

THE CASE FOR CHRIST



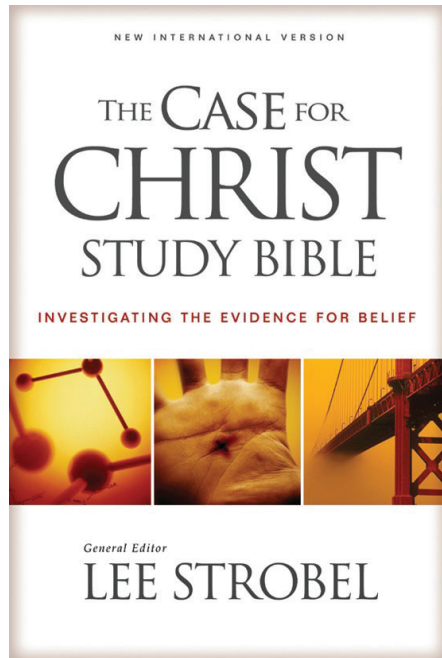
7-Day Plan

CASE FOR CHRIST

7-DAY PLAN

This 7-day reading plan explores Jesus' claims, his deity, and offers thoughts demonstrating that he is the Messiah by Lee Strobel, a former atheist. Devotional thoughts are drawn from Lee's own experiences and feature a journalistic style from his days as an investigative reporter with the Chicago Tribune. The plan is perfect for those engaged in a thorough search for the truth to decide if Jesus was who he claimed to be.

All devotions are drawn from The Case for Christ Study Bible.



DAY 1

*A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not
snuff out, till he has brought justice
through to victory.*

—Matthew 12:20

How Does Jesus Fulfill the Messianic Prophecy of the Servant Healer?

Matthew 12:15 – 21 quotes the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1 – 4, which states that the Messiah would, by God’s Spirit, tend to the weak with humility. In what ways does Jesus fulfill this prophecy?

Both Matthew and Isaiah depict a servant leader who would have the power to heal, but who would choose not to exercise his power to gain public recognition. Jesus quietly yet steadily proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God. In Matthew 12:16 Jesus asked those whom he cured not to tell others who he was. This is evidence of his humility and desire not to draw attention to himself.

The Messiah came to minister to the weak, which the bruised reed and smoldering wick poignantly symbolize. A bruised reed is fit only to be thrown away and a smoldering wick is to be trimmed or discarded. These images represent people rejected by others yet embraced by the Messiah. The Gospels record many instances of Jesus reaching out to those in low social standing who were at the mercy of those with power and wealth (see Matthew 11:28 – 30; Luke 7:36 – 50; John 8:1 – 11).

Jesus’ ministry to the sick and the weak and his demonstration of humility despite his great power fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah 42. Matthew recognized this fulfillment and recorded Christ’s deeds for us to appraise today.

DAY 2

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

—Matthew 14:32-33

How Did Jesus' Actions Support His Claims of Divinity?

Jesus' words, although impressive, were sometimes ignored or dismissed; however, the miracles he performed were difficult to discount or dispute. Among Jesus' many extraordinary powers was his authority over the natural world.

Matthew 14:22 – 33 records the miraculous event of Jesus walking on the windy surface of a stormy lake to reach his disciples. In addition, with Jesus' urging, Peter was miraculously empowered to also walk on the water. When Jesus and Peter climbed into the boat, the wind immediately became still, which caused the disciples aboard the boat to exclaim, "Truly you are the Son of God." A similar passage in Mark 4:39 reports that with the simple phrase, "Quiet! Be still!" Jesus quieted the furious squall. The disciples were stunned and terrified (see Mark 4:41). What kind of person, they wondered, possesses such power that even the forces of nature obey him? They knew the answer: only God himself.

Although words can be compelling, actions provide powerful evidence to reinforce one's words. In Jesus' case, he made bold claims, and as his disciples could attest, his actions reinforced his authority as the Son of God.

DAY 3

When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.” And the disciples were filled with grief.
—Matthew 17:22-23

Why Did Jesus Need to Die?

The paradox found in the Gospels gets as quizzical as it possibly can in Matthew 17:22 – 23. God was going to save the world through the death of his Son. God, in his divine nature, doesn’t die. So how was God going to get this done? How was God going to be the Savior of the human race? He had to come to Earth as a human being to accomplish that task. And Jesus was the one to do it.

Jesus said in Matthew 20:28 that he “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” This is either the highest form of megalomania or it’s an example of somebody who really believes, as he said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). It was as if Jesus was saying, “I have the authority to speak for the Father; I have the power to act for the Father; if you reject me, you’ve rejected the Father.”

Even if you eliminated the Gospel of John and just read the Synoptic Gospels, this would still be the conclusion you would come to. And it is the conclusion that Jesus would have led us to if we had a Bible study and asked him this question. An astute Bible reader needs to ask, “Why is there no other first-century Jew who has millions of followers today? Why isn’t there a John the Baptist movement? Why, of all first century figures, including the Roman emperors, is Jesus still worshiped today, while the others have crumbled into the dust of history?” It’s because this Jesus — the historical Jesus — is also the living Lord. He’s still around, while the others are long gone.

DAY 4

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”

—Mark 2:5-10

What is the Significance of Jesus’ Forgiveness of Sins?

Doctors note that sometimes people can have a psychologically induced illness, and if they get a new purpose or direction for living, they show relief from the symptoms — they don’t need the illness anymore. For some others, the “placebo effect” can have visible results. That is, if you think you’re going to get better, you often do get better. And when people came to Jesus, they believed he could heal them, so he did. But the fact remains: regardless of how he did it, Jesus did heal them.

Of course, even if you hold to this explanation for some cases, that doesn’t explain all of Jesus’ healings. Often a psychosomatic healing takes time; Jesus’ healings were instantaneous. Many times people who are healed psychologically have their symptoms return a few days later, but we don’t see any evidence of this in the Gospel accounts. And Jesus healed conditions like blindness and leprosy, for which a psychosomatic explanation isn’t very likely. In addition to these, he brought people back from the dead — and death is not a psychologically induced state! Finally, you have all of his nature miracles — the calming of the sea, turning water into wine. They defy naturalistic answers.

DAY 5

God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.

—Acts 5:31

Did People Witness to the Fact That Jesus Was God?

Though some critics have called Jesus merely a prophet or a good man, many people were witnesses of his divine identity. In Acts 5:31 Peter declared that Jesus is “Prince and Savior” and that he is seated at God’s right hand and able to forgive the sins of the very people who had crucified him. Peter clearly believed that Jesus is God. In Matthew 16:15 – 16 Jesus asked Peter about this very issue: “Who do you say I am?” and Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And the disciple Thomas, coming face to face with the resurrected Jesus, confessed, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

Even Gentiles proclaimed Jesus’ divinity. When Jesus died, the sky grew dark and the earth shook. Seeing all this happen, the Roman centurion and soldiers who carried out the crucifixion exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:54).

In Mark 2:1 – 12 (see also Matthew 9:1 – 8; Luke 5:17 – 26), Jesus not only forgave a paralyzed man’s sins but also proved his authority to forgive by curing the man of his paralysis. Jesus ministered to this man publicly, in front of many witnesses and in full view of the hostile Pharisees. Although the Pharisees rejected Jesus’ claim despite the evidence, those whose spiritual eyes were opened believed there was no room for doubt: Jesus was (and is) the Son of God.

DAY 6

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

—1 Corinthians 13:13

What Distinguishes Jesus From Other Religious Figures?

Jesus was unlike any person who preceded him or anyone who will follow him. While other religious figures throughout history have given wisdom and spiritual guidance to millions of people, two factors distinguish Jesus from the rest: first, his divinity, and second, his love.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul beautifully describes a unique kind of love that is greater than faith and hope — love that overshadows prophecy and all other impressive spiritual gifts. Although our perspective is too narrow to fully comprehend this love, we see clear glimpses of this eternal, unparalleled love through Jesus. This is the kind of love that this passage calls us to have for each other.

Jesus, the King of heaven, selflessly forfeited the comforts of heaven and rejected all offers of earthly power or wealth to lead a short, simple life. Ultimately he proved the depth of his love by sacrificing his life on our behalf. As the Son of God, he so loved the world that he paved a path to God for everyone who acknowledges him as God (see John 3:16; 14:6). These things make Jesus unique among religious figures.

DAY 7

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

—Ephesians 2:15-16

Did Jesus Really Die On the Cross?

Since Jesus' death is central to the Christian message, is there any way — any possible way — that he could have survived the crucifixion?

"Absolutely not," replies Dr. Alexander Metherell, who is both a medical doctor and a crucifixion expert.

"Remember that due to his flogging he was already in hypovolemic shock from the massive blood loss even before the crucifixion started. He couldn't possibly have faked his death, because you can't fake the inability to breathe for long. [Crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by suffocation due to the stresses that are put on the victim's chest muscles and hence his ability to breathe.] Besides, the spear thrust into his heart [see John 19:34] would have settled the issue once and for all. And the Roman soldiers weren't about to risk their own death by allowing him to walk away alive. It's impossible that Jesus merely swooned on the cross. It's a fanciful theory without any possible basis in fact."

— Adapted from interview with Dr. Alexander Metherell