



# BIG QUESTIONS

A COLLECTION OF THOUGHTS  
ON THE DEEP ISSUES OF LIFE

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# BIG QUESTIONS

by Matt Abbott

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## SO, I WAS THINKING...

I've come to realize that, sooner or later, every person who walks this earth gets around to asking themselves if there's something *more* than this life as we know it.

Oh, sure, we may act like we have life all figured out via science or religion—or even some combination of both. But, deep down inside us, we know that we still have unanswered questions. *BIG* unanswered questions.

And, as Pastor Jud Boies has rightly said, the moment we allow ourselves to start *asking* those questions, a tension begins inside us between two lines of thinking: one tells us that searching for deeper answers is pointless, and to not bother chasing them. The other line of thinking, however, says, “actually, there may be something to this. See where it leads!”

It's that second line of thinking that I want to follow in writing this book. And I want to do so for two reasons. First, I have repeatedly discovered that, as I *have* followed it, the rewards it brings in the end are more than worth the journey it takes to get to them. And second—as a Christian—the Bible I revere basically *commands* me to follow it.

After all, according to Christ Himself, the Greatest Commandment in all of Scripture is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind* and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, emphasis mine). Including—and employing—a person's mind has always been an important part of the Christian faith.

In fact, one thing that stands out to me from Scripture is how often Christ Himself sought to use tangible, logical evidence to make a case for His Messiahship. When pressed for a “sign” from opponents, for example, or asked for reassurance from an imprisoned John the Baptist, or simply explaining His identity and plan to His disciples before His crucifixion, Jesus was constantly pointing toward His miracles as *evidence* of Who He is. (See Matthew 16:1-4, Luke 7:18-23, John 5:16-30, and John 14:11.)

And, the church Jesus founded continued that method as it grew and progressed in the first century. In fact, the Apostle Peter even says in his second New Testament letter that it's actually *because* Christians have the power of God's Spirit available to us that we *should use* that power to “make every effort to add to our faith...knowledge,” as doing so is exactly part of what will help us be effective and productive in terms of growing and evangelism (see 2 Peter 1:3-9).

The Apostle Paul, too, sought to use logic and reason in evangelizing the people of Athens (Acts 17:16-34) and wrote to the Corinthian church concerning the importance of “[demolishing] arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and [taking] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). And the Apostle John urged the audience of his first letter to make sure not to simply believe everything they heard taught about God, but to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Perhaps my favorite verse on this topic comes from the Apostle Peter, however, who encouraged the readers of his first letter to “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15).

Thus, while I could continue citing many more reasons why I’m writing this book, it seems to me I’d best get on with actually writing it and seeking out those answers!

I hope you’ll come too.

## QUESTION 1: IS IT REASONABLE TO BELIEVE A GOD EXISTS?

I love the Big Bang theory.

No, not the TV show. I mean the *literal* Big Bang theory. I love it because it clears up so much for me in terms of this question. Because if the universe had a beginning, then it logically follows that it must have had a cause. Anything that begins to exist always has a cause.

And, really, there are only two possibilities for what that cause could be. Either “something” caused the Big Bang, or “nothing” caused it.

If “nothing” was the cause, then that’s fine. End of story. As a meme I saw recently put it, “we’re all just things, sitting on a thing, floating through a thing.” The only logical problem with that line of thought is this: it’s kind of impossible for things to be caused by “nothing.” Because there’s “nothing” there to cause it.

Even scientists like Stephen Hawking, who have attempted to explain how something can indeed come from nothing, end up with circular reasoning-type theories at best. And, as philosopher of science John Lennox says, “nonsense remains nonsense, even when spoken by famous scientists.”

So we’re left with “something” as the cause of the Big Bang. And whatever that “something” was, it had to be:

- Able to exist apart from nature, since it caused nature to begin existing,
- Able to exist outside of time, since it caused time to begin,
- Spaceless/immaterial (rather than physical), since it caused space to begin existing,
- Intelligent, since it caused information (like DNA) to exist in that which it created,
- Uncaused itself, since logically there cannot be an infinite regression of causes.

Notice what we get if we add all of that together: a *supernatural*, timeless, immaterial, intelligent, uncaused “something.”

...Or “Someone,” perhaps? After all, the above description certainly sounds a lot like exactly how the Bible describes “God.”

## QUESTION 2:

### IF GOD EXISTS, WHY DOES HE “HIDE”?

“Okay, Matt,” a skeptic may say; “but if the God the Bible describes *does* exist, then why does He seem to ‘hide’ from us? Why doesn’t He just reveal Himself fully to us?”

Actually, the answer—according *to* the Bible—is pretty simple:

#### **A. “You can’t handle the truth!”**

First of all, the Bible shows us repeatedly that if God *were* to reveal Himself fully to us, all at once, in all of His glory—we wouldn’t be able to handle it. For one thing, the Bible makes it clear that God is *holy* (i.e. “set apart as special” from everything else in all existence) and He dwells in “unapproachable” light (see 1 Timothy 6:16).

As a result, when people in Bible times caught even a *glimpse* of God, they immediately freaked out and either (a) “fell down as though dead” (see Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, and Revelation 1), or (b) just plain asked for someone *else* to speak to God on their behalf, lest they die (see Exodus 20:19).

The Bible also says that God’s ways are *so much higher* than our ways that there’s no way we *can* fully understand them, even if He *were* to reveal “everything” to us. In fact, in Isaiah 55:9, the Bible compares the difference between our ways and God’s ways to the drastic difference between the size of the earth and the size of the entire universe. (That’s a pretty big difference!)

Yet, even so, the Bible does make it clear that God wants a relationship with us, which brings us to Point B:

#### **B. “The testimony of Creation”**

God actually *isn’t* hiding from us, according to the Bible. All of the creation around us points to the fact that it had a *Creator*. And, according to the Bible, that was quite intentional on God’s part:

*“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made”* (Romans 1:20).

*“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole*

*earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:26-27).*

God has *always* used creation to point human beings to the fact that He exists, in hopes—as Acts says there—that we would “seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him”—which brings us to Point C:

### **C. God wants us to “want” Him**

Every so often, my wife will flirt with me by playing “hard to get.” As she explains, she does so because she’s looking for occasional reassurance that I still love her for *who she is*, not simply what she can do for me or give me. She wants to know that I truly love *her as a person*. I get that.

And, on a much larger level, God does the same thing with us. One thing the Bible makes clear from cover to cover is that God wants an *authentic* relationship with us. He doesn’t want us to be a bunch of mindless robots who are preprogrammed to “love and obey Him.” That’s why He gives us free will, with the freedom to choose *not* to love Him and follow Him.

He also doesn’t want those who *do* follow Him to do so out of a half-hearted, lukewarm, “duty”-driven commitment. That’s why He gives us *just enough* proof of His existence (via creation and, in the New Testament, Jesus’ parables) to show us that He’s there, that He’s good, and that He *wants* us—yet He leaves the response up to us.

Somewhat like my wife when she plays “hard to get”, God wants to know that we really want *Him*—not just what He can give us or do for us. He wants an authentic relationship with us based on authentic *love*.

That’s why God tells us plainly that if we *will* seek Him *with all of our heart*, we *will* find Him (see Jeremiah 29:13, Mark 4:1-20)—as former atheist authors like Lee Strobel, Ray Johnston, and J. Warner Wallace can testify!

### **D. Live and In Person**

Though, really, I can’t imagine God making His existence and desire for us more clearly known than He did around 2,000 years ago when He *showed up in person* in the form of Jesus Christ to teach us, heal us, and ultimately save us for eternity. (More on that in later chapters.)

So, really, God's *not* hiding from us. Not at all. All around us, He's left an abundance of "arrows" that point to both Him, His character, and how to have a relationship with Him.

The *real* question we should be asking is this one: when, and how, will we *respond* to Him?

### QUESTION 3: ARE MY ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 1 & 2 COP-OUTS?

“Timeout, Matt,” a skeptic may retort; “if the universe requires ‘God to create it, why does God not require something to create *Him*? Your argument sounds like special pleading to me.”

Not at all—for even the atheist who asks how the universe began will eventually have to end up at an uncaused cause of *some* kind.

After all, whether a person believes in a Quantum Vacuum theory, or a Multiverse Generator theory, or a Simulation theory, or an “Alien Seeding” theory—or God!—logically, we can only ask the question “but who created *that*?” so many times. If you go back far enough with *any* theory, at some point you have to end at an uncaused cause for the beginning of the universe we inhabit.

So why *couldn't* that cause be the God the Bible describes?

To some, I understand that such answers may seem like nothing more than the cop-out responses of a lazy religious person who is tragically satisfied with not understanding the world around them. But that is simply not what they are. On the contrary, as Pastor Greg Laurie has said so well,

*“People sometimes say, ‘You know Christians—they’re a bunch of brainwashed idiots, and they live by faith...’ Nonsense. I didn’t start thinking until I became a Christian. I marched in step with cultural cues where people told me what to say, what to think. [But] when I became a Christian, I started thinking carefully and deeply about life, and what truth is, and what truth isn’t.”*<sup>1</sup>

Makes sense. (And I’d certainly say the same for myself.)

As I mentioned in my introduction, according to Jesus Christ Himself, the Greatest Commandment in all of the Bible is to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind* and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30, emphasis mine). Christians who leave deep thought out of their faith are Christians who leave out obedience to 1/4 of the Greatest Commandment in all of Scripture!

“Okay, Matt,” the skeptic may push back, “but—ultimately—aren’t people like you ‘Christians’ only because your faith was handed down to you by your family?”

Actually, it's not that simple in my case—nor in many cases I know of. But even if it were that simple, let me ask you this: does the fact that my parents “handed down” information to me automatically negate the validity *of* the information? For example: my parents also taught me that  $2 + 2 = 4$  and that fire can burn me. Are those statements inherently *untrue* simply because I learned them from my parents? Of course not. Nor is Christianity automatically “untrue,” simply because a person may first learn of it from *their* parents. Regardless of the means through which information is acquired, the most important question is always this: is the information *true*?

As New York Pastor Timothy Keller has said so well,

*“Properly understood, Christianity is by no means the ‘opiate of the people.’ It’s more like the smelling salts.”*<sup>2</sup>

“So Matt,” the skeptic may retort, “now you’re saying that you have *all* of the answers to *everything* about life?”

Not at all. But *every* worldview comes with unanswered questions about life, whether Christian, atheist, agnostic, humanist—you name it!

By far, the better question to ask, as Apologist J. Warner Wallace says, is this: “which worldview gives me the *best answers* and leaves me with the *least questions*?”

For me and, obviously, many other people around the world through the centuries, the answer to that question is quite clear...

## QUESTION 4:

### WHAT IS THE BEST SPIRITUAL JOURNEY STARTING POINT?

Since it is reasonable to believe that God exists—based on, of all things, the clear evidence God has left for us to observe, coupled with the minds God gave us to process it all—then it would logically follow that God wants to have some kind of relationship with us.

Yet, in a world with so many different religions and ideas *about* God—many of which drastically conflict with one another—where is the most logical place to even begin seeking to know the “real” God?

Personally, I think scholar and professor Dr. Craig Hazen makes a strong point when he suggests starting with Christianity, *because...*

#### **A. Christianity is “testable”**

In other words, evidence can be offered *for* its validity, and *against* its validity, and the evidence actually means something.

In fact, even the Bible itself encourages people to “test” it and see for themselves if it holds any validity. Psalm 34:8, for example, symbolically calls people to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” And the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, essentially challenges his readers to try and disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a historical fact. For, as Paul says, there are plenty of eyewitness accounts of the resurrection, and “if Christ has not been raised, [our] faith is futile,” “those [who have died believing] in Christ are lost,” and “[Christians] are of all people most to be pitied”... “if only for this life we have hope in Christ.”

#### **B. In Christianity, Salvation is Free**

There’s no need for believers to crawl miles across broken glass, pay some fee, try to follow some “eightfold path”, nor obey “five pillars” of faith. In fact, the entire point of Christianity is that we *can’t* be “good enough” to know God on our own (Romans 3:23), because each one of us has already offended Him with the times we’ve lied, cheated, stolen, hated, etc. So the belief among Christians is that the only way we *can* have a relationship with God is if He helps us in a way we can’t help ourselves: by making the way for us to be forgiven for our offenses.

And, the Bible says He did exactly that through Jesus, Who did all the work *for* us. In dying on the cross, He took the responsibility and the punishment on Himself for our offenses, so we could be forgiven and free

of them. It's by God's grace that we're saved, through faith, Ephesians 2:8 tells us, "and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

So, in Christianity, all that is required on our part is the same thing we do every Christmas or birthday: to accept a gift and use what we're given. In the case of Christianity, that means accepting God's free gift of salvation through Jesus, and "using" it by living out the new life He gives us (see John 3:16, Romans 6:23, and Romans 10:9-13). That's it!

### **C. Christianity's worldview fits with daily life experience**

As a man in our church says to me every so often, "the more I understand the Bible, the more life just...makes sense." And, as we'll see as we progress through this book, it's true!

### **D. Christianity has Jesus as the center**

Think about this: Who is the One religious figure that *everyone*, from *every religion*, seems to want something to do with? From Buddhists (who believe Jesus to be a "bodhisattva"), to Muslims (who believe Him to be a Prophet), to Hindus (who believe Him to be a possible incarnation of their god Vishnu), to New Agers to...you name it! It's like *everyone* who talks about spiritual things has a place for Jesus somewhere in their teachings, or wants *something* to do with Him in *some* way. (Even *atheists* seem to choose Jesus most as a favorite target of argument and such.)

So, if you're on a quest for spiritual truth, why *wouldn't* you begin with the faith that has Jesus at its core, with books written by people who actually walked, talked, and learned from Him in person?

"But Matt," a skeptic may say; "this all assumes that we can actually trust the Bible to be accurate in terms of what it records. But how do we know we can trust the Bible in the first place?"

## QUESTION 5: IS THE BIBLE TRUSTWORTHY?

I'm convinced that the answer is a huge "yes" because of three main reasons:

### **A. The Bible's historical accuracy is constantly scrutinized, yet also constantly confirmed**

From ongoing archeological finds to ongoing scientific discoveries, it seems that not more than a month tends to pass without a published article offering information that verifies at least one aspect of the historical reliability of the Bible. All we have to do to see it is pay attention to the news! (Just 2 weeks prior to me writing this chapter, for example, CNN ran a story about the sale of the "earliest known stone version of Ten Commandments" that had been found.)

Consider, also, what scholars like former skeptic Sir William Ramsay often say about Biblical writers such as Luke. In reference to the minute details that Luke includes in his New Testament writings, Ramsay concluded that "Luke is an historian of the first rank. This author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

### **B. The Bible's textual accuracy is consistently verified to be legitimate**

We can rest assured that the Bibles we hold in our hands today contain the same, unaltered, non-manipulated contents that the original authors and eyewitnesses wrote down thousands of years ago.

Any concerns that people once had in terms of the accuracy of the Old Testament's text were easily laid to rest with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947—one of the "most important archeological finds *ever*" as some have labeled them. (If you don't know much about them, I encourage you to look them up and learn more. They're awesome!)

And, as far as the New Testament goes, more than 5,600 ancient Greek manuscripts of the Bible have been found, collected, compared, and found consistent with each other. More than 5,600! That's far more source material than exists for any other book written in antiquity that we commonly accept without protest. As Jewish scholar Jacob Klausner says, "If we had ancient sources like those in the Gospels for the history of Alexander or Caesar, we should not cast any doubt upon them whatsoever."

### **C. The Bible passes the “life accuracy” test every day**

In other words: when I *do* the things that God tells me to do in the Bible, I get the positive results that the Bible promises I’ll get. And when I do the *opposite* of what God tells me to do in the Bible, I get the *consequences* it promises I’ll get. Every time. (See Galatians 5:16-26 with Galatians 6:7-9 for example.) That tells me that the Bible is the real thing.

“Hang on, Matt,” someone may inquire, “so you mean to tell me that you think things like the Bible’s creation story *actually happened* like the Bible says?”

Let’s take a look.

## QUESTION 6: IS THE BIBLE'S CREATION STORY NONSENSE?

If we compare what Genesis 1 records to what science has discovered thus far in history, what do we *actually* find?

### A. The Big Bang Theory

Consider science's Big Bang theory, for example. As we already explored back in Question 1, the Bible certainly wouldn't argue against the idea that the universe had a beginning. (In fact, the Bible made that claim *thousands of years* before science came to that conclusion.)

And—as we discussed in Question 1—if we pair the Big Bang Theory with the way the Bible describes “God”, the two actually go together quite well on a logic/reason level.

### B. The Order of the Formation of the Earth and the Sun

Consider also the 2014 report that “a team of researchers studying the origin of the water in our solar system [including that found on earth] concluded that up to half of it formed before the sun itself was born”<sup>1</sup>

Oddly enough, Genesis would agree there too! As far as the order of creation goes, Genesis states *first* that God created a “formless and empty earth” (Genesis 1:1), and then *later* organized the waters (Genesis 1:6-10), and *after that* created the sun (Genesis 1:14).

### C. First Signs of Life

Now, I'm certainly no scientific scholar, but I did pay attention in High School biology class. And I remember that one of the basic parts of the theory of evolution is that “life began in the ocean.”

The funny thing is: the Bible would agree there too! Genesis 1:20-23 says that, next in the order of creation, God created “the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems” (v.21a).

(Granted, it seems the Bible would disagree with the theory of evolution on a number of points *thereafter*, but I'll tackle that discussion in a later chapter.)

### D. The Cambrian Explosion

Then there's what scientists call “the Cambrian explosion”—which, according to Wikipedia, was “the relatively short evolutionary event,

beginning around 541 million years ago in the Cambrian period, during which most major animal phyla appeared, as indicated by the fossil record.” In other words, there’s a time period that we easily observe in the fossil record where a bunch of animals seem to appear very suddenly out of nowhere—just like Genesis records happened when God created various animals “according their kinds” (see Genesis 1:20-25 for example).

### **E. Dust to Dust**

Then, of course, science says that way down the evolution line—at the “end” of the evolution line, basically—come human beings.

And, while the Bible would disagree about “how” people came to be, it would agree as to the “when” that science puts forth—Genesis lists human beings as the last creature that God creates (Genesis 1:26-28).

It’s also interesting to me that some scientists have made the claim that it seems human beings were originally vegetarians (per certain parts of our internal anatomy that mirrors other animals that *are* herbivores and differs from carnivores). That, too, lines up with Genesis 1:29, where God initially gives the first human beings *only* “every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it” to “be [theirs] for food” (God’s allowance for humans to consume meat comes *much later* in Genesis).

Then there’s what happens every time someone dies—which *any* of us can easily observe, scientist or not: we decay into dirt and dust. That, too, makes perfect sense in light of Genesis—for it records that God made human beings *out of* dirt (see Genesis 2:7, for example).

Basically, it sure seems rather obvious to me that a person who claims to believe in science’s explanations of how everything began *also* believes—at least in part, if not in whole—in the Bible’s creation account, *because*—whether or not the person realizes and acknowledges it—both scientific discoveries *and* the Bible point us toward the exact same *order of* creation (even though they may come to different conclusions in their timeline and/or other interpretations of how those events were connected).

## QUESTION 7: ARE THE CREATION “DAYS” IN GENESIS LITERAL?

One question that usually arises at this point in a discussion concerning the book of Genesis, is this one: “what *about* the timeline of the events, though? Science seems to have proven pretty conclusively that it took millions and millions of years for the universe to get to where it is today—so how on earth can a person reconcile *that* with what the Bible says about it forming in only 6 days?”

Actually, there are a number of possibilities:

### **A. The Day-Age Perspective**

Some thinkers have submitted what is called the *day-age* perspective, which says that God did indeed create everything in six days—but they were six *long* days, with each “day” lasting billions of years.

And, certainly, argument could be made from a Biblical perspective that “with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8; see also Psalm 90:4).

Plus, since—according to Genesis—the things that we as human beings use to *mark* time (like the sun) were not formed and set in motion until the fourth day, we don’t know how long a “day” technically was before then. (And it was days 1-3 in which the earth, sky, organized bodies of water, land, and plants were first formed.)

### **B. The Framework Perspective**

Another perspective that some people hold to is the *framework* perspective, which says that “the seven days of creation are nonliteral and consequential but nonetheless historical.”<sup>1</sup> Basically, the framework perspective teaches that the question of the earth’s age is settled by what nature around us reveals to us, not via what the Bible says about it.

The main problem with both “A” and “B”, however, is that we have to do something with the idea of death.

After all, if indeed each “day” is actually millions or billions of years, then—as fossil records would show from these perspectives—animals came to be, lived, and then died prior to the time period Genesis 3 records. Yet, according to the Bible, there *was* no death prior to Adam and Eve’s fall into sin as recorded in Genesis 3.

Day-Age and Framework proponents would simply retort, “well, then obviously death must have been a part of God’s ‘very good’ creation from the beginning—not a result of the events in Genesis 3.” But, clearly, that seems an obvious contradiction in itself. For, if death were “good”, then why would God spend the rest of the Bible employing His elaborate plan to redeem humankind *from* death via a Savior?

### **C. Six Literal Days**

Thus, we come to perspective C: that God did, indeed, create everything within six literal days. (Which, is certainly something that could easily have been accomplished *if* the God described by the Bible does actually exist—because such a God can do whatever He wants!)

“But Matt,” someone may say, “if Genesis 1 is *literally* true, then the universe would only be about six thousand years old. Yet, science has quite obviously proven otherwise via mathematics, physics, and various dating methods. So *what do you do* with Genesis 1 in light of that?”

### **Worth A Thought**

I won’t claim to have the answer that perfectly satisfies everyone on this one, but there are three things that I think are certainly worth a thought:

#### **• *Known Flaws in Scientific Dating Methods + Noah’s Flood***

Even a quick internet search concerning “water messing up radiocarbon dating” will show that there has been considerable discussion about the effect *of water* on methods like radiocarbon dating—mainly, that water can lead to faulty (i.e. “much older than reality”) readings.

Thus, if there were indeed a worldwide flood like Genesis 6-8 describes, then anything we attempt to date via radiocarbon *prior to the flood* would give us inaccurate results and appear to be much older than it actually is.

#### **• *The Evolution Factor***

Secondly, it occurs to me that at least part of the reason that scientists assume the earth is billions of years old is because it would “have to be” in order for evolution to play out as they theorize. However, if the Genesis account of creation *is* true, and evolution as science describes it is *not* part of the picture, then obviously a much younger earth easily becomes more of a possibility.

#### **• *Created with Age?***

However, for the person who may dismiss the above points altogether, I also offer a theory that a scientist friend once offered to me—a friend who

knows far more about science than I will ever claim to:

What if God *created the world with age*?

After all, so many of the arguments we put forth on this topic assume that whenever “Day 1” happened, the earth was created as a fresh, new planet with a clean slate. But what if that wasn’t the case?

What if God created the earth on Day 1 *with age* for bigger reasons than we’ve previously thought of? What if the earth *needed to be created with age* for life to be able to exist as immediately as God wanted it to—*within* 6 days?

It’s certainly worth a thought.

“The only problem with all of that,” someone may say, “is this: if God did, indeed, create the universe, then why does it contain such obvious flaws?”

QUESTION 8:  
IF GOD EXISTS, WHY IS CREATION “FLAWED”?

It’s called the “dysteleological argument,” and it goes like this:

“If ‘creation’ contains many defects, then design is not a plausible theory for the origin of our existence”<sup>1</sup>.

Proponents of the idea would support their argument by citing everything from congenital diseases and genetic disorders, to certain seemingly useless nerves/muscles/bones in the human body, to the habitats of certain animals (such as air-breathing whales and dolphins who reside in water), to the color of plants (since, if plants were black instead of green, they could absorb far more light energy than they currently do). I imagine one could even throw in natural disasters as a cherry on top.

So, if we are to believe the Bible, and the perfect Creator God from the Bible does indeed exist, then why *is* His creation so “imperfect” and “flawed?”

Actually, the Bible gives us a relatively simple two-part answer:

**A. Sometimes it’s an “Isaiah 55:9” thing...**

In terms of things such as plant colors, habitats, and internal structures, God’s ways are just so much higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9).

Thus, while I believe that God certainly invites (and even encourages!) us to study and explore the incredible intricacies and details of His creation via the sciences, we’re simply not always going to understand how or why He has created certain things in the way that He has (see also Job 38-41).

Though, at the same time:

**B. Sometimes it’s a “Genesis 3” thing...**

In terms of natural disasters, diseases and such, according to Genesis 1 and 2, God’s creation *was* “very good” when it was first created. However, according to passages like Genesis 3 and Romans 8, once sin entered the world via humankind’s fall into sin, creation was negatively impacted *by* that sin.

The Apostle Paul even says that creation was “subjected to frustration” and

“decay”, and “has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (see Romans 8:19-22).

In fact, Paul also says that even creation itself looks forward to the time described by the Bible when God will create a *new* heaven and a *new* earth, where there will *be* no more such decay and frustration, nor any more “death or mourning or crying or pain” nor “curse”, for the way in which things currently operate will have passed away and been “renovated” into something permanent and enduring (see Revelation 21-22).

### **...Heaven too?**

“So Matt,” you may ask, “the Bible says that the current *heaven* passes away too and gets replaced with something new?”

Yes, but “heaven” in the sense of “the sky/air/firmament/universe/‘home of the sun, moon and stars’,” not “heaven” in terms of “God’s dwelling place.” (Though, as Revelation 21-22 tell us, the new earth *will be* a place where God’s presence dwells with His people in perfect fellowship, forever.)

### **Where accountability fits in**

“So Matt,” someone may say, “if God is so aware of the current sin-caused problems in creation that He will one day renovate it all, then does He hold accountable for sin people who are born with, say, psychopathy (i.e. the inability to feel guilt/empathy/grief for sinful actions)? After all, if someone is born into that state, how can they ever come to a place of true repentance in order to access the salvation Jesus died to give us?”

Two thoughts on that:

- According to the Bible, God is a God of *perfect* justice, a judge Who is literally all-knowing, and would therefore certainly judge any such person with complete fairness at a level that only God could. However...
- If I’ve learned anything in my 38 years of life, it’s this: God can get through to literally *anybody*. (Even some fighters who were part of the ISIS movement have reportedly converted to Christianity as a result of dreams they had of Jesus speaking to them! <sup>1</sup>)

The person who was “born” a certain way—*whatever* that may be—can be “born *again*” in Jesus. (In fact, according to Jesus Himself, *none* of us can see God’s Kingdom unless we *are* born again [see John 3].)

Furthermore, according to Jesus, “No one can come to [Him] unless [God] the Father...draws them” anyway (John 6:44). And, even thereafter, it’s God Who “carries to completion” the work He starts in us (Philippians 1:6). So, really, as apologist Greg Koukl has said, “a sociopath would not have to change to receive salvation. The saying goes that ‘God catches His fish first and then He cleans them.’ We don’t clean ourselves” (...which is a truth that I, for one, am exceedingly grateful for).

After all, if God can save everyone from the unrighteous, to the immoral, to idolaters, to the greedy, to thieves, to drunks, to slanderers (see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11), who’s to say He couldn’t/wouldn’t draw even the sociopath into a salvation that never really depended much on us in the first place (see Ephesians 2:1-10)?

“Come on, Matt,” the skeptic may say; “doesn’t any of this strike you as one of many contradictions you find in the Bible?”

Actually, not at all. Allow me to explain why.

## QUESTION 9: DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF?

Over many years of reading and studying the Bible cover to cover, I'd discovered that any seeming inconsistencies in Scripture can usually be easily cleared up by considering two simple things: the context of the culture in which the passages were written, and the (very important!) difference between a *contradiction* and a *necessary difference*.

In terms of context, we must always remember to begin any reading of Scripture by unbiasedly considering what the passage meant to the *person* who wrote it down, at the *time* they wrote it down, during the *circumstances* in which they wrote it down—a type of study that theologians call “exegesis.” Often, this instantly proves any seeming contradictions to actually be seamlessly consistent.

Should exegesis *not* resolve a seeming contradiction, however, we must also remember the difference between a contradiction and a necessary difference. And, admittedly, doing so successfully may require a little bit of detective work—literally. But, thinking like a detective will clear it right up:

A *contradiction*, by definition, is “an assertion to the contrary or opposite of” something. (A “round square”, for example is a contradiction.) A *difference*, on the other hand, is by definition “an instance or point of unlikeness or dissimilarity.” (An “orange square” vs a “green square” is a difference.)

So, what people often call “contradictions” in the Bible actually *aren't* contradictions; they're *differences*. And *differences* are actually to be *expected* if multiple people are telling you the truth about an event they all experienced. Any police officer can tell you that.

In fact, in my job as a Security Officer at a well-known tourist attraction, I have the privilege of working with a number of people who have varying degrees of law enforcement experience. The Director of our department, for example, formerly worked as a Police Commander in California for 31 years and a polygraph examiner for 4 years. So, I took some time to interview *him* regarding this topic. Here's what he had to say:

*“Generally, the first thing you do [when interrogating suspects of a crime] is you would separate everybody and get [each person's] own account—[because] no two accounts are exactly the same. If they are [the same],*

*that's suspicious—it means at some point there may have been collusion... so you always want to get to people before they've had a chance to contaminate each other's statements with lies."*

Consider his point in terms of something like the differences between the accounts of Jesus' resurrection, for example. As he went on to say, from a detective perspective, such differences between the Gospels actually *point toward* their validity:

*"If they were all exactly the same, and they were all written at different times—then how could that happen? [But the Gospels are] different accounts, different frames from different perspectives, different connections with Christ. I like to see it as 'each writer had a different relationship'—which, depending upon whom you're asking and what their relationship with [Christ] was, might change the frame of how they saw the circumstances."*<sup>1</sup>

So—based on the philosophy that police officers use every single day in their efforts to discover truth—the fact that Biblical books *do* contain slight variations of the same stories *actually adds to the credibility of those stories*, since such variations are *exactly what we should expect to encounter* if an event actually happened and was described by numerous witnesses!

Thus, to put it simply: in the Bible, we have 66 books written by 50 + authors over about 1,600 years—and it *all agrees*.

## QUESTION 10: ISN'T HISTORY ULTIMATELY WRITTEN BY THE "WINNERS"?

Sometimes critics will suggest that the only reason we *have* a Bible in the first place is because “history is written by the winners.” In other words, the Bible—and the faith that is based on it—are ultimately just the result of the manipulation of the people in authority over the centuries.

There are two huge problems with that theory *in terms of* the Bible, however: the authors and the compilers.

### **A. The Authors**

If you know your history, then you are well aware that the first Christians were *hardly* what a secular historian would call “winners” in the grand scheme of the story.

In fact, as both first-century secular Roman writers *and* the Bible itself readily admit, the first Christians were heavily rejected and persecuted from every angle right from the beginning of the movement we now call “Christianity.” The Jewish culture around them disowned them, the Romans tried to destroy them, and every one of the founding apostles was martyred for his belief in, and proclamation of, the resurrection of Christ except for the Apostle John—who was exiled after an attempt at executing him failed.

Even the Apostle Paul, who is credited with writing the majority of the New Testament, himself readily admits that he started out as a skeptic who actively, harshly tried to destroy Christianity via intense persecution, and only *later* became a follower of Christ via a personal revelation he claims to have received *from* Christ Himself. (Which, therefore, also clearly shows that Paul couldn't have “invented” Christianity, since it's pretty difficult to “invent” something that pre-dates your conversion to it!) In fact, it wasn't until “three years” after Paul's conversion that he even visited the church's headquarters in Jerusalem, or became personally acquainted with the apostles and other members of the first-century church—which, clearly, had already very much existed (see, for example, Galatians 1:13-24).

### **B. The Compilers**

And should we have concerns over the “cherry-picking” of those who assembled the Scriptural canon we use today, consider what J. Warner Wallace rightly says,

*“Skeptics sometimes claim the New Testament Canon was the creation of*

*4<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic Church councils, rather than the reliable preservation of 1<sup>st</sup> Century disciples of the eyewitnesses.*

*“While it’s true the Council of Laodicea (363-364AD) endorsed the New Testament Canon we know today, these Church leaders simply affirmed the Scriptures followers of Jesus had been using for several generations. The earliest believers, hundreds of years before the Councils, preserved the precious eyewitness testimony related to Jesus, continually examining the competing accounts to make sure their collection was authentic and accurate. By the time of the Councils, a universal standard was accepted by orthodox Christians who wanted to determine which writings were the Word of God (and which were not). There were two important attributes considered by these believers:*

***“Eyewitness Reliability***

*Were the texts authored by an eyewitness or someone with immediate access to the eyewitnesses? (Could the texts be trusted to reflect the truth about what happened? Were they uncorrupted both historically and doctrinally?)*

***“Practical Utility***

*Did the texts reflect the Divine nature and purposes of God in a way that assisted God’s people in understanding Him better? (Were the texts useful in teaching people about God? Were they understandable and accessible?)*  
*“These areas of concern guided the selection process for the earliest believers as they protected and preserved the documents they received from the apostles. We can have confidence in this process because these collectors had firsthand access to the men who wrote the Gospels.”<sup>1</sup>*

## QUESTION 11: HOW DO WE KNOW JESUS CHRIST EXISTED?

“Oh please,” a skeptic may say at this point; “what evidence outside of the Bible do we even have that Jesus Christ ever existed in the first place?”

Actually, we have *a number* of first and second-century historical sources from *outside* of the Bible that we can look to for information regarding Jesus—and the picture that *they* paint of Him may just surprise you.

For example...

The record of ancient senator, proconsul, and historian Cornelius Tacitus states that,

*“Christus, from whom the name [Christian] 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 Judea, 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.”* (from Book XV AD 62-65)

And a first-century letter from “Pliny the Younger” to the Roman emperor Trajan includes a section that states the following:

*“They (the first-century Christians) were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”*

Then there’s the Greek satirist Lucian of Samosata, who—in the process of sarcastically roasting both Christ and Christians—affirmed that they were, in fact, real people:

*“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 faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property.”* (Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*. 11-13)

Consider also what the historical record of Phlegon can tell us when it includes the notion that,

*“Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that he arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails.”* (Origen *Against Celsus*, Book 2, Chapter 59).

And consider this hostile—but historicity-affirming—statement from Celsus:

*“Jesus had come from a village in Judea, and was the son of a poor Jewess who gained her living by the work of her own hands. His mother had been turned out of doors by her husband, who was a carpenter by trade, on being convicted of adultery [with a soldier named Panthéra]. Being thus driven away by her husband, and wandering about in disgrace, she gave birth to Jesus, a bastard. Jesus, on account of his poverty, was hired out to go to Egypt. While there he acquired certain (magical) powers which Egyptians pride themselves on possessing. He returned home highly elated at possessing these powers, and on the strength of them gave himself out to be a god.”*

My personal favorite extra-biblical statement about Jesus, however, comes from the Roman historian Josephus, who includes this in his famous *Antiquities of the Jews* (Book 18, chapter 3.3):

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

And that's not to even *mention* what we can deduce regarding the historicity of Jesus from additional statements made in the writings of Suetonius (69-140AD), Thallus (52AD), Mara Bar-Serapion (70AD), the Jewish Talmud (400-700AD), and more! (I encourage you to look them up for yourself if you are interested, willing and able.)

In the interest of keeping this chapter relatively short, however, allow me to stop here and consider *just* what we get when we add up *only* the information found in the writings I have quoted above:

We get a real flesh-and-blood man named Jesus, Who: (a) had a father who was a carpenter, (b.) lived in Palestine, (c.) was viewed by the people He encountered as a “wise man” and teacher, (d) taught about repentance and the “family of God”, (e) did miraculous works, (f) claimed to be God, (g) was accused by the Jewish leaders of a crime and subsequently crucified under Pontius Pilate, (h) was believed by His followers, who were called “Christians”, to have been resurrected after His death—a belief they themselves then preached about and were willing to die for.

That sounds *exactly like the way the Bible describes Jesus too*. Know why? Because the simple fact is—whether “inside” Scripture or “outside” of it—history speaks very clearly that Jesus Christ did, in fact, walk the earth in the first century A.D.

Lest you think I'm merely “cherry-picking” sources, however, consider what even a major skeptic like scholar Bart Ehrman has written in his book *Did Jesus Exist?*:

*“Despite the enormous range of opinion, there are several points on which virtually all scholars of antiquity agree. Jesus was a Jewish man, known to be a preacher and teacher, who was crucified (a Roman form of execution) in Jerusalem during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea.”*

## QUESTION 12: DID JESUS EVER CLAIM TO BE GOD?

“Okay Matt,” a skeptic may say at this point; “but so what? Wasn’t it the apostles who actually *misunderstood* Jesus in the first place, and made Him out to be ‘God’ from their own minds—when Jesus Himself never even made such a claim *about* Himself?”

Two thoughts on that:

First, Jesus most certainly *did* repeatedly claim to be God. In fact, it’s why the authorities of the early first century demanded that He be crucified in the first place! As “Bible Answer Man” Hank Hanegraaff sums up nicely:

*“First, Jesus claimed to be the unique Son of God. As a result, the Jewish leaders tried to kill Him because in ‘calling God his own Father, [Jesus was] making himself equal with God’ (John 5:18). In John 8:58 Jesus went so far as to use the very words by which God revealed Himself to Moses from the burning bush (Exod. 3:14). To the Jews this was the epitome of blasphemy, for they knew that in doing so Jesus was clearly claiming to be God. On yet another occasion, Jesus explicitly told the Jews: “I and the Father are one.” Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?” “We are not stoning you for any of these,” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God”” (John 10:30–33).*

*“Furthermore, Jesus made an unmistakable claim to deity before the chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin. Caiaphas the high priest asked Him: “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” “I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven”” (Mark 14:61–62). A biblically illiterate person might well have missed the import of Jesus’ words. Caiaphas and the council, however, did not. They knew that in saying he was ‘the Son of Man’ who would come ‘on the clouds of heaven’ he was making an overt reference to the Son of Man in Daniel’s prophecy (Dan. 7:13–14).”<sup>1</sup>*

Second—and quite ironically so—on the apostle’s end, they freely admit in their original writings that, whilst following Jesus as disciples, they didn’t fully understand Who Jesus was, or what specifically He came to do *as* the Messiah, until long *after* His crucifixion and resurrection (see, for example, John’s admission in 20:9).

## QUESTION 13: AREN'T CHRISTMAS AND EASTER PAGAN IN ORIGIN?

“But, Matt,” a skeptic may debate, “what about the supposed ‘miraculous’ birth and resurrection of Jesus? Aren’t those just stories the disciples stole from other, ancient pagan religions?” Let’s take a look.

### **Christmas and Mithras**

Some people, for example, will claim that the Bible’s Christmas story is *actually* just a ripped-off and re-told version of the ancient myth of the Persian deity Mithras. “After all,” skeptics claim, “Mithras’ was born (a) of a virgin, (b) in a cave, (c) attended by shepherds, (d) on December 25th—and that was just the beginning! Then,” they assert, “Mithras grew up to become (e) a traveling teacher with (f) twelve companions who were promised (g) eternal life! He even (h) performed miracles, (i) sacrificed himself for world peace, (j) resurrected three days later, and (k) was then celebrated by his followers via a Eucharist and (l) marking Sunday as a sacred day.

“*Obviously*,” they conclude, “the early Christians just plagiarized the entire story of Jesus from a myth that predated Him by 400 years.”

And, I must admit: that argument sounds pretty convincing...until you research *the actual myth of Mithras!*<sup>1</sup>

Because if you research the myth for yourself, you quickly discover that: (a) Mithras was born out of solid rock (not a virgin woman), which—understandably—did leave the presumed (b) “cave” that skeptics like to talk about. But is nowhere even close to the virgin birth story of Jesus Christ. (c) I will give skeptics the fact that Mithras’ birth *was* seen by shepherds—though, what makes no sense is that the “shepherd” part of the Mithras story occurs at a time in the myth in which human beings supposedly didn’t yet exist (...so...figure that one out).

Now, (d) Mithras *was* born on December 25th. But that’s an irrelevant point in *any* historical argument for or against Christmas, as there was never any real debate—even among the first Christians—that December 25th wasn’t the true date of Christ’s birth. It’s simply the date that was eventually adopted to celebrate it. And (e) there *isn’t* anything in the Mithraic story that shows him to be a traveling teacher. Nor (f) is there anything indicating that he had twelve disciples. (Though, granted—a

person *could* potentially assume that Mithras had twelve followers based on murals in which he's surrounded by twelve personifications of the zodiac signs. But the creation of those murals is easily dated to *after* Christianity began. So there's no way Christians could have "stolen" that idea from the Mithras myth.)

(g) There is also very little record of Mithras ever specifically offering immortality. (h) Mithras *did* perform miracles—but, so does *any* god in *any* ancient myth. So that's not exactly the most useful argument in this discussion either way. Far more applicable would be the claims of the death and resurrection of Mithras. (i) Yet, Mithras *did not* sacrifice himself for world peace, *nor* (j) resurrect. (In fact, he apparently never really dies at all in the myth.) Any historical indications of belief in resurrection that *are* found among Mithras followers are dated to well after Christianity already made resurrection claims about Jesus.

(k) Mithras followers *never* celebrated any kind of Eucharist along the lines that Christians do, though they did (l) historically celebrate Sunday as a sacred day. However, that was only the case in the city of Rome, and only well after Christianity had already begun.

So you tell me: does it make any logical sense to believe that an account of a resurrected-self-sacrificial-world-saving-virgin-born-twelve-disciple-leading-Teacher is a story that was "stolen" from a myth involving a rock-born-disciple-less-creature-who-never-even-died-and-only-conveniently-resembles-Jesus-*after*-the-events-of-Jesus'-life-have-already-been-recorded?

I don't think so either.

### **Easter and Eostre**

"Well, what about Easter?" some would say. "The real reason Easter exists is the Germanic goddess Eostre, whose existence began with the Anglo-Saxon Pagans."

But let's fact-check that too. Or, at least, *try* to fact-check it.

After all, if you search the internet to *attempt* to fact-check it, you'll find as many contradicting "historical facts" as you'll find fried foods at a State Fair. (Even dictionaries and other purveyors of etymology can't seem to agree on the origins of the word "Easter.")

So *did* pagan cults celebrate something called "Easter" prior to Christianity?

Ultimately, the answer to that question really doesn't matter. Because, regardless of what title we assign to that particular Sunday, the *bigger* question is this: "did the resurrection of Jesus Christ that *Christians* celebrate on that Sunday *actually happen?*" (And, as I'll explain in a later chapter, I think there are plenty of good reasons to believe that it did.)

"But Matt," a skeptic may say, "if pagan goddesses like Ishtar and Eostre *were* celebrated this time of year, doesn't that cause you *any* concern in terms of your supposed Christian holiday?" Not really.

For one thing, just because I may share a birthday with Chuck Norris (which I do), it doesn't mean that I *am* Chuck Norris, nor that I'm great at martial arts (which I'm very much not). It simply means that the two of us just happened to be born on the same day, albeit many years apart. Attempting to read anything deeper into our birthday scenario is pointless, as there's simply nothing more to discover there in terms of our relationship.

Similarly, Christians don't celebrate Christ's resurrection each Spring because we somehow "stole" the date from an ancient pagan festival. (If pagans chose to celebrate their goddesses during Spring, that was up to them.) But Christians celebrate Christ's resurrection during Spring because the resurrection is an event in history that is directly connected to *another* event in history that very *clearly* comes with an annual Spring date: the Jewish Passover (see Exodus 12 coupled with the Jewish calendar).

In fact, when the first (Jewish) Christians were attempting to convince the first-century Jewish culture around them that Jesus was the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, using *anything pagan* would have been self-defeating and brought about instant rejection by the Jews, since the Hebrew Bible commands against such things (Exodus 20:1-3, for example). That wouldn't have been very effective evangelism.

As equip.org rightly explains,

*"[According to the Bible, Christ's resurrection] occurred on the first day of the week after the Passover Sabbath. [Thus,] annually, the Lord's Day immediately subsequent to the Jewish Passover was a day of special resurrection celebration."*

However, as the website goes on to say, "*Today, [Christ's resurrection] is celebrated at different times depending on whether one is a Western Christian (Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Anglican) or an Eastern*

*Christian (Eastern Orthodoxy) because the West uses the revised Gregorian calendar and the East uses the Julian calendar. Early Christians consulted local rabbis to determine the date of Passover each year, which would correspond to [the Christian] Holy Week...In communities with no Jewish presence, Christians found it even more difficult to determine the date. Once the churches became unified in the fourth century, the date was more consistent until the West's adoption of the revised Gregorian calendar in the sixteenth century."*

"But Matt," the skeptic may retort, "what about 'Easter Eggs' and 'bunnies' and all of that? Aren't *those* pagan in origin?"

No doubt they are. No argument there. But as even a stand-up comedian like Jim Gaffigan has joked, "what does that have to do with Jesus?" Granted, Christians over the centuries have attempted to "redeem" things like Easter Eggs, and turn them into symbols that can be associated with Christian principles. But regardless of what you, I, or the store selling candy down the street thinks of marshmallows molded to look like baby chicks, the biggest question about Easter still remains:

What will we do with the Jesus Whom Christians celebrate each Sunday? I think C.S. Lewis best summed up the only choice Jesus left us with concerning Himself:

*"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."*

## QUESTION 14: HOW CAN GOD BE A "TRINITY"?

Now, naturally, any discussion that heads in the direction of "Jesus is God in human form" is going to eventually lead to the concept of God as a Trinity. (And that, actually, is one of the coolest things I've ever learned about the Bible.)

From literally page 1 of Genesis, when the Old Testament uses the word we translate into English as "God", it uses a *plural* Hebrew word ("Elohim") as if it were a *singular* word grammatically. In other words, in the Hebrew language it was originally written in, the Old Testament talks about God as if He were plural and singular at the same time.

Even if you don't currently read Hebrew, however—even in English translations, we see traces of the same idea in verses like Genesis 1:26-27, where it says the following:

*Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."*

*So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.*

First, God refers to Himself as an "us", then Genesis describes God as a "His" and a "He."

And, if we watch for it, that's just the beginning of what we find *throughout* Scripture that points to the idea that the God of the Bible—Yahweh, by Name—is One God in Three Persons. (Or, as we commonly refer to it in theology, God is a "Trinity" consisting of—as Jesus Himself lists it—"the Father and...the Son and...the Holy Spirit" [see Matthew 28:19])

Yet, the Bible is also very clear right down to the "Greatest Commandment", that "The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4), "there is no other" but Him (Isaiah 45:18), and He is a "jealous" God, besides Whom we are to have "no other gods" (Exodus 20:1-6).

"So," people often wonder, "how does the Trinity 'work' then? How can

God be ‘One’ yet ‘Three’ at the same time?”

And, many theologians throughout the ages have attempted to answer that—and failed. (And I’m not about to claim that I will succeed in this short chapter.) But that’s to be expected, since this *is God* we’re talking about! There’s no way our limited understanding *could* fully comprehend everything about Him.

That said, however, I *can* say that it’s obviously not *unreasonable* to have three items that are also “one.” We just have to take a step back and look at a couple of things that are around us every day to see it.

### **It’s Mathematical**

The first one is math.

“Oh please,” a skeptic may say; “there’s no way  $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ , Matt.  $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ .” Indeed it does. But rotate those “+” signs ever so slightly, and you end up with this equation—which *is* true:  $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$ . It’s not unreasonable to have three “1’s” that, mathematically, equal 1.

### **It’s Elemental**

It’s also not an unreasonable concept in terms of nature. Consider  $H_2O$  for example: the same exact chemical formula can exist as (1) liquid water, (2) frozen ice, or (3) steam. It’s all still  $H_2O$ , yet it takes three very distinct forms.

### **I know, I know...**

“But that’s not really a *perfect* analogy Matt,” someone may argue. And I get that. (Hey, I *told* you I wasn’t claiming I’d succeed in perfectly answering the question, remember?)

Ultimately, though, I think “Bible Answer Man” Hank Hanegraaff makes a great point in terms of all of this:

*“It is important to note that when [we] speak of one God [we] are referring to the nature or essence of God. Moreover, when [we] speak of persons [we] are referring to personal self-distinctions within the [Trinity]. Put another way, we believe in one What and three Who’s.”*<sup>1</sup>

And that, really, is what’s most important here anyway: daily building a saving, personal relationship *with those “Who’s”*. As Jesus Himself said, that’s what eternal life is all about (see John 17:3).

## QUESTION 15: DO HUMANS HAVE SOULS?

“Back up one step there, Matt,” someone may say at this point; “what makes you think humans even have souls for Jesus to relate to and ‘save’ in the first place?”

Simply put: the fact that someone could make that argument in the first place. (Allow me to explain...)

### Three Things Worth Considering

See, in order for a person *to* argue any point they believe to be true, the person obviously needs a couple of things from which to do that:

- a. the person needs a mind in which to *form* the argument,
- b. the person needs a free will in order to *choose* to argue,
- c. the person needs an identity to *make* the argument.

However, if all we are as human beings is merely physical matter, then—logically speaking—we wouldn’t have those things.

### A. A Brain Isn’t the Same Thing as a Mind

Oh, sure: in a solely material universe, we’d have *physical brains*—no doubt about that!

But a mind and a brain are not the same thing. Whereas a brain is physical and can be *measured* physically (via size, weight, etc.), a mind—and all that comes with it (such as thoughts, emotions, memories, etc.)—is, quite obviously, private and *immeasurable*. You can’t tell what any given person you meet is thinking or feeling unless they *tell you* what they’re thinking or feeling; you can’t find those things out merely by examining their physical brain in a laboratory.

“Well, what if your mind is just an illusion?” as some may suggest. But, as author and former cold-case detective J. Warner Wallace has retorted, “[If that’s true], then where does that illusion reside?” (Wouldn’t you *need a mind* to experience such an illusion?).

Clearly, there is more to human beings than just physical elements—which brings us to Point B.

## **B. A Brain Isn't the Same Thing as Free Will**

If human beings were merely physical beings without souls, then—as philosopher JP Moreland has said,

*“There would be no free will. That’s because matter is completely governed by the laws of nature. Take any physical object—for instance, a cloud. It’s just a material object, and its movement is completely governed by the laws of air pressure, wind movement, and the like. So if I’m a material object, all of the things I do are fixed by my environment, my genetics, and so forth. That would mean I’m not really free to make choices. Whatever’s going to happen is already rigged by my makeup and environment. So how could you hold me responsible for my behavior if I wasn’t free to choose how I would act? So if the materialists are right, kiss free will good-bye. In their view, we’re just very complicated computers that behave according to the laws of nature and the programming we receive. But, obviously they’re wrong—we do have free will. We all know that deep down inside. We’re more than just a physical brain.”*<sup>1</sup>

That brings us to Point C.

## **C. A Brain Isn't the Same Thing as an Identity**

Speaking of being held responsible for our actions, consider *what else* would be true if we were merely physical beings with no souls. As “Bible Answer Man” Hank Hanegraaff has written,

*“[If] human beings were merely material, they could not be held accountable this year for a crime committed last year, simply because physical identity changes over time. Physically, we are not the same person today that we were yesterday. Every day, we lose multiplied millions of microscopic particles. In fact, every seven years, virtually every part of our material anatomy, apart from aspects of our neurological system, changes. Therefore, from a purely material perspective, ‘The self who did the crime in the past is not literally the same self who is present at the time of punishment.’ [Yet] legally and intuitively, we recognize a sameness of soul that establishes personal identity over time.”*<sup>2</sup>

And why is that? Simple: as Wallace has also written,

*“We, as humans, are NOT dependent on our parts for our identity. [No matter] how much we have changed (even if we have an organ transplant), we know our identity is not at risk. I am still me, regardless of the fact I am now made of a completely different set of cells compared to my youth.”*<sup>3</sup>

That brings us to Point D.

#### D. “Something’s Missing...”

Anyone who has ever been to an open-casket funeral has seen it first-hand in even the quickest glance at the dead body: once a person dies, there’s, just, something “missing” afterward that no amount of makeup or embalming can replicate.

And I think we all know intuitively that it’s not merely the absence of various physical chemical and electrical processes that used to go on inside. There’s *obviously* something “more” that’s missing.

#### E. Even the Sciences Are Beginning to Agree

However, lest you be too quick to dismiss my arguments as “non-scientific” (and, therefore, invalid), consider what even some modern psychologists and scientists have said about all of this in recent years:

From *Psychology Today*: “Does the Soul Exist? Evidence Says ‘Yes’”:  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/biocentrism/201112/does-the-soul-exist-evidence-says-yes>

From *Australian News*: “Scientists Offer Quantum Theory of Soul’s Existence:”  
<http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/quantum-scientists-offer-proof-soul-exists/news-story/a02f2d9db939472b1a29d758c54e6a8d>

So what can we conclude from all of this? Personally, I like how Wallace sums it all up using the Law of Identity:

*“The Law of identity simply states that something on one side of the equal sign is identical to something on the other side of the equation if they have the exact same qualities or properties [A = A]. If this is true, we can say that they have an ‘identity relationship’. When applied to our examination of the soul, monists describe the following identity relationship:*

***the brain = the mind***  
***the body = the soul***

*“If this is true, all the properties and qualities on one side of the equation should be identical to all the properties on the other side of the equation. If there are differences in the qualities and nature of the items on opposite sides of the equation, we have two realities, just as Christians have argued all along.”<sup>3</sup>*

## QUESTION 16: IS RELIGION BAD FOR SOCIETY?

“Okay, Matt,” someone may reply; “but even if there *is* a God and I *have* a soul that needs saving, why on earth would I choose to follow a religion like Christianity? After all, what about all of the *conflicts* that religion has inspired throughout history? Isn’t religion actually the reason we *have* so many problems in the world?”

It certainly feels that way at times, doesn’t it. From modern-day news stories about religious extremism-inspired terrorism to the various wars and atrocities we read about in our history books, no reasonable thinker can deny that people throughout time have done some terrible things in the name of the God they claimed to follow.

However, if we’re truly examining this question from a logical, objective standpoint, then we also must ask ourselves if secularist ideologies have done any better in terms of promoting harmony. And, the fact is, they haven’t. They’ve actually done *worse*:

- The Nazi philosophy that Jews were subhuman and Aryans were superhuman—which was based on the naturalistic idea of “survival of the fittest”—led to the death of six million Jewish people.
- The atheistic Communist philosophy led to the death of approximately sixty-five million people under Mao Tse-tung, twenty to thirty million people under Stalin, and two million Cambodians under Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge regime.

Add those up, and that’s over *one hundred million people* who have died at the hands of *just two* secularist ideologies, all just during the twentieth century.

It seems to me that the problems in the world come from *people*—whether they’re religious or not. *And* it seems to me that, ironically, the Bible makes a strong point when it says that “the human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked,” (Jeremiah 17:9).

So what hope *is* there for humanity’s “heart problem”, then? For the Christian, the solution lies in our belief in a “spiritual heart transplant” of sorts that God can miraculously facilitate in our lives when we surrender to His leadership. (John 3:1-21; Romans 7:15-25).

“But if that’s truly possible,” the skeptic may respond, “then what *about* people who have claimed they were His followers, yet still performed horrible acts?”

From a Christian perspective, one can only assume that people who carry out *ungodly* acts—while claiming to do so in God’s name—have not truly had that genuine heart change through Jesus Christ. If they’d *had* a genuine heart change, they would instead have followed in the footsteps of many believers throughout history who have carried out countless humanitarian aid efforts that were motivated by their religious beliefs and commitments (consider, for example, Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Desmond Doss, Franklin Graham, Everett Swanson, Don Brewster, and so many others).

“Even so,” the skeptic may say, “if there truly is a God, then why does He allow *any* acts of suffering to occur *at all*?”

Let’s tackle that question next.

## QUESTION 17: IF GOD IS GOOD, WHY DOES SUFFERING EXIST?

It's an argument I've heard people like Neil deGrasse Tyson use more than once—though it's by no means a *new* argument:

*“Every description of God that I’ve heard holds God to be typically all-powerful and all-good. And then I look around and I see a tsunami that killed a quarter million people in Indonesia, an earthquake that killed a quarter million people in Haiti, and I see...tornados and disease, childhood leukemia—I see all of this and I say, ‘I do not see evidence of both of those being true simultaneously.’ If there is a God, the God is either not all-powerful or not all-good. He can’t be both.”*<sup>1</sup>

What surprises me, however, is what an intelligent person like him clearly misses in terms of that line of thinking—namely, that there may be a third option: what if, actually, suffering exists *because* God is both all-powerful and all-good? (Allow me to explain).

### **A. God's Ways vs Our Ways**

First, think about this: if the God of the Bible *does* exist, then how powerful would He have to be in order to create the universe? (Pretty powerful, right?). And what kind of knowledge and understanding would He have to have to create the universe? (Quite a vast knowledge and understanding, right?). In fact, how knowledgeable, understanding and powerful would He have to be *in comparison to us*? (There wouldn't even *be* any comparison, would there.)

So, if we're looking at this topic logically, and an all-powerful and all-loving God *does* exist, then shouldn't we actually *expect* Him to operate on a level that we *wouldn't* always be able to completely comprehend with our limited understanding? Doesn't it strike you as not only arrogant, but downright *illogical* to dismiss God's existence as a possibility, simply because *we* don't understand why He would allow certain circumstances to occur? (See also Job 38-42.)

That said, however, God *does* reveal to us via the Bible what some of the reasons are that we experience suffering in this life—which is important to this discussion for sure! After all, if we are aiming the original question specifically in the direction of the God described by the Christian Bible, then what we are *really* doing is questioning the validity of the *Bible's* claim that our God is “good” and “all-powerful,” aren't we. And if we are

questioning the validity of the *Bible's* claims of God's "goodness" and "powerfulness," then—logically speaking—we can only reasonably ask the original question in the context of how the *Bible* defines those terms and describes the God they are attached to. So a better question to ask would be this: *how does the Bible reconcile its view of Who God is with the suffering we experience in daily life?*

## **B. Who Defines "Power" and "Goodness"**

It's interesting to me to note that people like Tyson are so quick to imply that things such as tsunamis and earthquakes and such are "evil." In fact, it's interesting to me on at least two levels:

First: if there is no God, then where did people like Tyson *get their concept of evil in the first place?* In order for something to bother a person as an "evil occurrence" or an "injustice", it implies that the person is weighing it against an unbiased standard of goodness that we all share. But if there's no God, then what would define that standard—let alone *ingrain it within us?*

"Well, *obviously,*" the skeptic may retort, "if I'm debating about God, then I'm referring to His own standard that's in the Bible. I'm saying He doesn't line up to His *own* standards of goodness and love." But are you sure about that?

After all—secondly—in light of what the Bible demonstrates repeatedly,

*"The statement, 'A good God always prevents evil as far as he is able to,' is simply false...Instead, it is more accurate to say that a good God always prevents suffering and evil unless he has a good reason to allow it. Sometimes God might allow an evil because it will prevent a greater evil. Sometimes he might allow evil because it will produce a greater good. I am not saying that evil can be good, but rather than there may be good reason to allow bad things. Allowing some evil for a time, for example, may result in a better world in the long run than a world that never had evil to begin with. That certainly is plausible...God is not obligated by his goodness to use his power to prevent all evil in every circumstance, but may have morally sufficient reason to allow it in some cases.*

*"It is often hard for us to see how the bad thing God permits in the present could ever bring a greater good in the future. This is because we do not know the future or the infinitely complex set of events that fall like dominoes from our lives into the lives of others."*<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of which, consider the specifics *of* what the Bible tells us about the various causes of suffering in the world, as well as and how/why God specifically allows them:

### **C. Why Suffering Occurs According to Scripture**

#### ***Free Will***

One of the first causes of suffering that the Bible presents us with is the misuse of human free will, plain and simple. Scripture makes it clear that God wants a relationship with each one of us that is based in love. And, if love is to be authentic, then by definition we have to have the choice *not* to love. (Otherwise, we're no more than robots that "have to" love and obey Him—which is not what He wants.). So, God created us with the privilege of a free will. And He told us right from the beginning that our free will is *best used* when we use it to love and follow Him. Doing so will lead to love, joy, peace, and a host of other positives.

He also warns that *misusing* our free will leads to death (which isn't difficult to see in everyday life—from literal, physical death, to the death of relationships, to the death of dreams, to the death of emotions, to spiritual death). However, every single one of us still chooses, at times, to misuse our free will, don't we. We pursue hate rather than love, violence rather than peace, selfishness rather than selflessness, and so on. And, sometimes, the suffering we see in life is as simple as that: someone misused their free will and brought more "death" into life. Sometimes we do it to ourselves, sometimes it's a result of the choices of others that negatively impacts us. Either way, God honors the choices we make with the free will He gave us.

He doesn't *like* the choices that bring suffering, of course. And the Bible has much to say about how—for those who will draw near to Him in relationship—He will comfort those who are persecuted and afflicted by others in various ways, and one day He will make everything "right" once and for all. But to take away a person's free will is to go directly against God's plan for our lives. To Him, the ability to have authentic relationship is clearly worth the risk of misuse. So He leaves our free will intact.

#### ***Discipline***

At the same time, however, the Bible does also make it clear that God will allow suffering to come into our lives to discipline us at times *because* of choices we make (see Hebrews 12:1-11). He may also send suffering to get our attention and/or "block" us from heading in a destructive direction in

life (see Jonah 1-2). But, again: that's what any loving Father would do for His children, isn't it?

### ***Maturity***

The Bible also says that God will sometimes allow suffering into our lives to help us become mature and complete, as we learn to respond to the struggle in godly ways (see James 1:2-4, being mindful that the author was writing a time when the early church was heavily persecuted—via torture and death—simply for their belief in Jesus Christ). It's basically His version of a spiritual gym where we can “work out” our spiritual muscles in order to become stronger.

### ***To Show His Greatness***

Suffering can also be something God uses to use *us* in amazing ways, while keeping any selfish pride on our part at bay. Consider how the Apostle Paul wrote about a constant physical struggle he dealt with:

*In order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)*

Sometimes, God shows the world just how good and powerful He is in how He removes a struggle after a certain period of time, and sometimes He shows it in how He helps us *through* a struggle day by day. Sometimes, according to the Bible, what we need more than the removal of suffering is to adjust our *perspective of* the suffering.

### ***Satanic Attacks***

Granted, sometimes suffering can also be as simple as the fact that we have a spiritual enemy named Satan who wants to destroy us. (And, if the opening chapters of the book of Job are any indication, Satan may use everything from theft, to natural disasters, to illness, to our own family members to “attack” us at times.)

“So why does God allow that?” we may ask.

The answer according to books like Job seems to be simple: to show the devil—and even ourselves—that we are the real thing when it comes to our

faith in God. It's to show that we aren't in relationship with Him *just* for what He can "give" us. But that we really, truly, *love* Him and *know* Him and *honor* Him and *want* Him.

### ***Unknown Factors***

Other times, the Bible says, God simply doesn't *tell us* why suffering happens. Sometimes He just leaves it at, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9, NIV), and asks us to focus more on how we will *respond* to the circumstances than the "why's" of their existence (see Luke 13:1-5, for example).

So, *is* it possible for God to be all-good *and* all-powerful when suffering exists in the world? Absolutely. As author and speaker J. Warner Wallace says so well,

*"A good God values character over comfort. Creature comforts are temporary, but character transcends time. It shouldn't surprise us that a transcendent God would understand the difference, even when we don't. Unfortunately, character is often best developed as a result of our temporary pain and suffering. Patience, determination, the will to persevere and the ability to retain hope all result from the trials and tribulations of life. God may allow some level of temporary pain and suffering in order to develop our eternal, transcendent character."*<sup>3</sup>

### **C. The Rest of the Story**

We also must be careful not to miss "the rest of the story" in a discussion such as this. As Cure International representative Brant Hansen points out on his radio podcast, it's also worth noting that Tyson conveniently doesn't mention what happened immediately *after* the earthquake and tsunami he references. As Hansen explains,

*"I happened to be in Haiti shortly after the earthquake, and I happened to be in Indonesia within a week after the tsunami. And I saw a lot of Christians there...I do think it's worth noting that—whatever fault you're finding with this God—His followers are the ones that stream in like a river into the hurt, into the wound [to bring healing and help]."*<sup>4</sup>

How can we explain the kind of heart-change that prompts such unselfish love *without* an all-powerful, all-good God involved in the process?

Besides, if you think about it, "deleting" God from the equation doesn't fix

the underlying problem anyway. As Gregory Koukl also makes the point,

*“Nothing is really solved by getting rid of God...because removing God from the equation, though understandable, does nothing to eliminate the problem that caused someone to doubt God’s existence in the first place. God is gone, but the original problem remains. The world is still as broken. Atheism settles nothing on this matter. What now is the atheist to do? Nothing has really changed. Things still are not the way they’re supposed to be, so the atheist continues to be plagued with the same problem he started with. But given a Godless, physical universe, the idea that things are not as they should be makes little sense. How can something go wrong when there was no right way for it to be in the first place?”*

By contrast, however—as apologist Doug Groothuis has rightly argued—

*“the resources of the Bible, the Christian worldview, give us wisdom for living through suffering better than any other worldview; ...because of the themes of Creation, Fall and Redemption—which are rooted in reality—and because of the suffering and resurrection of Christ, we are able to suffer ‘better’ than those of any other worldview.”*<sup>5</sup>

...Which, it seems to me, is an ability that an all-powerful *and* all-good God would certainly enable people to possess who choose to put their faith and trust in Him.

#### **D. The Ultimate Goal**

Besides, no one ever claimed that the ultimate goal of a relationship with God through Christ was to have a safe, comfortable life here and now. Christians *know* this world is broken, which is why we maintain an eternal perspective and look forward to the eternity with God that the Bible describes—a place where “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (see Revelation 21).

In fact, the most logical proofs *for* the existence of Heaven actually *are* the concepts of the existence of evil *and* a loving God, since such a God *must* logically have an alternative *to* this broken world available for those He loves—a place where, most importantly, we’ll be *with* our all-powerful, all-good God.

After all—as one sees in the Bible’s accounts of everyone from Job, to Christ Himself, to the Apostle Paul—once a person grows in their faith to a

point of *mature* love for God, such a devotion is no longer conditional for that person upon worldly circumstances (whether favorable, prosperous, or not). They simply love God for Who He is, not what He gives (or *doesn't* give) them. And regardless of what comes their way, they have an unshakeable hope in Him.

“But Matt,” someone may wonder, “would it just be easier for God to destroy evil right now? Why doesn't He act more immediately?”

Great question! Turn the page for the answer...

## QUESTION 18: WHY DOESN'T GOD DESTROY EVIL?

This question is one that gets asked fairly often in various forms, but all boils down to this: why doesn't God just destroy evil and the devil right now and put an end to the suffering that results from their existence?

After all, while there may indeed be some *benefits* concerning the suffering we see and experience in this life (as discussed in the previous chapter), the Bible does say that God *will* one day put an end to the devil's schemes and temptations by banishing him to the "lake of fire" for eternity. And *after* that, God will hold a "final Judgement" for humanity and subsequently create a "new heaven and earth" where those who have put their trust in Christ as Savior will live with Him forever—a place where "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (see Revelation 20-22).

So, what is God waiting for? Why not just do all of that *now* and put a stop to "death, mourning, crying, and pain" once and for all? Why allow the devil to continue using the free will that he has to rebel against God and "steal, kill and destroy" like he does (John 10:10)? Is Satan some kind of "necessary" evil? Allow me to give you two thoughts to consider on that from a Bible perspective:

First, I love the point that Pastor Francis Chan made about this topic around a decade ago in a sermon he preached at Cornerstone Church in Simi Valley, California. He asked a question along the following lines:

*"If the goal for the Christian is to glorify God, then think about this: which scenario actually brings more glory to God and silences the devil—to simply destroy the devil? Or to leave a time when the devil can tempt us with all the sin the world has to offer, yet we, as followers of Jesus, genuinely respond to that temptation with, 'no thanks—I've got God and I'd rather have Him than anything else.'"*

Obviously, from an eternal, God-focused perspective, the latter option Chan poses accomplishes the task far more effectively than the first.

Secondly, the Bible tells us in 2 Peter 3:9 that *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

In other words: the main reason God is waiting to bring about His final

Judgement and destroy evil is...you. And me. And people just like us. He loves human beings more than we can comprehend (see John 3:16), and wants as many people as possible to put their faith in Jesus and be saved for eternity before the aforementioned judgement takes place and the opportunity ends forever. So He's waiting.

“But Matt,” someone may say, “if God is truly ‘loving’, then why not just let *everyone* into His Kingdom?”

Let's explore that answer next.

## QUESTION 19: WHY DOESN'T GOD LET EVERYONE INTO HEAVEN?

It's interesting to me when people pose this particular Big Question in one form or another, because I think we all intuitively know the answer.

### **We Get It—We Just Don't Like It**

I see evidence of that every time the judge of a major, media-followed court case passes a sentence that people in our culture don't like. What usually happens next? Riots. Angry rants on social media. Etc. Etc.

Why? Because we know: a "good" judge doesn't let guilty people go free. A "good" judge *punishes* the guilty. A "good" judge upholds justice. We get that.

We just don't like it when *God* is the Judge and *we* are the guilty parties. Yet, sooner or later, we have to face that reality and do something with it. Because while, as some famously claim, "only God can judge me"—the truth is, according to the Bible, that's actually quite accurate: God *will indeed* judge each one of us one day. And if we've ever broken even just *one* of His Commandments *one* time, we'll be found guilty and sentenced to an eternal punishment (which we commonly call "hell"), rather than be freely allowed into God's Kingdom. James 2:10 makes that abundantly clear.

Why? Because God, as a *perfect* Judge, has to punish the guilty. As a *perfect* Judge, He *can't* do any less. That's why He created hell in the first place—originally, "for the devil and [the devil's] angels" as Jesus Himself says (Matthew 25:41). It was for those guilty of rebelling against God.

The problem is, that now includes you and me. Everyone has sinned and fallen way short of God's perfect standards for us (Romans 3:23). We've lied, cheated, stolen, hated people, dishonored parents, been idolatrous—you name it. And, in doing so, we've offended the holy Creator and King of the Universe—and that's a big deal! And now, someone has to be punished for our crimes against Him.

Yet God offers us a way *out* of that punishment through His Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23). When Jesus died on the cross 2,000 years ago, that was God in human form taking the responsibility and punishment *on Himself* for our offenses against Him, so that God could perfectly uphold two sides of His character:

- His perfect justice could be satisfied, since “Someone” was punished for our offenses;
- His perfect love could be shown, because He took the punishment on Himself (Romans 5:8).

Salvation through Jesus is God’s perfect solution to our problem. And the best part is this: it’s a free gift of His grace. We don’t have to earn it. We *can’t* earn it. All we can do is make a choice to either accept it or reject it.

And so, as pastor Greg Laurie has said so well: really, “God doesn’t send [*anyone*] to Hell. You send yourself there...If you end up in Hell one day, you will have to practically climb over Jesus to get there.”<sup>1</sup> It’s our choice (see John 1:12 and Romans 10:13).

So, while God—as a perfect Judge—*can’t* just “let everyone in” to Heaven, God—as a loving Father—*did* make the way for *anyone* who *wants* Him and His Heaven *to get in*. It’s one choice away via repenting<sup>2</sup> and putting your faith in Jesus to save you. (I’m really not sure how much simpler God could have made it.)

### **Why Give Us A Choice?**

“But, see, that’s the thing, Matt,” someone may retort; “why give us the choice in the first place? Why not make it ‘automatic’?”

Simple: because God wants our love for Him to be authentic. And for love to be authentic, we have to have the choice *not* to love. Otherwise, our love is meaningless.

It’s like the difference between my wife and a toy bear that we own. The plush bear contains internal technology that is programmed to say “I love you, I love you” when you tap it. My wife, on the other hand, does not contain such programming (of course). When *she* says “I love you,” she *means* it out of her own free will. Any guesses as to which one means more to me to hear? You guessed it: my wife’s “I love you.” Why? Because she doesn’t have to love me. It’s her choice. And that makes all the difference.

And so God gives us a choice: to love Him and follow Him in the context of a relationship with Him, or not. And if we choose “not”—He will honor that choice. If someone doesn’t *want* Him, He won’t force Himself upon that person. He’ll honor their choice for eternity, no matter how much He may wish they’d choose otherwise (see 2 Peter 3:9)

## Why Create Lost People?

“But, see—that’s *another* thing, Matt,” someone may say; “if God is all-knowing, all-loving *and* all-powerful like Christians say He is, then why does He even allow people to be born whom He knows will never choose Jesus/Heaven? Why not just ‘skip to the end’, so to speak?” Apologist William Lane Craig answers that question masterfully:

*“Your question is actually about God’s middle knowledge, which includes His knowing what any person would freely do in any circumstances in which God might create him. The answer to your question...is: if God began the world at what in our world is the end of human history, then we would have a different world than this world and so different circumstances in which those same people might make very different decisions. For example, maybe [a woman with cancer] would freely believe in Christ and be saved if she were in her actual circumstances of having breast cancer, but if God began history at its end [she] would not believe and be saved. You can’t just pluck people out of the actual world and stick them in another world and be guaranteed that they would make the same choices. It might well be the case that a world which begins at what is the end of our world and which involves just the people in our world who believe would be a far worse world than this one.”*<sup>3</sup>

“Okay, Matt,” someone may say, “but what about people who never even hear about Jesus? What happens to them?”

Great question—let’s tackle that next!

## QUESTION 20: WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE WHO NEVER HEAR THE GOSPEL?

While I won't claim to have the "perfect" answer for this Big Question (and I'll tell you exactly why in point 3, below), I will share four thoughts with you that I have on the topic:

### **A. The Testimony of Nature**

Near the beginning of his First-Century letter to Roman Christians, the Apostle Paul mentions that "since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20, NIV).

In other words, even if the only information a person has to point them toward God is the fact that they—and the world around them—exist, that's still a very big testament *to* His existence. And, if they respond to *the information they have* regarding Him by reaching toward "Whomever" may have created them, God can certainly choose to honor that and reveal to them everything they need to know for salvation. (Remember: we *are* talking about the same God Who—to this day!—often leads Muslims in the Middle East to Jesus via revealing truth to them through dreams and visions.)

After all, as Paul is recorded as telling the First-Century people of Athens, "The God who made the world and everything in it... gives everyone life and breath and everything else... and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands... *so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him*, though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:24-27, emphasis mine).

### **B. God is, Indeed, Perfectly Just**

Secondly, as stated in the original question, God *is* a God of perfect justice. He *is* a perfect Judge. So—whatever the specifics may be in terms of those who die without ever hearing the Gospel—we can trust that God's judgement of such people would be in keeping with His perfectly just nature. And that leads to my third point...

### **C. God's Ways Are Beyond Ours**

As I've discussed more than once before in this book, the simple fact is that you and I will *never* be able to completely comprehend God and His ways,

because He's God and we're not (see Isaiah 55:9). So, we have to humbly leave it all up to Him in terms of this question. Besides,...

**D. Ultimately, It Doesn't Really Matter For Us**

“How can you say that?!” someone may ask. Simple: because you and I *do know* about Jesus. So the only question for us is this: how will we respond to Him?

“Time out, Matt,” someone may say, “how can Jesus really be the ‘only way’ to heaven?”

Turn the page for the answer to that particular question...

QUESTION 21:  
HOW CAN JESUS BE THE “ONLY” WAY?

In a world of “Coexist” bumper stickers, it can sound awfully intolerant for Christians to claim that “Jesus is the Only Way to eternal life.” So how on earth—and *why on earth*—could we say such a thing?

The first thing to understand in terms of the answer to that question is this: the idea that Jesus is the “Only Way” isn’t something that originated with Christians. It originated with Christ Himself. In John 14:6, Jesus Himself is quoted as saying the following to His disciples: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to [God] the Father except through me.” We’re simply quoting Jesus.

To understand *why* He said such a thing, however, allow me to ask you a couple of questions, borrowed from author Gregory Koukl:

**A: Do you think that people who commit moral crimes ought to be punished?**

If your answer is “yes,” then I most definitely agree.

**B: Have you ever done anything that would qualify as “morally bad” or “morally wrong”?**

If your answer is “yes” again, then please know that you are certainly not alone—we all have! (In fact, if you answered “no”, then I’d like to talk to your spouse or significant other to verify that.)

So we agree that (a) people who do bad things should be punished, and (b) we’ve done bad things.

You know what I call that? Bad news. This is not a good picture for us! I mean, imagine standing before a judge, about to be sentenced for the bad things we’ve done. The judge knows we’re guilty. You and I both know we’re guilty. But then the judge stops and asks a simple question: “Are either of you interested in a pardon?” (I don’t know about you, but I would certainly respond with, “YES PLEASE!”)

Now imagine that the judge does something unprecedented: he actually takes off his robe, steps down from the bench, and takes the punishment

we deserved *in our place* so that justice could still be upheld, yet we could go free.

Here's the good news: it's not that far-fetched of a scenario. Because that's exactly what the Bible says God did for us through Jesus. That's what the cross is all about: it's God, in human form, taking the responsibility and punishment on *Himself* that we deserved for all the things we've done that have offended Him. That way, His perfect justice is upheld, yet His amazing love for us is also seen, as He sets us free.

That's why Jesus is the "Only Way"; He's the Only One who solved the problem we had. As the perfect (i.e. "sinless") Son of God, He's the Only One Who *could* have solved the problem we had. Nobody else could do it, because nobody else in history was perfect. Everyone else had their *own* offenses to pay for. Only Jesus had a truly clean record before God that He could "trade" for ours.

That's why we, as Christians, put our confidence in Jesus, and *only* Him. Because if we're guilty before God, then we've got to find a solution to that guilt problem. And that's what God offers us in Christ—the *only* solution to that problem.

It's really no more "narrow-minded" than a math teacher who insists that  $2 + 2 = 4$  (and *only* 4), a pilot who follows the *only* instructions to safely fly a plane, or a doctor who prescribes the *only* medication that will cure the ailment we suffer from. If we don't fault them for such things, why fault God for His provision?

As pastor Kyle Idleman has written, however, "if grace is [merely] explained without being experienced, it really doesn't have much effect;" "God's grace is compelling when explained but irresistible when experienced...[It's] powerful enough to erase *your* guilt...big enough to cover *your* shame...real enough to heal *your* relationships...strong enough to hold *you* up when *you're* weak...sweet enough to cure *your* bitterness" (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

"But Matt," someone may say, "isn't this ultimately the same thing that *every* religion boils down to?" Not at all, actually.

Remember that game they used to play on the children's show *Sesame Street*, where they would show the audience four items and sing a little song that went like this:

*One of these things is not like the others*  
*One of these things doesn't belong*  
*Can you tell which thing is not like the others*  
*By the time I finish this song?*

(My apologies if the tune is now stuck in your head.)

I feel like we often play a “spiritual” version of that game in our culture—with a lot of people stumped as to how to find the answer. Yet, as someone who has studied world religions for years (including for my bachelor’s degree), it has become more than clear to me that the major religions of the world couldn’t be *more* different from one another in a *number* of ways.

### **Different Beliefs**

For example: take the beliefs the world’s major religions hold about who—or what—we should worship: Hinduism believes in millions of gods, Buddhism believes in no gods, Judaism believes in One God named Yahweh, Christianity believes in One God Who is a Trinity, and Islam believes in One God, named Allah. Those are pretty different right off the bat.

Then there’s what those religions say about *how to* properly connect with those deities and/or end up in a “good” afterlife: Hinduism says “follow the rules of your position in life” and you’ll reincarnate to a better spot next time, Buddhism says meditation is the way to realize everything you experience in life is actually an illusion, Judaism says to obey God’s Old Testament Laws, Christianity says to put your faith in Jesus, and Islam says to follow their “Five Pillars.”

“Well, wait right there, Matt,” a person may respond; “look at what you just wrote: most of those ‘goals’ all boil down to ‘just be nice and love people and you’ll be okay in the afterlife,’ right?”

Most. Except, if you notice, Jesus.

### **Different Solution**

Jesus’ whole point was that we *can’t* work out way to God on our own; our hearts and motives are broken and sinful to our core, which causes us to repeatedly fall short *of* His standards *to* love Him and others 100% of the time, perfectly. And, as a result of breaking His laws and offending Him along those lines (repeatedly!), we’ve gotten ourselves the spiritual death penalty in God’s legal system: hell.

Yet, God loves us so much He can't bear to send us there. Yet He also can't throw His justice away—He must uphold both His loving nature and His just nature. So He sends the perfect solution: His Son, Jesus, Who lives a perfect life and then dies on the cross in our place, taking the responsibility and hell that we deserved on *Himself*, so the punishment is taken and we can go free instead.

And, with our offenses out of the way, Jesus bridges the relational gap between us and God, enabling us to not only have the personal relationship with Him that we were created for, but also enabling us to be able to be filled with God's Holy Spirit to supernaturally change our hearts and help us live as He intended in the first place.

No one else from any other religion did that for us. Jesus alone stands out.

### **Different Scenario**

“But what *about* the claims of the other religions, Matt?” someone may ask. “Why should we trust what Jesus has to say over the others?” Well, consider this:

While, yes, many (if not all) of the other leaders of the world's religions will claim that *they* have the “right” way—and more than one have claimed historically that an angel from God *Himself* told them the info they have to share—notice something important about them: Notice how many of those founders were “alone” when their claimed revelations occurred.

Buddha is claimed to have found nirvana when he was *alone*. Joseph Smith (founder of Mormonism) claims an angel spoke to him when he was *alone*.

Even L. Ron Hubbard (founder of Scientology) claims his revelation about aliens came during a *personal* near-death experience in the Navy. And the list goes on, all with the same premise: “I've had a *personal* revelation while I was *alone* in some way; so just trust me and follow what I tell you about it.” (You tell me: doesn't a statement like that sound even the *least* bit suspicious to you?)

But, see, that's where Jesus stands *drastically* apart from other religious founders, too: Christianity is founded upon *public events* rather than *personal revelation*. Jesus' historically-attested earthly ministry was *public* from start to finish!

Even a quick reading of the New Testament shows that His birth was public (shepherds visited the just-born Christ and immediately spread the word about Him). His baptism was public. His teaching was public. His travels were public. His trial and crucifixion were (very much!) public. Even the earliest writings that we have about the resurrection say that it was witnessed by over 500 people at the same time (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

### **Different Claim**

But here's the ultimate kicker for me in terms of what sets Jesus apart: unlike any other religion founder in history, Jesus didn't just claim to *represent* God. He claimed to *be* God, and the only correct *Way to* God as a result (see John 14:6)—and He actually backed it up with the evidence to prove it (from historically-attested miracles to the resurrection itself).

That's why, if you were to line up the leaders of the world's religions and sing that song from Sesame Street asking which one was "not like the others"—in a very good and important way in this case, I'd add—the answer would be an easy one for me: Jesus Christ.

## QUESTION 22: ISN'T TRUTH RELATIVE?

I know, I know—it's right about here that someone would probably argue that this is all “just my interpretation” and that “truth is relative.”

“After all,” the thought process goes, “what's true for one person may not be what's true for someone else, and that's okay. Because absolute truth doesn't exist. All truth is relative. And while everyone has beliefs that are true for them, no one can say that what they believe applies to everyone.”

And, on the surface, that line of thinking sounds good. If nothing else, it certainly has a tolerant feel that makes a considerable effort to promote peace amidst conflict. After all—with that line of thinking, everyone wins!

Or so it seems at first glance. But, if we're being logical about Big Questions like this one, then I have to follow the original claim to its logical *conclusion*—and challenge three problems that I find there:

### **A. The Nature of the Claim**

The first problem I see with the original claim that “truth is relative” is that, while it does try to make the case that “everyone is right”, it also therefore makes the *background* case that everyone is also *wrong*—because I'm *only* right for myself. When it comes to everyone else, I'm *wrong*.

Which, when you think about it, begs this question: how can anyone be right *or* wrong about *anything* unless there's an absolute standard of truth by which to judge it all?

In fact, isn't the statement itself that “truth is relative” a statement that proclaims an absolute truth? As soon as someone says it, a person could reply, “is that true?” If truth, by definition, is something we arrive at when our statements, beliefs, thoughts, etc. match up with the way the world actually is, then isn't the original argument in and of itself a claim that there *is* an absolute truth—that “truth is relative?”

Really, the entire argument for relative truth is a self-destructing one as soon as it's made.

## **B. It's Obvious that Truth isn't Relative Based on the World Around Us**

Consider gravity, for example.

If I say to myself, "I don't like gravity, so I'm going to choose not to believe in it," I don't suddenly start floating upward while those who *do* believe in gravity stay put on the ground.

No, gravity exists and has a hold on everyone on earth *despite* their personal views, beliefs, desires, or understanding of it. And the statement that "gravity exists on earth" is one example of many of an absolute truth you and I acknowledge every day.

## **C. The Problem of Evil**

The Holocaust. Khmer Rouge. ISIS. Just thinking about those topics for even a second can make something inside of you well up and crave justice, can't it. Maybe it even inspires you to question God in terms of the problem of "evil."

But notice what you're doing as soon as you identify the actions of Nazis and Communists and terrorists *as* "evil": you're acknowledging that there is, in fact, an objective moral standard that governs the entire world. In order for there to be "evil" at all, there has to be an absolute standard for what good is. There has to be an absolute *truth*—not just in terms of science, but in terms of theology and ethics.

Granted, the problem of evil is a challenging one—and one I've done my best to address in this book. But it's also evidence that morality is objective, not subjective.

(And, I'd add, it's something that actually points *to* the existence of God in the first place. After all: for there to be any absolute laws concerning good and evil that govern any part of our existence, it implies there must be an absolute law *Giver*, doesn't it?)

## **Conclusion**

As philosopher J.P. Moreland has made the point, all you have to do is press a person's moral "hot button"—i.e. attack a value they hold dear—and you'll quickly find that even the staunchest claimed moral relativist is *only* a relativist when it's convenient for them to be one. (Consider our country's sudden concern with "fake news" for example.)

Know why? Because we all crave truth, whether we admit it or not. (Even arguing *for* the idea that “truth is relative” is, ironically, still arguing. And what is *any* argument? It’s an attempt to persuade others to adopt a point of view that you believe is absolutely true for everyone! Making *any* argument in the first place shows that the debater believes in absolute truth.) Because, quite obviously, truth is *not* relative. It is absolute, knowable, and important to seek out!

As apologist Greg Koukl has said, heading out into life while convinced that there is no absolute truth is like heading out to dine in a garbage dump while convinced that germs don’t exist. You need the truth to protect you from harm.

In fact, that’s one major reason why I wrote this book!

## QUESTION 23: IS JESUS THE “RIGHT” MESSIAH?

“Even so,” some argue, “back in the first century, so-called Jewish ‘Messiah’s’ were almost a dime a dozen. So—if you’re concerned with following the Bible’s promised Messiah in order to be saved—how can you be sure that Jesus of Nazareth is even the ‘right’ Messiah to follow?”

That’s definitely an important question—with an important answer: We know because of His legacy, His timing, His “fingerprint,” and His consistency.

### **Jesus’ Legacy**

As the early church of Jesus Christ began to preach in Jerusalem that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead—and the church effectively grew as a result of people *believing* that message—the local Jewish religious leaders repeatedly attempted to squelch the church’s efforts via court-like trials and persecution.

However, as the book of Acts records, during one such attempt by the Jewish authorities,

*A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the [Christians on trial] be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” (Acts 5:34-39)*

There’s a lot of wisdom in what (the historically well-known!) Gamaliel says there: if Jesus of Nazareth were “just another Messiah,” His ministry would last no longer than that of the others who came before Him. And yet, the church of Jesus Christ thrives to this day—nearly 2,000 years

later, despite having been heavily persecuted since its beginning in one way or another. That's certainly saying something in terms of God's supernatural assistance, protection, approval, and so forth, don't you think? The first-century Jewish authorities certainly did.

## **Jesus' Timing**

Then there's the timing of Jesus' life.

Since we're talking about a supernaturally-sent Messiah in the first place, then it obviously is not a stretch to assume that any Biblical prophecies about that Messiah must be taken into account in attempting to verify that Messiah's identity.

And while, admittedly, some of the prophecies found in Scripture can be confusing to us in modern-day America, one prophecy that seems pretty clear to me is found in the Old Testament book of Daniel.

Daniel wrote his book while the Jewish people were in exile during the reigns of the Babylonians (who had destroyed Jerusalem around 587 B.C.) and the Persians (who eventually came to power *after* the Babylonians). And, in chapter 9 of Daniel's book, the angel Gabriel tells Daniel that,

*From the time the word goes out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. (Daniel 9:25-26, NIV)*

In other words, the Messiah (or "Anointed One") Whom God would send to the earth would appear sometime in between Daniel's time and the next destruction of Jerusalem and God's Temple by a "ruler who would come." History tells us very clearly that Titus, who eventually became the emperor of Rome, *did indeed* next destroy Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D.

Thus, according to God Himself, the Messiah would have had to have come to earth *after* Daniel's time and *before* 70 A.D. Jesus of Nazareth (obviously) fits within that prophetic historical timeframe.

## Jesus' "Fingerprint"

Speaking of prophecies, did you know that Jesus fulfilled somewhere between 350-400 Messianic prophecies (depending upon whom you ask) from the Old Testament—prophecies that were both *extremely specific* and *written at least a few hundred years* before Jesus walked the earth?

Here's a list of just a few examples:

According to the Old Testament, the Messiah would...

...be born in Bethlehem  
(prophesied in Micah 5:2, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 2:1)

...born of a virgin  
(prophesied in Isaiah 7:14, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 1:18-23)

...be from the Jewish tribe of Judah  
(prophesied in Genesis 49:10, fulfillment recorded in Hebrews 7:14)

...be from the family of King David  
(prophesied in Isaiah 11:1, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 1 & Luke 3)

...spend time as a child in Egypt  
(prophesied in Hosea 11:1, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 2:13-15)

...preach deliverance  
(prophesied in Isaiah 61:1-3, fulfillment recorded in Luke 4:12-16, among many other verses)

...be a prophet  
(prophesied in Deuteronomy 18:15, fulfillment recorded in Acts 7:37)

...be "the Light of the world"  
(prophesied in Isaiah 9:1-2, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 4:12-16)

...be the Great Healer  
(prophesied in Isaiah 53:4, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 4:23-24, among many other verses)

...be the "Good Shepherd"  
(prophesied in Isaiah 40:11, fulfillment recorded in John 10:11, 14)

...have a triumphal entry into Jerusalem  
(prophesied in Zechariah 9:9, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 21:1-11)

...be rejected by His own people  
(prophesied in Psalm 69:8 and Isaiah 53:3, fulfillment recorded in John 1:10,11; 19:15)

...be betrayed by a friend  
(prophesied in Psalm 41:9 and Psalm 55:12-14, fulfillment recorded in John 13:18, 26)

...be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver  
(prophesied in Zechariah 11:12, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 26:14-16)

...be betrayed for silver that is later used to buy a potter's field  
(prophesied in Zechariah 11:13, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 27:3-7)

...be beaten and spit upon  
(prophesied in Isaiah 50:6, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 26:67)

...be struck with a rod  
(prophesied in Micah 5:1, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 27:30)

...be silent while persecuted  
(prophesied in Isaiah 53:7, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 27:14)

...be deserted by His followers  
(prophesied in Zechariah 13:7, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 26:31, 56)

...be crucified  
(prophesied in Zechariah 12:10 and Psalm 22:16, fulfillment recorded in John 19:18, 34 and 20:25, 27)

...be given vinegar and gall to drink  
(prophesied in Psalm 69:21, fulfillment recorded in John 19:28, 30)

...have his clothing divided by lot  
(prophesied in Psalm 22:18, fulfillment recorded in John 19:23-24)

...die among criminals  
(prophesied in Isaiah 53:9, 12, fulfillment recorded in Mark 15:27-28)

...be buried with the rich  
(prophesied in Isaiah 53:9, fulfillment recorded in Matthew 27:57-60)

...have none of his bones broken  
(prophesied in Psalm 34:20, fulfillment recorded in John 19:36)

...would “ascend” in triumph  
(prophesied in Psalm 24:7-10, fulfillment recorded in 1 Peter 3:22)

...would be our Heavenly Priest  
(prophesied in Zechariah 6:12-13, fulfillment recorded in Hebrews 8:1, 2;  
4)

...and, those are just *a few* of the prophecies. (I didn’t even *mention* everything Jesus did as the ultimate fulfillment of Passover as recorded in Exodus, for one example).

But here’s the point: as Peter Stoner says in his book *Science Speaks*,

*The chance that any man might have fulfilled [just eight of those prophecies] is one in 10 to the 17th power. That would be one in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (one hundred quadrillion).”*

To better understand those odds, Stoner suggests that,

*“we take 10 to the 17th silver dollars and lay them on the face of Texas. They will cover all of the state two feet deep. Now mark one of these silver dollars and stir the whole mass thoroughly...Blindfold a man and tell him he can travel as far as he wishes, but he must pick up [that one marked silver dollar]. What chance would he have of getting the right one? ...Just the same chance the prophets would have had of writing [just eight of those] prophecies and having them all come true in any one man.”*

And Jesus fulfilled *far more than just eight*. I don’t know what that does for you, but it speaks volumes to me!

Though, I’d have to say that it’s especially those last two fulfilled prophecies that I listed that are the ultimate “kickers” for me in terms of this Big Question.

Because out of all the human beings who have ever lived in all of history (let alone the self-proclaimed First-Century “messiahs”), only one Man

has ever been raised from the dead by God Himself to *prove* that the Man was, indeed, the promised Messiah. And that's Jesus of Nazareth.

As the Apostle Paul told the people of Athens during a first-century mission trip:

*"[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed [Jesus]. [God] has given proof of this to everyone by raising [Jesus] from the dead" (Acts 17:35, NIV).*

I don't think God can get much clearer than He's already spoken on this topic: we know that Jesus is the Messiah because God Himself raised Jesus from the dead to *show Jesus is the Messiah!*

"Oh come on, Matt," a skeptic may say, "you mean to say you *actually* believe that Jesus was *literally* raised from the dead?" Not only do I believe it, I can prove it evidentially beyond a reasonable doubt. (More on that in the next chapter!)

### **Jesus' Consistency**

"Hang on, Matt," a person once objected in a Bible study I led for college-agers; "what if all of that was just some kind of elaborate 'trick' from the devil? How do we know Jesus *was really from God*, even with all of the above points?"

Simple: because of the consistency of Jesus' message and life.

As Jesus Himself says in the Sermon on the Mount, He didn't come to "abolish the [Old Testament] Law or the Prophets"; rather He came to *fulfill* them! (See Matthew 5:17-20).

And, as He goes on to say (quite bluntly, I'd add): in the process of fulfilling them, He also called His followers to follow the Old Testament Laws *even better than ever before*, repeatedly making the point that God wasn't pleased with merely "outward" actions; God wanted us to love and obey His commands *from the heart, in the context of relationship* (see Matthew 5-7).

I highly doubt that the devil—if he were attempting to "trick" the world—would encourage us to follow God with even *deeper*, more *authentic* devotion than we'd ever had before. That simply doesn't make any sense.

Jesus' teachings and lifestyle weren't just consistent with the Messianic prophecies you find in the Old Testament. They were also 100% consistent with the love and character of God that we find in the Old Testament.

### **The Only Logical Conclusion**

If you ask me, Jesus' legacy, timing, "fingerprint," and consistency show well beyond a reasonable doubt that He is, indeed, the Savior God promised to send to the world.

Now, about that resurrection...

QUESTION 24:  
CAN WE PROVE THE RESURRECTION?

Let's play a game.

Below is a list of 12 historical facts that virtually every historical scholar worth his title will agree with—whether the scholar is a Christian, atheist, agnostic, Buddhist, or whatever. And my challenge is this: considering *all 12 historical facts together (as well as their logical implications)*, see if you can name just *one* logical conclusion that a person can come to, other than “Jesus truly must have risen from the dead.” Ready? Here are the facts:

1. There was a historical man named Jesus, from Nazareth, who died by Roman crucifixion in the early first century.
2. He was buried, most likely in a private tomb.
3. Soon afterward, His disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.
4. Jesus' tomb was found empty very soon after His burial.
5. His disciples had experiences which they believed were actual appearances of the resurrected Jesus.
6. Due to those experiences, the disciples' lives were thoroughly transformed, to the point of being willing to die for this belief.
7. The Resurrection message was the center of preaching in the earliest church.
8. This message was especially proclaimed in Jerusalem, where Jesus died and was buried shortly before.
9. As a result of this preaching, the church was born and grew.
10. Sunday became the primary day of worship. (It had previously been Saturday for around 1500 years, per the Jewish Ten Commandments. That's a major cultural change for a group with a 1500 year-old tradition.)

11. Jesus' half-brother, James—who had been a skeptic—was converted to the faith when he believed He saw the resurrected Jesus.

12. A few years later, skeptic and church persecutor Saul (also known as Paul) became a Christian believer due to an experience which he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.

Those are the facts. Ready for the game?

Ready? Set? Go!

“That’s easy,” someone may say. “*Obviously* the disciples just stole the body and made the whole thing up!” But wait: that completely ignores facts 5, 6, 11, and 12—especially #6! (After all, no one willingly dies a horrible, tortuous death for a lie they *know* they themselves made up, right?)

“Well,” a skeptic may respond, “then...maybe they *did* see Jesus alive—because He never really died in the first place!” But that ignores facts 1 and 6, especially when you consider that dealing with the dead bodies of loved ones was something *everyone had to do* back then (they didn’t have funeral homes and such like we do today). Everyday people *knew very well* the difference between a dead body and a living one. There’s no chance Jesus fooled everyone via simply “swooning.”

“Well,” the skeptic may reply, “then...maybe they all just went to the wrong tomb!” But that ignores facts 5-12.

“Well maybe they all hallucinated the resurrection!” But that ignores facts 5, 11, and 12.

“Well maybe the whole thing was just a legend!” But that ignores facts 1-12. (These are historical *facts*, remember.)

“Well...I just don’t think that’s really enough data to make a judgment.” Then—to be fair to history and the number of sources we have attesting this vs other events—we’d have to throw out most of what we know about *anything* in classical antiquity. So that’s not a very good option.

“Well maybe...Jesus was a space alien!” That’s possible, I suppose.

However, if you ask me? The simplest, most *reasonable* conclusion based on the facts listed in this chapter is this:

*Jesus did, indeed, rise from the dead.*

*Which means He was—and is—the promised Son of God Messiah,  
Who came to earth to save us.*

And that changes everything.

## QUESTION 25: WHAT ABOUT “OTHER” GOSPELS?

“But Matt,” someone may rightly ask, “your argument in the last chapter is based on what the books in the Bible claim about Jesus. Aren’t there ‘other’ accounts of His life too that aren’t included in the Bible? What about those?”

Here’s the thing:

Imagine, for a moment, that I’m the lead singer of a heavy metal band. (Just go with me on this.). However, my band isn’t getting the kind of attention that I wish it was. So, I devise a plan: (A) I’ll write a new song, (B) I’ll put Elvis’ name on it as the author, and then (C) I’ll go to the media and say I found a “long lost Elvis song” that I’m going to record—and voila! I get instant attention and credibility for my music!

“That’s insane,” you say. (And, I’d agree.)

Yet, at least once every two years or so, our culture falls for the exact same scenario in terms of so-called “Lost Gospels” you hear about in the news. Because, when you hear about documents like “The Lost Gospel of Judas” or “The Lost Gospel of Thomas”—those names are deceiving. Because they weren’t actually written *by* Judas, Thomas, or anyone else who even knew Jesus Christ personally.

In fact—as you can often hear fleeting references to by the scholars who get interviewed about the documents—those “Lost Gospels” were written (a) *many* decades after the events of Jesus’ life on earth, (b) *by* a group called the Gnostics, as (c) ancient propaganda to promote *their* beliefs (not those of authentic Christianity). Then the Gnostics attached famous Christian names to the documents to try to gain credibility (much like a failing heavy metal singer trying pass his song off as one Elvis wrote long ago).

“But, wasn’t Gnosticism just one ‘branch’ of Christianity?” you may ask. No, it wasn’t. Gnosticism—which is all about seeking to find “secret knowledge”—existed prior to Christianity, then simply tried to latch on to Jesus as their claimed anticipated ultimate *source* of secret knowledge, once He became well-known.

In reality, however, the foundational beliefs of Christianity and the foundational beliefs of Gnosticism couldn't be more different. Whereas Christianity is about Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross as a means to salvation, Gnosticism ignores the centrality of the crucifixion entirely, focusing instead on the idea that salvation supposedly comes via "self-knowledge" and "understanding oneself authentically, and recognizing where one fits into the cosmos." <sup>1</sup> Therefore, they say, the focus should be solely on what Jesus *taught* about those things.

Or, at least, what they *claim* He taught. Some of their claims are rather odd, however—such as the nonsensical story near the end of The Gospel of Thomas in which Jesus supposedly says that He'll turn Mary Magdalene into a man so she could be saved. (Yeah. It says that.)

So, before you get all excited or upset the next time someone mentions a "Lost Gospel," first pause to ask this question: "where did this supposed 'Lost Gospel' *actually* originate in the first place?" You might be surprised at the answer.

Some may not be authentic Christian "Gospels" at all (like *Judas* and *Thomas*). Some may not even be *ancient* at all! For example, consider this brief breakdown of a few other "Gospels" you may have heard about in the news in recent years, and the problems that come with them:

*The Gospel of Peter* was *obviously* written by someone who was completely ignorant of first-century Jewish culture and history (which the real Peter wouldn't have been), and who liked to make up bizarre stories like Jesus' cross *talking* at the resurrection (yes really).

*The Gospel of Mary* "appears to be something of a protest in the middle of the second century against rules that were probably shutting out eccentric, offbeat teachers, maybe some of whom were women." Basically, in the second century, a bishop would deny a Gnostic woman the right to preach about Jesus, so she would come back and say, "Wait—I found a Gospel written by Mary Magdalene, and she said I can preach." (...because *that* doesn't sound suspicious at all.)

*The Secret Gospel of Mark* has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt to be a forgery created by scholar Morton Smith in the 1950s in an attempt to promote his own views on homosexuality and potentially jump start his failing career.

...and on and on it goes.

Personally, I'll stick with the Gospels that we have in the New Testament, which—as we previously discussed—have been repeatedly tested and proven reliable on many levels.

## QUESTION 26:

### DOES GOD EVER SPEAK THROUGH OTHER RELIGIONS?

“So, then,” someone may ask, “are you saying that God *only* speaks through the Christian Bible?”

“After all,” they may go on, “I know someone who follows [fill in applicable name of religion other than Christianity], and once took part in [fill in applicable ritual related to said religion], and a miracle happened [they were healed of a disease, etc.]!”

Or, they may say, “I know someone who follows [fill in applicable religion name], and once listened to [fill in applicable leader/speaker related to said religion], and what that leader/speaker predicted would happen actually came true!”

“So, if Jesus truly were the ‘Only Way’ to God as you have asserted, then why would anything like that have ever occurred via a religion *other than* Christianity? Does God ever speak or act through other religions? And, if so, does that make other religions just as ‘valid’ as Christianity from a spiritual perspective?”

That’s a great question!

And, I’m glad to say, the Bible gives us a very simple, clear answer to it via the principle you find all the way back during Moses’ time, in passages like Deuteronomy 13:

*“If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, ‘Let us follow other gods’ (gods you have not known) ‘and let us worship them,’ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 13:1-3).*

And the solution to that test according to the Old Testament is this: stick with the God of the Bible wholeheartedly:

*“It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him (Deuteronomy 13:4).*

In the Hebrew language that verse was originally written in, the word we've translated into English as "Lord" there is actually God's Name too—what we may pronounce in English as "Yahweh."

That's important because Deuteronomy is making sure there's no doubt about *which* God we are to follow: the God of the Bible. "Yahweh". Not Buddha, not Brahman, not a modern-day guru, not anyone or anything other than "Yahweh"—the God the Bible talked about as the Creator, Sustainer, and Savior of the world, Who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(Which—if, logically, the Bible is the most reliable source of information concerning God and spiritual matters—that's definitely something to take seriously.)

## QUESTION 27:

### ARE ATHEISTS CORRECT ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER?

“Here’s the thing about the God of the Bible, though,” a skeptic like atheist Richard Dawkins would say at this point (and, in his book *The God Delusion*, did say):

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”

(And, if book sales are any indication, a lot of people in our culture apparently either agree with him on that, or at least are considering doing so.)

So today let’s ask the question prompted by Dawkins, point-blank: are atheists like him correct about God’s character?

According to his own statement, all we logically need in order to determine the answer is the Old Testament itself. So, let’s take a closer look at what it reveals about this topic.

I can only assume that Dawkins came to his conclusion via two main parts of the Old Testament:

A. The laws God gave to the Jewish people (hence Dawkins’ accusations of “jealousy, pettiness, control-issues, homophobia, racism,” etc.),

B. The actions God called the Jewish people to carry out in terms of taking over the land of Canaan in the book of Joshua (hence Dawkins’ accusations of “bloodthirsty ethnic cleansing, infanticide, genocide,” etc.)

#### **A. Boundaries are...bad?**

First of all, if we are to properly answer this question in terms of the Old Testament, then we have to understand that (obviously) the Old Testament assumes God’s existence.

And—aside from how we may feel about God’s laws—therein comes the bigger issue: if there is, indeed a God, then naturally He gets to define morality in the first place anyway. Not us. As wise theologian J. Vernon

McGee once said, “this is God’s universe and He does things His way. You may have a better way, but you don’t have a universe.” Therefore, what God defines as right and wrong and good and evil would then be—in fact—right and wrong and good and evil, regardless of our opinions of them. If there is a God, then *He* is the judge of *us*, not the other way around.

Though, even if we step into the shoes of the atheist for a moment and view God’s commands from their eyes, I’m not entirely sure what it is that people like Dawkins disagree with in the first place. Even a quick reading of the Ten Commandments reveals a list of things that I would think most people would view favorably—even in our culture. I’m unaware of any majority of our population who would disagree with the importance of not murdering others (Exodus 20:13), not stealing (Exodus 20:15), not giving false testimony in court (Exodus 20:16), learning to be content with what you have (Exodus 20: 17), being faithful to your spouse (Exodus 20:14), honoring your parents (Exodus 20:12), and even taking a day off from work each week to rest (Exodus 20:8-11). Add to those the first three commandments that simply direct God’s followers to give Him honor and respect and—really, what’s the big deal there?

Besides, if having boundaries for life makes God “petty, unjust” and so on, then what does it make parents who set rules for their children? Are such parents likewise “megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic” and “capriciously malevolent bullies?” Or are they just being good parents, trying to protect both their children and their relationship with their children? Since when does being “loving” or “good” amount to having no rules or boundaries anyway? (I would argue quite the opposite, actually. If I truly love someone or something, my goal becomes to protect it—which, obviously, requires some form of boundaries.)

As psychologists Henry Cloud and John Townsend make abundantly clear in their book *Boundaries*, a life with no boundaries is a life that’s a complete physical, emotional, and psychological mess. So, whether we believe in God or not—is that really the kind of life we’re after? If not—and we wouldn’t fault ourselves for it—then why would we hypocritically fault God for the same goals?

Healthy boundaries are not “bad.”

## **B. Justice is...bad?**

Now tell me this: if you saw a police officer stand by and do nothing as

a man was about to burn his own infant alive in public—how would you feel about that police officer? Or let's say the officer did arrest the man, but the judge subsequently let the man go with no penalty for his crime. How would you feel about the judge?

“That'd be horrible!” we say. “They'd even possibly qualify as the worst police officer and/or judge in the history of history!”

And I would agree. We get that.

And so did the Old Testament authors.

In fact, anytime someone like Richard Dawkins labels God with descriptors like “bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser”, it shows me that Dawkins hasn't carefully read all of the Old Testament that he is so passionately condemning. God tells us very clearly why He commands the Israelites to wipe out entire nations in the book of Joshua in passages like Deuteronomy 18:9-13:

*“When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord; because of these same detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God.”*

Check out that list of offenses there! Paired with other passages from the Old Testament, God is essentially telling the Israelites that, “I'll tell you exactly why I want you to destroy groups like the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites: because I've given them time to change their behavior and they've refused to do so. And—as a good God—I can't stand by any longer and let them continue the evil they're doing.”

As author Max Lucado says in his book *Glory Days*,

*Perrizites, Hitties, Canaanites, Amorites...just odd names to us. But names that struck fear in the hearts of the Hebrew people [back then]. These tribes were a cesspool of evil...For eight centuries the Amorites had cultivated a culture of degradation. They sacrificed babies in worship. They practiced [immorality] in the city and dedicated*

*themselves to witchcraft and idolatry. One scholar called the Canaan of thirteenth century B.C. a 'snake pit of child sacrifice and sacred prostitution...[people who were] ruthlessly devoted to using the most innocent and vulnerable members of the community (babies and virgins) to manipulate God or gods for gain.'*"<sup>1</sup>

I can't help but wonder—if the Old Testament recorded God not doing anything about such evil—if the atheists of today would condemn God as a “distant, uncaring failure of a judge” or something.

True justice isn't “bad.”

### **Conclusion**

Thus, simply put: whenever a person like Richard Dawkins argues something to the effect of, “How could a supposedly ‘loving and good God’ act like He did in the Old Testament?”, my response is this: “How could a truly ‘loving and good God’ not act like He did to define and destroy evil and seek to prevent further occurrences of it?”

The same could also be said of the things God describes in the Book of Revelation that the Bible says will take place in the future.

Speaking of which...

QUESTION 28:  
WHEN WILL THE WORLD END?

Hurricanes. Earthquakes. Volcanic eruptions. The worst mass shootings in modern American history. Some people see these things in the news and think the end of the world is just around the corner. Some people even attempt to set specific dates for it.

We saw it again in the news not long before I wrote this chapter:  
**“CHRISTIAN CONSPIRACY THEORIST SAYS APOCALYPSE BEGINS SEPTEMBER 23RD.”**

Then, in the news on September 24<sup>th</sup>: **“DOOMSDAY CONSPIRACY THEORY: DAVID MEADE RESCHEDULES APOCALYPSE FOR OCTOBER AFTER WORLD DIDN’T END.”**

It’s certainly not the first time someone has attempted to predict such things, and I doubt it will be the last. What saddens me about such “predictions,” however, is how often the people who make them claim to be basing their statements upon the Bible.

After all, Jesus Himself is very clear (and rather blunt) *in* the Bible concerning the end times when He says things like these to His disciples:

*“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”* (Matthew 24:36).

*“The Son of Man [speaking about Himself] will come at an hour when you do not expect Him”* (Matthew 24:44).

*“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority”* (Acts 2:7).

It certainly seems obvious to me that any attempts on our part to calculate or predict such things—when not even the Son of God knows them!—are futile at best and sinfully arrogant at worst.

“But Matt,” someone may counter, “Jesus *does* also give us signs to watch for, and He *does* command us to be prepared for the end, doesn’t He?”

Indeed, He does in passages like this one:

*“Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.*

*“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:4-14).*

And, later, He does indeed say this:

*“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door” (Matthew 32-33).*

But notice what Jesus *does* say to do there, vs what He *doesn't* say to do there:

- He *does* say to guard your own relationship with God via watching out for false prophets.
- He *does* say not to be alarmed when crazy things (like we see every day in the news, lately!) start happening.
- He *does* say to stand firm in your faith in Him regardless of how badly you are persecuted or how dark the world becomes around you.

And, He commands us elsewhere to “be on guard,” “be alert,” “keep watch,” and, basically, be prepared for His return at all times (see Mark 13:32-35 and Matthew 25).

Yet, through it all, notice what He *doesn't* say:

- He *never* says to start trying to calculate a specific date for it all.
- Yes, we are to (a) be aware of the “season” in which Jesus may return,

based on visible indicators for which He told us to watch, and (b) be “ready” at all times for His return—which includes carrying out the mission Jesus gave us to share the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8), standing firm in our own faith, and using our resources to serve Jesus faithfully until He does return (Matthew 25).

But, ultimately, we are not to start attempting to calculate and predict specific dates for it all. Instead, we are to trust God with the timing and the outcome of it all.

Our time and energy at this point in history are therefore best spent where they always have been best spent: in doing what Jesus *actually* said to do. (And our time and energy is *worst* spent in the same way it always has been worst spent: in wasting our time and energy on things Jesus *warned against pursuing*.)

So, let me ask you this: whenever the end may actually come—whether next year, next month, next week, or as soon as you finish reading this chapter—are you ready for the end in terms of how the Son of God *actually says* to be ready?

Or let’s take it a step deeper: technically, the world “ends” for each one of us whenever we die—whether or not the *entire* world ends at that point or not. So are you prepared for *that*—whenever the “end” for *you* may occur?

“That depends on what happens *after* death occurs,” you may say.

I couldn’t agree more.

## QUESTION 29: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

It's a question that everyone asks sooner or later, and a question many have attempted to answer via their own opinions or theories: "What, exactly, happens to a person after they die?"

If we want a logical, credible answer to that question, however, to whom could we go?

After all—just speaking logically—the only possible source of information on this topic that would be *truly credible* would be someone who *has died*. (And, aside from fictional movie characters like you find in certain science fiction films, we don't exactly have an abundance of real-world people who fit that category and can still communicate with us about their experience.)

Except, of course, for One.

As I've argued previously, the only Person in history that we can rest assured did (in fact) credibly experience death, resurrect thereafter, and subsequently give us details about what comes next is Jesus Christ. No other worldview, religion, or belief system has someone like Him as their cornerstone in terms of this question.

Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying that other worldview and religions don't have *opinions* and *theories* about the afterlife—certainly they do. But in every case other than Jesus, *opinions* and *theories* are *all* they have, as none of the people with whom those opinions and theories originated actually *experienced* the afterlife as Jesus Christ did.

Only Jesus has "been there," come back, and given us specific details about what to expect. So, personally, I'll go with what He has to say over and above anyone else—as that just makes the most sense logically in terms of this big question. And, while *much* could be said of what Jesus *did* pass on to us concerning the afterlife, I think it can all be summed up quite well via a Bible verse we find in the New Testament book of Hebrews, which says this:

*Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.* (Hebrews 9:27-28)

In other words, according to the teachings of Jesus Himself as they were handed down to us by His first-century eyewitness followers, there is no reincarnation, as some may suggest. Nor is there a “free pass” to Heaven for anyone and everyone who dies. Simply put: after we die, each one of us will stand before God to be judged.

The book of Revelation elaborates on exactly what that judgement will be like, too. As the Apostle John wrote in part, concerning the glimpse of the “Last Judgement” that he was given by the resurrected Jesus,

*“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:11-15).*

Intense as it may be—again—we can rest assured at its credibility, per the Source from which it came.

We can take comfort, however, in knowing that, *clearly* there is a way to make it through that judgement, as both the Revelation and Hebrews passages above make clear: by making sure our names are in the “book of life” *then* via putting our faith in Jesus Christ *now* to save us *from* that judgement.

The question is this: have you ever done that?

If not, then—admittedly—I understand why today’s question is a scary one. But it doesn’t have to be. It’s not too late to turn it around, into a question that—in your case—carries with it an answer that is full of hope, peace, and love.

“What makes the difference between ‘scary’ and ‘hopeful’ in this case?” Simple: it’s Jesus.

QUESTION 30:  
CAN A PERSON OF FAITH HAVE DOUBTS?

“I *want* to trust Jesus, Matt,” you may say, “I really do. I just...have doubts sometimes. So, obviously, I’m a ‘terrible Christian’ at best and not truly a believer at worst, right?”

Actually the Bible’s answer to that question may surprise you: it depends on what you *do* with the doubts and questions.

Consider John the Baptist, for example. If *anyone* were to be an example of someone with *zero* doubts about God, one would think it would be John. After all, according to chapter 1 of Luke’s tremendously historical biography of Jesus,

- a. John was a miracle baby of sorts,
- b. whose birth was foretold by an angel,
- c. and was the fulfillment of a major prophecy from the Old Testament,
- d. to be the forerunner of the Savior that God’s people had been waiting for Him to send for a *very* long time,
- e. which was a role that John did, eventually, fulfill as he had been destined to (as we see in Luke chapter 3).

Yet, as time goes on, John is unfairly arrested and put in prison. And by the time we get to chapter 7, it seems that John *himself* was beginning to question the Jesus he formerly publicly (and passionately!) had endorsed as *the* Son of God and Savior. As Luke tells us:

*[John sent his disciples to Jesus] to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?’” (Luke 7:18-20)*

Wait a minute. So, after all the miracles and activity of God that John had experienced—both in his own life, and in what he knew of Jesus—he *still* ended up with some doubt and questions when he was faced with tough times? Apparently so.

And notice how Jesus responds to John’s question here:

[Jesus] replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.” (Luke 7:22-23)

Then, it says,

*After John’s messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John, yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”* (Luke 7:24-28)

So, Jesus (a) took John’s question seriously and gave him an answer, and (b) Jesus *then* went on to publicly *praise* John as someone held in high esteem *by* Jesus.

“But—John doubted,” we may say; “and John questioned Jesus. So... why didn’t Jesus get mad at him?”

I think the answer is this: *because John did exactly what God wants us to do when we have doubts and questions: John took them to God, rather than letting the doubts and questions pull him away from God.*

One theme we see repeatedly in the Bible—from cover to cover, really—is that God isn’t afraid of our questions. In fact, anytime a person in scripture openly, honestly, humbly, and respectfully *asked* God a question, God didn’t “zap” them for it. He *answered* them in one way or another. (For example: consider Abraham in Genesis 17:9-19, Moses in Exodus 5:22-6:1, Gideon in Judges 6, Mary in Luke 1:26-35, and Ananias in Acts 9:10-17.)

Follow their example. Don’t let doubts and questions pull you *away* from God; let them drive you *toward* Him—and the awesome answers He wants to show you in the context of a *relationship* with Him. Ask Him your questions. Search His Bible for His answers.

“But Matt,” you may say, “Doesn’t God want me to live a life of faith?” Certainly, He does. But genuine faith is often built *through* times of doubt, *via* drawing close to God, asking the right questions, and finding the answers.

Consider the context in which James encourages his readers “to believe and not doubt,” for example—the context of *asking* God for wisdom *amidst* suffering that you don’t understand the purpose behind (see James 1:2-8).

Consider also the context of Hebrews 11:6, which says that “without faith it is impossible to please God”—the context that, as the rest of the verse says, “...anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

That’s why it’s so important to take our doubts and questions *to* God—because in doing so, we *are* showing faith that “He exists and rewards those who earnestly seek Him,” are we not?

The main question is this: as we ask our big questions and discover the answers, what will we do with the answers we find?

## QUESTION 31: WHAT IF IT'S TRUE?

So, as we come to the end of this book, here's the *real* big question: *what if it's all true?*

*What if*, as I've discussed, it is completely reasonable to believe that a loving God *does exist*? And *what if* that God did, in fact, create us with souls that will live forever?

*What if* that God does actually *want* a relationship with each one of us? *What if* the most logical starting point for that spiritual journey is, in fact, Christianity? *What if* the Bible is a completely trustworthy and relevant source upon which to build that relationship?

*What if*, as the Bible says, Jesus Christ did, in fact, exist as a real historical person? And *what if* Jesus did, in fact, prove that He is God's Son via His virgin birth and resurrection? *What if*, as a result, Jesus truly can give a person eternal life when they put their faith in Him to do so?

Basically, *what if* "faith" isn't just an excuse to avoid thinking deeply, but can actually lead us to everything that's been "missing" in our lives—including things that naturalistic humanism and moral relativism *can't* offer us?

*What if it's all true?* What would that mean for you?

I can tell you exactly what it would mean: it would mean that the most reasonable, logical next step after reading this book would be to pursue that relationship that God wants with you.

"But I still have questions!" you may say. And that's okay! I encourage you to continue seeking the answers. There are a wealth of credible resources available by authors like Lee Strobel, J. Warner Wallace, Gregory Koukl, Nabeel Quereshi, Ravi Zacharais, Hank Hanegraaff, Josh McDowell, and Stephen C. Meyer (just to name a few). Keep the investigations going!

Even if you tend to be among my more skeptical readers who might suggest that I "haven't proven anything" over the pages of this book, remember this: the burden of proof for the topics I've discussed falls on *both* the shoulders of the believer *and* the skeptic. It isn't *just* the

Christian who must offer logic and evidence *for* what we believe; it is also up to the skeptic to offer evidence and reason *for their* positions in rebuttal. (And, in case you're wondering, no—simplistic insults don't count as valid rebuttals.)

Wherever you fall on the faith spectrum, however, please do yourself a favor and seek the answers to the big questions of life. Then, follow the evidence to *wherever it ends up leading you*. Don't dismiss an argument simply because you don't *want* to believe it; dismiss it only if there is sound, reasonable evidence to the contrary.

For my part, I've shared what I see concerning the topics I've covered. Though, ultimately, I certainly won't claim to have all of life figured out perfectly. In fact, that's exactly *why* I follow Jesus: because *He does* have it all figured out. And following Him *works*, plain and simple.

Got a broken heart? He can heal it.

Got a guilt-filled past? He can forgive it.

Trying to figure out who you are? He can show you who He created you to be.

Got a fear of tomorrow? He can give you peace, hope, purpose, direction, and—most importantly—eternal life.

It's exactly what He came to earth to do 2,000 years ago. And He still does it every day. Countless people today are the best kind of proof of that: *living* proof.

In fact, the author of the book you just finished reading is one of them.

And if you'd like to put your trust in Jesus and begin the new life He offers you, you can do that right now, wherever you're reading this. You don't have to shine your shoes, dress fancy, or "get it all together" first. All you have to do is come to Jesus, and He'll take care of the rest. Forgiveness and eternal life are His gifts to you, just waiting to be *received*.

Jesus says we do that by "repenting", which is just a fancy word that means to make a "u-turn" in life, where you (a) stop going your own way, (b) put your trust in Jesus to save you, and (c) follow Him from now on until forever.

Have you ever done that? If not, would you like to right now? If so, then I encourage you to pause and reach out to Him this very minute, with a prayer like this:

*Dear God,*

*Thank You for loving me even when I went my own way. I'm sorry for the bad I've done. Thank You for sending Jesus to save me, by dying for me on the cross and rising from the dead. Jesus, please come into my life and save me. And help me follow You from this day forward. In Jesus' Name I pray. Amen.*

If you just prayed that prayer, would you do me a favor? Would you send me a note and let me know? I'd love to pray for you and send you a free book to help you with "what's next." You can email me any time at [pastormatt@seasidechurchonline.org](mailto:pastormatt@seasidechurchonline.org)

...and even ask me a big question or two.

## APPENDIX 1: HOW DO I FIND A “GOOD” CHURCH?

Take even a brief look around the area where I serve as a pastor, and you’ll notice something relatively unique: the population here is made up mostly of military families and college students who only live here for an average of 2.5 years.

As a result, this Big Question is one that’s not uncommon to hear followers of Jesus (or even spiritual seekers) ask around here. Many of them are used to asking it every 2.5 years. Which, in at least one way I suppose, makes me a fitting person to *be* a pastor in this area—because I’ve often had the same question.

One of my favorite books to read in the Bible is the book of Acts, which tells the story of how the church began and what it was like *at* the beginning, 2,000 years ago. And, simply put: it’s beautiful. It’s the definition of a “good,” and “healthy,” church.

Yet, for years it has frustrated me at how *unlike* the Acts church many modern-day churches look and operate. And I’ve often wondered “what is it that we’re ‘missing’ today?”

So, a couple of years ago, our church did an intensive, 8-month long, [almost literally!] verse-by-verse, exegetical study *of* the book of Acts, in hopes of answering questions like today’s topic. In other words, if we *just* read the book of Acts, *just* for what it says, in and of itself—not “reading things into the text” that aren’t actually there (from our own preconceived ideas, biases or denominational backgrounds and such)—what do we find a “healthy” church looks like according to *God’s* original blueprint for it?

Here’s what we concluded, concerning a number of different key topics:

*A. The church existed to make disciples of Jesus Christ. That was their mission from Jesus Himself.*

*B. The church was empowered by God’s Holy Spirit for that mission, and used their spiritual gifts as a team for God’s Kingdom.*

*C. The church immersed people in water, as immediately as possible upon the repenting and committing of their lives to Jesus Christ, as an*

*outward symbol of the spiritual change Jesus brought about in their lives.*

*D. The church operated like a spiritual family of followers of Jesus Christ, who were lovingly committed to each other 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and who made it a priority to gather for worship and fellowship.*

*E. The early church devoted themselves to praying with each other, and for each other, in open, honest communication with God.*

*F. The church had leaders who relied on God through prayer, Scripture study, and delegating responsibility appropriately, so as to be most effective in building God's Kingdom, not their own.*

*G. The church consistently, actively listened for God to speak to them through the Bible, prayer, other genuine followers of Christ, and circumstances, always "testing" everything with the Bible to make sure it's really God's voice.*

*H. God did do miracles through the church, but always for His Glory and often to bring nonbelievers to a place of openness to the Gospel.*

*I. The church faced a lot of persecution along the way, but never let it stop them from continuing their mission of sharing the Gospel with the world.*

*J. The church understood that we have a spiritual enemy, who is waging a very real spiritual war for the souls of people, but also understood that God's Spirit within us is far stronger than our enemy in the world, and there is power in the name of Jesus Christ.*

Basically, our overall conclusion was that a "healthy" church—according to what we see in the book of Acts—is *a spiritual family of followers of Jesus Christ, who passionately pursue the mission He gave us of making disciples, regardless of the cost to us in this life.*

But, as they've said for years on the television show *Reading Rainbow*, "you don't have to take my word for it." I encourage you to do your own study on the early church, and see what stands out to you.

Obviously, we'll never find a "perfect" church this side of Heaven. But if we can find one—large or small—with characteristics like those I've outlined above, it certainly seems to me like we'll be on the right track.

Or, if we can seek to *be* a church with characteristics like those I've outlined above, that's even better.

## APPENDIX 2: IS THE BIBLE “ANTI-SCIENCE?”

It’s a question I’ve had to answer more than once, especially as a bi-vocational Christian pastor who works part-time at a world-renowned science institution: “*How on earth* do you reconcile your faith with science, Matt?”

And my answer is simple: who says there has to be any conflict between the two in the first place?

After all, the Bible is pretty clearly *not* “anti-science:”

- Gospel author Luke was a practicing medical doctor;
- The Apostle Paul once encouraged his protegee to seek a medicinal remedy for “frequent illnesses” (see 1 Timothy [5:23](#));
- Psalm 19:1-6 is essentially a direct endorsement of undertaking astronomical study in order to worship God better;
- Romans [1:20](#) points out how the study of nature can show us just how real God is;
- In Jeremiah 31:35-37, “God Himself bases His own integrity upon certain scientific premises” ([equip.org](#));
- 1 Corinthians 15 basically *challenges* us to explore the testable—and verifiable—evidence for Jesus’ resurrection;
- *After* His resurrection, Jesus Himself is recorded as telling His disciples to see, touch, and eat with Him as *proof* that He truly was alive (see Luke 24:36-42 and John 20:24-31).

In fact, as [equip.org](#) rightly says,

*“Fact is, the very foundation of the scientific method is rooted in a biblical worldview. Christianity considers the world to be knowable, observable, descriptive, and above all, orderly because it has a design of infinite knowledge and wisdom. Based on this premise, early scientists like Kepler, Bacon, and Newton believed that by studying creation, they were obeying not only the Great Commission, but the cultural mandate to subdue the earth as well. Maybe the best way to put it is to ‘think God’s*

*thoughts after Him.*”<sup>1</sup>

Yes, science and Bible-based faith can coexist just fine. In fact, I’d even argue that they *should* coexist, based on what I see both in Scripture (as noted above) *and* in science.

For example: study astronomy and you’ll discover that the earth happens to be in a very narrow “habitable zone” of our galaxy—which not only enables life to exist here like it does, but *also* gives us a fantastic, unobstructed view of the universe. I don’t think that’s an accident. I think God *wants* us to “consider the heavens” like the Old Testament King David did (see Psalm 8).

Now, certainly, for the Christian, any science we undertake would be best carried out if governed by the moral laws we find in the Bible. (After all, if God *gave* us those laws in the first place so that we could (a) know Him and (b) have the best life possible, then seeking to “improve” upon life apart from His laws would, logically, be self-defeating. For, what would be the point of improving or prolonging a life that intentionally rejects the very God around Whom the best possible life revolves?)

I understand that this is exactly where some scientists differ with Christians, concerned that such moral restraints would hinder progress they’d like to make. Yet—even from an atheistic perspective—if we lose our humanity in the process of trying to *save* humanity, then what are we fighting for in the first place?

Even non-Christian doctors accept, and adhere to, the moral philosophy that we call the Hippocratic Oath. So why consider it strange that Christian scientists would wish to adhere to the moral standards of a book that *we* consider to be the most important and reliable book in the history of history?

“What about Darwinism, though, Matt?” you may say.

I guess you could say I just have a few questions of my own on that one...

## APPENDIX 3: THE DARWINISM QUESTIONS

To be clear: I'm not anti-science. And I don't believe the Bible is anti-science either (as I talked about extensively in Appendix 2.)

I just have a few questions when it comes to Darwinism.

### **A Definition for the Discussion**

Before I get to those, however, let me define exactly what I mean when I use the term "Darwinism" in this chapter:

In the wonderfully concise words of Dr. Jonathan Wells, I'm talking about "the theory that *all* living creatures are modified descendants of a common ancestor that lived long ago" and that "every new species that has ever appeared can be explained by descent modification" as "the result of natural selection acting on random genetic mutations".<sup>1</sup>

Now—that said—here's what I don't understand:

### **A. Attempts at Recreating Earth's Early Atmosphere**

Proponents of Darwinism will often tell you that "in the 1950's, biochemists Stanley Miller and Harold Urey conducted an experiment which demonstrated that several organic compounds could be formed spontaneously by simulating the conditions of Earth's early atmosphere."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, they proved via scientific experiment that life could, in fact, originate as they had theorized. However, if you dig a little deeper into the story, you discover that *since* the 1950's, biochemists and other researchers alike—including Marcel Florkin, Klaus Dose, and Sidney W. Fox, to name a few—have declared that the Miller-Urey experiment used a gas mixture that science no longer accepts as the accurate theorized composition.

And when modern scientists attempt the same experiment *with* the revised theorized gas composition, the results are—wait for it—very toxic formaldehyde and cyanide, neither of which are known to promote living cells (...actually, quite the *opposite*, of course).

So my first question is this:

If the results of scientific experiments like these don't support "step one" of Darwinism's theory, then why would anyone proceed to even hypothesize that step two would be correct?

(Though, for those who *do* proceed to step two, I have a second question...)

## **B. The "Tree of Life" Metaphor**

In Charles Darwin's famous book, *On the Origin of Species*, he unpacks a metaphor of a "great Tree of Life" in order to help the reader understand his theory for how all living creatures ultimately go back to a common ancestor. In this metaphor, "limbs" and "branches" represent where natural selection would have caused the variations that led to what we see today, all springing from one common root.

The only problem there is this: what science has discovered thus far in the fossil record doesn't agree with Darwin's tree. As Stephen C. Meyer masterfully discusses in his book *Darwin's Doubt*, we need look no further than the famous "Cambrian Explosion."

So my second question is this: why would science hold onto a theory that the fossil record itself challenges so clearly?

"But what about discoveries like 'Lucy'?" someone may retort. That leads me to my third question...

## **C. "Lucy"**

According to Wikipedia, "Lucy is the common name of AL 288-1, several hundred pieces of bone fossils representing 40 percent of the skeleton of a female of the hominin species *Australopithecus afarensis*... Lucy was discovered in 1974 in Africa, near the village Hadar in the Awash Valley of the Afar Triangle in Ethiopia, by paleoanthropologist Donald Johnson of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History."

Since the discovery, fans of Darwinism have been making the case that Lucy provides fantastic evidence in support of the theory that humans evolved from apes, since Lucy reportedly was among the first bipedal apes to walk like human beings.

However, in August of 2017, news broke that scientists had determined that Lucy "died by falling out of a tree." (See one such article, here: <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-37194764>)

But if Lucy were, in fact, among the first apes to begin the process of living life *on the ground* via walking like human beings do today, then why was she high enough up in a tree that a fall would cause her death? So my third question is this: if something *looks like* an ape (as Lucy does in bone structure), and *acts like* an ape (as Lucy apparently did via spending time in trees), then doesn't that make Lucy—very clearly—simply just *an ape*?

“But what about all of the *other* fossils we have in terms of creatures like Lucy?” someone may ask.

As Dr. Wells has also stated, “One of the major problems with paleoanthropology is that compared to all the fossils we have, only a minuscule number are believed to be creatures ancestral to humans. Often, it's just skull fragments or teeth. So this gives a lot of elasticity in reconstructing the specimens to fit evolutionary theory.”<sup>3</sup> And, as *Nature* chief science writer Henry Gee once concluded, “the conventional picture of human evolution is ‘a completely human invention created after the fact, shaped to accord with human prejudices.’”<sup>4</sup>

#### **D. Similar Embryos**

“But what about the comparison done by Ernst Haeckel in the late 1800's,” a Darwinist might say, “which showed similarities between the embryos of everything from fish, to chickens, to calves, to humans?” Yet—as even Wikipedia can tell you—Haeckel's original examples have been proven to have been both “cherry-picked” *and* “exaggerated” by him in order to fit the theory he was trying to prove. They weren't represent-tative of unbiased, non-manipulated reality.

So, my fourth question is this: why would anyone put confidence in “evidence” as Haeckel presented it?

#### **E. Structure Similarities**

“What about similarities between structures like bird wings, marine animal flippers, and human hands?” Darwinists might argue.

My fifth question: But doesn't it make just as much sense—if not *more sense*—to attribute such magnificent common features to the well thought-out plan of a divine *Designer*—rather than to random chance—as the mechanism for their origin?

## F. Archaeopteryx

“But what about the archaeopteryx discovery, and how that obviously fills the gap between reptiles and modern birds?” Darwinists might say.

My sixth question: If archeopteryx—which Dr. Wells points out is *clearly* just a species of bird that has long been extinct (based on bone structure, lungs, weight, muscles, etc.)—was a link *between* reptiles and modern birds, then why do scientists find the fossils that most resemble reptilian bird ancestors *later* in the fossil record than they find the archeopteryx? Shouldn’t it be the other way around if Darwinism is true?

### **Simplistic or Realistic?**

Simply put—as I’ve previously written about in this book—the Bible’s explanations for the origins of life just make more sense to me, both scientifically and evidentially.

I know, I know: a Darwinist would probably tell me that I’m making this all too simplistic, and that I don’t have the necessary education or credentials to *really* understand these things. And that may be true. But somewhere around 1,000 scientists (and counting!—see the complete list, here: <http://www.discovery.org/scripts/viewDB/filesDB-download.php?command=download&id=660>) who *do* have the aforementioned credentials have joined together in attaching their names to a 2001 statement called *A Scientific Dissent from Darwinism*, which declares the following:

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

I’m just saying: it seems to me that they have a point.

## APPENDIX 4: ARE WE LIVING IN A SIMULATION?

It may sound like a joke, but it's not—at least, not to astrophysicists like Neil deGrasse Tyson.

As Business Insider puts it,

*“One of the main arguments that physicists use to talk about what’s known as the ‘simulation hypothesis’ is that if we can prove that it’s possible to simulate a universe — if we can figure out all the laws that govern how everything works, which physicists are trying to do — that makes it much more likely that it is actually simulated. If we know that it’s possible to do something, it’s much easier to think that thing is being done. We haven’t been able to figure out how to simulate a universe — yet. But it’s not too hard to imagine that some other creature out there is far smarter than us.*

*“Tyson points out that we humans have always defined ourselves as the smartest beings alive...more intelligent than species like chimpanzees that share close to 99% of our DNA. We can create symphonies and do trigonometry and astrophysics — some of us, anyway.*

*“But Tyson uses a thought experiment to imagine a life-form that’s as much smarter than us as we are than dogs, chimps, or other terrestrial mammals.*

*“‘What would we look like to them? We would be drooling, blithering idiots in their presence,’ he says. Whatever that being is, it very well might be able to create a simulation of a universe. ‘And if that’s the case, it is easy for me to imagine that everything in our lives is just the creation of some other entity for their entertainment,’ Tyson says. ‘I’m saying, the day we learn that it is true, I will be the only one in the room saying, ‘I’m not surprised.’”*

*“And maybe that means there’s some chance of doing a reset at some point.”<sup>1</sup>*

So, are we living in a simulation? A couple of thoughts on that:

## A. Nothing New

The first thing that strikes me about the simulation hypothesis is that it's actually nothing new. Not by a long shot. It's essentially just an updated "sciencey" version of what religions like Buddhism have believed for centuries: that all of life is an "illusion."<sup>2</sup>

"Well, so what?" you may ask. "*Do* both ancient Buddhists and modern-day astrophysicists have a point on this one?"

That brings me to my second thought:

## B. The Biggest Question Still Remains

Ultimately, the simulation hypothesis does nothing to answer the biggest question of both science and theology: "where did everything come from in the first place?" The simulation hypothesis just pushes that question backwards one step, and places it behind the question of "who created the simulation we're living in?"

But think about this: if, indeed, we are living in a simulation, then it's exactly *that*, right? It's a *simulation*. In other words, it's an artificial imitation of *some kind of reality* that exists *somewhere*.

...Which means that the "real" reality *still* exists out there somewhere, in some form.

...Which means that things like nature, time, and information *still* exist out there somewhere, in some form.

...Which means that something (or someone) had to create *those* things which have now been simulated.

...Which means that we still ultimately need an uncaused cause behind the universe in which our simulation was created.

...Which means that we're still left with the question, "what was the uncaused cause behind the universe in which the simulation was created?"

...Which—still!—would need to be an uncaused cause that is all the things I've discussed previously in this book (such as intelligent, supernatural, timeless, etc.)—things that match the description of God we have in the Bible.

### C. And So...

*That* tells me—even if I were living in a simulation?—the fact that I can even use my non-physical human consciousness to *think* about all of this, including that I can conceive of such a God Who is *loving at all*, logically tells me that He’s still out there.

And *as* a God with the omnipresence required to create *any* universe, certainly He would be able to hear my prayers and petitions that are directed His way, even in a simulation, and respond to them.

He may even choose to *invade* the simulation at some point—perhaps as a man named Jesus—in an attempt to bring salvation to those of us trapped inside the simulation. If the simulation idea is indeed true, then perhaps that’s why Jesus was ultimately so rejected in history: He *was* in fact sent by God, and had the potential to “ruin” the simulation. (If we’re following the simulation thought process, that would certainly make sense.)

Thus, any hope of salvation or understanding of true reality would still hinge on pursuing a personal relationship with God through the Jesus He sent to us. So, for a follower of Jesus Christ, living life in a simulation wouldn’t really garner any difference in response from us in terms of faith. We’d live the same.

Thus, ultimately, it doesn’t matter if this is a “simulation” or not. Either way—speaking simply from a logical thought process—it doesn’t change my plans for today. Though I do have one simple question to close with...

### 4. Which is Truly Easier?

I must admit, I read things like the “simulation hypothesis” and think through the implications of it (as I have here), and, frankly, I end up wondering why people like Tyson reject the Bible’s (relatively straightforward) explanation of reality as something “improbable”, yet flock to ideas like a “simulation hypothesis” that—from what I’ve seen online—is laughable by many people.

Does a “simulation” *really* make more sense as an explanation for our universe than what the Bible has already outlined for us? Why are we as humans so quick to dismiss God as a possibility (which, as I have attempted to show throughout this book, *is a legitimate logical possibility*) yet so quickly believe that we may actually be living in something like we see in science fiction movies?

Could it be that the Bible is actually correct when it makes the point that each one of us is born with a sinful nature that *would* rather invent a crazy simulation theory than just surrender our pride, ego, and souls to a God Who loves us—a God Who *does*, in fact, plan to “reset” the universe one day (see Revelation 21-22)?

It all reminds me of a quote I once read back by a man named Robert Jastrow:

*“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.”*

My continual hope is that a scientist such as that would simply have the humility to admit it, and share what he’s learned so that *both* can benefit.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

SO, I WAS THINKING...

1. Quote and chapter title taken from Jud Boies' presentation, "Can You Support and Defend Your Faith in 30 Seconds", given at the 2013 Biola University Apologetics Conference at Bayside Church in Granite Bay, California.

QUESTION 3: ARE MY ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS 1 & 2 COP-OUTS?

1. Quote taken from K-LOVE Radio's "59 Seconds of Hope" featuring Greg Laurie, 2017
2. Quote taken from *The Prodigal God* by Timothy Keller (New York: Dutton, 2008), p. 113

QUESTION 4: WHAT IS THE BEST...STARTING POINT?

1. Points and quotes taken from Craig Hazen's presentation, "Is It Reasonable to Believe Christianity is the Only Way?", given at the 2013 Biola University Apologetics Conference at Bayside Church in Granite Bay, California.

QUESTION 6: IS THE BIBLE'S CREATION STORY NONSENSE?

1. See the entire article, here:  
<http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2014/09/half-earths-water-formed-sun-was-born>

QUESTION 7: ARE THE GENESIS CREATION "DAYS" LITERAL?

1. Quote and information taken from:  
[http://www.equip.org/bible\\_answers/genesis-creation-days-literal-long-literary/](http://www.equip.org/bible_answers/genesis-creation-days-literal-long-literary/)

QUESTION 8: IF GOD EXISTS, WHY IS CREATION "FLAWED"?

1. Quote and information taken from:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument\\_from\\_poor\\_design](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument_from_poor_design)
2. See this article, for example:  
<http://www.christianpost.com/news/report-isis-fighter-who-enjoyed-killing-christians-wants-to-follow-jesus-after-dreaming-of-man-in-white-who-told-him-you-are-killing-my-people-139880/>

QUESTION 9: DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF?

1. With thanks to Thomas Uretsky for his time and expertise during our interview, May 2017.

#### QUESTION 10: ISN'T HISTORY...WRITTEN BY THE "WINNERS"?

1. Quote taken from <http://coldcasechristianity.com/2016/how-geographic-separation-affirms-the-reliability-of-the-new-testament/>

#### QUESTION 12: DID JESUS EVER CLAIM TO BE GOD?

1. Quote taken from <http://www.equip.org/article/did-jesus-claim-to-be-god/>

#### QUESTION 13: AREN'T CHRISTMAS & EASTER PAGAN IN ORIGIN?

1. For further study, I recommend the following resources:
  - *The Origins of the Mithras Mysteries* by David Ulansey
  - *Mithras, the Secret God* by M. J. Vermaseren
  - *Mithraic Studies* by John R. Hinnells
  - *The Gospel and the Greeks* by Ronald H. Nash
  - *Answering More Prime Time Fallacies* by Hank Hanegraaff
  - *In Defense of Miracles* by R. Dougl's Geivett and Gary R. Habermas

#### QUESTION 14: HOW CAN GOD BE A "TRINITY"?

1. Quote takes from chapter 21 of *The Complete Bible Answer Book* by Hank Hanegraaff, Thomas Nelson, 2008.

#### QUESTION 15: DO HUMANS HAVE SOULS?

1. Quote taken/paraphrased from chapter 10 of *The Case for a Creator* by Lee Strobel.
2. Quote taken from <http://www.equip.org/article/the-human-soul-are-humans-nothing-more-than-bodies/>
3. Quote taken from <http://coldcasechristianity.com/2013/a-very-brief-review-of-arguments-for-the-existence-of-the-soul-bible-insert/>

#### QUESTION 17: IF GOD IS GOOD, WHY...SUFFERING EXIST?

1. Quote taken from Neil DeGrasse Tyson's appearance on the Netflix show "Chelsea"
2. Quote taken from *The Story of Reality* by Gregory Koukl
3. Quote taken from <http://coldcasechristianity.com/2013/why-would-a-good-god-allow-pain-and-suffering/>
4. Quote taken from *The Brant and Sherri Oddcast*, available on iTunes.
5. For one of Groothius' complete talks on this subject, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dezb1Ns14k8>

#### QUESTION 19: WHY DOESN'T GOD LET EVERYONE IN...?

1. Quote taken from <http://www.christianpost.com/news/greg-laurie-god-doesnt-send-people-to-hell-they-send-themselves-168685/>
2. "Repenting" is a fancy word that means "to make a u-turn in life." In other words, it means to stop living life your own way, surrender control to God, and start living His way instead.
3. Quote taken from <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/why-didnt-god-create-only-those-who-he-knew-would-believe-in-him#ixzz4sQQo8xa7>

#### QUESTION 21: HOW CAN JESUS BE THE "ONLY WAY"?

1. Quotes taken from *Grace is Greater* by Kyle Idleman, Baker Books, 2017

#### QUESTION 25: WHAT ABOUT "OTHER" GOSPELS?

1. Quotes taken from Lee Strobel's book *The Case for the Real Jesus*—which I cannot recommend to you enough! You can purchase a copy, here: [https://www.amazon.com/Case-Real-Jesus-Journalist-Investigates/dp/031033926X/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1485802609&sr=8-1&keywords=The+Case+for+the+Real+Jesus](https://www.amazon.com/Case-Real-Jesus-Journalist-Investigates/dp/031033926X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1485802609&sr=8-1&keywords=The+Case+for+the+Real+Jesus)

#### QUESTION 27: ARE ATHEISTS CORRECT...?

1. Quote taken from chapter 2 of *Glory Days* by Max Lucado, Thomas Nelson, 2016

#### APPENDIX 2: IS THE BIBLE "ANTI-SCIENCE?"

1. Quote taken from <http://www.equip.org/perspectives/what-is-the-relationship-between-science-and-the-bible/>

#### APPENDIX 3: THE DARWINISM QUESTIONS

1. Quote taken from *The Case for a Creator* by Lee Strobel, page 36.
2. Quote taken from [http://www.windows2universe.org/earth/Life/miller\\_urey.html](http://www.windows2universe.org/earth/Life/miller_urey.html)
3. Quote taken from *The Case for a Creator* by Lee Strobel, page 62.
4. Quote taken from *The Case for a Creator* by Lee Strobel, page 63.

#### APPENDIX 4: ARE WE LIVING IN A SIMULATION?

1. See the full article, here: <http://www.businessinsider.com/neil-degrasse-tyson-thinks-the-universe-might-be-a-simulation-2016-12>
2. ...which, logically speaking, I find significant problems with as a worldview. Consider, for example, apologist Greg Koukl's thoughts in this article: <https://www.str.org/articles/could-buddhism-be-true#.Ws5M0S--L-Y>

## “...**BUT, HOW DO YOU KNOW?**”

Regardless of upbringing, social status, education, religion (or lack thereof), or worldview, there's one thing that we all have in common: we have BIG questions.

“Why am I here?”

“What do I believe?”

“How do I know that what I believe is actually true?”

So often, however, it seems we struggle to find the time or space to explore the answers to those questions to the degree that they demand.

That's why Matt Abbott wrote this book: to provide short (yet thoughtful!) discussions about some of the most common BIG questions he's encountered along life's journey, all in the hopes that you'll come along with him as he seeks the answers.

All it takes is an honest heart, this book, and about five to ten minutes a day for one month. What you'll discover along the way, however, may just change your life forever.



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He is also the author of ***Behind the Scenes***: A closer look at the messages our pop culture media often sends us, and how God wants us to respond.