



From Atheist to Theist (Part 24)

Where's The Evidence?

By

Mark McGee

Evidence

That's what I was most interested in finding. It's what journalists do. We ask questions of many witnesses and search through documents and other information that will help us find answers to our questions about a story.

The biggest story of my career happened more than 50 years ago when I investigated evidence for the existence of God. I was not only a journalist – I was also an atheist. Atheists don't believe in the existence of God, so why bother investigating claims that must be false?

Good question!

The New Testament

My investigation eventually came to the New Testament. I had found much of the scientific evidence and philosophical arguments for the existence of God important and insightful. I was also impressed with the evidence for the reliability of the Old Testament from textual, historical, and archaeological evidence. So, that left the New Testament.

My interest in the New Testament was the same as the Old Testament. Were the texts reliable? Were the statements concerning historical events, people and places supported by historical evidence outside of the texts? Did archaeological evidence support references in the texts that could be confirmed or denied by archaeological findings?

Jesus Christ

It didn't take long to identify the primary purpose of the New Testament –

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.” Matthew 1:1

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark 1:1

The first verses of the first two texts in the New Testament are about someone named **Jesus Christ**. He is called “the Son of David, the Son of Abraham,” and “the Son of God.”

I recognized the names David and Abraham from my investigation of the Old Testament. I also recognized the name “God” from the Old Testament. So, this Jesus Christ had three fathers? David, Abraham and God? I had much to learn about Jesus.

As we mentioned in our last report, the nation of Israel had not heard a new prophetic Word from God in more than 400 years after Malachi wrote his prophetic text. Malachi said that God would send a “messenger” and a “voice” that would cry out in the wilderness. However, after many generations, God was silent, that is until a man named John (called “the Baptist”) came on the scene in the early part of the 1st century AD –

“In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight.’” Matthew 3:1-3

“John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, ‘There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to

stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Mark 1:4-8

“... the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” Luke 3:2-6

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.” John 1:6-9

We have a consistent story about John the Baptist from what are known as the “Gospel” accounts in the New Testament. Investigative journalists look for both *consistent* and *conflicting* information when interviewing witnesses and researching documents and other evidence. We don’t expect witnesses to give us identical information, but we do look for both consistencies and inconsistencies in their personal accounts about an event or series of events.

What I found in the Gospel accounts about John the Baptist were **consistencies**. John the Baptist claimed to be “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord;’ a claim of fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy –

“Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, ‘I am not the Christ.’ And they asked him, ‘What then? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No.’ Then they said to him, ‘Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?’ He said: ‘I am ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.” John 1:19-23

John was quoting Isaiah 40:3 – a direct connection to an Old Testament prophecy. John claimed that he was the “voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make straight the way of the Lord’” and that he was paving the way for someone else who would follow him –

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”
Matthew 3:11-12

“And he preached, saying, ‘There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’” Mark 1:7-8

“Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, ‘I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.’” Luke 3:15-17

“John answered them, saying, ‘I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.’” John 1:26-27

The Gospels are consistent in what they report about what John said concerning both himself and the “One” who would follow him. So, who was that person who would follow John the Baptist? Were the Gospel accounts consistent or conflicting with that information?

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” Matthew 3:13-17

“It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’” Mark 1:9-11

“When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.’” Luke 3:21-22

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’ I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.’ And John bore witness, saying, ‘I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.” John 1:29-34

The Gospel accounts are consistent with the information that John the Baptist pointed to Jesus of Nazareth as the one who would follow John, along with a “voice from Heaven” identifying Jesus as the beloved Son of God.

An investigative reporter **observes** information carefully before making any **interpretations**. I observed that the Gospel accounts were consistent in what they reported about John the Baptist and his relationship with Jesus of Nazareth, but made no interpretations at that time. Looking at evidence is part of the process, not the end of the process. There was much more to see and learn before I would reach a conclusion.

Next Time

I was interested in the idea of Malachi prophesying ‘two messengers.’ John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth were born more than 400 years later and were purportedly the ‘two messengers.’ I wanted to know how the New Testament writers would support that idea and will share what I learned in the next part of this series — *From Atheist to Theist*.