

“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,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“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).

Michael Gleghorn

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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,

“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

“How Do I Witness About the New Age Movement?”

How do I witness about the New Age movement with firm intelligence but empathy?

There are a number of helpful books available which set forth a Christian response to the New Age Movement. I will recommend a few resources you might want to consider, but the bibliographies in most of these will direct you to many further resources as well.

1. *Embraced by the Darkness: Exposing New Age Theology from the Inside Out* by Brad Scott (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996). Brad spent ten years involved in the New Age religion until converting to Christianity. He teaches at Golden Gate University.

2. *Confronting the New Age and Unmasking the New Age* by Douglas Groothuis (InterVarsity Press). Doug teaches at Denver Seminary.

3. *The New Age Movement and the Biblical Worldview* by John Newport (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). This looks like a comprehensive resource by a distinguished professor of Philosophy of Religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

4. *Apologetics in the New Age: A Christian Critique of Pantheism* by David Clark and Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990).

5. *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* by John Ankerberg and John Weldon (Oregon: Harvest House, 1996).

6. I would also recommend checking out Marcia Montenegro's website at www.christiananswersforthenewage.org. Marcia was a former astrologer who was deeply involved in the New Age Movement prior to her conversion to Christianity. She has many helpful articles on her site. CANA stands for Christian Answers for the New Age. Please be sure to check out her site.

Finally, there is a brief [article on the New Age Movement by Kerby Anderson](#) on the Probe website. In addition, there are many other related articles in our ["Cults and World Religions"](#) section on our Web site at www.probe.org.

A careful study of some of these resources, combined with prayer and compassion for those you seek to reach, will be of great benefit to you as you seek to share Christ with those you love.

Best wishes in witnessing for Him,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

Evaluating Miracle Claims

Probe's Michael Gleghorn demonstrates that not all miracle claims are equal. Although genuine miracles have occurred, a careful evaluation reveals that many claims are spurious.

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



Are They Alien Events?

I recently spoke with a Christian woman who told me of the concern she felt for many of her family members who had embraced the doctrines of Christian Science. As we discussed how she might effectively communicate the gospel to those she loved, she mentioned one of the main difficulties she faced in getting a fair hearing. Apparently, some of her family members had been surprisingly healed of various physical ailments. And naturally enough, they interpreted these healings as confirming the truth of Christian Science.

What are we, as Christians, to make of such claims? Are they miracles? What are we to think about the many sincere people, holding vastly different beliefs, who claim to have personally experienced miracles? And what about many of the world's great religious traditions that claim support for their doctrines, at least in part, by an appeal to the miraculous? Should we assume that all such claims are false and that only Christian miracle claims are true? Or might some miracles have actually occurred outside a Judeo-Christian context? Are there any criteria we can apply in evaluating miracle claims to help us determine whether or not a miracle has actually occurred? And could there be other ways of explaining such claims besides recourse to the miraculous?

Before we attempt to answer such questions, we must first agree on what a “miracle” is. Although various definitions have been used in the past, we will rely on a definition given by Richard Purtill. “A miracle is an event brought about by the power of God that is a temporary exception to the ordinary course of nature for the purpose of showing that God has acted in history.”^{1} A miracle, then, requires a personal, supernatural being who is capable of intervening in nature to bring about an effect that would otherwise not have occurred.

If this is what miracles are, then some religions have no real way of accounting for them. Take Christian Science for instance. “The Christian Science view of God is impersonal and *pantheistic*.”^{2} In this system, “miracles” can be nothing more than “divinely natural” events.^{3} But if a true miracle requires the intervention of a personal being who is beyond nature, then Christian Science has no place for such events because it does not admit the existence of such a being. As David Clark has stated: “Pantheism has no category labeled ‘free act by a divine person.’ So miracles are as alien to all forms of pantheism as they are to atheism.”^{4} Thus, far from demonstrating the truth of Christian Science, a genuine miracle would actually demonstrate its falsity! While such events may still have occurred, they can hardly be used as evidence in support of such traditions

Are They Legendary Events?

Apollonius of Tyana was, like Jesus, a traveling first century teacher. Like Jesus, he is credited with having performed a variety of miraculous feats. He is said to have healed the sick, cast out demons and predicted the future. He is even said to have raised the dead!

In a fascinating passage from his biography we read the following:

A girl had died...and the whole of Rome was

mourning...Apollonius...witnessing their grief, said: 'Put down the bier, for I will stay the tears that you are shedding for this maiden'...The crowd...thought that he was about to deliver...an oration...but merely touching her and whispering in secret some spell over her, at once woke up the maiden from her seeming death..."[\[5\]](#)

Readers familiar with the Gospel of Luke will recognize that this story is quite similar to the account of Jesus raising the widow's son (Luke 7:11-17). But isn't it inconsistent for Christians to affirm that Jesus really did perform such a miracle while denying the same for Apollonius? Not necessarily.

Suppose that the story about Apollonius is merely legendary, while the story about Jesus is truly historical. If that were so, then it would clearly make sense for Christians to deny that Apollonius raised someone from the dead while simultaneously affirming that Jesus really did perform such a feat. There are actually good reasons for believing that this is in fact the case.

Norman Geisler draws a number of significant contrasts between the evidence for Jesus and that for Apollonius.[\[6\]](#) First, the only source we have for the life of Apollonius comes from Philostratus. In contrast, we have numerous, independent sources of information about the life of Jesus. These include the four canonical gospels, many New Testament letters, and even extra-biblical references in writers like Tacitus, Josephus and others. Second, Philostratus wrote his biography about 120 years after Apollonius' death. The New Testament was written by those who were contemporaries and/or eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus. The point, of course, is that the further one gets from the original events, the more likely it is that accounts may become contaminated by later legendary developments. Third, Philostratus was commissioned to write his work by the wife of a Roman emperor, most likely as a means of countering the growing influence of Christianity. He

thus had a motivation to embellish his account and make Apollonius appear to be the equal of Jesus. The New Testament writers, however, had no such motivation for embellishing the life of Jesus. Finally, Philostratus admits that the girl Apollonius allegedly raised may not have even been dead![\[7\]](#) Luke, however, is quite clear that the widow's son was dead when Jesus raised him.

This brief comparison reveals that not all miracle claims are as historically well-attested as those of Jesus.

Are They Psychosomatic Events?

Amazing healings are among the most frequently cited miracle claims. Although many of these claims may be false, many are also true. But are they really miracles?

Some estimates indicate that up to 80 percent of disease is stress related. While such diseases are real, and really do afflict the body, they originate largely from negative mental attitudes, anxiety and other unhealthy emotions. For this reason, such diseases can often be healed through a reduction in stress, combined with positive mental attitudes and healthy emotions. But such healings should not be viewed as miracles because they do not involve God's direct, supernatural intervention.

If this is true, then we must carefully distinguish between psychosomatic events and those that are truly miraculous. Psychosomatic illnesses have psychological or emotional (rather than physiological) causes. Thus, people afflicted with such disorders may get better simply by coming to believe that they *can* get better. In other words, psychosomatic disorders can often be alleviated simply by faith—whether in God, a priest, a doctor, a pill, or a particular method of treatment. But there is nothing miraculous about this kind of healing. “It happens to Buddhists, Hindus, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and atheists. Healers claiming supernatural

powers can do it, but so can...psychiatrists by purely natural powers..."[{9}](#) Obviously, healings of this sort cannot be used as evidence for a particular belief system because all belief systems can account for them.

But are there any differences between supernatural and psychological healings that might help us decide whether or not a particular healing was truly miraculous? Norman Geisler lists a number of important distinctions.[{10}](#) First, supernatural healings do not require personal contact. Jesus occasionally healed people from a distance (John 4:46-54). In contrast, psychological healings often do require such contact, even if this simply involves laying one's hands on the television while an alleged faith-healer prays. Second, when a person is healed supernaturally there are no relapses. But relapses are common after psychological healings. Finally, a person can be healed of *any* condition by supernatural means, including organic diseases and major birth defects. Jesus healed a man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1-5) and restored the sight of one born blind (John 9). In contrast, not all conditions can be healed psychologically. Such methods are usually effective only in treating psychosomatic illnesses.

Thus, not every claim for miraculous healing is a genuine miracle. Only those healings that offer clear evidence of Divine intervention can fairly be considered miracles.

Are They Deceptive Events?

It appeared to be a miracle. The young man claimed he could see without an eye! Norman Geisler recounts an amazing demonstration he once witnessed in a seminary chapel back in the early 70s.[{11}](#) It involved a young man who had injured his left eye as a child. It was later surgically removed and replaced with a glass eye. For three years his father prayed, asking God to restore his son's vision. One day, his son excitedly announced that he could see with his glass eye! His father believed that God had worked a miracle. And apparently

he wasn't the only one.

At the chapel service the young man's father shared how the physicians who had examined his son had confirmed that his vision had been restored despite the removal of the young man's eye! The demonstration seemed to prove that this was indeed the case. The young man's glass eye was removed and his good eye was covered with a blindfold that had been inspected by one of the students in the audience. After various items had been randomly collected from those in attendance, the young man proceeded to read what was written on them! Needless to say, all who witnessed the performance were stunned by what appeared to be a genuine miracle. But was there another explanation? Although he initially thought that he had witnessed a miracle, Dr. Geisler later came to believe that he might have been deceived. But why?

It turns out that any skilled performer of magic tricks can do the very same thing. By applying some invisible lubricant to the cheek before a performance begins, the magician can have coins and clay placed over his eyes, along with a blindfold, and still read what has been handed to him. How is this possible? Dr. Geisler explains: "By lifting his forehead under the bandages, a small gap is made down the bridge of his nose through which he can see. It is not a miracle; it is magic."[\[12\]](#)

Since magic can often appear miraculous, we must carefully evaluate miracle claims for clear evidence of divine intervention. What are some differences between miracles and magic that may keep us from being deceived?[\[13\]](#)

First, miracles are of God and serve to glorify God. Magic is of man and usually serves to glorify the magician. Second, no deception is involved in miracles. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he was really dead, and had been for four days (John 11:39). But deception is an essential component of human magic. Finally, a miracle fits into nature in a way that magic does not. When Jesus healed the man born blind (John 9), He

restored the proper function of his natural eyes. By contrast, in the story above the young man claimed to see without an eye at all! While one is clearly of God, the other is simply odd.

Are They Demonic Events?

The Bible affirms the existence of both Satan and demons, evil spirit beings with personal attributes who are united in their opposition to God and His plans for the world. Although vastly inferior to God, they still possess immense intelligence and power. Is it possible that at least some of the apparently miraculous phenomena reported in the world's religions and the occult might be due to demonic spirits?

The book of Exodus seems to indicate that the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate the first two plagues that God brought upon their land (Exod. 7:22; 8:7). How should this be explained? While some believe the magicians relied on human trickery,[{14}](#) others think that demonic spirits may have aided them.[{15}](#)

Although we cannot know for sure which view is correct, the demonic hypothesis is certainly possible. Indeed, the Bible elsewhere explicitly affirms the power of Satan and demons to perform amazing feats. For instance, Luke tells of a slave-girl "having a spirit of divination...who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling" (Acts 16:16). Undoubtedly this was a demonic spirit for Luke records that Paul cast it out "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:18). This enraged the girl's masters because apparently, once the demon had been exorcised, the girl no longer retained her special powers (Acts 16:19).

In addition, Paul told the Thessalonians that the coming of the end-time ruler would be in "accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). In Revelation 13 we read that Satan gives his power and authority to this wicked ruler,

apparently even healing his otherwise fatal wound to the head (Rev. 13:3). Not only this, but the ruler's assistant is also said to perform "great signs" (v. 13). For instance, he is said to make fire come down from heaven and to give breath and the power of speech to an image of the ruler (vv. 13-15). The text implies that these wonders are accomplished through the power of Satan (v. 2).

This brief survey indicates that Satan and demonic spirits can indeed perform false signs and wonders that may initially appear to rival even genuinely Divine miracles. The book of Revelation tells us that the world of unregenerate humanity, deceived by such amazing signs, proceeds to worship both Satan and the ruler (Rev. 13:4). But how can we, as Christians, keep from being likewise deceived? In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts believers to put on "the full armor of God." Among other things, this involves taking up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (see Eph. 6:10-17). If we have faith in Christ Jesus, and if we are protected by "the full armor of God," we won't be easily deceived by "the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).

Notes

1. Richard L. Purtill, "Defining Miracles," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, eds. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary R. Habermas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 72.
2. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions and the Occult* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1990), 111.
3. Norman L. Geisler, in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, s.v. "Miracles, Magic and," (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 476.
4. David K. Clark, "Miracles in the World Religions," in Geivett and Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, 203.

5. Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, trans. F.C. Conybeare (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1912 [Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1]), 457-459, cited in Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 83.
6. Norman L. Geisler, in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, s.v., "Apollonius of Tyana," 44-45.
7. See Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 85.
8. Kenneth Pelletier, *Christian Medical Society Journal* 11, no. 1 (1980), cited in Geisler, "Healings, Psychosomatic," *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 301.
9. Norman L. Geisler, "Apollonius of Tyana," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 44-45.
10. Ibid., 118-122.
11. The story is told in Norman Geisler, *Signs and Wonders* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 59-60.
12. Ibid., 60.
13. I take these criteria from Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, 73-76.
14. See Dan Korem, *Powers: Testing the Psychic and Supernatural* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 172-176.
15. See John D. Hannah, "Exodus," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), 118.

UFOs and Alien Beings – A Christian Worldview Response

Michael Gleghorn addresses issues related to reports of UFO and alien sightings. He considers the various possible causes before closing with a biblical, Christian perspective pointing out these reports are often presented like false gospels. At the end of the day, even an alien cannot take away from the importance of faith in Christ.



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

A Tale of Two Hypotheses

It seems that almost everyone is interested in reports of UFOs and alien encounters. But how should these reports be understood? Where do these “unidentified flying objects” come from and what are they? Are intelligent beings visiting us from another planet or some other dimension? Or are UFO reports merely a collection of hoaxes, hallucinations, and misidentified phenomena? Can all UFO reports be adequately explained, or are there some that seem to defy all natural explanations? These are just a few of the questions we want to consider in this article.

First, however, it’s essential to note that most UFOs (unidentified flying objects) become IFOs (identified flying objects). John Spencer, a British UFO researcher, estimates that as many as 95 percent of received UFO reports “are turned into IFOs and explained satisfactorily.”^{[\[1\]](#)} For example, the report might be found to have been a clever prank or to have some natural explanation. Planets, comets, military aircraft, and rockets (among many others) have all been mistaken for

UFOs. But even if 99 percent of UFO reports could be satisfactorily explained, there would still be thousands of cases that stubbornly resist all natural explanations. These are called *residual* UFO reports.

If residual UFOs are not hoaxes, hallucinations, or some natural or man-made phenomena, then what are they? Most UFO researchers hold either to the extraterrestrial hypothesis or the interdimensional hypothesis. The extraterrestrial hypothesis holds that technologically advanced, interplanetary space travelers are indeed visiting our planet from somewhere else in the cosmos. Stanton Friedman, a representative of this view, states clearly, "The evidence is overwhelming that some UFOs are alien spacecraft."[{2}](#)

The interdimensional hypothesis agrees "that some UFOs are real phenomena that may exhibit physical . . . effects."[{3}](#) However, unlike the extraterrestrial hypothesis, this view does not believe that UFOs and alien beings come from somewhere else in our physical universe. So where *do* they come from? Some suggest that they come from some other universe of space and time. But others believe that they come from some other dimension entirely, perhaps a spiritual realm.[{4}](#)

How might we tell which, if either, of these two hypotheses is correct? Astronomer and Christian apologist Dr. Hugh Ross suggests that we employ the scientific approach known as the "process of elimination." He writes, "Mechanics use it to find out why the car won't start. Doctors use it to find out why the stomach hurts. Detectives use it to find out who stole the cash. This process can also be used to discover what could, or could not, possibly give rise to UFO phenomena."[{5}](#)

So what happens if we apply this process to the extraterrestrial hypothesis? Although quite popular here in America, there are some serious scientific objections to this viewpoint.

The Extraterrestrial Hypothesis

In the first place, it is highly improbable that there is another planet in our cosmos capable of supporting physical life. Dr. Ross has calculated the probability of such a planet existing by natural processes alone as less than 1 in 10^{174} . You actually have “a much higher probability of being killed in the next second by a failure in the second law of thermodynamics (about one chance in 10^{80}).”[\[6\]](#) Thus, apart from the supernatural creation of another suitable place for life, our planet is almost certainly unique in its capacity to support complex biological organisms. (See the Probe article [“Are We Alone in the Universe?”](#)) This alone makes the extraterrestrial hypothesis extremely improbable. But it gets even worse!

Suppose (against all statistical probability) that there *is* a planet with intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. What is the likelihood that such creatures are visiting our planet? And what sort of difficulties would they face in doing so?

Probably the greatest challenge to interstellar space travel is simply the immense size of the universe. One group of scientists, assuming that any alien spacecraft would likely maintain communication with either the home planet or with other members of their traveling party, “scanned all 202 of the roughly solar-type stars within 155 light-years of Earth. Not one intelligible signal was detected anywhere within the vicinity of these stars.”[\[7\]](#) This implies that, at a minimum, E.T. would have to travel 155 light-years just to reach earth. Unfortunately, numerous galactic hazards would prevent traveling here in a straight line. Avoiding these deadly hazards would increase the minimum travel distance to approximately 230 light-years.[\[8\]](#)

Dr. Ross estimates that “any reasonably-sized spacecraft transporting intelligent physical beings can travel at

velocities no greater than about 1 percent” of light-speed.[{9}](#) Although this is nearly 7 million miles per hour, it would still take about twenty-three thousand years to travel the 230 light-years to earth! Of course, a lot can go wrong in twenty-three thousand years. The aliens might run out of food or fuel. Their spacecraft might be damaged beyond repair by space debris. They might be destroyed by a contagious epidemic. The mind reels at the overwhelming improbability of successfully completing such a multi-generational mission.

In light of these facts, it doesn't appear that the extraterrestrial hypothesis can reasonably survive the process of elimination. Does the interdimensional hypothesis fare any better? A growing number of serious UFO researchers believe it can. Let's take a look.

The Interdimensional Hypothesis

The interdimensional hypothesis holds that residual UFOs “enter the physical dimensions of the universe from ‘outside’ the four familiar dimensions of length, height, width, and time.”[{10}](#) Where do they come from? Some believe that they come from another physical universe of space and time. But this does not seem possible. General relativity forbids “the space-time dimensions of any other hypothetically existing universe” from overlapping with our own.[{11}](#) For this reason, many researchers believe that residual UFOs must come from some other dimension entirely, perhaps even a spiritual realm.

What evidence can be offered for such a bold hypothesis? Many point to the strange behavior of residual UFOs themselves. Hugh Ross contends that residual UFOs “must be nonphysical because they disobey firmly established physical laws.”[{12}](#) Among the many examples that he offers in support of this statement, consider the following:[{13}](#)

1. Residual UFOs generate no sonic booms when they break the sound barrier, nor do they show any evidence of

meeting with air resistance.

2. They make impossibly sharp turns and sudden stops.
3. They send no detectable electromagnetic signals.

For example, “relative to the number of potential observers, ten times as many sightings occur at 3:00 A.M. (a time when few people are out) as at either 6:00 A.M. or 8:00 P.M. (times when many people are outside in the dark).”[\[14\]](#) If residual UFOs were simply random events, then we would expect more sightings when there are more potential observers. The fact that these events are nonrandom may suggest some sort of intelligence behind them. This is further supported by the fact that some people are more likely to see a residual UFO than others. Numerous researchers have observed a correlation between an individual’s involvement with the occult and their likelihood of having a residual UFO encounter. This may also suggest some kind of intelligence behind these phenomena.

Finally, residual UFOs not only appear to be nonphysical and intelligent, they sometimes seem malevolent as well. Many of those claiming to have had a residual UFO encounter have suffered emotional, psychological, and/or physical injury. A few people have even died after such encounters. In light of these strange characteristics, many researchers have reached similar conclusions about the possible source of these phenomena.

The Occult Connection

Many serious UFO investigators have noticed a striking similarity between some of the aliens described in UFO reports and the demonic spirits described in the Bible. Although it may not be possible to know whether some aliens are actually demons (and I certainly do not claim to know this myself), the well-documented connection between UFO phenomena and the occult cannot be denied.

In 1969 Lynn Catoe served as the senior bibliographer of a

publication on UFOs researched by the Library of Congress for the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research. After a two-year investigation, in which she surveyed thousands of documents, she drew explicit attention to the link between UFOs and the occult. She wrote, "A large part of the available UFO literature . . . deals with subjects like mental telepathy, automatic writing and invisible entities . . . poltergeist manifestations and 'possession.' Many . . . UFO reports . . . recount alleged incidents that are strikingly similar to demonic possession and psychic phenomena." [\[15\]](#) Veteran UFO researcher John Keel agrees. After surveying the literature on demonology he wrote, "The manifestations and occurrences described in this imposing literature are similar if not entirely identical to the UFO phenomenon itself." [\[16\]](#) The bizarre claim of alien abduction may lend some credibility to these remarks.

Many (though not all) of those who report an abduction experience describe the aliens as deceptive and hostile. Whitley Strieber, whose occult involvement preceded the writing of both *Communion* and *Transformation*, at times explicitly referred to his alien visitors as "demons." For example, in *Transformation* he described his emotional reaction to the aliens with these words: "I felt an absolutely indescribable sense of menace. It was hell on earth to be there, and yet I couldn't move, couldn't cry out, couldn't get away . . . Whatever was there seemed so monstrously ugly, so filthy and dark and sinister. Of course they were demons. They had to be. And they were here and I couldn't get away." [\[17\]](#)

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that abduction is often physically and emotionally painful, Mr. Strieber tends to believe that its purpose is ultimately benevolent. When integrated correctly, the abduction experience can provide a catalyst for spiritual growth and development. Still, he candidly admits that he is really not sure precisely *who* or *what* these beings actually are, and he continues to warn that

many of them are indeed hostile and malevolent.[{18}](#) In light of this, one can't help wondering about the experiences related in Mr. Strieber's books. If his encounters with aliens were not merely hallucinatory, or due to some mental disorder, isn't it at least possible that his sinister visitors really were demons? As noted above, many UFO investigators would indeed consider this (or something very much like it) a genuine possibility.

Another Gospel?

In his letter to the Galatians the Apostle Paul delivered a stirring indictment against every gospel but that of Christ. "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed" (1:8-9). Evidently, the purity of the gospel was deeply important to Paul.

In today's pluralistic society a variety of gospels are being preached. And among the great throng of voices clamoring for our attention are many UFO cults. Since the 1950s a number of these cults have arisen, often around a charismatic leader who claims to be in regular contact with otherworldly beings. Interestingly, unlike the abduction phenomenon, most contactees do not claim to have ever seen the aliens with whom they communicate. Rather, they claim that the aliens communicate with them psychically or telepathically. The contactee is simply a channel, or medium, through whom the aliens communicate their messages to humankind. This method of contact is rather intriguing for those who favor the interdimensional hypothesis. As John Saliba observes, "Many contactees . . . write about UFOs and space beings as if these were psychic phenomena, belonging to a different time/space dimension that lies beyond the scope . . . of modern science."[{19}](#)

So what sort of messages do the aliens allegedly communicate to contactees? Often they want to help guide us to the next stage of our spiritual evolution or give us advice that will help us avoid some global catastrophe. Strangely, however, many of them also want to deny or distort traditional doctrines of biblical Christianity. Oftentimes these denials and distortions concern the doctrine of Christ. For example, the Aetherius Society “views Jesus Christ as an advanced alien being . . . who communicates through a channel and travels to Earth in a flying saucer to protect Earth from evil forces.”[\[20\]](#) As a general rule, “UFO religions . . . reject orthodox Christology (Jesus’ identity as both God and man) and thus reject Jesus Christ as the . . . Creator and . . . Savior of humankind.”[\[21\]](#)

A deficient Christology, combined with an acceptance of biblically forbidden occult practices like mediumistic channeling (see Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:10-12; etc.), make many UFO cults spiritually dangerous. By preaching a false gospel, they have (perhaps unwittingly) placed themselves under a divine curse. By embracing occult practices, they have opened the door to potential demonic attack and deception. Nevertheless, there is hope for those involved with these cults. There is even hope for those tormented by hostile beings claiming to be aliens. The Bible tells us that through His work on the cross, Jesus disarmed the demonic rulers and authorities (Col. 2:15). What’s more, for those who flee to Him for refuge, He makes available the “full armor of God,” that they might “stand firm against the schemes of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). Regardless of *who* or *what* these alien beings might be, no one need live in fear of them. If Jesus has triumphed over the realm of evil demonic spirits, then certainly no alien can stand against Him. Let those who live in fear turn to Jesus, for He offers rest to all who are weary and heavy-laden (Matt. 11:28).

Notes

1. John Spencer, ed., *The UFO Encyclopedia* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), s.v. "identified flying objects (IFOs)," cited in Hugh Ross, Kenneth Samples, and Mark Clark, *Lights in the Sky & Little Green Men* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2002), 25.
2. Jerome Clark, *The UFO Encyclopedia*, 2d ed., vol. 1 (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1998), s.v. "Friedman, Stanton Terry," cited in Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 31.
3. Ross, et al., 32.
4. Ibid., 109.
5. Ibid., 34.
6. Ibid., 39.
7. Ibid., 57.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. Ibid., 109.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 69.
13. Ibid., 69-70.
14. Ibid., 116.
15. Lynn Catoe, *UFOs and Related Subjects: An Annotated Bibliography* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. iv (prepared under Air Force Office of Scientific Research Project Order 67-0002 and 68-0003), cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's and Other Supernatural Phenomena* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), 17.
16. John A. Keel, *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* (New York: Putnam's, 1970), p. 215; cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's*, 18.
17. Whitley Strieber, *Transformation: The Breakthrough* (New York: Morrow, 1988), p. 181; cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's*, 23.
18. For example, his recent online journal entry, "How We Can Protect Ourselves," (Aug. 28, 2003) at www.unknowncountry.com/journal/.
19. John A. Saliba, "Religious Dimensions of UFO Phenomena," in *The Gods Have*

Landed, ed. James R. Lewis (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 25; cited in Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 145.

20. Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 150.

21. Ibid., 164.

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