

HIS OWN BROTHERS DID NOT BELIEVE IN HIM
“For even his own brothers did not believe in him” (Jn. 7:5)

It was less than six months before Jesus would die on the cross. Since Jesus did not want to die prematurely, he stayed away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. The Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. This feast was on the 15th day of the 7th month (Lev. 23:34). The Passover, when Jesus would be crucified, was on the 15th day of the 1st month of the next year (Lev. 23:50).

It was at this point that the brothers of Jesus taunted him: **“You ought to leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world. For even his own brothers did not believe in him” (Jn. 7:3-5).**

After saying this the brothers of Jesus left for the feast. Jesus also went up, however not publicly, but in secret (Jn. 7:10). It is interesting that the brothers of Jesus who grew up with Him and lived with Him, did not “believe in Him”.

Let us consider what the Scriptures mean when they say the brothers of Jesus “did not believe in Him”.

FIRST, WHO WERE THE BROTHERS OF JESUS?

The Bible mentions the brothers of Jesus in several passages:

- **“While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and his brothers stood outside wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you’” (Matt. 12:46,47).**
- **“Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren’t all his sisters with us?” (Matt. 13:55,56)**
- **“Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent someone to call him” (Mk. 3:31).**
- **When Jesus taught at his home town synagogue in Nazareth the Scriptures state: “Where did this man get these things? They asked. What’s this wisdom that has been given him that he even does miracles? Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” (Mk. 6:2,3)**
- **“Now Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near because of the crowd” (Lk. 8:19).**
- Etc.

The Roman Catholic Church claims his “brothers” were actually his “cousins”. They have a vested interest in trying to prove that Mary was a perpetual virgin. The most obvious way to understand these Scriptures, however, is to acknowledge that when Jesus was born, the “Virgin Mary” brought forth her “firstborn” son, but not her “only begotten” son. After the birth of Jesus Mary apparently had normal relations with her husband and gave birth to four more sons and at least two daughters (Mk. 6:3).

After the birth of Jesus the Scriptures no longer refer to Mary as a “virgin”. Rather she is called **“Mary the mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14).**

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT HIS BROTHERS DID NOT BELIEVE IN HIM?

To answer this question let us consider several levels of belief.

I

There are some who deny that Jesus Christ was even a real person in history. Fortunately, historical evidence is reducing their numbers. The fact that virtually all of our modern world divides history into B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D. (the year of our Lord) indicates the obvious. Jesus was indeed a real person in history. Unbeliever H. G. Wells put it like this: *“Jesus of Nazareth . . . is easily the dominant figure in history. I am speaking of him, of course, as a man, for I conceive that the historian must treat him as a man, just as the painter must paint him as a man . . . to assume that he never lived, that the accounts of his life are inventions, is more difficult and raises more problems in the path of the historian than to accept the essential elements of the Gospel stories as fact . . . so the historian disregarding the theological significance of his life, writes the name of Jesus of Nazareth at the top of the world’s greatest characters”* (American Magazine, July 1922).

Obviously, the brothers of Jesus “believed” He was a real historical person!

II

Did the brothers of Jesus “believe” that He was born of a virgin? While the Scriptures do not specifically answer this question, it is probable that his brothers did not believe Jesus was born of a virgin. Joseph himself did not believe Mary until an angel of the Lord confirmed her story (Matt. 1:20,21).

It is also doubtful that anyone in Nazareth believed her story either. Perhaps this is why Mary “hurried” to the hill country of Judea to talk with her relative Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39-56). Since Elizabeth had also experienced a miraculous pregnancy she would be more apt to believe Mary than others. In fact, when Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting her baby leaped in her womb and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. **“In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished’”** (Lk. 1:41-45).

So, while Elizabeth believed Mary, we assume that the people of Nazareth did not. They apparently concluded that Mary was immoral and Jesus was illegitimate. After more than 30 years that ugly rumor still persisted. When Jesus was in Jerusalem the Jews said: **“We are not illegitimate children” (Jn. 8:41).** The implication, of course, is that Jesus was an illegitimate child.

Even though Jesus was definitely born of a virgin, His brothers apparently didn’t believe it.

III

Did the brothers of Jesus believe He could perform miracles? The obvious answer is “yes”! Everybody knew that Jesus was performing miracles. Matthew reported: **“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing**

every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.” (Matt. 4:23-25). There are, of course, many other Scriptures that say essentially the same thing! Everyone knew that Jesus was performing miracles. Even the wicked King Herod knew it (Lk. 23:8).

Of course the people in Nazareth where Jesus grew up knew that He performed miracles (Mk. 6:2).

The brothers of Jesus also knew He performed miracles. In fact they told Him to go to Judea so that **“Your disciples may see the miracles you do” (Jn. 7:3).**

So the brothers of Jesus knew He was a real historical person, and that He performed miracles, but they still “did not believe in Him”. This expression “believe in him” obviously refers to something deeper and more significant!

IV

To gain insight into “believing in Jesus” let us consider the story of the rich young ruler. This devout young man came to Jesus, fell on his knees, and said: **“Good teacher . . . what must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

To this question Jesus responded: **“Why do you call me good? . . . No one is good – except God alone” (Mk. 10:17,18).**

Now we are getting to the crux of the question about what it means to “believe in Jesus”! Many people are real historical persons. Many people have performed miracles. Many people have died for something they believed! But Jesus is the only person Who is “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). Obviously the rich young ruler knew that Jesus was “good”, the question is, did he know that Jesus was “God”?

This is also the question we want to ask to the brothers of Jesus!

This is also the question each one of us needs to answer. Do we really “believe in Jesus”? That is, “do we believe that Jesus is God?” The very magnitude of this thought staggers our imagination. There is perhaps no other thought more difficult to imagine or more critical to our salvation!

THE LONG WAR BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN

- Satan, as you know, fell from heaven because of his rebellion (Is. 14:12-15).
- Because of his pride God expelled Satan from heaven and threw him down to the earth (Ez. 28:14-17).
- The long war between God and Satan had begun.
- Satan won the first battle in the Garden of Eden. He deceived Adam and Eve, and his victory was significant. As the result of this victory sin entered into the world and death by sin (Rom. 5:12).

- Satan has also won many other victories, but he will not win the war!
- In association with the curse brought by sin, Satan learned for the first time that his ultimate defeat would come through the “Seed of woman” (Gen. 3:15).
- It never dawned upon Satan, however, that the “Seed of woman” would be “God Himself”!
- In fact, it never dawned upon anybody what God was going to do: **“No eye had seen, no ear had heard, no mind had conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).**
- **“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things” (I Pet. 1:10-12).**
- The fact that God Himself condescended to become a man, however, is foundational to our Christian faith. Note! **“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:5-11)**
- When the long war with Satan is over, God will be victorious and the devil will be cast into a lake of fire where he will be tormented forever and ever (Rev. 20:10).

THE BIG BANG AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS

For many years science agreed with Aristotle that matter is eternal. In 1927, however, [Georges Lemaître](#) noted that our universe is expanding and postulated that it could be traced back in time to a single originating point. This led the scientific community to “believe” that the universe was not eternal but actually had a “beginning”. The “theory” is that around 13.8 billion years ago there was “nothing”. Suddenly, “somehow” a very small ball appeared. This tiny concentration of energy was characterized by infinite density and heat. It is called a “Singularity”. Suddenly, the singularity began expanding, and the universe as we know it began. The expansion of this microscopic singularity into our vast universe is known as the “Big Bang” theory.

The Bible says nothing about the Big Bang, but it does teach the opposite. Instead of a tiny singularity expanding into the universe, our Infinite God became a tiny Singularity in the womb of a virgin. Just think of it! Our Creator God, Who is so vast that the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (1 Ki. 8:27), reduced Himself to a microscopic life form in the womb of the virgin Mary. The medical term for that microscopic life is “zygote”. This word comes from the Greek word for “joined”. It refers to the new life that is formed when the male sperm is “joined” to the female egg. Incredibly, this is the way God came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. When Mary questioned the angel Gabriel how she could become pregnant without knowing a man, he explained that the Holy Spirit

would overshadow her and her child would be called the “Son of God” (Lk. 2:34,35). Jesus had a human mother, but not a human father. He was not the “son of Joseph”, He was the “Son of God”!

You don’t have to believe the Big Bang Theory in order to be saved, but you do have to believe that God became incarnate in Jesus in order to be saved! This fact is an integral part of what it means to “believe in Jesus”!

LATER THE BROTHERS OF JESUS DID COME TO “BELIEVE IN HIM”!

After Jesus ascended into heaven 120 of His disciples gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13-15). This was probably the same “large upper room” where Jesus ate the last supper with His disciples (Mk. 14:15). It is also quite probably the **“the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark where many people had gathered and were praying” (Acts 12:12).**

At any rate, the Scriptures state that the 120 believers assembled with **“Mary, the mother of Jesus and His brothers” (Acts 1:14).** His brothers now “believed in Him”. They gathered with other believers in the upper room, and were a part of the original church formed by God a few days later on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Decisions are not made in a vacuum. Something obviously happened to convince the brothers of Jesus that He was not just a miracle worker, He was God! We will speculate about this later.

Two of the brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, became prominent leaders in the early church and even wrote inspired books that are now a part of our Bible.

INCREASE OUR FAITH

“The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith” (Lk. 17:5)

There are some who erroneously believe that faith is a word that means believing something without evidence. This is not true! Faith is built upon evidence! The more evidence, the more faith!

When you go to the bank to borrow money, for example, you must present evidence that you will be able to pay back the loan. The more evidence you have, the more money you can borrow. The same applies to Christianity. The more “evidence” we have the more “faith” we have!

One of the Twelve was Thomas called Didymus (Jn. 20:24). The word “Didymus” means “twin”. This leads to the idea that Thomas was a twin who had been mistaken many times for his twin brother. Consequently, when Thomas was told that Jesus had been raised from the dead he said: **“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it” (Jn. 20:25).**

A week later the disciples were in the house again, and even though the doors were locked, Jesus appeared in their midst. He stood in front of Thomas and said: **“Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe. Thomas said to Him, ‘my Lord and my God” (Jn. 20:27, 28).**

Then Jesus said: **“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed” (Jn. 20:29).**

Millions of people who “believe in Jesus” have never seen Him. Peter acknowledged this and wrote: **“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:8,9).**

The fact that you have not personally seen Jesus, of course, does not mean that your faith in Him is not based on evidence. Juries do not have to personally witness a crime to arrive at a correct verdict. The more evidence the jury has, of course, the more confidence they will have that their verdict is correct. Their challenge, as you know, is not to arrive at a verdict beyond “any” doubt, but rather “beyond a reasonable doubt”. Outside of pure mathematics, it is difficult to imagine “any” decision that can be reached without “any” doubt. There are, of course, many who try to cast doubt on the Deity of Jesus, but their doubts are not reasonable.

In this regard, it seems that Jesus appeared personally to His brother James, just as he did to Thomas and the other apostles. Paul wrote that the resurrected Jesus appeared first to Peter, then to the Twelve. After that He appeared to above 500 brethren at the same time. Then He appeared to “James” and finally to “all the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Who was this “James” to whom Jesus appeared?

There are three prominent men named James in the Bible. James the brother of John, James the son of Alphaeus, and James the brother of our Lord. Since James the brother of our Lord was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church, and also called an apostle (Gal. 1:19), it is quite possible that Jesus appeared to him in person. Since Jesus appeared to over 500 others at the same time He might also have appeared in person to all four of His brothers.

The apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith. The simple way to do this is by increasing evidence. Remember, faith does not come by “seeing”. The Scriptures are clear that **“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1).** Faith comes by “hearing”, not “seeing”! The “evidence” that we hear, and that produces and increases our faith, comes from the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).

THE TWO THIEVES

- As you know, Jesus was crucified between two robbers (Mk. 15:27).
- Initially both robbers joined in with the crowd and heaped insults on Jesus (Matt. 27:44).
- As the day wore on, however, one of the robbers changed his mind and came to “believe in Jesus”.
- This new believer shouted to the other criminal “Don’t you fear God?” (Lk. 23:40) Apparently he didn’t. As you know the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. This means that the unbelieving criminal died in ignorance. He could have learned something by listening to Jesus, but chose instead to die ignorant of hope and eternal life (Prov. 1:7).
- The criminal who “believed in Jesus” said: **“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk. 23:42).**
- **“Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43).**
- “Believing in Jesus” results in eternal salvation!

- Not everyone, of course, “believes in Jesus”. Both robbers had identically the same evidence, but only one of them believed it!

WILL YOU BELIEVE IN JESUS?

Jesus was declared the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). The thief on the cross knew that Jesus was dying, yet still “believed” He was “coming into His Kingdom”. It is amazing that this criminal saw this truth about Jesus before His disciples did.

Do you believe this?

If you believe that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried and raised again on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:1-11), then you are ready to commit your life to Jesus and be saved.

Christianity is like a marriage (Eph. 5:21-33). You make a life time commitment to your mate on your wedding day, but each day of your marriage you get to know them better.

The same is true in committing your life to Christ. The Ephesians, for example, were saved but Paul wanted God to give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so they could know Him better (Eph. 1:17). Paul himself also wanted to know Him better and counted everything a loss by comparison with the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ (Phil. 3:4-17).

This insight into the eternal nature of Jesus came to His brothers when they also “believed in Him”. They already knew something about Jesus because they grew up with Him. When they came to know Him better, however, they realized that He was God in human flesh. Because they finally “believed in Jesus” they will spend eternity with Him in heaven!

REMEMBER! THE 33 YEARS THAT JESUS SPENT IN HIS FLESH WAS ONLY A VEIL (HEB. 10:20). THE REAL JESUS IS ETERNAL!

Will you “believe in Jesus”? Will you make a life time commitment to God in the person of Jesus Christ?

Your commitment to Christ and your journey with Jesus will help you to **“grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”** (Eph. 3:18-21)

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