God and fully Man, the Son who took on flesh so He could pay our sin debt. The Jesus of Mormonism is the spiritual brother of Lucifer, a created being, and a god among many other gods.
 - Trinity: While Mormonism uses the word Trinity, we can see that the details are quite different from the traditional Christian view. In Mormonism, all three persons of the Trinity are different gods, not three persons in one being of God.
- Christian vs Jehovah's Witness:
 - Birth and Earthly Parents: While the JWs also hold to the idea of the virgin Mary, the nature of the child is different from traditional Christian views.
 - Divinity: We see with JWs that the Jesus of Scripture is not the Jesus of JW beliefs. The Jesus of JW belief was a created being of Jehovah and is Michael the archangel.

- Trinity: They do not hold to the Trinity, as shown above, and believe it is a later development.
- Christian vs Islam:
 - Birth and Earthly Parents: Mary is held in high regard among Islam, and it is affirmed in the Islamic faith that Mary was a virgin. They view the virgin birth as a miraculous sign. They even hold to Mary having a righteous lineage, although that lineage and the figures of history differ.
 - Divinity: Jesus is viewed as a prophet and messenger, but He is not viewed as God. Islam holds to Jesus having performed miracles and born of a virgin, and they even refer to him as Messiah, but their view of him does not align with Jesus being both human and God.
 - Trinity: Islam rejects the idea and doctrine of the Trinity. They view it as incompatible with monotheism.

Conclusion:

- As we can see from the above groupings, Jesus is defined differently within all four belief systems. There are times when believers can have a difference in understanding of what Scripture means, but the differences between these four groups point to a different Jesus entirely.
- Because of these differences, it is important to understand and acknowledge that when each religious group talks about Jesus, it is not the same person or being.
- Because of this, when it comes to Jesus, Justification, Sanctification, the Resurrection, etc., each Jesus is mutually exclusive. Each Jesus is different. When it comes to Jesus and who He is, the views are incompatible with one another.
- With that, we must look at Scripture and ask, if the four Jesus' described above are at odds, which one, if any, can save?
 - I believe the Jesus of Christianity, the true Jesus, is the only one that can save. The hope is that you and the group using this curriculum believes in that same Jesus, the one who took on flesh, who paid our sin debt and the only one who can give life.

Follow-Up Questions:

Question: Discuss the following with the group. If Christianity is true ...

- Can the Jesus of Mormonism save?
- Can the Jesus of JW save?
- Can the Jesus of Islam save?

Conclusion:

If you decide to split this lesson over 2+ sessions, I recommend defining a few questions and answering those questions for four belief systems, including Christianity. For example: what

does Justification mean and what is Jesus' role in Justification? This lesson covers a lot of information, and the group could easily spend a separate session on each of the three non-Christian belief systems. If the group decides to do this, but is unsure where to start, here are a few YouTube videos. I also included links to websites detailing Mormon, JW and Islam beliefs.

6 MAJOR Religious Groups Compared to Biblical Christianity with Mike Winger:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/M5T2nV77WR0?si=Pc3SC36eykfFHxeJ>

Recommended content creators that will have information on this topic:

- Mike Winger - <https://www.youtube.com/@MikeWinger>
- Allen Parr - <https://www.youtube.com/@thebeatagp>
- Inspiring Philosophy - <https://www.youtube.com/@InspiringPhilosophy>
- Wesley Huff - <https://www.youtube.com/@WesHuff>

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Figure I.1

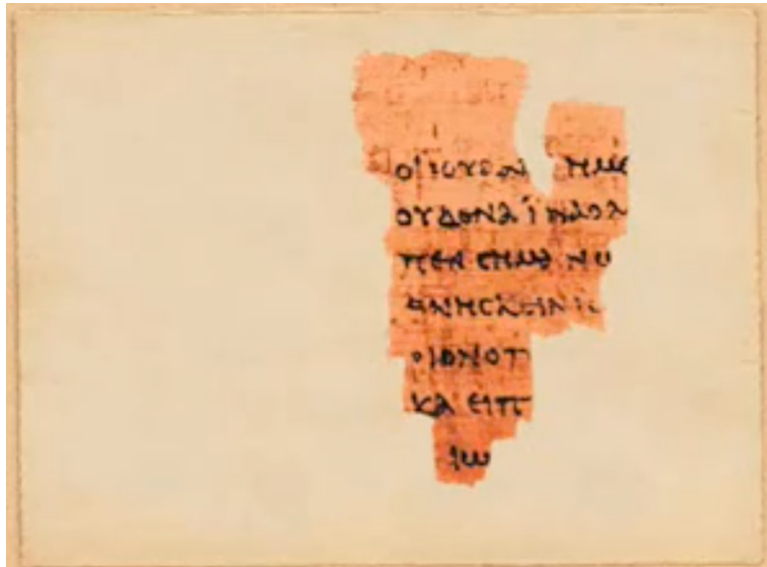


Figure I.2

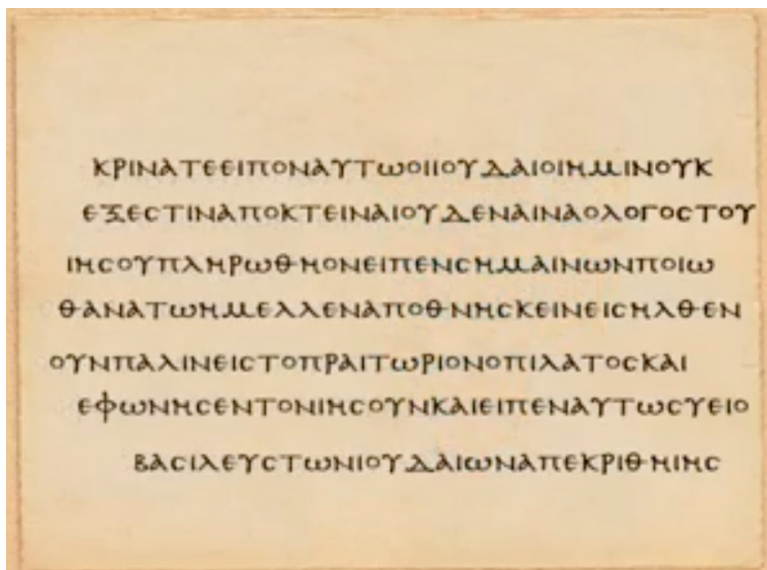


Figure I.3

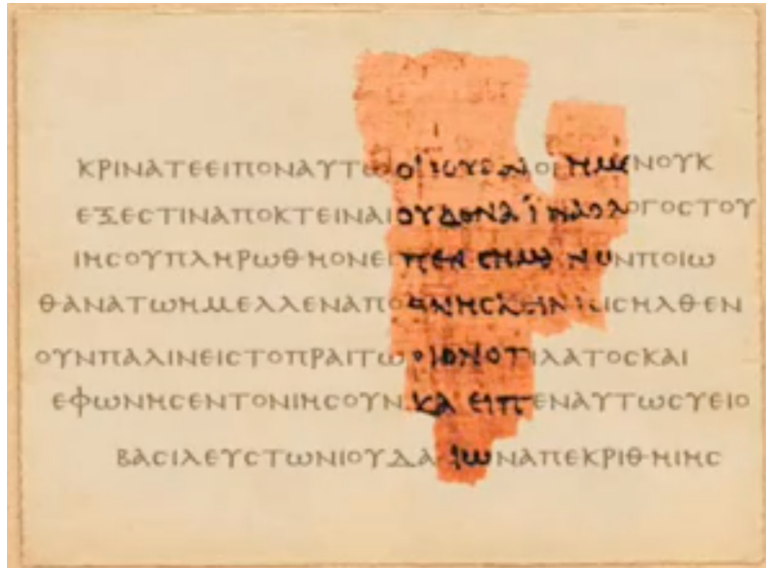


Figure I.4

Recto: John 18:31–33

The recto contains portions of the interaction between Pilate and the Jewish leaders:

Greek Text (visible portions):

ΟΙ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ ΗΜΕΙΝ ΟΥΚ ΕΞΕΣΤΙΝ ΑΠΟΚΤΕΙΝΑΙ
ΟΥΔΕΝΑ ΙΝΑ Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΙΗΣΟΥ ΠΛΗΡΩΘΗ ΟΝ ΕΙ-
ΠΕΝ ΣΗΜΑΙΝΩΝ ΠΟΙΩ ΘΑΝΑΤΩ ΗΜΕΛΛΕΝ ΑΠΟ-
ΘΗΣΚΕΙΝ ΙΣΗΛΘΕΝ ΟΥΝ ΠΑΛΙΝ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΠΡΑΙΤΩ-
ΡΙΟΝ Ο ΠΙΛΑΤΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΦΩΝΗΣΕΝ ΤΟΝ ΙΗΣΟΥΝ
ΚΑΙ ΕΙΠΕΝ ΑΥΤΩ ΣΥ ΕΙ Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΙΟΥ-
ΔΑΙΩΝ

Translation:

"... the Jews, 'For us it is not permitted to kill anyone,' so that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke signifying what kind of death he was going to die. Entered therefore again into the Praetorium Pilate and summoned Jesus and said to him, 'Thou art king of the Jews?'"

Figure I.5

Verso: John 18:37–38

The verso contains part of Jesus' response to Pilate and Pilate's subsequent remarks to the Jews:

Greek Text (visible portions):

ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΕΙΜΙ ΕΓΩ ΕΙΣ ΤΟΥΤΟ ΓΕΓΕΝΝΗΜΑΙ
ΚΑΙ (ΕΙΣ ΤΟΥΤΟ) ΕΛΗΛΥΘΑ ΕΙΣ ΤΟΝ ΚΟΣΜΟΝ ΙΝΑ ΜΑΡΤΥ-
ΡΗΣΩ ΤΗ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ΠΑΣ Ο ΩΝ ΕΚ ΤΗΣ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ-
ΑΣ ΑΚΟΥΕΙ ΜΟΥ ΤΗΣ ΦΩΝΗΣ ΛΕΓΕΙ ΑΥΤΩ
Ο ΠΙΛΑΤΟΣ ΤΙ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥΤΟ
ΕΙΠΩΝ ΠΑΛΙΝ ΕΞΗΛΘΕΝ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΥΣ ΙΟΥ-
ΔΑΙΟΥΣ ΚΑΙ ΛΕΓΕΙ ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΕΓΩ ΟΥΔΕΜΙΑΝ
ΕΥΡΙΣΚΩ ΕΝ ΑΥΤΩ ΑΙΤΙΑΝ

Translation:

"... a King I am. For this I have been born
and (for this) I have come into the world so that I would test
ify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth
hears of me my voice.' Said to him
Pilate, 'What is truth?' and this
having said, again he went out unto the Jews
and said to them, 'I find not one
fault in him.'"

Figure I.6

The difference in "font" (script/handwriting style) between P52 and Codex Sinaiticus is primarily defined by the evolution from an earlier, freer, second-century informal hand to a later, highly refined, professional fourth-century book hand.

- **P52 (Rylands Library Papyrus P52):** Dated to the first half of the 2nd century (c. 100–150 AD), P52 is written in an informal, cursive-influenced hand, sometimes described as a "documentary" or "informal book hand." The letters are not perfectly uniform, showing that it was likely copied by a professional scribe for everyday use rather than a luxurious edition.
- **Codex Sinaiticus (ⲁ or 01):** Dated to the 4th century (c. 325–360 AD), it features an early form of "uncial" script. This is a very precise, professional, and refined hand. The letters are capital (majuscule), stylized, upright, and uniform in size, indicative of high-quality parchment production. [Biblical Hermeneutics Stack Exchange +4](#)

Key Differences in Style:

- **Formality:** P52 is informal/cursive; Sinaiticus is a formal uncial book hand.
- **Execution:** P52 is quicker and less polished; Sinaiticus is meticulously written.
- **Age:** P52 is 200–300 years older than Sinaiticus. [Duke Libraries +4](#)

Both use the "nomina sacra" convention (abbreviating sacred names like God or Jesus), which was a common practice in early Christian manuscripts. [Updated American Standard Version](#)

Figure I.7



Figure I.8

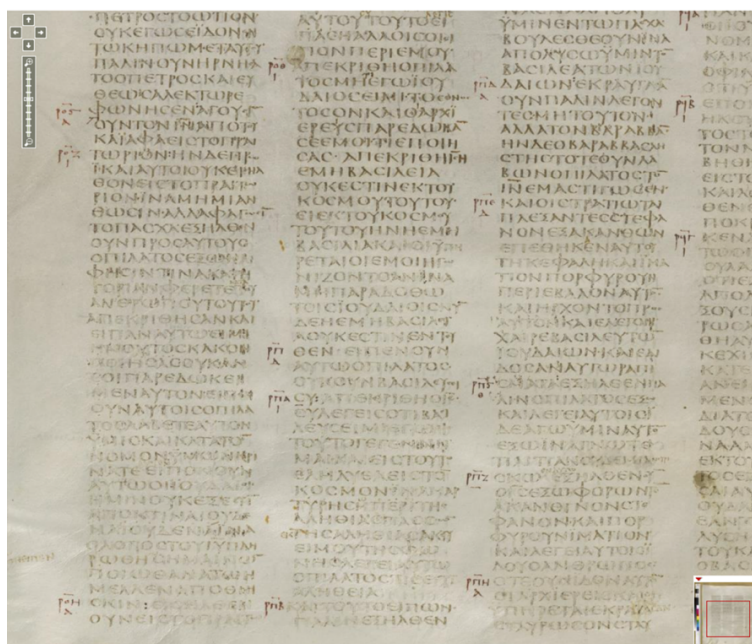
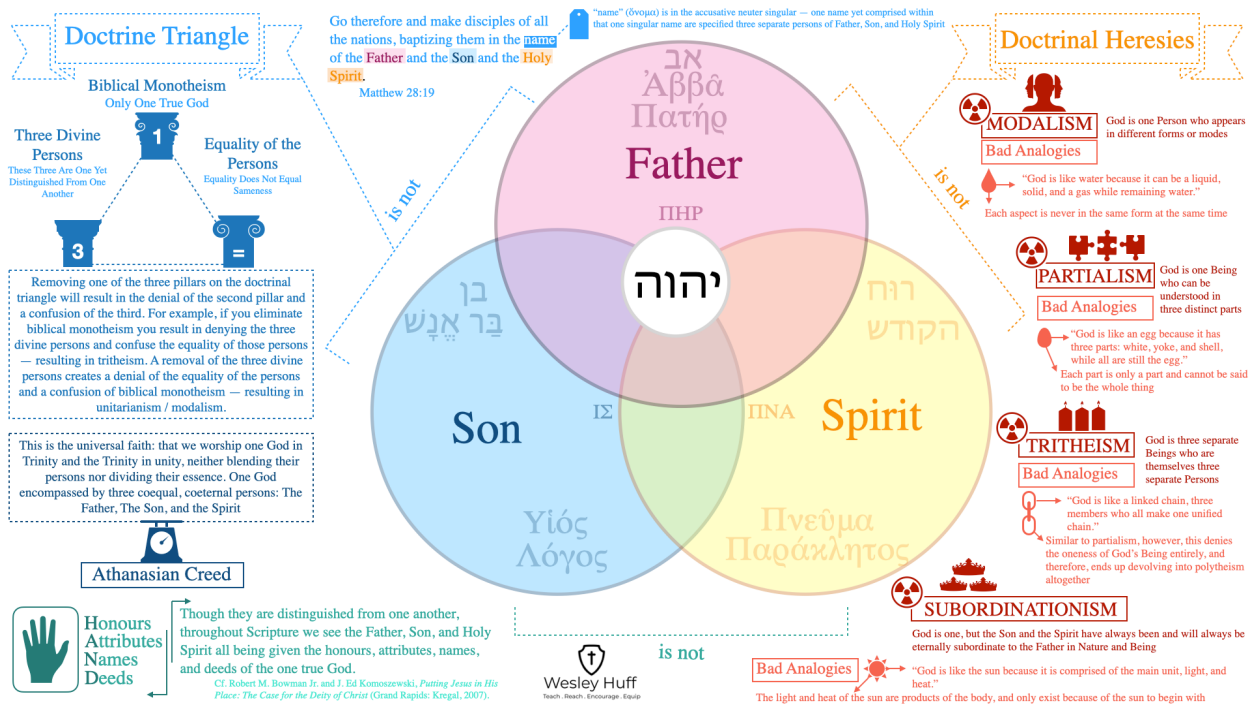


Figure I.9

	καίφα εἰς τὸ πραι τωρίον ἡν δὲ πρῶ τῇ· καὶ αὐτοὶ οὐκ εἰσηλ θόν εἰς τὸ πραιτω ρίον· ἵνα μὴ μίαν θώσιν· ἀλλὰ φαγωσὶ τὸ πάσχα· ἐξηλθεν οὖν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὁ πῖλατος ἐξω καὶ φῆσιν τίνα κατή γορίαν φερετέ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τούτῳ·	36	ἐγώ εἰμι· τί ἐποίη σας· ἀπεκρίθη ἱεὶς ἡ ἐμὴ βασιλεία οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου· εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἦν ἡ ἐμὴ βασιλεία· καὶ οἱ ὕπη ρεταὶ οἱ ἐμοὶ ἡγῶ νίζοντο ἀν· ἵνα μὴ παραδοθῶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις· νῦ ν δὲ ἡ ἐμὴ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ· εἶπεν οὖν αὐτῷ ὁ πῖλατος· οὐκ οὐκ βασιλεὺς εἰ σὺ· ἀπεκρίθη ὁ ἱε ρεὺς· οὐ λέγεις ὅτι βασι λεὺς εἰμι ἐγώ εἰς τοῦτο γεγεννη μαι· καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἐληλυθα εἰς τὸ κόσμον· ἵνα μαρ τυρήσῃ περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας· ἀκού ει μου τῆς φῶ νης· λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ πῖλατος τίς ἐστὶ ἀλήθεια·	19:1	ἦν δὲ ὁ βαρᾶββας Ἀλ στῆς· τότε οὖν Ἀλ βῶν ὁ πῖλατος τὸ ἴν ἐμαστῆσεν· καὶ οἱ στρατιῶται πλέξαντες στεφα νὸν ἐξ ἀκανθῶν ἐπέθηκεν αὐτοῦ τὴν κεφαλὴν· καὶ ἵμα τιον πορφύρου περιεβάλον αὐτό· καὶ ἤρχοντο πρὸς αὐτόν καὶ ἔλεγον· χαίρε βασιλεὺς τῶ Ἰουδαίων· καὶ ἐδί δοσαν αὐτῷ ραπί σματα· ἐξηλθεν πα λιν ὁ πῖλατος ἐξω καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· ἴ δε ἀγὼ ὑμῖν αὐτό ἐξω ἵνα γνῶτε τί ἀπαιτῶ· οὐδεμίαν εὐρί σκω· ἐξηλθεν οὖν ὁ ἱερεὺς ἐξω· φορῶν το ἀκανθίνον στῆ φανόν· καὶ πορ φυροῦν ἵματιον· καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· ἴ δου ὁ ἀνθρώπος· οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ ὑπηρέται ἐκράζα σταυρώσιν σταυ	9	τὸν μάλλον ἐφο βήθη· καὶ εἰσηλ εἰς τὸ πραιτωρίον καὶ λέγει τῷ ἱερε τῇ· ἔθεν εἰς σὺ· ὁ δὲ ποκρίσιν οὐκ ἐδ κεν αὐτῷ· λέγει τῷ ὁ πῖλατος· ἐ οὐ λαλῶ· οὐκ ἔ στι ἐξουσίαν ἐχὼ ἀπολῦσαι σε καὶ ζῶσαι· ἐξουσίαν καὶ ἐμοὶ οὐδεμί αν· εἰ μὴ ἡν δὲ μένον σοὶ ἀνωθ δια τοῦτο ὁ παρ δούς με σοὶ μεῖζ ον αμαρτίαν ἐχε ἐκ τούτου ὁ πῖλ τος ἐζητεῖ ἀπολ σαι αὐτόν· οἱ δὲ οὐδαῖοι ἔλεγον ἐάν τούτον ἀπο λύσῃς· οὐκ εἰ φ τοῦ καίσαρος· τ ὁ βασιλεὺς εἰ ποῶν ἀντιλέγει τῷ καίσαρι· ὁ οὖν πῖλατος ἀ κούσας τῶν λόγ																																																																
29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

Translation	Русский	Ελληνικά	Deutsch	English
18:25	But Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They then said to him: Art not thou also of his disciples? He denied and said: I am not.			
26	One of the servants of the chief priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter had cut off, says: Did I not see thee in the garden with him?			
27	Again therefore Peter denied; and immediately a cock crew.			
28	Then they lead Jesus from Caiaphas to the pretorium; and it was early morn. And they went not into the pretorium, that they might not be defiled, but that they might eat the passover.			
29	Pilate therefore came forth to them and said: What accusation bring you against this man?			
30	They answered and said to him: If this man had not done evil, we would not have delivered him to thee.			
31	Pilate therefore said to them: Take you him and judge him according to your law. The Jews then said to him: It is not lawful for us to put any one to death:			
32	that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke signifying by what kind of death he was about to die.			
33	Then Pilate entered the pretorium again, and called Jesus and said to him: Art thou the King of the Jews?			
34	Jesus answered: Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell thee of me?			
35	Pilate answered: Am I a Jew? Thy nation and the chief priests delivered thee to me: what hast thou done?			
36	Jesus answered: My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my servants would fight, that might not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not hence,			
37	Pilate then said to him: Art thou not then a king? Jesus answered: Thou sayest, for I am a king. To this end was I born, and to this end have I come into the world, that I might testify to the truth: every one that is of the truth hears my voice.			
38	Pilate says to him: What is truth? And having said this. he went out again to the Jews, and said to them: I find no fault in him.			

Figure IV.1



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