# “How Can I Share the Gospel with Jehovah’s Witnesses?”

**How can I deal most effectively with Jehovah Witnesses? I specifically want insights on how to really reach the hearts of these dear people. I am not interested in just winning an argument, but would like to present the Gospel in a way that will make an impact.**

I commend you for seeking to reach those lost in the JW organization. Yes indeed, our goal is not to win an arguement but to win them to Christ.

The best thing we can do is study the scriptures diligently and ask them questions regarding the nature of Christ and the integrity of the organization. The key is to get them to start asking questions and start seeking the answers. When JW’s run into a Christian who knows his/her Bible, they often seek answers from the elders. When the elders cannot answer, they often try to find the answers on their own, reading the Bible for the first time without the Watchtower magazines. As they seek and look for answers, many come to find that the JW Jesus is not the God of the Bible. This takes a while but with patience and perseverence, it will one day bear fruit. So the key is to get them to start asking questions about the Bible and their organization. Keep on witnessing, brother. We’ll be praying for you here at Probe.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

# The Dead Sea Scrolls Shed Light on the Accuracy of our Bible

*Dr. Patrick Zukeran reviews the discovery of and important historical findings from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The texts discovered provide clear evidence as to the accuracy of our version of the Old Testament and the care with which it was preserved.*

## The Story of the Scrolls

Worship at the sacred Jerusalem Temple had become corrupt, with seemingly little hope for reform. A group of devoted Jews removed themselves from the mainstream and began a monastic life in the Judean desert. Their studies of the Old Testament Scriptures led them to believe that God's judgment upon Jerusalem was imminent and that the anointed one would return to restore the nation of Israel and purify their worship. Anticipating this moment, the Essenes retreated into the Qumran desert to await the return of their Messiah. This community, which began in the third century B.C., devoted their days to the study and copying of sacred Scripture as well as theological and sectarian works.

As tensions between the Jews and Romans increased, the community hid their valuable scrolls in caves along the Dead Sea to protect them from the invading armies. Their hope was that one day the scrolls would be retrieved and restored to the nation of Israel. In A.D. 70, the Roman general Titus invaded Israel and destroyed the city of Jerusalem along with its treasured Temple. It is at this time that the Qumran community was overrun and occupied by the Roman army. The scrolls remained hidden for the next two thousand years.

In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd named Muhammad (Ahmed el-Dhib) was searching for his lost goat and came upon a small opening of a cave. Thinking that his goat may have fallen into the cave, he threw rocks into the opening. Instead of hearing a startled goat, he heard the shattering of clay pottery. Lowering himself into the cave, he discovered several sealed jars. He opened them hoping to find treasure. To his disappointment, he found them to contain leather scrolls. He collected seven of the best scrolls and left the other fragments scattered on the ground.

Muhammad eventually brought some of the scrolls to a cobbler and antiquities dealer in Bethlehem named Khando. Khando, thinking the scrolls were written in Syriac, brought them to a Syrian Orthodox Archbishop named Mar (Athanasius) Samuel. Mar Samuel recognized that the scrolls were written in Hebrew and suspected they may be very ancient and valuable. He eventually had the scrolls examined by John Trevor at the American School of Oriental Research (ASOR). Trevor contacted the world's foremost Middle East archaeologist, Dr. William Albright, and together these men confirmed the antiquity of the scrolls and dated them to sometime between the first and second century B.C.

After the initial discovery, archaeologists searched other nearby caves between 1952 and 1956. They found ten other caves that contained thousands of ancient documents as well. One of the greatest treasures of ancient manuscripts had been discovered: the Dead Sea Scrolls.

## Date and Contents of the Scrolls

Scholars were anxious to confirm that these Dead Sea Scrolls were the most ancient of all Old Testament manuscripts in the Hebrew language. Three types of dating tools were used: tools from archaeology, from the study of ancient languages, called paleography and orthography, and the carbon-14 dating method. Each can derive accurate results. When all the methods arrive

at the same conclusion, there is an increased reliability in the dating.

Archaeologists studied the pottery, coins, graves, and garments at Khirbet Qumran, where the Essenes lived. They arrived at a date ranging from the second century B.C. to the first century A.D. Paleographers studied the style of writing and arrived at dates raging from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. Scientists, using the radiocarbon dating method, dated the scrolls to range from the fourth century B.C. to the first century A.D. Since all the methods came to a similar conclusion, scholars are very confident in their assigned date for the texts. The scrolls date as early as the third century B.C. to the first century A.D.{1}

Eleven caves were discovered containing nearly 1,100 ancient documents which included several scrolls and more than 100,000 fragments.{2} Fragments from every Old Testament book except for the book of Esther were discovered. Other works included apocryphal books, commentaries, manuals of discipline for the Qumran community, and theological texts. The majority of the texts were written in the Hebrew language, but there were also manuscripts written in Aramaic and Greek.{3}

Among the eleven caves, Cave 1, which was excavated in 1949, and Cave 4, excavated in 1952, proved to be the most productive caves. One of the most significant discoveries was a well-preserved scroll of the entire book of Isaiah.

The famous Copper Scrolls were discovered in Cave 3 in 1952. Unlike most of the scrolls that were written on leather or parchment, these were written on copper and provided directions to sixty-four sites around Jerusalem that were said to contain hidden treasure. So far, no treasure has been found at the sites that have been investigated.

The oldest known piece of biblical Hebrew is a fragment from the book of Samuel discovered in Cave 4, and is dated from the

third century B.C.{4} The War Scroll found in Caves 1 and 4 is an eschatological text describing a forty-year war between the Sons of Light and the evil Sons of Darkness. The Temple Scroll discovered in Cave 11 is the largest and describes a future Temple in Jerusalem that will be built at the end of the age.

Indeed, these were the most ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament ever found, and their contents would yield valuable insights to our understanding of Judaism and early Christianity.

## The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text

The Dead Sea Scrolls play a crucial role in assessing the accurate preservation of the Old Testament. With its hundreds of manuscripts from every book except Esther, detailed comparisons can be made with more recent texts.

The Old Testament that we use today is translated from what is called the Masoretic Text. The Masoretes were Jewish scholars who between A.D. 500 and 950 gave the Old Testament the form that we use today. Until the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947, the oldest Hebrew text of the Old Testament was the Masoretic Aleppo Codex which dates to A.D. 935.{5}

With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now had manuscripts that predated the Masoretic Text by about one thousand years. Scholars were anxious to see how the Dead Sea documents would match up with the Masoretic Text. If a significant amount of differences were found, we could conclude that our Old Testament Text had not been well preserved. Critics, along with religious groups such as Muslims and Mormons, often make the claim that the present day Old Testament has been corrupted and is not well preserved. According to these religious groups, this would explain the contradictions between the Old Testament and their religious teachings.

After years of careful study, it has been concluded that the Dead Sea Scrolls give substantial confirmation that our Old Testament has been accurately preserved. The scrolls were found to be almost identical with the Masoretic text. Hebrew Scholar Millar Burrows writes, “It is a matter of wonder that through something like one thousand years the text underwent so little alteration. As I said in my first article on the scroll, ‘Herein lies its chief importance, supporting the fidelity of the Masoretic tradition.'”{6}

A significant comparison study was conducted with the Isaiah Scroll written around 100 B.C. that was found among the Dead Sea documents and the book of Isaiah found in the Masoretic text. After much research, scholars found that the two texts were practically identical. Most variants were minor spelling differences, and none affected the meaning of the text.

One of the most respected Old Testament scholars, the late Gleason Archer, examined the two Isaiah scrolls found in Cave 1 and wrote, “Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The five percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.”{7}

Despite the thousand year gap, scholars found the Masoretic Text and Dead Sea Scrolls to be nearly identical. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide valuable evidence that the Old Testament had been accurately and carefully preserved.

## The Messianic Prophecies and the Scrolls

One of the evidences used in defending the deity of the Christ is the testimony of prophecy. There are over one hundred prophecies regarding Christ in the Old Testament.{8} These prophecies were made centuries before the birth of Christ and

were quite specific in their detail. Skeptics questioned the date of the prophecies and some even charged that they were not recorded until after or at the time of Jesus, and therefore discounted their prophetic nature.

There is strong evidence that the Old Testament canon was completed by 450 B.C. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, is dated about two hundred fifty years before Christ. The translation process occurred during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus who ruled from 285 to 246 B.C.{9} It can be argued that a complete Hebrew text from which this Greek translation would be derived must have existed prior to the third century B.C.

The Dead Sea Scrolls provided further proof that the Old Testament canon existed prior to the third century B.C. Thousands of manuscript fragments from all the Old Testament books except Esther were found predating Christ's birth, and some date as early as the third century B.C. For example, portions from the book of Samuel date that early, and fragments from Daniel date to the second century B.C.{10} Portions from the twelve Minor Prophets date from 150 B.C to 25 B.C.{11} Since the documents were found to be identical with our Masoretic Text, we can be reasonably sure that our Old Testament is the same one that the Essenes were studying and working from.

One of the most important Dead Sea documents is the Isaiah Scroll. This twenty-four foot long scroll is well preserved and contains the complete book of Isaiah. The scroll is dated 100 B.C. and contains one of the clearest and most detailed prophecies of the Messiah in chapter fifty-three, called the "Suffering Servant." Although some Jewish scholars teach that this refers to Israel, a careful reading shows that this prophecy can only refer to Christ.

Here are just a few reasons. The suffering servant is called sinless (53:9), he dies and rises from the dead (53:8-10), and

he suffers and dies for the sins of the people (53:4-6). These characteristics are not true of the nation of Israel. The Isaiah Scroll gives us a manuscript that predates the birth of Christ by a century and contains many of the most important messianic prophecies about Jesus. Skeptics could no longer contend that portions of the book were written after Christ or that first century insertions were added to the text.

Thus, the Dead Sea Scrolls provide further proof that the Old Testament canon was completed by the third century B.C., and that the prophecies foretold of Christ in the Old Testament predated the birth of Christ.

## The Messiah and the Scrolls

What kind of Messiah was expected by first century Jews? Critical scholars allege that the idea of a personal Messiah was a later interpretation made by Christians. Instead, they believe that the Messiah was to be the nation of Israel and represented Jewish nationalism.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, written by Old Testament Jews, reveal the messianic expectations of Jews during the time of Christ. Studies have uncovered several parallels to the messianic hope revealed in the New Testament as well as some significant differences. First, they were expecting a personal Messiah rather than a nation or a sense of nationalism. Second, the Messiah would be a descendant of King David. Third, the Messiah would confirm His claims by performing miracles including the resurrection of the dead. Finally, He would be human and yet possess divine attributes.

A manuscript found in Cave 4 entitled the *Messianic Apocalypse*, copied in the first century B.C., describes the anticipated ministry of the Messiah:

> For He will honor the pious upon the throne of His eternal kingdom, release the captives, open the eyes of the blind,

> lifting up those who are oppressed… For He shall heal the critically wounded, He shall raise the dead, He shall bring good news to the poor.

This passage sounds very similar to the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. In Luke chapter 7:21-22, John the Baptist's disciples come to Jesus and ask him if He is the Messiah. Jesus responds, "Go tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news brought to them."

But, with the similarities there are also differences. Christians have always taught that there is one Messiah while the Essene community believed in two, one an Aaronic or priestly Messiah and the other a Davidic or royal Messiah who leads a war to end the evil age.{12}

The Essenes were also strict on matters of ceremonial purity while Jesus criticized these laws. He socialized with tax collectors and lepers which was considered defiling by the Jews. Jesus taught us to love one's enemies while the Essenes taught hatred towards theirs. They were strict Sabbatarians, and Jesus often violated this important aspect of the law. The Qumran community rejected the inclusion of women, Gentiles, and sinners, while Christ reached out to these very groups.

The many differences show that the Essenes were not the source of early Christianity as some scholars propose. Rather, Christianity derived its teachings from the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have proven to be a significant discovery, confirming the accurate preservation of our Old Testament text, the messianic prophecies of Christ, and valuable insight into first century Judaism.

# Two Major Prophets and the Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls have been an asset in the debate regarding two major and well disputed books of the Old Testament, Daniel and Isaiah. Conservative scholars maintained that Daniel was written in the sixth century B.C. as the author declares in the first chapter. The New Testament writers treated Daniel as a prophetic book with predictive prophecies. Liberal scholars began teaching in the eighteenth century that it was written in the Maccabean Period or the second century B.C. If they are correct, Daniel would not be a prophetic book that predicted the rise of Persia, Greece, and Rome.

Before the discovery of the scrolls, critical scholars argued that the Aramaic language used in Daniel was from a time no earlier than 167 B.C. during the Maccabean period. Other scholars, such as well-respected archaeologist Kenneth Kitchen, studied Daniel and found that ninety percent of Daniel's Aramaic vocabulary was used in documents from the fifth century B.C. or earlier.{13} The Dead Sea Scrolls revealed that Kitchen's conclusion was well founded. The Aramaic language used in the Dead Sea Scrolls proved to be very different from that found in the book of Daniel. Old Testament scholars have concluded that the Aramaic in Daniel is closer to the form used in the fourth and fifth century B.C. than to the second century B.C.

Critical scholars challenged the view that Isaiah was written by a single author. Many contended that the first thirty-nine chapters were written by one author in the eighth century B.C., and the final twenty-six chapters were written in the post-Exilic period. The reason for this is that there are some significant differences in the style and content between the two sections. If this were true, Isaiah's prophecies of Babylon in the later chapters would not have been predictive

prophecies but written after the events occurred.

With the discovery of the Isaiah Scroll at Qumran, scholars on both sides were eager to see if the evidence would favor their position. The Isaiah Scroll revealed no break or demarcation between the two major sections of Isaiah. The scribe was not aware of any change in authorship or division of the book.{14} Ben Sira (second century B.C.), Josephus, and the New Testament writers regarded Isaiah as written by a single author and containing predictive prophecy.{15} The Dead Sea Scrolls added to the case for the unity and prophetic character of Isaiah.

## Inventory of the Scrolls

The following is a brief inventory provided by Dr. Gleason Archer of the discoveries made in each of the Dead Sea caves.{16}

Cave 1 was the first cave discovered and excavated in 1949. Among the discoveries was found the Isaiah Scroll containing a well-preserved scroll of the entire book of Isaiah. Fragments were found from the other Old Testament books which included Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel, Ezekiel, and Psalms. Non-biblical books included the Book of Enoch, Sayings of Moses, Book of Jubilee, Book of Noah, Testament of Levi and the Wisdom of Solomon. Fragments from commentaries on Psalms, Micah, and Zephaniah were also discovered.

Cave 2 was excavated in 1952. Hundreds of fragments were discovered, including remains from the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Job, Psalms and Ruth.

Cave 3 was excavated in 1952. Here archaeologists found the famous Copper Scrolls. These scrolls contained directions to sixty-four sites containing hidden treasures located around Jerusalem. So far, no treasure has been found at the sites

investigated.

Cave 4, excavated in 1952, proved to be one of the most productive. Thousands of fragments were recovered from nearly four hundred manuscripts. Hundreds of fragments from every Old Testament book were discovered with the exception of the Book of Esther. The fragment from Samuel labeled 4Qsam{17} is believed to be the oldest known piece of biblical Hebrew, dating from the third century B.C. Also found were fragments of commentaries on the Psalms, Isaiah, and Nahum. The entire collection of Cave 4 is believed to represent the scope of the Essene library.

Cave 5 was excavated in 1952 and fragments from some Old Testament books along with the book of Tobit were found.

Cave 6 excavated in 1952 uncovered papyrus fragments of Daniel, 1 and 2 Kings and some other Essene literature.

Caves 7-10 yielded finds of interest for archaeologists but had little relevance for biblical studies.

Cave 11 was excavated in 1956. It exposed well-preserved copies from some of the Psalms, including the apocryphal Psalm 151. In addition, a well-preserved scroll of part of Leviticus was found, and fragments of an Apocalypse of the New Jerusalem, an Aramaic Targum or paraphrase of Job, was also discovered.

Indeed these were the most ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament ever found, and their contents would soon reveal insights that would impact Judaism and Christianity.

**Notes**

1. James Vanderkam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco, CA.: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), 20-32.
2. Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest

House Publishers, 1997), 278.
3. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL.: Moody Press, 1985), 513-517.
4. Vanderkam and Flint, 115.
5. Price, 280.
6. Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 304, quoted in Norman Geisler and William Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 367.
7. Archer, 25.
8. J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1984), 665-670.
9. Geisler and Nix, 503-504.
10. Ibid., 137.
11. Ibid., 138-139.
12. Vanderkam and Flint, 265-266.
13. Randall Price, *Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest House, 1996), 162.
14. Ibid., 154-155.
15. Ibid., 156-157.
16. Archer, 513-517.
17. Price, 162.

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# "Why Should We Trust the Bible?"

**Dear Mr. Zukeran,**

**I recently caught your article on "The Authority of the Bible" and I was wondering if you could answer a few questions for a long time follower of Christ who is now having trouble with the Bible. I'm not having trouble with the Bible as a whole, but what I'm having a problem with is the claim that it is inerrant. With your impressive list of merits, degrees, etc, I was wondering if you could tell me what you think about this. The name of God has been used to influence people to do some pretty awful things. How do we know that the Bible was immune from political influence during its translation?**

**Is there a line that you drew in the sand and just said, "Even though I don't understand it, I will claim this as truth"? In all your experience and learning, what is the one thing you hold to when everything else seems to falter?**

I did not grow up in a Christian home and throughout high school I attended a private Episcopal School. The priests were atheists or very liberal. Therefore, I grew up not believing in the Bible. Eventually I embraced Atheism. After hearing the gospel message at a small Baptist church, I began to investigate the claims of Christ. From the evidence of

creation, I could not deny the evidence for God's existence.

Then I studied the historical accuracy of the gospels and found them to be very accurate historical works written by first century eyewitnesses. (For more see the article "Historical Reliability of the Gospels.") In the gospels, Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God and confirmed his claims through his miraculous, sinless life, death, and resurrection. We have good historical evidence that Christ did live a miraculous life not only in the gospels, but in several works of non-Christian literature as well. (For more information read the article "The Uniqueness of Christ" and "The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?")

Since Christ confirmed his claims to be the divine Son of God, what He taught was true. He taught the Bible was the inerrant word of God. [Note: theologian Dr. Wayne Grudem defines inerrancy as the belief that all the words in Scripture are completely true and without error. "The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything which is contrary to fact." *Bible Doctrine*, Zondervan 1999, p. 40, 42.] Inerrancy applies to the original documents, not the copies. However, we have thousands of ancient manuscripts to confirm that our Bible today is very accurate to the original texts.

Finally, I agree, there have been atrocities committed in history in the name of Christ. However, we should not discount the Bible because of the misinterpretation and misapplication of men in history. To those who have misapplied the text, we can point to the Bible and show where they have deviated from the biblical teaching and the example of Christ. The reason we know they were in error is that we can point out the error in the biblical text. The truth of the Bible should not be judged on the misapplication of certain people or organizations. We do not discount the value of the medical practice because we have had bad doctors who have used their practice for evil ends. The example we should look at is Christ, the founder of

our faith.

Thanks for your question; it's great to interact with someone who is really thinking through the issues.

Patrick Zukeran

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# "I Would Become A Christian Except that It's Based on Lies and Deception"

**Mr. Zukeran:**

**I read your comparative essay on Buddhism and Christianity. It was very interesting. However, it is quite obvious to me that you are bias toward Christianity. You raised an interesting point that the Buddha's writings were written hundreds of years after his death, therefore, are not accurate and somewhat vague. You go on to say that Christianity has a more solid foundation being that there is a recorded history of Jesus during his ministry. There is one important fallacy in your logic that you failed to mention and/or consider that the Jesus you speak of actually existed. And many historians would agree with me that the Gospels were not written until hundreds of years after the so called death of Jesus. I do not write this criticism to offend, but to develop dialogue. My family and my community have deep roots in Christianity and I myself want to be a Christian, but I cannot lie to myself and deny the knowledge that I have. Unfortunately, I have yet to meet someone who can present Christianity to me in a way that will**

**allow me to embrace it. The reason being it is based on lies and deception.**

Thanks for reading my article and your response. I appreciate your honesty regarding the writings of Buddha. I was raised in the Japanese Buddhist tradition and many members of my family are still active members of the Buddhist community. In my studies of Buddhism, that was a question I often wrestled with and would ask the priests at the temple. I came to believe in Christ because of the compelling evidence for Christ. I came to learn He was unique and indeed the divine Son of God.

The four Gospels present an accurate historical record of Christ. Your assertion that the Gospels were written hundreds of years after the death of Christ is incorrect. I believed that claim for many years until I studied the evidence. Presently, due to the evidence we have found, I do not think you will find many historians today agreeing with your assertion. There is strong internal and external evidence that the gospels were written by eye-witnesses in the lifetime of the eye-witnesses.

Here are just a few evidences. We have numerous ancient manuscripts that uphold a first century date. The Chester Beatty Papyri is a group of manuscripts that contains most of the New Testament and is dated 250 A.D. Since it is a copy of almost the entire New Testament, we can safely conclude the original books of the New Testament were written well before, probably in the late first or early second century A.D. The Bodmer Papyri date to 200 A.D. and contain most of the book of John, the last gospel written. Since this is a copy, the original was probably written earlier and since Matthew, Mark and Luke precede John, they are written even earlier. Finally, we have the Rylands Papyri which is a fragment of the book of John which dates 120 A.D. and this fragment was found in Egypt. We can conclude that John was written within the first century since he wrote from Asia Minor and this copy had made its way from there down to Egypt where it was found. Since

Matthew, Mark, and Luke precede John, we can conclude these books were written within the first century A.D. The manuscript evidence alone silences the assertion that the gospels were written centuries after Christ's death.

Then we have quotes from the early Church Fathers. Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the church in Corinth in 90 AD and quotes from all four Gospels. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch writes a letter from Rome in 115 A.D. and quotes all four Gospels. Polycarp writes to the Philippians in 120 A.D. and quotes from all the Gospels. I could go on but I will stop here. The fact is, the Church Fathers from the first three centuries were already familiar with the writings of the Apostles and were already quoting them as inspired scripture.

So the assertion that the gospels are written hundreds of years after the death of Christ is a false assertion. For more information, please read my article titled "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels."

Sincerely,

Patrick Zukeran

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# "What Advice Would You Give Someone Leaving an Abusive

# Church?”

**We now realize that our church is abusive. What advice can you give us?**

I would advise you read a few books that will help during the difficult transition. *Recovering from Churches that Abuse* by Ron Enroth, *Healing Spiritual Abuse* by Ken Blue, and *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll. Often, there is a lot of hurt and bitterness. These books can help you overcome the pain and keep from becoming a bitter individual.

Second, I would advise you join a support group from a good church. There are very few support groups for spiritually abused victims but if you can find one, great. If not, a group to share your experience and pray with is a great help.

Third, many abused victims want to inform members who remain at the abusive church. This can be very frustrating and time consuming. I do not recomend spending a lot of your energy doing this. It is best to leave it all behind and begin a new chapter in your life.

Finally, enjoy your new freedom. Visit churches and fellowships. You will realize that the body of Christ is a lot bigger than you can imagine and this is refreshing to see. In the process, you will meet a lot of neat Christians who may become your new family in Christ.

Patrick Zukeran

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# “Mohammed and David Both Had Multiple Wives”

**Hi Pat,**

**I bought your “Evidence and Answers” CD series on Islam and listened to the first one today. I must say that it was very informative and enjoyable. In that particular broadcast, you contrasted Islam with Christianity by pointing out that Mohammed had eleven wives. However, the Bible records that King David, described as a man after God’s own heart, also had numerous wives and concubines. Doesn’t that nullify your argument with Mohammed somewhat?**

Great question. First, God’s intent was for men to have one wife so David was out of God’s will there, and the Bible shows He did not have a good home life. David was a man after God’s heart but he was not sinless, he only was deeply committed to God. In Islam a qualification for a prophet is that he is sinless after his call. Muhammad is believed to be sinless; that is why this is a key point. David is not believed to be sinless but sincere; Muhammad is supposed to be sinless. The Koran limits men to four wives but Muhammad took several more. Also, Muhammad’s youngest and most favorite wife Aisha was nine years old when they consummated their marriage. David did not marry a child but married women. Finally, Muhammad took his son-in-law’s wife as one of his wives as well. So the character of Muhammad does not point to a sinless prophet.

Pat Zukeran

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# “Did Jericho Have Walls Or Not?”

**I was reading your article Archaeology and the Old Testament which states that Jericho was found to have walls. But I was also reading at http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/jerques.htm which states that Jericho didn’t have walls.**

**I was wondering if you could elaborate further or perhaps explain this apparent contradiction.**

There are three Jericho sites: Old Testament Jericho, New Testament Jericho, and modern day Jericho. When referring to the city of Jericho, one must be sure which one we are refering to. Also, the walls of Jericho are not standing up on the surface. When cities are conquered in the Middle East, they are often abandoned and are buried by the sands, and often a new city is built on top of them. So the walls of Ancient Jericho are today below the surface. Two outstanding archaeologists on the site are Dr. Bryant Wood, and Randal Price. Randal Price’s web site is www.worldofthebible.com. Thanks for reading the article.

Pat Zukeran

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# The Worldview of Star Wars –

# A Christian Evaluation

*Dr. Zukeran takes a critical, balanced view of this popular movie series to help us understand the worldview it presents in light of a biblical worldview. From a Christian perspective, he points out the positive themes of the movies presented from a pantheistic worldview. We can use these movies to generate conversations about the differences between the worldview of Star Wars and a genuinely Christian worldview.*

## George Lucas

The *Star Wars* series has come to a climatic finale. Many of us can still remember the year 1977 when people stood in long lines at theaters several blocks long. It was not uncommon to hear of individuals who returned to see the movie, some over a dozen times. Few movies have generated the same excitement and following as this series. Through its production, special effects, and cinematography, *Star Wars* had a tremendous impact on the arts, setting a new standard for the movie industry.

Not only did *Star Wars* have an impact on the entertainment industry, it also opened our eyes to the worldview of pantheism. Pantheism comes from the Greek word “pan” meaning all and “theism” meaning God. It is the belief that the impersonal God is one essence with the universe. God inhabits all things. The universe is God and God is the universe. In other words, God is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. This worldview lies at the foundation of most Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age religions. This worldview gained popularity in the sixties, at a time when Eastern ideas began to enter the West. It drew public attention through celebrities such as The Beatles and Shirley McClain who embraced the teachings of the Eastern religions. *Star Wars*, with its success, continues to stir interest in the ideas of pantheism.

George Lucas borrowed themes from several religions and ancient myths in creating the story line for *Star Wars*. Lucas was not intending to introduce or promote a particular religion in his movie. However, he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. He created his movies to ". . . make young people think about the mystery. Not to say, 'Here's the answer.' It's to say, 'Think about this for a second. Is there a God? What does God look like? What does God sound like? What does God feel like? How do we relate to God?' Just getting young people to think at that level is what I've been trying to do in the films. What eventual manifestation that takes place in terms of how they describe their God, what form their faith takes, is not the point of the movie."{1}

George Lucas should be commended in his desire to inspire people to wrestle with such issues. This is a movie rich in theology and deep in philosophical ideas that are sure to generate some profitable discussions. C.S. Lewis, J.R. Tolkien, and Fydor Dostoevsky, in their classical fiction writings, presented answers to life's questions from a theistic worldview. In *Star Wars*, Lucas has accomplished a similar classic work presenting answers to life's questions from a pantheistic worldview. For this reason *Star Wars* is a fun movie that is full of theological ideas.

In the following sections, we will examine how Lucas' pantheistic worldview is illustrated in *Star Wars,* and present a biblical critique of this fine movie series.

## The Worldview of Pantheism

What are some of the major tenets of pantheism?

First, there is the concept of monism, the notion that all things are essentially of the same nature or essence. In other words, God is the universe; he is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. The universe is eternal

and flows out of the divine. Therefore, creation is *ex deo* (out of God), meaning out of the hands of God. The Greek philosopher Plotinus stated that everything flows from God, be it life or flower from a seed. Good and evil, light and darkness all flow out of God.

Pantheists also believe in the absence of a divine personal being who created the universe. Instead, they attest to a divine essence, an impersonal force, a cosmic energy that flows throughout all things in the universe. This energy is called "the One," "the divine," "Chi," or "Brahma." In *Star Wars*, it is called the Force.

Following their logic, if all is one in essence, all is divine. Hence, God and man are of the same essence, so man is essentially divine. Here is an illustration. God is the large ocean and we are all drops in that ocean. As a drop of water from a rain cloud must make its journey to unite with the ocean, so every individual must make their journey to become one with the divine. Spiritual guru Deepak Chopra writes, "Your body is not separate from the universe, because at quantum mechanical levels there are no well-defined edges. You are like a wiggle, a wave, a fluctuation, a convolution, a whirlpool, a localized disturbance in the larger quantum field. The larger quantum field – the universe – is your extended body."{2} He also states, "In reality we are divinity in disguise, and gods and goddesses in embryo that are contained within us seek to be fully materialized. True success therefore is the experience of the miraculous. It is the unfolding of the divinity within us."{3}

Since we are divine, true knowledge is attained by awakening the god within through an experience known as enlightenment. The One or the divine is not understood through the senses or rational thinking but by mystical union which is beyond the conscious self. This union comes through various means such as meditation, yoga, and channeling, among others. The process includes letting go of our conscious self and reaching out

with our emotions.

The ultimate destiny of man is to become absorbed into the divine. All individuals are involved in an endless cycle of reincarnation until they attain enlightenment and eventually break the cycle of reincarnation to be absorbed into the divine. These are some of the basic teachings of pantheism that are depicted in *Star Wars*.

## God and The Force

George Lucas stated that he wanted *Star Wars* to inspire young people to ask spiritual questions about God. In *Star Wars*, the idea of God is found in the Force. Lucas states, "I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people – more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system."{4} Master Jedi Obi Won Kenobi first introduces us to the Force in 1977. Sitting in his desert hut, Obi Won explains to Luke Skywalker the nature of the Force. He states, "The Force is what gives the Jedi his power. It is an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together." The Jedi Knights and their adversaries the Siths use this cosmic energy to perform supernatural feats.

The Force reflects one of the main tenets of the pantheistic worldview, the concept of monism, that all is in essence one. The Force is not a personal being. It is an impersonal energy that is made up of and resides in all living things. Therefore, all of life has the spark of divinity because all is essentially one unified entity.

George Lucas borrows a lot of his ideas from Eastern pantheistic religions. Chinese religions such as Taoism teach that this cosmic energy is called the Chi Force. Chi flows through all living things, and therefore the powers of the universe reside in each individual. Through meditation, yoga,

and other techniques of altering one's consciousness, one can master this energy within and perform supernatural feats.

Some Christians have mistakenly equated the Force with the Holy Spirit; however, there are several major differences. First, the Force is an impersonal energy field while the Holy Spirit is a personal being, the third member of the Trinity. He has a personality, intelligence, and will. Second, the Force is made up of all living things in the universe while the Holy Spirit is not contained in the universe. The Holy Spirit is an eternal being who was involved in creating the universe out of nothing (Genesis 1). Being God, the Holy Spirit is involved in the universe but He is not contained in the universe and exists independent of living things. Third, the Force can be manipulated by the Jedi who use it to accomplish their will, but the Holy Spirit cannot be manipulated by those He indwells. Instead He guides, teaches, and empowers them to do the will of God the Father. Christians do not master the Holy Spirit to accomplish their will, but rather the Holy Spirit guides them to do His will. Finally, the Force has a good side and a dark side which exist in a state of balance while the Holy Spirit has no dark or evil side but only the attributes consistent with a holy and good God.

## Salvation

The story of *Star Wars* centers on one figure, Anakin Skywalker, who is identified by the master Jedi Qui Gon Gin as the "chosen one." Anakin's birth was miraculous in that he was born of a virgin and his body has a high level of metachlorines. Qui Gon states that as the chosen one, Anakin will restore the "balance of the Force," a hope anticipated throughout the entire series. What does Lucas mean by this statement?

As stated previously, Lucas illustrates the teachings of the

pantheistic worldview throughout the movie series. He borrows several concepts from Taoism, one of them being the idea of restoring the balance of the force.

Taoism teaches that there are equal and opposing forces throughout the universe that balance one another. This is known as the yin/yang duality. Opposing forces such as positive and negative energy, light and darkness, life and death, have always been in a state of opposition. Neither side has dominance over the other, but there is a balance of these opposing forces. These forces are mutually dependent, and one cannot be known apart from the other. When these forces are not in balance, there is disharmony. When they exist in a balance, there is harmony.

Every individual must accept and live in harmony with this balance of opposing forces. When there is an imbalance of one over the other in a person, there is disharmony in one's life. When disturbed, this balance must be restored in the individual and in the world. Once balance is restored, harmony and peace returns. Darkness, death, and evil, are never defeated; they are only to be brought into balance with the opposing forces of light, life, and goodness. In *Star Wars*, the Force has two sides, a good side and a dark side. Imbalance has occurred because one side, the dark side, has become too pervasive and must be brought into balance by the opposing force of good. The dark side is not to be defeated permanently by the good but balance is to be restored to the Force. This is the concept George Lucas presents throughout the series.

In the Bible, the universe is not eternal but was created by God from nothing. The original creation was good. Evil, death, and suffering came as the result of the fall, which marred creation. The conflict between light and darkness, life and death, good and evil has not been an eternal struggle. The two forces are also not equal and in a balance. The Bible teaches that God is light, holy, good, and the life. He is not locked

in an eternal struggle with opposing forces. One day at His appointed time, He will not bring balance but restoration to the universe. This will occur when God judges the world, defeats evil permanently, and establishes a new heaven and earth where sin and its effects are no longer present.

## The Jedi Masters

The heroes in the *Star Wars* are the Jedi Knights. These select few individuals have mastered the Force and are powerful warriors. They function as the guardians of peace in the galactic empire and use their powers only in times of danger. Where did Lucas get his idea for the Jedi?

In a Discovery Channel documentary entitled "The Science of *Star Wars*," Lucas reveals the source of his idea. Once again, he borrows concepts from the pantheistic religions. Lucas reveals that his idea came from studying the Shao-Lin monks of China. The Shao-Lin monks are priests known for originating and becoming the masters of the martial arts. Their fighting skills were legendary throughout the land of China.

Not only are the Shao-Lin monks skillful fighters, they were also men who mastered the use of the Chi force. As previously mentioned, Chi is believed to be the cosmic energy that flows through all things including individuals. The Shao-Lin monks teach that through altering one's consciousness in meditation and other exercises, one can tap into the power of the Chi resident in each individual and use it to perform superhuman feats.

Using the Chi force, Shao-Lin monks believe they can deliver punches and kicks with devastating force. They are also able to withstand punishing blows from opponents and objects. Some even believe a master can strike down an opponent without physical contact by simply utilizing Chi energy.

In Star Wars, we see this parallel. The Jedi are dressed in

garments similar to the Shao-Lin monks, are headquartered at the Temple, and are masters of the Force. Using the Force, they are able to move objects, foresee future events, manipulate people's thoughts, and strike down opponents without any physical contact. For the Jedi, truth is ultimately found in their feelings. When questions arise, the phrase among the Jedi is, "Search your feelings. What do they tell you?" True knowledge for the Jedi is beyond the rational and instead found in feelings and intuitions beyond the rational mind. The Jedi are another example of Lucas' pantheistic worldview.

There is much to like regarding the Jedi. They are noble heroes who are self-sacrificing, disciplined, and courageous. However, Christians should reject the idea of the Force that is the power behind the Jedi. The Bible does not teach that there is a cosmic energy or Chi that flows through objects and individuals. Throughout their training, Jedi are taught to let go of the conscious mind and reach out with their feelings. Christians are taught to love God "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Christians do not abandon their mind but develop it to understand truth and God's will (Romans 12:1-2). The mind and heart work together through prayer, study of the Word, and guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern truth and God's will in situations.

## What Happens After Death?

What happens after death? This is another question George Lucas hoped young people would ask as they viewed this series. *Star Wars* presents an answer that once again reflects the teaching of pantheism. Pantheism teaches that we are all in an endless cycle of reincarnation until we attain enlightenment. It is then that we escape this cycle and become one with the divine meaning and become absorbed into the cosmic energy of the universe.

In *The Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin Skywalker is haunted with nightmares of his wife Padme dying at the birth of their child. Tormented by this dream he seeks the counsel of Yoda, the master of the Jedi. Yoda imparts to Anakin that death is a natural part of the universe. In other words, we should accept it without emotion. He adds that one should not grieve for those who have died and become part of the Force. Anakin must not become attached to things, including people, for attachment to objects leads to jealousy and the dark side of the Force. One must release all feelings from things, for it is only then that one's thinking will be clear.

Thus, in *Star Wars* those who die become absorbed into the Force. We also learn that the Jedi are able to delay this absorption and appear as spirit guides to aid those in the physical world. Those with special insight may learn how to communicate with these ascended masters.

This teaching is another fundamental tenet of pantheistic religions. Pantheism teaches that the material world is an illusion. Therefore, one should not grow attached to earthly things for they are merely an illusion and are not permanent. Several schools of Hinduism and Buddhism teach that this world is an illusion and, as such, we must rid ourselves of all desires. The most holy of followers will therefore live lives of celibacy and poverty, releasing themselves from any desire and spending their days in meditation and study. At death, some holy men will delay their union with the divine and remain as spirit guides to aid those on the journey to enlightenment.

The Bible teaches that at death, we will not be absorbed into an impersonal energy field but we will retain our personhood and stand before God in judgment. There is no reincarnation or second chance. Hebrews 9:7 states that "It is appointed for each person to die once and then comes the judgment." Those who know Jesus will spend eternity with the Lord and fellow believers for all eternity. Those who have rejected Christ

will spend eternity separated from God in Hell. The Bible presents a destiny that is just, but also filled with hope for those who know Jesus.

The answer presented in *Star Wars*, the annihilation of one's consciousness and absorption into a cosmic energy field, is a false one that even if true, would provide insufficient hope.

## How to Watch *Star Wars*

When it comes to movies, there are three basic responses among Christians. Some choose to avoid any movie that may teach contrary beliefs for fear that they or their children may be negatively influenced. Others are consumers and watch any movie believing it is harmless fun and entertainment. A third option is to select appropriate movies and then view them with discernment. I take the third position. The arts are meant to be enjoyed and to glorify God. Creation itself reflects the creative mind of God who designed man with the capacity to produce art. Man, however, many times uses the arts for less than noble reasons. However, Christians can learn valuable lessons about other belief systems and use movies as great teaching tools to help younger believers become more discerning and understand other worldviews.

In *Star Wars* we have a great teaching and discussion topic. There is much we should commend George Lucas for in this series. *Star Wars* is creative, entertaining, and family-friendly. It also promotes several good themes such as friendship, courage, and the dangerous corrupting power of selfish ambition. We should furthermore commend Lucas on his desire to make a movie that would inspire young people to think about deeper issues in life.

In the *Time Magazine* interview, Lucas states that he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. I certainly agree with Lucas, and wish more movies were designed for such purposes.

*Star Wars* is a great discussion piece because it creatively reflects the tenets of pantheism. Christians can use this film to discuss spiritual lessons revealed in the series. I have had profitable discussions with teens and adults on the spiritual principles illustrated in *Star Wars*. Questions such as "What do you think about the whole idea of the Force?", "Is there such a thing as a cosmic energy field?", "Can we master the power of this energy?", "What did *Star Wars* teach regarding what happens after death?", or "What do you think really happens after death?" have arisen in conversations.

Answers to these questions often lead to great discussions regarding worldviews, the nature of truth, and eternal life. *Star Wars* offers answers from a pantheistic worldview, which Christians can point out and explain why these answers are false. Movies like *Star Wars* can be a great teaching tool when Christians are equipped and informed to discern truth from error.

**Notes**

1. Bill Moyer, "Of Myth and Men," *Time* Magazine, (26 April, 1999), 93.
2. Deepak Chopra, *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, p.68, quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), 68.
3. Ibid., 96.
4. Ibid., 92.

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# Judaism Viewed from a Christian Perspective

*Dr. Pat Zukeran provides an overview of Judaism from an orthodox Christian perspective, including basic beliefs and practices and some suggestions for sharing one's faith with a Jewish friend.*

## Judaism Today

Throughout the last several decades, the eyes of the world have frequently focused on the tiny nation of Israel. What is the significance of this nation and her religion?



The focus of this article is the religion of the Jews. When studying Judaism, however, we must understand that there is a distinction between the Jewish people and the religion of Judaism. Many Jews do not embrace Judaism, but consider themselves to be secular, atheistic, or agnostic.

The term *Judaism* is often used to identify the faith of modern Jews as well as Old Testament Jews. For our purposes, the term is used to refer to the religion of the rabbis established around 200 B.C. and crystallized in A.D. 70. At this time, developments in rabbinic Judaism took place that distinguished it from the Old Testament faith. New institutions arose such as the synagogue (the house of worship and study), the office of rabbi (a leader holding religious authority), and the *yeshivot* (religious academies for training rabbis). One of the greatest changes came with the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. Sacrifices and the priesthood came to an end, and the rabbis became the authorities on spiritual and legal matters.

Since the eighteenth century, three main branches of Judaism developed: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative. Orthodox

Judaism upholds the divine inspiration of the Old Testament—giving greater authority to the first five books—and recognizes the Talmud as authoritative for interpreting the Jewish law. This branch continues to observe the traditional Jewish laws as practiced for centuries. An ultra orthodox sect within this branch is the Hasidic movement. This sect adheres strictly to the Law of Moses, and is a separatist group.

Reform Judaism is the liberal wing. It was founded by Abraham Geiger in Germany in the nineteenth century (1810-1874). Geiger was influenced by the Enlightenment, and so viewed reason and science as authoritative. He rejected belief in revelation, messianic hope, and the promise of land. This branch seeks to modernize what are considered outmoded ways of thinking. The primary focus of Reform Judaism is the ethical teachings of the Jewish Law.

Conservative Judaism is considered the intermediate position between Orthodox and Reform. It was founded in the nineteenth century in Germany by Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875). Conservatives seek to practice the Law and the traditions, but cautiously reinterpret the Law and adapt their practices to contemporary culture.

The existence of these and numerous other sects means a wide variety of beliefs within Judaism. In addition, as a result of the Enlightenment and the Holocaust, secularization among the Jews is increasing rapidly. Because of the wide variety of beliefs within Judaism, it is difficult today to define what makes a person Jewish.

Nonetheless, according to the Old Testament, Jews are the descendants of Abraham. It is these people to whom God has made special promises and who will have a prominent role in redeeming the world.

# Basic Beliefs of Judaism

Do Christians and followers of Judaism worship the same God? What is Judaism's understanding of Jesus? Let's take a look at some basic Jewish beliefs as compared with Christian ones.

Both religions believe in the Old Testament, the ethical teachings of the Law, and a hope in the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, they differ on some important fundamental doctrines.

Judaism rejects the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and teaches a unified monotheism based on Deuteronomy 6:4.

The main Scripture in Judaism is the Old Testament. Views of divine inspiration vary between the different branches. Orthodox and Conservative schools view the Pentateuch as the most inspired part, the Prophets and Writings less so. Another important book is the Talmud which includes the Mishnah and Gemara. The Mishnah consists of legal rulings, and was compiled around A.D. 200. The Gemara elaborates on the discussions of the Mishnah, and was compiled around A.D. 550. Most Jews, especially Orthodox Jews, consider the Talmud useful for giving instruction for life but not divinely inspired.

Judaism teaches that man is created in the image of God but without original sin. Study of the Torah can overcome our inclination to evil.

A proper relationship with God comes through repentance, prayer, and obedience to the Law. Jews do not feel they need "salvation" but assume a standing with God through their heritage. Conservative and Reform Jews view salvation as the betterment of self and society.

The Orthodox school holds to a bodily resurrection at death. The Conservative school teaches the immortality of the soul. The Reform school generally has no teaching regarding life

after death.

Central to Jewish hope is the Messiah. Orthodox Jews anticipate a personal Messiah, while Reform and Conservative Jews view the messianic concept as the ideal of establishing justice by human effort. A key dividing point between Judaism and Christianity, of course, is their views of Jesus. Judaism recognizes Jesus as a moral teacher, but rejects His claims to deity as a creation of the early church. The New Testament teaches that without accepting Christ, even the sons and daughters of Abraham cannot inherit eternal life.

From our brief survey, then, it is clear that Judaism and Christianity differ significantly on major doctrines. The two do not worship the same God. They also differ in salvation theology. Judaism is works-oriented and rejects the atoning work of Christ and His divine nature. Christianity proclaims faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross. The New Testament teaches that without accepting Christ, even the sons and daughters of Abraham cannot inherit the hope of eternal life.

## The Practices of Judaism

Jewish festivals and holidays are an integral part of Judaism. They memorialize key events in the history of the Jewish people and honor their unique heritage. Here are some important Jewish festivals.

The most significant is Passover, the first observance of which is recorded in Exodus 12. Jews continue to commemorate God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt in the fourteenth century B.C. Passover is observed in March or April and lasts a week.

Seven weeks after Passover comes Pentecost, which observes the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai.

The festival of Tabernacles occurs in the fall. This festival commemorates the forty years of wandering in the desert when the Israelites lived in tabernacles or booths. The ceremony includes prayer for rain and the reading of the Torah.

Rosh ha-Shanah is the celebration of the Jewish New Year. This joyful festival occurs in September or October and marks the beginning of a ten-day period known as the High Holy Days. Rosh ha-Shanah climaxes on the tenth day which is called Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is a solemn day when Jews fast, attend the synagogue, and recite prayers asking God for forgiveness of their sins.

Hannukah is celebrated in November or December and lasts eight days. It honors the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian armies of Antiochus Epiphanes and the rededication of the second Jerusalem Temple in 165 B.C. The lighting of the eight-branched menorah is the main feature of this celebration. When Israel was reestablished as a nation in 1948, the menorah became a national symbol.

Purim is a minor holiday celebrated in February or March and commemorates the deliverance of the Jews by God told in the story of Esther.

Not only are the holidays important, but the celebration of events in the life cycle are as well. Circumcision on the eighth day for boys is one. Another is the religious coming-of-age ceremony of Bar Mitzvah for boys at age 13, and Bat Mitzvah for girls at age 12 or 13. Third is the Jewish wedding. Finally, there is the funeral service and mourning for seven days.

These Jewish practices, especially those surrounding the holidays, not only play a key role in the life of the Jewish people, but are significant to the church as well. Major events in the life of Christ and the church in Acts occurred on these days. Christ died on the Passover, and the Holy

Spirit was given at Pentecost. Also, the symbolisms and rituals enacted at these festivals foreshadow what was fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ.

## Witnessing to the Jews

How do we share Christ with our Jewish neighbors? Before preaching the gospel, it would be wise to first build friendships with Jews and learn from them. Second, we should understand the Jewish perception of Christians and Christianity. For a Jewish person to become a Christian means to reject his or her heritage and distinctiveness; in other words, many equate it to becoming a gentile. This is difficult, for many harbor resentment for mistreatment by Christians and gentile nations.

After building trust, encourage them to read their own Scriptures. Many grow up reciting passages of the Old Testament but not *studying* the Old Testament or the messianic prophecies.

There are many messianic passages to which one could refer. One frequently used passage is Isaiah 53 which describes the suffering servant who takes on the sins of the people. Most Jews have been taught that this is the nation of Israel. However, the context and content of the passage make it clear it is not. A careful study soon reveals that Jesus Christ fits the description of this servant.

Another passage is the prophecy of the seventy sevens in Daniel 9. When properly calculated, the prophecy predicts the Messiah to enter Jerusalem and be crucified in AD 33. Put this date together with Isaiah 53, and who else fits the description but Jesus? Here are two passages that can open the mind of a Jewish friend to begin investigating further the prophecies and the life of Jesus. As you continue to talk, encourage them to read the Gospel of Matthew which was written

for the Jews.

There are also many images in the Old Testament and in Jewish festivals that point to Jesus Christ. The Passover lamb is a good example. The lamb was sacrificed and its blood was painted on the doorframe to identify and protect the Israelites from the Angel of Death. In Numbers 9, the Passover lamb was to be without blemish, and none of its bones were to be broken when sacrificed (Numbers 9:12). This is a foreshadowing of Christ, the unblemished Lamb of God who lived a sinless life. His blood was shed and covers the believer delivering us from sin and death. John 19:33 records that the Romans were about to break the legs of the criminals, but finding Christ already dead, they did not break his bones. In every way, Christ meets the requirements for the perfect sacrifice.

These passages and symbols reveal that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Be sure to explain that not only must one acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but that one must put all one's faith in His atoning work of sacrifice to be brought into a right relationship with God.

## Promises for the Chosen

Are the Jews God's chosen people? What is their role in God's plan for the world? To answer these questions, we must first look at the covenants God established with Israel which are the foundation of His redemption plan.

The first is the Abrahamic Covenant found in Genesis 12. This pledge includes the promises that Abraham will be a father of a great nation; that his descendants will own the land of Canaan forever; that those who bless Israel will be blessed, and whoever curses it will be cursed; and that the world would be blessed through Israel. Israel was to be a light to the world. Through their special relationship with God, and as

they lived in obedience to His law, the nations would take notice of this people and come to learn about their God. However, Israel was not able to live in obedience to God and did not fulfill this call.

The second pledge is the Land Covenant in Deuteronomy 30. In this covenant, the promise of the land of Palestine is reaffirmed to Israel. Added to this is a warning that if the Israelites do not obey God's law, they will be scattered from the land and regathered when they return to the Lord.

The third covenant is the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:11. This promise states that a descendant of David would establish an eternal rule of peace and righteousness. This forms the basis of Israel's hope in a future messiah who will deliver Israel from the rule of the gentiles and bring the Abrahamic Covenant to completion.

Finally, there is the New Covenant found in Jeremiah 31:31-34: "The time is coming," declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. . . . It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Israel was unable to obey God's law because they depended on their strength to live the law. What was needed was a new heart and empowerment to live the law. This pledge provides this, and guarantees that there will be a time when Israel as a nation will turn to her Messiah.

Several aspects of these covenants have been fulfilled. Abraham's descendants have become a nation. Christ was a descendant of David and fulfilled the old law making it possible for all men to know God. However, other promises are yet to be fulfilled. Israel doesn't yet possess the promised land in peace, and a Davidic Kingdom hasn't been established in Jerusalem.

Despite Israel's failure and rejection of their Messiah, however, God is faithful, and He will fulfill His promises at the appointed time.

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# The Five People You Meet in Heaven – A Biblical Worldview Critique

Written by Patrick Zukeran

*Dr. Zukeran presents a biblical worldview critique of the story by Mitch Albom, The Five People You Meet in Heaven. Albom's story presents some interesting ideas about the afterlife, but falls far short of expressing a complete understanding of God's description of heaven. It misses the importance of being created in God's image, being redeemed to be able to spend eternity with our Creator, and the fellowship with God and all the saints for eternity.*

## Brief Synopsis

Eddie lives an insignificant life as a maintenance man for the rides at the Ruby Pier amusement park. One day a mechanical failure causes a fatal accident. Eddie rescues a young girl from her death but in the effort, he is killed. This is when the adventure begins.

Eddie enters heaven and discovers it is not a garden but a place where he will meet five people whose lives intersected with his in some significant way on earth, some readily known to Eddie and some unknown to him. These five explain the meaning of Eddie's life and the purpose of heaven. Through this best-seller fictional story, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, author Mitch Albom teaches us his understanding of the meaning of life.

In heaven, Eddie learns five key lessons from the five

individuals. First, every life is interconnected so each person impacts others throughout his or her lifetime in ways that may not be recognized. Second, we should live sacrificing for others, for such acts inevitably lead to good outcomes. Third, forgiveness is necessary to find inner peace. Fourth, love is a powerful virtue that lasts eternally. And finally, our life, as insignificant as it may seem, has a purpose.

Heaven is a place where we find inner peace with ourselves when we learn these lessons. Through this process, we are cleansed of negative thoughts and scars we carried in our lifetime and find true inner peace. After this, we will choose our heavenly dwelling. There we will wait for newcomers whose lives intersected ours on earth. We will be one of the five people they will meet as they learn the meaning of their life on earth.

What accounts for the popularity of Albom's work? He addresses two life questions that every individual wrestles with and desperately seeks answers to: What is the meaning of my existence? and What happens after death? In a creative way, here is a story that offers significance to each person's life and hope beyond the grave.

Albom is an excellent writer and is sincere in his effort. This story causes each one of us to wrestle with these key questions of our existence and eternal destiny, issues many choose to ignore but must inevitably face. He also teaches some valuable life lessons. For these reasons, the story is enjoyable and thought provoking.

But after reading the story, I found that Albom's answers fall short of providing satisfactory solutions to every person's dilemma. In some ways he gets us closer to the answer, but never really gets there. Christians will find that he gives us some appetizers, but fails to deliver the main dish. In what follows, I will present a biblical critique of this story and explain how Albom scratches the surface but never finishes the

quest for meaning, significance, and eternal hope.

## The Quest for Meaning

What is the meaning of my existence? Does my ordinary life make a difference? Will I look back on my life with regret, feeling that I contributed nothing significant in my lifetime? These are issues most people ask throughout their lifetime and seek answers for.

In *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, Mitch Albom teaches that one does not have to be famous or powerful to impact the lives of others. Every person who has understanding can know his or her life was worthwhile.

In Albom's story, the meaning of life comes from understanding that everyone's life is interconnected. Therefore, even small decisions and actions we take can significantly affect the lives of others. In a CBS interview, Albom stated, "I think the meaning of life is that we're all kind of connected to one another. I'm living proof of the influence that one person can have on other people. Look at what Morrie did for me talking to me. And I wrote a book to try to pay his medical bills and went from one person to another person and people come up and say your book changed my life. How did that happen? I'm convinced that everybody has an effect on everyone."{1}

It is true that our life does affect others, some in very significant ways. However, we are still left empty at the end of the novel because Albom's proposed solution falls short of providing ultimate meaning for our existence.

In the story, the main character Eddie learns in heaven that he impacted the lives of others both positively and negatively, often unintentionally. Knowing our life led to another's tragedy or greater enjoyment still begs the question, "So what?" It may feel good temporarily to know I made a difference, but that will not bring everlasting

satisfaction. Why should we care if our lives affected others? Before we can answer the question, “What is the meaning of life?” we must first answer the question, “Why were we created?”

If we are a cosmic accident as Darwinian evolutionary theory teaches, there is no intended purpose for our existence. Therefore, our lives have no ultimate meaning, and impacting the lives of others is meaningless, for our final destiny is extinction.

If God created us for a purpose, then we need to find out why He created us. The answer to the meaning of life is directly tied to the origins question. Since Albom does not answer the origin question, he cannot provide an adequate answer for the meaning of life question. The Bible teaches that we were created by God to love Him, love others, and fulfill His calling upon our lives. Any answer that does not include God as a centerpiece of the answer will fall short, and Albom basically leaves God out of his version of heaven.

## Albom’s Heaven

Could the traditional Christian view of heaven be wrong? Albom gives us a very different picture. Albom developed his idea from a story his uncle, Edward Beitchman, told him when he was a child. One night his uncle was lying near death and woke up to see his deceased relatives standing at the foot of the bed. When asked, “What did you do?” his uncle responded, “I told them to get lost. I wasn’t ready for them yet.”{2} Albom remembered this story and began to develop his concept of heaven for the story.

Albom states, “Somewhere, swimming in my head, was the image my uncle had given me around that table, a handful of people waiting for you when you die. And I began to explore this simple concept: what if heaven was not some lush Garden of

Eden, but a place where you had your life explained to you by people who were in it—five people—maybe you knew them, maybe you didn't, but in some way you were touched by them and changed forever, just as you inevitably touched people while on earth and changed them, too."

His idea that heaven is a reunion with five people who explain the meaning of your life is masterfully pictured in this work. With each encounter the main character Eddie is taught a new lesson that puts the pieces of his earthly life together so that it begins to make sense. Some lessons bring joy, others bring remorse, but the pain is a cleansing process that results in inner peace. After this, individuals will choose their happiest moment on earth and that will be their eternal abode where they await the opportunity to teach a recently deceased newcomer the meaning of that person's life.

If heaven was a place similar to Albom's story, we would be very disappointed, for it is too small and shallow. Our souls are much bigger than this. How quickly we would get bored once we discovered the impact our life made and then spent eternity in a heaven we dream up for our pleasure. Earthly pleasure becomes painful when we get too much of it. The heaven described in the Bible is very different from this earth. Our joy is not wrapped in repeating earthly pleasures but is found in a person, Jesus Christ, who is the center of all creation. Our present earth is fallen and suffers the effects of sin. In heaven, sin and its consequences are not present.

God is the main focus in heaven, but unfortunately, in Albom's story, God plays a very small role. Psalm 16:11 states, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Only a heaven created by and centered on God will be big enough for our soul.

## Do All People Go to Heaven?

Albom's bestseller presents a new and creative vision of heaven. I agree with Albom that there is a heaven and an existence beyond the grave. However, it appears that Albom implies that everyone will go to heaven, and with this I disagree.

Albom portrays realistic characters in his story, none of whom lived a perfect life. All are guilty of some sin and negative behaviors that have consequences, some greater than others. There is some remorse when individuals in heaven learn how their actions caused negative results, but there is not a just payment for their sin.

Albom appears to assume that everyone will eventually find peace when they learn their lessons from the five people they meet. Although this is a comforting note, it is not what the Bible teaches. Albom's story doesn't reveal the dilemma facing all human beings: sin, failing to perfectly live up to God's perfect standard. It is because of sin that the Bible teaches that not everyone can enter heaven. Jesus states in Matthew 7:13, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The reason is found in the biblical understanding of human nature and God's nature. Man is sinful while God is holy, perfect, and without sin. The Bible teaches that all are guilty of sin and cannot enter into the eternal presence of a holy and just God. Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." What is required is a perfect savior who will pay the price for sin. Albom does not deal with the true nature of God, man, heaven's purpose, man's dilemma of sin, and the solution that God freely offers.

The Bible also teaches that there is a price for rejecting God's gift of grace, Jesus Christ. Jesus states, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:17-18). All who reject Christ cannot stand before a holy God, and will be separated from Him eternally in Hell.

Fiction can often teach principles that are true. However in this work, Albom's foundational idea of heaven misses the mark because he does not present a proper understanding of human nature and God's holiness.

## The People You Will We Meet In Heaven

Who will we really meet in heaven? Our answer is revealed in the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible is proven to be God's inspired word through miraculous confirmation and the testimony of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Jesus confirmed His claim to be God through His miraculous life and resurrection, and He affirms the authority of the Bible. The truth about heaven then is revealed not in a novel but in this divine revelation.

The next people we will meet in heaven are the saints of all the ages past (Rev. 7:9 and 19:1). There will be more than five; there will be a multitude! Along with them will be the angelic host.

Will we understand the meaning and see the impact of our life on earth? We will know everything about our life and much more. **We will come to a full understanding of God's plan for all of creation.** Only then will we see how our lives played a role in God's overall plan. We will see things from a renewed perspective because our minds will be transformed and freed

from the limitations that resulted from sin. 1 Cor. 13:12 states, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” If we knew the glory of the real heaven, we would say Albom’s, and any human attempt to describe heaven, is too small.

**Notes**


1. CBSNews.com, The Early Show, “Five People You Meet In Heaven,” Sept. 25, 2003, http://www.cbsnews.com.
2. The Five People You Meet in Heaven Web site, http://www.albomfivepeople.com/abouteddie.htm, 5/25/2005


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