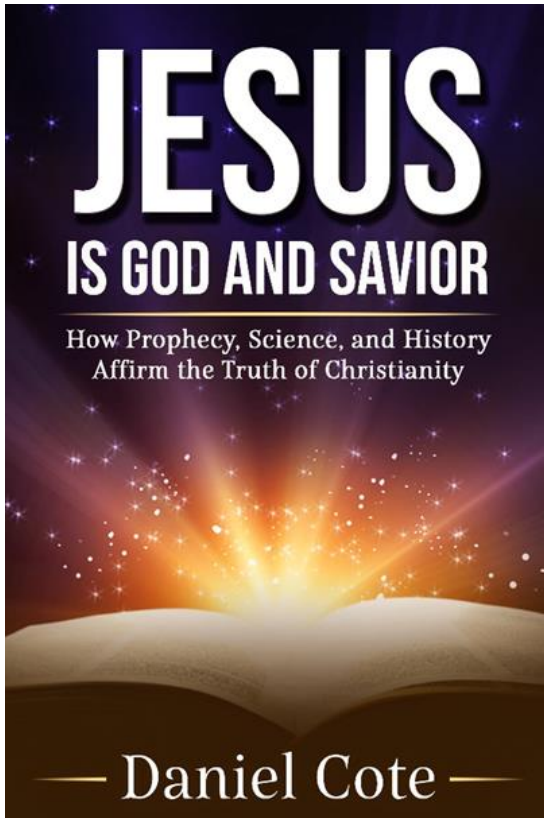


Jesus Is God and Savior:
How Prophecy, Science, and History
Affirm the Truth of Christianity



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Daniel Cote

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Soli Deo Gloria

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To God be the glory!

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Introduction

This is a book about truth and hope, the truth of who Jesus is, and the present and future hope that is only available through Him. It is a common belief that the religion one follows is a matter of birthplace, willingness to submit to creeds and doctrines on faith, or perhaps a desire for community. While the practices and traditions of religion may bring us comfort, the real question to be answered about any religion or worldview is, first, are the claims it makes true? And second, can it deliver on the promises it makes about this life and the next?

Since all religions and worldviews contradict each other, at most only one can be true. It is also possible that all religions and worldviews are false. Only an evaluation of the evidence can answer the question of whether any religion is true. No matter how you look at it, billions of people are committed to religions and worldviews that cannot deliver on their claims.

At his trial in Athens, Socrates remarked that the unexamined life is not worth living. Controversy surrounds the exact meaning of Socrates' statement, but as a minimum, shouldn't every individual be concerned about the big questions in life? For example, where did I come from? What will become of me? And what is true?

The purpose of this book is to present the evidence that Jesus is God and Savior and that the truth of Christianity is supported by the evidence of prophecy, science, and history. Along the way, dozens of objections raised by skeptics, naturalists, and atheists will be considered and answered.

Are you open to following the evidence where it leads? If not, reading this book will be a waste of your time. However, if you are open to considering the evidence, you will find compelling reasons to place your faith and hope in Jesus.

Why does any of this matter? The Bible tells us that all humans are sinners, which means we all break God's moral code. Sin separates humans from God because God is perfect

and righteous. The good news is that God forgives sins and grants eternal life to those who turn from their sins and believe in His Son, Jesus. By faith in Jesus, you can be reconciled to God. It is not an accident that you are reading this book. God is calling you through the Holy Spirit to place your faith in His Son to become His child for all eternity.

Furthermore, the Bible tells us that all human beings are created in the image of God and that God loves the world so much that He sent His Son to save it. That means you are of great worth and loved by God! God and Jesus will dwell with their children in heaven, where there will no longer be evil, suffering, or pain. Heaven will be populated by people of every nation and tongue. Will you be among them? Those who gain eternal life in heaven will have one thing in common: they will believe that God's Son Jesus died on the cross for their sins and rose from the dead.

According to the Bible, each person has only one life to live, after which time each will face God's judgment. The eternal destiny of each person will be heaven or hell. You can face God on your merits, or by faith, you can face God on Jesus' merits. It is up to you. In addition to solid evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, this book will also explain the basics of Christian beliefs. My prayer is that God, through the Holy Spirit, will open your heart and mind to believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In so doing, you will gain great comfort and guidance in this life and eternal life in heaven with God and His Son, Jesus.

Daniel Cote

1

Worldview: The Source of Varying Beliefs

Have you ever noticed how two seemingly reasonable people can be on opposite sides of an issue and diametrically opposed to the views of the other? Often what leads to such strong differences of opinion on a matter is worldview.

What Is a Worldview?

One dictionary defines *worldview* as “A particular philosophy of life or conception of the world.”¹ A more complete description of worldview is a belief system about the world and how it operates rooted in presuppositions (things individuals believe to be true) or beliefs concerning prime reality, the origin of the universe and human life, the source of ethics, and the ultimate destiny and purpose of humans.² All people have a worldview, but they may not be aware that they have it. As noted, an individual’s worldview is strongly influenced by personal opinions and presuppositions.

Consider issues like abortion, the origin of life, or euthanasia. Concerning abortion, some believe life begins at conception and is a sacred creation of God, while others believe life was not created by God but instead is the result of evolution by natural selection. The individual who believes life was created by God might be a Christian theist who also believes that God created life in His image, and thus, it must be protected. The individual who believes that life is the result of evolution by natural selection might be a philosophical naturalist who does not believe in God. The Christian theist might defend the life of the unborn, whereas the naturalist might view the mother’s desires and needs as superseding those of the unborn child.

Awareness of the worldview of others can help in understanding the positions they hold and facilitate engagement in dialogue. It can also help resolve conflicts and in working through your own positions on important issues.

We could consider a wide range of worldviews. This book will limit consideration to Christian theism, naturalism, and new ageism, as these are dominant in American culture. The following sections will seek to establish what is generally held to be true in these different worldviews. However, the beliefs of adherents of these worldviews vary considerably. Thus, this section will seek to establish what is commonly held by subscribers to each of these worldviews. As will be seen, worldviews contradict each other, which means, at most, only one could be true. Worldviews must be assessed according to how they comport or agree with the data and evidence found in the world around us.

Definitions

Before we can consider the different worldviews common in the western world, a few terms need to be defined.

Atheist: an individual who denies the existence of any gods or who rejects the existence of God because of the belief that evidence for God is lacking.

Theist: an individual who believes in the existence of a transcendent God who created the universe and who intervenes in it. Here, a “transcendent God” is one who existed before the universe and continues to exist independently and beyond it.

Naturalist: an individual who believes that the material and energy of the universe are all that exist and subscribes to the belief that all that occurs in the universe can be attributed to natural laws and processes.

New Ageist: an individual who holds new age beliefs about reality. New ageism is a modern worldview movement that elevates the individual as the prime reality in the universe. Syncretic in nature, new ageism draws upon Buddhism, Hinduism, mysticism, paganism, psychedelic drug use, divination, sorcery, channeling, and reincarnation, intending to gain enlightenment. New ageists would affirm a pantheist view

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(all is God) of the universe and all it contains. Thus, it affirms the divinity of humans.

Christian Theist: an individual who affirms the Trinitarian nature of God, who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and a biblical view of the origin of the universe and life, and furthermore, that eternal salvation is only available to those who repent of their sins and believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Deist: an individual who believes that while God exists as evidenced by the creation, He is not a personal God who intervenes in His creation.

Dominant Worldviews in Western Culture

The most common worldviews affirmed by Americans and many in western culture are Christian theism, naturalism, and new ageism. What complicates the topic of worldview is that people often treat worldviews as *à la carte* menus from which to pick and choose. Given that many people are not even aware that they hold a worldview, it is unlikely beliefs will be uniform among various groups.

An example of how the lines between worldviews become blurred is found in a recent Pew Research poll of Americans. Individuals responding to the Pew survey were asked to indicate whether they affirmed four beliefs associated with the new ageist worldview: (1) physical things are imbued with spiritual energy, (2) psychics, (3) reincarnation, and (4) astrology. Of those who declared no religion in particular, 78 percent hold at least one new age belief.³ Of those who identified as mainline Protestants, 67 percent affirmed at least one of these new-age beliefs. Even among evangelical Protestants, 47 percent affirmed at least one of these new-age beliefs. These data indicate that Americans, in significant percentages, are subscribing to new age beliefs and, furthermore, that new age beliefs are being added to pre-existing Christian beliefs in a syncretic manner. Overall, 62 percent of Americans hold at least one of these new age beliefs.⁴ Thus, the same person who visits a psychic or astrologer might enjoy attending Christmas worship services.

What Christian Theism, Naturalism, and New Ageism Affirm

The goal of this book is to show that Christian theism is the worldview best supported by prophetic, scientific, and historical evidence. To do that, we need to take a closer look at what each of these worldviews affirms. In this section, we will seek to establish what is generally held to be true by these different worldviews. As noted above, the beliefs of adherents of these worldviews span a considerable range. This section will seek to establish what is commonly held by those subscribing to each of these worldviews.

In considering Christian theism, naturalism, and new ageism, inquiry will be limited to what each of these worldviews claims or implies about eight aspects of human existence:

1. **The existence of God**—does a powerful Creator exist beyond the universe?
2. **The nature of reality**—does the universe alone exist, or is there something beyond the universe?
3. **The origin of the universe**—is the universe uncaused, self-caused, or created by God?
4. **The origin of diverse life on the Earth**—was life created, or did it evolve by natural selection?
5. **The mind-body problem**—does the mind die when the body dies, or does it live on?
6. **The source of ethics**—is morality defined by God or humans?
7. **The possibility of an afterlife**—does the mind (soul) live on in an afterlife, or does life end at death?
8. **Jesus**—is He the divine Son of God, a mere human, or something else?

The following paragraphs will sketch out what is generally believed by those who consider themselves Christian theists, naturalists, and new ageists. Since naturalism and new ageism do not derive from a single text, it can be expected that there will be more variability in what naturalists and new ageists might believe. Since Christian theism derives from the Bible, Christian theists would be expected to be more similar in their views.

Christian Theism

Christian theism is the worldview that contends that an all-powerful God exists beyond the universe and is distinct from it. This God brought the universe into existence from nothing and sustains it. God transcends the universe and is active or immanent in it.⁵ God created all materials, energy, natural processes, forces, and all animal, plant, and human life. Because God created the universe and is active in it, miracles are possible. The creation of the universe, some would say, is the greatest miracle; thus, other miraculous events should not come as a surprise. God created human beings in His image, and thus, human life is sacred, imbued with dignity and an innate moral law, and therefore must be treated with the utmost respect.⁶ Human life is composed of two distinct essences, a material body and a non-material soul and spirit sustained eternally by God.⁷ Thus, Christian theists are substance dualists, affirming that the mind is distinct from the body.

Christian theism affirms the Trinitarian nature of God, who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Moreover, the first parents of humanity, Adam and Eve, were created good in the image of God. However, because Adam and Eve disobeyed God at the fall, sin entered the world, and the image of God within them was damaged; it was defaced but not erased. Because of God's love for His creation, He sent His Son Jesus to restore relationship with humanity for all who repent of their sins and believe in His death and resurrection. Restoration of relationship and reconciliation with God is available to all who receive Jesus by faith.⁸ Life has meaning and purpose. Humans will live eternally, either in the presence of God or in separation from God. Moreover, Christian theists would affirm that God has a purpose for history. The events of creation history and human history bring glory to God, reveal the children of God, and fulfill God's purpose for humanity.⁹ Furthermore, Christian theists would affirm God's revelation of Himself and His plans and purposes through His inspired and inerrant Word, the Bible.

Naturalism

Naturalism is the worldview that the universe and the materials it contains are all that exist. Thus, all that occurs is the

result of natural processes and natural laws.¹⁰ The atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel affirms, “among the scientists and philosophers...materialism is widely assumed to be the only serious possibility.”¹¹ Some naturalists allow that some elements of the universe may not be material. Still, the vast majority of naturalists are materialists¹² who would affirm with Carl Sagan that the cosmos is the extent of all reality.¹³

According to naturalists, all physical events can be explained in terms of and as a result of other physical events.¹⁴ While yet unknown, it is assumed that the initiation and existence of the universe can be explained without calling upon a supreme being.¹⁵ Since the material universe is all that exists, there is no transcendent God or realm. Thus, there is no afterlife. Mind and body are of the same substance since only the materials, energy, and physical laws of the universe exist. The naturalist generally views the mind to be a product of the brain. Therefore, the naturalist would say that there is nothing more to human beings than the matter that makes them up. This view is described as substance monism and rejects the idea of the body possessing an immaterial soul or spirit that survives death.

Finally, since naturalists believe there is no transcendent God, ethics are grounded in human beings, the highest life form found in nature; thus, humans, not a supreme being, determine what is right or wrong.¹⁶ William Provine, a prominent naturalist, articulated his views stating there are no gods or purposes or directing forces of the universe; there is no afterlife, foundation for ethics, or the possibility of free will; there is no meaning to life.¹⁷ Similarly, philosopher David Johnson writes regarding the big questions of philosophy,

...many of the answers that our philosophical questioning made tempting were also troubling: There is no God, no soul, no afterlife, no free will, no persons, no mind, and so on. Embracing as true any one of these troubling answers might lead us to think that life is meaningless.¹⁸

It is important to consider divergent views within naturalism. As noted above, some naturalists like William Provine along with Friedrich Nietzsche¹⁹ reject the possibility of

a basis for ethics within the naturalist worldview. Many naturalists concur with the Humanist Manifesto II (the credo of many naturalists), “Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest.”²⁰ In contrast, naturalist philosopher Daniel Dennett holds out hope for discovering a basis for ethics within the naturalist paradigm.²¹

New Ageism

The new age movement lacks an authoritative book from which it derives its beliefs; thus, there are no well-defined doctrines or standards.²² The movement is eclectic and still developing from its infancy in the 1970s.²³ Former new age practitioners Steven Bancarz and Josh Peck view the new age movement as syncretic in that it combines beliefs from other systems of belief with a goal of defining a set of practices and beliefs aiding the practitioner in attaining enlightenment. The new age movement draws on the sacred texts of Hinduism and Buddhism and a wide range of topics, including transcendentalism, Gnosticism, occultism, meditation, sorcery, and witchcraft.²⁴

In the new age worldview, all is god, and no transcendent God exists; therefore, the prime reality is located in the self. Thus, like Christian theism, it elevates the importance of the individual, but for very different reasons. In Christian theism, the individual is important because human life is created in the image of God. In the new age worldview, the self is important because the self is divine, fully capable of manipulating external reality.²⁵

In *Confronting the New Age*, professor of philosophy, Douglas Groothuis summarizes the essential core beliefs of the new age movement:

1. Humanity is transitioning to an age of spiritual enlightenment, the age of Aquarius, where individuals discover the divinity within.
2. The pantheistic view that all is God and God is all, where there is no separation between individuals or material objects.

3. The view that God is an impersonal force or consciousness with no set moral code; humans are part of this impersonal consciousness.
4. The importance of using meditation, drugs, crystals, or other means to realize one's divinity.
5. There are neither good nor evil or objective moral prescriptions; sins need no forgiveness, while some in the movement do speak of the law of karma.
6. All individuals possess and are endowed with the prerogatives of deity and are capable of creating new realities using the paranormal, precognition, psychokinesis, psychics, or various other means.
7. Humans can tap into universal principles and laws through the channeling of spirit guides and revelations.²⁶

According to Groothuis, the new age movement is “an eclectic grab bag of Eastern mysticism, Western occultism, neopaganism, and human potential psychology.”²⁷ Moreover, according to new ageists, all religions are viewed as having the same true essence; all is God and God is all. Thus, the new age worldview fails to recognize important differences in doctrine and belief in the religions of the world.²⁸

Worldviews Contrasted

Considering the above, the Christian theist, naturalist, and new ageist worldviews contradict each other concerning the existence of God, the origin of the universe, and other areas of metaphysics (fundamental principles of reality). Please refer to the table on the following page for a summary of this section.

God, Reality, and the Universe

Christian theists affirm that God exists and transcends (is beyond) the universe which He created. Naturalists would deny the existence of God, affirm that only the universe exists, and reject the need for a Creator of the universe. New ageists would likely say that all is God or self is God, that the universe is real but open to manipulation by enlightened individuals who recognize their divine nature.²⁹

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Worldviews and Their Claims About Reality			
	Theism	Naturalism	New Ageism
God	God exists	God does not exist	All is God
Reality	Universe and transcendent God	Universe Only	Universe open to reordering by individuals
Origin of the Universe	Created by God	Uncreated	Impersonal energy or force
Origin of Life	Created by God	Chemical evolution/ panspermia	Chemical evolution/ panspermia
Diversity of Life	Created by God	Evolution by natural selection	Evolution by natural selection
Mind and Body	Two separate things (dualism)	The same thing (material monism)	The same thing (spiritual monism)
Source of Ethics and Morality	God	Humans	Humans
Afterlife	Spirit and soul (mind) continue in eternity	No afterlife	Reincarnation /spiritual evolution to divinity
Jesus	Divine Son of God	A mere mortal	One of many enlightened masters

The Origin and Diversity of Life

Regarding the origin and diversity of life, Christian theists affirm that all life was created by God. Naturalists expect to find the origin of life as the result of natural processes such as chemical evolution or panspermia (more on this later). Concerning the diversity of life, naturalists would affirm that it is the result of evolution by natural selection. New Ageists, who typically hold a high view of science,³⁰ would likely agree with naturalists regarding the origin and diversity of life.

The Nature of Mind and Body

Christian theists would affirm that the mind and body are two separate things (substance dualism). Naturalists affirm that the mind and body are composed of the same thing (substance monism). New ageists would likely affirm some form of spiritual monism where space and time (the material world) disappear as cosmic consciousness (self is one with the cosmos) is realized.³¹

Ethics and the Afterlife

Christian theists would affirm that God and His divine revelation are the ultimate sources for ethics and, furthermore, humans are imbued by their Creator with an objective moral code. Naturalists and new ageists would reject the divine origin of morality and see humanity as the ultimate source of ethics.

Christian theists believe in an eternal heavenly afterlife for all human beings who have faith in Christ and eternal separation from God in hell for those who do not have faith in Christ. Naturalists reject the possibility of an afterlife since, in their view, there is no transcendent realm. New ageists look to reincarnation in the progression to godhood and cosmic consciousness.

Who Is Jesus?

Christian theists affirm that Jesus is the divine Son of God. Since naturalists reject the existence of God, there can be no Son of God. New ageists reject the teachings of Jesus but often view Him as an enlightened spiritual master like Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama), but not the unique, eternal Son of God.

Conclusion

Christian theists, naturalists, and new ageists have irreconcilable differences. The question to ask is which, if any, of these worldviews is true? To answer this question, the arguments and evidence supporting each of these worldviews must be examined to determine which best explains the reality we observe. The following chapters will present much of the available evidence and reasoning for determining which worldview claims are true.

Study Questions

1. What is a worldview, and what is it made up of? Give a precise definition of worldview.
2. What are the core beliefs of Christian theism, naturalism, and new ageism?
3. Describe how Christian theists, naturalists, and new ageists would view abortion, miracles, and paranormal activity.
4. Describe a situation when you disagreed with someone, and you believe that the disagreement was rooted in differences in worldview.

2

Arguments for God with Answers to Objections

For millennia, Christian theists have defended the unique truth of Christianity. Naturalists might say there is no proof for the existence of God, but Christian philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig responds that there are good reasons and arguments to believe in God, even if they might not provide 100% certainty.³² A number of logical arguments for the existence of God have been proposed, including the Kalam cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the moral argument,³³ and the information argument.

Sound Arguments Are Persuasive

What makes an argument a good argument? Here is an example of a good deductive argument:

1. All men are mortal
2. Socrates is a man
3. Therefore, Socrates is mortal

This argument is a good argument for the reasons explained below. When the premises of a deductive argument are true, it is said to be factually correct. Not many would argue with the statement that all men are mortal. It seems evident that the death rate of mere humans is 100%; it is only a matter of time. Similarly, from everything we know about Socrates, it is clear that he was a man.

Furthermore, when the conclusion follows from the premises, the argument is said to be valid. More specifically, the argument is valid if the conclusion follows necessarily (unavoidably) from the premises. Factually true premises and valid construction make an argument sound. When an argument is sound, the conclusion is assured to be true. So, Socrates must be mortal.

So to recap, An argument is a good argument if it is sound. For an argument to be sound, it must have factually true premises and be valid in its construction. When these conditions are met, the conclusion must also be true. Philosophers and theologians seek to develop sound arguments to argue persuasively.

An easy way to determine if an argument is sound is to draw a Venn diagram. Here is the Venn diagram for this simple argument.

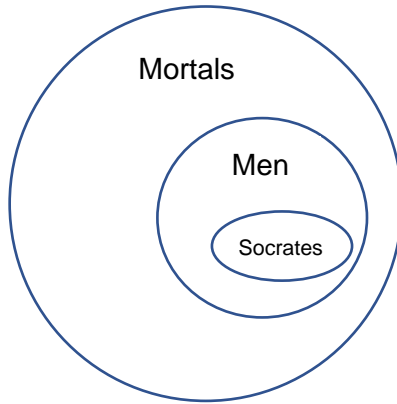


Figure 1.1: Venn diagram of a sound deductive argument.

From the Venn diagram drawn from the premises, we see that Socrates is trapped in the mortal group, that is, men. So, this is what the Venn diagram will look like for a sound argument assuming the premises are true.

Now let's look at an argument that is not sound.

1. All planets are distant from the Earth.
2. The Moon is distant from the Earth.
3. Therefore, the Moon is a planet.

While the Moon is distant from the Earth, it does not fall into the class of things that are called planets. To be considered a planet, an object must orbit a star. Since the Moon orbits the Earth, it cannot be considered a planet. If we look at the Venn diagram below, the moon cannot be placed in the planet circle

for the reason noted above. In this case, the premises of the argument are true, but the construction of the argument is not valid. Therefore, the argument is not sound.

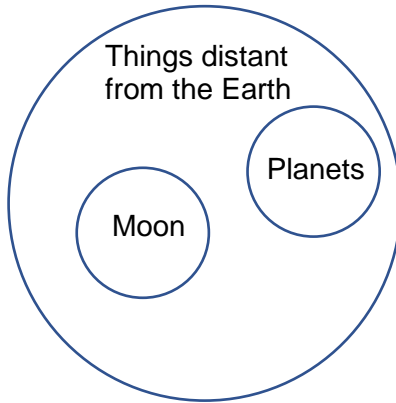


Figure 1.2: Venn diagram of a deductive argument that is not sound.

With that as background, let's consider four of the better arguments Christian theists have used to argue for the existence of God.

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

The Kalam cosmological argument can be stated as follows:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

The first premise is rooted in the principle of causality, which affirms that effects have causes. In other words, when an event happens, there is a reason why it happened. The principle of causality simply states that every effect has a cause.³⁴ It is hard to deny that in human experience, nothing happens without a cause. Will your car ever start unless someone or something performs some action that causes it to start? Of course, it will not. On the other hand, if you turn on the ignition, activate the

remote starter, or perhaps short out the proper ignition wires, the car will start. In any case, there is a cause for the effect (the starting of the car).

If the principle of causality were not true, science could not advance, and problems could not be solved because you could never be sure that you had found the cause of an illness or the cause of a train wreck. Illnesses and train wrecks could just be random effects, but in our modern scientific world, we know that events, illnesses, and train wrecks have causes. Therefore, few will attempt to deny the principle of causality.

Some might argue that events at the quantum level are uncaused such as the formation of virtual particles. However, this fails to recognize that these particles result from energy fluctuation and thus are not uncaused.³⁵

The second premise asserts that the universe began to exist. The Book of Genesis has said this very thing for 3500 years. But until Einstein's work in the early twentieth century, many scientists believed the universe was eternal and static in that it was not expanding.³⁶ In our modern scientific era, virtually all scientists affirm this premise with the acceptance of Big Bang Cosmology.³⁷

Objections and Responses

While the Kalam cosmological argument might seem intuitively obvious, some might still find objections to it. Let's consider some objections to the first premise to see if they pose a threat to the soundness of the Kalam cosmological argument.

The universe might have come from nothing

Some might argue that something can come from nothing. The problem with this objection is that there is no example of such a thing. Even virtual particles (short-lived subatomic particles) are the result of energy fluctuations.³⁸ Furthermore, nothing has no power to produce something. As C.S. Lewis said, "if there ever was a time that nothing existed, then nothing would exist now."³⁹

The laws of physics created the universe

Stephen Hawking said in an interview, “God is the name people give to the reason we are here. But I think that reason is the laws of physics rather than someone with whom one can have a personal relationship. An impersonal God.”⁴⁰ It is notable here that Hawking seems to accept the idea of God as long as it is an impersonal one that requires no relationship or imposes no constraints on its creation. Hawking believes the laws of physics are the reason for the universe’s existence which only leads to the question, where did the laws of physics come from? It seems irrational to believe that the laws of physics brought themselves into existence. As brilliant as Hawking was, he did not provide evidence for this belief, mathematical or otherwise. Thus, Hawking’s statement appears to be nothing more than an opinion that runs counter to all human experience. As Craig observes, if universes can cause themselves to exist, why is that not true of everything, including BMWs, people, and skyscrapers?⁴¹

If the universe needs a cause, then God needs a cause

Skeptics will raise the question if the universe needs a cause, then why doesn’t God need a cause? The Creator of the universe must have existed before its creation; otherwise, He could not have created it. Time and space were initiated at the creation event; therefore, God must be outside of time and space to bring time and space into existence. According to the principle of causality, only things that have a beginning need a cause. Beginning implies initiation in space and time. The Creator is outside of space and time because He existed before the initiation of space and time. Therefore, the Creator does not need a cause because He has no beginning in time and space. He is an eternal being.

Perhaps the universe is eternal and not created

If the universe were static and eternal, it would not need a reason or cause for its existence. If time and space had no beginning, there would be no need for a Creator. The problem with this view is that solid scientific evidence shows that the universe had a beginning. The plausibility of the static/eternal model of the universe was challenged by the theoretical work of

Albert Einstein and Georges Lemaître, which indicated that the universe must be expanding. Within decades, the predictions of Einstein and Lemaître were affirmed by the experimental observations of Edwin Hubble and others.

The period from the enlightenment until today has been one of tremendous advancements in science and understanding of the natural world. One of the greatest scientific enigmas of our age is the origin of the universe and fine-tuning of its physical laws and constants. According to the latest scientific estimates, the universe began to exist about 13.7 billion years ago. In what is referred to as the “Big Bang,” the universe began as an infinitesimal point of exceedingly high temperature and density and rapidly expanded. With the Big Bang, all matter and energy currently in the universe came into being in less than 10^{-43} seconds. The universe has been expanding ever since.

The discovery of cosmic microwave background radiation in 1964 by Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson provided strong evidence for the Big Bang. The observed cosmic microwave background radiation is consistent with the universe's origin, as described by the Big Bang theory.⁴² Furthermore, the universe's expansion rate has been experimentally verified using the Hubble Space Telescope, thus adding additional support for the Big Bang theory.

Is the Big Bang Theory ultimately correct about the beginning of the universe? Theories are refined as new data is collected, but it is certainly significant that cosmologists now almost universally agree that the universe had a beginning. For thousands of years, long before telescopes and space probes, the book of Genesis has affirmed this very thing: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth” (Genesis 1:1).

Maybe scientists are wrong, and the universe is eternal

A skeptic might argue that while the scientific view that the universe had a beginning has been well-supported by experiments, maybe cosmologists are wrong, and the universe is eternal and doesn't need a Creator. The problem here is that there is a good philosophical reason to believe that the universe is not eternal. If the universe were eternal, there would be an infinite number of days before today. Therefore, today would

never come. But today has come, so there cannot be an infinite number of days before today.

How powerful is the Creator?

The initiation of the universe as it is presently understood by cosmologists and physicists involved the highly controlled process through which energy, matter, space, and time came into being. While this process is called the Big Bang, it was not a massive explosion that might result from the detonation of a bomb, but instead, an event requiring immense control and precision far beyond human capability.⁴³

The estimated number of stars in the universe is 1000 billion trillion.⁴⁴ To put this into perspective, that is roughly 1000 times the number of grains of sand on the Earth's beaches. And some of these stars have diameters more than 200,000 times that of the Earth. As a comparison, if the Earth were the diameter of a golf ball, the largest known star would have a diameter equal to 24 times the height of the Empire State Building!

In order to form the universe, a vast amount of energy was required in a very short period of time (less than 10^{-43} seconds). Since power is the ratio of energy transfer in a given time, the power to initiate the universe is incredibly large since a massive amount of energy was transferred in a very short period of time. We can conclude from this that the power of the Creator is far beyond human understanding.

The Teleological Argument

Further study of the universe has revealed that the physical laws and constants embedded in the fabric of the universe are fine-tuned such that even very small changes would result in a vastly different universe unable to support life. Minor changes in the universe's fundamental forces would result in disastrous effects. The fine-tuning of the universe forms the basis for another argument for God's existence, known as the teleological argument. A more modern version goes as follows:

1. The fine-tuning of the universe is due to physical necessity, chance, or design.
2. It is not due to physical necessity or chance.

3. Therefore, it is due to design.⁴⁵

(Note: if the science and math of this section are bogging you down, a simpler form of this argument follows three pages ahead.)

The constants and laws of the universe are precisely set

In *The Creator of the Cosmos*, astrophysicist Hugh Ross states, “four different characteristics of the universe must be fine-tuned to better than one part in 10^{37} for life of any kind to exist.”⁴⁶ As physicist Paul Davies concludes, “A really big question is why the universe is fit for life; it looks like it has been ‘fixed up.’”⁴⁷ An increase or decrease of the ratio of the electromagnetic force constant to the gravitational force constant of just one part in 10^{40} will result in either only large stars being produced or only small stars being produced. Both types of stars are needed to support advanced life. Large stars produce heavier elements, and smaller stars, like the Sun, burn long enough to sustain a planet with life.⁴⁸

Pondering these questions, Ross provides an example to help visualize fine-tuning to one part in 10^{37} . If one were to cover a million and one continents the size of North America to a depth of 239,000 miles (the distance to the Moon) with dimes, the probability of selecting a specific dime out of all the dimes would be about one chance in 10^{37} .⁴⁹ Ross describes his interaction with astronomers:

In all my conversations with those who do research on the characteristics of the universe, and all of my readings of articles or books on the subject, not one person denies the conclusion that somehow the cosmos was crafted to make it a fit habitat for life... on the issue of the fine-tuning or careful crafting of the cosmos, the evidence is so compelling that I have yet to hear of any dissent.⁵⁰

The uniqueness of a solar system capable of supporting intelligent life is often not appreciated. Parameters of critical importance to providing the proper life-supporting environment on a planet in such a solar system include galaxy location, galaxy type, proximity to supernovae, star type, star age, star

luminosity, planet distance from the star, planet surface gravity, the inclination of orbit, axial tilt, rotation period, seismic activity, oxygen to nitrogen ratio, tectonic activity, mass and distance of neighboring planets, and moons, to name but a few.

According to Hugh Ross, this list of parameters is growing rapidly as knowledge of the universe increases. As of 2001, the list included 128 parameters, which must be fine-tuned in order for a life-sustaining planet to result. Ross has assigned probability values to each of the 128 parameters that they will fall into the range required to support life on a given planet. Probability values range between 0.5 and 0.00001 for the various parameters. According to Ross's calculations, the probability of all 128 parameters falling in the required range to support life is one in 10^{166} . Thus, there is an infinitesimally small probability that a planet such as Earth should be found in the entire universe, which becomes especially clear when the number of total planets in the universe is considered. The current estimate of the total number of planets in the universe is about 10^{22} .

From these values, Ross concludes that the chances of a planet such as Earth existing in the entire universe are 1 in 10^{144} .⁵¹ In the last two decades, the list of fine-tuned parameters for a life-supporting planet has grown to 676, making the likelihood of the universe producing another planet such as Earth even more remote.⁵² According to Ross,

the remoteness of the probability of finding a planet fit for life suggests that the Creator personally and specially designed and constructed our galaxy group, our galaxy, our sun, Jupiter, Saturn, Earth's collider, the moon, and the Earth for life.⁵³

Necessity and chance are ruled out

Perhaps the universe is the way it is because mathematics and the laws of physics demand it. Maybe it is necessary that the universe is the way it is, and there is no other way it could be. However, that is not the case. As William Lane Craig explains, the fine-tuning of the universe cannot be attributed to necessity since an almost infinite number of universes are possible. According to M-Theory (superstring theory aimed at unifying quantum mechanics and general relativity), 10^{500} different

universes are possible by varying the values of the constants of the universe (for example, the gravitational constant and the electric force constant, and many others).⁵⁴ In short, the constants of the universe could be other than they are. It is not necessary that they are as they are. But they are precisely set to provide our life-supporting universe. Even slight alterations in the constants of the universe would be devastating to life.

Given the probabilities described by Ross above, chance seems to be a highly unlikely explanation for the fine-tuning of the universe. With chance and necessity eliminated, design is the only remaining choice and leads to the conclusion that there is a designer of the universe.

What about the multiverse?

In recognition of the difficulties involved in obtaining a single fine-tuned universe capable of supporting life without a designer, some scientists have advanced the multiverse theory, which states that the present universe is but one of a large ensemble of many universes. Several objections to the multiverse hypothesis have been raised. First, according to theoretical physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne, there is no scientific evidence that the multiverse hypothesis is true.⁵⁵ Second, as philosopher Richard Swinburne observes, “To postulate a trillion-trillion other universes, rather than one God, in order to explain the orderliness of our universe, seems the height of irrationality.”⁵⁶ Finally, even if the complex multiverse theory were true, one might ask how the multiverse came to be, thus suggesting a designer after all.

So to review our examination of the teleological argument, few will argue against the observation that the physical constants of the universe appear to be exquisitely fine-tuned to infinitesimally narrow ranges. Three reasons are offered as possible reasons for the fine-tuning observed. Necessity fails because M-Theory permits 10^{500} possible universes based upon variations in physical constants. Chance fails because the probability of obtaining the present universe based on chance settings of physical constants is highly improbable mathematically. Thus, design is the only viable option.⁵⁷

A Simpler Form of the Teleological Argument

Craig's form of the teleological argument is a good one, but it can be difficult to gain comfort with the concepts of chance and necessity in the argument. A simpler form of the teleological argument is shown below:

1. Every design has a designer.
2. The universe and life have a highly complex design.
3. Therefore, the universe and life had a Designer.⁵⁸

Human experience and reason tell us that designs have designers. For instance, BMWs have designers. If universes can pop into existence without designers, so then should planes, automobiles, and skyscrapers, but they don't. This leads to the conclusion that the universe also needs a designer. Furthermore, designs have information content and specifications. The universe contains information in the form of highly coordinated natural laws and carefully set (specified) constants. The strong impression is that the constants of the universe, such as the gravitational constant, the electric force constant, and many others, are precisely set. As noted by Ross, at present count, 676 parameters must be fine-tuned to permit a life-supporting planet in the universe. The DNA code is clear evidence of the complexity of life (see the end of this chapter). Thus, the first and second premises are true. The form of the argument is valid and therefore leads to the conclusion that the universe and life had a designer.

The Moral Argument

The moral argument stems from the understanding that people in different cultures and times have held certain behaviors or moral values to be good, desirable, and applicable to all humans. These moral values applicable to all people are sometimes referred to as objective moral values, which are things societies have aspired to throughout the ages. Examples of objective moral values held in society are the prohibition against stealing, rape, injustice, the murder of innocents, bearing false witness against a neighbor, or genocide.

The moral argument was championed by C. S. Lewis and others. One version of the moral argument is cast in this form:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.⁵⁹

Let's consider in more depth the premises of the moral argument and some objections to it.

There are no objective morals if God does not exist

Many well-known atheists and agnostics would agree that if there is no God, there is no basis for objective morals. According to atheist and historian of science, William Provine, there is no “foundation for ethics” for determining what is right or wrong.⁶⁰ Philosopher and atheist Friedrich Nietzsche affirmed much the same thing.⁶¹ Many other atheists and agnostics would concur with the Humanist Manifesto II, which states, “Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest.”⁶² In other words, in the view of many atheists and agnostics, what is right or wrong is up to individuals and governing bodies and does not come as a result of divine commands.

Objection: Human morality is the product of evolution

However, some non-theists would argue that the human moral code is a product of evolution by natural selection (ENS).⁶³ These non-theists might argue that morality evolved to enhance survival. However, even if that were the case, it does not mean that the present state of human morality is special or objectively true; it is merely the product of the random accidents of evolution. Under different circumstances and pressures, perhaps on a different planet, a completely different moral code might have evolved. Perhaps in other evolutionary circumstances, injustice, rape, and genocide might have evolved to be desirable behaviors.

Given that it is hard to conceive a world where injustice and genocide are viewed as good things, it seems that evolution

cannot be credited with producing objective morals that seem universally good in all circumstances.

Survival of the fittest is contrary to altruism and benevolence

Furthermore, the driving force of ENS is said to be survival of the fittest, which is very unlikely to lead to such acts as building hospitals to care for fallen enemies in war or a fireman running into a burning building to save a complete stranger. Altruism toward enemies and strangers seems in complete opposition to ENS and survival of the fittest. Thus, from a naturalistic perspective, no objective moral law can be claimed.⁶⁴ Yet an objective moral law does exist.

As the former director of the Human Genome Research Institute, Francis Collins notes, “Agape [a Greek word for love], or selfless altruism, presents a major challenge for the evolutionist. It is quite frankly a scandal to reductionist reasoning. It cannot be accounted for by the drive of individual selfish genes to perpetuate themselves.”⁶⁵ The survival of the fittest cannot account for the fireman who runs into a collapsing burning building to save a child.

Furthermore, Notre Dame professor, Christian Smith, observes that concern for human rights and social justice emerged from the Judeo-Christian foundations of Western civilization, steeped in a belief in a God who had revealed Himself and His moral law in Scripture. Smith concludes that it is illogical to believe that naturalistic or atheistic approaches can provide the foundation for promoting benevolence and human rights.⁶⁶

Objection: morality is relative

Some might argue that values and morals are entirely dependent on culture, or as they might say, morality is relative. In response, the vast majority of people throughout the ages have condemned the murder of innocent people, stealing, rape, bearing false witness against others, unfair treatment, adultery, and sexual abuse of children. Modern examples of actions that would be widely condemned include child trafficking, child abuse, racism, Hitler’s killing of six million Jews, imprisonment

of innocent people, the SAT cheating scandal, property confiscation, and home invasion.

Not convinced? Consider the following simple act of injustice. Think back to when you were a student, or perhaps you are a student now. If your work was marked down by 20 percent for no reason, you certainly would have protested. It does not seem that anyone would be happy about this unfair treatment. It is a universal phenomenon that no one wants to be treated unfairly. That makes fairness a universal objective moral value for all people, places, and times, thus affirming the moral argument and its conclusion that God exists.

Objection: Some (like Hitler) don't follow the moral code

A small percentage of individuals in every society fail to live by the moral values that have been held sacred by people throughout time. That does not mean that objective moral values do not exist, but that some in every society lack the proper development of a moral compass.

While some human beings have engaged in rape, injustice, genocide, and theft, they would be quick to point out the evil of these acts if they were on the receiving end, which shows that all individuals are imbued with moral values. So, contrary to the viewpoints noted above, we see that objective moral values and duties do exist and seem to be embedded in human nature.

Objective morality shows the existence of God

Affirming that God exists, theists, on the other hand, see morality as rooted in the nature of God and would argue that evils like human trafficking, child abuse, injustice, and rape have always been and will always be wrong because they represent an assault on creatures created in the image of God. The theistic worldview makes sense of the longing for justice, moral awareness, and the spirit of altruism found in humans, as these are seen to flow from the love and perfection of God, who created human beings in His image. It seems that the existence of objective moral values and duties is best explained by the existence of a theistic God who created humans and imbued them with His moral law.

The Information Argument

Information is stored in many ways. If you visit a web page and derive information from it, that is only possible because the Creator of the web page took the time to organize letters into sentences or to provide diagrams and pictures. In the ancient world, information was stored on stone or clay tablets using early forms of writing such as hieroglyphics or cuneiform. A program stored in a computer's memory contains digital codes that represent certain mathematical or logical operations. The computer programmer writes the program that tells the microprocessor what to do.

Information Comes from Intelligent Beings

In these instances (web pages, ancient tablets, or computer programs), the source of information is an intelligent being. In fact, when we trace back to the source of information, wherever it is found, we always find that it was produced by an intelligent being. The reality is that there is no known source for information other than intelligent beings. Who else creates magazines, web pages, or computer programs? Only intelligent beings—right?

The human genome information content is vast

Consider the human genome, which is the complete DNA sequence of an organism and contains its complete specification and heredity information. According to the Human Genome Project web page:

The human genome is made up of DNA, which has four different chemical building blocks. These are called bases and abbreviated A, T, C, and G. In the human genome, about 3 billion bases are arranged along the chromosomes in a particular order for each unique individual. To get an idea of the size of the human genome present in each of our cells, consider the following analogy: If the DNA sequence of the human genome were compiled in books, the equivalent of 200 volumes the size of a Manhattan telephone book (at 1000 pages each) would be needed to hold it all. It would take about 9.5 years to read out loud (without stopping) the 3 billion bases in a person's genome sequence. This is calculated on a

reading rate of 10 bases per second, equaling 600 bases/minute, 36,000 bases/hour, 864,000 bases/day, 315,360,000 bases/year.⁶⁷

The genetic information content present in each human cell is the equivalent of 200 very large books! It would take 9.5 years to read the DNA sequence aloud. What a staggering amount of information is contained in every living organism. It should be obvious that there must be an intelligent source for the massive amount of information contained in the human genetic code.

Author and philosopher of science Stephen Meyer argues that wherever information is found, it can be traced to an intelligent source. For instance, the inscriptions found on the Rosetta Stone were made by intelligent beings.⁶⁸ Meyer concludes, “molecular biologists have identified information-rich sequences and systems in the cell, suggesting, by the same logic, the past existence of an intelligent cause for those effects.”⁶⁹ Meyer’s reasoning can be cast into a deductive syllogism as follows:

1. The only source of information is an intelligent being.
2. The human genome contains a vast amount of information.
3. Therefore, the source of the human genome is a highly intelligent being.

Considering the complexity of the human genome and human life, the human genetic code contained in DNA molecules must be the product of a highly intelligent designer. Moreover, the uniqueness of highly differentiated individuals strongly suggests that the designer is personal, superintending the variation of the DNA code between individuals. Thus, the DNA code found in each of us suggests a highly intelligent personal Creator. The conclusion seems difficult to avoid, but let’s consider objections and how one might respond to those objections.

DNA and life arose from chemical evolution

Chemical evolution is a “theory of how the first living cell arose from simpler chemicals in the primordial ocean.”⁷⁰ Thus, if

the theory of chemical evolution were true, it would provide an explanation for the origin of DNA, which is an essential molecule for life to arise.

One experiment aimed at simulating the conditions leading to the first living cell was conducted by Stanley Miller. In a glass apparatus, Miller introduced a mixture of hydrogen, methane, ammonia, and water vapor, the supposed atmosphere of the early Earth, and stimulated it with electric sparks to simulate lightning.

Remarkably, Miller's experiment produced important protein building blocks of life. Not long after Miller conducted his experiment, however, the consensus regarding the nature of the atmosphere of the early Earth changed. Hydrogen is believed to have escaped into space because of its low molecular weight. The likely atmosphere of the early Earth was viewed to be carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and water vapor.⁷¹ When Miller's experiment was repeated with the correct gases, it no longer produced proteins.⁷²

Research into the origin of the first living cell continued, but chemical evolution as an explanation for the origin of the first living cell has been virtually abandoned.⁷³ Recent estimates of the probability of a minimally complex cell arising by random chance and chemical evolution are one in $10^{41,000}$. Meyer concludes, "The probability of producing the proteins necessary to build a minimally complex cell . . . by chance is unimaginably small."⁷⁴

Without a first living cell capable of self-reproduction, the process of evolution by natural selection could never begin. Given the improbability of chemical evolution, researchers turned to investigating the possibility that the complex molecules necessary for life arose by self-ordering. Due to bonding affinities, atoms arrange themselves into complex molecules and crystalline structures. But as Meyer observes, scientists soon came to realize that "amino acids didn't demonstrate these bonding affinities."⁷⁵ Moreover, Meyer concludes that self-organization would not yield a genetic message, only a repetitive sequence.⁷⁶

The Information in DNA came from an alien source

Some have even argued that life was seeded in our solar system by a more advanced alien life form and perhaps arrived on Earth riding on meteorites. However, even if life did arise on the Earth by these means, it only moves the origin of life problem to another place in the universe, thus raising the question, who made the intelligent alien life forms?

The complexity of DNA points to an intelligent designer

Some might argue that science is young and might someday find a natural explanation for the origin of DNA.⁷⁷ Yet the uniform experience of humans is that the only source of information is intelligent beings. The wind, waves, and other natural processes have never been found to produce messages or sophisticated instructions of the type found in the DNA molecule. It seems reasonable to infer that any source of the DNA information discovered by scientists will be an intelligent being, after all.

The Nature of the Creator

In this chapter, we have considered four logical arguments for the existence of God. The Kalam cosmological argument reveals a Creator of great power capable of initiating a vast universe from nothing. The teleological argument shows the wisdom of the Creator in fine-tuning the universe to support human life. The moral argument shows the goodness of the Creator in establishing the moral code with which he has imbued his creatures. Such a Creator must also be personal because He has designed a habitat perfectly suited for His creatures, and He has imparted his moral law to each one. The information argument further affirms the vast knowledge and personal nature of the Creator who fashioned DNA, which sets apart each individual and each creature. Thus, these simple logical arguments drawn from what is revealed in nature point to a Creator of immense power and knowledge who is the standard of what is good and who has crafted the intricate details of the genome of each individual and creature as well as the perfect habitat allowing for the flourishing of His creation. The Creator described in this chapter bears a striking resemblance to the God

of the Bible. What is revealed in nature about the Creator should prompt individuals to seek more knowledge about God.

Study Questions

1. What makes an argument sound? Describe the nature of the premises and the structure of a sound argument.
2. Give your own example of a sound argument and an argument that is not sound.
3. For the Kalam cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the moral argument, and the information argument: (a) list the premises; (b) list the objections to the premises and a sentence refuting the objection.

3

Challenge to God #1: The Theory of Evolution

Perhaps the two most potent reasons atheists and agnostics cite for their skepticism about God's existence are the theory of evolution and the problem of evil. Many scientists consider evolution by natural selection to be a fact. Suppose evolution by natural selection is how humans came to be. In that case, the Bible's story about humanity's origin must be false because the theory of evolution and the Book of Genesis contradict each other on many levels. This chapter will consider the challenge that the theory of evolution poses to Christian theism. The next chapter will consider the problem of evil.

Christianity and Evolution Have Irreconcilable Differences

The Book of Genesis says that an all-powerful God created humanity in His image. Further, the Book of Genesis indicates that human beings are more than their bodies; they have an eternal soul breathed into them by God. Genesis says that God created complex creatures and plants fully formed according to their intended environment. Supporters of the theory of evolution would most likely deny all these things. Some have tried to reconcile the Bible's view of creation with the theory of evolution. But in reality, Genesis and the theory of evolution have irreconcilable differences, and at every turn, they contradict each other. This, of course, means that either Genesis or the theory of evolution is false. It is also logically possible that both Genesis and the theory of evolution are false. They must each be considered on their own merits. The validity of the theory of evolution will be considered in this chapter, while the validity of the Bible, which contains Genesis, will be considered in subsequent chapters.

Origin of Life According to Evolutionists

Let's start by summarizing what supporters of the theory of

evolution typically say about humanity's origin. Long ago, atoms combined into molecules, and those molecules combined to form more complex molecules. Then one day, about 3.8 billion years ago, these molecules organized and came to life as the first living organism, a simple cell. As this simple cell reproduced, random mutations occurred, resulting in new life forms. Natural selection favored mutations, which improved the organism's ability to survive. Over billions of years, beginning with that first simple living cell, evolution by natural selection (ENS) produced all the organisms and plants that have ever lived, including humans.

So, in summary, according to evolutionary theory, the diverse array of plants and animals we find on the Earth is purely the result of natural selection operating on random mutations, gradually and over billions of years.

Since all life is just the result of the proper combination of atoms and the random accidents of mutation, there is nothing beyond life on Earth. Humans are no more than the matter that makes them up, so when they die, that is the end of their existence. Humans have no soul or spirit, so there is no afterlife. Human life just ends. Corpses decompose into simple compounds and elements, and the process of evolution marches on.

Evolution Eliminates God?

If all life evolved by natural selection (ENS) operating on random mutations, there is no need for God. We are so used to hearing about evolution that many people just accept it as a fact. Many scientists refer to the theory of evolution as the "fact of evolution," even though in science, theories can never be proven. Stephen Hawking explained that even a single repeatable observation can destroy the most grandiose theory.⁷⁸ Is the theory of evolution really a fact?

Challenges to the Theory of Evolution

While some find the theory of evolution compelling, its flaws and limitations are often overlooked. Several lines of reasoning, coupled with available evidence, raise serious doubts about the validity of the theory of evolution. Here is a brief

summary of the challenges to the theory of evolution, which will be further developed in this chapter.

1. **The information in DNA**

The vast complexity of human DNA precludes the possibility of its formation by random processes. The information in DNA contains assembly instructions for producing proteins and protein machines necessary for living organisms.⁷⁹ As noted in Chapter 2, intelligent beings are the only known source of information. The random processes found in nature have never been seen to produce coded information and instructions as is found in DNA.

2. **The origin of the first living cell**

The theory of evolution affirms that all species developed as beneficial mutations resulted in the enhanced survivability of organisms. The accumulation of favorable mutations over time is credited with developing all plant and animal species on Earth. However, for natural selection to occur, a complete and functioning living cell must already exist. Without a reproducing cell, there is no possibility of mutations occurring in offspring, and evolution by natural selection could not even begin. Therefore, Darwin's theory of evolution cannot account for the origin of the first living cell.

3. **The improbability of abiogenesis**

Chemical evolution (a.k.a. abiogenesis) is the idea that non-living atoms combined into molecules. These molecules, in the distant past, formed living cells. However, origin of life researchers have recognized that the probability of atoms self-assembling into the molecules of life is virtually zero, even over billions of years. Thus, they have long been seeking alternatives with no prospects on the horizon.

4. **The lack of transitional forms in the fossil record**

If evolution is responsible for the immense diversity of species, vast quantities of transitional fossils should be found as species branched off from predecessors to form new species. However, leading proponents of the theory of

evolution lament the lack of transitional fossils, which would be expected if more sophisticated animals developed from less advanced animals.

5. The Cambrian Explosion

The Cambrian Explosion occurred about 530 million years ago. In a geologically short time period, a large array of complex, multi-celled organisms appeared on the Earth with no evidence of evolution from previous ancestors.

6. There are natural limits to biological change

Microevolution (evolutionary change within species) has been observed to produce changes within species, such as finches with varying beak types to suit their food supply and moths with color variations to suit their environment. Furthermore, Bacteria are constantly evolving. But macroevolution (evolutionary change creating new species) has never been observed. Finches remain finches, moths remain moths, and bacteria remain bacteria. Just as human breeders can breed species bearing desirable features, nature uses natural selection to make modest changes within species to suit creatures to their environment. But never has it been observed that a new species is born from this kind of variation.^{80,81}

7. Complex molecular machines are common in nature

Molecular machines found at the cellular level, such as the bacterial flagellum, are complex machines. Like mousetraps, they require all parts to be present if they are to function. But they are far more sophisticated than mousetraps. These complex molecular machines far exceed the best machines created by human designers. They bear unmistakable marks of intelligent design. However, no detailed scientific accounting for these complex molecular machines has ever been published.⁸²

Read on for a more-detailed point-by-point discussion of these challenges to the theory of evolution.

Point 1: The information in DNA—no plausible explanation has been proposed for the origin of the DNA code

Perhaps one of the best arguments to challenge the validity of the theory of evolution has already been presented. The human genome contains vast amounts of information best explained as the product of a mind or intelligence, as shown in Chapter 2. As an affirmation of the difficulty of explaining the formation of complex life structures like DNA through random processes, Stephen Meyer observes, “. . .most origin-of-life researchers have decided to consider other theories that do not rely heavily on chance.”⁸³

Point 2: The origin of the first living cell—a complete cell is needed before it can evolve

Even if evolution by natural selection is responsible for the diverse species we find on the Earth, you would need a complete, functioning, and living cell before ENS could occur. Evolution supposedly works through natural selection operating on random mutations resulting from the cell reproduction process. Unless you have a living cell, to begin with, there is nothing to reproduce. Therefore, no mutations will come about. So, ENS could not be the explanation for the origin of the very first single-cell organism.

Point 3: The Improbability of abiogenesis

In the 1950s, origin of life researchers theorized that the first single-cell organism arose by chemical evolution. Through chemical evolution, it was supposed that atoms formed into the molecules of life over long periods and began to live when fitted together. Life came spontaneously from the proper assemblage of molecules it was supposed. Today, few origin of life researchers credit chemical evolution as the process that led to life's origin on Earth because of the staggering statistical improbabilities.

Stephen Meyer estimates the probability of forming a simple protein molecule through the random assembly of atoms to be one chance in 10^{125} or one chance in *one* with 125 zeros after it. Meyer notes that 300 to 500 protein molecules would be required to build a simple cell, making the chance assemblage of

a cell nearly zero. Moreover, according to scientific dating, only about 100 million years elapsed between the cooling of the Earth and the appearance of the first single-cell organisms.⁸⁴ The odds of the chance assemblage of a simple cell in a mere 100 million years are so poor that it would be truly miraculous if it happened by random means—but evolution does not allow miracles. A Creator seems to be the best explanation for the origin of life on Earth.

Grasping at Straws

In recognition of these problems, some origin of life researchers proposed panspermia, the theory that the first cells came to the Earth riding on meteorites.⁸⁵ The theory of panspermia proposed that the planet Earth was infected with life from another solar system. However, Francis Crick, who discovered the structure of DNA, and Leslie Orgel, concluded that it is unlikely that spores or living organisms came to Earth from another solar system embedded in a meteorite.

Given the unlikelihood that living cells could survive a journey of this type, in 1972, Crick and Orgel proposed directed panspermia whereby the Earth was seeded by intelligent alien beings. Crick and Orgel acknowledged that scientific evidence to support this theory was lacking.⁸⁶ As mentioned in Chapter 2, suppose intelligent aliens did seed life on planet Earth. That only leads to the question: how did the aliens come to be? Who created them? A creative force in the initiation of life seems evident and hard to escape.

Point 4: The lack of transitional forms in the fossil record—the elephant in the room

The fossils that have been dug from the ground over the last several hundred years tell us about the development and appearance of species in the distant past. Collectively, these fossil discoveries are referred to as the “fossil record.” The fossil record does not support the theory of evolution, as is evident from the words of some of the most influential advocates of evolution by natural selection.

According to the theory of evolution, we should expect to find fossilized remains of “in-between” transitional species as,

say, sea creatures transform into land animals. Even today, we should see nature in confusion as existing species transition into new species. Instead of this continual transition and confusion of species, we find well-defined species in the fossil record that appear fully formed with no evidence of evolution from a previous ancestor. Throughout time, species either go extinct or remain with us to this day just as they originally appeared. This is obvious from the writings of Charles Darwin, who raised this concern about his own theory, and in the writings of modern proponents of evolution such as Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Dawkins. The words of Darwin, Gould, and Dawkins are also critical to understanding the state of the Cambrian era fossils and will be discussed below.

Point 5: The Cambrian explosion—an Insurmountable problem for ENS

As noted above, the theory of evolution presupposes that creatures, starting from a single cell organism, evolved by natural selection and transitioned into new species through almost countless small modifications over long periods.



Figure 3.1: Complex aquatic creatures of the Cambrian Period appeared without signs of evolution from previous animals.⁸⁷

What if a multitude of species appeared in the fossil record in a short period of time with no signs of evolution from previous ancestors? Wouldn't that mean that evolution by natural selection could not be the explanation for their appearance? That is precisely the problem faced by proponents of ENS in explaining a period in the history of the Earth called the Cambrian explosion, where the rapid appearance of many new life forms occurred.⁸⁸

Agassiz of Harvard disagrees with Darwin

As Darwin was preparing for the publication of *On Origin of the Species* in the late 1850s, he reached out to Louis Agassiz, another famous biologist and naturalist at Harvard University. Darwin sent Agassiz his manuscript for critique, looking to gain an ally for his theory that life evolved by natural selection from the most-simple single-celled organism to the complex life forms we see today, including humans. Agassiz was a leading expert on the fossil record. Darwin would be disappointed with Agassiz's conclusion that the fossil record did not support his theory of evolution. Agassiz concluded that the rapid appearance of complex aquatic animal forms in the Cambrian era could not be explained by Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection.⁸⁹

Rapid speciation in the Cambrian era

According to geologic dating, the Cambrian explosion began about 530 million years ago and lasted 5 to 10 million years. It was a period far too short to allow for evolution by natural selection of the many animal species that appeared, including the vertebrate phyla to which humans belong. Animal phyla are the taxonomic groups of animals that exhibit similar forms and attributes. There are 35 animal phyla. The astounding truth is that representatives of most of the animal phyla that exist today appeared in the Cambrian period, fully formed, with no evidence of evolution by natural selection or gradual transitions from previous animal forms. Instead, these Cambrian animals seemingly just popped into existence.⁹⁰

The complex Cambrian creatures are quite large and imposing. *Anomalocaris* was one to two meters long. In contrast, the creatures of the Precambrian period found just below

Cambrian shale layers were mere bacteria, single-celled organisms, and a few very simple multicellular organisms.⁹¹ With the Cambrian explosion, complex aquatic creatures made up of trillions of cells arrived on the scene fully formed with no evidence of ENS from the creatures that existed before the Cambrian era. Darwin was aware of this problem but assumed that fossil evidence would be found confirming his theory, but that has not been the case.

The Cambrian Explosion contradicts ENS

The Cambrian Explosion presents a severe challenge to the theory of evolution. Complex creatures appeared without adequate time to evolve or without leaving the fossil evidence of the evolutionary process. Whole phyla and classes appeared with no predecessors. The creatures that existed before the Cambrian Explosion bear no ancestral link to the creatures that appeared during the Cambrian Explosion. In short, the transitional fossils (fossils of species undergoing change resulting in new species) that would be expected with the process of ENS are non-existent.⁹²

Some scientists have argued that the creatures existing just before the Cambrian Explosion did not fossilize because they had soft bodies. This argument fails since small, soft-bodied creatures of earlier geological eras are represented in the fossil record.⁹³ Consequently, the theory of evolution, as envisioned by Darwin, fails to explain the rapid appearance of creatures in the Cambrian period. So why does Darwin's unsupported theory retain such a firm grip on modern science? Read on for the answer.

Darwin admits the fossils do not support his theory

Darwin knew the fossil record did not support his theory even in the 1860s. In *Origin of the Species*, Darwin voiced his concern about the lack of transitional forms in the fossil record. Darwin writes:

...why, if species have descended from other species by insensibly fine gradations, do we not everywhere see innumerable transitional forms? Why is not all nature in confusion instead of

the species being, as we see them, well defined?⁹⁴

From his own words, it is apparent that Darwin understood that evidence for his theory was seriously lacking. Writing just before the American Civil War, Darwin assumed that future fossil discoveries would affirm his theory. But has that been the case? Apparently not, as eminent scientists Gould and Dawkins affirm below.

Gould reiterates the fossil problem in the 1980s

Fast forward more than 100 years to the 1980s. By then, surely, paleontologists would have found supporting evidence for Darwin's theory of evolution. However, we find leading paleontologist and Harvard professor Stephen Jay Gould describing the same lack of transitional forms in the fossil record. In *The Panda's Thumb*, Gould writes:

The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology. The evolutionary trees that adorn our textbooks have data only at the tips of the nodes of their branches; the rest is inference, however reasonable, not the evidence of fossils. Yet Darwin was so wedded to gradualism that he wagered his entire theory on a denial of this literal record...⁹⁵

Gould affirms that the gradual transition between species postulated by Darwin is not found in the fossil record. He refers to this fact as "the trade secret of paleontology." According to Gould, Darwin denied the clear evidence from the fossil record, which showed that creatures did not evolve through small gradual steps.

According to Gould,

The history of most fossil species includes two features particularly inconsistent with gradualism:

1. Stasis. Most species exhibit no directional change during their tenure on Earth. They appear in the fossil record looking much the same as when they disappear; morphological change is usually limited and directionless.
2. Sudden appearance. In any local area, a species does not arise gradually by steady transformation of its ancestors; it

appears all at once and ‘fully formed.’⁹⁶

From Gould’s own words, we learn that transitional forms are extremely rare. Gradualism is not found in the fossil record, and creatures appear on the scene fully formed without signs of evolutionary descent from earlier creatures.

Gould continued his belief in evolution, but he abandoned Darwin’s gradualism because the fossil record did not support it. Gould was led by the lack of transitional fossil evidence to propose a new theory of “punctuated equilibrium” as the means to explain the abrupt appearance of new species.

According to the theory of punctuated equilibrium, species remain the same for long periods but sometimes undergo periods of rapid change. It was Gould’s attempt to explain away problems in the fossil record and the lack of the long searched transitional forms. In short, punctuated equilibrium is merely the naturalist’s way of explaining the sudden appearance of fully-formed species throughout the history of the Earth without admitting the possibility of a Creator.

Dawkins affirms the fossil problem and denies creation

That atheism is at the root of what sustains and perpetuates the theory of evolution is made abundantly clear in the words of leading evolutionist and Oxford professor Richard Dawkins. Speaking about the gaps in the fossil record (the lack of transitional forms between species), Dawkins rejects Gould’s punctuated equilibrium, but he affirms that the gaps are real. Consider the words of Richard Dawkins from his book, *The Blind Watchmaker*:

My point here is that, when we are talking about gaps of this magnitude, there is no difference whatever in the interpretations of ‘punctuationists’ and ‘gradualist.’ Both schools of thought despise so-called scientific creationists equally, and both agree that the major gaps are real, that they are true imperfections in the fossil record. Both schools of thought agree that the only alternative explanation of the sudden appearance of so many complex animal types in the Cambrian era is divine creation, and both would reject this alternative.⁹⁷

Dawkins affirms that the gaps in the fossil record are inconsistent with evolutionary theory, and, as Dawkins rightly observes above, the only alternative to evolution is divine creation. You certainly cannot go there if you are an atheistic or agnostic scientist. That is what evolution is really all about for some scientists—a plausible means of denying a Creator’s necessity. Dawkins rejects the possibility of creation and places his faith in a theory clearly contradicted by the fossil data.

The evolutionist believes that which he has not seen, cannot reproduce, and cannot support with fossil data. His belief in evolution is based on mere faith, and thus, the religion of some scientists is evolution by natural selection.

The logic regarding evolution is obvious

From the words of the evolutionists themselves, evolution is a theory with serious problems. Let’s put what has been said into a simple logical argument:

1. If the theory of evolution is correct, the fossil record should contain nearly countless transitional forms.
2. Evolutionists affirm the “extreme rarity” of transitional forms in the fossil record.
3. Therefore, the validity of the theory of evolution is highly questionable.

We do not categorically state that the theory of evolution is false at this point because it is possible that the countless missing transitional forms could appear in new fossil finds. However, the harsh reality is that it has been 160 years since Darwin formulated his theory, and Gould and Dawkins complain about the same gaps in the fossil record and the same lack of transitional forms. The picture for evolution by natural selection is bleak. Any other scientific theory that failed to explain scientific findings for more than 150 years would have died a natural death. But evolution continues to be promoted by much of the scientific establishment. Why? Because many scientists reject the possibility of divine creation, the only other alternative to evolution, as Dawkins observes. But they do so without considering the compelling evidence for intelligent design. We

see here the reality that the scientific establishment is not so open-minded in its search for truth after all.

Point 6: There are natural limits to biological change

In the early 1900s, Columbia University embryologist Thomas Morgan and others bred fruit flies (*Drosophila*) in genetic studies. Fruit flies possess a three-week generation time and can easily be contained in the laboratory and rapidly be bred to study the accumulation of genetic mutations. For many years, scientists tried to cause evolution in fruit flies through mutation. Scientists used selective breeding, chemical mutagens (substances that cause mutations), and radiation doses to force mutations.

Even though numerous mutations were identified, none of these resulted in the fruit flies' macroevolution into a new type of creature. The fruit flies changed within certain limits or became sterile. It appears that the genetic code of the fruit fly prevents it from transforming into a new and different creature. After many years of experimentation, fruit flies remained fruit flies, posing a challenge to the expectation that they could be caused to evolve into new and different creatures.⁹⁸

The results of fruit fly experimentation beg the question. If intelligent scientists could not cause the fruit fly to transform into a new species using massive doses of radiation and mutagens, how could it possibly occur by random chance mutations and natural selection? All experimentation to date shows that there are natural limits to the biological change of organisms through mutation. Fruit flies always remain fruit flies. They have never been observed to change into more sophisticated creatures.

Some might argue that millions or billions of years of mutations in organisms like fruit flies will lead to more favorable evolutionary results. As biologists Lane Lester and Raymond Bohlin observe, "placing one's hopes in the success of future experiments, when past experiments have had such a long negative track record, is hardly an enviable position for the Neo-Darwinists."⁹⁹

Point 7: Complex molecular machines are common in nature

According to the Nobel Laureate Francis Crick, “Biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved.”¹⁰⁰ But here, Crick presupposes the truth of evolution by natural selection. Many miniature molecular machines have been discovered in the last 50 years. Intelligent design proponents have questioned whether ENS could produce the vast array of molecular machines found in nature—molecular machines that must be fully assembled to function.

It is not just intelligent design proponents who raise this issue. Philosopher and atheist Thomas Nagel observes,

...that the appearance of life from dead matter and its evolution through accidental mutation and natural selection to its present forms has involved nothing but the operation of physical law—cannot be regarded as unassailable.”¹⁰¹

In part, Nagel’s skepticism seems to stem from evolutionists’ lack of explanations of how natural selection operating on random mutations could build complex structures.¹⁰²

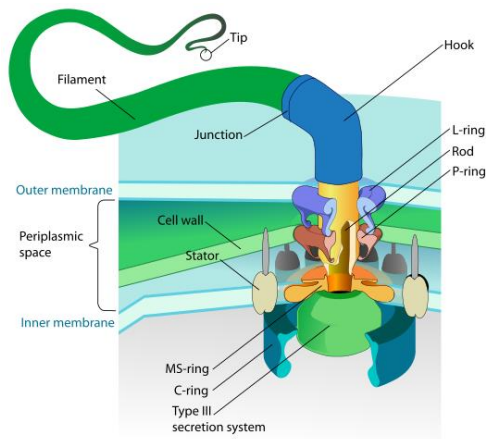


Figure 3.2: Diagram of the bacterial flagellum found in some bacteria.¹⁰³

Among these complex structures are molecular machines which require all parts to be present to function. An example of such a machine is the bacterial flagellum shown in the artist's rendering of Figure 3.2.

The flagellum is a propeller filament driven by a rotary-style motor capable of moving the bacterium through fluid at an astonishing rate of 20 body lengths per second. In achieving this movement speed, the propeller filament turns at up to 100,000 RPM, clockwise or counterclockwise, reversing in just a quarter turn as needed. All parts of the flagellum must be in place, or it will not propel the bacteria. The bacterial flagellum represents a level of cellular complexity that was not known in Darwin's day and appears to be the product of intelligent design.¹⁰⁴

Biochemist Michael Behe and many others question how molecular machines could be assembled by gradual change and evolution. Like other molecular machines and processes of this type, they either work or do not work. For molecular machines to work, all the parts must be present simultaneously.

Behe sees the bacterial flagellum as irreducibly complex, meaning it will not work without the stator, rotor, and propeller filament. Unless all parts of the bacterial flagellum evolved simultaneously in a concerted way, it seems very unlikely that a long series of gradual steps could produce the bacterial flagellum. The production of components to work together is a mark of intelligent design, not evolution by natural selection, which relies on random chance mutations.¹⁰⁵ For a visual presentation related to the bacterial flagellum and other molecular machines, see the videos referenced in the notes.¹⁰⁶

Objection: Theistic evolution accounts for the flagellum

Theistic evolutionists (a.k.a. evolutionary creationists) are among the most strident critics of intelligent design. At the forefront of the critique of intelligent design is BioLogos, a Christian organization founded by the renowned scientist Francis Collins. BioLogos affirms the inspiration and authority of the Bible yet rejects a literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation. Collins argues his case for Christian belief and theistic evolution in his book, *The Language of God: A Scientist*

Presents Evidence for Belief. Current details of the views of evolutionary creationists are found on the BioLogos webpage:

[Evolutionary Creationists] accept evolution as the best scientific explanation we have for how life on Earth has changed over time. In biology, evolution refers to “descent with modification,” which includes the idea that all species are descended from a common ancestor over many generations. We therefore accept the scientific evidence that all life on Earth is related, including humans...¹⁰⁷

Thus, theistic evolutionists (or evolutionary creationists) would affirm the common descent of all species from the first living cell as the result of ENS accumulating modifications over long periods of time.

Theistic evolutionists have been challenged on theological and scientific grounds. Theologians argue that the Genesis account of the creation of life presents the view that God directed the intimate details of speciation, resulting in all the plants and animals that have ever lived. As an undirected process, ENS is incompatible with the biblical view of creation.

Furthermore, the Bible describes God’s active and current involvement in producing individuals as we learn in the Book of Jeremiah, where God says to the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you...” (Jeremiah 1:5). Similarly, in the Book of Psalms, David affirms the active role God played in his formation as an individual, saying, “For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13).

Moreover, theistic evolution faces all the challenges on scientific and evidential grounds presented in the seven points described above. A particular target of theistic evolutionists has been the assertion, championed by Michael Behe, that molecular machines are irreducibly complex. According to Behe, in *The Language of God*, Collins “does not even try to address the problems for evolution I and other intelligent design proponents have brought up.”¹⁰⁸ Finally, as Meyer notes in his recent co-authored book, *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, a growing body of evidence (some noted in points 1-7 above) challenges the creative power of ENS:

... a huge body of scientific evidence now challenges the creative power of the mutation/selection mechanism, especially with respect to some of the most striking appearances of design in biological systems.¹⁰⁹

In a recent video introducing his book noted above, Meyer highlights the growing consensus that Neo-Darwinism (modern form of Darwin's theory) is failing, as evidenced by a recent conference in London at the Royal Society, where a meeting was held of the most influential and eminent evolutionary biologists to discuss the failure of ENS as a mechanism for producing diverse species. Now, Meyer concludes, is not the time for Christians to seek to accommodate or capitulate to Darwin's failing theory.¹¹⁰

Common Descent or Common Design?

Many scientists view similarity in form and DNA as evidence for the descent of all species from a common ancestor—the first single-cell organism. The abrupt appearance of complex organisms in the Cambrian era poses a significant challenge to common descent, given their rapid appearance without signs of evolution from predecessors.

These similarities in morphology (form) and DNA could be attributed to common design. Human designers do not begin from scratch when designing a new mechanism or system. Human designers do not reinvent the wheel. Instead, successful designs are reused and repurposed to meet new needs and environments. It seems logical that the intelligent designer of life would take a similar approach.

If we consider automobiles, we observe significant variation in style and shape, yet there is much similarity among them. A four-wheel design is well-suited for travel on fairly smooth roads and is used by all manufacturers. Power must be distributed to the wheels, and thus, all cars have some form of motor and transmission. The commonality that we see in automobiles can be attributed to common function. Similarly, common form does not necessarily argue for common descent; it may just as well be attributed to common function. For example, animals that need to navigate in water have fins to position their bodies in their

environment. Because many such animals have fins, it should be expected that similarities would be found in their DNA that results in fins. Thus, common forms and similarities in DNA can be explained due to common function, not common descent.

Many Credible Scientists Doubt the Validity of ENS

The walls of the fortress around the theory of evolution are gradually being dismantled. Many competent scientists see it as a theory in crisis because of the above reasons or others. Over 1000 scientists holding PhDs from respected institutions all over the world have signed their names to the following statement:

A Scientific Dissent From Darwinism

We are skeptical of claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life. Careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory should be encouraged.¹¹¹

You can read about *A Scientific Dissent From Darwinism* and view the names and positions of the dissenting scientists at www.dissentfromdarwin.org.

Study Questions

1. How does DNA challenge chemical evolution?
2. Explain what is meant by chemical evolution and ENS. What are the differences between them?
3. Explain why a living cell must exist before ENS can take place.
4. Describe what occurred at the Cambrian explosion. How does the Cambrian explosion challenge the truth of ENS?
5. What is a transitional form? What is punctuated equilibrium, and why did Gould propose it?
6. Explain how Agassiz, Darwin, Gould, and Dawkins have reacted to the fossil record.

4

Challenge to God #2: Why Is There So Much Evil?

Skeptics and atheists often challenge Christianity on the grounds that the existence of evil precludes the possibility of the existence of the God of the Bible. If a good God existed, they say, He would not permit the evil that occurs in the world to continue. Atheists and others point to Hurricane Katrina of 2005 or the Sandy Hook massacre of innocent school children, which took place in 2012, and ask how a God who Christians claim to be good could allow these things?

Why a good God allows evil is a serious question that should not be glossed over. It deserves a well-thought-out answer. Christians believe that some of the best information about why evil exists comes from the Bible. Thus, this chapter will incorporate some biblical reasons for why evil exists. The use of the Bible in this context is legitimate if it can be shown that the Bible is inspired by God. Therefore, this chapter will accept what the Bible says about the origin of evil at face value. Subsequent chapters will provide a defense of the divine inspiration of the Bible.

The Logical Argument Against God

The logical argument advanced by skeptics regarding the problem of evil looks something like this:

1. If God is all good, He would destroy evil.
2. If God is all-powerful, He could destroy evil.
3. But evil has not been destroyed.
4. Therefore, an all-good and all-powerful God does not exist.

If we look carefully at this argument, we see in the first premise the presumption that no amount of evil could exist in the world if the God described in the Bible existed. We should think

seriously about what kind of world that would be. If freedom to do other than God's will were not permitted, the skeptic would likely complain that God is a control freak.

Free Will in the Bible

God allowed Adam and Eve to obey or disobey. In many places in the Bible, God calls on humans to choose whether they will follow Him. Consider Joshua 24:15, where Joshua, who led the Israelites after Moses, calls them to choose whom they will follow:

If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:15)

Consider these words of Jesus in the Gospel of John:

If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself. (John 7:17)

Many other verses in the Bible teach that God has given humans the freedom to choose their actions (Genesis 2:16-17; Jeremiah 19:4-5; Matthew 23:37; John 1:12-13; Revelation 3:20; James 1:13-16; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; Ephesians 1:13). Therefore, if human beings are to be free creatures, they must be allowed to do other than what God desires them to do. If that were not so, humans would be reduced to robots having no choice but to execute God's commands.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). This verse shows that the God of the Bible will allow His creatures to disobey. God wants his creatures to freely choose to obey Him because in doing so, they will demonstrate their love for Him. True love is never forced but instead chosen freely. The result is that if God's creatures are free and allowed to freely choose, there will be, by necessity, evil in the world, because some will choose to disobey God's moral commandments.

Types of Evil in the World

Philosophers identify two types of evil in the world: moral and physical. Moral evil is caused by human beings who have the moral capacity to act and choose and are thus considered moral agents. Examples of moral evil would be murder, genocide, and theft. A person might be killed by an angry bear or another human being, but the bear is not a moral agent (knowing right and wrong) and cannot make moral decisions. The human being, however, does have the moral capacity and the ability to know right from wrong.

On the other hand, physical evil is the result of natural forces or disease. It is sometimes referred to as natural evil. Examples of physical evil include earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and diseases like HIV or COVID-19.

Atheists and skeptics ask if God exists, how could He allow the heinous, barbaric, and cruel acts committed by ISIS and suicide bombers, or how could a good God have allowed the Japanese to commit genocide in Asia and the Germans to commit genocide in Europe? World War II resulted in the death of millions of innocent people in Asia and Europe. Others question why God allows tsunamis that kill tens of thousands of people, as we have seen in the Indian Ocean region and on Japan's Pacific coast. And more recently, why has God allowed COVID-19 to kill hundreds of thousands?

Some Reasons Why Evil Exists

First, we can see that not all choices that humans make are good ones—much of disease, illness, and poverty are results of the poor choices and decisions people make. Drugs, alcohol, and obesity are responsible for millions of deaths each year. Moreover, they can result in poverty for the individuals involved and their families and limit educational opportunities. Annually in the United States, it is estimated that over \$150 billion is spent on alcohol, and another \$150 billion is spent on cannabis, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine.¹¹² How much better off would families be if that \$300 billion were directed toward food, the necessities of life, and education?

Beyond personal choices, individuals make choices that impact others. Individuals are free to choose their actions, and

often the free choices made by individuals injure, kill, or harm others. This will be discussed at length below.

Reasons for physical evil in the world

Why would an all-powerful, good God create a world that can be so hostile to human life? Hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and floods kill tens of thousands yearly and destroy vast amounts of property. Yet, it is often overlooked that many of the dangers associated with life on this planet are part of the natural processes that make the Earth habitable.

We live in a complex world designed to support life. Scientists are beginning to understand the complexity of our ecosystem, but there is a vast amount we do not know. Consider God's response to Job amidst his suffering:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the Earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4–7)

God's point seems to be that limited, finite creatures like Job and other humans are really in no position to and lack the wherewithal to advise Him regarding the right way to create a planet and universe capable of sustaining life. It seems reasonable that the critic of the universe should be knowledgeable about the intricacies of universe creation.

Hurricanes have beneficial effects

Let's consider some specific reasons that God might allow physical evil in the world. Hurricanes can be devastating, particularly for coastal populations. However, we seldom hear about the beneficial effects of hurricanes essential in sustaining a habitable climate on Earth. Here are some benefits of hurricanes. Hurricanes are effective in providing rainfall to drought-prone areas. The moisture picked up by hurricanes in tropical regions is redistributed along the eastern seaboard and the desert southwest of the United States, for example. Similarly, the strong, fast-moving winds of hurricanes distribute heat on the planet from

warm areas to colder regions and also act to vent heat to the upper atmosphere. In this way, hurricanes help balance the distribution of heat around the globe.

Hurricanes are also beneficial in oxygenating the oceans, breaking up patches of bacteria, and helping to end red tides. Another positive effect of hurricanes includes the redistribution of sand from the ocean bottom, thus, in many cases replenishing barrier islands. Finally, hurricanes drive seeds and spores further inland, replenishing plant life in previously barren areas.¹¹³

Tsunamis and earthquakes result from plate tectonics

Tsunamis and earthquakes wreak much havoc on the Earth. I remember watching, in disbelief, the news coverage of the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and tsunami. That one natural disaster resulted in over 200,000 deaths and incredible damage to property and infrastructure along the coasts of India, Indonesia, and Thailand.

Why would God permit such devastating earthquakes and tsunamis? Earthquakes and tsunamis are the results of plate tectonics. The Earth's crust is made up of plates that, long ago, were joined together in the supercontinent Pangea. All the Earth's plates are in motion, floating atop the Earth's hot mantle. This process is referred to as plate tectonics.

A very hot solid metal core is at the center of the Earth (see Fig. 4.1). The intense heat at the center of the Earth is a remnant of the heat associated with the formation of the Earth. It is also fueled by the nuclear decay of radioactive elements within the Earth. This intense heat in the Earth creates convection currents in the mantle that lead to the movement of the Earth's plates. In addition, convection currents in the outer core cause the Earth's magnetic field. Both plate tectonics and a magnetic field are essential for sustaining life on Earth.

Above the solid metal core is a flowing liquid metal core. Above the liquid metal core is the mantle upon which sits the crust. Even though the mantle of the Earth is solid in nature, the convection currents in it cause it to move slowly, carrying the continent above with it. Earthquakes are the result of the plates of the Earth shifting. When the plates of the Earth shift, bump into each other and slide past one another, earthquakes result.

Mountain ranges can also be created by this process. Earthquakes can also induce shifting elevations of the seafloor resulting in tsunamis.

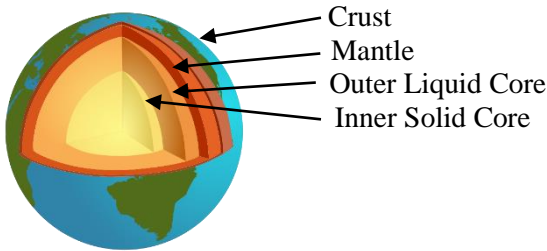


Figure 4.1: Structure and layers of the Earth.¹¹⁴

Plate tectonics is essential for life

Plate tectonics results in physical danger for the inhabitants of the Earth. But here is the important point. Plate tectonics is believed to have been essential in preparing the Earth for advanced life. Early in the development of the Earth, the Sun's luminosity (brightness) was significantly less than it is today. Consequently, the Earth should have been a frozen snowball. But thanks to plate tectonic activity, volcanoes spewed carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which kept the planet warmer and more habitable for life. As our Sun grew brighter, more evaporation of water resulted in rainfall, which removed carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Subduction is the process of one tectonic plate slipping under another. In subduction zones, water from the oceans drained, taking some of the carbon dioxide with it, which helped stabilize the Earth's temperature as the Sun warmed.¹¹⁵

The same mechanism that results in plate tectonics produces a protective magnetic field for the Earth. Directly below the Earth's mantle is the liquid core composed of flowing molten metal, which generates electric currents producing the Earth's magnetic field. Because of the magnetic field, energetic particles coming from the Sun (which are harmful to life and our atmosphere) are deflected around the Earth or directed toward the poles, resulting in the aurora borealis. If not for the magnetic

field, the Earth's atmosphere would be depleted, and life would be endangered.¹¹⁶

Reasons for moral evil in the world

Regarding the moral evil inflicted upon us by our fellow creatures, there are many reasons for it, but sin is central to the moral evil we find in our world. We live in a fallen, decaying world (Romans 8:20-22).¹¹⁷ The Bible tells us that the Earth is cursed because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, and as a result, sin and death entered the world, spreading to all of humanity (Genesis 3; Romans 5:12). With Man's disobedience, paradise was lost, so we are broken people in a broken world, corrupted with sin and disease and decay that lead to death. Humans are not right with God, nor are they right with each other. C.S. Lewis writes in *The Problem of Pain*:

When souls become wicked they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this, perhaps, accounts for four-fifths of the sufferings of men. It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs; it is human avarice or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature, that we have poverty and overwork.¹¹⁸

Lewis suggests that a great deal of human suffering is due to the wickedness of human beings. For example, consider the concentration of wealth in 2019. According to Oxfam International, 2153 billionaires possess more wealth than 4.6 billion people.¹¹⁹ If humans were good, such wealth inequality would not exist. The problem seems to support Lewis's point.

Humans are a major contributor to evil in the world

Professor and Christian apologist Clay Jones has studied the problem of evil for many years. Jones would echo much of what Lewis says. Jones describes the Milgram experiment conducted at Yale University in the early 1960s. In the experiment, the experimenter presided over a teacher and a learner. The learner was to learn word pairs and was tested by the teacher. The experimenter told the teacher to administer an electric shock each time the learner made a mistake. The learner could be heard

by the teacher but not seen. The teacher believed he was administering real shocks to the learner. Unbeknownst to the teacher, the learner was an actor. While the learner would scream in pain when the shocks were administered, in reality, they were unharmed, but the teacher did not know this. The shocks were to increase from 15 volts to 450 volts. Voltages in this range can potentially harm or kill a human being. Yet the result of the Milgram experiment was that 65% of teachers recruited in the experiment were willing to administer all of the shocks as instructed by the experimenter even though screams of pain and agony from the learner could be heard. This was true of male or female individuals designated as teachers.

Was this a fluke? Could humans be so cruel to other human beings? It was no fluke. The experiment has been repeated in other countries and produced teacher compliance as high as 85% in administering the highest level of shock.¹²⁰

The Milgram Experiment was conducted to gain an understanding of how ordinary people could participate in the horrendous inhuman acts committed in the German concentration camps of World War II. Jones, who has studied the human capacity for evil throughout the ages, finds strong concurrence among genocide researchers that genocide is carried out by average ordinary people who comply with authority figures. Given the circumstances and opportunity, Jones concludes, “genocide is what the average person does.”¹²¹ History reveals that our species is covered in a very thin veneer of humanity that, when stripped away by the desire to survive, can lead the average person to commit heinous and barbaric acts against fellow humans.

Apart from structure, social boundaries, and law and order, events quickly careen out of control. It does not take much for humans to fall into self-preservation mode. Though many will resist or deny it, the reality is that the heinous acts and murders committed in the German concentration camps and the Soviet Gulag were carried out by average ordinary people like you and me. Certainly, there were evil masterminds, but it was average people who provided the massive amounts of labor needed to kill millions. The same can be said of any other act of genocide in history.¹²²

If we honestly take an introspective look deep inside ourselves, we will find brokenness, self-centeredness, anger, a tendency toward retribution, jealousy, lust, addictive behavior, or a myriad of other imperfections. But aren't the vast majority of people good? There are people who do good things, but there are no good people. To be good would require moral perfection. This is an important distinction. Moral perfection is an attribute humans lack.

Are some people good?

Mahatma Gandhi is an example often given of a good person whose tireless effort, wise leadership, and commitment to peaceful resistance led to the freeing of India from British subjugation. Gandhi did great and good things and many good deeds. But, as Jones points out, the conclusion that Gandhi was a good person is seriously challenged by the treatment of his young female relatives.¹²³ It is well documented that Gandhi engaged in sleeping naked with younger women and relatives. At the age of 77, he regularly slept naked with women half his age. Toward the end of his life, he was sleeping naked with Manu, his 18-year-old grandniece and Abha, the 18-year-old wife of his grandnephew.¹²⁴ No, Gandhi was not good. Like all other mortals, he did good things, but he was not good. All humans are capable of evil and, in the right circumstances, great evil. This is one of the reasons there is so much evil in the world.

Professor David Berlinski, the author of *The Devil's Delusion*, catalogs the hundreds of millions of deaths of innocent people in the twentieth century alone as the result of wars, revolutions, and the rise of Communist regimes.¹²⁵ The willingness of ordinary people to take human life in exchange for power, control, sex, and as a means of eking out a living is breathtaking and depressing. Yes, humans have the capability to do good, but that does not mean that they are good. Hence, there is a staggering amount of evil we find all around us that was not a result of God's action.

Why Does God Allow Children to Suffer?

It is heart-wrenching to see how some people suffer due to illness or disease. However, one of the hardest things we

encounter is suffering in children and young people. Consider infant death, cancer in young children, or situations where children are abused or kidnapped for sex trafficking. Skeptics assert that if God existed, He would not allow these things to take place.

Consider this thought experiment. Some would argue that children should be protected by God from death, abuse, and disease. But, then again, the death of a college-age child is devastating, and some would argue that if God existed, He would protect young adults. Young adults are so filled with promise and potential; doesn't it stand to reason that God would protect them from death? Still, it is so tragic when people die in their thirties. Often, they have young children who depend on them. Also, their contribution to society is increasing. If God existed, the skeptic might conclude that He would surely protect people in their thirties from death. Thus, He must not exist. Then again, people in their forties often have children in their teens who need them desperately and are in a highly productive part of their lives. Certainly, God, if He existed, would protect people in their forties from death.

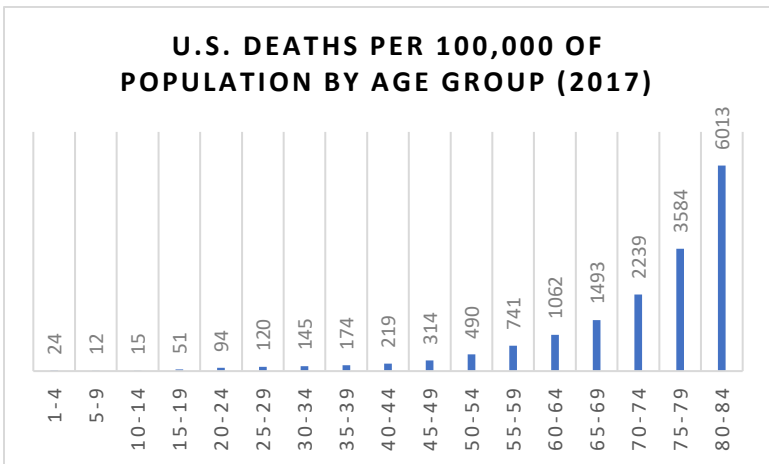


Figure 4.2: U.S. Deaths per 100,000 of Population by Age Group for 2017. Data represent an average of male and female death rates for each age group.¹²⁶

From this thought experiment, we could quickly convince ourselves that no one should ever die. A good case for why God should protect people of any age group could be made. But note this important point from Figure 4.2. God has already made it so that the death rate for younger individuals is far less than for people in middle age or older. Consider the graph above. In the United States, the annual death rate is 51 people (or less) per 100,000 for individuals up to 19 years of age but it increases rapidly after that.

Clay Jones points out several other problems with indestructible children. If God made some age group indestructible, parents would miss out on the opportunity to learn to protect their children, and children would never learn about what behaviors are safe. Hence, once children moved beyond the age of indestructibility, they would be completely unprepared to live in a dangerous world.

Moreover, if children were protected by God in such a way that they could not be abused, killed, or raped, the ability of humans to freely choose would be greatly diminished. And by what mechanism would God protect children from these horrendous acts? If God miraculously intervened every time a child was in danger, He would interfere in the free will He gave humans. Jones writes,

He couldn't do all these things unless He were to make His existence unmistakably apparent to even the most hardened skeptic. After all, even the most dull-witted person would conclude, sooner or later, that there's something about the universe that prevents children from coming to harm. In the real world, parents and their children must learn to be responsible because natural laws do work in regular ways.¹²⁷

God has revealed Himself in His creation and through His Son, but if humans are to be free as it seems God would have them be, God's existence must not be blatant or too obvious. Some theologians refer to this as the divine hiddenness of God. God keeps just enough distance so that ultimately, the human choice to follow Him must flow from faith in His existence.¹²⁸

Danger Adds a Sense of Urgency to Life

As young children, we quickly learned that our habitat on Earth is filled with wonder and beauty, but we also quickly learned that our planet is a dangerous place. The high value humans generally place on life leads to the building of shelters to protect people from the elements, agriculture to feed hungry people, transportation to facilitate the activities of life, medical technology and pharmaceuticals to save lives, and the development of technology to enhance life. The danger and seeming indifference of our planet's habitat creates a sense of urgency in life and an understanding that it could be over for any of us at any moment.

Christian theists believe that those who choose Jesus will be granted eternal life in heaven, and those who reject Jesus will be eternally separated from God in hell. For those who are aware of heaven and hell, the danger we experience on Earth and the understanding that life could be over at any moment adds a sense of urgency to the decision we must make about Jesus. Perhaps God prompts us to move forward in the decision-making process by the dangers we experience in our habitat and our understanding of the ephemeral (temporary) nature of life.

What Is the Right Amount of Evil?

The skeptic will argue that there should be far less evil in the world. But what amount of evil should God permit in the world? Leading atheist Sam Harris elucidates the view of some atheists regarding the amount of evil that God (if He exists) should permit in the world.

An atheist is a person who believes that the murder of a single little girl—even once in a million years—casts doubts upon the idea of a benevolent God. Examples of God's failure to protect humanity are everywhere to be seen. The city of New Orleans, for instance, was recently destroyed by a hurricane. More than a thousand people died; tens of thousands lost all their earthly possessions, and nearly a million were displaced.¹²⁹

Harris set the bar high for a benevolent God. According to Harris, not a single little girl should be murdered in a million years if a good God exists. While a world where no evil exists

sounds very appealing, what level of freedom would be afforded to the creatures living in that world? Such a world could only be achieved if humans were robots forced to obey every command of God to perfection. As noted above, theists argue that a morally perfect God would not force His creatures to obey but rather desires that creatures obey because of their love and faith in Him. God does not force people to love Him. Instead, He desires that His creatures freely choose to love Him and follow Him. Only love freely given is true love.

So, what about physical evil caused by disease and natural disasters? Shouldn't a good God allow far less of that? God has many critics over this. But to be a qualified critic of creation, shouldn't the critic be capable of creating a universe and life from nothing? The best critics are experts in the field. One would hardly give credence to an amateur critique of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel painted by Michelangelo. Likewise, the critic of the universe created by God should be knowledgeable in universe creation. Then they would be fully knowledgeable of the challenges and complexities involved. This seems to be the point that God makes to Job, saying, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the Earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:4). It seems likely that God would pose the same question to Sam Harris in the twenty-first century that He posed to Job thousands of years ago. The one who cannot create a universe and life is in no position to criticize the almighty God who can.

According to Jesus (Matthew 13:37–43), God allows evil in the world for the purpose of revealing the children of God who will freely choose to follow Him. But one day, at the end of the age, all evil will be destroyed, and all who work evil will be separated for all eternity from the children of God who will inhabit His kingdom. Furthermore, God is building a people to coexist with Him in heaven. The failures of integration and peace among the races and nations on Earth will be fully corrected and realized in heaven in the presence of God and Jesus (the Lamb), as we read in Revelation 7:9.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples

and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; (Revelation 7:9)

In response to the logical argument advanced by skeptics and atheists noted at the beginning of the chapter, Christian theists argue as follows:

1. God is all good and desires to defeat evil.
2. God is all-powerful and is able to defeat evil.
3. Evil is not yet defeated.
4. Therefore, evil will one day be defeated

Summary

The problem of evil challenges Christian theists to think seriously about this issue to provide a reason for the hope they have (1 Peter 3:15). With that said, limited, finite creatures should not presume that they will ever fully understand why an infinite, all-knowing, all-good God allows evil in the world. The problem of evil raises serious questions but falls short of proving that God does not exist. There are logical reasons why God might allow evil in the world. The fact that humans recognize evil in the world leads to the conclusion that all are imbued with some standard of what is right, just, fair, and good. God must be the source of this moral standard. Since evil has not yet been destroyed, the Christian theist concludes that God will one day destroy evil. This is consistent with the teaching of the Bible. A beautiful image of God's ultimate plan for those who love Him is presented in the Book of Revelation. The Apostle John writes:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." (Revelation 21:3-5)

Study Questions

1. Do you believe you have a level of freedom in your actions? Give three examples of how free creatures are allowed to produce evil in the world. Why would God allow freedom if it has the potential to result in evil acts?
2. Distinguish between physical evil and moral evil. Give two examples of each.
3. Write a paragraph describing the damage caused by hurricanes and plate tectonics and the positive effects they produce.
4. How have human beings produced evil in the world—give three examples. What is the Milgram experiment, and what does it show us about humanity?
5. Why might God allow the suffering of children? What might occur if children were protected to the point that they were indestructible?
6. What is the right amount of evil in the world? Is it possible for mere humans to know the answer to that question?
7. How would a Christian theist defend God, given that we do see much evil in the world?

5

Introduction to Prophecy in the Bible

A prophecy is a prediction about the future. The Bible is a fascinating book in that 27% of the 31,124 verses it contains are prophetic in nature, with 1817 predictions about the future being made in 8352 verses.¹³⁰ This chapter and the three that follow will present the case that the Bible contains accurate prophecies made hundreds or thousands of years in advance, a thing no human could do. Once the evidence is presented, conclusions will be drawn about the origin and nature of the Bible and its main character, Jesus Christ.

How Could We Know That a Book Is from God?

Among the most compelling proofs for the divine origin of the Bible is that it contains hundreds of specific prophecies that have shown to be accurate in their fulfillment.

The prophecies in the Bible are about the Messiah (the Servant of the Lord who Christians recognize as Jesus Christ), nations and peoples, and world events, past, present, and future. Many of these prophecies have been fulfilled in the last several thousand years. The remainder are appointed for the future. That the Bible contains predictive prophecy makes it unique among religious books, as theologians Norman Geisler and William Nix indicate:

Other books claim divine inspiration, such as the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and parts of the Veda. But none of those books contains predictive prophecy. As a result, fulfilled prophecy is a strong indication of the unique, divine authority of the Bible.¹³¹

What is God's purpose in providing details about the future in the form of prophecy? It seems that God is sending a message to you and me. He has made a way for people throughout the ages to know that the Bible is the true record of His revelation to

humanity. The God of the Bible is a God of reason. He calls people to use their minds to seek Him and find Him. God does not call men and women to follow Him in blind faith. In His power and omniscience, God provides good reasons for belief. The Christian faith is a reasonable faith given the confirming evidence available to those who inquire about these matters.

Many have found the clear record of fulfilled prophecy to be a very compelling piece of evidence showing the Bible to be from God. Who else could foretell the future and be right 100% of the time? Nostradamus's prophecies are vague and confusing and subject to being twisted to say whatever the interpreter is trying to prove (more on that later). In contrast, many biblical prophecies are straightforward and detailed, as will be seen below.

A Book that Predicts the Future Is a Supernatural Book

God's all-knowing divine nature is revealed by His ability to predict future events, which are recorded in many books of the Bible. God makes this evident through the prophet Isaiah saying:

I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done... (Isaiah 46:9-10)

Here God says that He is unique in His knowledge of the future because no one else can declare how things will turn out long before the events occur. God is in the business of foretelling the future. This is critical in understanding the divine nature of the Bible. Consider the following simple logic:

1. Only God knows the future in clear detail.
2. The Bible accurately predicts the future in clear detail.
3. Therefore, the Bible is from God.

The first premise is true since only an all-knowing, omniscient being could accurately foretell the future long in advance. The following chapters will show that the second premise is also true. After consideration of the prophecies, you can draw your own conclusion. But if the two premises of the

logical argument above are true, the conclusion is inescapable. Suppose one concludes that the Bible is from God. In that case, it seems reasonable to seek to understand the message the Bible contains for humanity.

Types of Prophecy

There are two broad groups of prophecies in the Bible: general prophecies and Messianic prophecies. General prophecies deal with Israel's fortunes and future, Jerusalem, the nations of the ancient world, and the events of the end times. Messianic prophecies deal with the coming Servant of the Lord, the Messiah, who would suffer and die as payment for the world's sins and later rule the Earth.

Christians believe that Jesus Christ is a unique individual in history and that He is the subject of the Messianic prophecies. The word *Messiah* is from the Hebrew word that means "anointed one." While there are other people the Bible speaks of as anointed, there is a special individual, a great Messiah, who is to be a savior of His people. The Bible is very clear that the Messiah is to be a savior not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:5-6).

The English word *Christ* derives from the Greek word *Christos*, which means Messiah. Jesus is called Christ because Christians believe He is the Messiah of the Old Testament who was anointed by God to bring salvation to the world (Matthew 16:16). Jesus fulfills the two missions prophesied for the Messiah. At His first coming, Jesus came as a suffering servant who died to pay for humanity's sins and bring peace and reconciliation with God for all who repent of their sins and believe in His death and resurrection. At His second coming, Jesus will return as a conquering king and mighty ruler who will establish His kingdom on Earth, removing all evil from it.

Who Were the Prophets?

The prophets came from all walks of life and had a wide range of personalities and occupations. They all had one thing in common: they were God's spokesmen revealing His will to the people. They were called directly by God. God revealed His message for the people to the prophets and used their unique

personalities and skills to communicate this message to the people. The message was often given for the purpose of correcting behavior that was displeasing to God.

How Did the Prophets Receive Their Prophetic Words?

The prophets received revelation from God through visions, dreams, direct communication, and angelic messengers. The authenticity and authority of a prophet were confirmed by the accuracy of his prophecies. The Apostle Peter provides excellent insight into the nature of prophetic revelation. Peter writes:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20–21)

The Apostle Paul adds the following details regarding the nature of prophecy in his second letter to Timothy, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16. Additional insight into the means of God's prophetic revelation is found in several Old Testament passages.

The prophets received God's messages from the voice of an angel (Gen. 22:15–19), the voice of God, a dream (Daniel 2), or a vision (Ezek. 40:2ff.). The prophetic speech might range from the somber reading of a father's last will (Genesis 49) to an exultant anthem to be sung in the Temple (Ps. 96:1, 13).¹³²

At times, God's prophets were empowered by God to perform miraculous signs confirming their message. For example, Moses says that the miraculous events and plagues of the Exodus were sent by God (Deuteronomy 6:22). The New Testament Apostles performed numerous signs through the power of God and in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:12; Acts 15:12; Acts 16:18). An individual who gave false predictions was considered a false prophet. False prophets were not taken lightly in Bible times. The penalty for uttering false prophecies was death (Deuteronomy 18:18-22). God did not want individuals

falsely claiming that they were speaking for Him for personal gain and thus misleading the people.

When Were the Prophecies Written?

The prophecies contained in the Bible were written during the lives of the authors. A large fraction of biblical prophecy is found in the Old Testament writings of Moses, David, and the prophets. Moses wrote the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) before 1400 BC. The Psalms of David, which contain many prophecies, were written about 1000 BC. The writing prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) lived and wrote their books during the period between the ninth and fifth century before Christ. New Testament prophecy is found in the teaching of Jesus and in the epistles. It primarily concerns the future, the Second Coming of Jesus, the end times, and the culmination of God's plan for humanity. Notably, Jesus predicted His own resurrection and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which occurred in AD 70 (Mark 9:31; Matthew 24:1-2).

Some Bible critics will claim significantly later dates for the writing of these Old Testament prophetic books. They typically assign later dates to these books because they reject the obvious supernatural implications of books that predict the future, not because the evidence leads them in that direction. The arguments that liberal scholars give in support of these later dates have been refuted by conservative Bible scholars.

However, even if one were to accept later dates for the writing of the Old Testament books, the Dead Sea Scrolls clearly show (see Chapter 6) that they existed long before the birth of Jesus. Therefore, we have indisputable physical evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls that the Old Testament Bible prophecies were written long before the events they predicted.

As theologian Norman Geisler observes:

Even the most liberal critics admit that the prophetic books were completed some 400 years before Christ, and the Book of Daniel by about 167 B.C. Though there is good evidence to date most of these books much earlier (some of the psalms and earlier prophets

were in the eighth and ninth centuries B.C.), what difference would it make? It is just as hard to predict an event 200 years in the future as it is to predict one that is 800 years in the future. Both feats would require nothing less than divine knowledge.¹³³

Is the Bible unique among religious books?

Are all religious books written over the last several thousand years equal? Much more will be said on this matter, but as noted at the beginning of this chapter, the Bible is unique in that it contains legitimate predictive prophecy. Chapter 13 will show that the evidence for the divine inspiration of the Bible is unmatched in the other religious and sacred books of the world.

Study Questions

1. What percentage of the Bible is prophecy? What is the purpose of prophecy in the Bible? Do all religious books contain prophecy?
2. Based upon prophecy, what logical argument leads to the conclusion that the Bible is from God?
3. How does fulfilled prophecy confirm that the Bible is from God? What types of prophecies are found in the Bible, and what are they about?
4. What types of individuals did God choose to be prophets? And how did they receive their message? What was the penalty for giving false prophecy?

6

Messianic Prophecy—Overview

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Messianic prophecies deal with the coming Servant of the Lord who would suffer and die for sin but also, one day, rule the Earth as a mighty king. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the unique individual in the history of the world that is the subject of the Messianic prophecies. Christians believe this because of the remarkable similarity between what is prophesied about the Messiah and the events in the life and ministry of Jesus. From the beginning to the end of the Old Testament, a major theme of the Bible is the savior who would come to reconcile man to God. The Messiah is that savior, and the events of the life of Jesus Christ testify that He is the savior of the world promised by God through the prophets.

Specific Prophecies About the Messiah

The Bible contains over 100 prophecies about the coming Messiah that God would send into the world. These prophecies are found in the Old Testament and were made 400-1400 years before the birth of Jesus. The table on the following two pages lists 57 prophecies fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus at His First Coming. A number of these prophecies are repeated in other Old Testament books, but only one or two references for each are given in the table. The table has three columns. The first column lists the prophecies about the Messiah. The second column provides the location where it is found in the Old Testament. The third and last column gives the New Testament location showing that the prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus. Theologians count many other Messianic allusions and prophecies in the Old Testament, but the ones contained in the table are the most explicit.

The character of the Messiah is dual in nature. At His First Coming, the Messiah came as the suffering servant of the Lord

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who laid down His life for the people to save them from the penalty of their sin. However, Jesus promised to return (John 14:3). This event is referred to as the Second Coming or the Second Advent. At His Second Coming, Jesus the Messiah will return as a conquering King having dominion over the entire world; He will purge the world of evil and rebellion against God (Matthew 24-25; Revelation 19:11-19; also, Chapter 18 of this book). In between these two comings of the Messiah, people the world over have the opportunity to accept or reject Jesus as Lord and Savior. When the scope and details of Messianic prophecy are understood, they provide compelling evidence that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world, as will be discussed below.

Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled at Jesus' First Coming		
Prophecies About the Messiah Fulfilled by Jesus	Old Testament Location	New Testament Fulfillment
Male	Genesis 3:15	Matthew 1:24-25
Descendant of Adam and Eve	Genesis 3:15	Luke 3:38
Descendant of Abraham	Genesis 12:2	Matthew 1:1
Descendant of Jacob	Numbers 24:17	Matthew 1:2
Descendant of Judah	Genesis 49:10	Matthew 1:2
Descendant of Jesse	Isaiah 11:1	Luke 3:23-32
Descendant of David	2 Samuel 7:12-16	Matthew 1:1
Born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23-25
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2-5	Matthew 2:6
Have eternal existence	Micah 5:2	John 1:1; 8:58
Preceded by a forerunner-John	Isaiah 40:3; Mal. 3:1	Matthew 3:3
Would escape into Egypt	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:14
Prophet	Deut. 18:15-18	Acts 3:22-23
Priest	Psalms 114:4	Hebrews 5:6-10
King	Psalms 2:6	Matthew 21:5
Judge	Isaiah 33:22	Luke 2:11
Called Lord	Psalms 110:1	Luke 2:11
Called "Immanuel"	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:23
Son of God	Psalms 2:1-9	Acts 9:20
Resurrected	Psalms 16:10	Matthew 28:6
Cried out as one "forsaken"	Psalms 22:1	Mark 15:34
Scorned by the people	Psalms 22:6-7	Matthew 27:39-44

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Trust in God	Psalm 22:8-10	Matthew 27:43
Suffer thirst on the cross	Psalm 22:15	John 19:28
Hands and feet pierced	Psalm 22:16	Matthew 27:35
Clothing would be gambled for	Psalm 22:18	Luke 23:34
Commit His spirit to God	Psalm 31:5	Luke 23:46
His Bones would not be broken	Psalm 34:18-22	John 19:33
Betrayed by a close friend	Psalm 41:9	Luke 22:3-5
Ascend from the Earth	Psalm 68:18	Luke 24:50-53
Offered drink mixed with gall	Psalm 69:21	Matthew 27:34
Teach in parables	Psalm 78:2	Mark 4:34
Rejected by His own people	Psalm 118:22	Acts 4:11; Luke 20:17
The timing of His death	Daniel 9:24-26 ^a	John 19:17-18 ^b
Anointed by the Holy Spirit	Isaiah 11:2	Matthew 3:16-17
Minister in Galilee	Isaiah 9:1-2	Matthew 4:12-16
Worker of miracles	Isaiah 35:4-6	Matthew 9:35
Bring salvation to entire world	Isaiah 49:6-7	Acts 13:47
Voluntarily went to death	Isaiah 50:6; 53:12	John 10:18
Endure beating and spitting	Isaiah 50:6	Mark 14:65
Disfigured	Isaiah 52:14	John 19:1-3
Despised and forsaken	Isaiah 53:3	Luke 18:31-33
Pierced through	Isaiah 53:5	John 20:25
Killed as payment for sins	Isaiah 53:5, 8	1 Pet 2:24
Silent before His accusers	Isaiah 53:7	Matt 26:63; 27:12-14
Buried in a rich man's tomb	Isaiah 53:9	Matt 27:57-60
No violence or deceitful words	Isaiah 53:9	1 Pet 2:22
Guilt offering	Isaiah 53:10	John 1:29
Righteous character	Isaiah 53:9-11	1 John 2:29; 3:7
Counted as a transgressor	Isaiah 53:12	Luke 22:37
Enter Jerusalem on a colt	Zechariah 9:9	Matthew 21:1-11
Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:12-13	Matthew 26:15
Field purchased with 30 pieces	Zechariah 11:13	Matthew 27:9
Pierced by Jerusalemites	Zechariah 12:10	John 19:37
Abandoned by His followers	Zechariah 13:7	Mark 14:27, 50
Enter the temple	Malachi 3:1	Matthew 21:12-13
Initiate a new covenant	Malachi 3:1	1 Corinthians 11:25

^aSee Chapter 8 for an explanation of the dating of the death of the Messiah prophesied in Daniel 9.

^bSee Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 143. Hoehner concludes that Christ was crucified on Friday, April 3rd, AD 33.

Jesus Fulfilled the Prophecies Against Incredible Odds

Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies with astonishing accuracy. What are the odds that a single individual could fulfill this large catalog of prophecies shown in the table made hundreds of years or more in advance?

Peter Stoner was a professor of science and mathematics who calculated the estimated probability that one person could fulfill the Messianic prophecies on a purely random basis. Stoner assigned his students the task of determining the probability of a single individual fulfilling each of the prophecies. The students made conservative estimates based on available historical information. As an example, to determine the probability of an individual being born in Bethlehem, the students estimated the average population of Bethlehem from the time of the prophet Micah to the present. They then divided the Bethlehem population average by the average population of the world over the same period.

When Stoner received the students' estimates, he made them more conservative and calculated the probability that a single individual could fulfill 48 of the Messianic prophecies. Stoner even encouraged skeptics to make their own estimates. Upon completion, Stoner submitted his work to the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA), an international network of scientists who are Christians. The ASA validated Stoner's scientific approach.¹³⁴

Stoner estimated the probability that a single person could fulfill just 48 of the messianic prophecies to be one chance in 10^{157} . This is, of course, an incredibly small probability.¹³⁵ The number 10^{157} is *one*, followed by 157 zeros! It is easy to understand the probabilities of one chance in 100 or one in a thousand. But one chance in 10^{157} is completely out of human experience. Suffice it to say that the chances of one person in the entire history of the world fulfilling all the Messianic prophecies are virtually zero unless the events were orchestrated by some all-knowing outside agent (God). That seems to be the only way that it could happen.

Easier to find a random atom in the universe

To gain some perspective of the infinitesimal probability of

one chance in 10^{157} , consider this: there are only about 10^{80} atoms in the entire universe. If somehow, you could paint a single atom red and hide it somewhere in the universe, a person with the ability to travel anywhere in the universe instantaneously would have a far better chance of finding the red atom on the first try than Jesus had of fulfilling 48 of the Messianic prophecies. Moreover, it is estimated that only somewhere around 100 billion people have lived on Earth since Homo sapiens appeared. One hundred billion is equivalent to 10^{11} ; thus, nowhere near enough humans have lived to provide a reasonable opportunity for an event having a probability of one chance in 10^{157} to occur.

The claims that Jesus and the disciples made are extraordinary, but His fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies is even more extraordinary. If Jesus were merely human, it would have been impossible for Him to fulfill the Messianic prophecies, but if Jesus were the all-knowing God in the flesh as He and His disciples claimed, fulfilling the Messianic prophecies would have been a trivial task. The fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies provides strong evidence that Jesus is the Son of God.

Only God could bring about fulfillment of the prophecies

How could it be that Jesus fulfilled dozens of Messianic prophecies if He was not a divine being? The Messianic prophecies were written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Yes, Jesus did certain things to fulfill the prophecies showing that He was the Messiah (Matthew 21:1-11). For example, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey specifically to fulfill prophecy. But if Jesus were a mere human, how could He fulfill prophecies that were beyond His control?

The Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament was to be a male who would enter life through the normal birth process. He would be a descendant of Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, and David. He would be born in Bethlehem of a virgin. He would escape after birth into Egypt as a baby. His ministry would be in Galilee. He would be put to death for the sins of His people. He would be rejected by the Jews, but He would bring salvation to the Gentiles. He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver; in

death, His hands and feet would be pierced. Soldiers would gamble for His clothing. He would be buried in the tomb of a rich man. And, He would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven.

Are any of us able to control the place of our birth and our sex at birth, our blood relatives, the exact manner in which we will die, and the many other things just mentioned that were prophesied about Jesus? If Jesus were a mere human, like us, He would not have had any control of these aspects of His life. But if Jesus were God, He was completely capable of bringing all these things to come to pass.

The statistical odds that a merely human Jesus could fulfill all that is prophesied about Him out of pure luck is zero. Unless, of course, He was not merely human, but instead, the divine Son of God. It seems obvious if we consider the fulfilled prophecies with an open mind that Jesus is God, just as He claimed to be. The question at this point is will the reader follow the evidence where it leads?

Many say they desire to know the truth. If one truly desires the truth, one must follow the evidence where it leads. The question facing all who have an understanding of Messianic prophecy and its implications is, *can they handle the truth?* The truth seems to unavoidably lead to accepting Jesus as God and Savior. Perhaps the truth will become even more obvious when the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is presented in Chapter 11.

Objections to Christian Interpretation of Messianic Prophecy

As the table above indicates, Isaiah 53 is among the most important Messianic passages in the Old Testament. How have Jewish rabbis handled this text? Eitan Bar, an Israeli scholar, and Messianic Jew writes,

The 17th century Jewish historian, Raphael Levi, admitted that long ago the rabbis used to read Isaiah 53 in synagogues but after the chapter caused “arguments and great confusion” the rabbis decided that the simplest thing would be to just take that prophecy out of the Haftarah readings in synagogues. That’s why today when Isaiah 52 is read the reader stops in the middle of the chapter and the week after skips straight to Isaiah 54.¹³⁶

Elsewhere we learn that until the twelfth century, the Servant described in Isaiah was viewed by the Jews to be the Messiah. After that point, the rabbis changed their interpretation of Isaiah 53, naming the nation of Israel as the Servant. We can easily see that this is incorrect because the nation of Israel has never suffered innocently (Isaiah 53:9) or willingly (Isaiah 53:7) as the Servant does. Nor did Israel's suffering provide substitutionary atonement as payment for sin (Isaiah 53:5) as the Servant's suffering does.¹³⁷ So, this text is certainly not referring to Israel, as modern rabbis contend, but to the Messiah, who is a perfect fit.

Psalm 22 is another Old Testament messianic passage of great importance. Early Jewish sages recognized Psalm 22 as speaking of the Messiah. Verse 16 is of particular importance and reads, "For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet." (Psalm 22:16). It is hard not to see the similarity between this verse and the crucifixion of Jesus. According to Eitan Bar, the rabbis change one Hebrew letter in one word of the original text, which completely changes its meaning. Instead of "They pierced my hands and feet," the rabbis render this portion of the verse to read, "Like a lion are my hands and feet," which seems strange. Bar explains why the rabbis are incorrect in their interpretation:

Originally, the text actually read: "They have mined (bore a hole) in my hands and feet," Meaning, they have pierced my hands and my feet. The original Hebrew word means to mine or bore, to make a hole or dig a pit. Like mining a hole in the ground or digging a well. According to Bar-Ilan University's Biblical Hebrew Dictionary the meaning of "mine" is the same as "dig." This is reinforced in various places throughout the Old Testament. For example, in Exodus 21:33 or in 2 Chronicles 16:14. However, seeing as this description of boring holes in the Messiah's hands and feet sounded a little too much like Jesus for the rabbis, they decided to shorten the letter VAV (ױ) to become the letter YUD (ם). Any person who reads any ancient version of the Old Testament, such as the Septuagint or the Dead Sea Scrolls, will see for themselves that the original text doesn't say "like a lion", but rather "they have bored/pierced." The Dead Sea Scrolls, dated hundreds of years before the time of Jesus ... and were written at least 1,200 years prior to the Masoretic text.¹³⁸

Jewish interpretations of the Messianic prophecies are disingenuous and fail to contend with the fact that these texts point unmistakably to Jesus as the subject of these prophecies.

So What? Nostradamus made prophecies

Some have argued that prophecy is not unique to the Bible. While this is true, it fails to take into account the clear, distinct, and accurate nature of biblical prophecy when compared to other prophecies that have been made.

Nostradamus is often mentioned as one famous for his prophecies. Nostradamus was a French physician and astrologer who wrote prophecies in the form of quatrains (a stanza of four lines). One of the most famous examples of Nostradamus's prophecies is said to foretell the death of King Henry II of France during a friendly jousting exhibition with Gabriel, Count of Montgomery, at a royal wedding. The quatrain reads as follows:

The young lion will overcome the old one,
On the field of battle in single combat;
He will burst his eyes in a cage of gold,
Two fleets one, then to die, a cruel death.

In this quatrain, Gabriel, Count of Montgomery, is taken to be the young lion, and King Henry II is purported to be the old lion. During the competition, the count's lance shattered, and a splinter of it entered Henry's helmet (cage of gold) and lodged in his brain just above the eye. Henry died after days of suffering.

A number of problems have been noted with taking the historical events of the jousting match between Henry and Gabriel as a fulfillment of this quatrain. First, the French have never used the lion as an emblem, and thus is not fitting as a reference to Henry or Gabriel. Second, Henry was 41; the age difference between Henry and Gabriel was about six years. Thus, the young and old designation does not seem fitting. Third, the events do not take place on the field of battle but at a wedding feast. Moreover, "field of battle" is vague and could apply to many different events and places. Fourth, the lance splinter did not burst Henry's eye but entered above it into his brain. Fifth,

gold was costly and too soft to serve as a helmet. There is no evidence that Henry's helmet was coated with gold; thus, the gold cage reference seems an unlikely reference to Henry's helmet. Sixth, the reference to two fleets fails to describe anything relevant to the events. Finally, it does appear that Henry died a cruel death.¹³⁹ What is considered one of Nostradamus's best quatrains poorly predicts the actual events that it is claimed to prophesy.

In contrast to Nostradamus's prophecies, the Messianic prophecies in the Bible give specific details using language that correctly describes numerous events in the life of Jesus.

Psychics and fortune tellers predict the future

Skeptics of Bible prophecy attempt to place Bible prophecy on par with the predictions of psychics and fortune-tellers. Yet, the Bible is in a class by itself when it comes to predicting the future. Of the hundreds of prophecies the Bible contains, there are no known errors. In the 1970s, with the rise of new age spirituality, the western world experienced a resurgence of interest in psychics. Christian apologist Norman Geisler summarizes the dismal track record of psychics whose predictions were subjected to scrutiny.

A study of prophecies made by psychics in 1975 and observed until 1981 showed that of the seventy-two predictions, only six were fulfilled in any way. Two of these were vague and two others were hardly surprising—the U.S. and Russia would remain leading powers and there would be no world wars. *The People's Almanac* (1976) did a study of the predictions of twenty-five top psychics. The results: Of the total seventy-two predictions, sixty-six (92 percent) were totally wrong...An accuracy rate around 8 percent could easily be explained by chance and general knowledge of circumstances. In 1993 the psychics missed every major unexpected news story, including Michael Jordan's retirement, the Midwest flooding, and the Israel-PLO peace treaty. Among their false prophecies were that the Queen of England would become a nun, and Kathy Lee Gifford would replace Jay Leno as host of *The Tonight Show* (*Charlotte Observer* 12/30/93).¹⁴⁰

No psychic billionaires

An individual who knew the future even five minutes in advance could quickly amass a fortune in the stock market. Yet a quick Google search of billionaires reveals that the world's billionaires amassed their fortunes through corporations, business enterprises, investments, or inherited fortunes. The conspicuous absence of psychics from the billionaire list speaks to their inability to actually predict the future. The track record of psychics revealed in the previous quotation shows they are merely guessing about the future, which explains why they seem to be primarily found soliciting the unsuspecting public for trivial fees. The predictions of psychics are a far cry from the prophecies of the Bible, which have a perfect track record of fulfillment.

The Gospel writers changed the facts to fit the prophecies

Some have suggested that the disciples were aware of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, so when the New Testament books were written, the New Testament writers falsified the events of Jesus' life to fit the Old Testament prophecies. This objection fails for several reasons.

First, from the earliest days of the church, the disciples were persecuted, beaten, and killed for proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah who died and rose from the dead (see Acts 4-5; 7:54-50; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33). As will be shown in Chapter 11, many disciples of Jesus met their demise proclaiming the death and resurrection of Jesus. They would not have died for something they knew to be a lie.

Second, as will be shown in Chapter 14, the key facts of Jesus' life are established independently of the New Testament by the first and second-century non-Christian writings of Josephus, Pliny, Lucian, the Babylonian Talmud, and others. Gospels containing details contrary to the commonly known facts would have been rejected.

Third, the disciples who had just lost their beloved leader and were suffering persecution would have had to coordinate their stories to engineer the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies by Jesus—all to fabricate a story that would ultimately get many of them killed. Thus, they lacked the motive

to undertake such a hoax. Further discussion of objections to the resurrection is found in Chapter 11.

The prophecies were revised to fit the historical facts

Some critics and skeptics have suggested that the prophecies presented in the Bible were changed to fit the historical facts about Jesus. It would be easy to fabricate fake prophecies after Jesus lived His life. However, this objection fails because of an amazing archaeological treasure trove of manuscripts found in the Dead Sea caves.

During the 1940s, one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of modern times was made in the caves at Qumran near the Dead Sea. Initial discoveries were made by Bedouins, but soon archaeological expeditions were organized, and the discoveries multiplied to include hundreds of fragments of every Old Testament book except Esther, many dating a century or more before the birth of Jesus. It was called “the greatest manuscript discovery of all time” by renowned archaeologist William Albright.¹⁴¹



Figure 6.1: Cave 4 of the Dead Sea caves contained numerous Old Testament manuscripts, historical books, and fragments. Other caves are seen in the background.¹⁴²

The Dead Sea Scrolls Affirm the Modern Bible

The Dead Sea Scrolls are the remnants of the library of the

ancient Essenes, a devout Jewish sect that once inhabited the monastery at Qumran well before the time of Christ. Among the ancient scrolls found at Qumran was a complete copy of all 66 chapters of the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, which has been dated to about 100 BC or earlier. Astonishingly, this ancient parchment is virtually identical to other more recent Hebrew copies of Isaiah (Masoretic text) from which English Bible translations come, even though it predates these by a thousand years.

This remarkable accuracy of the reproduction of the Book of Isaiah over a 1,000-year period speaks to the reliability of the work of the scribes and copyists of the Old Testament. Moreover, it invalidates the skepticism of Bible critics, who charge that the Scriptures were revised to match historical events and then passed off as prophecy. Examination of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which predate the life of Christ by more than 100 years, reveals that they contain the Messianic prophecies noted in the table above.^{143, 144}

The most important thing about the Isaiah scroll found at Qumran is that it is filled with prophecies about the Messiah that were fulfilled in the Life of Jesus Christ, and it clearly demonstrates that these prophecies were written well before the birth of Christ. Over twenty characteristics of the Messiah or events in His life were predicted in the Book of Isaiah alone. All were fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ.

The following emerges. The discovery of copies or fragments of all but one of the Old Testament books of the Bible in the Dead Sea caves, many predating the birth of Jesus by 100 years or more, invalidates the theory that the Bible books were modified or revised to fit the event of the life of Jesus the Messiah. The prophecies of God's promised Messiah were made long before Jesus was born, and they were fulfilled in His life.

Regarding the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Norman Geisler concludes:

The [Dead Sea Scrolls] provide an important apologetic contribution toward establishing the general reliability of the Old Testament Hebrew text, as well as the earliest copies of parts of Old Testament books and even whole books. This is important in

showing that the predictive prophecies of the Old Testament were indeed made centuries before they were literally fulfilled.¹⁴⁵

Study Questions

1. Choose five of the Messianic prophecies found in the table above that you find most compelling. Look up and compare the Old and New Testament passages. Does the New Testament passage show fulfillment of the prophecy in the life of Jesus? Summarize your thoughts.
2. Write a paragraph summarizing Peter Stoner's statistical analysis of the Messianic prophecies and the conclusions he reached. What is the likelihood of anyone fulfilling 48 Messianic prophecies?
3. How does Messianic prophecy show that Jesus is God and Savior?
4. How have Jewish rabbis attempted to dismiss the Messianic prophecies found in the Bible fulfilled by Jesus?
5. Are Nostradamus's prophecies and the prophecies of psychics on par with those of the Bible? Write a paragraph summarizing your thoughts.
6. How do the Dead Sea Scrolls show that the Messianic prophecies were made in advance of the life of Jesus?

7

Messianic Prophecy—Important Passages

This chapter is intended to be a guided exploration of two of the most important Messianic passages in the Bible, Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Each section will begin with the text of the passage, followed by an exposition (explanation) of the passage. Hopefully, this will help you, the reader, to see the nuances of these passages and how they point to Jesus.

Psalm 22

Psalm 22 was written by David, the king of Israel, and contains important Messianic prophecies, as noted in the table found in Chapter 6. Psalm 22 was written during the life of David, about 1000 years before Jesus was born. Two important passages from Psalm 22 are given below (verses 1-3 and 9-19) and are followed by an explanation of these verses.

¹ My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning. ² O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; And by night, but I have no rest. ³ Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. (Psalm 22:1-3)

⁹ Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb; You made me trust when upon my mother's breasts. ¹⁰ Upon You I was cast from birth; You have been my God from my mother's womb. ¹¹ Be not far from me, for trouble is near; For there is none to help. ¹² Many bulls have surrounded me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. ¹³ They open wide their mouth at me, As a ravening and a roaring lion. ¹⁴ I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me. ¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And my tongue cleaves to my jaws; And You lay me in the dust of death. ¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded me; A band of evildoers has encompassed me; They pierced my hands and my feet. ¹⁷ I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me; ¹⁸ They divide

my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots.¹⁹
But You, O Lord, be not far off; O You my help, hasten to my
assistance. (Psalm 22:9-19)

Notice that David opens his psalm with the words, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” These are among the very last and dying words of Jesus uttered from the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). It appears that Jesus uttered these words so that generations of seekers and the faithful would go to Psalm 22 and find His true identity as the Messiah sent by God. The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day would have been well acquainted with these opening words of Psalm 22. They would have also known that David was not referring to himself in this passage. Surely, David had faced great challenges as king of Israel, but his hands and feet were never pierced. Furthermore, David died of natural causes at an old age. Thus David could not be referring to himself in Psalm 22.

Psalm 22 is a prophecy about someone else, a great individual who will cause the entire world to turn toward God, as we read in verse 27 of this psalm following the passage above. Again, we see that David is not in view in this psalm because he never turned the whole world to God. Several of David’s psalms (Psalm 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 45, 72, 110, 118) contain important details regarding the life of the Messiah. Jesus refers to David as being “in the Spirit” as he wrote Psalm 110, a psalm where the relationship of God and the Messiah are described (Matthew 22:43-46). Thus, David’s reference to someone other than himself in Psalm 22 is not unusual.

In the passages above, David correctly identifies important events in the life of the Messiah. The subject of the psalm is an individual whose faith and trust in God are complete (verses 9-10). The body of the individual portrayed in Psalm 22 has been ravaged. He is surrounded by those who seek to destroy Him, described figuratively as strong bulls and ravening lions. He is surrounded by evildoers. The use of the word *evildoer* implies that humans are the attackers since animals cannot perpetrate evil because they are not moral beings. The subject’s bones are out of joint, and His strength is dried up like a potsherd. His tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth.

The process that led to Jesus' crucifixion would have left Him extremely dehydrated. Jesus was scourged according to Roman practices, which was a standard step in the process of execution. The whip used would have been multi-stranded with pieces of bone or small metal balls attached to the strands. The intended result of the scourging was to severely weaken the victim. It would have resulted in Jesus' back, buttocks, and legs being ripped and reduced to quivering ribbons of flesh. In addition, the blood loss would have left Jesus with severe dehydration.¹⁴⁶

In the ancient world, clay pots were fired at well over 1000°F (538 °C) to remove moisture from the clay. In Psalm 22, the victim's strength is dried up like a potsherd (suggesting dehydration and weakness). A potsherd is a piece of a pottery vessel where all moisture is removed by kiln firing; thus, it is very dry indeed. Consider Jesus' weakened state after scourging and being forced to carry the crossbeam of His cross, only to reach the site of His crucifixion to have his hands and feet nailed to a cross. Nails were placed in the upper part of the hand or wrist (considered part of the hand as in Genesis 24:22) to prevent them from ripping through the soft flesh of the hand.¹⁴⁷ The psalm's imagery of the severely weakened and dehydrated victim being pierced matches the circumstances of Jesus' crucifixion perfectly.

Imagine hanging on a cross for hours with nails in your hands and feet. According to medical experts, the stretching of the arms and position of the body of crucified victims causes dislocation of the shoulders, elbows, and wrists and great difficulty in breathing. The victim's bones would certainly be out of joint, as we read in verse 14. To exhale, you need to pull and push yourself up by your badly wounded hands and feet. And as you do so, the quivering ribbons of flesh on your back would rub against the rough surface of the cross. The pain would be excruciating and unbearable.¹⁴⁸ The strain on the arms related to the breathing process described above causes the arms to stretch by six inches.¹⁴⁹

Another fascinating aspect of this psalm is that David describes crucifixion hundreds of years before it was invented. Crucifixion was practiced beginning with the Assyrians,

Persians, and Greeks long after David lived and was later adopted by the Romans.¹⁵⁰

David adds another important detail in verse 18 that appears to remove all possibility that David's description of Jesus' crucifixion is purely coincidental. According to David, the victim's clothing would be divided among his tormentors and gambled for. This very thing is mentioned as taking place in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.¹⁵¹

As we continue reading Psalm 22 beyond the passage noted above, when all seems to be lost, the victim calls to God for assistance, and He prays for deliverance (Psalm 22:19-20). The tone of the Psalm then turns positive, affirming the concern that God has for the afflicted. The prayers of the victim are answered (Psalm 22:24), and because of His work described in this psalm, all the nations to the ends of the Earth will turn to God and worship Him. At present counting, nearly 2.4 billion people identify as Christians from all the nations of the Earth, claiming Christ as their savior and offering praise and worship to God. The subject of Psalm 22 can be none other than Jesus Christ. No other individual in the history of the world fulfilled the events described, which were written 1000 years before Jesus was born. It seems hard to escape that only an omniscient God could provide David with details of the life of Jesus so far in advance. So too, it is hard not to see that Jesus, God's Messiah, is the subject of this psalm.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Theologian Charles Ryrie says of this Bible text, which is given in its entirety below, "This is one of the most treasured and important passages in the Old Testament."¹⁵² It is hard to disagree with Ryrie on that point because when portions of this text are read, they are often mistaken for New Testament descriptions of the ministry of Jesus. That is astonishing, considering that Isaiah wrote this text about 700 years before Jesus was born.

This passage from the Book of Isaiah is not a forgery written after the fact to match the events in the life of Jesus. Its authenticity as a prophetic passage is established beyond the shadow of a doubt in that the Book of Isaiah is found in

complete form among the Dead Sea Scrolls and predates the birth of Jesus by over 100 years. This passage contains a number of predictions about the ministry, suffering, and death of Jesus. With a bit of digging, a rich picture of God's love and plans for humanity emerges. The text of Isaiah 52:13–53:12 follows below.

¹³ Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. ¹⁴ Just as many were astonished at you, My people, So His appearance was marred more than any man And His form more than the sons of men. ¹⁵ Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand. ¹ Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ² For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. ³ He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. ⁴ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. ⁶ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. ⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? ⁹ His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. ¹⁰ But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. ¹¹ As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One,

My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.
¹² Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors. (Isaiah 52:13–53:12)

This text is worthy of significant attention and unpacking since it contains at least 17 specific predictions about the Messiah fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

God speaks through the prophet Isaiah describing the mission and work of the Servant of the Lord. The Servant of the Lord, or Servant, is the name Isaiah uses to refer to the Messiah, who appears in Chapters 42, 49, and 50, of the Book of Isaiah and in this passage from Isaiah 52 to 53. These passages are sometimes referred to as Servant songs. The Servant's work described in these passages is often affirmed by the New Testament writers as having been fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ. In other words, the New Testament writers quote Isaiah extensively when describing the life and ministry of Jesus.

Other servants of God have performed some task or mission for God, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. But the Servant of the Lord described in Isaiah accomplishes things that no human ever has or ever could accomplish, pointing to his divinity. The Servant of the Lord will bring salvation and justice to the ends of the Earth, clearly a task that could not be accomplished by a mere human.

What did the Jewish rabbis think about this text? As Eitan Bar noted previously, the rabbis stopped reading it in the synagogues because arguments arose over it because of the obvious way it describes the ministry of Jesus. And until the twelfth century, the Servant was viewed by the Jews to be the Messiah.

Note that the text begins in Chapter 52 with the statement that the Servant will prosper and be exalted. We read of the exaltation of Jesus in several New Testament texts, including Philippians 2:9, which indicates, "God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name." In

Philippians 2:10, Paul says of Jesus that His name will be above all names, and before Him, every knee will bow.

For the Servant of Isaiah 52:13 to be greatly exalted and prosper, He would need to be resurrected because the subsequent verses tell us that He would be humiliated, disfigured, crushed, pierced, and laid in the grave. So, at the very beginning of this passage, we see a prophecy of the resurrection of the Servant.

Many were and still are astonished at the brutal disfigurement of the Servant at the hands of His accusers. The presentation of the torture of Jesus in the movie *The Passion of the Christ*, as sickening as it is, is not far off the mark. The gruesome details of the process of Roman crucifixion can be found in the article “On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ,” published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.¹⁵³

According to this text from Isaiah, by His suffering the Servant will sprinkle many nations. Sprinkling here refers to the sprinkling of blood in front of the veil in the temple sanctuary for the cleansing of the priest. This is described in Leviticus 4:6 in the Mosaic Law. So, the meaning here is that by the shedding of His blood, the Servant will cleanse the sins of those who trust in Him. Christians have received Jesus throughout church history, but it will be too late for those who have rejected Him at the Second Coming.

The text continues in Chapter 53, which begins with the question, “Who has believed our message?” The answer is that few of His people in the Jewish nation believed in the Messiah that God sent to them. Jesus didn’t fit the profile of the powerful human political leader that the Pharisees expected to come, take charge, and fight the battles of the Jewish nation. They missed the fact that the Messiah would have dual roles, fulfilled in two advents.

At His First Advent, the Messiah would be a suffering Servant who would atone for the people’s sins. At His Second Advent, the Messiah will come as a conquering King who will vanquish evil and rebellion against God from the Earth (Psalm 2, Revelation 19). If the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day had understood the Scriptures better, particularly this text from the

Book of Isaiah, they would have realized that Jesus was precisely the kind of Messiah that God had promised them.

The following will address specific prophecies about the Messiah found in Isaiah 53. The arm of the Lord in verse 1 is a reference to the strength of the Lord revealed in His Messiah, who would be a mighty king, but not in the worldly ways that the Jews of His day desired. In verse 2, we learn that the Servant would grow up before God as a tender shoot. This was fulfilled in the life of Jesus since He did not beam to Earth as an adult but instead was born into the world as a mere helpless baby, a tender shoot. We also learn in verse 2 that contrary to the images of the renaissance Jesus depicted in stained glass windows and artwork, Jesus was probably not physically attractive, nor was there anything royal in His appearance.

Moving to verses 3 and 4, we learn that the Servant was to be despised and forsaken by men. He would suffer grief and sorrow. He would not be esteemed by the people. This fits perfectly with the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was despised and forsaken by men. The nation He came to save rejected Him. Luke describes the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus suffered on our account in Chapter 22 of his gospel, saying, "And being in agony He [Jesus] was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44). Sweating blood is called hemathidrosis and can occur in an individual suffering from extreme stress levels.

Moreover, the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah is smitten. When we use the word *smitten*, we usually are speaking of the strong attraction of one person to another. That is one meaning. The other meaning is "to strike with a firm blow," which is what God did to His Servant Jesus on our behalf.

Verse 5 describes the firm blow with which God would strike the Servant. He was to be pierced through for the transgressions of the people and crushed for their sins. The piercing of the Messiah is an important theme of Old Testament Messianic prophecy. It is found in this text from Isaiah, Zechariah 12, and Psalm 22. In the New Testament, the Book of Revelation prophesies the return of Jesus, who was pierced (Rev 1:7).

According to Isaiah 53, verse 5, not only was the Servant of the Lord to be pierced, but He was also to be scourged, which means to be whipped. This is precisely what happened to Jesus. Jesus was whipped with a multiple-stranded whip, and He was pierced by nails in His hand and feet, and later a lance was driven into His side. Jesus was scourged and then pierced five times, in perfect accordance with Isaiah's words.

People throughout the world have heard that Jesus was crucified. For the open-minded, these prophecies of piercing fulfilled in the life of Jesus point unambiguously to Him as the Messiah God appointed to be the savior of the world. Who else in history claimed to come to die for the world's sins and then died a death by scourging and piercing? Jesus is the only one showing to all who will consider the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah of the Old Testament.

Verses 6 and 7 describe why these terrible things were to occur to the Servant. The punishment for our iniquity and rejection of God was made to fall upon the Servant of the Lord. The punishment for the sins of all humanity was to be exacted on the suffering Servant of Isaiah. But in all of this, He would refuse to open His mouth to articulate a defense. The Servant would take the punishment with no attempt to evade it. As Jesus stood before Pilate, He declined to verbally defend himself. Pilate says to Jesus in John 19:10, "...don't you know I have the authority to release you or crucify you?" Jesus willingly accepted the punishment and suffering that was due to us because He came for crucifixion, not coronation. He came to die as payment for the sins of humanity, not to achieve worldly greatness. As we learn in Matthew 26, Jesus could have called on more than twelve legions of angels to save Him. But He did not call for help for your sake and my sake because only His sacrificial death could reconcile sinful humans to a righteous God.

Verse 8 prophesies that the Servant would be bound and led away, which fits well with the description of the Roman cohort's arrest of Jesus in John 18:12. They bound Jesus and led him to a sham trial.

Furthermore, according to Isaiah, the Servant was cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of the people

(Isaiah 53:8). Here, to be “cut off out of the land of the living” is a clear reference to the killing of the Messiah. This same terminology is used in Daniel 9:26, which says that the Messiah would be cut off at the appointed time and have nothing.

The violent nature of the Roman crucifixion of Jesus is a stunningly accurate fulfillment of this text. All of this happened to the Servant, not because He deserved it, but because God willed it for the purposes of redemption and the restoring of sinful humans to relationship with Him. The work of the Servant fulfilled in the life of Jesus is explained to a large crowd by Peter after the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:22–23), where Peter says to the crowd celebrating the feast of Pentecost:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (Acts 2:22–23)

In killing Jesus, God paid the sin debt of all humanity. According to the Bible, God is just. Therefore, He could not turn a blind eye to human sin. No mere human could pay the debt for the sins of humanity because all are sinners who have broken the commands of God. In ancient Israel, the acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the people was an unblemished lamb (Exodus 12:1-7). Christ, as the perfect, sinless, unblemished lamb of God, was the sacrifice acceptable to God in payment for the sins of humanity. According to 1 Peter 1:18-19:

You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Moral perfection in an unblemished sacrifice was the only sacrifice that was acceptable to God, as we learn over and over in the Old Testament. The church has taught the impeccability of Christ, meaning that he was without sin, since the earliest days. In Isaiah 53:11, we read of the righteousness of the Servant who

would justify many and bear their iniquities. But when it comes to humans, as Paul reaffirms in Romans 3:10, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.” In contrast, the sinless Servant is the Messiah, the righteous Savior of God, sent by God. When it comes to the salvation of humanity, God had to do it Himself; it was an inside job. Because apart from Jesus, there has never been a human born to a woman who was qualified to do the job (More on that in Chapter 19).

In verse 9, we learn the Servant of the Lord was to be put to death with wicked men. Jesus was put to death with wicked men as we read in Matthew 27:38, “At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.” Yet, in death, the Servant of the Lord was to be laid in the tomb of a rich man. This was perfectly fulfilled when Jesus was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea as recorded in Matthew 27:57, which says, “When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus.” Joseph had Jesus laid in a tomb that he had commissioned for himself.

In verse 10, we see the rationale of the Lord, who was pleased to crush the Servant as a guilt offering. Because of His sacrifice, the Servant would live. Our text says He would prolong His days in an obvious reference to resurrection. The Servant was cut off and laid in a grave (verses 8 and 9), yet in the next verse (10), He is back to life because His days are prolonged. Again, this is perfectly fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus.

But there is more. Isaiah tells us that because of His sacrifice, the Servant would see His offspring (verse 10). The offspring of the Servant are the children of God, which make up the church. In the Gospel of John, we learn “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). The Servant’s offspring are the body of believers in the church.

Continuing in verse 11, we learn that many will be justified by the sacrificial work of the Servant. At present counting, there are about 2.4 billion professing Christians in the world, comprising 31% of its population. But don’t just think about today. Think about the multitude of individuals that have placed

their faith in Christ throughout the ages. This prophecy is fulfilled in an extraordinary way in the life and work of Jesus.

Finally, verse 12 tells of the end result of the Servant's work. Because He served the will of the Father and interceded for transgressors, He won a great victory, and to the victor go the spoils. As is customary for a victor in battle, the Servant will divide the spoils, the loot, the goods seized in war with the strong. Once again, this prophecy was perfectly fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus. In 1 Corinthians, Paul explains that because of the resurrection of Jesus, He accomplished victory over death, and He will share that victory with all who believe in Him. Thus, in a tangible way, as prophesied in Isaiah 53:12, Jesus shares the fruits of His victory over death with His disciples by sharing immortality with them (1 Corinthians 15:52-58).

This prophetic passage from Isaiah is perfectly fulfilled in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, Jesus is unmistakably the Servant prophesied in Isaiah.

Study Questions

1. Read the chapter. Then, without referring to the explanation of Psalm 22, read Psalm 22 in your Bible and list as many prophecies you find that were fulfilled by Jesus. Once you have completed your list, refer to the explanation of Psalm 22 and identify any prophecies you missed.
2. Repeat the exercise above for Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

8

Other Examples of Prophecy in the Bible

In the previous three chapters, we have seen numerous prophecies that have been fulfilled in the life of Jesus, validating the claim of Christians that He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. To anyone with an open mind, I believe these prophecies will be compelling evidence of the divinity of Jesus and the divine origin of the Bible. Yet, the Messianic prophecies are only a part of the fulfilled prophecies that are found in the Bible.

Ten Specific Examples of Fulfilled Prophecy in the Bible

The following paragraphs contain examples of fulfilled prophecy, including seven that are not about the Messiah. For each prophecy, I have provided the approximate date the prophecy was written, the Bible text of the prophecy, an explanation of the prophecy, and a summary of how it was fulfilled.

Prophecy 1: The Regathering of Israel

Date of Prophecy: 592-570 BC

Bible Text: Ezekiel 36:22-24 (also Ezekiel 11:14-18)

...Thus says the Lord God, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went...the nations will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land."

Summary of Prophecy

Many amazing prophecies are made about the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, but perhaps one of the most amazing

predicts the re-gathering of the people of Israel from the countries of the world. Writing in the sixth century before the birth of Christ, God says to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel that they would once again be brought into their own land of Israel from the lands and nations where they had been scattered.

Fulfillment

In AD 70, the Roman general Titus crushed a Jewish revolt and destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem. Many Jews were killed, and the Jews living in Israel were dispersed throughout the world. For nearly 1800 years, the Jews remained dispersed throughout the nations of the Earth. They have been persecuted in many places and often suffered exile from the nations where they resettled. Six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust alone.

In the 1800s, Jews from around the world began immigrating to Israel. In 1948, the United Nations voted to divide Palestine into a Jewish and Palestinian state. Against all odds, Israel once again became a nation and has been under attack ever since because many of her neighbors refuse to accept her right to exist.¹⁵⁴ A massive wave of Jewish immigration from many nations to Israel commenced in 1948 and has continued to this day.

Prophecy 2: Birthplace of the Messiah

Date of Prophecy: 700 BC

Bible Text: Micah 5:2-5:4

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *too* little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.... And He will arise and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God.... He will be great to the ends of the Earth.

Summary of Prophecy

From the tiny, insignificant town of Bethlehem would come an eternal being (meaning that He existed before creation). Ephrathah is the ancient name of Bethlehem. We learn that this

eternal being will be ruler in Israel. He will shepherd His flock with the power and majesty of God, and His greatness will extend to the ends of the Earth.

Fulfillment

Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem. That part of the prophecy is fulfilled. Jesus came as God in the flesh and as the King of the Jews, a fact He affirmed in his trial before Pontius Pilate. Jesus proved that He was God by rising from the dead (see Chapter 11). Since Jesus is God, He is an eternal being, meaning He existed before the creation of the universe. While the Jews rejected Him at His first coming, the whole world will be under Jesus' dominion at His Second Coming.

Prophecy 3: Destruction of Jerusalem

Date of Prophecy: 700 BC

Text: Micah 3:9-12

Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and twist everything that is straight, who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with violent injustice. Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, her priests instruct for a price and her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, "Is not the LORD in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us." Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the temple *will become* high places of a forest.

Summary of Prophecy

The prophecy is addressed to the house of Jacob and its rulers. In the Old Testament, when God blessed Jacob, He changed his name to Israel. The twelve patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel were sons of Jacob, so the prophecy addresses the leaders of Israel.

In this prophecy, Zion and Jerusalem are synonymous. The prophet Micah, speaking for the Lord, condemns the injustice and evil ways of the priests, prophets, and leaders of Israel, and in particular those of Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. The rulers are complacent, thinking that they have the Lord on their side.

Because of their evil, God will allow Jerusalem and the temple to be destroyed and overgrown.

Fulfillment

Nebuchadnezzar ruled the Babylonian Empire from 605-562 BC. From the beginning of his rule, Nebuchadnezzar harassed, raided, and finally destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC. He deported and resettled a large number of Jews, using them as slaves for his various building projects. Jerusalem was looted, and the bronze pillars of the temple along with the bronze, gold, and silver implements from the temple were broken up and carried to Babylon. All of the houses in Jerusalem and the temple were burned. Nebuchadnezzar's army broke down the walls of the city around Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1-21). Jerusalem lay in ruins and was desolate from the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC until the Jews were allowed by the Persian king Cyrus to return to rebuild the temple in 538 BC. About 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem and arrived there in 536 BC to begin the rebuilding of the temple.

Prophecy 4: Continuance of the Jews

Date of Prophecy: 1450-1410 BC

Text: Leviticus 26:41-45

Speaking of the Jews, God says through Moses:

...if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land...They...meanwhile, will be making amends for their iniquity, because they rejected My ordinances and their soul abhorred My statutes. Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the Lord.

Summary of Prophecy

The Old Testament prophesied that the Jews would survive. God said that He would punish the Jews if they disobeyed Him and worshipped other gods, but He also promised to sustain and protect a remnant throughout the ages.

In the Book of Leviticus, God conveys to the Jews the conditions for remaining in fellowship with Him. God is holy, and He required obedience and faithfulness from His chosen people with whom He had made a covenant. God promised to bless the Jews if they were faithful to Him and His laws, and He promised to punish them if they disobeyed. God's objective in punishment is clearly to bring His people to repentance so that they will humble themselves before Him. God promised to never completely destroy the Jews because He made a covenant with them—He promised there would always be a remnant of the Jews.

Fulfillment

The Jews trace their origin to Abraham over 4,000 years ago. During that time, empires have risen, and fallen and political boundaries have been drawn and redrawn. The Jews were conquered and dispersed from their own land by ancient empires that have come and gone. They have been kicked out repeatedly from European nations where they sought asylum. They have been persecuted and murdered throughout history, and yet they survive to this day. No other group in the world has maintained its national and religious identity over a 4,000-year period in such a manner. That the Jews survive to this day is truly miraculous but completely to be expected according to this and other prophecies.

The survival of the Jews to this day, in particular, the rebirth of the Jewish nation in 1948, is truly amazing. Precisely what Moses prophesied about the Jews has been fulfilled completely!

Prophecy 5: The Destruction of Tyre, an Important City North of Israel

Bible Text: Ezekiel 26:1-15

Now in the eleventh year, on the first of the month, the word of

the Lord came to me saying, “Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem, ‘Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken; it has opened to me. I shall be filled, now that she is laid waste,’ therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves. They will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock. She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,’ declares the Lord God, ‘and she will become spoil for the nations. Also her daughters who are on the mainland will be slain by the sword, and they will know that I am the Lord.’ ” For thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry and a great army. He will slay your daughters on the mainland with the sword; and he will make siege walls against you, cast up a ramp against you and raise up a large shield against you. The blow of his battering rams he will direct against your walls, and with his axes he will break down your towers. Because of the multitude of his horses, the dust raised by them will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of cavalry and wagons and chariots when he enters your gates as men enter a city that is breached. With the hoofs of his horses he will trample all your streets. He will slay your people with the sword; and your strong pillars will come down to the ground. Also they will make a spoil of your riches and a prey of your merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and throw your stones and your timbers and your debris into the water. So I will silence the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will be heard no more. I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the Lord have spoken,” declares the Lord God. Thus says the Lord God to Tyre, “Shall not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall when the wounded groan, when the slaughter occurs in your midst?”

Date of Prophecy: About 586 BC

Summary of Prophecy

The residents of Tyre took pleasure in the destruction of Israel. God would punish them for doing so. The prophet Ezekiel records God’s decree that Tyre would be laid waste by the “nations” who would be brought against her. The island portion

of Tyre was to be scraped to the bare rock and destined to become a place for the spreading of fishnets in the midst of the sea. The Lord declares that Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, would slay the inhabitants on the mainland and destroy the houses. Stone and timber would be thrown into the water, and Tyre would never be rebuilt.

Fulfillment

For thirteen years spanning 585 BC through 572 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, besieged the mainland portion of Tyre and finally destroyed it. Later in 332 BC, Alexander the Great besieged and destroyed the island portion of Tyre, 350 years after Ezekiel's prophecy. He gained access to it by building a causeway to the island of stone and wood materials scraped from the mainland into the sea. While areas around Tyre have been rebuilt, the city itself remains in ruins. Here again, the Bible's prophecy about Tyre was completely fulfilled.¹⁵⁵

Prophecy 6: Purging the Altar at Bethel of Idol Worship

Bible Text: 1 Kings 13:1-2

Now behold, there came a man of God from Judah to Bethel by the word of the Lord, while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. He cried against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says the Lord, 'Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'"

Date of Prophecy: About 930 BC

Summary of Prophecy

A prophet of God prophesies 300 years in advance that a son of David (a descendent of David) named Josiah would purge the altar in Bethel of idol worship. He would sacrifice the priests of the high places on it and burn their bones upon the altar.

Fulfillment

The fulfillment of this prophecy takes place in about 620 BC and is recorded in 2 Kings 23:16-20.¹⁵⁶ Exactly as prophesied

hundreds of years earlier, Josiah, King of Judah and descendent of David, cleansed the temple at Bethel of idol worship. As prophesied, Josiah slaughtered the priests of the high places and burned their bones on the altar at Bethel.

This may seem to be a violent and gruesome act, but is justified in the light that the Jews were God's chosen people. God had made a covenant with them that if they remained faithful, they would retain His blessing. In the first of the Ten Commandments, God makes it clear to the Israelites that they must have no other gods. The idol worship at Bethel was a grave sin. The priests of the high places led the people and the nation of Israel astray. They were affecting the eternal destiny of the Israelites and thus needed to be destroyed to preserve the nation.

Prophecy 7: Jesus: A Savior for the World

Date of Prophecy: 740-680 BC

Bible Text: Isaiah 49:5-6

And now says the Lord, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him...He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the Earth."

Summary of Prophecy

As noted previously, the tribes of Jacob composed the Nation of Israel. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Servant of the Lord (the Messiah, i.e., Jesus) says that God has told Him that He has much greater plans for Him than merely bringing salvation to the Jews. The purpose of the Servant will be to extend salvation to the very ends of the Earth, meaning all the nations of the world.

Fulfillment

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples this command,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on Earth. Go

Jesus Is God and Savior 112

therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus' disciples quickly spread the light of the gospel, which is the good news that salvation is available to all those who repent of their sins and truly believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In many cases, the disciples risked their lives to speak what they believed to be the truth. Many died as martyrs because they refused to recant their testimony about Jesus (more on that in Chapters 11 & 14). Today, the words of the prophet Isaiah have been fulfilled, for Christianity has been spread to virtually every nation on Earth and its boundaries continue to expand. Approximately 33% of the world's population now claim Christian affiliation. In places where the church is oppressed, as in China and Africa, growth is rapid.

Prophecy 8: Prediction of the 70-Year Babylonian Exile of the Jews

Date of Prophecy: 605 BC

Bible Text: Jeremiah 25:8-11

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, "Because you have not obeyed My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north," declares the LORD, "and *I will send* to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years."

Summary of Prophecy

The northern part of Israel had already been destroyed over one hundred years earlier by the Assyrians. What was left of Israel was the southern kingdom of Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God announces that

Judah would be attacked and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. The normal sounds of life and its joys would be silenced in a horrible way, and the Jews would become slaves to the king of Babylon for 70 years.

Fulfillment

The Jews were held captive in Babylon for 70 years, beginning in 605 BC. The Jews were still there when Babylon was conquered by the Persians. In 538 BC, Cyrus, the king of Persia, conquered Babylon and issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland to rebuild the temple. They arrived in Jerusalem in 536 BC, 70 years after the beginning of their exile, and thus the prophecy was fulfilled exactly as given.

Prophecy 9: Naming the Persian King Who Would Release the Jews over 150 Years in Advance

Date of Prophecy: 740-680 BC

Bible Text: Isaiah 45:1-13

Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, whom I have taken by the right hand, to subdue nations before him and to loose the loins of kings; to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth" Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons, and you shall commit to Me the work of My hands. It is I who made the Earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands And I ordained all their host. I have aroused him [Cyrus] in righteousness and I will make all his ways smooth; He will build My city and will let My exiles go free, Without any payment or reward," says the LORD of hosts.

Summary of Prophecy

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God names Cyrus as the world ruler He would raise up to free His sons (the Jews) from their still future exile at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. When Isaiah wrote this prophecy in about 700 BC, the Assyrians were still the dominant world power, the Babylonian empire was still to rise and fall, and the future great

king of Persia, Cyrus, who would conquer Babylon and free the Jews, had not even been born.

Fulfillment

The Assyrians were eclipsed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. In 539 BC, the Babylonian Empire fell to Cyrus the Great, ruler of the Persian Empire. As noted above, in 538 BC, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland to rebuild the temple exactly as was foretold by the prophet Isaiah. The Cyrus Cylinder, an important archaeological artifact discovered in Babylon, records the edicts of Cyrus and describes the Persian policy of allowing displaced peoples to return to their native lands to rebuild temples and sanctuaries.¹⁵⁷ Thus the prophecy was fulfilled.

Prophecy 10: Dating the Messiah's Execution and the Destruction of Jerusalem—*Perhaps One of the Greatest Prophecies*

Date of Prophecy: 537 BC

Bible Text: Daniel 9:24-26

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

Summary of Prophecy

Daniel 9:24-26 records the prophet's vision concerning his people and the Messiah. In the context of the prophecy, each "week" represents seven years. Daniel is visited by Gabriel who tells him that the Messiah will be cut off (killed) 69 weeks (7 weeks + 62 weeks = 69 weeks) from the issuing of a decree to

restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

Fulfillment

Theologian Harold Hoehner demonstrates that this prophecy is fulfilled exactly.¹⁵⁸ The Jewish administrative calendar used 30-day months and 360-day years.¹⁵⁹ The 69 weeks, then, is equal to 483 Jewish-calendar years ($69 \times 7 = 483$). When this time period is converted to solar years (365 days per year as in our current calendar), a reduced span of 476 years is anticipated between the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the time when the Messiah would be cut off or killed.

Decrees were issued by Persian kings regarding the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem. As noted earlier, Cyrus issued such a decree allowing the Jews to return to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. It was reaffirmed by Darius, a successor of Cyrus. It was the later Persian king Artaxerxes however, who specifically issued a decree allowing the rebuilding of the fortifications and the walls of the city of Jerusalem. This decree was issued to Nehemiah by Artaxerxes in 444 BC. The Messiah was killed exactly 476 years later in AD 33, a widely accepted date for the crucifixion of Jesus. More than 500 years in advance, the Book of Daniel reveals the exact timing of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.¹⁶⁰

A Perfect Track Record

Time and again, the prophecies contained in the Bible have been fulfilled in human history. What has been presented above is a small sample of the many prophecies found in the Bible. Jesus promised to return to usher in the eternal state. In the future history of the world and at Jesus' Second Coming, the yet-unfulfilled prophecies in the Bible will be fulfilled. Only an all-powerful, all-knowing Being could foretell the future hundreds of years in advance, a sign that what is contained in the Bible is of divine origin. If the Bible is not merely a human book, then it requires very close attention and scrutiny. What is found in the Bible cannot be found in any other book on the face of the Earth.

Study Questions

1. Write a paragraph summarizing your thoughts about the consistent record of the fulfillment of the prophecies in this chapter.
2. For Prophecy 3, summarize the prophecy and the means of its fulfillment.
3. For Prophecy 5, summarize the prophecy and the means of its fulfillment.
4. For Prophecy 7, summarize the prophecy and the means of its fulfillment.
5. For Prophecy 10, summarize the prophecy and the means of its fulfillment.

9

The New Testament: The Most Reliable Ancient Book

The goal of this chapter is to provide a synopsis of several lines of reasoning, which lead to the conclusion that the New Testament, which records Jesus' ministry, is a very reliable book.

Multiple Eyewitnesses of the Events

In assessing historical events, great weight is given to eyewitness testimony. Several factors tend to strengthen eyewitness testimony:

1. It is given soon after the events occur before embellishment can occur.
2. It is provided by multiple independent witnesses to allow the comparison of details.
3. It is given by neutral or hostile witnesses who have nothing to gain.
4. It contains details that are unfavorable to the witnesses since people generally do not make up things that make them look bad or weaken their position.¹⁶¹

All the books included in the New Testament were written by eyewitnesses or their close associates. We know this through the writings of early church leaders and historians. Matthew, Peter, and John were disciples of Jesus. Mark functioned as a scribe for Peter and thus would have recorded Peter's eyewitness account of the New Testament events. Paul was a zealous persecutor of the church who converted to Christianity through a divine encounter with Jesus Christ on Damascus Road. Luke was a close associate of Paul. Although Luke was not an eyewitness to the resurrection, he was an eyewitness to Paul's ministry and miracles and to the rapid growth of the early church. Most likely, Luke was also acquainted with other eyewitnesses since he tells

us at the beginning of his gospel that he carefully investigated everything from the beginning. James and Jude were half-brothers of Jesus (Jesus was fathered by God; James and Jude were fathered by Joseph). Hebrews is an anonymous book and may have been written by an eyewitness, but we cannot be certain. The writer of Hebrews was, at the very least, a person of great intellect who was in tune with the early church and its beliefs and doctrine.

The books selected for inclusion in the New Testament were all written before the close of the first century by the authors noted above. Other books surfaced in the second century, such as the heretical Gnostic works discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. These books were rejected by the early church because they were late in their composition and they lacked a connection to the apostles who were eyewitnesses to the ministry of Jesus.

The New Testament Writers Were Reliable Eyewitnesses

In general, the factors described above that strengthen eyewitness testimony are applicable to the New Testament authors. Within 15 to 20 years after Jesus' resurrection, the New Testament books began to appear. With the exception of the Apostle John's books and perhaps Jude's letter, it is likely that the New Testament books were complete within 35 years of the resurrection. Some have contested early dates for the New Testament books, but noted scholar W. F. Albright concludes:

In general, we can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about AD 80....¹⁶²

This means that people who witnessed Jesus' ministry were still alive and would have been able to refute any embellishments to the true story. As will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, the Apostles had nothing to gain by telling their story since, in most cases, they were put to gruesome deaths for proclaiming it.

When we consider the New Testament, we find embarrassing details about the authors, which enhance its credibility. After all, why would the authors write embarrassing things about themselves unless they were true? In the New

Testament, we find John and James, his brother, vying for position and power, Peter denying Christ three times before the rooster crows, and Paul as an accessory to murder and completely hostile to Christianity. James, the half-brother of Jesus, was initially skeptical of Jesus' claims.

The New Testament writers did not sugarcoat Jesus' teachings about tough topics like hell, divorce, or morality, which many would have found offensive. They also did not try to manage the collective story by harmonizing details, which they would have certainly done if they were trying to fabricate a hoax.

In summary, the New Testament books were written soon after the events before embellishment could occur by multiple eyewitnesses who had nothing to gain, and they provide many details not flattering to the apostles. This gives the New Testament a ring of truth, which can be heard by anyone willing to read it with an open mind.

Far More Early Manuscripts than Any Other Ancient Book

The New Testament was completed in the first century. While we do not have the original books, we do have a large number of copies of the New Testament books. A recent tally of Bible manuscripts includes 5,856 Greek New Testament manuscripts and 18,130 New Testament early translations (Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Latin, and other languages). Many of the New Testament manuscripts date to the early centuries AD, with fragments dating back to the early second century, just a few decades after the death of the Apostle John. It is estimated that if New Testament manuscripts were stacked, they would form a stack one mile high. In comparison, a stack only about four feet high on average would be available for classical Greek and Roman writers such as Thucydides, Herodotus, Plato, Sophocles, Tacitus, Homer, and Pliny. Consequently, compared to the Bible, the classical writers have fared far worse, for far fewer early manuscripts are available. While the works of ancient classical writers are accepted virtually without question, the same treatment or better should be afforded to the New Testament since it is supported by far better manuscript evidence.¹⁶³

The New Testament manuscripts include fragments of the Gospel of John dating to about AD 130 and almost complete Gospels of Luke and John dating to AD 200. Codex *Vaticanus* contains almost all of the Bible and dates to AD 325-350. Codex *Sinaiticus* contains a nearly complete New Testament and dates to the mid-fourth century, about 300 years following the original writing of the New Testament. These are a few of the early manuscripts of the thousands of New Testament manuscripts that survive to this day.¹⁶⁴ An extensive tabulation of extant New Testament papyri listing their New Testament content is available online.¹⁶⁵ In contrast, ancient secular manuscripts have not fared so well. Only 188 copies of *Thucydides' History* and 106 copies of *Herodotus' History* are still extant. Yet, they are considered among the most reliable historical works of the ancient world and held in high regard.^{166,167}

The New Testament Was Accurately Transmitted

When multiple copies of ancient texts are available, it is easy to determine how well the text was preserved over time. Scholars merely look at the variation in different copies of the text as a function of time. Early copies of texts are considered to most likely reflect the original text. By analyzing available manuscripts, scholars have concluded that the New Testament transmission (copying) accuracy is over 99 percent. By comparison, Homer's *Iliad* is copied with about 95 percent accuracy and the Hindu *Mahabharata* with about 90 percent accuracy.¹⁶⁸

While it is estimated that there are about 400,000 variations in the early New Testament texts, this is to be expected given the large number of New Testament manuscripts available for comparison. Most of the variations in the New Testament manuscripts are misspellings, use of synonyms, the omission of words or lines, repetitions, the reversal of letters, wrong division of words, etc. Given the vast number of manuscript copies, it is a straightforward task to reconstruct the original text of the New Testament with a high degree of confidence. According to the agnostic New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman, "Essential Christian Beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament."¹⁶⁹ Thus, none of the

described variations impact Christianity's basic beliefs or teachings.

The New Testament was carefully copied because the scribes who copied it believed it to be the Word of God. This has resulted in very high transmission accuracy. The net result is that the New Testament is the most well-preserved and documented book of the ancient world. In support of this conclusion, Sir Frederic Kenyon, an eminent textual scholar, and former Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum, wrote:

The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world.¹⁷⁰

Early Citations of the New Testament

Additional corroboration of the text of the New Testament is found in the writings of the early church fathers, who quoted the New Testament so extensively that virtually all of the New Testament could be reconstructed from these quotations alone.¹⁷¹ The early church fathers were the leaders of the church who followed in the footsteps of the Apostles. The table below presents the number of citations of the New Testament made by selected early church fathers prior to AD 339. While this table is not exhaustive, it shows the centrality of the New Testament teaching as reflected in their writings. Note that there are only 7957 verses in the New Testament, and these verses are quoted 36,389 times in the early church fathers.

Church Father ¹⁷²	Citations
Justin Martyr (AD 133)	330
Irenaeus (AD 170)	1,819
Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-212)	2,496
Origen (AD 185-253)	17,992
Tertullian (AD 160-220)	7,258
Hippolytus (AD 170-235)	1,378
Eusebius (265-339)	5,186
Grand Total	36,389

The New Testament Excels When Fact-Checked

The Book of Acts is a central book of the New Testament because it documents the expansion of the early church rooted in the apostles' work and belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. A number of fact-checking expeditions have been undertaken with respect to the New Testament to see if what it records is true. The result has been the confirmation at every turn of specific historical and geographical details cited in the New Testament.

The Book of Acts contains hundreds of specific details, as would be expected in a factual eyewitness account. These include prevailing shipping winds, ports, titles of government officials, the structure of the coastline, islands, cities, countries, landmarks, local industry, land routes, languages spoken in various places, political customs, and the rights of Roman citizens to name but a few. These have been cross-checked with other ancient sources, archaeological investigations, and local research. According to Norman Geisler, "Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands without error."¹⁷³

Time and again, the Book of Acts has been vindicated because Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, was a careful historian. One investigator of these matters was the prolific British author, archaeologist, and New Testament scholar, Sir William Ramsay. He began his investigation of the Book of Acts with an unfavorable attitude toward it but concluded in the end that it showed "marvelous truth."¹⁷⁴

In a later book, Ramsay said this about Luke's stature as a historian:

Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact; he is possessed of the true historic sense...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.¹⁷⁵

Similarly, the Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White affirms the wide acceptance of the reliability of the Book of Acts by Roman historians:

For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming.... Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.¹⁷⁶

Archaeology Supports the Accuracy of the New Testament

In the last 200 years, archaeology has provided an immense amount of evidence in support of the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular. Many archaeological finds corroborate the facts presented in the New Testament. While archaeology cannot prove the New Testament, it can add important circumstantial evidence in support of it. The following is a partial list of archaeological discoveries that affirm specific facts presented in the New Testament:¹⁷⁷

1. Structural remnants of Herod's Temple (John 2:20).
2. An inscription naming "Herod, King of Judea" (Matthew 2:1).
3. An inscription bearing the name and title "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea" (Luke 3:1).
4. A coin inscribed with the name Quirinius who ordered the census at the time of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:2).
5. A cave in Bethlehem long held to be the birthplace of Jesus (Luke 2:4-7).
6. The town of Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, an important center of Jesus' ministry (Mark 2:1).
7. The house of the Apostle Peter in Capernaum (Matthew 8:14).
8. The ossuary (bone box) of Caiaphas, the high priest who condemned Jesus (Matthew 26:3).
9. Remains of a victim of crucifixion with a seven-inch nail remaining in his ankle bone (Acts 2:23).
10. The location of the crucifixion of Jesus and His place of burial (John 19:17; Mark 15:46).
11. The Pool of Siloam where Jesus performed a miraculous healing (John 9:1-12).
12. An inscription bearing the name "Erastus" mentioned by Paul in the Book of Romans (Romans 16:23).

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13. The judgment seat where Paul stood before Gallio, Proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12).
14. The Pool of Bethesda, where Jesus healed a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years (John 5:1-5).
15. The Arch of Titus in the Roman forum which depicts the plunder of the temple after its destruction in AD 70 as prophesied by Jesus (Matthew 24:1-2).

Archaeology is a powerful witness to the plausibility of the New Testament, as these specific examples show. Skeptical biblical minimalists have, in many cases, sought to divorce archaeology and biblical studies and have rejected the biblical narrative as a reliable source of information informing archaeology. Yet it cannot be refuted that numerous archaeological discoveries affirm the biblical narrative. New Testament scholar Craig Evans observes:

If archaeologists and historians could not find correlation between archaeology and the biblical text, there would be no such thing as 'biblical archaeology'. But of course they do find such correlation, and lots of it. This is why there are many magazines and journals devoted to archaeology, a great many scholarly reference works on archaeology and countless scholarly and popular books that treat this subject from every conceivable angle.¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, the impressions of those who have spent decades digging in the Holy Land are enlightening. Famed archaeologist of the Bible lands, Nelson Glueck, excavated over 1,000 ancient sites. With respect to the agreement of archaeology with the Bible, he said this:

...It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible.¹⁷⁹

According to this eminent expert, no one has ever dug anything up that contradicted what the Bible says. Quite to the

contrary, the Bible has been affirmed by scores of findings. How could this be unless the Bible is true history?

A Great Legal Mind Affirms the Admissibility of the New Testament

Simon Greenleaf was a lawyer, law professor, and one of the great legal minds of the nineteenth century. He was influential in the development of Harvard Law School and wrote *A Treatise On The Law of Evidence*, which became a standard text for the training of lawyers.

Greenleaf was challenged to analyze the New Testament according to the standard methods for evaluating legal evidence. Greenleaf took on the challenge and produced an essay titled *Testimony of the Evangelists*. In it, he concluded that according to the “Ancient Document Rule,” the New Testament would be received into evidence as an authentic document since it bears no marks of forgery and has been in the proper custody of the church throughout the ages.¹⁸⁰

Greenleaf writes:

The narratives of the evangelists are now submitted to the reader’s perusal and examination, upon the principles and by the rules already stated. . . . With the relative merits of modern harmonists, and with points of controversy among theologians the writer has no concern. His business is that of a lawyer examining the testimony of witnesses by the rules of his profession, in order to ascertain whether, if they had thus testified on oath, in a court of justice, they would be entitled to credit and whether their narratives, as we now have them, would be received as ancient documents, coming from the proper custody. If so, then it is believed that every honest and impartial man will act consistently with that result, by receiving their testimony in all the extent of its import.¹⁸¹

Greenleaf concludes here that the testimony of the evangelists is credible and should be accepted by “every honest and impartial” person.

What about the lost books of the New Testament?

While it is true that other Gospels were around in the early centuries of the church, they were rejected by the early church

because they were not written by authors close to the events when they actually occurred. The gospel writers Matthew and John were Apostles who followed Jesus throughout His earthly ministry. Mark was a close associate of the Apostle Peter. Luke was a traveling companion and co-worker of the Apostle Paul. The New Testament gospel writers wrote their Gospels within a few decades of Jesus' crucifixion. As mentioned earlier, the Gospel writers were eyewitnesses or their close associates.

The books left out of the New Testament were written 100 to 200 years or more after the crucifixion by individuals who were not eyewitnesses. These include the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Thomas, and others. They were discovered in Egypt several hundred miles from Jerusalem and are filled with Gnostic teachings. The Gnostics were a cult with an assortment of varying beliefs borrowed from the Jews, Greeks, various philosophers, and Christianity. The Gnostics merged many religious beliefs of the day, so they were not Christians.¹⁸²

The Gnostics' beliefs and claims were rejected by the early church because they did not agree with the Apostles' eyewitness testimony. It is important to remember that the lost books of the Bible were not really lost. It is much more accurate to say that they were rejected by the early church because they were not written by eyewitnesses, given the late dates of their writing. Consider this thought experiment. Say you live in AD 2250 and want to learn about the Boston Marathon bombing of April 15, 2013. It makes sense that the most reliable information would come from eyewitnesses and sources contemporary to the events. Regarding the events of Jesus' ministry and crucifixion, that is what we have in the New Testament. The Gnostic Gospels were written late by people who were not eyewitnesses and therefore could not be trusted. Consequently, they were wisely rejected by the early church.

Summary

We have seen that the ancient manuscript evidence for the New Testament is vast and far better than for any other book of the ancient world. Furthermore, biblical scholars and archaeologists have confirmed numerous facts presented in the

New Testament regarding specific historical and geographical details. Therefore, it is not an overstatement that the New Testament is the most reliable book of the ancient world. Yet the fact remains that the New Testament is often dismissed by skeptics and scholars. The apparent reason for this dismissive attitude is that the miracles the New Testament contains are unacceptable to the modern mind. However, if one accepts the existence of the God who created the universe, the New Testament miracles would be trivial for such a God, as spectacular as they seem. It is to the subject of miracles and the resurrection of Jesus that we will turn in the following two chapters.

Study Questions

1. Explain the factors that strengthen eyewitness testimony. How do these factors apply to the New Testament writers?
2. How does the ancient manuscript evidence for the New Testament compare with other ancient books?
3. How can manuscript copies be used to determine the reliability of copying and transmission of an ancient document?
4. What types of variations are typically found in copies of New Testament manuscripts? Do any of the textual variants affect the beliefs of Christianity?
5. Write a paragraph summarizing the factual claims of the Book of Acts. Do the facts claimed in the Book of Acts agree with what is found upon investigation?
6. Write a paragraph summarizing how archaeology supports the claims and plausibility of the Bible.
7. What are the lost books of the Bible, and why were they rejected by the church?

10

Miracles: Why They Are Possible

Most theologians would say that the resurrection of Jesus is the central claim of Christianity. The resurrection is central to the Christian faith because it is meaningless without it. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:14, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith is also in vain.” Historian and Christian apologist Gary Habermas identifies important aspects of the Christian faith which are dependent on the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. These include validation that Jesus is the divine Son of God, the forgiveness of sins, hope, and assurance of eternal life, meaning in this world and the next, and the promise of the resurrection of the believer to immortality. Habermas concludes, “So without the resurrection, there would have been no faith, theology, or church. Christianity would be groundless and fruitless. In brief, Jesus Christ’s victory was clearly...indispensable.”¹⁸³ The resurrection is indispensable to the Christian faith, which is why it is central to it. There is no Christian faith without the resurrection of Jesus.

The Truth of Christianity Depends on a Miracle

Therefore, we quickly conclude that the truth of Christianity is dependent on a miracle. It is the miracle of the resurrection that confirms the truth of Jesus’ message and His divinity. But what exactly is a miracle? In our modern culture, we tend to use the word miracle to describe a lot of different things. Whenever we hear about some fortunate outcome to a set of circumstances, we tend to call it a miracle. You might hear by the water cooler, “It’s a miracle that no one got killed in that 16-car pile-up on 84 this morning.” Similarly, we like to call drugs that produce good results “miracle drugs” when really, there is a natural explanation for how they work according to the laws of chemistry and biology. So too, there is a physical explanation for why no one got killed in the 16-car pile-up; perhaps the cars all

had airbags that protected the passengers. Perhaps God protected people, but it was not overt.

What exactly is a miracle?

Theologians and philosophers have a more precise definition of a miracle. According to Christian apologist and philosopher Richard Purtill,

A miracle is an event (1) brought about by the power of God that is (2) a temporary (3) exception (4) to the ordinary course of nature (5) for the purpose of showing that God has acted in history.¹⁸⁴

So, a miracle is seen to occur when God intervenes in the normal circumstances of life to change the outcome for His purposes.

Purtill makes several points regarding this definition. First, miracles are temporary exceptions to the normal course of things. As an example, once Lazarus was raised (John 11:1-46), the normal course of events that dead men stay dead resumed. Second, since miracles are an exception to the normal course of nature, they can be said to be supernatural. Given Lazarus's illness, it was natural for him to die. That he rose from the dead is beyond the natural and thus supernatural. Third, for something to be a miracle, it must be caused by the power of God. If it is not of God, then it is part of the natural realm and thus not a miracle. Finally, the raising of Lazarus by Jesus served to confirm that God acted through Him and thereby affirmed His claim to be the Son of God.¹⁸⁵

Hume's skepticism

Naturally, skeptics object because they reject the notion that a God exists beyond the universe. For the skeptic, the material universe operating according to natural laws is all that exists. So, if there is no God, there can be no acts of God. Not surprisingly, skeptics reject miracles. But have skeptics shown that miracles are impossible? To answer that question, we need to consider the objections of the highly influential Scottish skeptic David Hume. Even though Hume lived and wrote in the 1700s, his skeptical

arguments continue to strongly influence modern philosophy to this day. Nothing in Hume's arsenal is deadly for the prepared theist, but the paragraphs below will consider a few of his strongest objections and how theists might respond.

According to Hume,

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.¹⁸⁶

What Hume claims here is that miracles cannot occur because natural laws, in all human experience, cannot be altered. Certainly, if nothing exists except the natural laws of the universe and the materials and energy within it, it seems Hume would be correct. But as has been shown in Chapter 2, there are good reasons to believe that a transcendent God exists beyond the universe who is its Creator. In which case, God, as the Creator of the natural laws, would be able to intervene to make temporary exceptions to them. In short, if God is the author of all reality, as this book has argued, He is able to intervene to alter that reality as He pleases.¹⁸⁷

Earlier in his essay on miracles, Hume also states, "A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence."¹⁸⁸ Here, Hume seems to rule out miracles because they have less supporting evidence than natural laws. Theologian Norman Geisler believes Hume is arguing that miracles are incredible for this reason and summarizes Hume's argument against miracles in this way:

1. A miracle is, by definition, a rare occurrence.
2. Natural law is, by definition, a description of regular occurrence.
3. The evidence for the regular is always greater than for the rare.
4. A wise man always bases his belief on greater evidence.
5. Therefore, a wise man should never believe in miracles.¹⁸⁹

Hume's argument suffers from several problems. First, it leads to dismissing reports of miracles before the evidence can be weighed. If we were to follow Hume's approach, the strong evidence for the resurrection of Jesus presented in the next chapter would be ruled out from any consideration because resurrections do not happen very often. Second, as Geisler observes, Hume's argument against miracles leads to the conclusion that we should always believe the most probable outcome in any situation. On this basis, a lottery winner should never believe that they had won the lottery, and a person that had been struck by lightning should reject that event because it is unlikely.

Furthermore, following the logic of Hume's argument, unique and unusual events of history should not be believed because of the unlikelihood of their occurrence. The victory of the American colonies was very unlikely, given the mismatch of forces and resources between the British and the Americans. Likewise, the Moon landings of the American space program should be rejected according to Hume's logic since they are rare events that have not been repeated for over 50 years at this writing.

Finally, Hume states that "it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country."¹⁹⁰ To which the theist might respond, Hume can make this statement only if he dismisses the Gospel accounts and the ancient non-Christian writers who report these claims regarding Jesus (see Chapter 14). If Hume fails to consider and assess the plain evidence of history, the wise person should reject his claim that no resurrection has been observed in any age. So here again, Hume fails on this point. If miracles are reported in history, the only reasonable thing to do is consider the evidence.

The Miracles of Jesus

The New Testament was shown in Chapter 9 to be a reliable book. It documents the many miracles performed by Jesus witnessed by His disciples. It is important to remember that the New Testament authors had nothing to gain by claiming that Jesus performed miracles as many suffered and died for their

claims about Jesus. None of the disciples profited from claiming that Jesus performed miracles and rose from the dead (more on that later). Being a Christian in the first couple of centuries was not a good career move. Claiming miraculous things about Jesus was a good way to get killed in the first century. The disciples were sincere about their claims regarding Jesus, and they had no reason to lie.

The New Testament includes eyewitness accounts of about 35 instantaneous miracles performed by Jesus, often before hundreds of watching people. The New Testament tells us that Jesus healed the sick and the blind, controlled natural forces, and was able to raise people from the dead. Jesus was able to turn water into wine and feed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. As amazing as these miracles seem, they would have been easy if Jesus were the Son of God, as will be defended in subsequent chapters. The Apostle John tells us in his gospel that everything that exists was created through Jesus, so healing sick people or controlling the natural forces that He had created would not have been a big challenge for Him.

One such miracle was raising a dead man. Before raising Lazarus who had been dead for four days, Jesus said to Martha, one of Lazarus's sisters, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies" (John 11:25). Jesus prayed and commanded Lazarus to come out of his tomb. The New Testament records the following account:

Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (John 11:39-44)

Jesus did this amazing miracle to show that He was sent by God. Jesus changed many hearts and minds that day. The Apostle John goes on to say many of the Jews put their faith in Him after witnessing this great miracle. Only the Son of God, God in the flesh, could do such things.

Objection: There Are Miracles in Other World Religions

Hume and others remark that miracle claims can be found in other world religions, so these claims cancel each other out and thus cannot be used as confirming evidence for the truth of religious claims. While it is true that miracle claims can be found in the writings of other world religions apart from Christianity, they are only found in accounts written long after the death of the religious figure and lack supporting evidence. Historian and scholar Edwin Yamauchi makes exactly this point. He writes, “if we exclude later legendary and apologetic accounts, we find that early accounts attribute miracles only to Jesus.”¹⁹¹ The point Yamauchi is making is that the miracles attributed to any other religious leader are found in texts that were written long after the subjects died when legend and myth had adequate time to propagate.¹⁹²

In contrast, New Testament scholars generally agree that Paul’s death, burial, resurrection, and appearance account contained in 1 Corinthians 15 dates to the mid-30s AD, just a few years after Jesus’ death.¹⁹³ Moreover, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were all written between the middle and end of the first century, beginning about two decades after the resurrection of Jesus. Thus, the miracle accounts of the New Testament are supported by early eyewitness accounts, making them unique among the miracle claims of world religions.

What miracles are attributed to other religious leaders?

According to professor of theology David K. Clark, the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama), Confucius, and Lao Tzu discouraged seekers of miracles. Clark relates this story regarding the Buddha:

[T]he Buddha encountered a man who spent twenty years of fasting and penance learning to cross a river by walking on water. Gautama [the Buddha] told the man his effort was wasted because he could cross on a ferry for a small coin.¹⁹⁴

Elsewhere, the Buddha's teaching suggests that miracles are impossible and that he was agnostic about the question of the existence of an ultimate God.¹⁹⁵

In the Quran, we find Muhammad declining to perform signs and wonders in Surah 17:90-93, where Muhammad says in essence, I am just a messenger of flesh and blood, not a wonder-worker. Still, despite Muhammad's refusal to perform miracles, some Muslims believe that he did perform miracles, including the splitting of the Moon for the purpose of converting unbelievers. The claim that Muhammad split the Moon is based upon a questionable interpretation of Surah 54:1 and fails to be mentioned or supported by any contemporary accounts. A number of miracles are credited to Muhammad in the hadiths (traditions believed to contain the sayings of Muhammad).¹⁹⁶ But these began to appear almost two centuries after the life of Muhammad.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, "even Muslim scholars acknowledge that the vast majority [of these miracle stories] are inauthentic."¹⁹⁸

So, with respect to the Buddha and Muhammad, we do not find miraculous events recorded in early writings, but rather as Yamauchi informs us, they appear in much later writings.¹⁹⁹ For the purpose of comparison, the following are some examples of miracles attributed to Gautama and Muhammad in later writings long after their deaths. It seems Gautama returned home after attaining enlightenment, and he rose into the air, shooting out flames and streams of water from his body and walking in the sky. Another time, Gautama was washing his hands over the seeds of a ripe mango, and in doing so, he caused a tree to spring into the air, 50 hands high. Regarding Muhammad, it is said that the butter from which he ate continually increased in amount. Also, a tree moved from where it was on its own accord to shade Muhammad as he slept. There is also this miracle claim: A wolf spoke and converted a Jew to Islam.²⁰⁰

Conclusion

Miracle claims need to be evaluated on the basis of the evidence supporting them. To rule miracles out without consideration of the evidence is hasty and illogical. If God exists, as this book has argued, miracles are possible. The Creator of all things is able to intervene in His creation as He so chooses. If God can create a universe from nothing, by all means, He could raise Jesus from the dead and do all of the other miracles found in the New Testament through Him.

In the supposed miracles of Gautama and Muhammad, which were not written by eyewitnesses, we find fanciful tales, myths, and legends. The miracles that occur in the Bible are rooted in the love of God and His grand plan for humanity, motivated by His desire for reconciliation with His creatures through the sacrificial death and resurrection of His Son.

Study Questions

1. Why is the resurrection of Jesus the central claim of Christianity?
2. Provide a precise definition of a miracle.
3. Explain David Hume's objections to miracles. How have theologians and philosophers challenged Hume's objections?
4. What types of miracles did Jesus perform? What was Jesus' purpose in performing miracles?
5. Describe the miracles found in other world religions? How do they differ in supporting documentation, evidence, and character from the miracles performed by Jesus?

11

The Truth of the Resurrection

In the modern world, there exists a diversity of worldviews, religions, and cultures. An approach to assessing the truth of the resurrection of Jesus not appealing to the inerrancy of the Bible is needed. Passages from the Bible will be mentioned in making the argument below, but the force of the argument rests on the historical facts accepted by scholars, not the inerrancy of the Bible.

The *Minimal Facts* Support the Resurrection of Jesus

Resurrection scholars Gary Habermas and Michael Licona have developed an argument in support of the resurrection rooted in the available historical facts and refer to it as the “minimal facts approach.”²⁰¹ According to Habermas and Licona, “This approach considers only those data that are so strongly attested historically that they are granted by nearly every scholar who studies the subject, even the rather skeptical ones.”²⁰² So, when an individual rejects or disagrees with the minimal facts, they are placing their own opinion above what is accepted by the scholars who are experts in the field of New Testament resurrection studies. People are entitled to their personal opinions, but they are not entitled to their own personal facts. Facts are evidence-based and true for everyone.

Habermas and Licona identify four minimal facts to which virtually all conservative, liberal, skeptical, and agnostic New Testament scholars would agree:

1. Jesus died by crucifixion.
2. Jesus’ disciples believed that He rose and appeared to them.
3. The church persecutor Paul was suddenly converted.
4. The skeptic James, the brother of Jesus, was suddenly converted.²⁰³

The following paragraphs give a brief overview of each of the four minimal facts above and supporting evidence.

Fact 1: Jesus Died by Crucifixion

First, Jesus died by crucifixion. Roman crucifixion was about killing people in a gruesome, horrible way to send a message to anyone who might want to rebel against Roman authority. It was extremely painful and torturous and ended in death. That Jesus died by crucifixion is recorded in all four Gospels (Matt 25; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19). Furthermore, there are several non-Christian sources of the period that affirm the crucifixion of Jesus as well, including Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian of Samosata, Mara Bar-Serapion, and the Jewish Talmud (see Chapter 14). However, it should be noted that Mara only says that Jesus died, and the Talmud indicates that Jesus was hung on a tree, which is a first-century description of crucifixion.²⁰⁴

In addition to the early and eyewitness testimony of Jesus' death by crucifixion, in 1986, three individuals, including a pathologist, published an article in the peer-reviewed *Journal of the American Medical Association* on the physical death of Jesus Christ. The authors concluded, on review of the evidence and what is known about Roman crucifixion, that Jesus died on the cross. They concluded that Jesus' death was from hypovolemic shock and exhaustion asphyxia and was indicated by the thrusting of a spear into his side, which brought forth water and blood (John 19:34). According to the article, the water was likely from the pericardial sac surrounding the heart, and the blood was probably from the right atrium or ventricle of the heart.²⁰⁵

Fact 2: Jesus' Disciples Believed He Rose and Appeared

Second, Jesus' disciples believed that He rose and appeared to them, as is recorded in the Gospels (Matt 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21). Following the crucifixion, the disciples were transformed from fearful to boldly proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1-3). Many would suffer proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, and some would die as martyrs (more on this later). Therefore, their behavior was consistent with the true belief that Jesus had risen and appeared to them.

In addition to the Gospel accounts, the New Testament includes oral tradition, which dates to the very early days of the church. An example of an early Christian creed embedded in the New Testament is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which reports the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of Jesus.²⁰⁶ Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:

³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that He appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. ⁶After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; ⁷then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

While 1 Corinthians has been dated to A.D. 55, William Lane Craig argues that verses 3-5 of this text date closer to A.D. 36, just a few years after the crucifixion of Jesus. According to Craig, this early Christian creed forms the basis of the death, burial, resurrection, and appearance account contained in the Gospel of Mark and the Book of Acts. Craig concludes that the proximity of this 1 Corinthians creed to the death of Jesus ensures the reliability of this account.²⁰⁷ Moreover, note that Paul says that he received this information and names Peter (Cephas is the Aramaic form of Peter) and James, the half-brother of Jesus. According to Habermas, "many critical scholars hold that Paul received it from the disciples Peter and James while visiting them in Jerusalem three years after his conversion"²⁰⁸ (Galatians 2:9).

Corroboration of reports of the resurrection appearances of Jesus to the disciples is also found in the writings of the apostolic fathers, who were the leaders of the church following the apostles, beginning with a letter written by Clement (circa A.D. 95), who was the bishop of Rome and a disciple of the apostles himself.²⁰⁹ Polycarp, who is believed to have been a disciple of the apostles appointed as bishop of the church at Smyrna in the first century, mentions Jesus' resurrection five times in a letter he wrote to the church at Philippi.²¹⁰ Furthermore, the Jewish

historian Josephus writing in the first century, indicates that the disciples “reported that he [Jesus] had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive.”²¹¹

The disciples did more than merely claim that the resurrected Jesus appeared to them; they behaved as if they believed that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to them. The true faith in the resurrection of Jesus possessed by the disciples is confirmed by their willingness to die for their belief in the resurrection and proclamation of it. According to secular writings, early church writings, and the Bible, this is how some of the apostles and disciples of Jesus died:²¹²

Stephen	Stoned
Paul	Beheaded
Peter	Crucified
James (Jesus’ brother)	martyred
James	Cut with a sword
Thomas	Pierced with a spear
Philip	Crucified
Bartholomew	Crucified
Andrew	Crucified
Many Others	Burned as human torches, crucified, or ripped to shreds by wild animals under Nero (see Chapter 14)

Moreover, the suffering of the disciples is corroborated in the Book of Acts and in the writings of the early church fathers (Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Ignatius, Origen, Dionysus of Corinth) of the second and third centuries.²¹³

It has been said that one might die for what they believe to be the truth, but no one would die for what they know to be a lie. The disciples were willing to die, proclaiming the resurrection because they were convinced that it was true. It doesn’t make sense that the apostles and disciples would keep on saying something that was likely to lead to their death unless they really believed that it was true.

Fact 3: Paul was Converted from Persecutor to Chief Evangelist

Third, the church persecutor Paul was suddenly converted and became a believer in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul's conversion experience is well documented in several of his letters (1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians) and the Book of Acts. Paul changed from a deadly opponent of the church to the greatest evangelist of the church. Habermas and Licona see Paul's conversion experience as different from the general conversion experience in that Paul claimed that it came as a result of a personal appearance of the resurrected Christ. Thus, Paul's conversion was not based on the testimony of others. The change in Paul was such that he was willing to suffer and die for his beliefs, as is affirmed in his writings as well as those of Luke, and the early church fathers, Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Tertullian, Dionysus of Corinth, and Origen.²¹⁴

The following passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians describes the suffering Paul endured proclaiming the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.
(2 Corinthians 11:24–28)

In the New Testament, we learn that Paul was born in Tarsus and was thus a Roman citizen, possessing all the rights appertaining thereto. But Paul was educated in Jerusalem by one of the most illustrious rabbis of his time, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Paul was an up-and-coming Jewish leader who described himself as a "Hebrew of Hebrews" in Philippians 3:5. Christianity was a threat to Israel and the Jewish religion. So, Paul was empowered by the Jewish leaders to stamp it out, and his murderous

campaign of persecution against Christians began (Galatians 1:13-14). Paul looked on approvingly at the stoning of Stephen, a devout Christian (Acts 7:54-8:3). Shortly after this, Paul tells us of a dramatic conversion experience where the resurrected Jesus appeared to him (Acts 9). The observed result of this conversion experience is that Paul transitioned from the chief persecutor of the church to the chief evangelist of the church, leaving success and prosperity for beatings, stoning, danger, hunger, and poverty. What could account for such a transition other than an encounter with God?

Fact 4: James Converted from Skeptic to Church Leader

Fourth, the skeptic James, the half-brother of Jesus, was suddenly converted. Before the crucifixion, James was skeptical of Jesus and did not believe in Him. In Mark 3:21, Jesus' family concludes He has lost his mind and attempts to take custody of Him. In John 7:5, John reports that even Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him. After the crucifixion, however, James became a leader of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:12-21; Galatians 1:19), a fact that would lead to his untimely death (Galatians 2:9; Acts 12:17).

Furthermore, James is accepted as the author of the New Testament Book of James, a practical guide to Christian living, and writes in the very first line of that text, "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." (James 1:1). Like Paul, James's conversion follows an appearance by the resurrected Jesus as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:7. That he truly believed, Habermas and Licona conclude, is demonstrated by his willingness to die a martyr's death as recorded in the writings of Josephus, Hegesippus, and Clement of Alexandria.²¹⁵

Fact 5: The Tomb Was Empty

Habermas and Licona present a fifth fact: the tomb was empty. While it does not meet the requirements for the minimal facts presented above, Habermas's research indicates that seventy-five percent of the scholars who study the resurrection would accept that Jesus' tomb was empty as a historical fact.²¹⁶ In support of the empty tomb, Habermas and Licona offer the following evidence.

First, the disciples began to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus about fifty days after the crucifixion. If Jesus were still in the tomb, His body would have been exhumed and put on display to counter the claims of the disciples. A recent theory that the corpse was decomposed beyond recognition has been proposed to explain why the body was not exhumed to refute the claims of the disciples. This theory fails to explain the Jewish leaders' hesitance since the distinctive wounds, stature of the corpse, and hair would have served as adequate identifying marks.²¹⁷ Furthermore, given the report in Acts 2:41 that on the day of Pentecost, 3000 souls in Jerusalem were added to the rolls of Christianity, it seems that the Jewish leaders would have taken the risk of producing the body if they had it to stem the tide of conversions.

Second, the Jewish enemies of Christianity accused Jesus' disciples of stealing the body, as is recorded in Matthew 28 and affirmed in the second-century writings of Justin Martyr, Trypho, and Tertullian.²¹⁸ If the body had been in the tomb, there would have been no need to accuse the disciples of stealing it. Moreover, Matthew indicates that the Jewish leaders bribed the guards of Jesus' tomb to say that the disciples stole the body while they slept (Matthew 28:12-13). The penalty for a Roman guard who lost a prisoner was often death. The risk of death for the guards adds credibility to Matthew's statement that the guards were bribed to claim they lost their prisoner as they slept. Bribing the guards would not have been necessary if the body of Jesus was in the tomb.

Third, the empty tomb was discovered by women. If the empty tomb story had been made up by the disciples, given the low status of women as trustworthy witnesses in the first century, the disciples would not have fabricated a story where women discovered the empty tomb.²¹⁹

Habermas and Licona conclude, because of the strong evidence for it, the empty tomb should be viewed as historically certain even if virtually all scholars in the field of New Testament studies do not accept it. They suggest that those who deny the empty tomb do so for reasons other than a lack of evidence.²²⁰

The Best Explanation for the Minimal Facts: Resurrection

With the solid evidential basis affirming the four minimal facts and the fifth fact, Habermas and Licona conclude that the best explanation for these five facts is that Jesus rose from the dead.

Objections to the Resurrection

Naturally, skeptics have proposed alternative theories to explain the minimal facts. So let's consider the main objections to the minimal facts argument.

The disciples lied about the resurrection of Jesus

Is it possible that the disciples lied about the resurrection to gain fame? Had the disciples been lying, the Jews would have simply gone to the tomb of Jesus and produced the dead body. Remember, the disciples often suffered gruesome deaths for proclaiming the resurrection. Facing death, if it were a lie, they would not have continued proclaiming the resurrection. Thus, this objection fails.

Myth or legend

Some have suggested that Jesus' resurrection was a mythical account or legend, yet this is contradicted by the clear evidence that the disciples began to proclaim the resurrection shortly after the crucifixion (within a month or two). Therefore, the many years required for legends to develop were not available, thus defeating this theory. Moreover, legends or mythological accounts do not explain the very early conversion of Paul from church persecutor to chief evangelist or the conversion of James, the brother of Jesus, from skeptic to believer. James and Paul converted because of a divine encounter with the resurrected Jesus. So, myth and legend played no part in their conversion. The disciples' true belief was that they had seen the risen Jesus, and this was affirmed by their willingness to die as martyrs for their beliefs.²²¹

The disciples stole the body

As mentioned above, early Jewish opponents of Christianity claimed that the disciples stole Jesus' body from the tomb to

prop up their resurrection story. (Matthew 28:11-15). Or perhaps someone else stole the body of Jesus.

The stolen body theory is contradicted by the fact that the tomb was heavily guarded. On Saturday, at the urging of the Pharisees, Pilate told the Jewish leaders to make the tomb as secure as they knew how. The New Testament reports that the tomb of Jesus was heavily guarded and affixed with a seal (Matthew 27:62-66).

Moreover, the disciples would not have died for a lie they had fabricated after stealing the body of Jesus, as noted above. A permanently dead Jesus would not have inspired the disciples to proclaim the resurrection at the risk of death.

Finally, the stolen body theory fails to account for the resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples and Paul and James. The change in Paul and James could have only come about as the result of an encounter with the resurrected Christ; a mere claim of resurrection by His disciples would not have caused Paul and James to believe.

Jesus swooned but recovered in the tomb

Some have suggested what is known as the swoon theory, which remains popular to this day among Muslim apologists.²²² This is the theory that Jesus was still alive when he was put into the tomb and that somehow, he got out of the tomb and appeared to his followers, thus inspiring the birth of the Christian church. The swoon theory is contradicted by minimal fact one, which affirms on the basis of the medical and historical evidence that Jesus died on the cross discussed above. Thus, it has been rejected by scholars for these reasons.

Furthermore, it fails to explain Jesus' heavenly appearance to Paul on the Damascus Road described in Acts 9, which led to his conversion, or the appearance of Jesus to James leading to his conversion. Moreover, for it to be true, it would have been necessary for Jesus to somehow escape a guarded tomb with a large stone sealing the entrance. Jesus would have been in terrible bloody shape, severely in need of medical attention, and in that deplorable condition, He would have certainly not been able to inspire the disciples in that condition to die as martyrs for a lie, claiming that He rose from the dead. Because it fails to

explain the minimal facts and lacks credibility, the swoon theory has been discarded by scholars.²²³

The disciples hallucinated

Other skeptics, including Gerd Ludemann, affirm the hallucination theory and suppose that the disciples hallucinated that they saw the risen Jesus.²²⁴ The hallucination theory fails because groups of individuals do not experience the same hallucination since they are private in nature and dependent on mental state and physiological condition. Further, the psychological conditions which typically produce hallucinations are belief, expectation, and excitement. That the disciples saw their beloved leader die on a Roman cross (minimal fact one) would not engender these feelings but instead despair.

Moreover, if the disciples experienced hallucinations, that would have meant that Jesus was still dead in the tomb, a fact that would have been obvious for all to see. People could have just walked to the tomb to see that the disciples were lying. If the body were still in the tomb, the disciples would not have proclaimed the resurrection, risking death to do so. Again, the hallucination theory fails to explain the minimal facts and available evidence.^{225,226}

Someone else died in Jesus' place

It has been suggested by Muslim apologists that Judas or someone else died in place of Jesus on the cross. However, for this to be true, all of the parties involved (the disciples, Jesus' own mother, Jewish leaders, and Roman authorities) would have fallen for deception. Jesus was a well-known person. It is incredible that the disciples and the Jewish leaders would have been mistaken that it was Jesus who died on the cross.

Naturalistic Explanations All Fail

The problem for the skeptics is that the naturalistic explanations for the resurrection of Jesus fail. They all fail because they are contradicted by one or more of the widely accepted minimal facts. Only this is left after consideration of objections to the resurrection: the best explanation for the events of that first Easter morning is Jesus rose from the dead.²²⁷

The Resurrection Affirms the Existence of God

A dead body would not have been able to reanimate itself, nor could physical laws. A dead body continues to decay according to the laws of nature and entropy. If there were nothing beyond the material universe, a dead man could not have been raised. Nothing in the physical universe could have raised Jesus from the dead. Thus, the fact that Jesus did rise from the dead points to a transcendent God beyond the material time-space universe. A being who exists outside the time-space continuum is an eternal being.

If we consider the nature of this transcendent God, in order to raise Jesus, He would need great power, knowledge, and control over natural laws and the material universe. In raising Jesus, God exhibited concern for Jesus, who was innocent, which speaks to His love, justice, goodness, and wisdom. Thus, the resurrection points to the existence of the God of the Bible. Moreover, the resurrection of Jesus confirms His message and authority.

As Habermas observes, God would not have raised a heretic, which affirms that Jesus was sent by God and that His message was approved by God. Furthermore, the Old and New Testament Scriptures are affirmed to be from God, for it was Jesus' message that He came to fulfill the prophets, not to abolish them (Matt 5:17) and that the disciples would be guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13).^{228,229}

Thus, it can be concluded that the universe was created by an intelligent, incredibly powerful, moral God who existed in eternity before the foundation of the time-space universe. The Creator of the universe is able to intervene in the universe He created; thus, miracles such as the resurrection are possible. As Habermas concludes, "Prospectively, if this is a theistic universe, it is very likely that God performed a miracle in raising Jesus from the dead..."²³⁰

Study Questions

1. Explain the minimal facts argument. What are the minimal facts, and who accepts them? What supporting evidence is available for each of the minimal facts?
2. What is the best explanation for the minimal facts?

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3. List objections to the resurrection raised by skeptics and how they have been refuted by Christian theologians and apologists.
4. Can you think of other objections to the resurrection? How might theologians and historians answer those?
5. If Jesus rose from the dead, what is implied about Jesus and the existence of God?

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Jesus Is God and Savior

We are at a good point to reflect on the evidence presented that leads to the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God sent by God as a Savior for the world. Consider the following logical argument:

1. Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies demonstrating that He is the Messiah.
2. The Messiah is the Son of God.
3. The Messiah is the Savior that God sent into the world.
4. Therefore, Jesus is the Son of God and Savior.

Let's review and summarize the evidence for each point of this argument.

Jesus Fulfilled the Messianic Prophecies

As was presented in Chapters 5-8, the Old Testament has much to say about the Messiah and His ministry. The table in Chapter 6 summarizes 57 Messianic prophecies fulfilled by Jesus that were made hundreds of years before He was born. Thus, Jesus' fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies is compelling evidence that He is the Messiah promised by God long before the birth of Jesus.

Furthermore, found among the Messianic prophecies is a prediction that the Messiah would rise from the dead. The case for the resurrection of Jesus is laid out in Chapter 11. It seems that the open-minded observer should agree that the best explanation for the minimal facts and the birth of the Christian church is that Jesus rose from the dead. As discussed above, the resurrection points to the existence of God and confirms the message and authority of Jesus. Surely God would not raise a heretic whose message was contrary to the truth that God would have us know. A central teaching of Jesus was that He was the

Messiah (more on that later in this chapter). Thus, His resurrection supports the fact that He is the Messiah.

As explained in Chapter 6, the physicist Peter Stoner estimated the probability that a single person could fulfill just forty-eight of the messianic prophecies is one chance in 10^{157} . This is, of course, an incredibly small probability. Suffice it to say that the chances of one person in the entire history of the world fulfilling all the messianic prophecies is virtually zero, unless the events were orchestrated by some omniscient, omnipotent outside agent, which in this case would have to be God. No human could have orchestrated the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. Given Jesus' fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies against tremendous odds, His identity as the Messiah is validated. The probabilities compel us in that direction. More fulfillment of prophecy is yet to come; however, according to Jesus, the Messianic prophecies that are unfulfilled at this time will be fulfilled in the future and at His Second Coming (Jesus' promised return to remove evil and sin from the world and to make all things new: see Matt 24-25).

The Messiah Is the Son of God

The Messianic Psalm 2 provides a powerful image of the Son of God. It was written by David about 1000 years before Jesus was born. Here is an excerpt from Psalm 2:

Why are the nations in an uproar
And the peoples devising a vain
thing? The kings of the Earth take their stand
and the rulers take counsel together
Against the LORD and against His Anointed,
saying, "Let us tear their fetters apart
And cast away their cords from us!"
He who sits in the heavens laughs,
the Lord scoffs at them.
Then He will speak to them in His anger
And terrify them in His fury, saying,
"But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain."
"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to Me, 'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as
Your inheritance, And the very ends of the Earth as
Your possession. (Psalm 2:1-8)

This passage pictures the rebellion of the nations against God and His Anointed (*Messiah* in Hebrew), who is also the Son

of God. He is begotten of God, meaning He is of the same nature and essence as the Father. According to the psalmist, the nations desire to remove the fetters and cords imposed by God, meaning that the nations desire to be free of the constraints and commands of God. But we see that God is sovereign, and the will of God will come to pass. The Messiah is the King of Zion, which is God's spiritual kingdom, and moreover, He is the Son of God. There is a direct linkage in Psalm 2 between the Messiah and the Son of God.

How do we know that David is not writing about himself in the psalm? The answer is that David never possessed all the nations of the Earth to rule over. That the Son rules over the nations with a rod of iron implies that He has complete dominion over the nations. The imagery of Psalm 2 foreshadows events described in the Book of Revelation 2:26-27, where Jesus says He will share His dominion with those who overcome in this life by obeying His commands. At Jesus' Second Coming, the faithful will rule over the nations as Jesus does with a rod of iron.

Psalm 2 definitively demonstrates that the Messiah is the Son of God by referring to these individuals as one and the same.

The Messiah Is the Savior That God Sent into the World

A passage of great hope for all the people of the world is found in Isaiah 49:6, which tells of God's desire to offer salvation to the entire Earth. In this passage, the Messiah is describing what God has told Him:

He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the Earth." (Isaiah 49:6)

The Messiah's task was to bring light into a dark world so that people from every corner of the Earth could be saved. It was too small a thing that God's great Messiah should come into the world only to save Israel because it was God's plan from the beginning that salvation would be offered for all people. So, we see that God intended that by His Earthly ministry, Jesus would

bring the hope of salvation to all the people of the Earth. In the New Testament, Jesus paints the same picture of the purpose of His time on Earth in that beloved passage from the Gospel of John:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16–18)

As noted in Chapter 7, further evidence is found in Isaiah 53 that the mission of the Messiah was to bring salvation to the world. Moral perfection in an unblemished sacrifice was the only sacrifice that was acceptable to God, as we learn in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 53:11, we read of the righteousness of the Servant (Messiah), who would justify many and bear their iniquities. But when it comes to humans, as Paul reaffirms (quoting David) in Romans 3:10, “**THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.**” In contrast, the sinless Servant is the Messiah, the righteous Savior of God, sent by God. When it comes to the salvation of humanity, God had to do it Himself; it was an inside job—because apart from Jesus there has never been a human born to a woman who was qualified to do the job since all humans except Jesus are tainted with sin (more on this in Chapter 19).

According to Jesus (John 3:16-18), God sent Him into the world as a Savior to spare all who believe in Him from judgment for their sins. According to the Apostle Paul, when we place our faith in Christ, the sacrifice that He made by shedding His blood is accepted by God as payment for the sins of all who believe in Him. By faith in Jesus, sinners are considered righteous before God; they are justified before God and granted eternal life in His presence in heaven (Romans 3:21-24). Jesus, the Messiah, was given the ministry of reconciliation by God, and in Him, God is reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Jesus Is God

As mentioned above, Jesus is begotten of God, meaning He shares God's attributes and essence. All earthly creatures beget offspring of their own kind. When God begets, He begets God. In this Messianic passage from Isaiah, the Son is portrayed as God Himself.

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6–7)

This passage is often repeated in Christmas services in recognition that it applies to Jesus. His incarnation begins the process of prophetic fulfillment. The Messiah was to come as a child, born to the nation of Israel. Yet, this child was and is destined for greatness. He will rule the world from the throne of David. Israel's leaders had been incompetent, but the coming of a wise, supernatural leader was foretold by Isaiah. We see this in the names of the child. He is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Let's take a moment to unpack each of these names. The Christ child is a wonderful counselor. The Hebrew word that is translated as *wonderful* means wonderful in a miraculous or supernatural way, and thus, His counsel is perfect in revealing the ways of God. His example is the perfect way, for it is God's way, and thus this counselor has full authority to say as Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

By studying His life, we are counseled on the best way to live our lives. Each one of us is born with a flawed human nature. A bit of introspection reveals that we are broken creatures as the result of the fall, susceptible to sin and folly, addiction, and self-centeredness. Thus, a wonderful counselor who teaches us with the perfect example of His life is what we need. What we need is what God made manifest in Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus, God shows His love for the creatures He created in His image.

But Jesus is more than the perfect example. He is the Mighty God. If the Christ child's identity were unclear, this name makes it amply clear. That special child, born over 2000 years ago, was laid in the feeding trough of domesticated animals in a backwater province, descended from a subjugated and oppressed people. His mother and earthly father had little to offer in the way of worldly wealth. Unlikely as it seems, this child, the prophet declares under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is the Mighty God.

When Isaiah wrote this prophecy, he was no doubt aware of what he was writing, for the description Mighty God is used by Moses in reference to the God of Israel. This name for the child means that He existed before Abraham and Adam at the foundation of the world. What boggles the mind is that the child laid in the manger, together with His heavenly Father, spoke the universe into existence and fashioned all that we see. Can there be any question that the name Mighty God is perfectly fitting for the Christ child?

If any questions remain as to the identity of the Christ child, they are dispensed with in the third name of the child, for He is the Eternal Father. The Christ-child in His existence is eternal. He had no beginning, and He will have no end. His eternal nature is precisely what the Scriptures declare about God. Some don't understand how the Christ child can be called Father but consider this. The Christ child is the second person of the Trinity, which means He shares all attributes of God. The Christ-child possesses fatherhood, for He is the Creator and progenitor of all things. Jesus says in John 14:9, ". . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" We have no doubt, we have no question, we do not have to wonder about the nature of the Father, for in the Christ-child, the Eternal Father is revealed.

The meaning of the last name of the child is deep. The Christ child is the Prince of Peace, and this is a recurrent theme in the Christmas story. How did Jesus bring peace to the Earth? Our world is filled with hatred, violence, terrorism, and discord, and it is getting worse. To understand why the Christ child is the

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Prince of Peace, we need to journey back about 3,500 years, or 1500 years before Jesus was born, to the book of Leviticus, Chapter 3, where the sacrificial peace offering is described.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace because He was the only one, in His sinless perfection, who could pay the price of peace between God and humanity. Jesus purchased our reconciliation to God by His sacrifice on the cross. Moreover, Jesus brings eternal peace because He will preside over an eternal kingdom with His Father, in a new heaven and a new Earth where the tabernacle of God will be among men (see Revelation 21-22). In the eternal kingdom, He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, crying, or pain; the first things will have passed away. The Christ-child will bring these things about, for He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He will be our God, and we will be His people, enjoying intimacy with Him that is only possible in a place where all sin and death have been removed. Peace with God is found only through faith in Christ, and these wonderful things are only for those who believe in and know Jesus.

Furthermore, when we consider the attributes and characteristics of God described in the Bible, we also find that Jesus possesses these same characteristics and attributes, as summarized in the Table below.²³¹

Attribute of God	Also True About Jesus
Self-existent "I Am"	John 8:24
Alpha and Omega	Revelation 1:17-18; 2:8
Lord	Matthew 12:8; Acts 7:59-60
Savior	Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11
King	Revelation 17:14; 19:16
Judge	John 5:22
Light	John 1:4, 9
Redeemer	Acts 20:28
Creator	John 1:2, 3, 10; Colossians 1:15-18
Giver of Life	John 5:21; 10:28
Forgiver of Sin	Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:1-12
Omnipresent	Matthew 18:20; 28:20
Omniscient	Matthew 9:4; Luke 5:4-6

Omnipotent	Matthew 28:18; John 10:18
Eternal	John 8:58; Isaiah 9:6
Due Worship	Matthew 14:33; John 9:38
Raised Jesus	John 10:17-18

Conclusion: Jesus Is God and Savior

We can now add to the logical argument we began with.

1. Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies demonstrating that He is the Messiah.
2. The Messiah is the Son of God.
3. The Messiah is the Savior that God sent into the world.
4. Therefore, Jesus is the Son of God and Savior.
5. However, the Son of God is fully God.
6. Therefore, Jesus Is God and Savior

The Christian concept of the Trinity is that there is one God consisting of three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who are equal in their divine natures, existing eternally in loving communion, relationship, and interaction, fully unified in purpose. As the Second person of the Trinity, Jesus is fully God and fully human. He has a divine nature and a human nature. The role of the Son in creation was to accomplish redemption as Savior. Thus, Jesus is God and Savior.

Did Jesus Claim to be God?

It is said by skeptics, “Jesus never claimed to be God. His followers just made that up after He died.” The evidence is quite to the contrary. Consider what Jesus says about Himself in the New Testament. In John 10:30, Jesus says that He is one with God: “I and the Father are one.” In Mark 14:63-65, Jesus claims to be the Christ or the Messiah. The Jews understood that He was claiming to be God in the flesh, so they tried to kill Him as we learn in this passage from the Gospel of Mark:

“...Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, “What further need do we have of

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witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. (Mark 14:63-65)

In a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus tells her plainly that He is the Messiah in John 4:24-26. The woman questions Jesus, ““I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.””

Speaking to the religious leaders of His day, Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” (John 8:58) The only way Jesus could have existed before Abraham, who lived on Earth over 2,000 years before Him, is if Jesus transcended space and time as eternal God. Moreover, in referring to Himself as the “I Am,” Jesus is invoking the name of God from Exodus 3:14. Here we find Jesus’ affirmation that He is God. The Jewish leaders understood what Jesus was claiming in declaring to be the “I am” because they immediately attempted to stone Him for blasphemy.

Study Questions

1. Explain how Psalm 2:1-8 leads to the conclusion that the Messiah is the Son of God.
2. Was the Messiah sent for the Jews or also for the Gentiles? Explain and provide support for your answer from Isaiah 49:6. How do Isaiah 49:6 and Isaiah 53 link the role of the Messiah and the Savior?
3. What statements in Isaiah 9:6-7 lead to the conclusion that Jesus is God? Describe all the attributes of the Christ child that you find in this passage.
4. Write a paragraph summarizing how Jesus shares the attributes of God. How does this show that Jesus is God?
5. Did Jesus claim to be God? Explain.

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Ten Reasons to Believe the Bible Is the Word of God

The essential, non-negotiable beliefs of the Christian faith include:

1. The existence of the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who created all things from nothing.
2. The Bible (66 books of the Old and New Testament) is the inerrant (without error), divine, inspired, authoritative Word of God, trustworthy in all it teaches.
3. All human beings were created in the image of God, but by their sin and disobedience (the fall) became alienated from God and incurred physical and spiritual death. As a result of the fall, the image of God has been defaced but not erased in all human beings.
4. Jesus is the promised Old Testament Messiah, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus is truly God and man.
5. Jesus, in His sinless righteousness, was the sacrifice acceptable to God for the sins of the world. Out of love for the world, He suffered and died as payment for the sins of the world.
6. All who by the Holy Spirit receive Jesus, repenting of their sins and believing in Him, are reconciled to God and saved for everlasting life in heaven. Those who do not receive Jesus are lost and will be eternally separated from God in hell.
7. Christians are called into the universal fellowship of the church that is the body of Christ for the purpose of worship through the word and sacraments, training in discipleship, and evangelizing the world.
8. On the last day, Jesus will return to judge the world. The saved will receive the blessing of eternal life, and the lost will suffer eternal separation from God.

The Essential Truths of Christianity Come from the Bible

When we consider these beliefs that Christians have held sacred since the first century AD, we see that they come from the Bible and the teaching of Jesus. God's existence is revealed in nature (see Chapter 2), but beyond that obvious truth, the truth claims of Christianity flow from the Bible. Therefore, it is crucial that we always keep before us the reasons for believing that the Bible is the divinely revealed, inerrant Word of God, true in all it affirms.

R. A. Torrey was a protégé and successor to D. L. Moody, the great evangelist of the 1800s. The legacy of Moody and Torrey is alive and well today and includes two important Christian universities, Biola University in Los Angeles and the Moody Bible Institute. Moody preached to millions in pulpits throughout the world, and he would take the Yale-educated Torrey along. Because of his international reputation, Moody was able to gain access to the pulpits of large theologically liberal churches. On many occasions, he would tell Torrey to preach his sermon titled, "Ten Reasons Why I believe the Bible is the Word of God." Then as now, the Bible was under attack, and Moody understood that the truth of the Christian faith rested upon and was rooted in the Bible.²³²

As the title of this chapter implies, its purpose is to summarize essential lines of reasoning that lead to the conclusion that the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God. Some of the content of this chapter is also mentioned by Torrey, but there has been much advancement in biblical scholarship and apologetics in the last 100 years. Also, expect that some things you have already read will be repeated or summarized with the goal of compiling a hopefully compelling defense of the Bible in a single chapter. Bear in mind that there are many books available on the topics contained in this chapter for further study. Some can be found in the notes for this chapter. Below, you will find ten reasons to believe the Bible is the Word of God.

1. The Bible is the Word of God according to the Resurrected Christ.

Jesus proved He is the Son of God by fulfilling the Messianic prophecies, performing miracles, and rising from the

dead (See Chapters 6, 7, & 11). As Professor Gary Habermas observes, “By raising Jesus from the dead, God placed His stamp of approval on Jesus’ entire message, both concerning himself and his other teachings, because God would not have raised a heretic from the dead.”²³³

If you accept that Jesus is the Divine Son of God who rose from the dead, you are compelled to listen to and believe what He says about the Bible. In short, Jesus tells us that the Bible is the Word of God. Jesus says this about the Old Testament in Matthew 5:17-18:

¹⁷ Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ “For truly I say to you, until heaven and Earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

The Law and the Prophets refer to the entire Old Testament, so what Jesus is saying here is not a single word of the Old Testament will fail to be fulfilled. The divine Son of God is saying that all the recorded history in the Old Testament is correct, and the prophecies, past, and future, will come to pass as they are written. Jesus is saying that the Old Testament text is trustworthy. You can count on it, and it is true. So, we have Jesus’ word that the Old Testament is trustworthy and true.

What about the New Testament? What assurance do we have from Jesus that it is trustworthy? Here is what Jesus says in John 16:12-14, shortly before He would be nailed to a cross:

¹² I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. ¹³ “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ “He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

In this passage, Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit (which occurred at Pentecost—see Acts 2:1-4) and furthermore that the Holy Spirit would guide the disciples into all the truth. All the truth that the Holy Spirit revealed to the disciples became the New Testament. So, the clear inference is

that the New Testament is a product of the divine will of God and Jesus by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is completely trustworthy because God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18; John 17:17).

Moreover, the Apostles Peter and Paul taught that the Bible is the Word of God. The Apostle Paul writes, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Peter affirms “. . .no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Apostles Peter and Paul believed and taught that the Scriptures were given to us by God.

2. The Bible is the Word of God because of the fulfilled prophecy it contains. (See Chapters 5-8)

The Bible contains 31,124 verses, 27% of which are prophetic in nature; 1817 predictions about the future are made in 8352 verses.²³⁴ Prophetic passages in the Bible deal with Israel’s fortunes and future, Jerusalem, the nations of the ancient world, and the events of the end times. Messianic prophecies concern the coming Servant of the Lord. The Bible contains many accurate prophecies made hundreds or thousands of years in advance, a thing no human could do. Thus, the Bible must be the product of the omniscient (all-knowing) mind of God. Theories that the Old Testament was revised to match the life of Christ have been demolished by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, many of which predate the birth of Jesus by 100 years or more. The prophecies of God’s promised Messiah were made long before Jesus was born, and they were fulfilled in His life.

The Bible contains about 100 Messianic prophecies, which were written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. The Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament was to be a male who would enter life through the normal birth process; He would be a descendant of Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, and David; He would be born in Bethlehem of a virgin; He would escape after birth into Egypt as a baby; His ministry would be in Galilee. He would be put to death for the sins of His people; He would be rejected by the Jews but would bring salvation to the Gentiles;

He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver; in death, His hands and feet would be pierced; soldiers would gamble for His clothing; He would be buried in the tomb of a rich man; and, He would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven. Moreover, in Daniel 7, the Bible predicts the exact timing of the Messiah's death, which coincides with the death of Jesus. All of these and many other prophecies not mentioned here were fulfilled in the life of Jesus. When all the prophecies in the Bible are considered, we see that hundreds of these prophecies have been fulfilled, but many are appointed for the future. A detailed treatment of Bible prophecy can be found in *Every Prophecy of the Bible* by professor and prophecy scholar John F. Walvoord.

While we may not know in advance what we will have for lunch on a given day, the Bible, because it is from God, predicted the details of many future events hundreds, in some cases, thousands of years in advance. The logic that we derive from this fact is:

1. Only an all-knowing God could know the future hundreds of years in advance.
 2. The Bible accurately predicts the future hundreds of years in advance.
 3. Therefore, the Bible is from God.
- 3. The Bible is the Word of God because it is the most reliable text of the ancient world. (See Chapter 9)**

The original copies of ancient manuscripts (known as autographs) are generally not available for examination because they were often written on perishable materials such as papyrus or parchments. Clay tablets, pottery, and stone inscriptions fare much better by comparison. While this may seem of concern, when many copies of manuscripts are available, it is a straightforward task for textual scholars to compare texts to determine how a text has changed over time and to infer the text's transmission accuracy over time. Concerning the Bible, the task of identifying textual variants is aided by the vast number of early Old and New Testament manuscript copies that survive to this day.

A recent tally of Bible manuscripts includes 5,856 Greek New Testament manuscripts, 18,130 New Testament early translations (Syriac, Coptic, Arabic, Latin, and other languages), and 42,300 Old Testament scrolls and codices. Many New Testament manuscripts date to the early centuries AD, with fragments dating back to the early second century, just a few decades after the death of the Apostle John. It is estimated that if the Old and New Testament manuscripts were stacked, they would form a stack 2.5 miles high. In comparison, a stack only about four feet high on average would be available for classical writers such as Thucydides, Herodotus, Plato, Sophocles, Tacitus, Homer, and Pliny. Consequently, compared to the Bible, the available manuscripts for the classical writers have fared far worse. While the works of ancient classical writers are accepted virtually without question, the same treatment or better should be afforded to the Bible since it is supported by far better manuscript evidence.²³⁵

For the New Testament, we have ancient copies and fragments dating to the second century. For the Old Testament, copies and fragments of virtually all books were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, dating to the second century BC, over 100 years before Jesus lived. Attestation of the ancient nature of the Old Testament is found in the Ketef Hinnom scrolls dating to about the seventh century BC. It contains blessings similar to Numbers 6:24-26.²³⁶

The New Testament manuscripts include fragments of the Gospel of John dating to about AD 130 and nearly complete Gospels of Luke and John dating to AD 200. Codex *Sinaiticus* contains the entire New Testament and has been dated to the mid-fourth century, less than 300 years following the original writing of the New Testament. These are a few of the early manuscripts of the thousands of New Testament manuscripts that still survive. In contrast, the situation is not the same for the books of classical authors. Only 188 copies of *Thucydides' History* and 106 copies of *Herodotus' History* are still extant. Yet, they are considered among the most reliable historical works of the ancient world.²³⁷

By analyzing available manuscripts, scholars have concluded that the New Testament transmission accuracy is over

99 percent. It is estimated that 400,000 variations are found in the extant New Testament manuscripts. This seems like a large number, but remember, there are thousands of manuscripts. The majority of variations in the New Testament manuscripts are misspellings, omission of words, repetitions, reversal of letters, wrong division of words, use of synonyms, etc.²³⁸ These are small things, for they were written when there were no dictionaries, spell check, or the internet. According to the agnostic New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman, “Essential Christian Beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament.”²³⁹ Thus, none of the variations described impact the basic beliefs or teachings of Christianity.

Regarding the Old Testament, three major groups of manuscripts are available for comparison, the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew Masoretic Text, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Old Testament variants include omission of words, syllables, or letters, doubling up on the writing of these, reversal of letters or words, joining words together, splitting words, mistaking similar letters, or skipping lines.²⁴⁰ Given the vast number of available manuscripts, the original intention of the authors of the Old Testament Books can be discerned with a high degree of certainty. Christian apologists Josh and Sean McDowell conclude, “The text of the Hebrew Bible was copied with a high degree of accuracy. . . .”²⁴¹ Thus, as paleographer and biblical scholar Fredric Kenyon concluded,

The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true “Word of God, faithfully handed down from generation to generation throughout the centuries.”²⁴²

God’s providence preserved His Word

Therefore, when you read the Bible, you can have high confidence that you are reading a text that accurately represents the message that the author, prophet, or apostle intended to convey. The wealth of manuscripts available for comparison leads to the conclusion that the providence of God was at work in history, preserving His Word for the ages and future

generations.

4. The Bible is the Word of God because of the unity of its message.

The unity of the Bible (i.e., the cohesive story that it conveys) declares that it is from God. The story of the Bible spans long periods of time, the origin of humanity, the fall of humanity, the redemption of humanity, and the culmination of God's plan for humanity. What is striking is that the Bible was not written by a single author at a single time. Instead, it was written by about 40 authors, over a period of about 1,500 years, in different locations and languages and in different literary styles.

Yet the Bible text exhibits amazing unity. Each author's contribution reveals part of the overall story, and it all fits together like tiles placed into a mosaic. Think about it for a moment. How could the Bible convey such a unified story when it was written by many people, over many years, and in many places unless the storyline was coordinated in some way? It seems that the best answer is that God is the source of the Bible. That is why the story is unified. Consider the following logic:

1. The Bible exhibits strong unity in the story it conveys.
2. No human lived long enough to unify the storyline of the Bible.
3. If the unity of the Bible is not of man, then it must be of God, for the unity of the Bible could certainly not be an accident.

R. A. Torrey illustrated this point, likening the Bible to a vast building. Torrey writes,

Suppose a vast building were to be erected, the stones for which were brought from the quarries in Rutland, Vermont; Berea, Ohio; Kasota, Minnesota; and Middletown, Connecticut. Each stone was hewn into final shape in the quarry from which it was brought. These stones were of all varieties of shape and size, cubical, rectangular, cylindrical, etc., but when they were brought together, every stone fitted into its place, and when put together, there rose before you a temple absolutely perfect in every outline, with its

domes, sidewalls, buttresses, arches, transepts—not a gap or a flaw anywhere.²⁴³

Torrey then asks his hearers how they would account for such a vast structure coming together from different but perfectly fitting parts obtained from diverse locations. Torrey concludes with the only reasonable answer. The vast structure and its perfectly fitting diverse parts are the product of the “master-mind of the architect who planned it all, and gave each individual worker his specifications for the work.”²⁴⁴ So too, the only reasonable conclusion is that the eternal God is behind the intricate story of the Bible, woven together over 1500 years.

5. The Bible is the Word of God because its claims are affirmed by the archeological record. (See Chapter 9)

In the last one hundred years, archaeology has provided much evidence supporting the claims of the Bible. Many archaeological finds corroborate the facts presented in the New Testament. While archaeology cannot prove the Bible and its message, it can add important, compelling circumstantial evidence in support of it. The following is a partial list of archaeological discoveries that affirm specific facts presented in the New Testament:²⁴⁵

1. Structural remnants of Herod’s Temple (John 2:20)
2. An inscription naming “Herod, King of Judea” (Matthew 2:1)
3. An inscription bearing the name and title “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea” (Luke 3:1)
4. A coin inscribed with the name Quirinius who ordered the census at the time of Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:2)
5. A cave in Bethlehem long held to be the birthplace of Jesus (Luke 2:4-7)
6. The town of Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee an important center of Jesus’ ministry (Mark 2:1)
7. The house of the Apostle Peter in Capernaum (Matthew 8:14)

8. The ossuary of Caiaphas, the high priest who condemned Jesus (Matthew 26:3)
9. Remains of a crucifixion victim with a seven-inch nail remaining in his ankle bone (Acts 2:23)
10. The location of the crucifixion of Jesus and His place of burial (John 19:17; Mark 15:46)
11. The Pool of Siloam where Jesus performed a miraculous healing (John 9:1-12)
12. An inscription bearing the name “Erastus” mentioned by Paul in the Book of Romans (Romans 16:23)
13. The judgment seat where Paul stood before Gallio, Proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12)
14. The Pool of Bethesda, where Jesus healed a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years (John 5:1-5)
15. The Arch of Titus in the Roman forum that depicts the plunder of the temple after its destruction in AD 70 as prophesied by Jesus (Matthew 24:1-2)

Archaeology is a powerful witness to the plausibility of the New Testament, as these specific examples show. Regarding the Old Testament, the famed archaeologist of the Bible lands, Nelson Glueck, who excavated over 1,000 ancient biblical sites, concludes:

...It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible.²⁴⁶

So, according to Glueck, no one has ever dug anything up that contradicts what the Bible says. Quite to the contrary, the Bible has been affirmed by scores of findings. How could this be unless the Bible is true history?

6. The Bible is the Word of God because of the superiority of its teaching.

Consider the wisdom of the proverbs and the sublime nature of the Psalms and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:7).

Consider the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), where with a word picture, Jesus embeds in the minds of those who read it a mandate for the love of everyone. When we turn to the Sermon on the Mount, we find words of wisdom and words of love that, when put into practice, lead to peace, harmony, love, and joy. There Jesus raises the bar of moral teaching, calling humans out not only for evil actions but also for evil thoughts. Jesus calls His followers to not even entertain anger, violence, lust, or retribution.

According to Jesus, it is not enough to avoid evil deeds; the perfection of our God requires that we not even harbor evil thoughts, lust, and malice. These are higher ideals than can be found in the teachings of the world's other religions. We must love our enemies and those who persecute us; we are to give without expecting anything in return; we are to put others before ourselves; and we are to love our neighbor (who is everyone) as ourselves. Where can a compendium of moral teaching superior to those of Jesus be found? You are welcome to search for it in the sacred scriptures of the world. Please let me know if you find it, but I do not believe you will.

When we consider the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, they were ahead of their time and revolutionary in their treatment of women, the poor, the marginalized, and the downtrodden. They were revolutionary in the hope they contained. The simple way in which Jesus came and lived speaks to the inclusivity of the gospel. Nowhere in the books of the world do we find more concern for righteousness, justice, and the worth of individuals created in the image of God. The teachings of Jesus are sublime, have the ring of truth, and rise above human wisdom, which point to their divine origin.

7. The Bible is the Word of God because of its scientific reliability

For 3500 years, the Bible has declared that the universe had a beginning and was created from nothing. Up until the work of Einstein a little over 100 years ago, the scientific view was that the universe was eternal. Today, virtually all scientists agree that the universe had a beginning as reported in the Book of Genesis

(see Chapter 2). This radical change in the scientific view led agnostic Astronomer Robert Jastrow to write:

For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.²⁴⁷

The Bible is an ancient book and is not to be treated as a scientific textbook. But where it affirms truths about creation, the natural world, historical events, and the nature of humanity, time and again, it is found to speak correctly.

During the 1920s, Edwin Hubble published the results of his astronomical observations, which proved that the universe was expanding. Until then, it was thought that the stars and galaxies stayed in fixed positions in relation to each other. The current scientific understanding is that the universe came into existence when energy transformed into matter, beginning from an infinitely hot and infinitely dense single point (sometimes called a singularity), which inflated at incredibly high rates of speed.²⁴⁸ Thus, our universe did not come as a rearrangement of existing matter but instead as the formation of matter from pure energy. Moreover, it is expanding at a rapid rate.

Interestingly, for centuries Christian theists, informed by Genesis, have declared that the universe was created by God *ex nihilo*, meaning that the universe was not created from pre-existing material. Recognition of the scientific foreknowledge of the Bible prompted physicist and Nobel Laureate Arno Penzias to say: "...the best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted, had I had nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms, the Bible as a whole."²⁴⁹

While the expansion of the universe came as a surprise to scientists, it was declared in the Book of Psalms 3000 years ago. In the Bible, we find about a dozen references to the stretching out of the heavens, exactly as Edwin Hubble discovered. In Psalm 104, we read:

Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great;
You are clothed with splendor and majesty, Covering Yourself

with light as with a cloak, Stretching out heaven like a tent curtain. (Psalm 104:1–2)

And in Isaiah 45, God speaking through the prophet over 2700 years ago, says: “It is I who made the Earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands And I ordained all their host” (Isaiah 45:12).

Noah’s Flood

Where the Bible speaks about science, its claims are affirmed by the data. While scientific theories and speculation may contradict the claims of the Bible, no scientifically proven facts show the claims of the Bible to be false. The much-maligned flood of Noah finds considerable support in the historical and cultural record. Dr. John Morris has studied 200 stories that describe a flood event in human history. Morris concluded that flood accounts collected from ancient cultures throughout the world affirm many of the same key facts found in the Genesis flood account.²⁵⁰ How could 200 cultures throughout the world have the same key facts about a devastating flood unless the flood of Noah is a historical event?

In Genesis 6:15, God gives Noah the dimensions and aspect ratio according to which he is to construct the ark, saying, “This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits.” An investigation of the stability of a vessel constructed according to these dimensions was conducted by a group of researchers at the Korea Research Institute of Ships and Ocean Engineering. The group tested 12 different hull forms of the same displacement using 1/50 scale models. The researchers concluded that the hull form of Noah’s Ark was the safest in high wind and waves, as we read below:

Total safety index, defined as the weighted average of three relative safety performances, showed that the Ark had a superior level of safety in high winds and waves compared with the other hull forms studied. The voyage limit of the Ark, estimated on the basis of modern passenger ships, criteria, revealed that it could have navigated through waves higher than 30 metres.²⁵¹

Other evidence of scientific foreknowledge in the Bible

According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the universe is running out of usable energy, which agrees with Psalm 102:25-26, which states the universe is wearing out like a garment.

The Bible was written in ancient times when it was generally believed there were 3000-6000 stars. Yet, in 600 BC, the Prophet Jeremiah wrote that the stars (hosts) of the heavens could not be counted, just as the sand of the sea cannot be measured (Jeremiah 33:22). Jeremiah's description fits with the current estimate of stars which now stands at about 100 billion trillion (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, that the Earth is round and hangs in space on nothing is affirmed in the Old Testament (Job 26:7; Isaiah 40:22). Genesis 17:12 prescribes the circumcision of male babies on the eight-day after birth, the day when the vitamin K level is highest in infants, an important factor in coagulation and minimizing bleeding.²⁵² In addition, precautions for quarantining the sick were stated in Leviticus 13:46 long before the efficacy of quarantining was discovered by scientists.

Adequate materials for life

The Bible states that Adam, the first human, was created from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). The dust of the ground is the crust of the Earth which contains all the naturally occurring elements including the 19 essential elements of life.²⁵³ In contrast, the Quran provides three contradictory statements indicating that life was created from water (Surah 21:30), blood (Surah 96:1-2), and clay (Surah 15:26), all of which lack the essential complement of elements for the creation of life.

Conclusion regarding the Bible's scientific foreknowledge

How could the Bible reveal these truths long before they became known to science? It appears that the Creator revealed these things to the Bible authors.

Claims of scientific foreknowledge in the Quran

In 1976, Maurice Bucaille, the personal physician of the king of Saudi Arabia, published his book *The Bible, the Quran*

and Science, arguing for the scientific foreknowledge of the Quran. According to Bucaille:

The Quranic description of certain stages in the development of the embryo corresponds exactly to what we today know about it, and the Quran does not contain a single statement that is open to criticism from modern science.²⁵⁴

In making this statement, Bucaille refers to the following Quranic passage describing the creation of life by Allah:

Then we made him a sperm in a fixed lodging. Then we made the sperm a hanging (thing), then we made the hanging into a chewed (thing), then we made the chewed into bones, then we clothed the bones with flesh, then we developed it into another creation, so blessed be Allah, the best of Creators. (Surah 23:13-14)

Is this Quranic passage really a good description of how life develops? Former Muslim and Medical doctor Nabeel Quereshi challenges and rejects Bucaille's interpretation:

To a student of developmental biology, this verse is singularly unimpressive. Even Bucaille begins his assessment by remarking that, at face value, the scientific statements are "totally unacceptable to scientists specializing in this field." However, he explains that the problem is the seventh-century vocabulary the Quran was forced to use. Once we substitute modern scientific vocabulary (such as "uterus" for "lodging"), the problems are more than resolved. As a Muslim who grew up with somewhat fluid interpretations of the Quran, I conceded Bucaille's point. But as a student of medicine, I realized that no matter how much we substituted the words, one aspect of this verse was simply inaccurate. The verse explains the sequential development of an embryo, but the sequence is incorrect. An embryo does not first become bones to be later clothed with flesh. One layer of an embryo, the mesoderm, differentiates into bone and flesh at the same time.²⁵⁵

Creation stories in Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism

Contrary to the scientific understanding that the universe was not created from pre-existing material, the Quran seems to

affirm that the universe began as a mass that was then separated: “Do the disbelievers not realize that the heavens and earth were once one mass then We split them apart? And We created from water every living thing. Will they not then believe? (Surah 21:30).

There are many Hindu creation stories. Two are summarized in the passages below.

First Hindu creation story:

Upanishad 1.4: The world is said to have come into existence because the Primeval One, having become bored being the only being in existence, split Itself into a variety of forms and manifestations (i.e., the material world and all of its beings) so that, through them, It could experience a loving and playful relationship with Itself.²⁵⁶

Second Hindu creation story:

Vishnu Purana: Vishnu, lying on an ocean of milk atop the serpent Sesha, sprung a lotus from his navel that contained the god Brahma. Having been sprung from Vishnu's navel, Brahma creates all living beings, as well as the sun, moon, planets, etc. and a number of other gods and demigods. Following Brahma's creative acts, it is then said that Vishnu expanded himself into Ksirodakasayi Vishnu (Paramatma) and entered into everything that exists in the material and immaterial spheres.²⁵⁷

Buddhism offers no specific creation account. The Buddha declined to answer questions about the origin of the Earth and focused his followers on how to avoid suffering. “This is partly due to the fact that Buddhists do not believe in any God who has created the world.”²⁵⁸

Regarding the creation of humanity according to Hinduism, V. Venkata Rao provides this summary of two contradictory accounts:

According to the Matsya Purana, sage Manu was the first man (and the first human) created by God. In the above Purana it was mentioned that Lord Brahma created, using his divine powers, the Goddess Shatrupa (as Saraswati was first called) and out of the union of Brahma and Shatrupa was born Manu. Manu obtained through long penance his wife Ananti. The rest of the human race

originated from Manu and Ananti....[The] Rigveda has a different account of the origin of the human race, which was born from the five children (four male, and one female) of Lord Prajapati, as Brahma was earlier called. Of the two versions, the Matsya Purana is more popular and complete.²⁵⁹

It is left to the reader to determine whether they hear the ring of truth in the Islamic and Hindu creation stories.

8. The Bible is the Word of God because of the influence it has had on human culture.

Many skeptics and critics of Christianity point to its failures and the harm committed in the name of Christ. Examples often cited include the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, and the Salem Witch Trials as evidence that Christianity is evil. But as one author points out,

Since oppression and mayhem are neither religious duties for Christians nor logical applications of the teachings of Jesus, violence done in the name of Christ cannot be laid at his door. This conduct might tell you something about people. It tells you nothing about God or the gospel.²⁶⁰

Jesus rejected violence in His Name and rebuked His followers who wanted to fight those who came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:51-56). Christians are sinful creatures, and they often poorly represent Jesus and His teaching. It is true that Christians are often poor ambassadors for Jesus, but that fails as a reason to reject His teaching.

Christians often fail as ambassadors of Christ

No one disagrees that Christians should be more like Jesus. Yet, this overlooks the long list of good that has been done by Christians in the world. In his book, *What If Jesus Would Have Never Been Born*, pastor and scholar D. James Kennedy enumerates and provides supporting evidence of the benefits to society resulting from the application of the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ in society in recognition that all human life is created in the image of God.²⁶¹ These include:

- Hospitals to care for the sick
- Universities, many of which were started for Christian purposes
- Literacy and education for the masses
- Capitalism and free enterprise
- Representative government
- Civil liberties
- The abolition of slavery championed by British evangelicals and the Northern church
- Modern science
- The elevation of women
- Benevolence and charity flowing from the Good Samaritan ethic
- Higher standards of justice
- The elevation of the common man
- The condemnation of immorality
- High regard for human life (unborn, sick, and elderly)
- The codifying and setting to the writing many of the world's languages
- The great development of art and music
- The countless changed lives transformed from liabilities into assets to society because of the gospel
- The eternal salvation of countless souls

Christians established hospitals to care for the sick

Let us consider a few examples from this list. First, the development of hospitals. Because Christians believe that each human life is created in the image of God, each life has great value (Genesis 1:26). Concern for healing the sick flows from the Earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, who spent much of His time healing people. Moreover, caring for the sick and poor is mandated by Jesus (Matthew 25:31-46). In recognition of the Bible's teaching on this matter, the bishops of the church in attendance at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) were instructed to start hospitals in all cathedral cities. Early Christian hospitals were opened in Caesarea, Rome, and Paris and were often supported by charitable giving.²⁶²

In the 1600s, Catholic reformer Saint Vincent de Paul co-founded the Daughters of Charity to emulate Christ in caring for the sick. Even the renowned French skeptic Voltaire wrote glowingly in the 1700s of Christian organizations serving the poor and sick, saying, “The religious institutes devoted to succoring the poor and serving the sick are among those most worthy of respect.”²⁶³ Florence Nightingale, influenced by Lutheran Pastor, Theodor Fliedner, founded the modern profession of nursing.²⁶⁴

Kennedy writes:

In the United States, the first hospitals were started largely by Christians. Prior to the establishment of the first hospital—the Pennsylvania Hospital (established in Philadelphia in 1751), which received great input from the Quakers—there were almshouses. Started by Christians, these were refuge shelters for the poor and the sick.²⁶⁵

Moreover, Charles E. Rosenberg of the University of Pennsylvania notes that the early hospitals in the United States were “framed and motivated by the responsibilities of Christian stewardship.”²⁶⁶ Hundreds of hospitals retain religious affiliation to this day.

The Red Cross was started by an evangelical Christian, Henry Dunant. While he was in Italy on business, Dunant witnessed a bloody battle in the fight for Italy’s unification. It was there that his vision for the Red Cross was born. So powerful an idea was the Red Cross that it was adopted first in Turkey as the Red Crescent and has spread throughout the Muslim world.²⁶⁷ Christian missionaries established hundreds of hospitals. In 1935, half of the hospitals in China were run by Christians.²⁶⁸

Christians undertook to educate the masses

Judaism and Christianity are concerned with what the Bible teaches. In order for the common person to have access to the Bible, education is requisite. Thus, there is a long and traceable influence of Christianity in the expansion of education for the

average person. Under the influence of the learned Christian scholar Alcuin, Charlemagne issued an edict in 787 “that bishops and abbots (the heads of monasteries) should begin educating young boys in reading and writing, the Bible, theology, and grammar.”²⁶⁹ According to Garry J. Crites of Duke University, the effects of the educational reforms of the Carolingian Renaissance were not permanent but lasted well into the future. Crites writes, “Its influence would be felt 400 years later in the thinking of Scholasticism, 700 years later among the intellectuals of the Renaissance, and even in the musings of Christian intellectuals in the twenty-first century.”²⁷⁰

Early modern universities were established by the 1200s in the scholastic period at Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, and Bologna for the purposes of educating scholars in Christian theology, church law, medicine, and Aristotelian thought.^{271, 272} Later, the Protestant reformers encouraged the reading of the Bible by common people. Puritan support for education was affirmed by the passing of a law requiring the education of all children in 1642.²⁷³

Later on the American continent, the prestigious Ivy League was established. Harvard, Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, Brown, Dartmouth, and Cornell were founded for the purpose of training Christian leaders. Of the first 108 colleges established on the American continent, 106 were established as Christian institutions. By 1860, there were 246 colleges in America, and all but 17 had Christian affiliations.²⁷⁴

The positive influence of Christianity on Western society

Have the sacred books of Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism ever produced such good in human society? That is a question for the reader to research and ponder. Kennedy and the other authors referenced lay out a compelling case for the immensely positive benefits to society in the name of Jesus Christ.

Vishal Mangalwadi, a leading Christian intellectual and scholar from India, argues that the Bible has been transformative to the “social, political, and religious institutions that have sustained Western culture for the past millennium.”²⁷⁵ In reference to the United States, Mangalwadi notes that virtually every president of the United States has taken his oath of office

with his right hand on the Bible, “some who did not do so were following their understanding of Jesus, who asked his disciples not to swear. For some it was but a tradition.”²⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it is a tradition that has continued to the present day.

To show the continued influence of the Bible, Mangalwadi quotes several great American presidents:

With biblical Christianity in mind, Washington said: “Religion and morality are the essential pillars of civil society.”

Washington was not alone in believing the Bible was the key to American character. President John Quincy Adams said, “So great is my veneration of the Bible, that the earlier my children begin to read it the more confident will be my hope that they will prove useful citizens of their country and respectable members of society. I have for many years made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year.”

President Abraham Lincoln stated that “the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to men. All the good from the savior of the world is communicated to us through this book.” In a public message to the American Bible Society in August 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower summed up the Bible’s place in America: “The Bible is endorsed by ages. Our civilization is built upon its words.”²⁷⁷

Kennedy cites Earl Warren, the former governor of California noted for his centrist to liberal views on many issues:

I believe no one can read the history of our country without realizing that the Good Book and the spirit of the Saviour have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses... Whether we look to the first Charter of Virginia...or to the Charter of New England...or to the Charter of Massachusetts Bay...or to the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut...the same objective is present; a Christian land governed by Christian perspectives.²⁷⁸

The Bible has been a powerful positive influence in the world. It has been foundational in the development of western culture, which has arguably produced the freest and most productive human societies and nations. Such a book cannot be the product of human authorship.

9. The Bible is the Word of God because of the depth and profundity of its teaching.

The Bible is the only book that answers the fundamental questions of human existence: Why is there anything? Who is God? Who are men and women? Why am I here? What is wrong with the world and humanity? How can things be made right? What is the Creator's plan? What happens when I die? Why is there so much evil in the world? How did the Creator create? How will the world end? What is my purpose?²⁷⁹

Apologetics scholar and television host John Ankerberg identifies unique aspects of the Bible related to the depth of teaching it conveys. Of the world's religious books, the Bible begins with the creation by God of the universe and all that is in it from nothing and explains the sequence of creation culminating with creatures created in His image.²⁸⁰ The Bible explains why things are so bad in our world and lays out God's plan to fashion a people for Himself who will freely love Him (Titus 2:11-14). As we read in Chapter 7 of the Book of Revelation, heaven will be filled with a multitude of people from every nation and tongue in heaven. In Leviticus 26:12, God declares to the Israelites: "I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people." At the very end of the Bible, in Revelation 21:7, we find these divine words "The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my Son." God desires to be our God and for us to be His people.

Intimate communion with His creatures is what God intended for Adam and Eve from the outset. Sin destroyed that communion, but the Bible reveals God's plan and actions in history to reclaim His creation. At the fall of Adam and Eve, God announced a savior for the world (Gen 3:15). God's program progressed, setting the stage for the entry of the Savior (Messiah) through Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and the nation of Israel. Jesus is the Messiah, and through His work and the work of the Holy Spirit, the church was born. The faithful of all ages will live in eternal communion with God. This is a grand, true story that can be found nowhere else in the world's sacred books.

Only the Bible offers salvation that is available to all as a free gift by the grace of God. Where all other religious books tell people how to work their way to God, the Bible tells people they cannot work their way to God. The Bible announces that salvation is secured for all who believe in what God has done through the finished work of Jesus Christ. According to the Bible, God saves His people because limited, broken, fallen humans will never be able to save themselves. Humans are contingent beings who depend on God for their existence. God is not dependent on anyone or anything. He is transcendent, eternal, and immortal, and thus, He can save mortal beings and provide eternal security for them.

The Bible offers the greatest moral standards of any book available to humans (see point 6 above). It is the only book that offers objective evidence in the form of prophecy (see point 10 below) and the resurrection of Jesus that it is the Word of God. It provides a completely realistic view of creation and the evil we find in it, reasons for the fallen human condition and the prevalence of disease and decay, and a divine plan of salvation. It offers a realistic solution for human sin and evil in the world. It is the most translated (complete Bible: 717 languages; New Testament: 1582languages)²⁸¹, purchased, and memorized book in the world. It is quickly being carried to all the nations of the Earth.

The Bible has the ring of truth, and it conveys the truth that we observe about ourselves and our world. It says that a nation divided against itself cannot stand, and we observe that this is true in the very life of our nation and others. It says that evil spiritual forces are at work in our world, and who can deny that they are? It says that each of us is broken, mired in sin, and in need of a savior. Who can deny that? It is a source of hope that the human soul desires. It is profound to the point where each reading adds new dimensions of truth and depth of understanding. By the Spirit, it convicts and converts, and it has changed the lives of billions for millennia. The Bible reveals the unfailing love of God for His creation. The Bible cannot be a merely human book.

10. The Bible is the Word of God because it is unique among religious books.

As we have come to see, there are several good reasons to believe that the Bible is the Word of God, as summarized in points 1-9 above. But what about the sacred books of the other major religions in the world? How do they stack up against the Bible? I will start with the conclusion and then provide some of the details supporting it. In short, the Bible is in a Divine category by itself.

All the world's religious books explicitly or implicitly deny the unique deity of Christ. So, if the Bible is right about Christ, they must be wrong. Professor of world religions Winfried Corduan has sifted through the sacred books of the world's religions and assessed the credibility of these ancient books, seeking evidence of divine inspiration.²⁸²

Quran (Islam)

The Quran consists of 114 surahs (chapters) believed by Muslims to be the angel Gabriel's revelation to Muhammad during his lifetime (AD 570-622).²⁸³ Interestingly, the Quran affirms that Jesus was the righteous Messiah born of the virgin Mary. It affirms that Jesus performed miraculous healings, including raising the dead, and that He would give life to a bird fashioned with clay (Surah 3:45-49). Yet the Quran denies that Jesus is the Son of God (Surahs 5:116 and 17:111). We find Muhammad admitting that he is a sinner (Surah 40:55, 47:19, and 48:2) and unable to do miracles when asked for confirming evidence that his message is from God (Surah 6:37). According to Norman Geisler,

Muslims offer predictive [prophecies] in the Qur'an as a proof that Muhammad could perform miracles. But the evidence is not convincing. The suras most often cited are those in which Muhammad promised victory to his troops. What religious military leader is there who might not say to his troops: "God is on our side; we are going to win. Fight on!"²⁸⁴

Geisler summarizes, "The evidence that Muhammad possessed a truly supernatural gift of prophecy is lacking. His prophecies are vague and disputable."²⁸⁵

Al Islam is the official website of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. According to *Al Islam*, the following prophecies (see the table below) given by Muhammad are found in the Quran.²⁸⁶

Quran Passage	Prophecy
"Their skins will bear witness against them as to what they have been doing" (41:21)	Fingerprints
"Corruption has spread on land and sea because of what men's hands have wrought" (30:42)	Pollution
"They will alter Allah's creation." (4:120)	Genetic Engineering
"And when the mountains are made to move." (81:4)	Roads in the Mountains
"And when the wild beasts are gathered together." (81:6)	Zoos
"And when books are spread abroad." (81:11)	Books Published and Spread
"And when various people are brought together." (81:8)	Modern Communication Systems
"And by the heaven full of tracks" (51:8)	Air Traffic System

Identifying the Quranic passages noted above as prophecies of fingerprints, pollution, genetic engineering, roads in the mountains, and the rest strains credulity and appears to be an attempt to find prophecy at all costs to silence the critics of the Quran. While the Bible prophets were concerned with the destiny of nations and eternal salvation for the masses, the Quran's prophecies are concerned with zoos, among other things. If these are the prophecies of the Quran, they fail to rise to the level, profundity, and specificity of Bible prophecy.

Corduan concludes regarding the Quran,

Even though there is no particularly good reason to deny that the Quran is a fairly accurate record of Muhammad's teachings, there is also no particularly good reason to accept it as inspired scripture.²⁸⁷

In contrast, the New Testament "is corroborated by Jesus Christ, who authenticated his claims of divinity with a resurrection."²⁸⁸

***The Vedas, Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita
(Hinduism)***

The faithful Hindu must accept the divine revelation of the Vedas while they are under no constraint to observe what is taught in them. The four Vedas are the Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva. The Rig Veda contains a collection of hymns to the early Hindu gods. The Sama and Yajur Vedas also contain hymns as well as ritual sayings; the Atharva Veda contains mantras, magic, and spells. The Vedas are the writings of the Brahman caste of the Aryan invaders of the Indian subcontinent dating to 1500 and 800 BC. They lack connection to history, promote polytheism, and are antithetical to the monotheism of the Bible.

The Upanishads date to about 500 BC and are the philosophical writings of unknown sages intended to supplement the Vedas. Later Hindu religious writings are found in the Bhagavad Gita (400 to 100 BC), which describes the struggle within a family. According to the Bhagavad Gita, salvation is available to devotees of Krishna who are obedient to the caste system.

The sacred texts of Hinduism have been largely preserved orally, but there are almost no ancient manuscripts. This stands in stark contrast to the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular, where manuscripts are available dating to 100 years after the resurrection. The Bible affirms the personal nature of God. Yet, Brahman, the god of ultimate reality at the top of the Hindu pantheon of gods, is impersonal and pantheistic, leading to the appealing idea that humans are divine. Corduan concludes that there is no rational basis or evidence showing that the sacred Hindu books are divinely inspired.²⁸⁹

The Pali Canon and Lotus Sutra (Buddhism)

The earliest text of Buddhism is the Pali Canon (a.k.a. Tripitaka), which dates to about the fifth century BC but was not completed until about 400 years later. Because it was constantly revised, its textual integrity is very poor. It is said to have been assembled by the Buddha's disciples. A later book, the Lotus Sutra, purports to be the Buddha's teachings later in life and offers the attractive prospect of universal salvation. The Lotus

Sutra, which dates to about AD 200, contradicts the much earlier Pali Canon. Hence, scholars doubt it represents the teaching of the Buddha, and it is viewed by some as a forgery. The Buddhist holy books lack the marks of divine inspiration and offer no reason for their acceptance as such.²⁹⁰ Furthermore, the notion of a personal God is foreign to Buddhism, so there is no God to inspire these sacred books.

The Analects (Confucianism)

The Analects attributed to Confucius contain wisdom teaching for living virtuous lives and date to the sixth century BC. However, it is not viewed as a religious book. Although revered by the followers of Confucius, it was not considered divinely inspired.²⁹¹

The Daodejing (Daoism or Taoism)

Daoism represents an important component of Chinese popular religion. The *Daodejing* contains the wisdom sayings attributed to the Chinese philosopher Laozi in the sixth-century BC. Others see this collection of wisdom sayings to be the product of sages around 300 BC. This philosophical work has come to be the central text of Daoism. Yet, it provides no reason to accept it as divinely inspired. Furthermore, it identifies no gods who might have inspired it.²⁹²

Conclusion to point 10

There are sacred books of other religions, but the story is much the same. They are not claimed to be divinely inspired, or they lack the evidence of divine inspiration of the type found concerning the Bible presented above.²⁹³

Conclusion to This Chapter

Christians affirm that the Bible is the only book inspired by God because it is the only book that contains strong internal, prophetic, scientific, and historical evidence for its divine inspiration, as presented in the previous chapters. Perhaps an appropriate ending to this chapter is found in the words an unknown writer wrote of the Bible:

This book is the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding; its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveler's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's character. Here paradise is restored, heaven opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the feet. Read it slowly, frequently, and prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Follow its precepts, and it will lead you to Calvary, to the empty tomb, to a resurrected life in Christ; yes, to glory itself, for eternity.²⁹⁴

Study Questions

1. Which four reasons to believe that the Bible is the Word of God do you find most compelling? Summarize each of those four reasons and the evidence supporting it in separate paragraphs.
2. Describe the positive influence the Bible has had on western civilization.
3. What is different about the Bible compared to other religious books in terms of the answers it provides to the great questions in life?
4. Write a paragraph explaining why the Bible is unique among the religious books of the world. How do the alleged prophecies of Muhammad compare to Bible prophecy?

14

Ancient Non-Christian Writings Affirm Christian Claims

It is not unusual to hear someone say that nothing is known about Jesus outside of the New Testament or that He never existed. The fact is that a number of ancient sources outside of the Bible affirm the important claims of Christianity. I am not saying that secular writers believed that Jesus was the Son of God and that He rose from the dead, but they do affirm that these things were being said about Him in the first and second centuries.

A summary of what we learn from ancient secular and non-Christian writings about Christianity is provided at the end of this chapter, but first, let's consider the writings themselves.

Tacitus

Tacitus, a Roman historian writing in AD 109, affirms the torture of Christians during Nero's reign. Nero was suspected by some of setting the great fire of Rome. To deflect the blame from himself, Nero blamed the Christians as scapegoats. Christus (Latin form of *Christ*) is identified as the originator of Christianity who was killed by Pontius Pilate. Tacitus indicates that the early Christians were killed in excruciating manners. They were torn by dogs, crucified, or burnt as human torches to provide illumination at night. Nero reigned from AD 54 to AD 68. The great fire of Rome occurred in AD 64, so this persecution of Christians broke out toward the end of Nero's reign. It is during this period that the Apostles Peter and Paul are thought to have been martyred. Tacitus writes this gruesome account in the following passage from *Annals*:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty

during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre 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. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.²⁹⁵

Josephus

Josephus was a first-century Jewish historian who lived from AD 37 or 38 to AD 97. He served in the Roman army, and later in his career, he was appointed as court historian under the Roman Emperor Vespasian. Josephus wrote the following in *Antiquities*:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and [he] was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who became his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.²⁹⁶

Josephus informs us that Jesus was a wise and virtuous man who garnered a significant following. He was sentenced to crucifixion by Pilate, but even after He died, His disciples continued to follow His teaching and claimed that they had seen Him. Josephus, a Jew who would have been familiar with the Messianic prophecies, goes so far as to say “perhaps” He was the Messiah predicted by the prophets.

Thallus

Thallus wrote around AD 52. None of his works are still

extant (in existence), though a few fragmented citations are preserved by other writers. One such writer is Julius Africanus, who wrote in about AD 221. He cites Thallus regarding the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ. Thallus describes an eclipse and an Earthquake at the time of the crucifixion of Christ:

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an Earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun.²⁹⁷

In this passage, Julius Africanus, citing Thallus, affirms that after the crucifixion, darkness came upon the world of the type associated with an eclipse, even though an eclipse was not expected,²⁹⁸ and that an Earthquake occurred. Thus Thallus, writing less than twenty years after the crucifixion, confirms events described by the gospel writers Mathew and Luke (Matthew 27:51; Luke 23:44).

Pliny the Younger and Emperor Trajan in AD 112

Pliny the Younger was a Roman administrator. He was the adopted son of Pliny the Elder, a natural historian. Pliny the Younger held several military and civil positions, including imperial magistrate under the Roman Emperor Trajan. In the following passage, Pliny seeks the advice of Trajan concerning the handling of Christians. In this exchange, we learn that Christians were persecuted for practicing devotion to Christ.

The Roman policy at that time was to offer Christians an opportunity to recant, curse Christ, and worship the Roman gods and the emperor. If they were willing to do this, they would be pardoned and set free. Otherwise, they were to be punished. We learn that true Christian believers would not curse the name of Christ and worship the Roman gods.

This passage also provides insight into early Christian worship. Hymns were offered to Christ who was revered as God. The Christians agreed to refrain from evil and later return for a fellowship meal.

Trajan, in his response, affirms Pliny's handling of Christians.

Pliny's question to Trajan:

It is my custom, Sire, to refer to you in all cases where I am in doubt, for who can better clear up difficulties and inform me? I have never been present at any legal examination of the Christians, and I do not know, therefore, what are the usual penalties passed upon them, or the limits of those penalties, or how searching an inquiry should be made...In the meantime, this is the plan which I have adopted in the case of those Christians who have been brought before me. I ask them whether they are Christians, if they say "Yes," then I repeat the question the second time, and also a third – warning them of the penalties involved; and if they persist, I order them away to prison. For I do not doubt that – be their admitted crime what it may – their pertinacity and inflexible obstinacy surely ought to be punished...Those who denied that they were or had been Christians and called upon the gods with the usual formula, reciting the words after me, and those who offered incense and wine before your image—which I had ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, along with the regular statues of the gods – all such I considered acquitted – especially as they cursed the name of Christ, which it is said *bona fide* Christians cannot be induced to do.²⁹⁹

Pliny continues to describe Christian worship as he understands it:

... on a fixed day they used to meet before dawn and recite a hymn among themselves to Christ, as though he were a god. So far from binding themselves by oath to commit any crime, they swore to keep from theft, robbery, adultery, breach of faith, and not to deny any trust money deposited with them when called upon to deliver it. This ceremony over, they used to depart and meet again to take food – but it was of no special character and entirely harmless.³⁰⁰

Trajan's reply to Pliny:

You have adopted the right course, my dear Pliny, in examining the cases of those cited before you as Christians; for no hard and fast rule can be laid down covering such a wide question. The

Christians are not to be hunted out. If brought before you, and the offense is proved, they are to be punished, but with this reservation—if any one denies he is a Christian, and makes it clear he is not, by offering prayer to our gods, then he is to be pardoned on his recantation, no matter how suspicious his past.³⁰¹

Lucian of Samosata

Lucian of Samosata was an Assyrian satirist who wrote in the Greek language. His life spanned about AD 125-180. In the passage below, we learn that Christians in his day worshipped Christ, who was the originator of Christianity. We also learn that Christians regarded themselves to be immortal (they possessed eternal life in Christ), and for this reason, they were not afraid of death. They regarded each other as brothers, denied the Greek gods, and worshipped Christ, who had been crucified. They were not attached to worldly goods and considered their property to be in common.

The Christians, you know, worship a *man* to this day,—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.... You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then 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. All this they take quite on trust, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.³⁰²

A Jewish source: The Babylonian Talmud

An early Jewish source regarding the execution of Jesus (Yeshu) is found in the Babylonian Talmud in the records of the Sanhedrin. This passage dates to the first two centuries AD and tells us that the Jews announced their plans to stone Jesus in advance. In the end, we learn that Jesus was hanged, as in “hanged on a tree,” another expression referring to crucifixion used by the Apostle Peter in Acts 5:30. We learn that Jesus was accused of sorcery, which would speak to His ability to do

miracles. It is also clear that the Sanhedrin was concerned that Jesus was leading people away from their control into what they termed as “apostasy.” This passage further confirms that Jesus was executed on the eve of the Passover, as is reported in the gospels.

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, “He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy [sic]. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.” But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of Passover!³⁰³

Non-Christian Sources Affirm the Major Claims of Christianity

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the major claims of Christianity are affirmed by secular and non-Christian writers. That is not to say that the claims were believed by the secular and Jewish writers, but it is clear that the major claims of Christianity in the twenty-first century were present in the first and second centuries.

We can summarize what is learned about early Christianity from these sources as follows:

1. Christians were persecuted and martyred for their beliefs.
2. True Christians refused to recant their testimony about Jesus.
3. Early Christians followed Jesus’ teaching and were willing to die for their beliefs.
4. Jesus worked wonders or amazing signs, which were interpreted by some as sorcery.
5. Christianity spread rapidly in the Roman world.
6. Christians were peaceful.
7. Christians refused to worship the Roman and Greek gods.
8. Christians believed that Jesus rose from the dead.
9. Christians believed that they would have eternal life.
10. Jesus led a virtuous life.
11. Many Jews and Gentiles became followers of Jesus.

12. Jesus was condemned to die and was crucified by Pontius Pilate.
13. Jesus appeared to the disciples three days after His death.

The secular and Jewish writers add significant validation to the reports that are made in the New Testament.

Christians Refused to Recant—More Evidence for the Resurrection

By the second century, Christianity was spreading rapidly. As we learned above from the correspondence between Pliny and the Roman Emperor Trajan in AD 112, Christians who recanted their testimony about Jesus and venerated the Roman gods could be pardoned. Yet true Christians went to their death refusing to renounce Jesus and the truth of His resurrection. Often these Christians would suffer torture for days, but in the end, their refusal to renounce Jesus ended in horrific deaths. Many were crucified, burned at the stake, or fed to wild animals.

The Christians in the early second century were in a position to know if the major claims of Christianity were true. They needed only to inquire of those from the previous generation, parents, and grandparents, who were in a position to be eyewitnesses to the events. Would anyone doubt a parent's or a grandparent's recollection of the events they witnessed in the Vietnam War? Certainly, most would trust their parents and grandparents, just as the early Christians would have trusted their parents and grandparents. If Christianity and its central claims about Jesus were a lie, the early Christians would have known it, renounced it, denied Jesus, and worshipped the Roman gods to save their lives—but they didn't do it!

No one will die for something they know to be a lie

Early Christians refused to renounce Jesus and worship the Roman gods because they believed that Jesus truly was the Son of God who rose from the dead and that through faith in Him, they gained the most important thing of all, eternal life in heaven. No Earthly, temporal torment was worth sacrificing that.

Study Questions

1. Using the list of the claims of Christianity affirmed by ancient authors, identify which author(s) affirm each of the thirteen claims.
2. Many Christians went to their deaths, refusing to renounce their faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. What are the implications of their unwillingness to renounce Christ?

15

Evidence For the Soul and Afterlife

One of the great debates of modern philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience is the nature of the mind.³⁰⁴ Materialistic monism (sometimes called physicalism) affirms that there is only one type of thing in the universe: matter. On the other hand, substance dualism posits two kinds of things in the universe: matter and mental things like minds.

If materialistic monism is true, all that exists in the universe is matter, which leads to the conclusion that everything can be explained by the laws of physics and chemistry. On that view, the mind is merely a product of the brain and its electrochemistry. Since the mind ceases to exist when the brain dies, life apart from the body and an afterlife seems implausible. On the other hand, if dualism is true, not all can be explained by natural laws and electrochemical processes; minds or mental things are distinct from the body. Thus, the mind surviving bodily death and an afterlife are plausible.³⁰⁵ It is important to point out that Christian theists often equate the mind with soul and spirit, the soul being the part of consciousness that animates the body and the spirit being the part of consciousness linking the individual to God.

So if materialistic monism is true, the brain dies upon death, and there can be no afterlife. If substance dualism is true, the mind is distinct from the body, and an afterlife makes perfect sense. From this point forward, I will refer to materialistic monism as monism and substance dualism just as dualism.

The Mind-Body Problem

Naturalists often vigorously deny dualism, but the mind is not so easily reduced to matter and chemical processes. This is affirmed by atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel, “Consciousness is the most conspicuous obstacle to a comprehensive naturalism that relies only on the resources of physical science.”³⁰⁶ Nagel

concludes that consciousness cannot simply be reduced to the physical material realm.³⁰⁷ While Nagel identifies the difficulty associated with monism and how it views the mind, he stops short of embracing dualism and encourages the “aim of finding an integrated naturalistic explanation of a new kind.”³⁰⁸ Nagel suspects that matter possesses yet undiscovered mental properties and that even atoms have characteristics of minds. The problem with this view is that there is no evidence that it is true, and it does not explain how trillions of distinct atoms, each with their own mental properties, could form a unified mind.

Near-Death Experiences

What if it could be demonstrated that minds (or souls in the Christian understanding) continue to function when the body is in clinical death or even brain death? Clinical death occurs when consciousness, pulse, and breathing have stopped. Once the heart stops beating, brain injury occurs within minutes. After 9 minutes, irreversible brain damage is likely, and after 10 minutes, survival is unlikely. Brain death corresponds to the cessation of brain activity and is measured as a flat-line EEG (electroencephalogram). Yet, in numerous, well-documented cases of near-death experiences (NDEs), the mind continues to function after clinical death and sometimes even after brain death, implying that the mind is distinct from the brain.

In the last fifty years, new insight into the mind-body problem has been sought through the study of NDEs. In *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, Professor Gary Habermas suggests that NDEs present a substantial challenge to naturalism because they demonstrate that the mind continues to function when a patient has suffered clinical and brain death. Habermas concludes that NDEs provide a strong argument for an afterlife, thus falsifying monism and ultimately naturalism.³⁰⁹

Habermas distinguishes evidential from non-evidential NDEs and focuses on evidential NDEs. Evidential NDEs or veridical NDEs³¹⁰ take place on Earth when after death, a resuscitated individual who was formerly clinically or brain dead can provide significant details of their treatment that occurred when their eyes were closed and completely incapacitated. In some cases, resuscitated individuals could report on events that

took place elsewhere in the hospital and even in their homes, sometimes at significant distances from where they were treated, all while they were dead by all measures of modern science. In some cases, the individuals who suffered NDEs were legally blind from birth. Yet, they could still report visual details of events that occurred when they had suffered clinical and brain death. The claims of evidential NDE experiencers (NDEr) can be investigated and potentially corroborated.

In contrast, non-evidential NDEs occur in a location different from the Earth in an other-worldly place. They are referred to as non-evidential NDEs because it is usually impossible to investigate or corroborate the claims of the NDEr. The NDEr will often recollect traveling through a tunnel toward light and meeting deceased friends, family members, and a being of light. While reports of non-evidential NDEs are fascinating to read, they do not provide information that can be independently verified.

NDE cases are common to the human experience, and thousands of cases have been reported. According to the radiation oncologist and recognized NDE researcher Jeffrey Long:

Near-death experiences (NDEs) are reported by about 17% of those who nearly die. NDEs have been reported by children, adults, scientists, physicians, priests, ministers, among the religious and atheists, and from countries throughout the world.³¹¹

Long states,

A common characteristic of near-death experiences is an out-of-body experience. An out-of-body experience (OBE) is the apparent separation of consciousness from the body. About 45% of near-death experiencers [NDEr] report OBEs which involves them seeing and often hearing ongoing Earthly events from a perspective that is apart, and usually above, their physical bodies. Following cardiac arrest, NDErs may see, and later accurately describe, their own resuscitation.³¹²

In their book, *Beyond Death: Exploring the Evidence for Immortality*, professors Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland give

examples of corroborated evidential NDEs occurring in different physiological circumstances. The following sections will summarize various types of specific NDE cases.

NDEs while comatose

Evidential NDEs have occurred while patients are comatose in a state of deep unconsciousness due to injury or disease.

- After nearly drowning in a swimming pool, Katie was rushed to the emergency room and resuscitated. She had suffered extensive brain swelling. She was on lung support for breathing and was profoundly comatose. After three days, she recovered and described her doctors, the medical procedures conducted, and the hospital rooms where she was taken, all of which occurred while her eyes were closed and she was in a severely disabled state. As she recovered, Katie said that she met Jesus, the Father, and an angel named Elizabeth. While comatose, she followed her family home. She described her father's reaction to her accident, the preparation details of the evening meal by her mother, and the toys that her brother and sister were playing with. Katie's doctor investigated the events of her resuscitation and her claims about her family. The details provided by Katie were found to be accurate.³¹³
- Five-year-old Rick had suffered Meningitis and decided to stay behind as his body was driven in an ambulance to the nearby hospital. From his vantage point at home, Rick observed his father's grief as he loaded the family in the car to drive to the hospital. Rick rushed ahead and arrived at the hospital ahead of the ambulance, observing as a 12-year-old girl was moved out of the room into which he was placed. After his recovery, the events described by Rick were found to match the events that had transpired.³¹⁴
- A chemist who had been blinded a year before his NDE correctly reported the details of his NDE. Others NDEr, blind for years, described details of the dress and jewelry of those present at the time of their near death.³¹⁵

NDEs while clinically dead

- A boy, age 11, whose heart stopped for 20 minutes, reported watching himself and the treatment he received and the interaction of the doctors from above his body. After he was resuscitated, he described the events of his treatment, the instruments used, and the discussion of the medical personnel and their genders.³¹⁶
- A girl, age 8, almost drowned when her hair was caught in a swimming pool drain. CPR was administered for 45 minutes to restore the functioning of her heart. She reported visiting heaven, floating out of her body during that time. Upon recovery, she was able to describe the efforts of the paramedics and the treatment she received in the hospital emergency room in substantial detail.³¹⁷

NDEs when EEG had flat-lined

Cardiologist Fred Schoonmaker compiled 1,400 NDEs over 18 years, including 55 patients registering flat-lined EEGs indicating the absence of brain function, some for as long as 30 minutes to three hours. Some of the most vivid memories described by participants in the study occurred when their brains had flat-lined. Events reported by these individuals were independently verified by others.

- One woman who was clinically dead and had flat-lined on her EEG spontaneously revived after about 3.5 hours and lifted the sheet from her face as an orderly transported her to the morgue. She reported floating over her body during resuscitation attempts and correctly described the procedures used in an attempt to revive her, including the personnel in the room, their discussions, the designs of the doctor's ties, and even a joke that had been told to relieve tension. All the events described matched the records and recollections of the team, even though, by all accounts, she was brain dead when the events occurred.³¹⁸

NDEr meeting others who had died unbeknownst to them

Some experiencers of near-death report encountering friends, acquaintances, and loved ones who had died, entirely unbeknownst to them. In other words, NDEr reported meeting

acquaintances who had died nearly simultaneously to their NDE or shortly before.

- A woman NDEr perceived that she was leaving her hospital room, doctor, and grieving husband behind for what she perceived to be heaven. There she encountered a young man, Tom, whom she knew. She had not expected to meet Tom in heaven. Tom told her that he had just arrived. An angel who was present told the woman she would be returning to Earth, which disappointed her because it was, in her estimation, the most beautiful place she had been. She woke up in her hospital bed. Later that night, her husband received news that their friend Tom had died in an automobile accident.³¹⁹
- A seven-year-old boy (Cory) suffering from leukemia reported to his mother that he had a vision of a crystal castle. There he said he met his mother's boyfriend from high school, who had died in an automobile accident. The mother called friends and confirmed that her old boyfriend had died on the day that Cory reported seeing him in a vision.³²⁰
- A family had been involved in a car accident that took the mother's life. Her two boys were taken to different hospitals. The youngest boy was unaware of his mother's death. He awoke from a comatose state and reported that his mother and brother Peter were waiting for him. He fell back into an unconscious state and died. Shortly after, a call was received from the other hospital where his brother Peter had been taken, informing the hospital staff that Peter had died.³²¹

So, are these sample cases documented by Habermas and Moreland isolated instances, or are they a few of many corroborated cases? These cases represent a small sample of the many cases available that are documented and corroborated by credible medical and other professionals. Among others, Long cites two Large NDE studies. According to Long, one study undertaken by Dr. Janice Holden reviewed 89 case reports of NDEs with out-of-body experiences (OBE) and found "92% were considered to be completely accurate with no inaccuracy whatsoever when the OBE observations were later investigated."³²² Another study considered 617 NDE cases, 287 of which included OBE. According to Long:

In this group of 287 NDErs with OBEs, there were 65 (23%) who personally investigated the accuracy of their own OBE observations after recovering from their life-threatening event. Based on these later investigations, none of these 65 OBErs found any inaccuracy in their own OBE observations.³²³

In a recent book chapter, Habermas cites 300 evidential NDE cases, “dozens of which careful scientific efforts to determine the accuracy”³²⁴ of the cases have been undertaken.

Objections to NDEs

On the surface, evidence of minds operating and fully functional outside of the body seems to support substance dualism over materialistic monism. Monists have sought to explain away NDEs as the product of natural causes, including the brain waking from anesthesia, effects of the dying brain, “oxygen deprivation, temporal lobe seizure, exaggerations, or hallucinations.”³²⁵ But as Habermas points out, all of these conditions are internal to the patient and therefore fail to explain the information that NDErs could only have access to from a vantage point outside of their body, above it, or at a great distance from it.³²⁶ In short, the body and brain problems fail to explain how the mind continues operating and collecting information concerning patient treatment and circumstances outside of the incapacitated brain and body. If the mind is fully functioning outside of the body while the body and brain are not functioning, the mind must be separate from the brain.

Conclusion

Given the vast amount of corroborated NDE out-of-body cases, the seemingly unavoidable conclusion is that the mind can function when the body and brain are incapacitated. This contradicts the notion that the mind and the brain are identical. NDEs challenge materialistic monism and affirm substance dualism. Furthermore, they open the door to the possibility of an afterlife and a transcendent non-material realm which Christians call heaven.

As Habermas concludes:

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It often seems that the anti-NDE position only hangs by two very weak and virtually irrelevant desires: to preserve its natural worldview commitments at all costs, no matter what, and its strong dislike of any “spiritual” options. But one thing is clear: the naturalist position does not do well when attempting to refute the hundreds of NDE evidential cases. Hence, the naturalist view is by far the weaker explanation here; it is not even close.³²⁷

Insight into the lengths that atheists, naturalists, and monists will go to preserve the possibility of a purely material world is found in Thomas Nagel’s description of his fear that religion might be true:

I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God; I don’t want the universe to be like that.³²⁸

Despite the wishes of humans, the universe is the way it is, and NDEs point to non-material existence, which defies naturalistic explanations.

Study Questions

1. Describe the circumstances of an NDE. How do evidential NDEs challenge monism and, thus, naturalism?
2. How do NDEs show that the mind continues to function apart from the body? Give specific examples from the NDE sample cases provided.
3. Describe objections to NDEs and how those objections have been challenged by NDE researchers.
4. According to Habermas and Nagle, why do atheists and naturalists resist the seemingly obvious implications of NDEs?

Evidence For God in Ancient Cultures¹

According to the Bible, every human being on planet Earth is a descendent of Noah and his family (Genesis 9:18-19). If this is true, evidence should be found among ancient cultures for the God of the Bible. It will come as a surprise to many, but that is precisely what is found in the lore of the most ancient cultures of the world. Yet this fact remains unknown to most, even in Christian circles.

Research Reveals Monotheism as the Original World Religion

In the late 1800s, evolution was all the rage, and scholars sought to apply Darwinian principles in several fields of endeavor. Among these were the origin and diversity of life, the social sciences, and the origin of religion. While many scholars presupposed the evolutionary development of religion from animism or polytheism to monotheism through intermediate stages, Andrew Lang, Wilhelm Schmidt, and others showed that monotheism was, in fact, the earliest form of human religion. In religious and cultural studies, original monotheism is the theory that affirms that the earliest religion of humanity was monotheistic in nature.

In *The Making of Religion*, author Andrew Lang, writing in the late 1800s, affirmed that the supreme god among Australian tribes was regarded as an “all-seeing, all-knowing, creative, and potent moral being.”³²⁹ As a specific example, Lang describes the beliefs of the Australian Kurnai tribe. The Kurnai refer to their god Mungnan-ngaur (meaning “Our Father”) as one who destroyed the Earth by water but then ascended to the sky where he remains. Mungnan is immortal, and his precepts include listening to the older men, sharing with and living peaceably

¹The content of this chapter was previously published at reasons.org in the *Voices Blog*.

with friends, refraining from promiscuous behavior, and obeying food restrictions.³³⁰

Lang concluded, “there are two chief sources of religion, (1) the belief, how attained we know not, in a powerful, moral, eternal, omniscient Father and Judge of men; (2) the belief in a human afterlife.”³³¹ Lang’s work contradicted the prevailing evolutionary theories of religion (that religion evolved from polytheism to monotheism) and was received with either skepticism or silence.³³²

Schmidt finds monotheism in the most ancient cultures throughout the world

In the 1900s, ethnologist Wilhelm Schmidt identified the people groups and tribes having the oldest, least materially developed culture. The oldest tribes that remain on Earth tend to be geographically isolated by mountain ranges, seas, island locations, rivers, or primeval forests. They are food-gatherers at the initial economic development stages who have not exploited farming or breeding animals. They possess only primitive housing, clothing, and tools and lack more advanced cultural elements such as farming, weaving, pottery, or metallurgy.³³³

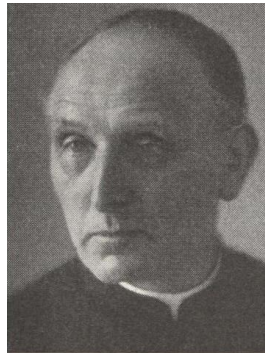


Figure 16.1: Wilhelm Schmidt.³³⁴

Examples of the tribes Schmidt identified as possessing the earliest, least advanced human culture include the Andamanese and Semang of Asia, the Bushmen of Southern Africa, the Tierra del Fuegians of South America, the Samoyeds and Koryaks of Northern Russia, the indigenous people of the Arctic Circle, the

Algonquin and Sioux of North America, and many tribes in Australia.³³⁵ Schmidt reasoned that the tribes possessing the most ancient human culture would also have the most ancient notions of religion.

Schmidt collected the early reports of explorers, missionaries, and ethnologists and found among these tribes consistent belief in a supreme being greatly resembling the God of the Bible. When their oldest tribal legends were considered, the results were astounding. Among these tribes, the supreme being is referred to as “father,” “my father,” or “our father” and held in great reverence and affection; other names include the “one above,” “divine sky lord,” “great and supreme spirit,” “slayer in the sky,” and “overseer.” Regarding his character and attributes:

- He is the creative power of the universe.
- He is the giver of the moral law and is incapable of evil.
- His moral code includes the prohibition of murder, adultery, fornication, and the requirement of honesty and helping those in need.
- He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. Though these tribes would not use these words specifically, their descriptions imply such.
- He is prayed to and worshipped. In many of these tribes, sacrifices are offered to this god.

Moreover, the tribes of the earliest culture affirm the reality of the afterlife, with many believing there will be no childbearing. Many of these tribes believe their God to be eternal.³³⁶ Naturally, Schmidt’s work was met with criticism. But as Winfried Corduan (perhaps the foremost living expert on original monotheism) concludes, the theory of original monotheism remains unrefuted.³³⁷

Accounting for original monotheism worldwide

How is it possible that these preliterate, geographically distanced, indigenous tribes possess such an advanced, theistic view of God, very similar in many ways to the God of the Bible? The most logical answer to this question seems to be that the

God of the Bible revealed himself (Romans 1:20), and the memory of him has been carried forth. We find among these ancient tribes precisely what we would expect if all the people of the Earth trace their origin back to Noah and his family, to whom God revealed himself (Genesis 9:1-17). The knowledge of God spread from that point forward.

Why has Schmidt's work largely been ignored or unread? Schmidt was criticized for the verbosity of his writings and for the fact that he was a Catholic priest. But his critics did not enter the dialogue free of worldview bias and presuppositions, which included anti-supernaturalism.³³⁸ Corduan concludes, "the obvious reason for the rejection of Schmidt is that he found at the origin of human culture...marital faithfulness in monogamy, straightforward honesty, altruistic sharing while respecting the other person's property, and the general aversion to the shedding of human blood unnecessarily. And, of course, ...submission to the will of one God."³³⁹

Evidence for Original Monotheism in Ancient China



Figure 16.2: James Legge. Missionary, sinologist, and Oxford professor.³⁴⁰

James Legge (1815–1897) was a Scottish missionary to China, an eminent sinologist, and the first Oxford University professor of Chinese studies. During his time in China, Legge produced a massive seven-volume translation of the Chinese classics into English.³⁴¹ Previously shrouded in mystery, James Legge's translation of the Chinese classics into English revealed an astounding picture of religion in ancient China.

Shang Di: The monotheistic God of ancient China

Legge was convinced that Shang Di, the God of the ancient Chinese, was synonymous with the God of the Hebrew Bible. In support of this conclusion, he writes:

Do the Chinese know the true God?...I answer unhesitatingly in the affirmative. The evidence supplied by Chinese literature and history appears to me so strong, that I find it difficult to conceive how any one, who has studied it, can come to the opposite conclusion.³⁴²

Legge reached this conclusion by substituting God in every Chinese classic location where Shang Di is referenced. Legge found that the use of God in these contexts was entirely appropriate, given what is known about the Hebrew God. He concludes, “The Chinese know Him who is the Creator, the Preserver, and the Governor of the Universe.”³⁴³ According to Legge, Shang Di is self-existent, he existed before the creation of the universe, and his years are without end. Moreover, in their 4000 years of history, the Chinese have never fashioned an image of Shang Di.³⁴⁴

While some disagreed, Legge was not alone in his conclusion that Shang Di is the Hebrew God. William Henry Medhurst, a scholar and missionary who produced Chinese-English and English-Chinese dictionaries concurred with Legge. According to Medhurst, Shang Di is the supreme ruler described in the Chinese classics, but whose name was later corrupted and applied to other lesser deities, “but these are...different from him whom the ancients worshipped under the title of Supreme Ruler ...”³⁴⁵

If Shang Di is an essential part of Chinese history, why is this fact not evident to modern Chinese? Author Chan Kei Thong elucidates the matter, saying:

Many of the modern translations of these ancient Chinese texts have excised the passages that mention Shang Di. This is one reason why so many Chinese themselves, even scholars of these texts, are ignorant of the truth of the prevalence and the dominance of the belief in Shang Di in ancient times.³⁴⁶

The nature of Shang Di

Thong has undertaken to discern God's attributes as communicated in the Chinese classics using Legge's complete and unaltered translation. In his book, *Faith of Our Fathers*, Thong provides evidence from the Chinese classics that Shang Di is sovereign, eternal, immutable, powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, and infinite. Similarly, Thong shows that the moral attributes of Shang Di include love, holiness, grace, faithfulness, goodness, mercy, compassion, and justice.³⁴⁷ Thong concludes that Shang Di is the one true Creator God of the Hebrews revealed in the Bible, known from the earliest times of Chinese civilization.³⁴⁸ In this matter, Thong, Legge, and Medhurst concur.



Figure 16.3: Temple of Heaven Complex. Imperial sacrificial altar complex in Beijing, China.³⁴⁹

The emperor's sacrifice and submission to Shang Di

The *Book of Documents* (*Chinese Classic of History*)—generally attributed to Confucius (551–479 BC)—includes references to sacrifice to Shang Di. In the *Canon of Shun*, Emperor Shun (c. 2294–2184 BC) is said to have sacrificed to Shang Di.³⁵⁰ The last king of the Shang dynasty (c. 1765–1122 BC), King Zhou, is said to have become morally corrupt and to have neglected Shang Di and sacrifices in the temple of his ancestors.³⁵¹ Because of these transgressions, heaven ordered the destruction of the Shang dynasty.³⁵²

Furthermore, the Chinese historian Sima Qian (145–86 BC), in his *Historical Records*, records the sacrifice of the first emperor of Qin (259–210 BC), who “sacrificed to the Supreme God at Yong.”³⁵³ Elsewhere, Sima Qian indicates that in ancient times, emperors of the Xia dynasty (2070–1600 BC) personally sacrificed to Shang Di at the border.³⁵⁴

How exactly was sacrifice to God conducted by the ancient Chinese? Some emperors introduced innovations and corrupted sacrifices to Shang Di by including the worship of other gods, while others neglected these ancient rituals. According to Legge, at the inception of the Ming dynasty (AD 1368–1644), worship of Shang Di was restored under the advice of two committees. Sacrifices were limited to the two great border sacrifices performed earlier during the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties.³⁵⁵ The most recent location where the border sacrifice was performed is the Temple of Heaven (literally “Altar of Heaven”) complex in Beijing. Until 1911, records indicate that at the Altar of Heaven in Beijing, 654 sacrifices were carried out over approximately 500 years by 22 emperors.³⁵⁶ The one who performed the sacrifice held the Mandate of Heaven. Thus, it was only performed by the emperor. Preparation for the border sacrifice involved selecting sacrificial animals (usually calves), a proclamation by the emperor six days before the sacrifice at the altar mound, and an inspection of the sacrificial animals five days before the ceremony. The emperor fasted for three days in advance of the sacrifice. Two days in advance of the ceremony, the prayers and offerings were inspected by the emperor.³⁵⁷

The memory of monotheism remains in China

While some critics have argued that Shang Di is not the God of the Bible, the striking similarity seems hard to ignore and is just as expected if all nations of the Earth traced their heritage back to Noah. Just as Noah had sacrificed to God upon exiting the ark, the kings and emperors of China sacrificed to Shang Di. Professor Corduan concludes, “the memory of original monotheism is alive and well in China. Efforts by Thong and others to revive this part of their ancient heritage are spreading.”³⁵⁸

Study Questions

1. What did Schmidt find regarding the God of the most ancient cultures of the world? Where are the ancient cultures located on Earth?
2. What were the attributes of the God of these ancient tribes? Does the God of ancient tribes share attributes and characteristics with the God of the Bible? Explain.
3. Why has Schmidt's work been largely ignored? What thoughts does Corduan share on this matter?
4. What did Legge conclude about the ancient Chinese and their knowledge of God? How did he arrive at his conclusion?
5. What are the attributes of Shang Di, according to Thong? Does Shang Di share attributes with the God of the Bible?
6. Describe the sacrifice at the border in Ancient China. Read Genesis 8:18-22. Do you see any similarity between the border sacrifice and the Genesis account of Noah's sacrifice upon exiting the ark?

The Death of Naturalism and New Ageism?

We began with a discussion of worldviews and what they affirm regarding God, reality, the origin of the universe and life, the diversity of life, the nature of mind and body, the source of ethics and morality, the possibility of an afterlife, and the identity of Jesus. Throughout this book, a large body of evidence has been presented in support and affirmation of the truth of Christian theism. Since the claims of Christian theism contradict those of naturalism and new ageism, they cannot all be true.

If Christian theism is true, then naturalism and new ageism must be false because contradictory statements about the same thing cannot be true in the same sense at the same time. In logic, this is referred to as the law of noncontradiction. For example, if Christian theism affirms that an eternal God exists and naturalism affirms that no God exists, either naturalism or Christian theism is false because they contradict each other and say the opposite is true.

Assessment of Naturalism and New Ageism

We are now in a position to assess naturalism and new ageism in light of the evidence presented for Christian theism. The worldview table presented in Chapter 1 is provided again below and summarizes the beliefs affirmed by each of the three worldviews considered. So, how do naturalism and new ageism stack up when considered against Christian theism? It is to that question that we now turn in the following paragraphs.

God, reality, and the origin of the universe

Theists have argued that the universe and life demand a Creator. Drawing on what is observed about the universe and life, Chapter 2 presented four logical arguments in support of the existence of God: the Kalam cosmological argument, the teleological argument, the moral argument, and the information

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argument. Objections were considered, but these arguments have stood the test of time and have never been conclusively refuted.

Worldviews and Their Claims About Reality			
	Theism	Naturalism	New Ageism
God	God exists	God does not exist	All is God
Reality	Universe and transcendent God	Universe Only	Universe open to reordering by individuals
Origin of the Universe	Created by God	Uncreated	Impersonal energy or force
Origin of Life	Created by God	Chemical evolution/ panspermia	Chemical evolution/ panspermia
Diversity of Life	Created by God	Evolution by natural selection	Evolution by natural selection
Mind and Body	Two separate things (dualism)	The same thing (material monism)	The same thing (spiritual monism)
Source of Ethics and Morality	God	Humans	Humans
Afterlife	Soul and spirit (mind) continue in eternity	No afterlife	Reincarnation /spiritual evolution to divinity
Jesus	Divine Son of God	A mere mortal	One of many enlightened masters

Furthermore, theist arguments for God elucidate the nature of the Creator, who must be vastly powerful and knowledgeable, personal, exceedingly wise, and who is the source of the moral code. The theist God must exist prior to the universe to bring it into existence, implying that God transcends (is beyond) the universe. Moreover, fulfilled prophecy (Chapter 5-8), the resurrection of Jesus (Chapter 9), the unity of the Bible and scientific foreknowledge (Chapter 13), and the monotheism found among the most ancient tribes and cultures (Chapter 16) also argue for the existence of God. If God exists, as strong evidence suggests, the theist view of reality and the origin of the universe is affirmed.

If the theist evidence and logical arguments regarding God are accepted, the atheism affirmed by naturalists is refuted along with their beliefs that the universe is uncreated and nothing exists beyond it. Moreover, the pantheism (the notion that all is God) of new ageists is called into question because God and the universe have been shown to be distinct since God must have existed prior to the universe to create it.

New ageists would say that all is God and the goal of human beings is to achieve cosmic consciousness recognizing their godhood, thus allowing them to bend the universe to their will. The problem arises that there is no compelling evidence that humans are God. For example, if humans are God, why did they forget that they are God, and why do they get sick and die? Forgetfulness, sickness, and dying are not limitations or weaknesses that are associated with divine beings. If humans are not God, they have little hope of reordering the universe and bending it to their will, as new ageists contend.

Theists have established the need for a personal God who existed before the universe, which negates the new ageist view that the origin of the universe is rooted in impersonal energy. The case was presented for the personal nature of the Creator, who, through the DNA code, has crafted the intricate details of human life, resulting in unique individuals. By the fine-tuning of the universe, the Creator has engaged in the personal act of providing the perfect habitat for the flourishing of His creatures, including human life. Finally, the Creator has imbued each person with a moral code that results in the universal desire for

fairness and justice, which argues for the personal nature of the Creator.

Origin and diversity of life

Christian theists affirm that God created all life and is the author of the diversity we find in nature. Naturalists and new ageists would both support naturalistic means for the origin of life. In the 1950s, origin of life researchers theorized that life arose by chemical evolution (abiogenesis), a process by which life spontaneously arose by the chance assembly of atoms into the compounds of life. In this undirected process, life arose from non-living matter. As shown in Chapter 3, the estimated odds of the chance assembly of a cell is virtually zero, which led origin of life researchers like Francis Crick and Leslie Orgel to hypothesize that life was seeded in our solar system by intelligent aliens. Crick and Orgel acknowledged that scientific evidence to support this theory was lacking.³⁵⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 2, even if intelligent aliens did seed life on planet Earth, that only leads to the question, how did the aliens come to be? A creative mind in the initiation of life seems evident and hard to escape.

Furthermore, several other lines of reasoning challenge evolution by natural selection as an explanation for the diversity of life (see Chapter 3). First, the information in DNA must have an intelligent source. No credible naturalistic explanations have been suggested for the origin of the DNA code. Second, in the Cambrian period, complex life forms appeared in a short period without evidence of evolution from simpler life forms. While there should be billions of transitional body forms, given the multitude of species on the Earth, there is a conspicuous lack of them in the fossil record, a problem affirmed by Darwin, Gould, and Dawkins. Third, microevolution has been observed to produce changes within species, such as finches with varying beak types and moths with color variations to suit their environment. However, finches remain finches, moths remain moths, dogs remain dogs, fruit flies remain fruit flies, and bacteria remain bacteria. Never has it been observed that a new species is born from this kind of variation. Fourth, complex molecular machines are found in nature, like the bacterial

flagellum, which requires all parts to be present simultaneously in order to function. These molecular machines far exceed the best machines created by human designers, thus bearing the marks of an intelligent designer and not the random accidents of evolution. No credible, detailed scientific accounting for the origin of these complex machines by naturalistic means has been published.

In summary, the failure of explanations for the origin and diversity of life by naturalistic means challenges the truth of both naturalism and new ageism. Christian theism, having the resources of an intelligent designer, best explains the origin and diversity of life.

Mind, body, and afterlife

Christian theists affirm that the mind and body are two separate things. On Christian theism, the individual survives the death of the body in the afterlife. However, naturalists would affirm that the mind is a product of the brain, which dies when the body dies. Thus, no afterlife is possible. New ageists believe that the realm of cosmic consciousness is the ultimate reality and thus affirm a form of spiritual monism. According to new ageists, humans undergo cycles of death, reincarnation, and birth while ultimately evolving toward recognition of their divinity.

As was shown in Chapter 15, NDEs present a considerable challenge to the naturalist's view of the mind. Given the vast amount of corroborated NDE out-of-body cases, the seemingly unavoidable conclusion is that the mind can function when the body and brain are incapacitated. This contradicts the naturalist's notion that the mind is merely a product of the brain. NDEs challenge materialistic monism and affirm substance dualism. Furthermore, they open the door to the possibility of an afterlife and a transcendent non-material realm which Christian theists call heaven.

With regard to new ageist affirmations of mind, body, and the afterlife, where is the evidence? Where is the evidence that human beings are divine spirit beings capable of cosmic consciousness? Where is the evidence that human beings undergo cycles of reincarnation until they achieve divinity? A large body of evidence has been presented in support of

Christian theism, which affirms that humans are created beings, contradicting claims of human divinity and the ability to achieve godhood. Furthermore, disease, decay, and death are a reality for all persons. Even those that new ageists would regard as enlightened masters succumb to the tomb. As affirmed by Christian theism and discussed in the following chapter, (1) humans are beings created in the image of God, but they are not God, and (2) humans have only one life to live, which will be followed by judgment before God (Hebrews 9:27).

Source of ethics and morality

If God exists, it is wishful thinking to believe, as naturalists and new ageists do, that humans are the source of morality. Considerable evidence has been presented throughout this book affirming the existence of God, the divinity of Jesus, and the inspiration of the Bible. Thus, the belief that humans are the source of ethics and morality lacks supporting evidence and is rooted in personal beliefs, opinions, and a denial of a transcendent Creator. The God who exists, as Christian theists have argued, is the source of the moral code for His creatures.

Jesus

Considerable evidence that Jesus is God and Savior is presented in Chapters 11 and 12. Jesus fulfilled numerous prophecies, did miraculous works, rose from the dead, and demonstrated His divine nature proving He is God. Here again, the evidence affirms Christian theism against naturalist and new ageist contentions.

Summary

The beliefs of Christian theists have been shown to agree with the prophetic, scientific, and historical evidence available. Furthermore, Christian theists have satisfactorily answered the objections raised by skeptics (as has been done throughout this book). The same cannot be said of naturalism and new ageism, where supporters have generally ignored the challenges posed in this book. Naturalism and new ageism thus appear to be worldviews rooted in atheist, materialist, or pantheist dogma and not the available evidence. Thus, billions of people hold and live

according to false worldviews, making crucial decisions according to false presuppositions. In light of the evidence, the retreat from Christian theism is hasty and ill-founded. If Christian theism is true, as the evidence affirms, there will be an eternal cost to those who reject it.

Study Questions

1. Given the summary in this chapter and the evidence presented throughout the book, can you conceive of a way that naturalism and new ageism could be true and Christian theism false?
2. If you were a Christian theist, how would you summarize the case for Christian theism? Write a paragraph summarizing your thoughts.
3. If Christian theism is the true worldview, what are the implications for your life?

18

What Christianity Teaches

Christianity teaches many things. Rooted in the evidence presented so far, this chapter will assume the premise that the Bible is the Word of God and that truth about ultimate reality can be found there. Please begin with a review of the list of non-negotiable beliefs of the Christian faith provided at the beginning of Chapter 13. Beyond that list, we will add details in the following paragraphs and describe true Christianity as taught by the Bible.

True Christianity

There are three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), who together form the eternal Godhead (Matthew 28:19). They are of the same substance but are different in their roles. The persons of the Trinity have many overlapping roles, but in general, the Father creates (Genesis 1:1), the Son saves (John 3:16-18), and the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin (John 16:8). The Trinity exists in perfect unity and harmony. The universe and everything in it were created by God through Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:16). Adam and Eve, the first parents of all humanity, disobeyed God (Genesis 3). At the fall, sin and death entered the world (Romans 5:12). Since all humanity is descended from Adam and Eve, human sin nature is passed forward from generation to generation (Genesis 3; Roman 8:20-22). Because of sin, humans are separated from God. Humans were born in sin and will continue to sin throughout their lives. (Colossians 1:21-22).

Jesus descended from heaven and was born of the Virgin Mary (Matthew 1:23). He took on human flesh as a sacrificial act to reconcile sinners to God. He is the Son of God who died on a cross as payment for the sins of all people (Romans 5:8). On the Sunday after His crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). By His sacrifice, Jesus reconciles all who

believe in Him to God (Romans 5:5-11). All who repent and believe in Jesus will be granted eternal life in heaven. You can become a child of God for eternity by receiving Jesus and placing your faith in Him (John 1:12-13; John 3:16-18). However, not all will receive God's gift of eternal salvation (Romans 1:18).

Furthermore, all who believe in Christ should be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and follow the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). Moreover, they should affiliate with a body of believers in a local church (Hebrews 10:25). The Bible (Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures) is the inspired, inerrant Word of God (see Chapter 13). God's purpose in human history is to purify a people for Himself, zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14). Christ will return at the Second Coming and eliminate pain, evil, suffering, and death from His creation (Revelation 19:11-21; 21:1-4). The destiny of all humans is heaven or hell. Heaven is the place of eternal existence in communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Revelation 22:3-7). Hell is the place of eternal torment and separation from God (Revelation 21:8).

Not all Christian churches teach the truth about Christ and the Christian faith (2 Timothy 4:3; John 14:15). True Christianity teaches what the Bible teaches because it is the inspired Word of God without error (John 17:17; Psalm 119:160). In short, Christians believe that everything the Bible affirms is true. Christians view the Bible as the ultimate guide for understanding and living a life pleasing to God (Deuteronomy 12:28). God, working through the Holy Spirit, used ordinary people (the prophets), having distinct personalities, to convey His message to humanity through the ages (2 Peter 1:21). This resulted in the compilation of the Bible (See Chapter 13).

More Detail about Christianity

The following sections derive from the Bible and add a bit of depth to what was said above about the teachings of Christianity.

God

There is one God, but three persons in God: Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Together, they are known as the Trinity and sometimes the Godhead. Each person of the Trinity is God, and they are in perfect union with one another (John 10:30). The persons of the Trinity are of the same substance, eternal in nature, but they occupy different offices.

God is the standard of all perfection (Mark 10:18). He cannot tolerate or condone sin in any way because it is completely contrary to His perfect nature (Habakkuk 1:13; Psalm 11:7). We say that God is holy because He is free of imperfection and evil. Thus, He is the sole author of the moral code. God is all-powerful and all-knowing (Luke 1:37; Psalm 147:5). He is the author of all that exists (Revelation 4:11). His love, justice, and truth are perfect (Matthew 5:48).

Creation

God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were present at the creation of the universe (Genesis 1:2; Colossians 1:16). They existed when the universe did not (Genesis 1; Isaiah 9:6). God brought the universe into existence through Jesus (John 1:1-3). All that was created by God was very good, including man and woman (Genesis 1). The first man and the first woman were Adam and Eve (Genesis 2). All human beings who ever lived are descendants of Adam and Eve.

The Fall

God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to tend His creation (Genesis 3). There were few rules. Adam and Eve were to be fruitful and to multiply, and they were to refrain from eating from or touching the tree in the middle of the garden. God gave Adam and Eve the freedom to obey or disobey Him. Adam and Eve were tempted by Satan, and they disobeyed God. Something changed drastically in them and in the world around them. Sin had entered the world and corrupted God's good creation. Adam and Eve were changed forever, and death and disease entered the world. They were permanently corrupted by sin in what appears to be a genetic change. The result is that sinful humanity is alienated from a perfect God who is the standard of what is right and good. Since all humanity is descended from Adam and Eve, all humans inherited a sin nature

(Romans 5:12). It is a fact of human experience that the human sin nature shows up in different ways in different people and that there are no perfect people (Romans 3:23).

The solution to human alienation from God

God, in His perfect justice, cannot look the other way at the sins of humans. However, in His perfect love, He has made a way for humans to be reconciled to Him (John 3:16-18). For God, the Creator of the universe, the only acceptable sacrifice and payment for the sins of the world was His Son's suffering and death on the cross (Isaiah 53:1-12). At the cross, God in human flesh paid the price for the sins of the world. All who truly repent of their sins and believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus will be granted eternal life in the presence of God in heaven (Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9).

The Reality of Sin in Our Own Lives

God has made His rules for how we must live our lives plain in the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:1-22). Let's consider for a moment how we would stack up against God's Ten Commandments on our own merits.

Think for a moment. Have you ever told a lie, even a little white lie, perhaps a lie of convenience or to spare someone's feelings? It is still a lie. Have you ever fudged the numbers on your income taxes—a few more deductions here, a bit less income there? Have you ever exaggerated on a job application or résumé? No doubt, there is not a person who has not broken the commandment not to lie in some way. How about stealing? Have you ever taken something that did not belong to you, anything at all, perhaps just a pencil, a paper clip, or a few coins? How about adultery?

Maybe you are comforted that you have never physically cheated on your spouse, but Jesus says that if we even look on another person with lust, we have committed adultery in our hearts! How about murder? Perhaps you are safe there, but once again, not so fast. Jesus says if we are even angry with our brothers, we have committed murder in our hearts. How about taking the Lord's name in vain? Have you ever done that? Most likely, you have. What about having other gods before the Lord?

Maybe we don't have idols made of stone or metal, but what about money, things, and activities? Do you ever put these before God? Can any of us really say that we put God first in our lives all of the time? Do you skip church habitually, or have you just gone through the motions of getting there and sitting there, or avoided church completely? If so, you have not kept the Sabbath. How about coveting? Have you ever wanted something that belonged to your neighbor? Maybe you have been a bit jealous? We have all fallen short of God's perfect standard. The truth is all humans are sinners.

Why Good People Will Not Be in Heaven

I won't go through the rest of the commandments, but I think if we are honest, we must admit that we have all broken the Ten Commandments many times throughout our lives. The breaking of God's commandments is sin, and sin erects a barrier between us and God, who is perfect (Romans 6:23; Isaiah 59:2). When we say we are a "good person," we are comparing ourselves to the standards of the world; but that standard is far too low! We miss the point that the true standard is perfection. That is God's standard, and when we compare ourselves to it, it should be obvious that we have all fallen short of the perfection of God (Luke 18:19). The world's standards are not God's standards. We can never be good enough to be in the presence of a perfect God on our own merits. We love to hear about the perfect love of God but are less interested in the perfect justice of God. But ignoring it will not diminish it. A perfect God must judge sin.

No. Good people will not be in heaven. There are people who do good things, but there are no people who are perfectly good. Only righteous people will be in heaven. Only righteous people will be in heaven before a righteous God. On our own merits, we can never achieve righteousness, but thanks be to God, He credits righteousness to each of us when we repent of our sins and truly believe in his Son (Romans 3:21-24).

God's Nature Demands a Penalty for Sin

The prophet Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:13) tells us that God is so pure that he cannot even look on wickedness, and that is what

sin is. God has not just made some arbitrary standard to set us up for failure (James 1:13-14). No, He has given us His law because it is His standard, and it represents who He is. Since God is the owner and Creator of the universe, His standard must be satisfied. God is the one and only standard of what is good, and what is good is what is consistent with His nature. Because God is just, He must judge sin (Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 89:14). God cannot go against His own perfect nature.

If God is So Loving, Why Must He Punish People?

God's perfect justice demands that there be a penalty for sin. Some say, "If God is so loving, there cannot be a hell." The problem with this assessment is that it overlooks that God is simultaneously perfectly loving and perfectly just. He can't give up on His justice to show His love.

Consider the hypothetical situation where someone breaks into your home and brutally murders your spouse while you are away. The responsible individual is brought to trial. The evidence is clear-cut, and the murderer is convicted by the jury. At sentencing, the judge allows the murderer to speak before the sentence is read. The murderer begins to cry, says he is sorry, and promises never to do it again. The judge then reads the sentence: the murderer is to be set free because he is sorry for what he has done. The judge bangs the gavel, and the murderer freely leaves the courtroom while you sit there in agony, contemplating your broken life.

No civilized people would stand for such an outrage. There would be cries for the removal of the judge from the bench. This is a ridiculous outcome to this tragic story, but it represents exactly how people often think God will interact with them. They assume that God is so loving that He will never punish them. They assume, like the incompetent judge, that God will just overlook their sins.

The outcome is ridiculous because justice is neglected! No good human judge will let a lawbreaker go scot-free—the murderer has broken God's commandments and owes a great debt to society whether he is sorry or not. Neither should we think that God, the perfect judge, can let us off scot-free when we break His laws. An all-knowing, perfectly just God cannot

just overlook the sins we have committed!

God's love and justice must be both satisfied in His dealings with his creatures. Each of us, throughout our lives, breaks God's laws in many ways. If we are honest with ourselves, if we look deep inside, we will find some very unpleasant things. Can you imagine if every evil thought you had and every evil deed you ever committed flashed up on a giant screen for everyone in the world to see? Can you honestly say that you would be proud of all your thoughts and deeds?

If God is perfectly good and we are corrupt, fallen people by God's standards, are we hopelessly destined to be eternally separated from God? By no means. God has provided a solution to this dilemma (1 Timothy 1:15).

Here Is Where the Love of God Comes In

God knows that His children cannot pay the debt for their sins. God descended from the heavenly realm to offer payment for the sins of His children. Jesus Christ came clothed in humanity to pay the price for our sin debt through his sacrifice on the cross.

Nothing the guilty murderer described above could do would change the fact of his guilt. So too, nothing we can do will change the fact that we are guilty before God. We had a sinful nature at birth, and we have sinned throughout our lives. It is, therefore, by the grace of God that we are saved because nothing we can do will remove our guilt. God reaches down to us. We have no hope of working our way to Him. God, through Jesus, is the author of our salvation.

Because of His unfailing love for His creatures, God made a way that they could be reconciled to Him. God sent Jesus on a mission to rescue fallen humanity. The sacrifice for the sins of the world that was acceptable to God was the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Christ died for our sins. He died the death that we deserved and paid the price for our sins. His death on the cross atoned for our sins (Matthew 20:28; Galatians 3:13). Through the death of His sinless Son Jesus, we are reconciled to God, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ is credited to all who believe in him (2 Corinthians 5:18-21; 1 Peter 2:24; Hebrews 9:28; Isaiah 53:4-6).

Through the work of Christ, the sins of those who repent and believe have been nailed to the cross, and God has dropped the charges lodged against us. In short, believers are forgiven, and their sin debt is paid in full (Colossians 2:13).

Jesus Christ is God revealed in the flesh. He led a sinless life (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus did something for us that no human could do. He saves us from drowning in our sin because He is sinless. Jesus can save us from drowning in a sea of sin because He is not drowning in sin. He stands on the rock of eternal righteousness. A drowning person cannot save another drowning person. They both will drown. By believing in Christ, we accept the sacrifice that He made on our behalf, and we are reconciled to God.

Those who trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are granted salvation, not on the basis of works, but through the mercy and the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). Believers in Jesus are renewed and regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14). God works on believers throughout their lives to prepare them for eternity in His presence. No human could hope for a more excellent destiny (1 Corinthians 2:9).

A Dark Side

Since Adam and Eve, the default eternal destination of all humans is hell because God cannot countenance the moral lapses of humans. We all need a Savior. Eternity in God's presence is only for those who repent of their sins and truly believe in Jesus. Consider Jesus' words:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)

Those who truly believe in Jesus are sure to be with God for eternity. Those who do not believe in Jesus are sure to be separated from God for eternity.

The Eternal Destiny of All People

No person knows the eternal destiny of another person. God will decide where each of us will spend eternity. However, God has made His divine game plan quite clear. The Bible tells us that after we live our lives, we will be judged by the perfect Judge (Hebrews 9:27). There will be no reincarnation, second chance, or trap door escapes. There are only two possible places where humans will spend eternity: heaven or hell. According to the Bible, those who have rejected, denied, or ignored Jesus will be separated from God forever in a place called hell (Revelation 21:8). Those who repent of their sins, receive Jesus by faith in this life, and truly believe that He is the resurrected Son of God will be granted access to heaven. There is no middle ground described in the Bible. Those who ignore Jesus or deny that He is the Son of God have rejected Him and have cast their lot with the outcasts.

Even after reading this, many will make their own salvation plan. They will say to themselves, "I believe that all good people will go to heaven." When people say this, they are making themselves out to be the lord of the universe. They certainly can't prove that all good people will go to heaven. As noted earlier, there are people who do good things, but there are no perfectly good people. Therefore, none are righteous in the eyes of God (Romans 3:11-12).

On the other hand, the Bible, affirmed by the substantial evidence presented in this book, makes it clear that faith in Jesus is the only way to God. The Lord of the universe has spoken to us through a prophetic, divine book. He has said that only those who believe in His Son will gain access to heaven. It's God's universe. He created it from nothing! It follows that God is the one who will define how His creatures can gain access to His heaven.

Heaven

Heaven is the eternal place where God and Christ are in charge (Matthew 22:44). It is a place of perfection and great beauty where there will be no evil, sickness, pain, or death (Revelation 21:3-5). There will be no judgment or sin. It is the place of perfect harmony where those who love God will be with

God. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will be present there. All who die believing in Christ as their Savior will immediately be granted access to heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8). True believers of all ages will spend eternity in the presence of God, basking in His glory, serving Him, and singing His praises.

Hell

Hell is a troublesome topic for many, so consider the following before you reject the reality of hell. Can you imagine spending your life ignoring God, making jokes about Jesus freaks and Christians, or rejecting what the Bible teaches about proper living, and ending up in a place like heaven where the residents sing praises to God and Jesus for eternity? For the person who has ignored God or rejected God by denying His Son, heaven would not be the place he or she would want to be. In fact, to someone who ignores or rejects Jesus, heaven would be a place of torment, a living hell.

Jesus, the one who proved He is the Son of God by fulfilling the Messianic prophecies, mentions hell dozens of times, referring to it as hell, the outer darkness, or the place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Hell is a place of misery and eternal punishment, and complete separation from God. It is the place where Satan, his angels, and those who have ignored or rejected Jesus will spend eternity. The unrighteous and their spiritual father Satan will be cast into the furnace of fire prepared for them where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:41-42).

If there is eternal heaven, there must be eternal hell because God will not allow the perfection of heaven to be corrupted by the evil of hell. God will separate from Himself those who despise, reject, or ignore Him. God allows his enemies to have their own way. God considers those who reject His Son to be enemies (Romans 5:10), along with Satan and his rebellious angels, which is a sobering thought.

Conclusion

Perhaps the best conclusion for this chapter is to say that your eternal destiny has everything to do with what you do with Jesus. Receive Him and be welcomed as a child of God. Apart

from Him, there is no redemption, eternal salvation, or hope. As the Apostle Paul writes:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” (Titus 2:11–14)

A shorter conclusion to this chapter might be as follows: Jesus—don’t leave Earth without Him.

Study Questions

1. Summarize the core beliefs of Christianity in a paragraph. Where should Christians go to learn what true Christianity teaches?
2. What occurred when Adam and Eve disobeyed God? What happened to the world and human life with that disobedience? What was God’s solution to human alienation from Him?
3. What difference is drawn in this chapter between good and righteous people? Why does God only allow righteous people in heaven? Why must God’s justice be upheld in His dealings with human beings?
4. How can human beings obtain righteousness before God? How are God’s love and justice satisfied in Jesus Christ?
5. Write a paragraph summarizing the eternal destiny of all people. Does this biblical teaching trouble you? What questions are raised in your mind as you contemplate the matter of eternal destiny?

19

Only Jesus Is Qualified to Save

I grew up in the L.A. area. If you were thinking of Los Angeles, you would be sadly mistaken. The residents of Maine (USA) refer to the small cities of Lewiston and Auburn as the L.A. area. As a child, my mother worked the second shift at Bates Mill, which produced bedspreads in vast Civil War-era mills powered by a canal that diverted water from the mighty Androscoggin River. As a small child, I would often go with my father to pick up my mother from work. We would park by the canal, the thought of which still fills me with fear. The water was dark, swift, and dangerous. A wood fence lined the canal, and every so often, a car driving along the canal would veer into it, resulting in horrible deaths and disasters. Sometimes the tragedy would be compounded by the loss of those who tried to save the drowning victims. I remember wondering how I would respond if I saw someone drowning in the canal. Would I jump in to save them, not that I was qualified, or would I stand by and watch them drown? Would I try to help, or would I be a coward in my estimation at that time? In my mind, there seemed to be only those two options, and I was tormented by this question.

This brings us to the question, what does it take to be a Savior, and what qualifications are needed to be the Savior of the human race? In his book, *Christ Among Other Gods*, Erwin Lutzer, the former senior pastor of the famed Moody Church, addresses this question and discusses the necessity of the Virgin Birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25).

The Virgin Birth is ridiculed among the wise of this world, who go so far as to postulate that the birth of Jesus was the product of the union of Mary and a man who was not Joseph. This would imply that the Christ child was the product of mere human fornication among peasants. And those who have said such things seek to turn the divine birth narrative into a sordid tale of human folly, steeped in a cover-up and human depravity.

In saying these things, they seek to strip it of the divine power it truly holds. However, as has been shown, there is good evidence to believe that the God of the Bible exists. For such a God, facilitating a virgin birth is a trivial act. To skeptics of the Virgin Birth, the supernatural incarnation of Jesus is a cover-up story for human folly. Since it is at the core of Christianity, the skeptic supposes that Christians who believe such things are weak-minded. Yet the Virgin Birth of Jesus is a central doctrine of the Christian faith, and in the following paragraphs, I will explain why. It has to do with the necessary credentials of a Savior.

The Credentials of the Savior

The Messianic prophecies gave many of the details of the life of God's Savior for humanity. But let's consider the essential credentials of God's promised Savior for humanity revealed in Scripture. First, from Genesis 3:15, we learn that the Savior would be male and born of a woman. He would not beam to Earth fully formed, but rather He would enter it in the normal way, precisely as Jesus did.

Second, the Savior had to be sinless, for as we read in 1 Peter 1:18-19, "You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." Moral perfection in an unblemished sacrifice was the only sacrifice that was acceptable to God, as we learn over and over in the Old Testament sacrificial system. The church has taught the impeccability of Christ, meaning that he was without sin, since the earliest days. We read of the righteousness of the Messiah in Isaiah 53:11, which says, "...By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities." When it comes to humans, as Paul reaffirms in Romans 3:10, "There is none righteous, not even one." In contrast, the Messiah, the Savior, is the righteous, sinless servant of God.

Third, the Savior had to be God. The Apostles refer to Jesus as the Son of God. The angel Gabriel refers to Jesus as the Son of God. Satan and his demons know that Jesus is the Son of God. The Father declares Jesus to be His Son. Jesus refers to Himself

as the Son of God. There is no escaping it. The New Testament declares that Jesus is the Son of God. The Old Testament describes the coming Savior as God in Isaiah 9:6, which reads,

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

Since the Savior must be “Mighty God” and “Eternal Father,” we find the requirement that the Savior had to be God.

Three essential qualities of the Messiah

In summary, the essential attributes of the Messiah, the Savior that God would send to enter human history, are these three. First, He had to be a male born of a woman. Second, He had to be sinless. And Third, He had to be God. Jesus embodied all these attributes.³⁶⁰

The Necessity of the Virgin Birth

So, why is Virgin Birth necessary? Mary was fully human, and like all of us who are fully human, she inherited the sinful nature of Adam and Eve (Romans 5:12). Here is the crux of the matter. If Jesus had been fathered by a human father, say Joseph, as the child of two sinners (Mary and Joseph), Jesus would have been born in sin.

But Jesus was not fathered by Joseph. He was fathered by God the Holy Spirit, who supernaturally interceded to conceive a sinless child in Mary. Thus, Christ was sinless from conception. The Savior of the world had to be an unblemished, perfect offering, the only offering that would be acceptable to God (Isaiah 53:11). That would not have been possible if Jesus were the mere offspring of two human parents.

Matthew 1:27 explicitly tells us that Joseph did not consummate his marriage to Mary until Jesus was born. There could be no possibility that the Christ child was merely born of human parentage. Jesus was born in the form of a man, but He is also the Great I Am (John 8:58), who was with the Ancient of Days in eternity past, as we learn in Daniel 7. He entered the

world without sin so as to save it. As Paul informs us in Philippians 2, Jesus “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” because He was in His nature God. Thus, Jesus was the perfect Savior because He was fully human, fully God, and without sin.

Can any other world religion claim a sinless savior? Buddha didn't claim to be sinless. He abandoned his wife and young son to go on a quest for enlightenment. The Dalai Lama doesn't claim to be sinless. He seems to consider himself to be an average Dalai Lama.³⁶¹ In the Quran, we find Muhammad in need of forgiveness from Allah (Surah 47:19). In the history of human existence, only Jesus could claim the credentials of divinity and sinlessness.

Objections to the Virgin Birth

Liberal theologians (those who reject the inerrancy of the Bible) have argued against the Virgin Birth, that it was not required, and that Jesus could have been infused with divinity, perhaps at His baptism. But then, He would have remained a sinner until His baptism, which would have disqualified Him from being the perfect sacrifice to save humanity. It just takes one sin to make a sinner.

The Scriptures are plain. The Holy Spirit fathered Jesus in the womb of Mary, and He was born the Son of God. For the God who created all life and the entire universe, this was a momentous but trivial task.

Others have objected to the Virgin Birth saying that it was borrowed from Greek and Roman mythology. It is true that great people sometimes had supernatural birth legends attributed to them. It was said of Alexander the Great that when his mother's marriage to Philip was consummated, thunder and lightning struck her womb. Another legend regarding the conception of Alexander indicates that his mother conceived after swallowing a pomegranate.

Zeus is said to be the father of the gods because he fathered demigods when he consorted with women. Supposedly, Perseus was conceived when Zeus showered Danae with gold. Hercules was claimed to be the child of Zeus and a human mother.³⁶²

In no Greek or Roman legend do we see even a remote correspondence to the Virgin Birth narrative of Jesus. The Greeks and Romans were polytheists. Nowhere in their legends do we see the incarnation of a monotheistic God in human form through whom the universe had been created. We have no clue who originated these Greek and Roman birth legends. But when we consider the Virgin Birth narrative of Jesus, it is confirmed by Matthew and Luke, identifiable historical figures who were contemporaneous with the events.

Moreover, the Virgin Birth of Jesus is affirmed throughout the New Testament by other writers, and it was a central teaching of the early church, as we see in the Apostles Creed. The Virgin birth is not a legendary event. It is a historical event prophesied long before Jesus was born. The Greek and Roman stories of miraculous births are shrouded in myth and legend. The Virgin Birth of Jesus has the ring of truth because it was a necessary part of God's program of redemption and had been predicted long before the birth of Jesus.

The Results of the Virgin Birth

Consider Hebrews 7:26-27 on this matter, which reads:

For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. (Hebrews 7:26-27)

Our Savior and High Priest did not need to atone for his own sins before He atoned for ours. He was perfect and unblemished from conception, the incarnate Son of God who created us. That is why He was able to save us. That is why Jesus' death was the only acceptable sacrifice to God. In human history, there has never been another person like Jesus.

Many see Christianity as exclusive, and for this reason, they say it cannot be true. They argue that billions follow other religious leaders, and surely, they cannot all be lost. Yet Jesus says unequivocally and without exception in John 14:6, "I am

the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

Jesus is the only way to God because He is the only one who ever lived that is qualified to save anyone. This is a very important observation. Jesus was sinless, and Jesus was God. Jesus was qualified to save. None of this can be said about Muhammad, the Buddha, the Dalai Lama, or any other religious leader who ever lived. They were not qualified to save themselves, let alone anyone else. A sinful, finite human who will face death cannot promise to provide eternal life for other humans. On the other hand, our sinless Savior was the perfect fragrant offering before God, who possessed eternal life in Himself, was fully qualified, and was able to confer eternal life to those who believed in Him. It is for this reason that Jesus is Human History’s Central Figure.

Human History’s Central Figure

You might remember H. G. Wells for his science fiction novels such as *The War of the Worlds*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, and many others. But H. G. Wells was a prolific writer in several fields, including biography and history. Wells was a prominent historian who wrote a book called *The Outline of History*. It was published in 1920 and sold two million copies. Wells was an influential historian, and he was also an atheist. Listen to what Wells, the historian, had to say about Jesus:

I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.³⁶³

That is quite an endorsement from an atheist historian who concluded that Jesus is easily the most dominant figure in all of history. Recently, two prominent computer scientists wrote a program to analyze 800,000 Wikipedia pages of prominent figures of the past and present. They examined the length of the page, the number of views, the number of edits, and the number of links back to the page. What they found was, by far, 2000

years after He lived, Jesus is the most significant person that has ever lived.³⁶⁴ Yes, Jesus is the central figure of human history because He is the way, the truth, and the life.

What the soul truly yearns for can only be delivered by the child who was born in such a lowly state and laid in a manger. Over 2000 years ago, Jesus plunged into the dark, swift, and dangerous waters of this broken world, knowing He would be humiliated by the ones He created. He was the only one qualified in the history of the world to do the job. He didn't hesitate. He set aside divine prerogatives because of His love for you (Philippians 2:5-11). Repent of your sins, and trust in Him. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and it is only in Him that true hope and joy can be found.

Study Questions

1. Summarize the credentials of a Savior and the three essential qualities of the Messiah. Why must the Messiah possess these qualities?
2. Why was the Virgin Birth of Jesus necessary?
3. Some agnostics and skeptics have concluded that Jesus is human history's central figure. How did they come to this conclusion?

20
Eternal Hope

Blaise Pascal lived in the 17th century, long after the dawning of the Northern Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation. Pascal was a great French mathematician, scientist, philosopher, and theologian. He was also a devout Christian, and in the circles he traveled, he was surrounded by atheists, skeptics, and agnostics. Pascal sought a way to convey to his friends and acquaintances the danger of their skepticism and complacency. He formulated what has come to be known as Pascal's Wager.

The essence of Pascal's Wager is this. Each person in this life must wager either that God exists or that God does not exist. If one believes in God, that individual has nothing to lose but everything to gain. However, if one chooses not to believe in God, that individual has everything to lose and gains very little in this life by their lack of piety.

Pascal's wager has been criticized by many, but it still intrigues people to this day. Is it possible to revise Pascal's Wager to be more compelling? Consider the following simple logical argument.

1. In John's Gospel, Jesus promises heaven to those who believe in Him and hell to those who do not believe in Him.
2. A wise person considers the available evidence before making conclusions.
3. There is great eternal significance should Jesus' claim be true.
4. Therefore, a wise person would make a careful investigation into the evidence supporting or invalidating Jesus' claims.

The purpose of this book has been to lay out the evidence supporting the truth of Jesus' claims about who He is and what He says about the eternal destiny of every person. Jesus is our only eternal hope. When the evidence for Jesus' claims is considered, and the challenges facing the naturalist and new ageist worldviews are understood, I hope many will conclude under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is God and Savior, worthy of love and devotion.

Still, many will not come to that conclusion. To these individuals who are still skeptical, I will leave you with this. Many have called upon God in confusion and uncertainty, asking that God, if He exists, would reveal Himself. So, if you are still skeptical, are you willing to ask God for answers and clarity about Jesus? If not, I would ask, why not? What do you have to lose?

My prayer is that God, through the Holy Spirit, will open your heart and mind to repent of your sin and believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In so doing, you will gain renewed purpose in this life and eternal life in heaven with God and His Son Jesus, who says,

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

~Matthew 7:7-8

May God bless you with wisdom, joy, love, and eternal hope in this life and the next.

Soli Deo Gloria!
D. C.

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