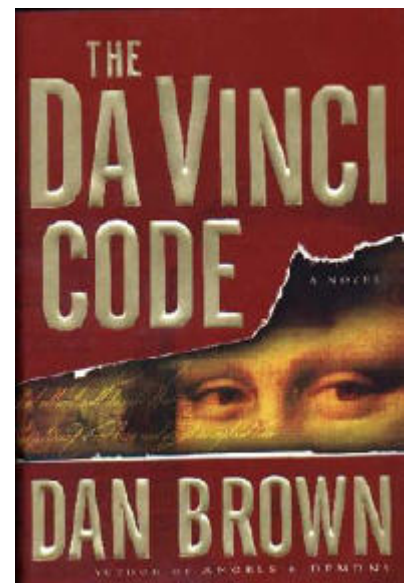


What Happened at Nicaea

The identity of Jesus of Nazareth is central to the beliefs of Christianity. Christianity does not call a person to join a philosophy, or a set of practices. Sure, there are philosophical ideas and practices that are consistent with Christianity. However, the central part of the Christian faith is a call to be in a relationship with Christ Jesus. Christian apologist Michael Ramsden once remarked, "Without Christ the Christian is left with the letters I A N and Ian cannot help you." While this is simplistic, saying it does convey the importance of Jesus to the Christian religion. This is exactly the question that many bishops were called to answer in the city of Nicaea in A.D. 325.

Some skeptics claim that no one claimed that Jesus was not seen as divine until the council of Nicaea. In 2003 this view was popularized in Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code* and in the movie that followed. In this novel Brown uses a fictional story to make factual claims about the origin of Christianity and the person of Jesus. While investigating a murder, several of Brown's characters make some disturbing discoveries. One character states, "Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...A great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless." [\[1\]](#) Another character says that "Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death." [\[2\]](#) While most of Brown's claims have been disregarded, the claim that the divinity of Jesus was something invented is still floating around. So it is still important to understand what happened at the Council of Nicaea.



One interpretation of the Council of Nicaea is that it was a "local dispute...eventually judged by the ecumenical

councils.”{3} The result is that the issue of this local dispute was influenced by cultural issues that was then imposed on all Christians by an ecumenical council. An examination of the facts reveals that this interpretation is the result of imposing philosophical presuppositions onto the historical narrative instead of looking at the facts.

Before the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine was praying when he saw a cross in the heavens with the inscription, “CONQUER BY THIS.” Constantine had that sign painted on the shields of all his soldiers before the battle. Constantine won the battle and became co-emperor of the Roman Empire with Licinius. From that point Constantine worked to promote the Christian religion in the Roman Empire.

In 318 Arius, a presbyter (priest or elder) in Alexandria, began to teach that Christ was a divine being that was created by the Father. Christ then created the world. This view made Christ “a kind of divine hero: greater than an ordinary human being, but of a lower rank than the eternal God.”{4} The Bishop of Alexandria disagreed with this view. The conflict led to a council meeting in Alexandria where Arius was excommunicated. Arius, who had the support of Eusebius, the Bishop of Nicomedia, spread his teachings through the empire. Several more meetings were held, but the controversy continued.

Constantine believed that it was his duty to promote unity in the Christian religion for the sake of the empire. Constantine wrote “My design then was, first, to bring diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as it were, of settled uniformity ...and, second, to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world, then suffering under the power of grievous disease.”{5} Constantine called the council of Nicaea to “adjudicate the meaning of Jesus’ divinity”{6} so that there could be cultural unity in the empire. The controversy may have started as a local dispute between a bishop and a presbyter, but it spread through the

empire and caused enough division to get the attention of the empire. This was not just a local dispute any more, and involved more than just cultural influence. Theological questions that defined the very nature of Christianity were at the heart of the controversy.

Arius' argument had a logical component, and a component based on Scripture. The logical argument, or "logic of monotheism,"[{7}](#) focused on the Father's unity. Arius reasoned that if God was perfect, transcendent, and changeless, and the sustainer of all things, then everything and everyone is separate from God. If everyone is separate from God, then Jesus is separate from God. Jesus has a special role in creation and redemption but cannot be God because there is only one God. This means that Jesus is a created being. Because Jesus was created, he is subject to change. Therefore, Jesus was not God.

To popularize his argument, Arius wrote easily memorized, catchy songs set to familiar tunes, which allowed his teachings to spread across the empire. One song had the lyrics:

And by adoption had God made the Son
Into an advancement of himself.
Yet the Son's substance is
Removed from the substance of the Father:
The Son is not equal to the Father,
Nor does he share the same substance.[{8}](#)

Arius also used Scripture as part of his argument. Arius identified wisdom with Christ. He cited Proverbs 8:22 which says, "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old." Jesus states that "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Luke states that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). This indicates that Jesus changed, something God cannot do. Paul writes that Jesus is "the firstborn among many

brothers” (Romans 8:29). Paul also states that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn among all creation” (Colossians 1:15). Arius argued that these verses meant that Jesus was the first created being. John writes, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Paul writes to Timothy about God, “who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6:16). Arius taught that these verses taught that God was totally set apart from creation, which includes the Son.

Arius’ opponents thought that he was “reading meaning into innocent passages.”[{9}](#) To show this, these bishops looked to the Scripture to find their own proof texts. Paul writes of Jesus “though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Philippians 2:6). This verse identifies the Son with the Father. John opens his Gospel with, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus was not only *with* God, he *was* God. The author of Hebrews writes that Jesus “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by his word and his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is identified as the exact imprint of the Father and the sustainer of the universe. Paul calls Jesus the “Lord of Glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8). The author of Hebrews states that “Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus does not change and neither does the Father.

The opponents of Arius countered his argument that Proverbs 8 showed that wisdom was created by pointing to verse 30, “Then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily in his delight, rejoicing before him always.” They argued that this verse showed that wisdom was always with God.

The orthodox bishops also responded with an argument called the “logic of salvation.”[{10}](#) The argument is that if Christ

is not truly God, then Jesus cannot save mankind from sin. If Jesus is less than God, and is subject to sin, then his sacrifice is insufficient to redeem mankind of their sin. Paul taught this when he wrote, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ cannot make us the righteousness of God if he is not of the same substance as the Father.

In his novel Brown portrays the outcome of the Council of Nicaea as coming down to a close vote. The vote was 300 to 2. In any election this would have been called a landslide. The council instated what later became the Nicene Creed. Its statement is as follows:

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.

The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.

He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.

He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.

He spoke through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

Constantine did not decide that Jesus should be made a God, nor did he participate in the vote. The deity of Jesus was not what was at issue at this council either. The issue before the council was the nature of Jesus' relation to the Father.

The Council of Nicaea may have decided against Arius' view, but the controversy was not over yet. The Arians were exiled after the council. Eusebius of Caesarea was recalled after writing a theology that made Constantine the "earthly image of the *Logos*." [\[11\]](#) Arius was recalled from exile after giving a statement of faith that Constantine did not understand, but died unexpectedly the day before taking communion with the faithful.

Athanasius took the office of bishop of Alexandria after Alexander, the previous bishop, died. Athanasius was Alexander's advisor at the time of the council in 325. Athanasius did not welcome the Arians back into the Church, putting him in conflict with Constantine. The Arians tried to dispose of Athanasius at Tyre in 335. Athanasius was accused of abusing clergy that disagreed with him and of cutting off food to Constantinople by instigating a dock strike. Constantine banished Athanasius to Trier in Gaul.

When Constantine died, Athanasius and Marcellus, who taught that the Father and the Son were of a similar substance, were allowed to return from exile. The Eastern Empire was ruled by Constantius, and the West by Constans. The Nicene Creed was still the official doctrine, but the Arians outnumbered the orthodox Christians. To advance their cause the Arians convinced Constantius to banish Athanasius and Marcellus again. In 340 Bishop Julius recalled Athanasius and Marcellus. Marcellus' teachings were declared orthodox. However, in 341 there was a council at Antioch that rejected the teachings of Arius and Marcellus. Athanasius was not allowed a hearing at the council. The creed that was affirmed by this council excluded Arianism and condemned Marcellus. Constans and Constantius decided to call a council in Sardica. This council ended in schism between the eastern and western parts of the Empire. Athanasius abandoned Marcellus and was allowed to return to Alexandria.

In 350 Constantius gained control over the western Empire. He allowed the Arians power in the Church. Bishops were forced to turn on Athanasius. In 356 Athanasius was banished again. A creed was published in 357 that banished the philosophical language that was used in Nicaea. Basil, Marcellian's successor, taught that the Son was of the same substance as the Father; this development was encouraging to Athanasius.

When Emperor Justine ascended to power, he permitted all exiles to return. A council was held in 362 in Alexandria where the Nicene Creed was affirmed. Another council was held in 381 in Constantinople where a modified version of the Nicaea Creed was affirmed and all bishops were assured that the three persons of the Trinity were not three Gods. Three persons formed the one Triune God. It took 66 years of conflict after the Council of Nicaea for the Church to reach a conclusion about the issue.

There were four main affirmations that resulted from the Council of Nicaea. First, Christ was "very God of very

God.”{12} Jesus is God in the same sense that the Father is God. Second, Christ is “of one substance with the Father.”{13} On this point the distinction was one Greek letter. Arianism taught that Jesus was of a similar substance (*homoiousios*) with the Father. Athanasius and the orthodox Christians believed that Jesus was of the same substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. It can be said that the whole dispute was over one letter. Third, Jesus was “begotten, not made.”{14} Fourth, Jesus “became human for us men, and for our salvation.”{15} Without the work of Jesus there is no salvation of mankind.

Athanasius spent most of his life defending the truth of Christian doctrine. He was exiled five times. He placed himself on the line to fight the good fight. Athanasius deserves to be remembered as one of the greatest theologians and defenders of the truth. Even when his name is forgotten, the fruit of his work will remain.

There are many misconceptions about the Council of Nicaea in the larger culture. Constantine did not decide to declare Jesus divine. He called a council to attempt to resolve a dispute among Christians. From Constantine’s point of view, the stability of the Empire stood on the stability of the Christian religion. The Christians did not decide to declare that Jesus was divine at this council. This was a belief that was already held by the majority of Christians. The primary question that was being discussed transcended cultural boundaries. If Christ is fully God, then this transcends all cultural boundaries. If Christ is fully God, then all of mankind will be united once again to worship their king.

Notes

1. Quoted by Hank Hanegraaff and Paul L. Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact of Fiction?* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishing 2004), 15.
2. Ibid. 32.
3. Virginia Burrus and Rebecca Lyman, “Shifting the Focus of

History,” in *A People’s History of Christianity Vol. 2: Late Ancient Christianity*, Ed. Virginia Burrus, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 18.

4. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 100.

5. Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), 51.

6. Ibid. 48.

7. Ibid. 54.

8. Ibid. 53.

9. Ibid. 54.

10. Ibid. 55.

11. Tim Dowley, Ed. *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 169.

12. Noll, 57.

13. Ibid. 58.


14. Ibid. 58.

15. Ibid. 58.

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Bible Literacy Quiz: A Test of Scripture Knowledge

Take this test of basic Bible knowledge to help assess your biblical literacy. This simple quiz examines some of the key doctrines and events of the Bible. It will give you a good feel for your breadth and depth of Scriptural knowledge.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#). 

It’s alarming to us at Probe Ministries to see the drop in biblical literacy among Americans. Growing numbers of people

don't know what the Bible says, even the most basic foundational truths and people and facts.

Evangelical pollster George Barna says,

Over the past 20 years we have seen the nation's theological views slowly become less aligned with the Bible. Americans still revere the Bible and like to think of themselves as Bible-believing people, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Christians have increasingly been adopting spiritual views that come from Islam, Wicca, secular humanism, the eastern religions and other sources.[\[1\]](#)

That's because we're not reading and studying the Bible. If we don't know what God says is truth, it makes us vulnerable to believing a lie.

Take the quiz yourself: click [here](#) for a format with the questions and answers separated.

1. Who wrote the first four books of the New Testament?



Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

2. Who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament?

Most conservative scholars hold that the Pentateuch was written by Moses.

3. What two Old Testament books are named for women?

Esther and Ruth.

4. What are the Ten Commandments?

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before Me.

2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

5. Honor your father and your mother.

6. You shall not murder.

7. You shall not commit adultery.

8. You shall not steal.

9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife—or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:2-17)

5. What is the Greatest Commandment?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37,38)

6. What is the second Greatest Commandment?

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39)

7. What is the Golden Rule?

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (Matthew 7:12)

8. What is the Great Commission?

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19,20)

9. What was the test of a prophet, to know that he was truly from God?

He had to be 100% accurate in his prophecies. The penalty

for a false prophet was death by stoning. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22)

10. To whom did God give the 10 Commandments?

Moses. (Exodus 20)

11. Which two people did not die?

Genesis 5:24 says that Enoch, who was Noah's great-grandfather, "walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." The other was the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot and horses of fire. (2 Kings 2:11)

12. What is the root of all kinds of evil?

The love of money. (1 Timothy 6:10)

13. What is the beginning of wisdom?

The fear of the Lord. (Psalm 111:10)

14. Who delivered the Sermon on the Mount?

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 5-7)

15. How did sickness and death enter the world?

Romans 5:12 says that sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin. The fall of man is recorded in Genesis 3, where God's perfect creation was spoiled by Adam's sin.

16. Who was the Roman governor who sentenced Christ to death?

Pontius Pilate. (Matthew 27:26)

17. Who are the major prophets?

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

18. What people group is the Old Testament about?

The Hebrews, who became the nation of Israel. They were descendants of Abraham through Isaac.

19. What happened while the Lord Jesus was in the desert for 40 days?

He was tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1) Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

20. How many people were on Noah's ark?

Eight: Noah and his wife, his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. (Genesis 7:13, 1 Peter 2:5)

21. Who was the first murderer?

Cain, who killed his brother Abel. (Genesis 4:8)

22. Which person was afflicted with terrible trials but trusted God through it all?

Job. (See book of Job)

23. Who was Israel's most well-known and well-loved king?

David. (1 Chronicles 29:28)

24. Who was "the weeping prophet?"

Jeremiah.

25. Who was thrown into the lion's den?

Daniel. (Daniel 6)

26. Who were the two people in the famous fight with a stone and a sling?

David and Goliath. (1 Samuel 17)

27. What is the book of Acts about?

The early years of the church, as the gospel begins to spread throughout the world.

28. What are epistles?

Letters.

29. On what occasion was the Holy Spirit given to the church?

Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4)

30. Whom did God command to sacrifice his only son?

Abraham. (Genesis 22:2)

31. What was the Old Testament feast that celebrated God's saving the firstborn of Israel the night they left Egypt?

Passover. (Exodus 12:27)

32. Who was the Hebrew who became prime minister of Egypt?

Joseph. (Genesis 41:41)

33. Who was the Hebrew woman who became Queen of Persia?

Esther. (Esther 2:17)

34. Who was the pagan woman who became David's great-grandmother?

Ruth. (Ruth 4:17)

35. Which angel appeared to Mary?

Gabriel. (Luke 1:26)

36. How did the Lord Jesus die?

He gave up His life while being crucified. (John 19:18)

37. What happened to Him three days after He died?

He was raised from the dead. (John 20)

38. What happened to the Lord Jesus 40 days after His resurrection?

He ascended bodily into heaven. (Acts 1:9-11)

39. What should we do when we sin, in order to restore our fellowship with God?

1 John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

40. How did the universe and world get here?

Genesis 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." We are told further in Colossians 1:16 and 17 that the Lord Jesus Christ was the one who did the creating.

41. Where did Satan and the demons come from?

Satan was originally the best and the brightest angel, but he sinned in his pride, wanting to be God. Some of the angels followed him, and these "fallen angels" were cast out of heaven. (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28)

42. Who directed the writing of the Bible?

The Holy Spirit. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21)

43. Where was the Lord Jesus before He was conceived in Mary?

In heaven. (Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Corinthians 15:49)

44. Who taught in parables?

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 13:3)

45. What are parables?

A short, simple story with a spiritual point.

46. Which two animals talked with human speech?

The serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:3) and Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:28).

47. With which woman did David commit adultery?

Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11)

48. Which one of their sons succeeded David as king?

Solomon. (2 Samuel 12:24)

49. Who was the female judge of Israel?

Deborah. (Judges 4:4)

50. Who was the wisest man in the world?

Solomon. (1 Kings 3:12)

51. Who was the first man?

Adam. (Genesis 2:20)

52. Who was the most humble man on earth?

Moses. (Numbers 12:3)

53. Who was the strongest man on earth?

Samson. (Judges 13-16)

54. Where were the two nations of God's people taken into captivity?

Israel was taken into Assyria (2 Kings 17:23), and Judah into Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:20).

55. Which cupbearer to a foreign king rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem?

Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 2:5)

56. Who were the two Old Testament prophets who worked miracles?

Elijah and Elisha. (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 6)

57. Which Old Testament prophet spent three days in the belly of a great fish?

Jonah. (Jonah 1:17)

58. What is the last book of the Old Testament?

Malachi.

59. For which Israelite commander did the sun stand still?

Joshua. (Joshua 10)

60. Who was the first king of Israel?

Saul. (1 Samuel 13:1)

61. Who built the temple in Israel?

Solomon. (1 Kings 6)

62. Which of the twelve tribes of Israel served as priests?

Levites. (Deuteronomy 10:8)

63. Which city fell after the Israelites marched around it daily for seven days?

Jericho. (Joshua 6:20)

64. What did God give the Israelites to eat in the wilderness?

Manna and quail. (Exodus 16)

65. Which two people walked on water?

Jesus and Peter. (Matthew 14:29)

66. Who was the first martyr?

Stephen. (Acts 7)

67. Who betrayed Jesus to the priests, and for how much?

Judas betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. (Matthew 26:14-15)

68. What is the Lord's Prayer?

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13)

69. Who was the first person to see the risen Lord?

Mary Magdalene. (John 20:16)

70. Which prophet and cousin of the Lord was beheaded?

John the Baptist. (John 14:10)

71. To what country did the young Jesus and His parents escape when Herod was threatening His life?

Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15)

72. What was Christ's first miracle?

He turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana. (John 2:11)

73. Which one of the Lord's personal friends did He raise from

the dead?

Lazarus. (John 11)

74. Who was the greatest missionary of the New Testament?

Paul. (see book of Acts)

75. Who was Paul's first partner?

Barnabas. (Acts 13:2)

76. Whom did an angel release from prison?

Peter. (Acts 12)

77. Which event caused God to splinter human language into many tongues?

The building of the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11)

78. Which chapter of an Old Testament prophet's book gives a detailed prophecy of the Messiah's death by crucifixion?

Isaiah 53.

79. Who wrestled all night with the Lord and was left with a permanent limp?

Jacob. (Genesis 32:22-32)

80. Which two pastors did Paul write letters to?

Timothy and Titus.

81. Who was hailed as a god when he was bitten by a snake but nothing bad happened?

Paul. (Acts 28:5-6)

82. Which two New Testament writers were brothers of the Lord Jesus?

James and Jude. (Matthew 13:55)

83. Which two New Testament books were written by a doctor?

Luke and Acts. (2 Timothy 4:11)

84. Who had a coat of many colors?

Joseph. (Genesis 37:3)

85. In what sin did Aaron lead the Israelites while his brother Moses was up on the mountain talking to God?

They made an idol in the form of a golden calf. (Exodus 32)

86. How many books are there in the entire Bible?

66: 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament.

87. What's the difference between John the Baptist and the John who wrote several New Testament books?

John the Baptist was a prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of God was near in preparation for his cousin Jesus' ministry. The John who wrote the gospel of John, the epistles—1, 2 and 3 John—and Revelation, was one of the twelve apostles and one of those closest to the Lord, along with Peter and James. He called himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

88. Who saw the Lord appear to him in a burning bush?

Moses. (Exodus 3)

89. How many sons did Jacob have?

Twelve. They were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. (Genesis 35:22)

90. Who gave up his birthright for a bowl of stew?

Esau. (Genesis 25:33)

91. Which Psalm starts out, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want?"

Psalm 23.

92. Who disowned the Lord Jesus three times before a cock crowed?

Peter. (Matthew 26:69-75)

93. What did the Lord do just after the Last Supper to demonstrate His love and humility?

He washed the disciples' feet. (John 13:5)

94. Where is the New Testament "Hall of Faith?"

Hebrews 11.

95. Who appeared with the Lord Jesus in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration?

Elijah and Moses. (Mark 9:4)

96. Who is the second Adam?

The Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49)

97. Which Old Testament prophet married a prostitute because God told him to?

Hosea. (Hosea 1:2)

98. What are the two sacred ordinances that the Lord commanded us to observe?

Baptism (Matthew 28:19,20) and Communion, or the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

99. What are supernatural enablings that allow a believer to serve the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness?

Spiritual gifts. (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:8-13, 1 Peter 4:10-11)

100. Whose tomb was Christ buried in?

Joseph of Arimathea. (Matthew 27:57-60)

101. Who wrote the book of Hebrews?

Nobody knows.

102. Which is the “epistle of joy?”

Philippians.

103. What is the book of Revelation about?

The end of the world.

104. Who is the bride of Christ?

The church—that is, all who have trusted Him for salvation. (Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 19:7-8)

Note

1. bit.ly/fr8BuA

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George Washington and Religion

Kerby Anderson presents a compelling argument for the view that George Washington was a devoted Christian rather than a deist. He points to Washington’s insistence on the importance

of services for his soldiers, his personal church attendance, his prayer life and his commitment to the spiritual upbringing of his godchildren.

Background

What was George Washington's view of religion and in particular of Christianity? The historical perspective used to be that Washington was a Christian and orthodox in most of his beliefs. But the modern view has been that he was either a lukewarm Anglican or more likely a Deist.



I want to look at some new research that argues for the traditional view and against the modern view of George Washington's religion. One book is *Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of our Country*.^{1} It is written by Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute and winner of the Templeton Award) and Jana Novak. Another book, written by Peter Lillback with Jerry Newcombe, is *George Washington's Sacred Fire*.^{2}

George Washington was born into a Virginia family of moderate wealth and was exposed to various religious activities: lessons in religion, regular prayer, Sunday school attendance, and reverence for God. His mother had a daily ritual of retiring with a book of religious readings.

By the time he was a teenager, Washington had already assumed serious responsibilities as a professional surveyor and then as a major in the Virginia militia. His adventures in the wild lands gave him invaluable lessons about the military, Indians, and the British. Years later in a speech to the Delaware chiefs, Washington said, "You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are."^{3}

He studied the Bible as well as the writings of ancient heroes. The busts and portraits at Mount Vernon demonstrate this. There are busts of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden, and Frederick II of Prussia. In the dining room are portraits of the Virgin Mary and St. John.

Washington's own stepgranddaughter "Nelly" Custis saw him as a religious man. She wrote this to one of Washington's early biographers:

It was his custom to retire to his library at nine or ten o'clock, where he remained an hour before he went to his chamber. He always rose before the sun, and remained in his library until called to breakfast. I never witnessed his private devotions. I never inquired about them. I should have thought it the greatest heresy to doubt his firm belief in Christianity. His life, his writings, prove that he was a Christian. He was not one of those who act or pray, "that they may be seen of men." He communed with his God in secret.[\[4\]](#)

In what follows we will look at the evidence for George Washington's faith as it surfaced in his letters and actions as general and president.

Deism vs. Christianity

Pick up a book about George Washington written during the nineteenth century, and you will probably see that he is described as being a Christian. However, if you pick up a book written in the last seventy years, it will describe him as a Deist. Why the change?

The turning point seems to be a study by historian Paul F. Boller, Jr. entitled *George Washington and Religion*. His conclusion can be summarized in a single sentence: To the "unbiased observer" George Washington appears as a Deist, not a devout Christian.[\[5\]](#) Most historians since Boller accepted

this idea and were less likely to assert that Washington was a Christian.

What do we mean by “Deism”? Deism is the belief that God is merely a watchmaker God who started the universe but is not involved in the affairs of humans and human history. One definition of Deism is that “There is no special providence; no miracles or other divine interventions intrude upon the lawful natural order.”[\[6\]](#)

Was George Washington a Deist? He was not. It is worth noting that even historian Paul Boller admitted that religion was important to Washington as a leader. Boller writes, “he saw to it that divine services were performed by the chaplains as regularly as possible on the Sabbath for the soldiers under his command.”[\[7\]](#) We might reasonably ask, Why would chaplains be important to a Deist?

Boller even admits there are testimonials of Washington’s church attendance. This is important since many historians even go further than Boller and assert that Washington did not even attend church as a mature adult.

Michael Novak admits that some of the names Washington often used for God *sound* Deist, but that does not mean that he was a Deist. In fact, his prayers for God’s action were just the opposite of what you might hear from a Deist. Washington believed God favored the cause of liberty and should be beseeched to “interpose” his action on behalf of the Americans. He called for public thanksgiving for the many ways in which Americans experienced God’s hand in key events in our history.

Washington used more than eighty terms to refer to God, among them: Almighty God, Creator, Divine Goodness, Father of all mercies, and Lord of Hosts. The most common term he used in his writings and speeches was “Providence.” When he did so, he used the masculine personal pronoun “he.” Washington never

refers directly to God as an “it,” as he does occasionally with Providence. God is personal.[{8}](#)

If we look at the history of the eighteenth century, there were many with orthodox religious beliefs who sometimes used the philosophical language of the enlightenment. Washington was a Christian, even though he often used terms for God associated with Deists.

A Religious Nation Goes to War

There has been some dispute about how religious America was during the Revolutionary War. There was a shortage of churches and clergy (especially along the paths of westward migration). But we should also remember that this War of Independence followed the First Great Awakening.

At the first meeting of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia (September 1774), the first motion from the floor was for prayer to seek guidance from God. But there was resistance, not because of the prayer, but because of the theological disagreements among the members (Anabaptist, Quakers, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians). Sam Adams settled the dispute by saying he was no bigot and could pray along with any minister as long as he was a patriot.[{9}](#) I have in my office a picture of a painting showing George Washington praying with men like Patrick Henry, John Jay, and Richard Henry Lee.

At the second meeting, they proposed that Washington be appointed commander in chief of the Continental Army. He did not think he was equal to the command but accepted it. He wrote his wife, “I shall rely, therefore, confidently on that Providence, which has heretofore preserved and been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return safe to you in the fall.”[{10}](#) At the time, Washington was the only man on the continent in uniform since no Continental Army yet existed. To

the British, he was the supreme traitor, in open rebellion to the King. His neck was at risk, and the American independence depended on him.

One event that George Washington believed showed God's providence was the Battle of Long Island in 1776. Washington and his men were trapped on Brooklyn Heights, Long Island. The British were poised to crush the American army the next day and that would have been the end of the rebellion. Washington planned a bold move and began evacuating his troops under the cover of darkness using everything from fishing vessels to rowboats. But there was not enough time to accomplish the task. When morning came, the fog of night remained and only lifted in time for the British to see the last American boat crossing the East River beyond the reach of their guns. You can read more about this miraculous event in Michael Novak's book, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*.[\[11\]](#)

Washington also required chaplains for the Continental Army, and personally took time for prayer. He forbade his troops under pain of death from uttering blasphemies, even profanity. He called upon them to conduct themselves as Christian soldiers because the people demanded it.[\[12\]](#)

Washington's actions during the Revolutionary War demonstrate his Christian character.

First in War and First in Peace

In his eulogy for George Washington, Henry Lee said he was "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." We could also say the Washington demonstrated Christian character both in war and in peace.

While fulfilling his duties as general, he came to be known as a "nursing father." This is a biblical phrase (Num. 11:12, Is. 49:23 KJV) that appears in many of the tributes to Washington

after his death. He brought together very diverse groups to fight the Revolutionary War by bridging ethnic and social divisions. This ranged from the regiment from Marblehead, Massachusetts (that included men of mixed race, blacks, and Indians), to the Virginian and southern aristocrats to the yeomen in hunting shirts from western Virginia.

One of his orders stated that "All chaplains are to perform divine service tomorrow, and on every succeeding Sunday. . . . The commander in chief expects an exact compliance with this order, and that it be observed in future as an invariable rule of practice—and every neglect will be consider not only a breach of orders, but a disregard to decency, virtue and religion." [{13}](#)

Washington grew even more explicit as the war dragged on: "While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of a Christian." [{14}](#)

Washington lost a great deal of money during the war by paying for things out of his own pocket and by refusing a salary. He happily returned to Mount Vernon and spent happy years with his wife. But the constitutional convention in 1787 brought him to elective office. He was elected as president by unanimous vote in 1789.

In his inaugural address, Washington said, "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency."

He issued a thanksgiving proclamation in 1789 in which he asserted "the duty of all nations" in regard to God. His

thanksgiving proclamation of 1795 proclaims there are signs of "Divine beneficence" in the world. And in his farewell address, he reminded Americans that "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."

Washington demonstrated Christian character in war and in peace.

Washington as Christian: Pro and Con

Let's summarize the arguments historians make about Washington's religious faith. Those who believe that George Washington was a Deist and not a Christian usually make the following observations.

First, Washington never took communion at Sunday services. Second, he refused to declare his specific beliefs in public. Third, he rarely used the name of Jesus Christ in private correspondence and in public utterances. Finally, while he believed in God and had an awareness of Providence in his life, it all seems more like a Greek or Roman view of fate.

Michael Novak's response to these observations is helpful. "All these objections have a grain of truth in them. Still, they are consistent with Washington's being a serious Christian who believed that he had a public vocation that required some tact regarding his private confessional life."[\[15\]](#) Novak adds:

It is not at all unusual for public men in pluralistic American life to maintain a notable reserve about their private convictions. They do not burden the public with declarations of their deepest beliefs, whose general force they trust their actions will sufficiently reveal. In the public forum, they happily give to Caesar what is Caesar's and in the private forum, to God what is God's.[\[16\]](#)

What are some of the reasons to believe Washington was a Christian? First, he religiously observed the Sabbath as a day of rest and frequently attended church services on that day. Second, many report that Washington reserved time for private prayer. Third, Washington saved many of the dozens of sermons sent to him by clergymen, and read some of them aloud to his wife.

Fourth, Washington hung paintings of the Virgin Mary and St. John in places of honor in his dining room in Mount Vernon. Fifth, the chaplains who served under him during the long years of the Revolutionary War believed Washington was a Christian. Sixth, Washington (unlike Thomas Jefferson) was never accused by the press or his opponents of not being a Christian.

It is also worth noting that, unlike Jefferson, Washington agreed to be a godparent for at least eight children. This was far from a casual commitment since it required the godparents to agree to help insure that a child was raised in the Christian faith. Washington not only agreed to be a godparent, but presented his godsons and goddaughters with Bibles and prayer books.

George Washington was not a Deist who believed in a "watchmaker God." He was a Christian and demonstrated that Christian character throughout his life.

Notes

1. Michael Novak and Jana Novak, *Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of our Country* (NY: Basic Books, 2006).
2. Peter Lillback, with Jerry Newcombe, *George Washington's Sacred Fire* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006).
3. Novak, *Washington's God*, 93.
4. Ibid., 136.
5. Lillback, *Sacred Fire*, 28.

6. Novak, *Washington's God*, 110.
7. Lillback, *Sacred Fire*, 28.
8. Ibid., 577.
9. Novak, *Washington's God*, 123.
10. Ibid, 64.
11. Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2002).
12. Novak, *Washington's God*, 30-31.
13. Ibid., 90.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 219.
16. Ibid., 219-220.

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Historical Cycles

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of four world-changing cycles: a political/cultural cycle, a generational cycle, a technological cycle, and a financial cycle.

Are there cycles in history? Yes, even though there is a linear trajectory in history, there are generational cycles we can observe. No doubt you have heard the phrase: "Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, weak men create hard times." Or you may have heard: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." And you may have heard the phrase "the fourth turning" that predicts a crisis at the end of a four-fold cycle.

We are going to look at four of the most often quoted cycles: a political/cultural cycle, a generational cycle, a technological cycle, and a



financial cycle. Today we take for granted democracy, capitalism, and the industrial revolution. These political, economic, and technological realities were not always in our world but came about because of revolutions.

One of the most significant revolutions took place 250 years ago. Andrew Wilson talks about this in his book, *Remaking the World*. He describes 1776 as “a year that witnessed seven transformations taking place—globalization, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the Great Enrichment, the American Revolution, the rise of post-Christianity, and the dawn of Romanticism.”

Some of the events in 1776 we know. That was the year the Declaration of Independence was ratified. It was the year when Adam Smith published the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. It was also the year of James Watt’s invention of the steam engine that spawned the industrial revolution. Both capitalism and the industrial revolution led to a significant increase in life expectancy and the rise of social development.

In this article as we discuss each of these four cycles, we should remember this interesting fact: all these cycles seem to be converging today. The last time these cycles converged in 1776, the world changed.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”

What does the future hold? Only God knows. As the song goes, “He’s got the whole world in His hands.” We may not know the future, but we can trust in the One who knows the future.

I think we are likely headed for a massive change in the future. But it is difficult to predict what political event or economic spark might inflame our world. Therefore, we should all be in prayer for our leaders and prepare ourselves for

possible turmoil ahead.

Political/Cultural Cycle

Let us look at what appears to be an eighty-year political/cultural cycle. (It actually seems to average out to about 84 years). Go back to 1848 and you have Karl Marx publishing the *Communist Manifesto* and other works. The political and social impact of his Marxist perspective swept through Europe, changed the political structure of many countries, and is still an influence today. This idea not only introduced a new way of viewing the world but was also responsible for removing the monarchy from most nation states.

Another important political change happened 84 years later in the 1930s. In Europe, you have the rise of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. In this country, you had the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt who signed into law a significant number of New Deal programs that vastly expanded the scope of government and are influential in our lives today. It is worth remembering that the federal government wasn't as large as it is today. Roosevelt was responsible for the creation of so many of the alphabet soup of programs and federal agencies. The following decades were the era of big government.

If you add another 84 years, you come to 2016. In Europe, you have the political battle known as Brexit and the beginning of some populist uprisings. In this country, you also had the rise of populism and a reaction to the size and scope of big government. That was best illustrated by the election of Donald Trump.

It was also a time of turmoil. In Europe, we had the farmer protests in the Netherlands and the yellow jacket protests in France. In the U.S., we had BLM protests and Antifa protests.

There is also a longer cycle that describes the rise and fall of empires. General John Glubb notices that most empires last

about 250 years. If you apply that to the U.S., you find that we are entering the end of that cycle. One key date is 1776. That not only marks the beginning of the nation (Declaration of Independence) but the promotion of capitalism (Adam Smith and the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*). By the way, if you go back about 250 years before that you come to the Protestant Reformation that began when Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the Wittenberg Door.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for a massive change in the future.

Generational Cycle

We now turn to looking at a generational cycle.

More than a quarter century ago, William Strauss and Neil Howe wrote their bestselling book, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*. In it, they argued that history could be understood as coming in turnings, which have cycles of four. Each cycle spans a length longer than human life, roughly 80 to 100 years. That unit of time was what the ancients called the saeculum. These four turnings of the saeculum comprise the historical rhythm of growth, maturation, entropy, and destruction.

The first turning is a High – an upbeat era of strengthening institutions and weakening individualism. That is when a new civic order develops and the old values decay. The second turning is an Awakening – which is a passionate era of spiritual upheaval. This is when the civic order comes under attack from new values. The third turning is an Unraveling – which is a downcast era of strengthening individualism and

weakening institutions. This is when the old civil order decays and new values develop. The fourth turning is a Crisis – which is a decisive era of secular upheaval. The values regime propels the replacement of the old civil order with a new one.

The authors predicted that political, economic, and social upheavals would rattle the United States in and around the 2020s. The 2008 economic crisis and the changes just described from 2016 seemed to support the predictions made in the book.

Last year, Neil Howe wrote *The Fourth Turning Is Here*. The title tells it all. We are in crisis as illustrated by a government that does not seem to function, low public trust in just about any institution, political polarization, moral and legal chaos, and a collapse of families. He reminds us of the Abraham Lincoln quote that “a house divided against itself cannot stand” and that the government “will become all one thing, or all the other.” He also reminds us of other fourth turning crises in America: World War II, the Civil War, and the American Revolution.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for a massive change in the future.

Technological Cycle

Let’s look at a technological cycle.

There appears to be about a fifty-year technological cycle, in which we see important technological revolutions. In the late 18th century, we saw the beginnings of what today we refer to as the industrial revolution. Most people lived on farms. This revolution brought people out of the farms into the cities and

factories.

Fifty years later was the age of steam and railways that changed the world significantly. Up until that time, we had manpower and horsepower. Trains that run on steam and steam ships changed the world in significant ways. Now people could move faster and carry heavier loads over a longer distance.

Fifty years after that we had steel and electricity. Steel was important in buildings. Brick buildings could only be a few stories high. Steel allowed designers to create skyscrapers and to build bridges over larger sections of water. Electricity literally lit up the dark night and provided numerous conveniences that we take for granted today.

Fifty years after that we had oil, automobiles, and a revolution in mass production. Automobiles provided people with the ability to go wherever they wanted without having to walk, ride a horse, or catch a train. Advances in mass production enhanced the industrial revolution and made possible the vast array of products available to us today.

By the 1970s, we came into the age of information and telecommunications. This came about with the development of the transistor and then the microchip. Our digital world developed because of these inventions.

Today, we find ourselves in a world of fast computers, [artificial intelligence](#), and [genetic engineering](#). We have social media, but we also have social media censorship. We have creative graphics, but we also have deep fakes and growing questions about [what is real and what is fake](#). We can genetically treat and cure diseases, but we can also [genetically engineer humans](#). How much of this will be driven by politics or economics? It is worth noting this latest technological cycle raises significant questions and also coincides with the political cycles and the generational cycle.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for a massive change in the future.

Financial Cycle

In this article we have looked at four important historical cycles. Now we conclude by covering a financial cycle. You will notice that some of the financial cycles parallel the technological revolutions.

America moved from an agricultural society to an industrial economy to an information society.

If you look at the wealth cycles of nations, you notice something interesting about which currency was dominant. The financial superpower changes over time, on average about 100 years. Perhaps you have seen a chart that shows these changes:

Portugal – Portuguese Real (15th century)

Spain – Spanish Real (16th century)

Netherlands – Dutch Guilder (17th century)

France – Franc (18th century)

Britain – Pound sterling (19th century)

U.S. – U.S. dollar (20th century)

Where are we today? The U.S. and other countries around the world are experiencing a debt crisis. One significant reason for this is the fact that the dollar is no longer “good as gold.” For 5,000 years, money was gold. But protecting it and transporting it was difficult. Banks and nations held the gold and created paper certificates that represented the value. Sometimes, the amount of paper currency was not always backed by gold.

The greatest problem came in the 20th century. In 1944, the Bretton Woods conference fixed gold at \$35 per ounce. But by 1971, President Nixon closed the gold window and we have seen over the last fifty-plus years that the value of the dollar has continually declined. Also, the possibility of the U.S. dollar remaining the reserve currency in the world is questionable.

At the same time, this country and other countries are facing a significant debt crisis. It is easy to spend more when all you need to do is print more money. That leads to inflation and a devaluation of your currency.

When faced with a debt crisis, you only have a few options. You can default on the debt, which some nations have done. You can tax the citizens, but there isn't enough wealth in any nation to cover the size of those national debts. You could cut spending, but few politicians would ever consider that option. Instead, most countries (including the U.S.) print more money. Unfortunately, that can only last for so long. Just look at Weimar Germany or Zimbabwe or Venezuela.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were "men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do."

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for a massive change in the future.

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Bible Literacy Quiz: Separated Format

The original Bible Literacy Quiz can be found [here](#).

1. Who wrote the first four books of the New Testament?

[Answer](#)

2. Who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament?

[Answer](#)

3. What two Old Testament books are named for women?

[Answer](#)

4. What are the Ten Commandments?

[Answer](#)

5. What is the Greatest Commandment?

[Answer](#)

6. What is the second Greatest Commandment?

[Answer](#)

7. What is the Golden Rule?

[Answer](#)

8. What is the Great Commission?

[Answer](#)

9. What was the test of a prophet, to know that he was truly

from God?

[Answer](#)

10. To whom did God give the 10 Commandments?

[Answer](#)

11. Which two people did not die?

[Answer](#)

12. What is the root of all kinds of evil?

[Answer](#)

13. What is the beginning of wisdom?

[Answer](#)

14. Who delivered the Sermon on the Mount?

[Answer](#)

15. How did sickness and death enter the world?

[Answer](#)

16. Who was the Roman governor who sentenced Christ to death?

[Answer](#)

17. Who are the major prophets?

[Answer](#)

18. What people group is the Old Testament about?

[Answer](#)

19. What happened while the Lord Jesus was in the desert for 40 days?

[Answer](#)

20. How many people were on Noah's ark?

[Answer](#)

21. Who was the first murderer?

[Answer](#)

22. Which person was afflicted with terrible trials but trusted God through it all?

[Answer](#)

23. Who was Israel's most well-known and well-loved king?

[Answer](#)

24. Who was "the weeping prophet?"

[Answer](#)

25. Who was thrown into the lion's den?

[Answer](#)

26. Who were the two people in the famous fight with a stone and a sling?

[Answer](#)

27. What is the book of Acts about?

[Answer](#)

28. What are epistles?

[Answer](#)

29. On what occasion was the Holy Spirit given to the church?

[Answer](#)

30. Whom did God command to sacrifice his only son?

[Answer](#)

31. What was the Old Testament feast that celebrated God's saving the firstborn of Israel the night they left Egypt?

[Answer](#)

32. Who was the Hebrew who became prime minister of Egypt?

[Answer](#)

33. Who was the Hebrew woman who became Queen of Persia?

[Answer](#)

34. Who was the pagan woman who became David's great-grandmother?

[Answer](#)

35. Which angel appeared to Mary?

[Answer](#)

36. How did the Lord Jesus die?

[Answer](#)

37. What happened to Him three days after He died?

[Answer](#)

38. What happened to the Lord Jesus 40 days after His resurrection?

[Answer](#)

39. What should we do when we sin, in order to restore our fellowship with God?

[Answer](#)

40. How did the universe and world get here?

[Answer](#)

41. Where did Satan and the demons come from?

[Answer](#)

42. Who directed the writing of the Bible?

[Answer](#)

43. Where was the Lord Jesus before He was conceived in Mary?

[Answer](#)

44. Who taught in parables?

[Answer](#)

45. What are parables?

[Answer](#)

46. Which two animals talked with human speech?

[Answer](#)

47. With which woman did David commit adultery?

[Answer](#)

48. Which one of their sons succeeded David as king?

[Answer](#)

49. Who was the female judge of Israel?

[Answer](#)

50. Who was the wisest man in the world?

[Answer](#)

51. Who was the first man?

[Answer](#)

52. Who was the most humble man on earth?

[Answer](#)

53. Who was the strongest man on earth?

[Answer](#)

54. Where were the two nations of God's people taken into captivity?

[Answer](#)

55. Which cupbearer to a foreign king rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem?

[Answer](#)

56. Who were the two Old Testament prophets who worked miracles?

[Answer](#)

57. Which Old Testament prophet spent three days in the belly of a great fish?

[Answer](#)

58. What is the last book of the Old Testament?

[Answer](#)

59. For which Israelite commander did the sun stand still?

[Answer](#)

60. Who was the first king of Israel?

[Answer](#)

61. Who built the temple in Israel?

[Answer](#)

62. Which of the twelve tribes of Israel served as priests?

[Answer](#)

63. Which city fell after the Israelites marched around it daily for seven days?

[Answer](#)

64. What did God give the Israelites to eat in the wilderness?

[Answer](#)

65. Which two people walked on water?

[Answer](#)

66. Who was the first martyr?

[Answer](#)

67. Who betrayed Jesus to the priests, and for how much?

[Answer](#)

68. What is the Lord's Prayer?

[Answer](#)

69. Who was the first person to see the risen Lord?

[Answer](#)

70. Which prophet and cousin of the Lord was beheaded?

[Answer](#)

71. To what country did the young Jesus and His parents escape when Herod was threatening His life?

[Answer](#)

72. What was Christ's first miracle?

[Answer](#)

73. Which one of the Lord's personal friends did He raise from the dead?

[Answer](#)

74. Who was the greatest missionary of the New Testament?

[Answer](#)

75. Who was Paul's first partner?

[Answer](#)

76. Whom did an angel release from prison?

[Answer](#)

77. Which event caused God to splinter human language into many tongues?

[Answer](#)

78. Which chapter of an Old Testament prophet's book gives a detailed prophecy of the Messiah's death by crucifixion?

[Answer](#)

79. Who wrestled all night with the Lord and was left with a permanent limp?

[Answer](#)

80. Which two pastors did Paul write letters to?

[Answer](#)

81. Who was hailed as a god when he was bitten by a snake but nothing bad happened?

[Answer](#)

82. Which two New Testament writers were brothers of the Lord Jesus?

[Answer](#)

83. Which two New Testament books were written by a doctor?

[Answer](#)

84. Who had a coat of many colors?

[Answer](#)

85. In what sin did Aaron lead the Israelites while his brother Moses was up on the mountain talking to God?

[Answer](#)

86. How many books are there in the entire Bible?

[Answer](#)

87. What's the difference between John the Baptist and the John who wrote several New Testament books?

[Answer](#)

88. Who saw the Lord appear to him in a burning bush?

[Answer](#)

89. How many sons did Jacob have?

[Answer](#)

90. Who gave up his birthright for a bowl of stew?

[Answer](#)

91. Which Psalm starts out, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want?”

[Answer](#)

92. Who disowned the Lord Jesus three times before a cock crowed?

[Answer](#)

93. What did the Lord do just before the Last Supper to demonstrate His love and humility?

[Answer](#)

94. Where is the New Testament “Hall of Faith?”

[Answer](#)

95. Who appeared with the Lord in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration?

[Answer](#)

96. Who is the second Adam?

[Answer](#)

97. Which Old Testament prophet married a prostitute because God told him to?

[Answer](#)

98. What are the two sacred ordinances that the Lord commanded us to observe?

[Answer](#)

99. What are supernatural enablings that allow a believer to serve the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness?

[Answer](#)

100. Whose tomb was Christ buried in?

[Answer](#)

101. Who wrote the book of Hebrews?

[Answer](#)

102. Which is the “epistle of joy?”

[Answer](#)

103. What is the book of Revelation about?

[Answer](#)

104. Who is the bride of Christ?

[Answer](#)

Answers

1. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. [Back](#)

2. Most conservative scholars hold that the Pentateuch was written by Moses. [Back](#)

3. Esther and Ruth. [Back](#)

4. 1. I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before Me.

2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

5. Honor your father and your mother.

6. You shall not murder.

7. You shall not commit adultery.

8. You shall not steal.

9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not

- covet your neighbor's wife—or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:2-17) [Back](#)
5. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37,38) [Back](#)
6. "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39) [Back](#)
7. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
(Matthew
7:12) [Back](#)
8. "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19,20) [Back](#)
9. He had to be 100% accurate in his prophecies. The penalty for a false prophet was death by stoning. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22) [Back](#)
10. Moses. (Exodus 20) [Back](#)
11. Genesis 5:24 says that Enoch, who was Noah's great-grandfather, "walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away." The other was the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot and horses of fire. (2 Kings 2:11) [Back](#)
12. The love of money. (1 Timothy 6:10) [Back](#)
13. The fear of the Lord. (Psalm 111:10) [Back](#)
14. The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 5-7) [Back](#)
15. Romans 5:12 says that sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin. The fall of man is recorded in Genesis 3, where God's perfect creation was spoiled by Adam's sin. [Back](#)

16. Pontius Pilate. (Matthew 27:26) [Back](#)
17. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. [Back](#)
18. The Hebrews, who became the nation of Israel. They were descendants of Abraham through Isaac. [Back](#)
19. He was tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1) Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. [Back](#)
20. Eight: Noah and his wife, his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. (Genesis 7:13, 1 Peter 2:5) [Back](#)
21. Cain, who killed his brother Abel. (Genesis 4:8) [Back](#)
22. Job. (See book of Job) [Back](#)
23. David. (1 Chronicles 29:28) [Back](#)
24. Jeremiah. [Back](#)
25. Daniel. (Daniel 6) [Back](#)
26. David and Goliath. (1 Samuel 17) [Back](#)
27. The early years of the church, as the gospel begins to spread throughout the world. [Back](#)
28. Letters. [Back](#)
29. Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4) [Back](#)
30. Abraham. (Genesis 22:2) [Back](#)
31. Passover. (Exodus 12:27) [Back](#)
32. Joseph. (Genesis 41:41) [Back](#)
33. Esther. (Esther 2:17) [Back](#)
34. Ruth. (Ruth 4:17) [Back](#)

35. Gabriel. (Luke 1:26) [Back](#)
36. He gave up His life while being crucified. (John 19:18) [Back](#)
37. He was raised from the dead. (John 20) [Back](#)
38. He ascended bodily into heaven. (Acts 1:9-11) [Back](#)
39. 1 John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." [Back](#)
40. Genesis 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." We are told further in Colossians 1:16 and 17 that the Lord Jesus Christ was the one who did the creating. [Back](#)
41. Satan was originally the best and the brightest angel, but he sinned in his pride, wanting to be God. Some of the angels followed him, and these "fallen angels" were cast out of heaven. (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28) [Back](#)
42. The Holy Spirit. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21) [Back](#)
43. In heaven. (Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Corinthians 15:49) [Back](#)
44. The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 13:3) [Back](#)
45. A short, simple story with a spiritual point. [Back](#)
46. The serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:3) and Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:28) [Back](#)
47. Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11) [Back](#)
48. Solomon. (2 Samuel 12:24) [Back](#)
49. Deborah. (Judges 4:4) [Back](#)
50. Solomon. (1 Kings 3:12) [Back](#)

51. Adam. (Genesis 2:20) [Back](#)
52. Moses. (Numbers 12:3) [Back](#)
53. Samson. (Judges 13-16) [Back](#)
54. Israel was taken into Assyria (2 Kings 17:23), and Judah into Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:20). [Back](#)
55. Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 2:5) [Back](#)
56. Elijah and Elisha. (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 6) [Back](#)
57. Jonah. (Jonah 1:17) [Back](#)
58. Malachi. [Back](#)
59. Joshua. (Joshua 10) [Back](#)
60. Saul. (1 Samuel 13:1) [Back](#)
61. Solomon. (1 Kings 6) [Back](#)
62. Levites. (Deuteronomy 10:8) [Back](#)
63. Jericho. (Joshua 6:20) [Back](#)
64. Manna and quail. (Exodus 16) [Back](#)
65. Jesus and Peter. (Matthew 14:29) [Back](#)
66. Stephen. (Acts 7) [Back](#)
67. Judas betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. (Matthew 26:14-15) [Back](#)
68. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

- Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13) [Back](#)
69. Mary Magdalene. (John 20:16) [Back](#)
70. John the Baptist. (John 14:10) [Back](#)
71. Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15) [Back](#)
72. He turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana. (John 2:11) [Back](#)
73. Lazarus. (John 11) [Back](#)
74. Paul. (see book of Acts) [Back](#)
75. Barnabas. (Acts 13:2) [Back](#)
76. Peter. (Acts 12) [Back](#)
77. The building of the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11) [Back](#)
78. Isaiah 53. [Back](#)
79. Jacob. (Genesis 32:22-32) [Back](#)
80. Timothy and Titus. [Back](#)
81. Paul. (Acts 28:5-6) [Back](#)
82. James and Jude. (Matthew 13:55) [Back](#)
83. Luke and Acts. (2 Timothy 4:11) [Back](#)
84. Joseph. (Genesis 37:3) [Back](#)
85. They made an idol in the form of a golden calf. (Exodus 32) [Back](#)
86. 66: 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. [Back](#)
87. John the Baptist was a prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of God was near in preparation for his cousin Jesus'

ministry. The John who wrote the gospel of John, the epistles—1, 2 and 3 John—and Revelation, was one of the twelve apostles and one of those closest to the Lord, along with Peter and James. He called himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” [Back](#)

88. Moses. (Exodus 3) [Back](#)

89. Twelve. They were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. (Genesis 35:22) [Back](#)

90. Esau. (Genesis 25:33) [Back](#)

91. Psalm 23. [Back](#)

92. Peter. (Matthew 26:69-75) [Back](#)

93. He washed the disciples’ feet. (John 13:5) [Back](#)

94. Hebrews 11. [Back](#)

95. Elijah and Moses. (Mark 9:4) [Back](#)

96. The Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49) [Back](#)

97 Hosea. (Hosea 1:2) [Back](#)

98. Baptism (Matthew 28:19,20) and Communion, or the Lord’s Table (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). [Back](#)

99. Spiritual gifts. (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:8-13, 1 Peter 4:10-11) [Back](#)

100. Joseph of Arimathea. (Matthew 27:57-60) [Back](#)

101. Nobody knows. [Back](#)

109. Philippians. [Back](#)

103. The end of the world. [Back](#)

104. The church—that is, all who have trusted Him for

salvation. (Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 19:7-8) [Back](#)

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The Causes of War

Meic Pearse's book The Gods of War gives great insight into the charge that religion is the cause of most war. History shows this is not true: the cause of most war is the sinful human heart, even when religion is invoked as a reason.

The Accusation

Sam Harris, the popular author and atheist, says that “for everyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict.”[\[1\]](#) Writing for the Freedom from Religion Foundation, fellow atheist Richard Dawkins adds, “Only the willfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today.”[\[2\]](#) Speaking more bluntly, one British government official has said, “theocrats, religious leaders or fanatics citing holy texts . . . constitutes the greatest threat to world peace today.”[\[3\]](#)

War is the ultimate act of intolerance, and since intolerance is seen as the only unforgivable sin in our postmodern times, it's not surprising that those hostile to religion would charge people holding religious convictions with the guilt for causing war.



This view is held by many others, not just despisers of religion. A 2006 opinion poll taken in Great Britain found

that 82% of adults “see religion as a cause of division and tension between people. Only 16% disagree.”[\[4\]](#)

To be honest, religion has been, and remains, a source of conflict in the world; but to what degree? Is it the only source of war, as its critics argue? Is it even the primary source? And if we agree that religion is a source of war, how do we define what qualifies as a religion? This leads to another question. Are all religions equally responsible for war or are some more prone to instigate conflict than others? Once these issues are decided, we are still left with one of the most difficult questions: How does a religious person, especially a Christian, respond to the question of war?

When confronted with the accusation that religion, and more importantly, Christianity, has been the central cause of war down through history, most Christians respond by ceding the point. We will argue that the issue is far too complex to merely blame war on religious strife. A more nuanced response is needed. Religion is sometimes the direct cause of war, but other times it plays a more ambiguous role. It can also be argued, as Karl Marx did, that religion can actually restrain the warring instinct.

In his provocative new book, *The Gods of War*, Meic Pearse argues that modern atheists greatly overstate their case regarding religion as a cause for war, and that all religions are not equal when it comes to the tendency to resort to violence. He believes that the greatest source for conflict in the world today is the universalizing tendencies of modern secular nations that are pressing their materialism and moral relativism on more traditional cultures.

The Connection Between Religion and War

When someone suggests a simple answer to something as complex as war, it probably is *too* simple. History is usually more

complicated than we would like it to be.

How then should Christians respond when someone claims religion is the cause of all wars? First, we must admit that religion can be and sometimes is the cause of war. Although it can be difficult to separate political, cultural, and religious motivations, there have been instances when men went off to war specifically because they believed that God wanted them to. That being said, in the last one hundred years the modern era with its secular ideologies has generated death and destruction on a scale never seen before in history. Not during the Crusades, the Inquisition, nor even during the Thirty Years War in Europe.

The total warfare of the twentieth century combined powerful advances in war-making technologies with highly structured societies to devastating effect. WWI cost close to eight and a half million lives. The more geographically limited Russian Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 resulted in nine million deaths. WWII cost sixty million deaths, as well as the destruction of whole cities by fire bombing and nuclear devices.

Both Nazi fascism and communism rejected the Christian belief that humanity holds a unique role in creation and replaced it with the necessity of conflict and strife. By the end of the nineteenth century, Darwin's ideas regarding natural selection and survival of the fittest had begun to affect philosophy, the social sciences, and even theology. Darwin had left us with a brutal universe devoid of meaning. The communist and fascist worldviews were both firmly grounded in Darwin's universe.

Hitler's obsession with violence is well known, but the communists were just as vocal about their attachment to it. Russian revolution leader Leon Trotsky wrote, "We must put an end once and for all to the papist-Quaker babble about the sanctity of human life." Lenin argued that the socialist state

was to be “a system of organized violence against the bourgeoisie” or middle class. While critics of the Russian Tsar and his ties with the Orthodox Russian Church could point to examples of oppression and cruelty, one historian has noted that when the communists had come to power “more prisoners were shot at just one soviet camp in a single year than had been executed by the tsars during the entire nineteenth century.”{5}

So, religion is not the primary cause of warfare and cruelty, at least not during the last one hundred years. But what about wars fought in the more distant past; surely most of them were religiously motivated. Not really.

Meic Pearce argues that “most wars, even before the rise of twentieth century’s secularist creeds, owed little or nothing to religious causation.”{6} Considering the great empires of antiquity, Pearce writes that “neither the Persians nor the Greeks nor the Romans fought either to protect or to advance the worship of their gods.”{7} Far more ordinary motives were involved like the desire for booty, the extension of the empire, glory in battle, and the desire to create buffer zones with their enemies. Each of these empires had their gods which would be called upon for aid in battle, but the primary cause of these military endeavors was not the advancement of religious beliefs.

Invasions by the Goths, Huns, Franks, and others against the Roman Empire, attacks by the Vikings in the North and the Mongols in Asia were motivated by material gain as well and not religious belief. The fourteenth century conquests of Timur Leng (or Tamerlane) in the Middle East and India resulted in the deaths of millions. He was a Muslim, but he conquered Muslim and pagan alike. At one point he had seventy thousand Muslims beheaded in Baghdad so that towers could be built with their skulls.{8}

More recently, the Hundred Years War between the French and English, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars were secular conflicts. Religious beliefs might have been used to wrap the conflicts with a Christian veneer, but promoting the cause of Christ was not at the heart of the conflicts.

Pearce argues that down through the millennia, humanity has gone to war for two main reasons: greed expressed by the competition for limited resources, and the need for security from other predatory cultures. The use of religion as a legitimating device for conflict has become a recent trend as it became less likely that a single individual could take a country to war without the broad support of the population.

It can be argued that religion was, without ambiguity, at the center of armed conflict during two periods in history. The first was during the birth and expansion of Islam which resulted in an ongoing struggle with Christianity, including the Crusades during the Middle Ages. The second was the result of the Reformation in Europe and was fought between Protestant and Catholic states. Even here, political motivations were part of the blend of causes that resulted in armed conflict.

Islam and Christianity

Do all religions have the same propensity to cause war? The two world religions with the largest followings are Christianity and Islam. While it is true that people have used both belief systems to justify armed conflict, are they equally likely to cause war? Do their founder's teachings, their holy books, and examples from the earliest believers encourage their followers to do violence against others?

Although Christianity has been used to justify forced conversions and violence against unbelievers, the connection between what Christianity actually teaches and these acts of violence has been ambiguous at best and often contradictory.

Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians told to use violence to further the Kingdom of God. Our model is Christ who is the perfect picture of humility and servant leadership, the one who came to lay down his life for others. Meic Pearce writes, "For the first three centuries of its history, Christianity was spread exclusively by persuasion and was persecuted for its pains, initially by the Jews but later, from 63, by the Romans." [{9}](#) It wasn't until Christianity became the de facto state religion of the Roman Empire around AD 400 that others were persecuted in the name of Christ.

The history of Islam is quite different. Warfare and conflict are found at its very beginning and is embodied in Muhammad's actions and words. Islam was initially spread through military conquest and maintained by threat of violence. As one pair of scholars puts it, there can be no doubt that "Islam was cradled in violence, and that Muhammad himself, through the twenty-six or twenty-seven raids in which he personally participated, came to serve for some Muslims as a role model for violence." [{10}](#)

Much evidence can be corralled to make this point. Muhammad himself spoke of the necessity of warfare on behalf of Allah. He said to his followers, "I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no God but Allah.'" [{11}](#) Prior to conquering Mecca, he supported his small band of believers by raiding caravans and sharing the booty. Soon after Muhammad's death, a war broke out over the future of the religion. Three civil wars were fought between Muslims during the first fifty years of the religion's history, and three of the four leaders of Islam after Muhammad were assassinated by other Muslims. The Quran and Hadith, the two most important writings in Islam, make explicit the expectation that all Muslim men will fight to defend the faith. Perhaps the most telling aspect of Islamic belief is that there is no separation between religious and political authority in the Islamic world. A threat to one is considered a threat to the other and almost

guarantees religiously motivated warfare.

Pacifism or Just Wars?

Although most Christians advocate either pacifism or a “just war” view when it comes to warfare and violence, Pearse argues that there are difficulties with both. Pacifism works at a personal level, but “there cannot be a pacifist state, merely a state that depends on others possessed of more force or of the willingness to use it.”[{12}](#) Some pacifists argue that humans are basically good and that violence stems from misunderstandings or social injustice. This is hardly a traditional Christian teaching. Pearse argues that “a repudiation of force in all circumstances . . . is an abandonment of victims—real people—to their fate.”[{13}](#)

Just war theory as advocated by Augustine in the early fifth century teaches that war is moral if it is fought for a just cause and carried out in a just fashion. A just cause bars wars of aggression or revenge, and is fought only as a last resort. It also must have a reasonable chance of success and be fought under the direction of a ruler in an attitude of love for the enemy. It seeks to reestablish peace, not total destruction of the vanquished, and to insure that noncombatants are not targeted.

However, even WWII, what many believe to be our most justified use of force, failed to measure up to this standard. Massive air raids against civilian populations by the Allies were just one of many violations that disallow its qualification as a just war. As Pearse argues, “war has an appalling dynamic of its own: it drags down the participants . . . into ever more savage actions.”[{14}](#)

How then are Christians to think about war and violence? Let’s consider two examples. In the face of much violent opposition in his battle for social justice, Martin Luther King said, “be

ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. . . . We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win *you* in the process.”^{15} Reform was achieved, although at the cost of his life, and many hearts and minds have been changed.

However, another martyr, German minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, rejected pacifism and chose to participate in an attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler, mainly because he despaired that an appeal to the hearts and minds of the Nazis would be effective.

Neither King nor Bonhoeffer were killed specifically for their faith. They were killed for defending the weak from slaughter, as Pearse puts it. Perhaps Pearse is correct when he argues, “If Christians can . . . legitimately fight . . . , then that fighting clearly cannot be for the faith. It can only be for secular causes . . . faith in Christ is something for which we can only die—not kill. . . . To fight under the delusion that one is thereby promoting Christianity is to lose sight of what Christianity is.”^{16}

Notes

1. Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.
2. *Ibid.*, 15.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 14.
5. *Ibid.*, 31.
6. *Ibid.*, 53.
7. *Ibid.*, 54.
8. *Ibid.*, 55.
9. *Ibid.*, 134.
10. *Ibid.*, 58.
11. *Ibid.*, 59.
12. *Ibid.*, 173.
13. *Ibid.*, 175.

14. Ibid., 173.

15. Ibid., 180.

16. Ibid.

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3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth

Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth.

Pine scent inside my home, the quick defensive tightening of my skin as I walk outside into the cold brisk air, and then the reflexive opposite – the slow relaxation of my whole body as I stand in front of a fire warming myself.

These experiences during the holidays warm my heart.



As we look toward Christmas and hear the nativity story this season, I want to share with you one conversation starter I use to defend my faith.

Let me share it with you. It's rather simple. It's easy to remember because it comes entirely out of Matthew's second chapter. It's not long and involved either—just three points.

Skeptics ridicule the Bible for its many supposed “errors,” “holes,” and “inconsistencies.” They conclude that it's

unreliable. Sharing this quick three-point apologetic can assure them that the Bible is reliable and can be trusted.

If the Bible makes three prophecies and then records the fulfillments of those prophecies, don't you think that makes the book at least a little bit credible? That's what you can do citing just the Christmas story from Matthew 2.

You might be tempted to dismiss this, saying it doesn't matter. But here's why the reliability of Scripture matters. IF Scripture can be trusted, AND what it is says is true, then some of the recorded teachings of Jesus could radically alter your life.

In Matthew 10:39 Jesus said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Or Luke 14:27, "Whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple."

Does that mean the disciple of Jesus has to lose his life?!! In a sense, yes.

How's that for radical?! If the Bible is reliable, then that means your life is at stake. Literally. That's not exaggeration: your physical life and your spiritual life. Both.

So there's a lot at stake then, if what the Bible says is true. Let's take a look, then, shall we?

Matthew's account of the Christmas story records three distinct fulfillments of prophecy: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth. We'll consider these one at a time.

Jesus Born in Bethlehem

Your life hangs in the balance of the Bible's reliability. That's why this discussion matters—whether or not the Bible is

reliable. The Christmas story from Matthew 2 offers strong evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we get into the first of three instances in the Christmas story that point to the miraculous fulfillment of prophecy strictly surrounding Jesus' birth—namely the location of His birth, Bethlehem.

The gospel writer, Matthew, begins chapter two telling the story of the Magi—the fabled wise men from the East who came to worship the King of the Jews. They arrive in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital city, expecting to find the baby King. They are disappointed, but redirected to Bethlehem by King Herod's chief priests. Why? Because those priests had read the prophet Micah who foretold the Messiah, the coming King, would come out of Bethlehem.

In Matthew 2:6, the writer is quoting the prophet Micah 5:2.

You may have known Jesus was born in Bethlehem. That's a pretty widely known fact, which is also why it's a great place to start this conversation to make a case for the Bible's reliability. It might sound like this.

“You know Jesus was born in Bethlehem, right?” you could begin. “Well, did you know that was prophesied hundreds of years prior?” Don't worry about trying to remember the citation. Just focus on it being fulfilled prophecy. You can always look up the reference later if you want to. If you want extra credit, go for the prophet's name, Micah.

Some skeptics may grant that Jesus indeed fulfilled prophecy, but that he did so intentionally. That is, skeptics basically charge Jesus with reading the Hebrew prophets, and then deliberately fulfilling as many as he possibly could in order to win favor, influence, and gain a following.

However, this is difficult to achieve when you haven't been born yet! How could he possibly have deliberately fulfilled

anything when he wasn't deliberating anything at all? He wasn't conscious, and didn't even exist yet in the flesh.

So no, Jesus could not have fulfilled this prophecy by Himself in order to deceive and manipulate. What are the chances Jesus' birthplace would fulfill prophecy? Not likely!

Jesus' Flight to Egypt

The second fulfillment of prophecy recorded in Matthew 2 (the Christmas story), is Jesus' flight to Egypt. Practically overnight Jesus' father, Joseph, moves his family out of the country—out of Israel and into Egypt. Here's the text. Matthew 2:14-15.

“So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

International travel back then was not what it is today. Modern conveniences ease travel today and increase comfort, yet it still remains difficult for us. Joseph and Mary, however, risked their very lives in order to relocate internationally. This effort was not undertaken lightly. Joseph was, after all, under orders from an angel.

Question: what do you think are the chances an ancient near-eastern middle-class laborer would embark upon world travel with only a moment's notice? He risked the life of his fiancée. He risked the life of his (adoptive) child, not to mention his own. This kind of journey was highly unusual. So it seems unlikely this scenario would have played out under other circumstances—that it was mere coincidence to fulfill prophecy.

When compared to non-biblical prophecy, this one seems awfully specific. It names the country out of which he is

called–Egypt–not something vague like “foreign country.” No. The prophet Hosea mentions Egypt specifically in chapter 11:1. Further it mentions the gender of the child—a male child, a son.

The specificity of the prophecy and the unlikely nature of the event occurring on its own both point to divine orchestration. This was no accident. The fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus’ birth make the Bible seem a lot more reliable.

Your life is in the balance of the Bible’s reliability. The teachings recorded in this book can save your life. The bigger question is, will you believe them? Do you want to be saved? Do you believe Jesus is Lord and accept His sacrifice on the cross to save you from sin? (If so, please email me at paul@probe.org.) I want to hear from you.

Jesus, Genocide Survivor

Three fulfilled prophecies recorded by Matthew chapter two—in the Christmas story—underscore the reliability of this controversial ancient text. The Christmas story is evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we consider the third prophecy Jesus’ birth story fulfills: namely, that there would be a genocide killing babies. Here’s the text from Matthew 2:16-18.

“Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.’”

The gospel writer, Matthew, is quoting a prophecy of Jeremiah. To decode this passage, first keep in mind that Rachel,

Jacob's wife, was mother to Israel's twelve tribes, and here she is a kind of symbolic mother for all of Israel. The second point to note is that Ramah is located in Bethlehem.

With that in mind, the prophecy foretells of Israel's mothers crying in Bethlehem, mourning the loss of their children. The author draws our attention to the amazing accuracy of this prophecy. Not only does he get right the who and the what—the moms and their weeping because of the lost babies, but he also correctly prophesies the small village! Incredible.

What are the chances Jesus would fulfill this prophecy this specifically? And as we discussed before, if Jesus were no more than a charlatan attempting to self-fulfill these prophecies, how could a man orchestrate something as large-scale as the death of all the baby boys in a village? Plus the Bible records that was Herod's idea. And remember, Herod didn't want Jesus around. Herod was attempting to eliminate potential competition for his throne.

The genocide ordered by the Jewish king, an event that is part of the Christmas story of Jesus' birth, fulfills prophecy. In so doing it shows the Bible is reliable. That's a big deal because the Bible records the story of a very important man—one whom you need to know: Jesus.

Conclusion

We've been discussing how the Christmas story indicates the Bible is true. We've done that by considering three instances recorded in Matthew 2 that fulfill Old Testament prophecy.

First, the prophet Micah prophesied the coming Ruler would come out of Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2:1 records that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Second, the prophet Hosea prophesied that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt. Jesus' father Joseph moved infant Jesus to Egypt to flee the coming baby genocide. When it was safe,

Joseph was instructed in a dream to return. So Jesus was called out of Egypt. (Matthew 2:14)

Then thirdly, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied all the mothers in Bethlehem would mourn the loss of their children. Matthew 2:16 records that after King Herod learns the news of Jesus' birth, he orders all infant boys in Bethlehem killed.

What are the chances of one man fulfilling ALL of those prophecies? Not likely! If you want more, read Josh McDowell's book *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. He records 61 prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. In it he quotes professor Peter Stoner who calculated the probability of Jesus fulfilling just eight prophecies. He illustrates the likelihood this way. Cover the state of Texas in two feet of silver dollars. Mark just one silver dollar. Now choose one silver dollar at random from anywhere in the state. The chances of picking up the marked silver dollar on the first try are the same as Jesus fulfilling just eight Old Testament prophecies. Not happening!

We have good evidence that what the Bible records is accurate. It will stand up to criticism that Jesus attempted to fulfill prophecy on his own, to position himself as a teacher with authority, influence, or to gain a following. But the fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy we discussed cannot be intentionally self-fulfilled. They either occurred before He was born, or were entirely out of His control.

Do you now believe in Jesus because you listened to this? Email me. I'd love to hear from you (paul@probe.org). Are you already His disciple? God has a unique purpose for your life, only you can fulfill. You are his ambassador. Share the good news. Your life is not the only one at stake. Your neighbor's is too. Have you shared with him or her yet? Take your next step of faithfulness today, whatever that is. I am praying you do.

You now have a great conversation starter to help you get

there. The Christmas story is tremendous evidence for biblical truth.

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A Christian Worldview Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment

Steve Cable examines the Second Amendment from a biblical perspective.

In today's America, the Second Amendment invokes intense arguments regarding its meaning and application. Events like the Newton school, the Aurora movie theater, and the Tucson shopping center shootings bring sorrow to our minds and prayers to our lips. Some say the way to prevent these tragedies is to remove the right for individuals to own and carry firearms. Others argue that firearms carried by responsible individuals could have prevented much, if not all, the carnage of these mass shootings.

Any discussion of the Second Amendment should begin by making sure we are familiar with the wording and the original meaning of this part of our Bill of Rights. The Second Amendment states: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Although we can reasonably assume the authors of the Bill of Rights and the people of that day felt that this was an unambiguous statement, it is not the case today.



Some believe that the phrase “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms” creates an individual constitutional right. This view is referred to as the “individual right theory,”^{1} that legislative bodies are precluded from prohibiting firearm possession. Others argue that the phrase “a well-regulated Militia” means that it was only intended to restrict Congress from legislating away a state’s right of self-defense. This view is called the “collective rights theory.”^{2}

In all likelihood, the authors intentionally combined these two thoughts. The states could not muster a militia of their people unless the people were allowed to keep arms. This view is supported by people involved in crafting and/or approving the Bill of Rights. Samuel Adams wrote, “The said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to . . . prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms.”^{3} Similarly, Noah Webster wrote, “Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in American cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be on any pretense, raised in the United States.”^{4}

Does a Christian worldview provide guidance for our views on the Second Amendment? The Bible does not talk about guns, but does it provide instruction on this issue? In 1 Peter, we learn that governments bear the sword to implement justice. Under our Constitution, we, the people, are ultimately the ones who bear the sword to ensure justice.

The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?

As discussed above, those responsible for the Second Amendment intended to ensure individuals could bear firearms legally. What concerns led to this original amendment to our constitution?

To understand, we should review the context for the introduction of the Bill of Rights. When the Constitution was sent to the states for ratification in 1787, two groups formed around adding a bill of rights to the Constitution, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The Federalists supported the Constitution as written, believing that any attempt to list certain rights as remaining with individuals or states would be interpreted as making other rights subject to the federal government. The Anti-Federalists believed it was important to clearly state key fundamental rights over which the federal government would have no jurisdiction. Neither group was arguing against any of the Bill of Rights, but rather whether it was more effective to be silent or to list them explicitly.

The Federalists, who had the majority of delegates to the convention, were wrong in assuming that most people would agree with their hands-off approach. This situation led to many of the states ratifying the Constitution with the stipulation that a bill of rights be added. The right to bear arms was a common component of these stipulations. As James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, "The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation . . . forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition . . . The several kingdoms of Europe . . . are afraid to trust the people with arms." [\[5\]](#)

When the first Congress met, James Madison presented a bill of rights before the members of the House. The first Congress converted these into twelve amendments which were sent back to the states for ratification in September of 1789. The language which would become the Second Amendment was essentially unchanged from that offered by Madison. On March 1, 1792, Thomas Jefferson announced the ratification of the United States Bill of Rights.

In Romans, Paul wrote, "But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for (governing authorities) do not bear the sword for nothing;

for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.”[\[6\]](#) However, if government officials hold all power, those who would control us will seek that power by taking over the government. In our constitutional system, the people are the ultimate governing authorities and thus are given the right to bear arms to protect the nation against those who would take over for the practice of evil.

The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?

As noted previously, two different thoughts arose in interpreting the Second Amendment, namely the “individual rights theory” and the “collective rights theory.” Which view is supported by the Supreme Court?

In the most recent ruling of 2008, the court ruled the amendment confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense. It also determined that the clause concerning a well-regulated militia does not limit the part which clearly states an individual’s right to keep and bear arms. Thus, the Court affirmed the “individual rights theory” of interpretation.

Remember, the framers of the Second Amendment were aware that guns held by individuals could be used for criminal activity. They felt that protecting individual liberty was more important than trying to create a perfectly safe environment. However, it should not be interpreted that everyone should have equal access to firearms. The Court has supported laws which 1) restrict those with mental problems or a criminal background in acquiring guns and 2) limit general access to specific types of weapons for mass destruction.

The difficult question is, when does the government cross the line into the realm of interfering with a person’s rights? First, what is meant by arms; does it include tanks, RPGs,

etc.? Second, what could legally preclude a person's right to bear arms? What type of personality or personality disorder makes it dangerous to others for you to carry a gun?

On the first question, the answer is not defined by what is needed for hunting or protection from thieves. From the perspective of the Founding Fathers, it needs to be weapons such that if a sufficient number of people possess them, the government is unable through the force of an army to impose any unconstitutional burdens upon the people. The Court's position is that rifles and handguns are sufficient and that the government has the right to control other types of weapons.

The second question is equally difficult: how does one determine who is sane enough to have the right to bear arms? The Court has allowed this to be defined in terms of mental deficiencies, mental problems and a criminal background.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, we are told to pray for those in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life with all godliness and dignity. Our Constitution indicates that we are to take up arms as necessary to protect a government supporting godliness and dignity. It is reasonable to preclude those without a sane concept of a quiet and peaceful life from accessing firearms, which would always be a small minority of the populace.

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Ignored?

To this point, we have laid out the history and the status of our right to bear arms. We have three possible responses: 1) accept and obey this law, 2) ignore it as counter to God's greater law, or 3) work to repeal the law. Let us first consider the question, "Is this a law that we should ignore?"

As spelled out in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, Christians are to uphold the laws of our land. Although no specific governmental system is promoted in the New Testament, we appreciate a system that protects our ability to worship God consistent with 1 Timothy 2:1-2. We support protecting the individual religious freedom offered by this country. At the same time, we want to limit robbery, murder and mayhem. How do these potentially conflicting desires relate to our view of the Second Amendment?

Remember, its underlying purpose is to ensure that our freedoms as individuals and as states are never trampled on by the federal government or others. The framers of the Constitution were worried about the tendency of large governments to attempt to consolidate their power at the expense of freedom. As Christians, we should desire to live in a society where we are free to worship God and share our faith with others.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, we see that we should pray for such a society because "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." As citizens of this nation, the Second Amendment makes it clear that we have a responsibility to protect our rights from those who would attempt to abuse their position, to maintain our freedoms including our freedom to live godly lives and share Christ freely.

In 2 Peter 2:13-14, we are to submit "for the Lord's sake to every human institution," whether to a king or his representatives. Within our structure of government, we submit to our Constitution and its principles. The Second Amendment calls for us (if needed) to be armed and ready as individuals to participate in a state militia or, in the absence of a militia, to act as individuals to protect our liberty. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that this also confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful

purposes.

Clearly, the right to bear arms as defined in our Constitution and explained by Supreme Court rulings is not counter to biblical teaching. Therefore, we are to act in accordance with this amendment to our Constitution. Whether we should try to repeal this law is discussed below.

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?

If the Second Amendment creates more harm than good, we can support repealing it. The main argument for this position is that guns are used by some to harm the innocent. If guns are freely available to the citizenry, does the harm done outweigh the value envisioned by the Second Amendment?

Many innocent people have been killed by deranged individuals and criminals with guns; at the same time, we cannot remember a time when American citizens were called to the streets to protect our Constitution. Have we reached a point where the nature of today's weapons and our society make the Second Amendment a detriment?

One group argues that if private ownership was illegal and strictly enforced, it would severely limit gun violence. An opposing view believes the problem is actually worsened by the lack of gun ownership by the public. If more law abiding citizens were armed and prepared to respond, the number of people killed would drop due to the deterrent effect.

What is the problem with repealing the Second Amendment? To have no guns among the citizenry, the government must be very proactive in removing guns from society as a whole. Guns must be removed from those not inclined to obey—; a very difficult task as evidenced by the prevalence of alcohol during Prohibition. If accomplished, the government must assume unprecedented powers which may be fine as long as

the Constitutional is not usurped. But if a future government decides to do so, there will be nothing to stop it.

Swords were used to kill people in Jesus' day. Did Jesus rail against the presence of swords and demand that no one but soldiers should carry them? No, in fact, he told His disciples that he who had no sword should buy one because of the troubled days ahead.^{7} Peter was carrying his sword in the garden when Jesus was arrested.^{8} While Jesus kept Peter from interfering with His arrest, Jesus did not use that situation to initiate a "sword control" campaign.

Perhaps a more sensible way to control gun violence would be to encourage law-abiding citizens to carry weapons, particularly in public areas. This approach creates a deterrent against the insane, the criminal, and a future government gone amok.

According to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, in the last days, swords will be beaten into plowshares and nations will no longer lift up the sword against other nations. We are clearly not in those last days now. Keeping the Second Amendment in place highlights our commitment to a government "of the people, by the people and for the people," while we wait for Christ's bodily return.

Notes

1. *Second Amendment*, Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second_amendment

2. Ibid.

3. Philip Mulivor, *Proclaiming Liberty: What Patriots and Heroes Really Said about the Right to Keep and Bear Arms*, Brightman Press, New York, 2011 quoting Samuel Adams, Amendment introduced on 6 Feb. 1788 in the Massachusetts ratifying convention, qtd. *In Debates and Proceeding in the Cnvention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Held in the*

Year 1788

4. Ibid., Noah Webster, "An Examination of the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution." *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States Published During Its Discussion by the People 1787-1788*.

5. Ibid., James Madison, "Paper 46," *The Federalist Papers*.

6. Romans 13:4

7. Luke 22:35-38

8. John 18:10

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Christmas Articles



Various articles about Christmas by Probe staff members.

[Why the Stories of the Virgin Birth Fit Together](#) [Tom Davis]

Tom Davis answers the charge that the two nativity accounts in the gospels contradict each other, showing how well they complement each other by contributing details from two different perspectives.

[A Christmas Quiz](#) [Dale Taliaferro]

A quiz concerning the Christmas story from a biblical perspective.

[3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth](#) [Paul Rutherford]

Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth.

[The Star of Bethlehem](#) [Dr. Ray Bohlin]

What was the Star of Bethlehem? Some people suggest it was an astronomical conjunction of planets and stars. But it might have been the Shekinah Glory, a physical manifestation of God's presence on earth.

[Christmas Film Favorites](#) [Todd Kappelman]

Todd Kappelman highlights some favorite films of the Christmas season, encouraging Christians to enjoy the films while separating the sacred from the secular: *A Christmas Carol*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

[Truth You Can Sing About: 5 Christmas Carols](#) [Steven Davis]

Probe Radio producer Steven Davis wrote the scripts providing devotional insights into five Christmas carols, and his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis wrote and performed the music underneath.

[Truth You Can Sing About: Part 2](#) [Steven Davis]

Probe Radio producer Steven Davis wrote five more scripts providing devotional insights into five Christmas carols, and his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis wrote and performed the music underneath.

[Truth You Can Sing About: Part 3](#) [Steven Davis]

For the third year in a row, Steven Davis and his son Jon Clive Davis collaborated on a new look at five Christmas carols, accompanied throughout each day's broadcast by new compositions of each carol.

[The Theology of Christmas Carols](#) [Dr. Robert Pyne]

A look at the theology behind five Christmas carols: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Joy to the World, O Little Town of Bethlehem, and O Holy Night.

[Christmas SHINY!](#) [Sue Bohlin]

The visible presence of God in the Old Testament—the Shekinah glory—shows up again at Christmas. No wonder we like shiny, sparkly things that remind us of the glory of heaven!

[Is Christmas Necessary?](#) [Jerry Solomon]

Christians have had to respond to the customs of the surrounding culture since the beginning of the church. In the end, though, Christmas is necessary only in terms of its historical and theological content.

[Reincarnation: The Christmas Counterfeit](#) [Sue Bohlin]

Sue blogs that Jesus is the only person who had a life before His birth, which we celebrate at Christmas.

[Celebrating Christmas Wrongly?](#) [Sue Bohlin]

Sue suggests that our motives are what determines whether we're celebrating Christmas right or not.

[Loving God Through Xmas Music?](#) [Sue Bohlin]

Sue Bohlin suggests that believers practice discernment as we listen to Christmas music, putting each song in the right category and allowing each category to point us to Christ.

[Why I Won't Apologize For Watching Hallmark Christmas Movies](#)

[Sue Bohlin]

Cultivating a biblical worldview, seeing everything through the lens of creation|fall|redemption, has led Sue to see how the happy endings of Hallmark movies point to the Ultimate Happy Ending in the book of Revelation.

[The Christmas Story: Does It Still Matter?](#) [Rusty Wright]

Christmas often means time with family, hectic shopping, parties, cards and gifts. But what about the first Christmas?

Why is the original story the baby in a manger, shepherds, wise men, angels important, if at all? The answer may surprise you.

[The First Christmas Wreath](#) [Jimmy Williams]

The founder of Probe Ministries examines the role of the wreath in Christmas.

[The Great Light](#) [Jimmy Williams]

A short essay on the role of light at Christmas.

[The Stable](#) [Jimmy Williams]

Jimmy Williams examines the symbolic and prophetic role of the stable in Christmas.

[Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?](#) [Rusty Wright]

Have you ever missed a great opportunity because you weren't listening carefully? Twenty centuries ago some clues to impending good news of monumental import eluded most folks. Fascinating prophecies of Jesus' birth and life bring revealing insights into your own life today.

Why the Stories of the Virgin Birth Fit Together

Tom Davis answers the charge that the two nativity accounts in the gospels contradict each other, showing how well they complement each other by contributing details from two different perspectives.

It is December again, the time of year that western culture celebrates Christmas. Historically Christians claimed that Jesus was born on December 25 as early as the late second century.^[1] The primary biblical and historical sources for

Jesus' birth are found in Matthew chapters 1 and 2, and Luke chapters 1 and 2. These chapters tell us the history of God becoming one of us through the virgin conception and birth of Jesus. The birth of Jesus is important because it is the beginning of God fulfilling his promise to send a savior to Israel. Many opponents of Christianity reject these stories as myths or fanciful stories. Their view is that these stories are made up to fulfill prophecy. They claim that these accounts are two completely different stories that are incompatible with each other.

Some Alleged Problems

One skeptic in particular, New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman, claims that "The problem is that some of the differences between Matthew and Luke are very difficult to reconcile with one another."[{2}](#) When reading objections like this it sounds as if the early Christians were not aware that the four Gospels were not identical in the way that they told the story of the life of Jesus.

However, the early Christians were aware that each Gospel tells us about the life of Jesus from a particular point of view. When these stories are examined, they complement each other and give a more complete account of the birth of Jesus. The end process of examining these issues and giving a complete account is called a harmony. The first harmony, the Diatessaron, was written by a Christian named Titian around A.D. 170. [{3}](#)

Ehrman raises an issue that he thinks is irreconcilable: "Where was Joseph and Mary's home town?"[{4}](#) Ehrman points out that Luke says Joseph and Mary live in Nazareth and have to travel to Bethlehem because of a census, while Matthew does not mention them living in Nazareth before the birth of Jesus. But is this really a contradiction? No! Luke tells us about the things that happened in Nazareth while Matthew chooses not to address those things.

Ehrman points out that there are wise men in Matthew, but there are shepherds in Luke.[{5}](#) But Luke tells us that the shepherds visited Jesus on the night of his birth, while Matthew says that the wise men came some time, probably more than a year, after Jesus was presented at the Temple.

Ehrman also points out that Matthew tells us Herod wants to kill Jesus, while Luke tells us Caesar wants a census taken.[{6}](#) But these are not contradictory claims. There is no reason to say that if one happened the other could not.

We have seen in a brief overview how the claim that the stories of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke are not compatible with one another can be resolved. But how do the stories fit together? I will summarize the narratives in Matthew and Luke, then combine the narratives to show that when they are combined they fit together to make one fuller narrative.

Matthew's Narrative (Matthew 1:18-2:23)

As I summarize the birth narrative in Matthew, who is visited by angels? Who is making the decisions? From whose perspective is the story being told? These questions help tell us who is the possible source of the story.

Matthew begins his narrative with Joseph. Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married. In ancient Israel, engagements lasted a year. Mary is pregnant before they are married. Joseph does not want to marry Mary, but also does not want to disgrace her family. He decides to make the divorce private.

While Joseph was thinking these things over, an angel from God tells him that Mary's pregnancy is an act of God. Joseph will have a son, and the son's name will be Jesus. Jesus will save his people from their sins.

When Joseph wakes up he changes his mind and marries Mary. Joseph and Mary do not have sexual relations and she is a virgin when her son is born. They named their son Jesus as the

angel instructed Joseph. Matthew tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Later, some Magi, probably from Persia, show up looking for the one who was born King of the Jews. These Magi claim to have seen this king's star, so they came to worship him.

King Herod does not like the news that the Magi bring. He is the king and there is no room for another king. So Herod goes to the chief priests and the scribes to find out where the Christ is supposed to be born. They search the scripture and tell Herod that the Christ will be born in Bethlehem. Herod tells the Magi that the new king was born in Bethlehem. Herod asks the Magi to stop by on their way back to Persia and tell him where the new king will be found so he can go and worship him too. However, Herod wants to kill this new king, because he is the king and there will not be another king.

As the Magi are approaching Bethlehem they see the star again. The star leads them to the house where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus are staying. The Magi worship Jesus and give him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The Magi are warned in a dream not to go back to see Herod, so they go back to Persia without stopping in Jerusalem.

An Angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him that Herod wants to kill Jesus, and that he needs to go to Egypt to escape Herod. Joseph wakes up and takes Mary and Jesus to Egypt.

Herod realizes that the Magi went back to Persia without telling him where the new king was born. Herod is furious! He sends soldiers into Bethlehem with orders to kill every boy under the age of two.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus live in Egypt until Herod dies. Then, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him to return to Israel. Joseph wants to return to Judea, but he is afraid the new ruler, Archelaus, will kill Jesus so he moves to

Nazareth.

Notice that in Matthew the narrative focuses on Joseph's role in the events surrounding Jesus' birth. Matthew 1 gives Jesus' genealogy through Joseph's lineage. The narrative begins with Joseph having to decide whether he should divorce Mary, or continue with their engagement and marriage. Joseph is visited by an angel in his dreams three times. This focus on Joseph suggests that this narrative is told from Joseph's point of view. Next I will summarize Luke's narrative.

Luke's Narrative (Luke 1:5-2:52)

As we did with Matthew, ask, who is the main character in the story? Who does the story focus on?

Zechariah, a priest faithful to God, had no children because his wife, Elizabeth, could not have children. Zechariah was selected to enter the sanctuary of the Temple to burn incense when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Gabriel tells Zechariah that Elizabeth will become pregnant and they will have a son who is to be named John. Zachariah is skeptical, so Gabriel makes him unable to speak. As Gabriel said, Elizabeth becomes pregnant.

Six months later Gabriel is sent to Nazareth to visit a virgin, Mary. Mary is engaged to Joseph. Gabriel tells Mary that she has found favor with God and she will conceive and have a boy who is to be named Jesus. Mary does not understand how this can be. Gabriel explains that it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, who happens to be Mary's cousin. When Mary arrives John, who is not yet born, recognizes that Mary's child, Jesus, is the coming Messiah. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and recognizes that Mary's child will be blessed.

Elizabeth gives birth to John. After John was circumcised her

neighbors and relatives wanted to name the child after Zechariah. Elizabeth tells them the child is to be named John. This causes an argument among the people because he has no ancestor named John. Zechariah regains his speech and ends the discussion by proclaiming that his son's name is John. This amazes the people and news of this spread throughout Judea.

Mary is back in Nazareth when Caesar calls for a census. Joseph, her husband, is from the lineage of David, who is from Bethlehem. This means that Joseph and Mary have to travel to Bethlehem for the census. While they are there, Mary gives birth to Jesus. Mary wraps Jesus in blankets and lays him in a manger because there is no room in the guest room.

There were shepherds in the area who were watching over their flocks of sheep. Suddenly an angel from God appeared to them. This frightened the shepherds. The Angel told them not to be afraid. He brought them good news, the Messiah was born in Bethlehem. Then a group of angels appeared proclaiming, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth to people he favored."

When the angels leave, the shepherds decide to go to Bethlehem to see the child. When they arrive, they find Mary, Joseph, and the baby in a manger just like the angels told them they would. The shepherds tell Joseph and Mary about the visit of the angels and what they said about the child. The shepherds leave praising God. Mary continues to think about these things.

After eight days Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple to be circumcised. While at the Temple Joseph and Mary are approached by Simeon, who has been told by the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah before he died. Simeon shares this with Mary and Joseph, telling them that Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles and would bring glory to Israel. Then Anna, a prophetess, comes to see Jesus in the Temple. Anna thanks God and tells the people about Jesus.

After all the requirements of the law were fulfilled, Mary and Joseph return to Nazareth.

Notice that in Luke, the angels appear to Mary. Luke includes Mary's journey to visit Elizabeth, and that John and Jesus are relatives on Mary's side of the family. The genealogy in Luke 3 goes through Heli, who is Mary's father. Luke's account of the birth of Jesus seems to come from Mary's perspective.

Combining the Stories

Finally I will place the two stories together to make one story. Do the transitions from Luke to Matthew, or from Matthew to Luke, flow smoothly? Are there any contradictions or irreconcilable differences?

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Egypt.

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When we combine both narratives we can see that we have two narratives that are told from two different perspectives. These differing perspectives lead to an emphasis on different details. When the accounts are harmonized we can see that these details are not contradictory, they are complementary. The narratives fit nicely together, like the pieces of a puzzle, to make a more complete larger picture of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus.

Conclusion

God became one of us. God did what he promised he would do in the Old Testament. The conception and birth of Jesus is the beginning of the defeat of death and sin. Jesus' birth is directly tied to His death and resurrection. The power of sin, death, and Satan is broken. This is the reason that Christians celebrate this event every year. As the angels said, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors." (Luke 2:14 SCB)

Notes

1. "The traditional date for the birth of Christ from as early as Hippolytus (ca. A.D. 165-235) has been December 25th." Hoehner, Harold W. *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 25.

2. Ehrman, Bart. *Jesus: The Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1999), 36.
3. Thomas, Robert, L. *A Harmony of the Gospels with Explanations and Essays*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 269.
4. Ehrman, 37.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

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