

“Where Was God Between Cain and Abel, and Noah?”

I am conversing with a Wiccan. One of her reasons for turning away from Christianity is that God was silent after dealing with Cain and Abel up to the time of Noah and the flood. For nearly two thousand years pagan civilizations thrived, say in Sumeria and Mesopotamia. Where was this monotheistic God at this time in history? In her mind this God is uninvolved and therefore heartless for bringing a flood. Where in the Bible does it say God was involved with man during this time? I must say this got me thinking. Can you please help me out here?

God was indeed involved in the affairs of His creation between the time of Cain and Abel and the Flood. The clearest example of His involvement (in a clearly miraculous sense) can be found in Genesis 5:24 – “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (see also Heb. 11:5). Clearly, such an event requires Divine intervention.

Obviously, this one example is enough to prove God’s involvement in the affairs of men and the world between the time of Cain and Abel and the Flood. But God is actually constantly involved in the affairs of the world. In the first place, the world only exists because God created it (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16; etc.). And the universe is continuously upheld in existence by the word and power of God (Heb. 1:3). Thus, God’s involvement with His creation is continuous. And God has revealed Himself to man not only in the Bible and Christ (special revelation), but also in creation (Psalm 19:1-4; Rom. 1:18-23), providential acts of kindness (Acts 14:17), and conscience (Rom. 2:14-15) – all examples of what is called general revelation. Such revelation is also continuous and ongoing to all men, at all times, in all places.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Did the Jesus Stories Arise from Pagan Myths?”

In his book *The Jesus Mysteries* Tim Freke speculates that the New Testament stories originated as pagan myth. Clearly there are very close resemblances to stories of Greek Dionusis and Egyptian Osiris, and others such as nativity stories, 12 disciples, ministry, miracles and message, last supper, crucifixion, resurrection, and return to judge man.

Bishops in the 4th century selected and revised the books of the New Testament to be consistent with their agreed-upon orthodox doctrine. Some openly acknowledged the more than coincidental “Jesus” stories in pagan mythology. They explained this as the work of the devil trying to deceive the faithful by creating these myths years before the supposed birth of Jesus. This is far too much of a stretch for me to accept.

If Biblical stories originated from pre-existent myth, how can we Christians reconcile this with our faith?

Thanks for writing Probe Ministries. You raise some interesting issues that are still debated among scholars today. Although I am far from an expert in this area, the little bit of reading which I have done leads me to a conclusion roughly as follows.

First, it is true that some of the Mystery Religions and pagan

stories arose prior to Christianity. What's not always as clear, however, is the precise doctrinal content of these religions prior to Christianity. In other words, some of the doctrines which are very similar to Christianity did not arise until AFTER the origin and spread of the Christian church. Thus, while a particular Mystery Religion, etc., may have existed prior to Christianity, it may still have borrowed Christian themes, symbols and doctrines after the origin of the Christian church. In those cases, the doctrinal borrowing was done by the Mystery Religions – not by Christianity.

Second, we have to ask, "Are these pagan stories history, or are they myths?" Although we may not always have all the evidence we would like, most scholars would readily acknowledge that there is no good reason for believing these stories to be anything other than myths. The Gospel stories, on the other hand, are firmly rooted in history. Additionally, when one looks very carefully at the alleged parallels between Christianity and pagan religions, what one typically finds is that the "parallels" are actually quite superficial. For instance, one might find myths related to the cycle of seedtime and harvest, in which a god dies and rises ANNUALLY in conjunction with the pattern of "death" and apparent "rebirth" in nature. This is, in a sense, a mythological expression of what happens in nature each year. But the Gospel writers don't speak of Christ's death in these terms. His death is not an annual event associated with seasonal changes, it was a once-for-all-time event in which God reconciled the world to Himself through the death of His Son as a substitutionary sacrifice for the world's sins! For reasons such as these (i.e., the non-historical qualities of the pagan stories and their superficial similarities to Christianity), I think it's somewhat of an unwarranted leap to conclude that early Christians stole their ideas from these pagan beliefs and practices.

Third, Christianity arose out of Judaism, which was thoroughly

monotheistic at the time of Christ. But these theories have early Jewish Christians borrowing from pagan, polytheistic beliefs, rather than from Jewish, monotheistic ones. Frankly, I find this thesis extremely difficult to swallow if, as the critics say, Christianity arose by purely naturalistic processes (as opposed to a unique set of supernatural events).

Finally, suppose that there are some pagan accounts which seem to resemble Christianity and which are earlier in time. Since most scholars agree that these accounts are mythological, not historical, what might we conclude from this evidence? Personally, I like what C.S. Lewis had to say. He said that these ancient myths, largely the products of poetic imagination, were essentially good dreams sent to the pagans by God foreshadowing the good things to come. What they had seen in these dreams ("through a glass darkly," as it were), God later did clearly and in history when He sent His Son to be our Savior. According to Lewis, the Gospel story about Jesus is "myth become fact." That is, the ancient myth has now become true history in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This idea, in my opinion, has genuine merit.

As for the idea that bishops in the 4th century selected and revised the books of the New Testament to be consistent with their agreed-upon orthodox doctrine, this is simply false. We have manuscript evidence for the New Testament as far back as the early second century. No such revision occurred. There were, of course, selection criteria. But these were hardly arbitrary. The doctrinal content of the books did have to conform to the "rule of faith." But this insured the purity of the church's doctrine – not its corruption. Thus, many false and spurious "gospels" of the second century and later were rejected. But this was because they were not written by apostles (or companions of apostles), they did not conform to the "rule of faith," they had numerous historical and theological inaccuracies, and the church recognized them as

inferior products which lacked any sign of God's divine authorship and inspiration, etc.

Thus, biblical stories did not originate from pre-existent myths. They are firmly rooted in history, as even extra-biblical historical sources and archaeology repeatedly confirm.

Hope this sets your mind at ease a bit.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“People in Hell DIE, Not Suffer Forever!”

In answer to the e-mail question [“Are People in Hell Isolated and Alone?”](#) The bible clearly states that the wages of sin is DEATH not eternal life, be it in heaven or hell as you think. Malachi 4:3 plainly says they shall be ashes under our feet. In Is.1:28 “...and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed.” Is.66:17 says “...shall be consumed together, saith the Lord.” Rev 20:9 “...and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.” Rev 20:14 “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” Doesn't say second life but second death. You should look up some of the Greek and Hebrew words that have been translated into hell, that would make it more clear to you.

Thank you for your letter. You are correct in noting that the fate of unbelievers is one of heated debate these days, even among professing evangelicals. My own difficulty with the

thesis of conditional immortality stems from passages like Matthew 25:46, Revelation 14:9-11 and Revelation 20:10. It is difficult for me to see how these passages can be consistent with the denial of eternal punishment.

For example, in Matthew 25:46 Jesus states: "And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." The same Greek term, *aionion* (eternal), is used to describe both punishment and life.

Revelation 14:11 reads in part: "And the smoke from their torture will go up forever and ever, and those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night." What troubles me about this verse is the concluding phrase, "those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night." Again, these unfortunate people appear to be enduring eternal, conscious torment.

Finally, in Revelation 20:10 we read: "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they will be tormented there day and night forever and ever." The beast and false prophet are both human beings. And yet, along with the devil, they will endure eternal punishment. Furthermore, Revelation 19:20 states, "Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf—signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur." Please note that this takes place prior to the thousand year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:1-7). And yet, when the thousand years are over, the beast and false prophet are still being tormented in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). This lake of fire is the same place where all unbelievers are thrown in Revelation 20:15.

It's true that this is called the "second death," but does the Bible equate "death" with "annihilation"? How do you read

Ephesians 2:1-2? The Ephesians were formerly “dead.” But does this mean that they didn’t have personal, conscious existence? Wouldn’t you agree that the Ephesians were spiritually dead (i.e. separated from the spiritual life of God)? And might this not also be what the Bible means by the “second death” (i.e. unremedied spiritual death results in eternal separation from God)? When the Bible speaks of death it does not mean “annihilation.” Rather, it means “separation.”

Physical death is the “separation” of the spirit from the body (James 2:26). Spiritual death is the “separation” of a conscious, living person from God (Ephesians 2:1-2). And the second death is the “eternal separation” of an unredeemed person from God (Revelation 20:11-15).

This, at any rate, is why it’s so difficult for me to embrace the doctrines of conditional immortality and annihilationism.

Hope this helps.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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“How was Salvation Achieved Before Christ?”

How was salvation achieved prior to the Resurrection of Christ and the spreading of Christianity?

Salvation has always been a gift of God’s grace, received by

faith alone. While today believers look back to the death and resurrection of Christ as that which makes God's gift of salvation possible, before the time of Christ believers looked forward to the coming of a Savior. This Savior, or Deliverer, would be of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; Gen. 15:6), and the seed of David (2 Sam. 7:12-17; see also Matt. 1:1-17). He was prefigured in the Passover (Exod. 12), the offerings in Leviticus 1-5, the Tabernacle, and the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), just to name a few. Furthermore, He was prophesied by Isaiah, Micah, and many others. Thus, before the coming of Christ, the CONTENT of saving faith (i.e. what someone was to believe in order to be saved) may have been somewhat different (depending on the extent of God's revelation to that point in history), but the OBJECT of saving faith has always been God and His faithful promises revealed in Scripture. This is why Paul is able to hold up Abraham as a model of faith for the first century Christians in Rome (see Romans 4). As Paul points out, all the way back in Gen. 15:6 we read of Abraham, "Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." In other words, Abraham was saved by grace, through faith, just as we are today.

God bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

Why Didn't God Communicate to

Us More Clearly?

Why is there so much confusion among believers and denominations? Why didn't God state everything in a simple, abridged manner to avoid this cluster of contradictory interpretations? This not only relates to young earth vs old earth, but on hundreds of doctrinal topics.

Thanks for your letter. You ask a very good question: "Why didn't God state everything in a simple, abridged manner to avoid this cluster of contradictory interpretations?"

Let me attempt to provide some possible options to consider. Before doing so, however, I must honestly admit that I do not know (with any certainty) why God did things the way He did. The only way I could know this would be if God had told me. And He hasn't. However, He may have given us some clues in the Bible itself.

First, I think we should always bear in mind that MOST of the Bible is readily comprehensible when read carefully. To be sure, there are "some things hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16), but much of the Bible (when read carefully) is readily understandable.

Second, sometimes man's difficulty with biblical interpretation stems from sinfulness and a strong motivation not to WANT to understand what the text says. This, I think, is why Jesus sometimes spoke in parables. Parables revealed spiritual truth to those open to receive it, but hid the truth from those who rejected Jesus and His message. Along these lines, note in particular Jesus' statement in Matthew 13:10-17—

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not

been granted.

“For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

“Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

“In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.’

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.

“For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

(See also Isaiah 6:9-10; Mark 4:11-12; Luke 8:16-18; etc.). Thus, some of the difficulty with understanding God’s word comes from man’s sinfulness, hard-heartedness, and unbelief.

Finally, with those passages which are really difficult, and about which very good Christian scholars differ, I think we have a motivation to dig deeper into God’s word, to study more diligently, to seek His meaning more carefully and prayerfully. By agonizing over difficulties, many Christians have gained a very deep knowledge of the Scriptures.

These are at least some POSSIBLE reasons why God’s word is sometimes difficult to understand. I hope they help at least a little bit.

The Lord bless you,

“What is the New Covenant?”

What is the New Covenant?

The primary Old Testament passage pertaining to the New Covenant is Jeremiah 31:31-34. In this wonderful passage God promises to make a New Covenant with His people (v. 31), a covenant unlike the Mosaic covenant (v. 32). Under this New Covenant, God promises to write His laws on the hearts of His people (v. 33), to have intimate communion with them (vv. 33-34), and to forgive their sins (v. 34).

This New Covenant was inaugurated in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. On the night of His betrayal and arrest, Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples. During the course of this meal He told them, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20).

In the New Testament, the book of Hebrews has a great deal to say about this New Covenant. In an article on “Covenant,” Trent Butler describes some of the special features of the New Covenant as related in the book of Hebrews :

“The emphasis is on Jesus, the perfect High Priest, providing a new, better, superior covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6). Jesus represented the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s new covenant promise (Heb. 8:8, 10; 10:16). Jesus was the perfect covenant Mediator (Heb. 9:15), providing an eternal inheritance in a way the old covenant could not (compare 12:24). Jesus’ death on the cross satisfied the requirement that all covenants be established by blood (Heb. 9:18, 20) just as was the first covenant (Ex.

24:8). Christ's blood established an everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20)" (*Holman Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Trent C. Butler (Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 312).

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"Did the Girl Raised from the Dead Get a Second Chance for Salvation?"

How do you explain the situation represented in Matthew 9:18-25, of the little girl being raised after dying?

While He was saying these things to them, a synagogue official came and bowed down before Him, and said, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live." Jesus got up and {began} to follow him, and so did His disciples. And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch His garment, I will get well." But Jesus turning and seeing her said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well." At once the woman was made well. When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, He said, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him. But when the crowd had been sent out, He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

My question is this: If if she was unsaved, did this girl get

a second chance at salvation? If yes, how does this fit in with knowing that “it is appointed for man once to die and after this the judgment”? Secondly, if she was saved, was she allowed to share about the glory of heaven? If not saved, how could she be brought back from Hell?

You ask some interesting and important questions, but I’m honestly not sure that either I, or anyone else, can give you any definitive answers. I will say that the doctrine of a second chance is almost always understood in the sense of a “second chance” for salvation AFTER death (sometimes even after judgment), but PRIOR to the eternal state (which is, by definition, both permanent and eternal). Thus, strictly speaking, the case of the little girl in Matthew 9 may not have any direct relevance to this doctrine. This is at least highly probable for three very good reasons:

1. Scripture nowhere clearly affirms the doctrine of a second chance for salvation after death.
2. The little girl’s death was only temporary. The Father knew all along that His Son would shortly raise her.
3. The little girl did not go before God for final judgment at this time.

The doctrine of the “intermediate state” (i.e. between death and resurrection) is debated among theologians. Most evangelicals believe that after death the immaterial part of a person goes either to a temporary place of punishment called Hades, or a temporary place of peace in the presence of the Lord called Paradise (see Luke 16:19-31; 23:43). After the resurrection and final judgment the entire person will then go to their eternal destiny (either the Lake of Fire or the new heavens and the new earth – See Revelation 20:11-21:8). Since this little girl did not enter her eternal destiny, she could not have shared about Heaven or Hell as we commonly think of them. But could she have shared about either Hades or Paradise?

The difficulty with answering such questions is twofold: 1. The Bible simply doesn't tell us whether or not the girl was saved, nor what her conscious experience (if any) was like between physical death and resuscitation. Thus, anyone trying to answer such questions will be speculating with no clear Scriptural support for this special event. 2. The case is clearly an exceptional one and thus, by definition, does not fit within the general doctrine of what happens to a person after death. Most people who die are not subsequently brought back to a natural mode of physical human existence in this world. The case is an exception, and therefore will not necessarily fit all the rules. Needless to say, the Father knew (even before the little girl died) that His Son would raise her from the dead. Therefore, the usual things which happen to a person after death need not necessarily apply in this case. The Lord had no intention that she remain dead at that time! And finally, after restoring the little girl to life, we simply aren't told whether she was allowed to share her experiences between death and resuscitation, whether or not she had any conscious experiences at all to share, or if she did, whether or not she even remembered them.

My own opinion is that, as Christians, we have an ethical obligation to honestly tell people when we've run up against the limits of our knowledge. Thus, in explaining this passage to someone, I would say much of what I've said above, but I would honestly tell them that the Bible doesn't always satisfy our curiosity about such matters. Sometimes the questions we bring to the Bible simply aren't answered there. In such cases, we must humbly confess our ignorance and rest in the knowledge of God's omniscience. God knows the whole, whereas we know only a part.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Did the OT Jews Expect a Divine Messiah?”

Did the Jews, prior to Jesus, expect the Messiah to be divine, i.e. God Himself? Everything I can find seems to indicate that they expected him to be divinely appointed, divinely empowered, with divine authority, with kingly authority and priestly authority but I don't see that necessarily the same as God Himself. Two passages could result in that expectation perhaps: Psalm 110:1 and Isa 7:14.

I was wondering this because of the people's response to Jesus, especially as He started to make clear His divine association with God the Father.

You ask a great question. It does not appear that the Jewish people anticipated a truly divine Messiah. Messiah means “anointed one” – and the Jewish people did see such people as being closely connected with God in some way (e.g. as a representative of God, empowered by His Spirit, etc.).

Over time, the Jewish concept of Messiah evolved to include a royal, prophetic, and priestly function. In the intertestamental period, particularly in the Psalms of Solomon, Messiah is regarded as a warrior-prince who would throw off the yoke of Rome and establish a Jewish kingdom. This is probably why Jesus is sometimes reluctant to identify himself as the Messiah in the Gospels.

However, when one reads the OT Messianic texts (like Ps. 110; etc.) in light of NT teachings, it becomes clear that it is quite possible to understand the OT conception of Messiah as being both human and divine. It may not have been clear to the OT Jewish people, but it does become clear in light of NT

revelation. Indeed, I think Jesus makes this very point about Ps. 110 in Matt. 22:41-46.

Hope this helps a bit.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“Why Did God Create the World Knowing Jesus Would Die?”

I would like to know why God would create the world, when He knew in advance that man would sin and Jesus would have to die. I know that God created the world for a relationship with us, and for His glory. It just seems awfully selfish for Him to create a world in which His own Son would have to suffer and die. Was it God the Son on the cross, or God the Father, too, through the Trinity? I have struggled with this question for so long.

You are correct in your observation that God knew, even prior to creating the world, that man would sin. The Father also planned to send His Son as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. As far as I know, the Bible does not explicitly tell us why God chose to create the world as He did. However, since the Bible does tell us that God is perfectly good and wise, I think we are safe in assuming that God had good and wise reasons for doing things this way. We can only speculate on what those reasons might have been. But ultimately, we have to rest in the morally perfect character of God, trusting in His goodness and wisdom.

However, I believe I would take exception with your statement, "It just seems awfully selfish for Him to create a world in which His own Son would have to suffer and die." Let me make a few observations and comments about this. First, God the Son was also involved in creation (John 1:1-3; etc.). Second, God the Son was a willing participant in the plan of redemption. The Father and Son do not will different things. They are in perfect agreement with one another. Third, I would argue that this is about the most UNselfish thing the Father could possibly do. The Father loves the Son. What could possibly be selfish about His freely giving His own Son as a redemptive sacrifice for the sins of the world? And the Bible is clear about His motive and reason for doing this. It was love (John 3:16).

Finally, it was God the Son incarnate as the Man Jesus who died on the cross. The Father did NOT die on the cross. Many people in our churches today are quite confused on this issue. One often hears prayers in which the person thanks the Father for dying on the cross. This is incorrect. The Son became incarnate and died for our sins, according to the will of His heavenly Father (which He certainly was in agreement with).

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"How Does Christians' Singing Hallelujah Differ From Hindu

Chanting?"

In discussing chanting with a Hindu, I stumbled when he pointed out that we Christians also repeat God's name when we sing "Hallelujah, hallelujah..." So are we repeating vainly? Of course not. If we are praising God, he claimed, so are they.

How can I make my point against chanting but still justify our glorification of God singing "Hallelujah"? Also he pointed out that they are praising God like we also praise God in Psalms.

It seems to me that a few points can be made to distinguish what Christians are doing from what Hare Krishnas and other Hindus are doing.

1. "Hallelujah" comes from two Hebrew words meaning "Praise the Lord" (i.e. *Hallelu Yah*). When we say Hallelujah, we are praising the Lord. This seems different from simply repeating the name of a particular god over and over. We are praising the Lord, not simply repeating His Name.

2. Although this may not be true for all of those engaged in repetitive chanting of the name of a god, nevertheless, for many of these people such chanting is intended to focus the mind and help induce an altered state of consciousness in which one "realizes" that "All is One," "All is God," "I Am God," etc. This, of course, is not what Christians are trying to achieve when they praise the Lord. Thus, the intentions of Christians in praising the Lord are very different from the intentions of some Hindus in repeating the name of a god.

3. Hindus and Christians typically have very different conceptions of "God." Even if we both refer to the Supreme Being as "God," we mean something very different by this term. Hindus are typically pantheists or polytheists; Christians are monotheists. Thus, we have very different ideas or definitions about what (or who) "God" is.

These three differences, at least in my opinion, make it very difficult to equate what Christians are doing when we praise the Lord with what Hindus are doing when they engage in the repetitive chanting of a god's name.

The Lord bless and keep you!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries