

**TRUSTING THE GOSPELS
FOR
HIGH SCHOOL
HOMESCHOOLERS**

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UNIT DESCRIPTION

A study exploring the trustworthiness of the four Gospels. Students will wrestle with common objections to trusting the Gospels and consider eight reasons to trust the Gospels. In addition, students will compare the biblical Gospels to selected non-biblical Gospels. Finally the life of Jesus will be compared with the lives of Confucius, Buddha, and Muhammad. This unit contains 21 lessons, 4 quizzes, and answers to the daily lessons and quizzes.

SUGGESTED GRADING

If someone will be grading your work, or even if you (the student) will be doing the grading here's a suggested grading system:

Completion of Lessons (50%)

Quizzes (50%)

REQUIRED RESOURCES

1. **A modern English version of the Bible.** (You can read many Bible versions for free at www.biblegateway.com.)
2. **A notebook** to answer the questions and do the assignments given in each lesson.
3. **Access to the internet** because this unit incorporates free online resources. (Since the internet is always in a state of flux some of the instructions regarding online resources may need to be updated.)

ABBREVIATIONS USED

W – work to be completed

Q – question to answer in your notebook

= precedes a definition

^{en} – endnote signs are indicated with **bold superscript numbers** in the daily lessons. *Please read all answers in the back because they contain important information, but do so only *after* you've answered the questions yourself.

^{fn} – footnotes (written with superscript roman numerals) contain bibliographic information.

NT – New Testament

TRUSTING THE GOSPELS

Lesson 1: To Believe or not to Believe

There are two extremes in life. You can believe everything you hear or you can disbelieve everything you hear.

Q: What are the dangers of both extremes?¹

Q: Have you ever been tricked into believing something that was false? If so, write down your experience.

Q: Who's the most gullible person you know? Who's the most skeptical person you know?

Q: In what ways do we demonstrate trust every day?

Of course, no one is completely skeptical and no one is completely gullible, but our personalities tend to lean toward one side of the spectrum. When it comes to religious matters some people attempt to be completely skeptical and distrust every belief system. Others are more on the gullible side and seemingly swallow everything they hear.

Since both extremes are dangerous, we should seek to find a healthy balance. We can arrive at a balanced position by using discernment. Discern = distinguishing truth from error. When it comes to the big issues of life, like God and life after death, discernment becomes even more important because there are many different views, the issues are vital, and getting tricked in this area would be a major mistake.

Q: In general, where would you place yourself on the spectrum below? Support your answer with an example or two.

Skeptical ————— Discerning ————— Gullible

Let's conclude this lesson by considering a couple fundamental questions.

W: Write an essay in response to the following questions:

- Does what we believe matter? Why or why not?
- Should people believe the truth? Why or why not?

Lesson 2: Fiction or Non-Fiction?

In the previous lesson, we looked at the importance of distinguishing truth from error. That means we have to determine whether someone or something is worthy of our trust. As we move forward, our focus will be on the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In particular, we're seeking to answer the question: Are the four Gospels trustworthy?

Some have read the Gospels and concluded that they are works of fiction. In fact, some even believe that Jesus never existed. Check out jesusneverexisted.com if you don't believe me. On the other hand, others have read the Gospels, believed every word and surrendered their lives to Jesus. It seems that the standard of judging truth and error varies greatly from person to person. So our job is to consider whether the Gospels should be placed in the fiction or non-fiction section of the library. (By the way, I'm assuming that you've already read the Gospels. In particular, we'll be working with the Gospel of Mark in a few lessons.)

W: Make a list for each of the following headings:

1. Reasons for believing the Gospels
2. Reasons for doubting the Gospels

Faith is not a matter of believing without reasons. You don't have to throw away your brain to become a Christian. Jesus commanded us to use our intellect when he quoted the Shema: love the Lord your God with all your mind (Mk. 12:30).

W: Consider the following question and write an essay in response.

- What difference would it make if Jesus was simply the greatest fictional character ever invented and not a historical person?

Lesson 3: Objections to Trusting the Gospels

Let's begin by listing a few reasons people give for distrusting the Gospels.

1. They contain stories that sound fictional such as healings and miracles.
2. They seem to contradict each other.
3. They've been changed so much that we no longer know what was originally written.
4. There's no evidence that they're historically accurate.

Your responses to those criticisms will determine whether you trust or distrust the Gospels.

W: Write your own responses to any two of the objections above.

Lesson 4: Reasons to Trust the Gospels: Part 1

Here are four reasons to trust the Gospels.

- 1. The four writers basically say the same thing in different ways.** While each Gospel gives different details of the life of Jesus, they all essentially tell the same story. That story is focused on a first-century Jew named Jesus, who taught about God, gathered a group of disciples to himself, performed miracles, got into trouble with the religious authorities, was sentenced to death for blasphemy, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and three days later rose from the dead. All four Gospels agree on those facts. Any differences between the Gospels are minor compared to their major similarities. Furthermore, many argue that the differences enable us to trust the Gospels because they show that the writers didn't directly copy each other.
- 2. Many of the details in the Gospels sound true.**
 - First, the Gospels record embarrassing details about the disciples. The disciples are portrayed as a regular group of guys who usually mess up (Matt. 17:16–20; Mk. 4:40; 6:52; 8:32–33; 10:13–14; 14:37, 50, 66–72). These stories not only sound true to life, but it's difficult to explain why the Gospels contain such stories if they didn't actually happen. Why would Christians make themselves and their leaders look so bad? Consider the apostle Peter who became one of the primary leaders of the early church. Why would any Christian invent the story of Peter denying Jesus three times? And why would Christians preserve this story in writing?
 - Second, the Gospels record embarrassing details about Jesus. Jesus was accused of being out of his mind and demon-possessed (Mk. 3:21–22), unable to perform mighty works in his hometown (Mk. 6:5), ignorant of the end time (Mk. 13:32) and to top it all off, killed on a cross. Think of it, the hero of the story dying as a common criminal. Finally, Jesus' resurrection contains an embarrassing detail. At a time when the witness of females wasn't valid testimony, women were the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 28:1–10; Mk.16:1–8; Lk. 24:1–11; Jn. 20:11–18). If you were fabricating stories to promote the Christian faith it's unlikely that you would include these embarrassing details.

- Third, the Gospels are full of incidental details that seem to come from eyewitnesses. For example, “green grass” (Mk. 6:39), “an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard” (Mk. 14:3), a young man running away naked (Mk. 14:51–52), “the father of Alexander and Rufus” (Mk. 15:21), and 153 large fish (Jn. 21:11). These details don’t carry any significant meaning in the narratives, but they sound like eyewitness information.

3. **The Gospel writers claim to be conveying accurate information and we usually give people who make such claims the benefit of the doubt** (Mk. 1:1; Lk. 1:1–4; Jn. 19:35; 21:24). Think about it, when someone says, “I’m telling you the truth, this really happened” do you tend to believe it? Most of the time we give such people the benefit of the doubt. We can conclude: the Gospel writers say they’re telling the truth and they sound like they’re telling the truth.

4. **The NT books (which include the Gospels) are the best supported documents of ancient history.** While we don’t have the original writings for the NT books, we have many copies of each book. There are more than five thousand Greek copies of the NT or parts thereof and specifically more than two thousand copies of the Gospels. These copies are closer in time to the original writings than any other work of ancient history. By comparing the copies, textual critics can arrive at the original wording with a high degree of certainty.

W: In support of the last point, go to www.carm.org/manuscript-evidence and look at the chart comparing the NT with other ancient works of literature.

W: Look through the Gospel of Mark and make your own list of incidental details.

Lesson 5: Reasons to Trust the Gospels: Part 2

W: Review the four reasons to trust the Gospels from the previous lesson.

Here are three more reasons to trust the Gospels.

5. **Archaeological discoveries support the historical accuracy of details in the Gospel accounts.**

Archaeology = the study of the remains of ancient civilizations. While archaeology gives us a window into the past, it's limited because it can't reproduce events, only a relatively small number of remains have been discovered, and the remains have to be interpreted. But there's no disagreement that remains which correspond with details in the Gospels have been discovered. While the list of discoveries is constantly growing, here are a few items that have been found.

- a. **The Western Wall of Herod's Temple** – While the temple was destroyed by the Romans, a large part of the Western Wall is still standing and dates from the time of Jesus. (This wasn't a difficult discovery to make.)
- b. **The pool called Bethesda in Jerusalem** (Jn. 5:2) – a pool was discovered in the nineteenth century matching the description of the pool in John 5.
- c. **Pontius Pilate inscription**, discovered in Caesarea in 1961. The reconstructed inscription reads, "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea."
- d. **First-century synagogue in Capernaum** (Mk. 1:21) – discovered in 1968.
- e. **Remains of a first century crucifixion victim** – found in 1968 in an ossuary (bone box) with the name Yohanan on it. An iron nail with olive wood was embedded in the ankle bone. Yohanan's legs were crushed which corresponds with John 19:31–32.
- f. **Sea of Galilee boat** – discovered in 1986 at the bottom of the lake and dates to the time of Jesus.

g. **Caiaphas's ossuary** (Jn. 18:14) – discovered in 1990 and dates to the time of Jesus. The words, “Joseph, son of Caiaphas” were inscribed on the side.

h. **Nazareth home** – discovered in 2009 and dates to the time of Jesus.

As stated earlier, discoveries have to be interpreted. Archaeology can give us an ossuary with the name Caiaphas on the side, but it can't prove that this is the same Caiaphas who presided over Jesus' trial as recorded in the Gospels. It can show us that people traveled across the Sea of Galilee by boat in Jesus' time, but it can't show us that Jesus calmed the storm on one of those boats. With the limitations of archaeology understood, we can say that this field of research has been favorable to the Gospels.

W: Using Google images look up pictures of any three of the items listed above.

6. Ancient authors support the reliability of the Gospel record.

W: Read the following quotes and make a list of what you learn about Jesus and the early Christians from each author. Check your summary of each writer with the answers in the back.²

“so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned”ⁱ

Flavius Josephus (c. AD 37–100) – Jewish Historian

“Christians . . . asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so.”ⁱⁱ

Pliny the Younger (c. AD 63–113) – Provincial Governor

ⁱ Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus* 20.9, trans. William Whiston (London: Paternoster Row, 1825).

ⁱⁱ Pliny, *Letters* 10.96, trans. William Melmoth, rev. W.M.L. Hutchinson (Loeb, 1915).

“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Suetonius (c. AD 69–140) – Roman Historian

“But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.”^{iv}

Tacitus (c. AD 56–117) – Roman Historian

“The Christians . . . worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. . . . [It] was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.”^v

Lucian (c. AD 120–180) – Writer

We’re now ready to add an experiential reason to trust the Gospels.

- 7. The Jesus of the Gospels has transformed people for the better.** If reading the Gospels made people more deceitful or more selfish then we should be suspicious of the Gospels. But many people say that reading the Gospels has led them into a relationship with Jesus which has made them more hopeful, honest, generous, and kind people. And history shows that many Christians gave their lives to build hospitals, schools, rescue missions, etc.

W: Memorize 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 for a quiz tomorrow.

ⁱⁱⁱ Suetonius, “Life of Claudius,” 25.4, trans. J.C. Rolfe (Loeb, 1913-14).

^{iv} Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

^v Lucian, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, trans. H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), 11-13.

Lesson 6: The Resurrection: Considering the Options

W: Write out 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 from memory.

W: Look over the seven reasons to trust the Gospels from the previous two lessons, then write a summary of those reasons in your own words.³

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians about twenty years after Jesus' death. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, Paul states that he's passing on something he received. That means the message he's passing on was circulating before he wrote 1 Corinthians. So the message at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 15 brings us very close to the earliest beliefs of Jesus' followers.

W: Make a list of observations on 1 Corinthians 15:1–8. (An observation is simply a detail that you notice.)

According to Paul, the most important part of the Christian message is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, with the emphasis being placed on the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:4–8). That is what Christians should hold to. In trying to determine the credibility of the resurrection, there are two primary questions to consider.

1. Where did this unique belief come from?

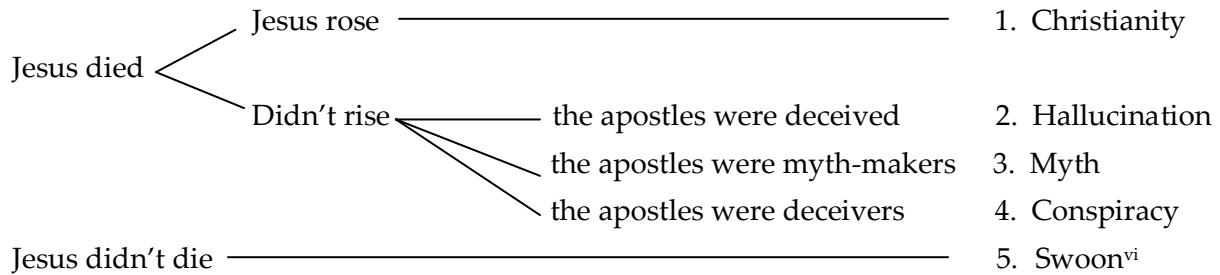
As far as we know, the belief that a man could rise from the dead in the middle of human history to a higher state of existence was not held by anyone in the ancient world. Jews were expecting a general resurrection at the end of time (Jn. 11:24) and the Greeks looked forward to the destruction of the body and the immortality of the soul. There was no concept of the resurrection of the body in the middle of history.

2. How do we explain the subsequent events? There are a number of important events that followed Jesus' death such as:

- the empty tomb
- the alleged appearances of Jesus to the disciples
- first-century Jews worshiping a human being as divine
- Jewish followers of Jesus gathering for worship on Sunday
- the conversion of Paul

- the rapid spread and acceptance of the Christian message without the use of violence

The chart below lists five possible explanations of the evidence.



W: Assess the pros and cons of each explanation.

W: Read the refutations of the last four theories at www.peterkreeft.com then

- Featured Writing
- More Featured Writing (at bottom)
- Resurrection Evidence

^{vi} Slightly modified version of the chart found in *Pocket Handbook of Christian Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, pg. 71. Copyright(c) 2003 by Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press PO Box 1400 Downers Grove, IL 60515. www.ivpress.com.

Lessons 7–9: Debating the Resurrection

W: For the next three lessons watch the lengthy debate on the resurrection between Mike Licona and Bart Ehrman (about 2 hours). Go to [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and type in “Ehrman-Licona debate.” There are four parts to this debate and you can begin part 1 at the six-minute mark.

W: As you’re watching, take notes on what you think are the best arguments in the debate.

*If you’re interested in watching another video on the credibility of Jesus’ resurrection search for the youtube video, “Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead? NT Wright” (1:37:21). You can begin at around the nine-minute mark. Wright is especially good on comparing ancient views of life after death and explaining what makes the claim of Jesus’ resurrection unique.

Lesson 10: Defending the Resurrection

You probably noticed from the debate that Licona emphasized the explanatory power of the resurrection. In other words, Jesus' resurrection makes the best sense of the evidence. As one scholar stated, "If the coming into existence of the Nazarenes . . . rips a great hole in history, a hole the size and shape of the Resurrection, what does the secular historian propose to stop it up with?"^{vii}

On the other hand, Ehrman pointed to the historical improbability of a resurrection. After all, what are the chances that someone rose from the dead? The resurrection is a miracle and miracles are by definition highly improbable events.

At its core, the debate about the resurrection hinges on a theistic or atheistic worldview. Worldviews with a living and active God have a way to make sense of a resurrection event. But worldviews without God, have no way of reasonably hypothesizing a resurrection. So for Christians the best explanation of the evidence is the resurrection of Jesus and yet for non-Christians the resurrection is the most implausible thing to have happened.

Let's solidify the Christian arguments for the resurrection with the next three short videos.

W: Watch the following youtube videos on the resurrection and summarize the main points of each video.

- Type in "Tom Wright resurrection" (10:20)
- Type in "Gary Habermas one minute apologist" (2:54)
- Type in "Mike Licona one minute apologist resurrection" (2:55)

*All three men have written books on Jesus' resurrection which can be found on amazon.com.

While acknowledging that all are not convinced, we can affirm that a strong case can be made for Jesus' resurrection. And that gives us our final reason for trusting the Gospels.

8. A strong case can be made for the greatest miracle—Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

An actual resurrection makes sense of the origin of this unique belief and the subsequent

^{vii} Quoted in Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* 2nd Ed., (IVP, 2004), 134.

events. If the greatest miracle of all took place, then lesser miracles such as multiplying bread and healing the sick are certainly possible.

The eight reasons to trust the Gospels are most impressive when considered together.

W: Study lessons 1–10 for a quiz tomorrow. Memorize the eight reasons to trust the Gospels along with three things we learn from ancient authors and two archaeological discoveries.

Lesson 11: The Gospel of Thomas

W: Write out the eight reasons to trust the Gospels, along with two archaeological discoveries and three facts affirmed by ancient authors.

Q: What are the four reasons people have for distrusting the Gospels?

For some people there's a fifth obstacle to trusting the Gospels: the presence of other Gospels. There are more than twenty other ancient books that have been labeled Gospels. Some scholars have placed these books in the same category as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John because they also focus on Jesus' life or teachings.

Q: Should the non-biblical Gospels be valued as highly as the biblical Gospels for accurate information about Jesus? Why or why not?

You're going to read a few of the non-biblical Gospels for yourselves and then I'll let you answer that question again.

W: Go to www.gnosis.org

- Library
- Nag Hammadi Library
- Alphabetic Index
- The Gospel of Thomas

W: Read The Gospel of Thomas, summarize it, then compare it with the Gospel of Mark.

Lesson 12: The Gospel of Judas

W: In your Google search bar type in “the gospel of judas national geographic pdf” then click on the first result. (If you’d like to learn more about the discovery of this document go to the national geographic site.)

- Read The Gospel of Judas, summarize it, and make a list comparing The Gospel of Judas with the Gospel of Mark.

Lesson 13: The Gospel of Peter

W: Type in “The Gospel of Peter” into your Google search bar. Click on the result from earlychristianwritings.com translated by Raymond Brown.

- Read The Gospel of Peter, summarize it, and make a list comparing The Gospel of Peter with the Gospel of Mark.

Lesson 14: The Infancy Gospel of Thomas and The Gospel of Mary

W: Type in “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas” into your Google search bar. Click on the result from earlychristianwritings.com which says “First Greek Form.” Read The Infancy Gospel of Thomas.

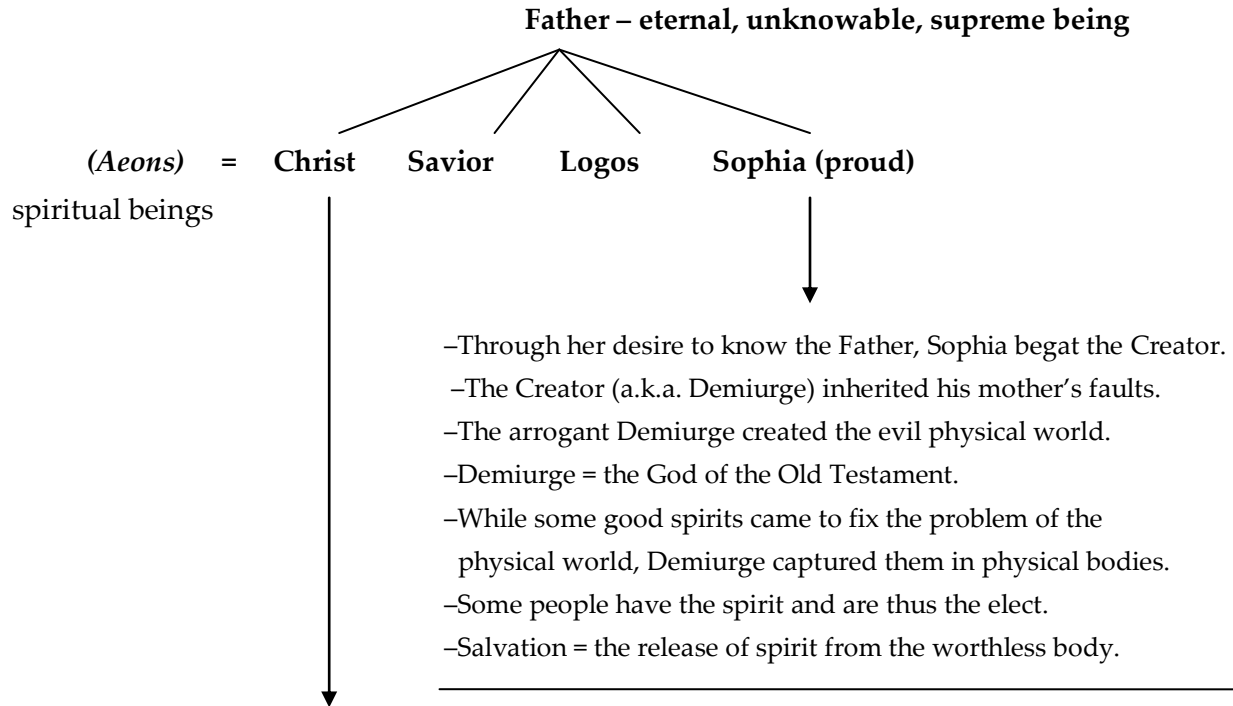
W: Type in “The Gospel of Mary” into your Google search bar. Click on the result from gnosis.org then scroll down. Read The Gospel of Mary.

Lesson 15: The Four Gospels versus the Other Gospels

Q: What is your impression of the five non-biblical Gospels that you read?

Q: Should the non-biblical Gospels be placed on the same level as the biblical Gospels? Here are a few reasons why Christian scholars don't think the non-biblical Gospels are as valuable as the biblical Gospels for our understanding of Jesus:

1. They cannot be dated to the first century like the biblical Gospels. Most scholars believe these Gospels were written during the second century at the earliest. That means the four Gospels are the earliest accounts of Jesus' life.
2. Unlike the biblical Gospels, many of the non-biblical Gospels contain mostly sayings of Jesus detached from any historical setting. They're not rooted in the real world like the biblical Gospels.
3. Many of the non-biblical Gospels have a badly damaged text so we're missing large parts of them. With the biblical Gospels we have hundreds of copies so we can establish the original text with a high degree of certainty.
4. The Jesus of the other Gospels says things which seem to contradict the Jesus of the four Gospels. For example, "every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Gospel of Thomas, 114). Furthermore, the overall message of many of these Gospels is contrary to the message of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Many non-biblical Gospels contain a Gnostic (silent g) message. Gnosticism comes from a Greek word which means knowledge and specifically it refers to a secret or mystic knowledge. On the next page, you'll find a chart depicting one version of ancient Gnosticism.



- Christ is a spiritual being who came from the highest Father to save the spirits imprisoned by Demiurge.
- The highest Father is the God of the New Testament, the Father of Jesus Christ.
- Since the body is evil, Christ only *appeared* to have a human body.
- It is this knowledge that saves us. ^{viii}

As you can see, the Gnostics believed that the physical world was evil and this influenced their understanding of God, Christ, and salvation. Like Christianity, Gnosticism taught the necessity of salvation but it reinterpreted the meaning of salvation. Gnostics believed salvation came through accepting secret knowledge about the Creator, Jesus, and the spirit within.

W: Review lessons 1–16 for a quiz tomorrow. (You won't have to reproduce 1 Corinthians 15:1–8 from memory.)

^{viii} The diagram has been created using the information on Gnosticism found in D. Jeffrey Bingham, *Pocket History of the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 37-40.

Lesson 16: Comparing Jesus

W: Complete the quiz below on a separate sheet of paper.

Quiz 1 (Trusting the Gospels)

(10 pts. for #1, 18 pts. for # 2-6)

1. Define discern –
 2. List three reasons to disbelieve the four Gospels and three believe the four Gospels.
 3. List five things we can learn from ancient authors about Jesus and his early followers.
 4. Reproduce the chart listing the five possible explanations of the evidence (resurrection being one of them).
 5. List three significant facts about 1 Cor. 15:1–8.
 6. List three reasons why conservative scholars don't trust the non-biblical Gospels for accurate information about Jesus as much as the biblical Gospels.
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So far we've looked at five perceived obstacles to trusting the biblical Gospels:

1. They seem to contradict each other.
2. They contain stories that sound fictional such as healings and miracles.
3. They've been changed so much that we no longer know what was originally written.
4. They aren't supported by history or archaeology.
5. There are other Gospels.

Let's look at one more obstacle to trusting the four Gospels and ultimately to trusting Jesus:

6. There are other great teachers besides Jesus.

The existence of other great teachers leads some people to place their trust in someone other than Jesus. While the Gospels are captivating, some people are more captivated by other stories. We'll limit our comparison of Jesus to three other world-famous teachers.

W: Answer the following three questions:

1. What do you know about Confucius?
2. What do you know about Buddha?
3. What do you know about Muhammad?

W: Make an outline of the main points of Jesus' life that you would use if you were writing a summary of his life.

We will be using summaries of Confucius, Buddha, and Muhammad.

Q: What's the problem with summarizing a person's life?⁴

The summaries of these teachers are taken from a book called *The World's Religions* by Huston Smith. Smith was a well-known authority on world religions. We'll devote one lesson to each teacher. The following period will begin with a quiz on the teacher that we covered the previous day.

Two qualifications are in order. First, Smith's chapter summaries have been condensed into two-page summaries so there's a lot that's been omitted. Second, Smith notes that some of the stories about these teachers are probably legendary. I've excluded opinions on legendary material so that you get what is popularly believed by the followers of each teacher.

Lesson 17: The Life and Teachings of Confucius

W: Read and study the information below for a quiz on Confucius tomorrow.

Confucius

Born in China in 551 BC, Confucius had a modest upbringing. His circumstances forced him into menial labor. "On reaching the age of 15, I bent my mind to learning." After a brief marriage and several minor governmental posts, Confucius gained a following as a skilled teacher. But his goal was public office because he believed that he could reorder society if given the chance. The problem of his day was social anarchy; states were at war with each other. Confucius believed society should return to the customs which formerly held people together. However Confucius never achieved his goal of public office, because he preferred to keep his integrity, rather than compromise with those in authority. When asked for advice from the ruler of his own state, he told him he should first learn to govern himself before governing others.

At the age of 50 Confucius sensed his divine mission. For the next 13 years he wandered from state to state giving advice to rulers on how to improve their governing, while hoping to get the chance to put his ideas into practice. He was criticized and rejected. Confucius was only supported by a small group of disciples. He returned to his own state and spent the last 5 years teaching and editing China's literary classics. He claimed to be a "lover of the ancients." Confucius died at the age of 72.

Confucius is recognized as one of the world's greatest teachers. Like Socrates, he was "a one-man university," well-versed in history, poetry, government, math, music, sports, etc. He was an informal teacher who preferred to converse with his students rather than lecture them. He did this by asking questions skillfully and directing students to relevant writings. He was always ready to defend the cause of the common people. Students who couldn't afford to pay him, were treated the same as any other student.

Confucius taught, "What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others." "There was nothing other-worldly about him. He loved to be with people, to dine out, to join in the chorus of a good song . . . He presented himself to his students as their fellow traveler, committed to the task of becoming fully human but modest in how far he had gotten with that task." Confucius said, "There are four things in the Way of the profound person, none of which I have been able to do. To serve my father as I would expect my son to serve me. To serve my ruler as I would expect my ministers to serve me. To serve my elder brother as I would expect my younger brothers to serve me. To be the first to treat friends as I would expect them to treat me. These I have not been able to do."

After his death, Confucius's students elevated him to a status far beyond what he claimed for himself. One disciple said, "He is the sun, the moon, which there is no way of climbing over. The impossibility of equaling our Master is like the impossibility of reaching the sky by scaling a ladder." Confucius' writings became the primary training manual for government officials from 130 BC until 1905 (with the exception of AD 200–600). Confucianism essentially became China's state religion in AD 59 and sacrifices were ordered for Confucius in all urban schools. A few centuries later, temples were built throughout the empire as shrines to him. "Until this century, every Chinese school child for two thousand years raised his clasped hands each morning toward a table in the schoolroom that bore a plaque bearing Confucius' name."

Teachings

1. Jen – a "human-heartedness" that is expressed in "a feeling of humanity toward others and a respect for oneself." This virtue reaches out with good will toward all people.
2. Chun tzu – perhaps best translated as "the Mature Person." It is the virtue of the ideal host who is at ease anywhere and thus able to focus on others and put them at ease. It is a "What can I do for you?" attitude which remains constant even in the midst of success or adversity.
3. Li – propriety which means adhering to the appropriate way of doing things. According to Confucius, there are five constant relationships: parent and child, husband and wife, elder and younger sibling, elder and younger friend, ruler and subject. Each of these relationships should function in a certain way. Relating the right way leads to a set pattern for every act and thus becomes a rite.
4. Te – this is the power by which people are ruled, "the power of moral example." Honest leaders inspire trust. "Goodness becomes embodied in society neither through might nor through law, but through the impress of persons we admire."
5. Wen – "the arts of peace" in contrast with "the arts of war." Confucius taught that the state with the greatest culture wins even if they're defeated militarily. A culture should focus on the arts of peace.^{ix}

^{ix} Houston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 154-93.

Lesson 18: The Life and Teachings of Buddha

W: Complete the quiz on Confucius below.

W: Read and study the information below for a quiz on Buddha tomorrow.

Quiz 2 (Confucius)

1. Confucius was born in _____ BC.
2. Confucius's goal was _____ office.
3. T or F Confucius never became a politician.
4. The problem of Confucius's day was social _____.
5. T or F Confucius talked about God and life after death.
6. Confucius is recognized as one of the world's greatest _____.
7. Confucius was a "lover of the _____."
8. T or F Confucianism became China's state religion in AD 59.
9. List and explain three of Confucius's five main teachings.

Buddha

Buddha means “the Enlightened One,” or the “Awakened One.” Born around 563 BC in Nepal, his parents named him Siddhartha Gautama. Because his father was a king (equivalent to a feudal lord), Siddhartha had a luxurious upbringing. At 16 he married a beautiful neighboring princess who bore him a son whom they named Rahula. Siddhartha had a great family, wealth, good looks, and a bright future ahead of him.

But he came to realize that life is painful and temporary which caused him to long for more. Siddhartha said, “Life is subject to age and death. Where is the realm of life in which there is neither age nor death?” After saying goodbye to his wife and son, he left in the middle of the night to follow the path of a truth-seeker at the age of 29. He mounted his great white horse and together with his gatekeeper headed for the forest. Upon reaching the forest, Siddhartha changed clothes with his gatekeeper. The gatekeeper then returned with the horse to break the news to his family.

For 6 years, he gave himself to his search for enlightenment. But the search was not easy. He sighed, “How hard to live the life of the lonely forest-dweller . . . to rejoice in solitude” He first sought out two Hindu holy men who taught him about raja yoga and Hindu philosophy. After learning all he could learn, Siddhartha moved on to join a group of ascetics. Asceticism = the harsh treatment of the body for a spiritual purpose. He reasoned that if his body was holding him back he would break its power. He became the most disciplined ascetic in the group, performing such fasts as eating only six grains of rice a day. After fainting and having to be fed by his associates just to stay alive, Siddhartha realized the futility of asceticism. Through this experience he developed the principle of the Middle Way—a path between asceticism and indulgence. According to the Middle Way we should give the body “what it needs to function optimally but no more.”

The final phase of his quest led him into deep concentration and rigorous thought similar to what he had learned from the Hindu masters. One day, while meditating under a Bo Tree in northeast India, he sensed that enlightenment was near. He vowed not to move until he attained it. The Evil One attempted to disrupt his concentration. The first temptation came in the form of three voluptuous women. Siddhartha remained unmoved. Second, he was assailed with “hurricanes, torrential rains, and showers of flaming rocks,” but these all “turned into flower petals as they entered his field of concentration.” Siddhartha’s meditation deepened until finally his Great Awakening had arrived. The event was felt throughout the universe. All created things rejoiced and lotuses bloomed on every tree. Siddhartha had become the Buddha—the Awakened One. Buddha was in bliss and stayed where he was for 7 days. Unable to rise on the 8th day, he remained lost in a state of bliss for 49 days. But the Evil One was waiting with one last temptation. This time he appealed to Buddha’s

reason: “How will anyone understand the truth you have arrived at?” Why not just slip away at once into nirvana?” Buddha replied, “There will be some who will understand and the Evil One was banished forever.

For almost the next 50 years Buddha preached his message throughout India. In the process, “he founded an order of monks and challenged the deadness of brahmin society” by rejecting the caste system. He kept a busy schedule of preaching, counseling, training, overseeing the monks, and answering questions from people who came to him from all over. His “combination of a cool head and a warm heart” made him “accessible to all.” While he objectively analyzed the problems presented to him, he also showed sympathy and tenderness.

Although “there was constant pressure during his lifetime to turn him into a god,” he constantly rejected it. He insisted that he was human in every respect and did not hide his weaknesses. Even into his latter years, he would still walk through the streets with a begging-bowl in hand. However, Buddha did believe that he had reached the highest level of understanding. Around the year 483 BC. Buddha contracted dysentery after eating boar’s flesh in the house of Cunda the smith. Realizing that Cunda might feel responsible, Buddha informed him that it was one of the greatest meals of his life. Then he died.

“One thing I teach,” said the Buddha: “suffering and the end of suffering.”

Four Noble Truths

1. Life/All is dukkha. Dukkha = suffering and the dislocation that is at the heart of everything. Something has gone wrong and life is out of joint. While we may enjoy life, we only do so on a superficial level. Dukkha is at the core and root of existence.
2. Tanha is the cause of dukkha. Tanha = selfish desire.
3. Suffering can and must be extinguished by overcoming tanha.
4. The way to overcome suffering is through the eightfold path.

The Eightfold Path

1. Right views – We must make sure our views and beliefs are accurate. We must evaluate our views before they can be improved.

2. Right intent – our motives must be pure
3. Right speech – speak the truth and speak in love
4. Right conduct – for example, do not kill, steal, lie, cheat
5. Right livelihood – earn a living by occupations that promote life not destroy it
6. Right effort – exertion is required in order to reach the goal but we must be wise and exert ourselves for the long road ahead, “the slow and steady wins the race.”
7. Right mindfulness – ignorance is our major problem, specifically ignorance of our true nature
8. Right concentration – enables us to see things directly and clearly

The eightfold path leads to nirvana. Nirvana = extinction—the extinction of the finite self into boundless life. Nirvana is the highest destiny of the human spirit. If nirvana is not reached reincarnation occurs.^x

^x Smith, 82-149.

Lesson 19: The Life and Teachings of Muhammad

W: Complete the quiz on Buddha.

W: Find a map of Saudi Arabia so you can trace Muhammad's migration.

W: Read and study the information below for a quiz on Muhammad tomorrow.

Quiz 3 (Buddha)

1. What does the name Buddha mean?
2. Siddhartha Gautama had a _____ upbringing.
3. What are the two extremes that the Middle Way tries to avoid? What is your personal opinion of the Middle Way?
4. T or F The first group Gautama learned from were the ascetics.
5. T or F Buddha's message did not focus on God.
6. "One thing I teach, _____ and the end of _____."
7. Buddha preached his message throughout _____ for _____ years.
8. Write out Buddha's Four Noble Truths.
9. Define tanha –
10. Buddha had a combination of a _____ head and a _____ heart.

Muhammad

Muhammad was born into the leading tribe of Mecca in AD 570. According to the Qur'an, Muhammad was a descendant of Ishmael. (Ishmael and his mother went to the future site of Mecca after being banished by his father, Abraham.) The name Muhammad = "highly praised." Muhammad's father died a few days after he was born and his mother died when he was six. He was raised by his uncle who put him to work taking care of the flocks. Beloved by those who knew him, he was of "sweet and gentle disposition."

During this time, life in the desert was based on loyalty to the tribe; there was no obligation to those outside one's tribe. Constant rivalry and pillaging between the tribes created a lawless situation. The only order that existed was drunkenness, immorality, and violence. The religion of the time didn't help. Animistic polytheism taught that the desert was inhabited by jinn (demons), but the jinn "inspired neither exalted sentiments nor moral restraint." Muhammad rejected the polytheism and immorality around him.

Muhammad took up the caravan business and at the age of twenty-five he entered the service of a wealthy widow named Khadija. They married though Khadija was forty. Their marriage was a happy one and his wife believed in him when everyone else doubted. For the next fifteen years, Muhammad was being prepared for his ministry. During this time he often visited a mountain on the outskirts of Mecca to find solitude and pray to Allah. (While the Meccans worshiped Allah they didn't believe he was the only God. Muhammad, however, was a member of the hanifs who worshiped Allah exclusively.) Throughout his time of preparation, Muhammad was becoming increasingly impressed with the greatness of Allah.

Around the year 610, Muhammad received his commission. On this night, called "The Night of Power" the Book was opened to Muhammad while he was on the floor of the cave. An angel came to him and said "Proclaim." Muhammad objected saying, "I am not a proclaimer." This happened three times. When he returned home, Muhammad told his wife what happened and she became his first convert. Khadija announced, "You will be the Prophet of this people." For the next twenty-three years the command "Proclaim" along with the words to proclaim were given to Muhammad. These words are recorded in the Qur'an. Muhammad did not work miracles because God sent him to preach. The only miracle he claimed was the Qur'an itself, seeing as he was illiterate.

There was a hostile reaction to Muhammad's message because it threatened the popular polytheistic beliefs. Mecca had 360 shrines which were frequently visited, producing much revenue. Muhammad's teachings were also unpopular because they demanded that people give up

immorality. Finally, Muhammad's teachings were not welcomed because they challenged the social system based on class distinctions. The monotheistic message was revolutionary because it placed everyone on the same level as creatures of the one and only God. The Meccan leaders displayed their resistance by ridiculing Muhammad, even to the point of covering him and his followers with dirt and filth as they were praying. The first followers were also stoned, beaten and thrown in prison. After three years of preaching Muhammad had less than forty converts. But by the end of the decade several hundred families were followers.

Muhammad's persistence and success threatened the Meccan nobility who were determined to get rid of him. But 280 miles to the north in Yathrib, Muhammad's teachings were being accepted. Yathrib needed a strong leader because of their internal rivalries so they called on Muhammad. After Yathrib promised to observe the teachings of Islam, Muhammad and his friend Abu Bakr fled from Mecca. The two safely arrived in Yathrib in the year 622. In Arabic, Muhammad's journey is called Hijra. The Muslim calendar begins with the year 622 because Muhammad's escape is considered to be the turning point in world history. The name Yathrib was changed to Medina, which means "the city" in honor of the prophet who settled there.

For the next several years there was warfare between Mecca and Medina. In the second year of the Hijra the Medinese defeated a Meccan army many times larger. But the following year the Medinese were defeated and Muhammad was wounded. Two years later, the Meccans laid siege to Medina but failed. Finally, eight years after Muhammad escaped from Mecca he returned as conqueror. The city surrendered to him and became Muslim. Upon entering the city, he went to the Ka'ba (a cubical temple allegedly built by Abraham), and rededicated it to Allah. He then returned to Medina.

Although Muhammad was the ruler, he remained humble. "He lived in an ordinary clay house, milked his own goats, and was accessible day and night to the humblest in his community." Tradition says his administration was a perfect blend of justice and mercy. He was able to bring the five conflicting tribes of the city (three of which were Jewish) into a confederation. Ten years after the Hijra in 632, Muhammad died "with virtually all of Arabia under his control." Muslims believe that while there were true prophets before Muhammad, he was the greatest and final prophet called "The Seal of the Prophets."

The Five Pillars

1. The confession of faith called the shahadah. "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his Prophet." Every Muslim must recite this creed slowly and meaningfully at least once in their lifetime.

2. Ritual prayer five times a day directed toward Mecca. Praying five times a day is required because one night during Ramadan, Muhammad was taken on a white horse with wings to Jerusalem and from there he ascended through the seven heavens into the presence of Allah. Allah told him that Muslims should pray fifty times a day. On his way down he met Moses in the sixth heaven. Moses was incredulous at the requirement to pray fifty times a day and told Muhammad to negotiate with Allah because the people would never obey. Muhammad negotiated with Allah and got the number down to five.
3. Almsgiving – a legislated tax given to the poor, about 2.5 percent of one’s income.
4. Fasting – during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar known as Ramadan, Muslims must refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sexual intercourse from sunrise to sunset.
5. Pilgrimage – all able-bodied and economically-able Muslims should journey to Mecca at least once in their lifetime.^{xi}

^{xi} Smith, 221-67.

Lesson 20: Review

W: Complete the quiz on Muhammad.

W: Study the chart on the next page comparing Confucius, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad.

W: Write an essay explaining what you will take away from our study comparing Jesus with Confucius, Buddha, and Muhammad. Make sure to address who you would prefer to place your trust in and why.

Quiz 4 (Muhammad)

1. Muhammad was born in AD _____ and died in AD _____.
2. During Muhammad's lifetime, life was based on loyalty to the _____.
3. Define polytheism –
4. What happened on "the Night of Power"?
5. Muhammad was a descendant of _____.
6. What is the hijra?
7. T or F Mecca initially accepted Muhammad's teaching.
8. T or F The Ka'ba is in Mecca.
9. The angel commanded Muhammad to _____.
10. List the Five Pillars of Islam.

<u>Confucius</u>	<u>Buddha</u>	<u>Jesus</u>	<u>Muhammad</u>
Born in 551 BC in China	Born in 563 BC in Nepal	Born in 4 BC in Israel	Born in AD 570 in Arabia
Normal birth	Normal birth	Virgin birth	Normal birth
Modest upbringing	Luxurious upbringing	Modest upbringing	Modest upbringing
Married at 19, divorce 23	Married at 16, left at 29	Never married	Married at 25, several wives
Influenced by China's classics	Influenced by Hinduism	Influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures	Influenced by Judaism, Christianity and hanifs
Divine mission at 50	Enlightened at 35	Voice from heaven at 30	Angelic command at 40
Didn't teach about God	Didn't teach about God	Taught about God and his kingdom	Taught that Allah is the only God
A "one-man university," taught morality	Taught 8-fold path	Taught love for God, neighbor and enemy	Taught 5 Pillars
Loved to be with people	Meditated 3x per day	Prayed in solitude often Performed many healings and miracles	Prayed 5x per day
Believed he could reform society	Believed he had the greatest level of understanding	Believed he was God's Son	Believed he was the greatest prophet
Normal death – 72 years	Normal death – 80 years	Executed ~ 33 years Raised from the dead	Normal death – 62 years

Summaries

-Began to study age 15	-Left family and wealth	-Miraculous birth	-Parents died when he was young
-Great teacher, very knowledgeable	-“Cool head and warm heart”	-Emphasized love	-Received messages from angel
-Wanted to become a gov't official and unify China	-Wanted to end suffering	-Performed miracles	-Taught about Allah
-Didn't teach about God or afterlife	-Selfishness is cause of suffering	-Died young	-Political and military leader
	-Deep meditation	-Rose from the dead	

ANSWERS

¹ **The gullible approach** of believing everything is dangerous because people have a tendency to lie or misunderstand what they're talking about. Gullibility leaves us vulnerable to being tricked. Sometimes experience is a good teacher for the gullible types.

The skeptical approach of disbelieving everything/everyone is impractical. Almost everything we know comes from others. How do you know your name? How do you know where you were born? Why do you believe George Washington was the first President of the United States? We are dependent on what others tell us about ourselves and the world.

² **Josephus**

- Jesus was called Christ
- Jesus' brother was named James

Pliny

- James was the brother of Jesus
- Christians met on a fixed day
- Sang to Christ as to a god
- Vowed to be upright citizens

Suetonias

- Jews believed in Jesus in Rome
- These Jews were expelled from Rome because they were causing some kind of trouble

Tacitus

- Nero falsely charged the Christians
- Christians were hated
- Christ is the founder
- Christ was put to death by Pontius Pilate
- Pilate was the procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius
- The Christian faith originated in Judea
- Christian faith broke out in the city of Rome

Lucian

- Christians worship a man who was crucified
- They believe that upon conversion they become brothers
- They deny the gods of Greece
- They worship the crucified sage and live after his laws

So we don't need the Bible to learn that:

1. Jesus had a brother named James
2. Jesus was handed over to Pilate by the Jewish leaders
3. Jesus was killed by crucifixion
4. Jesus' followers claimed to see him after he died
5. Jesus' followers are called Christians
6. Christians met on a certain day
7. Christians worship Christ and sing to him
8. Christians deny other gods
9. Christians live upright lives
10. Christians were hated
11. The Christian faith started in Judea and spread to Rome

There's another quote from Josephus that some scholars claim is embellished by early Christians so I didn't include it just to be safe. But here it is:

"Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

If this quote is genuine we also learn that:

12. Jesus performed wonderful works
13. Jesus was a teacher/wise man/sage
14. Many Jews and Gentiles believed in him
15. Jewish leaders suggested to Pilate that he be condemned to the cross

16. Jesus appeared alive again on the third day

17. His followers were named after him and called Christians

³ We have four ancient documents, called Gospels, which focus on life of Jesus. The internal evidence shows that the Gospels agree with each other on the major areas of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The accounts sound credible because they record embarrassing details of the first believers and Jesus. They also include incidental details which usually come from eyewitness testimony. In addition, the external evidence of archaeology and ancient authors has been favorable to the Gospels. Although we don't have the original documents, we do have thousands of ancient copies through which we're able to determine the original texts with a high degree of certainty. Finally, the Gospels have had and continue to have a positive impact on the lives of many people.

⁴ Many things are left out and the main points are often simplified too much.

ANSWERS - QUIZZES

Quiz 1 (Trusting the Gospels)

1. distinguishing truth from error
2. Any three from both groups:

Disbelieve

- They contain stories that sound fictional such as healings and miracles.
- They seem to contradict each other.
- They've been changed so much that we no longer know what was originally written.
- There's no evidence that they're historically accurate.

Believe

- The four writers basically say the same thing in different ways.
 - Many of the details in the Gospels sound true.
 - The Gospel writers claim to be conveying accurate information and we usually give people who make such claims the benefit of the doubt.
 - The NT books (which include the Gospels) are the best supported documents of ancient history.
 - Archaeological discoveries support the historical accuracy of details in the Gospel accounts.
 - Ancient authors support the reliability of the Gospel record.
 - The Jesus of the Gospels has transformed people for the better.
 - A strong case can be made for the greatest miracle—Jesus' resurrection from the dead.
3. See endnote 2 in answer section (lesson 5).
 4. See chart in lesson 6.
 5. Any three of the following:
 - We are saved by holding firm to the gospel (vv. 1–2),
 - the gospel did not originate with Paul; he also received it,
 - the gospel was the most important thing for Paul—"of first importance" (v. 3),
 - the gospel is Jesus' death for our sins, burial, resurrection, and resurrection appearances (vv. 3–8, 5.) in this section, Paul places the emphasis on Jesus' resurrection appearances,
 - since Paul received this message before he wrote 1 Corinthians around AD 50, this message gets us very close to the earliest beliefs of the first Christians.
 6. Any three of the following:
 - They cannot be dated to the first century like the biblical Gospels.
 - Unlike the biblical Gospels, many of the non-biblical Gospels contain mostly sayings of Jesus detached from any historical setting.
 - Many of the non-biblical Gospels have a badly damaged text so we're missing large parts of them.
 - The Jesus of the other Gospels says things which seem to contradict the Jesus of the four Gospels.

Quiz 2 (Confucius)

1. 551
2. public
3. True
4. anarchy
5. False
6. teachers
7. ancients
8. True
9. See the list in lesson 17.

Quiz 3 (Buddha)

1. Enlightened or Awakened One
2. luxurious
3. asceticism and indulgence. Personal answer.
4. False
5. suffering, suffering
6. India, 50
7.
 - Life/All is dukkha. Dukkha = suffering and the dislocation that is at the heart of everything.
 - Tanha is the cause of dukkha. Tanha = selfish desire.
 - Suffering can and must be extinguished by overcoming tanha.
 - The way to overcome suffering is through the eightfold path.
8. selfish desire
9. cool, warm

Quiz 4 (Muhammad)

1. 570; 632
2. tribe
3. the belief in many gods
4. The Book was opened to Muhammad while he was on the floor of the cave. An angel came to him and said "Proclaim" but Muhammad objected saying, "I am not a proclaimer." This happened three times.
5. Ishmael
6. Muhammad's escape from Mecca to Medina in the year 622.
7. False
8. True
9. Proclaim

10.

- The confession of faith called the shahadah. “There is no god but God and Muhammad is his Prophet.”
- Ritual prayer five times a day directed toward Mecca.
- Almsgiving – a legislated tax given to the poor, about 2.5 percent of one’s income.
- Fasting – during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar known as Ramadan.
- Pilgrimage – all able-bodied and economically-able Muslims should journey to Mecca at least once in their lifetime.