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# WHY BELIEVE?

A REASONED APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY



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STONE CENTER  
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# WHY BELIEVE?



September 20, 2023  
Acts2Fellowship



NEIL SHENVI

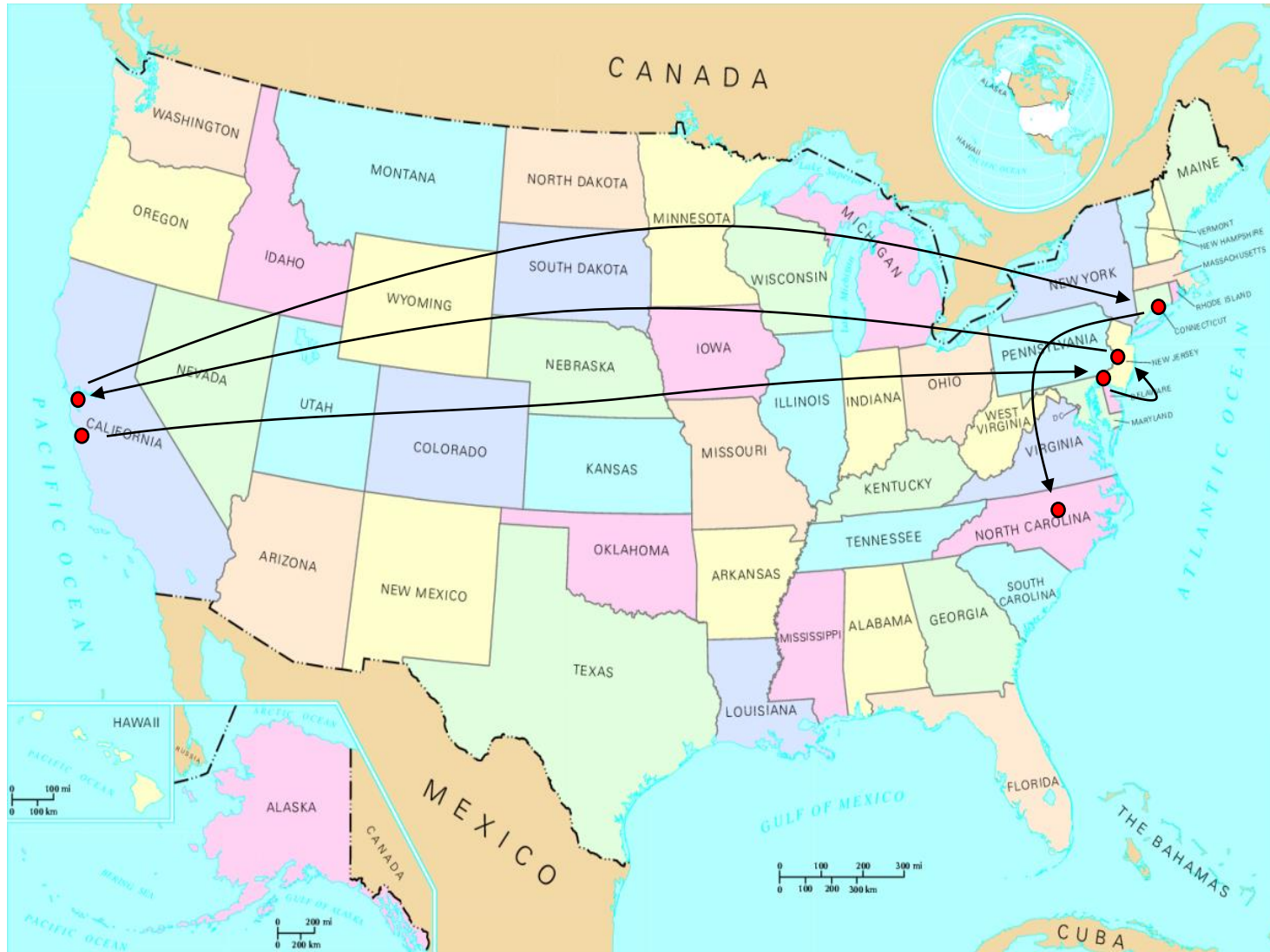


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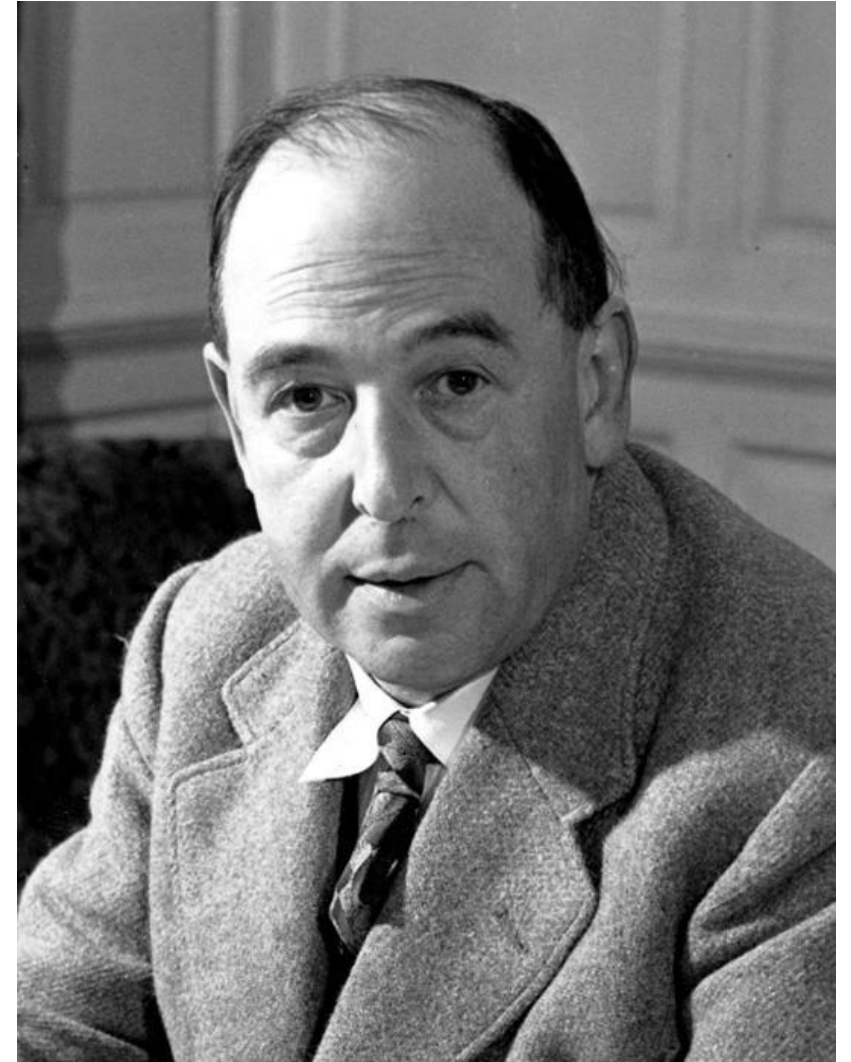


# Outline

- Introduction
- Trilemma
- Moral Argument
- Argument from the Gospel
- Conclusion

# Liar, Lunatic, or Lord

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. - C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 55–56



# Liar, Lunatic, or Lord or Legend

You are probably familiar with the old birthday party game, “telephone.” ... Invariably, the story has changed so much in the process of retelling that everyone gets a good laugh... Imagine playing “telephone” not in a solitary living room with ten kids on a sunny afternoon in July, but over the expanse of the Roman Empire (some 2,500 miles across!), with thousands of participants, from different backgrounds, with different concerns, and in different contexts, some of whom have to translate the stories into different languages all over the course of decades. What would happen to the stories? – Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*, 51–52



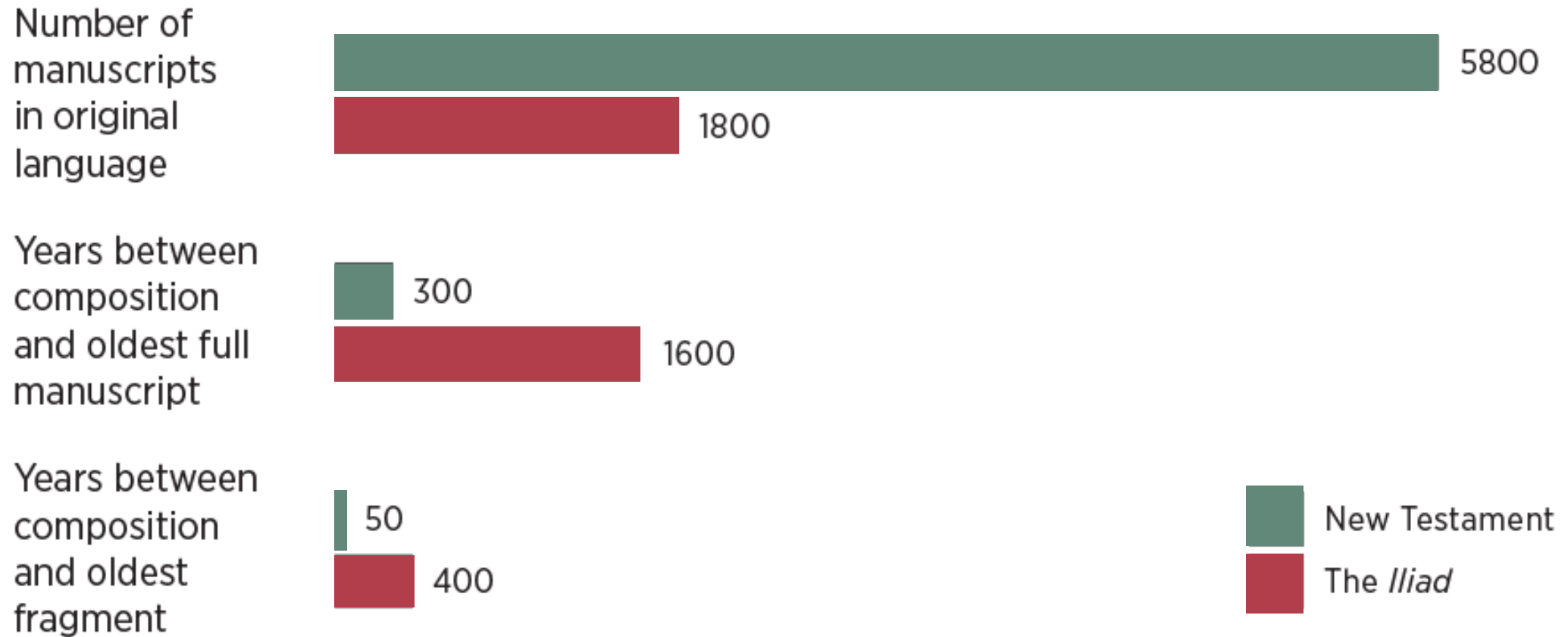


# Liar, Lunatic, or Lord or Legend

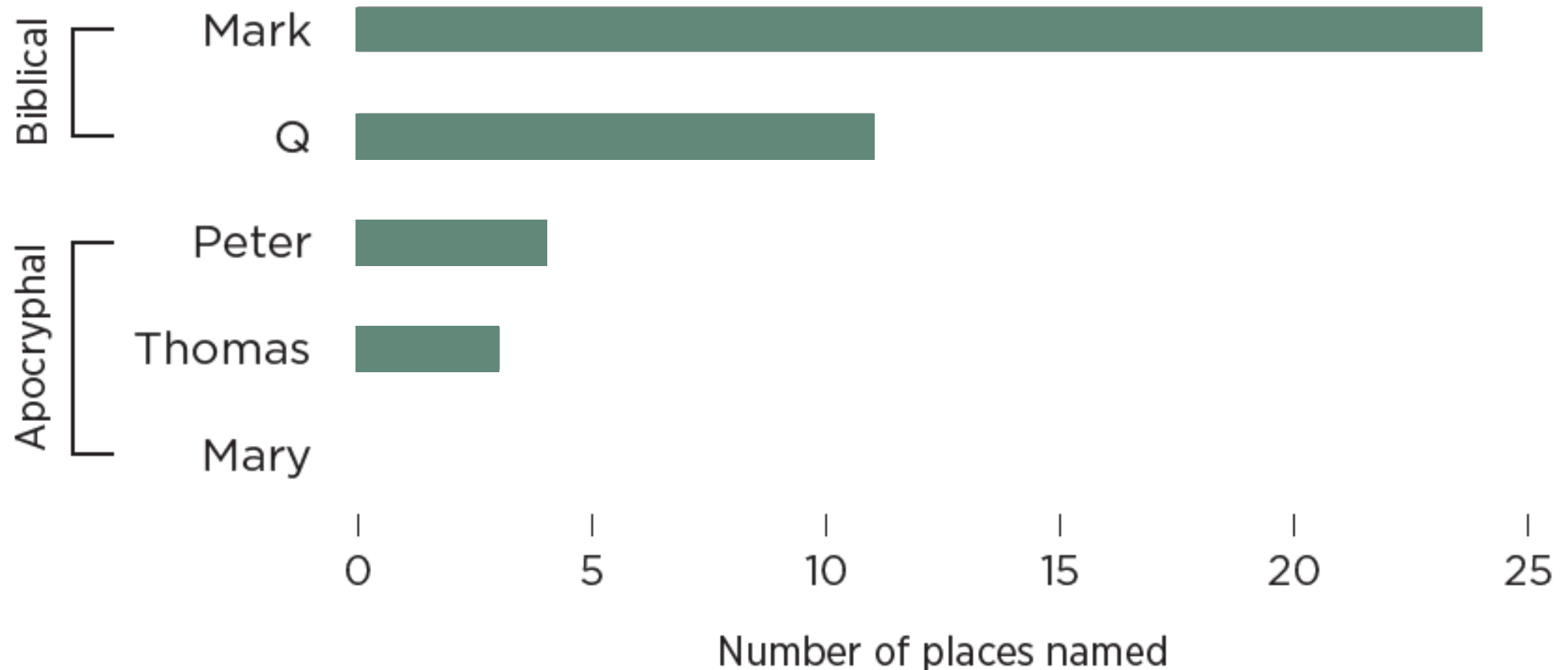
These are composite documents, the final products of long and creative traditions in which old material was reworked and new material interpolated. As they now stand, they are witness first of all to the faith of their individual writers and their late first-century, largely Gentile communities. Only at a distance do they relate to the people and the period they purport to describe. - Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus*, 4



# Manuscript evidence



# Geographic evidence



# Contextual evidence

- Aramaicisms: *Boanerges* (Mk. 3:17); *Talitha cumi* (Mk. 5:41); *Corban* (Mk. 7:11); *Ephphatha* (Mk. 7:34); *Abba* (Mk. 14:36); *Eloi Eloi lema sabachthani* (Mk. 15:34)
- Religious controversies: ceremonial washing (Mk. 7:3-4), Corban (7:11), Sadducees' denial of the Resurrection (Mk. 12:18)
- Gentile circumcision:
  - “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.” (Gal. 5:2)
  - “Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh” (Phil. 3:2)
  - “some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.” (Acts 15:5)



# Onomastic evidence

Gospels and Acts			Ossuaries	
<i>Rank</i>	<i>Male Names</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Male Names</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Simon	10.5	Simon	13.3
2	Joseph	7.7	Joseph	10.2
3	Judas	6.4	Judas	10.0
4	John	6.4	Lazarus	6.6
5	James	6.4	John	5.7
6	Jesus	3.8	Jesus	5.0
7	Ananias	3.8	Ananias	4.1
8	Herod	3.8	Matthew	3.8
<i>Rank</i>	<i>Female Names</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Female Names</i>	<i>Percent</i>
1	Mary	35.0	Mary	23.5
2	Salome	6.0	Salome	23.0

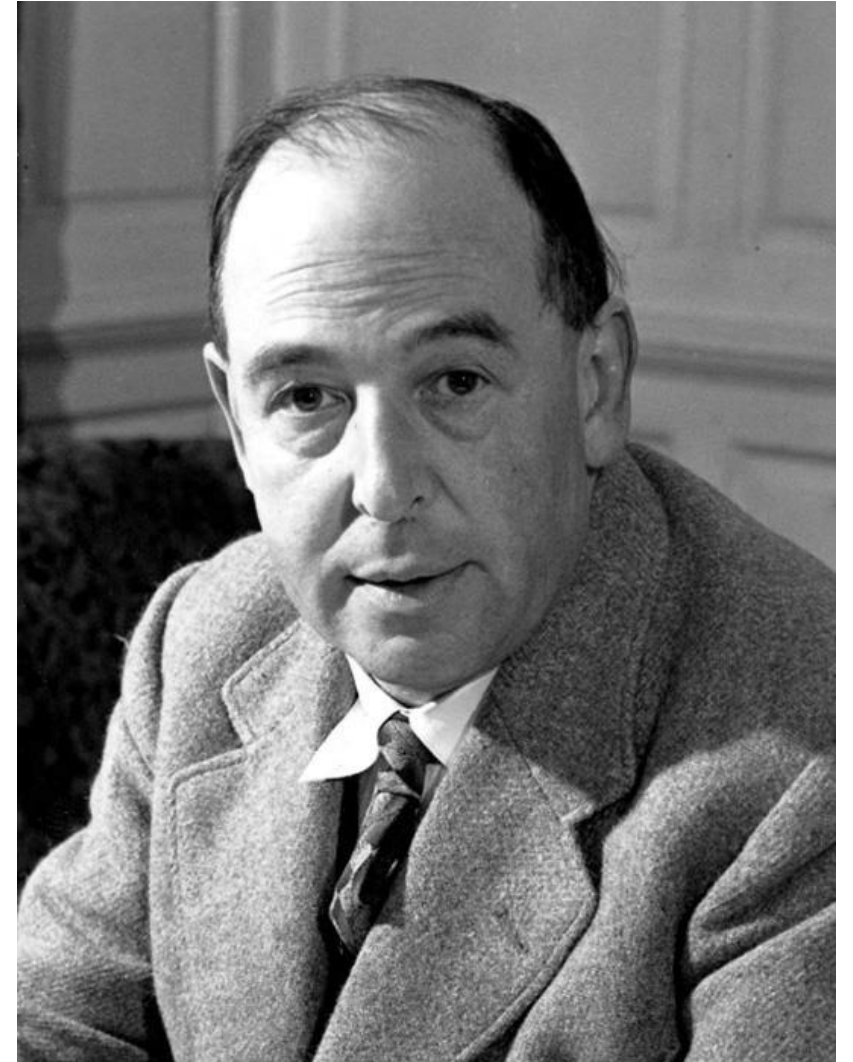
# Jesus's claims

- Jesus claimed to be the Jewish Messiah, God's chosen ruler of the nation of Israel (Matt. 26:63–64; Mark 8:29–30; John 4:25–26).
- He claimed to be able to forgive sin (Matt. 9:2–8; Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:18–26; 7:36–50).
- He claimed that he was the only way to know God (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 14:6).
- He claimed to have preexisted (Luke 10:18; John 8:57–58; 17:5).
- He claimed that we must love him more than our mothers or fathers or children or even our own lives (Matt. 10:37–39; Luke 9:23–24; 14:26–27; John 12:25).
- He claimed that our eternal destinies depend on our response to him (Matt. 16:24–27; Luke 12:8–9; John 5:24).
- He claimed that he would suffer for our sins (Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20; John 3:14–15).
- He claimed that he would rise from the dead (Matt. 16:21; Mark 10:34; John 2:19).
- He claimed that he would return at the end of time to judge all of humanity (Matt. 25:31–46; Mark 13:26–27; John 5:28–30).

# Liar, Lunatic, or Lord

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

- C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 55–56



# Outline

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# Deductive Form

P1. If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.

P2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.

Therefore,

C. God exists.

# Is Premise 1 True?

- “God does not exist [and] all possibility of finding values in a heaven of ideas disappears along with Him. . . . Everything is permissible if God does not exist.” - Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, 22
- “[Moral facts] constitute so odd a cluster of qualities and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events, without an all-powerful god to create them.” - J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God*, 115
- “A ‘soft atheist’ would hold that one could be an atheist and still believe in morality [but] the religious fundamentalists are correct: without God, there is no morality.” - Joel Marks, “An Amoral Manifesto (Part I)” *Philosophy Now* 80 (2010), 30–33.

# Is Premise 2 True?

- Moral realism vs. external world realism
- A survey of professional philosophers found that most are moral realists:

## Meta-ethics: moral realism or moral anti-realism?

Accept or lean toward: moral realism	525 / 931 (56.4%)
Accept or lean toward: moral anti-realism	258 / 931 (27.7%)
Other	148 / 931 (15.9%)

- “distinguishing right and wrong” “good and bad distinguished” and “moral sentiments” are “human universals” found in every culture – Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 435-439
- Cypher’s Challenge
- Amoralism Pill

# Deductive Form

➡ P1. If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist.

➡ P2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.

Therefore,

➡ C. God exists.



# Morality and truth-seeking

P1. If God does not exist, then we are not morally obligated to seek the truth.

P2. We are morally obligated to seek the truth.

Therefore,

C. God exists.

# Premise 1: If atheism is true, should we seek truth?

- Truth can be opposed to human flourishing
- Falsehood can promote human flourishing



Premise 2: If I'm not morally obligated to seek truth, why seek it?

Why should I care whether Christianity is true or false?

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# The Argument From the Gospel

P1. If a religion makes uniquely true claims about existential realities, the **best explanation** is that it is uniquely true.

P2. Christianity makes **unique claims** about the reality of our moral failure and our need for rescue.

P3. It is **true** that we are **moral failures**.

P4. It is **true** that we need **rescue**.

Therefore,

C. the best explanation is that Christianity is **uniquely true**.

# Basketball Analogy



# The Uniqueness of Christianity

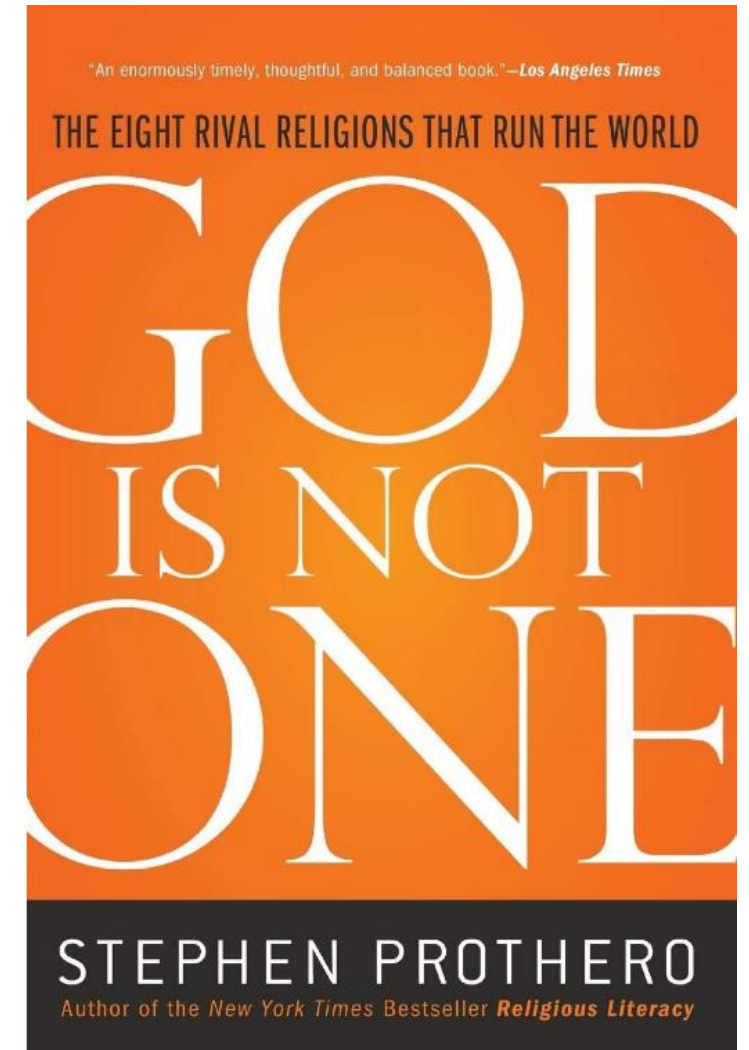
Prof. Stephen Prothero's characterization of world religions:

Religion	The problem is...	The solution is...
Buddhism	Suffering	Awakening
Hinduism	Samsara ("wandering")	Moksha ("release")
Islam	Pride	Submission
Judaism	Exile	Return to God
Christianity	Sin	Salvation

# The Uniqueness of Christianity

“[W]hile it may seem to be an act of generosity to state that Confucians and Buddhists and Muslims and Jews can also be saved, this statement is actually an act of obfuscation...

[J]ust as hitting home runs is the monopoly of one sport, salvation is the monopoly of one religion. If you see sin as the human predicament and salvation as the solution, then it makes sense to come to Christ.” – Stephen Prothero, *God is Not One*, p. 22-23.



# Sin as transgression





# Sin as slavery



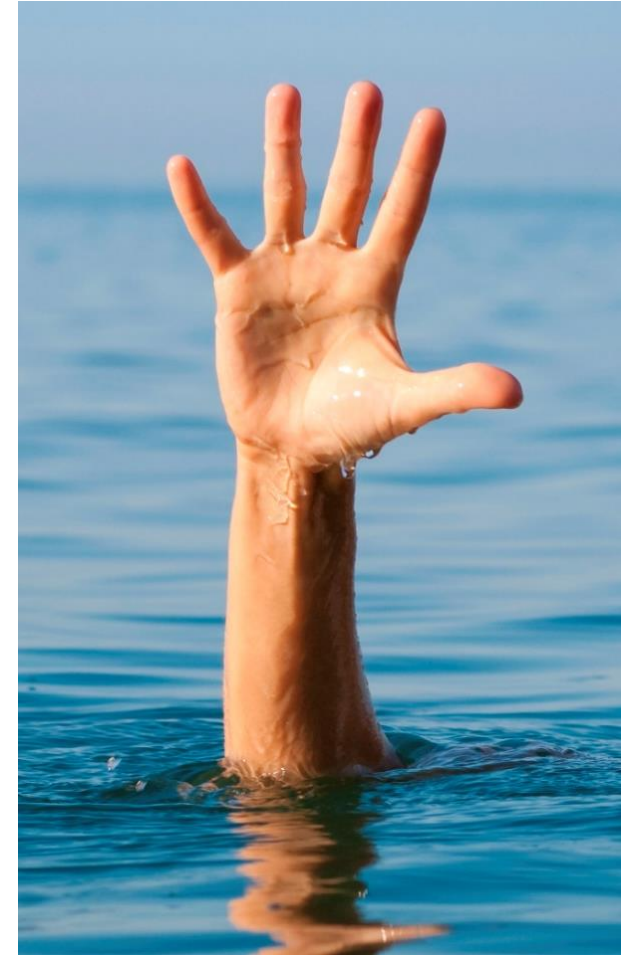


# The Bible on Rescue

"God shows his love for us in that **while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" - Rom. 5:8

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved" - Eph. 2:4-5

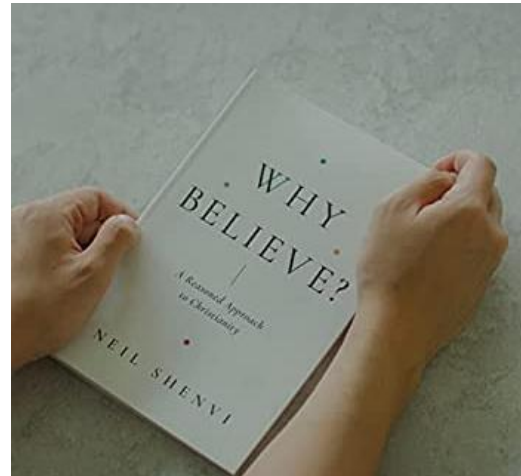
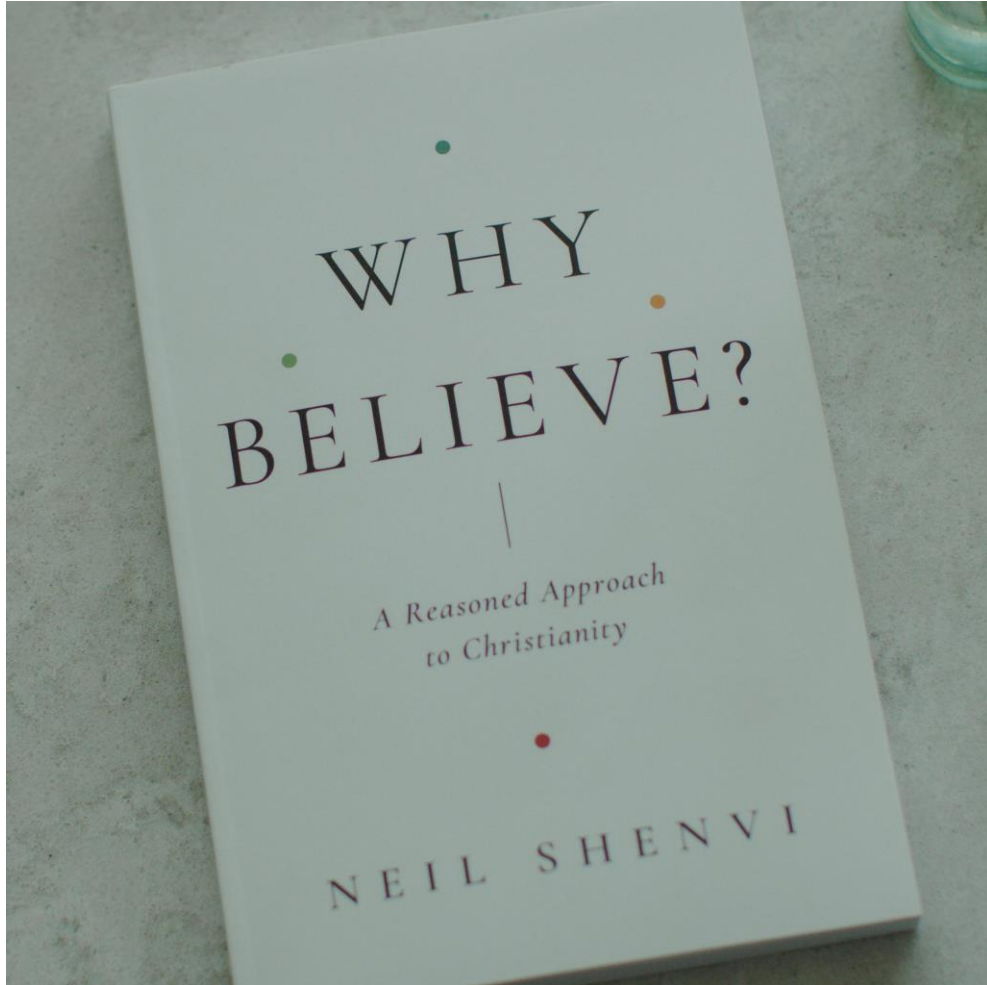
**"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**- Luke 19:10



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# Why Believe?



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# Acknowledgements

Dr. Christina Shenvi



Dr. Pat Sawyer



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- Twitter @NeilShenvi

# Announcements:

- Follow Neil at: Shenviapologetics.com
- Response form: <https://tinyurl.com/a2f2023>
- This Friday 9/22: Problem of Pain talk



A2F CAROLINA INVITES YOU

# HOW COULD A LOVING GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

9/22 (FRI) | 6:30PM | 211 W CAMERON AVE

DINNER PROVIDED

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RIDES @ 6:15PM AT  
HOJO LOOP + DAVIS LOT

TEXT (919) 960-1001