“Where Are the Old Testament Prophecies of Jesus’ Resurrection?”

I was reading Cruci-fiction and Resuscitation: The Greatest Hoax in the History of Humanity? to learn more about the resurrection of Jesus. When I went to the two Old Testament references he gave (Psalm 34:20, “He keeps all his bones, Not one of them is broken,” and Zechariah 12:10, “…they will look on Me whom they have pierced…”) as evidence of the prophecy of resurrection, I discovered that these were not prophetic at all but simply words and phrases that were taken out of context. Can you provide me with any Old Testament writing that does speak directly of the resurrection of the messiah?

John 19:36-37

> “For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, “NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.” And again another Scripture says, “THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED.”

may cite both of these OT passages. However, the one in v. 36 may actually be citing Exodus 12:46–

> “It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it.”

or Numbers 9:12–

> “They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute of the Passover they shall observe it.”

Thus, it is not clear whether John viewed Psalm 34:20 as having Messianic implications. And certainly it does not refer to Jesus’ resurrection. (But then, we would note, the author

never indicated these verses refer to the resurrection. The article is about the crucifixion as well, which these verses do prophesy.)

The passage in Zechariah 12:10 is Messianic and would at least be consistent with the resurrection of Christ (as it probably refers to His Second Coming). Isaiah 53:10-12 would also seem to be consistent with Jesus' resurrection:

> But the LORD was pleased
> To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
> If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
> He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days,
> And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.
> As a result of the anguish of His soul,
> He will see it and be satisfied;
> By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many,
> As He will bear their iniquities.
> Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
> And He will divide the booty with the strong;
> Because He poured out Himself to death,
> And was numbered with the transgressors;
> Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
> And interceded for the transgressors.

However, in neither of these passages is Jesus' resurrection specifically predicted.

The only OT texts which specifically teach the doctrine of resurrection are Isaiah 26:19-21;

> Your dead will live; Their corpses will rise.
> You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy,
> For your dew is as the dew of the dawn,
> And the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.
> Come, my people, enter into your rooms
> And close your doors behind you;

Hide for a little while
Until indignation runs its course.
For behold, the LORD is about to come out from His place
To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;
And the earth will reveal her bloodshed
And will no longer cover her slain.

Ezekiel 37:12-14;

“Therefore prophesy and say to them,
‘Thus says the Lord GOD,
“Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people;
and I will bring you into the land of Israel.
Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and
caused you to come up out of your graves, My people.
I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land.
Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it,” declares the LORD.'”

and Daniel 12:1-3:

“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise.
And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time;
and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.
Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life,
but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.
Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven,
and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Job 19:25-27 is another possibility:

> "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
> And at the last He will take His stand on the earth.
> Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God;
> Whom I myself shall behold,
> And whom my eyes will see and not another.
> My heart faints within me!

None of these texts are specifically Messianic. I do not think there are any specific predictions of Jesus' resurrection in the OT. This, I think, is partly why Jesus' disciples had such a difficult time understanding His own predictions of His resurrection. They did not have a category for a dying and rising Messiah (i.e. raised to glory, never to die again) within world history. They only knew of a general resurrection at the end of time.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

Addendum: April 7, 2021 by Sue Bohlin

I would respectfully suggest that we can also turn to the powerful words of Peter in Acts 2:24-32, where He unfolds the realization that David had prophesied about the Lord's resurrection in Psalm 16—

"But God raised him up, having released him from the pains of death because it was not possible for him to be held in its power. For David says about him,

> 'I saw the Lord always in front of me,
> for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken.
>
> Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced;
> my body also will live in hope,

> because you will not leave my soul in Hades,
> nor permit your Holy One to experience decay.
>
> You have made known to me the paths of life;
> you will make me full of joy with your presence.’

“Brothers, I can speak confidently to you about our forefather David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. So then, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, David by foreseeing this spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did his body experience decay. This Jesus God raised up, and we are all witnesses of it.”

Astrology: Do the Heavens Declare the Destiny of Man?

Dr. Michael Gleghorn critically examines the claim of astrology that the heavenly bodies somehow influence, or even determine, events on earth.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

A Brief Historical Introduction

Astrology is based on the notion that the heavenly bodies somehow influence, or even determine, events on earth. It is believed that an accurate understanding of these heavenly influences, especially at the time of one’s birth, can give us insight into a person’s character and destiny. Although belief in astrology is very ancient, it continues to have many adherents even in our own day. One writer estimates that as

many as one quarter of the world's population "believe in and follow astrology to some extent."{1} Unfortunately, Christians are not exempt from such beliefs. Estimates indicate that anywhere from ten to thirty percent of those claiming to be "born again" Christians entertain some belief that astrology is true.{2}

Although there is some scholarly disagreement over when the western system of astrology originated, astrologer Robert Parry observes, "Conventional scholarship leans toward the view that astrology began in the old Mesopotamian civilizations of the Middle-East sometime around the second millennium B.C."{3} At this time there was no distinction between astrology and astronomy. However, "because centers of learning were also . . . centers of religion, natural astrology soon became corrupted by pagan myths, deities, and magic. As a result, two forms of astrology began to coexist: natural astrology ([or] astronomy) and religious astrology."{4} It was "the Alexandrian astronomer Ptolemy . . . [who] refined astrology to its present form in the second century A.D."{5} It is this brand of astrology that has most influenced the West. But it is by no means the only form in existence.

Ancient astrological systems differing from our western variety were developed both in China and India—as well as elsewhere. But not only do these systems differ from ours, they also differ from each other. Furthermore, within each of these three major systems, we also find many contradictory subsystems.{6} For example, "Not all western astrologers agree that there are 12 zodiacal signs. Steven Schmidt in his book *Astrology 14* claims . . . a total of 14 signs. But some argue for only 8, others for 10, and a few for 24."{7} It was doubtless these many differences that led astrologer Richard Nolle to admit that there are nearly as many astrological systems as there are astrologers!{8}

But don't all these differences affect astrology's

reliability? After all, won't different systems give different results? Indeed they will. For instance, one astrologer may predict that you'll have a wonderful marriage; another that you'll never marry—you might easily receive contradictory readings from different astrologers! And the law of non-contradiction says they can't both be right (though they could both be wrong). It is for reasons such as these that we should be hesitant about placing our faith in astrology.

Difficulties in Chart Interpretation

"The basis of all astrological work is the Birth Chart. This is an accurate map of the sky for the exact date, time and place of birth. . . . [T]his can be the birth of a person . . . a nation . . . or even of an idea or question."{9} Once the astrologer has such information, he is ready to begin interpreting the chart. But what sort of information is most relevant to chart interpretation?

Although we cannot cover all the details, the astrologer is primarily concerned with examining the planets, houses, and signs—and how these are related to one another. Thus, astrologer Robert Parry writes, "[E]ach planet has a distinct and definite character which is modified by the sign and house in which it is placed. Mars, for example, is the planet of aggression, extraversion, self-confidence and sexuality."{10} The "signs" are the twelve signs of the zodiac. "Everyone is . . . born under one of these . . . signs (Pisces the fish, and so on)."{11} Finally, "the *houses* are the 12 divisions of the zodiac that are said to correspond symbolically to every area of life . . . the planets are said to travel through the houses, influencing each area of life as they do."{12}

But the astrologer must not only pay attention to the planets, houses and signs, he must also note their relationships to one another. For instance, "Angular relationships between planets are . . . very important. These relationships are called 'aspects' . . . a Square (90-degree) aspect between two

planets indicates tension or disagreement . . . whereas a Trine (120-degree) aspect indicates sympathy and cooperation."{13}

Interpreting a birth chart is thus a very complex affair. Indeed, one astrologer "calculated the *least* possible number of different combinations resulting from the most basic . . . chart . . . [as] roughly equivalent to the estimated number of atoms in the known universe!"{14} And such complexity is just one of many difficulties.

Another is that not all astrologers agree on the number of signs that need to be considered in interpreting a chart. While most acknowledge twelve, some think there are *less* and others *more* than this. There are also differences regarding where the various houses should be placed on a chart. And clearly such differences will lead to conflicting interpretations.

Finally, there is the problem of *authority*.{15} What factual basis do astrologers have for asserting that the Square aspect indicates disagreement, while a Trine indicates cooperation? Why do some astrologers consider Saturn a "bad" planet and Jupiter a "good" planet? How does the astrologer know "that the first house represents personality, the second . . . money [and] . . . the eighth . . . death?"{16} Since such assertions appear to be arbitrary, it follows that results will be arbitrary as well. One should, therefore, be wary about accepting the advice of astrologers—at least when they're speaking *as astrologers!*

The Problem of Twins

In his book, *In Defense of Astrology*, Robert Parry attempts to defend astrology against the twelve most common objections that are usually raised against it. Let's consider just one of these: the problem of twins.

Some twins are born within minutes of each other, yet they may lead very different lives. But if one's character and destiny are largely determined by the positions of the heavenly bodies at the time of birth, we would expect twins to be remarkably similar in these respects. Clearly, however, this is not always the case. Even Parry admits that one twin may die quite young while "the other lives on to a ripe old age."{17} As an astrologer, how does he deal with this difficulty?

He begins by observing, "Even a few minutes can make a lot of difference to a birth chart."{18} He then argues that even when one twin dies while the other lives, "the same event, namely death, has entered both lives at the same time. One twin dies . . . the other is touched radically by the sorrow . . . of . . . death."{19} He concludes, "Surely this is an argument for, rather than against astrology."{20} But how convincing is this argument, really?

While it may be true that a few minutes can occasionally make a big difference to a birth chart, this is clearly not always the case. Indeed, some scholars state that even "a birth interval of several minutes would make no real difference."{21} Second, there is surely a very big difference indeed between someone actually dying on the one hand, and someone losing a loved one to death on the other. It seems undeniable that the destinies of two such people are radically different. Surely this constitutes a legitimate objection to the ability of astrology to predict a person's destiny.

Additionally, for those of us who accept the authority of the Bible, it's instructive to contemplate the lives of Jacob and Esau, twins born so close to one another in time that Jacob came out of the womb "with his hand holding on to Esau's heel."{22} Astrology would expect these two men to have very similar personalities and destinies. But did they?

The Bible records, "When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a peaceful

man living in tents."{23} In addition to being quite different in personality and temperament, they were different physically as well. Esau was a hairy man, but Jacob a smooth man.{24} But most importantly, the destinies of both men, as well as their descendents, were drastically different. God bestowed His special favor on Jacob, but rejected Esau declaring, "I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau."{25} Surely if astrology were true, one would not expect twins born at virtually the same time to be so thoroughly different in both their character and destiny.

Astrology and Science

Numerous studies have attempted to test the claims of astrology. The scientist most often cited by astrologers as having furnished "proof" for some of its ideas is the late French psychologist Michel Gauquelin. Astrologer Robert Parry writes:

> Gauquelin's results are remarkable. For instance, the traditionally energetic and aggressive planet Mars is shown quite conclusively to be more frequently strong in the charts of sportsmen than chance would normally allow. . . . These professional attributes tend, moreover, to be in line with traditional astrological law, which has always associated Mars with competitive spirit.{26}

Gauquelin's results are known as the "Mars effect." He claimed to have found evidence for this effect in "a study that attempted to test whether or not the birth dates of 2088 sports champions were 'statistically significant' according to the position of Mars."{27} Ironically, although some slight evidence for this effect was indeed noted, Gauquelin "did not consider it an astrological effect."{28} Moreover, although frequently cited as lending validity to the subject, he "never claimed to validate traditional astrology in any sense."{29}

Still, he did claim to find some evidence for the "Mars

effect.” Doesn’t this lend some credibility to astrology? Not necessarily. “The problem for astrologers is that the ‘Mars effect’ has never been confirmed in 30 years of subsequent studies.”{30} One of the most damaging studies in this regard was published in 1995 by a team of French scientists. After an exhaustive twelve-year study, the team’s “attempt to independently replicate Gauquelin’s findings failed; it offered ‘no evidence for the Mars effect.'”{31} Since this “effect” is generally considered strong confirmation for the truth of astrology, it seems that scientific support for the subject is quite hard to come by.

But aren’t there other tests for the validity of astrology? For instance, don’t all the predictions made by astrologers offer a means of testing the subject’s accuracy? Indeed they do, but the results are usually quite unconvincing. While successful predictions may sometimes occur, as a general rule, “published predictions . . . seem to have a worse record than client self-disclosures.”{32}

In a study conducted between 1974-79, over 3,000 predictions by such alleged astrologers as Jeane Dixon and Carroll Righter were examined. The number of failures was 2673—almost 90 percent! Moreover, “the astrologers . . . were given the benefit of the doubt for any prediction that could have been attributed to shrewd guessing, vague wording, or inside information.”{33} Without such benefits, the failure rate would have been almost 100 percent! The authors of the study concluded, “The results . . . paint a dismal picture . . . for the . . . claim that ‘astrology works’.”{34}

Astrology and the Bible

What does the Bible say about astrology? According to one astrologer, “The Bible is full of the philosophy of astrology.”{35} But when one carefully examines the passages thought to speak favorably of astrology, one is bound to conclude with Drs. Bjornstad and Johnson: “Absolutely NO

scriptural passage supports astrology . . . not a single reference even indicates tolerance of this art."{36}

The Bible condemns faith in astrology as futile and misplaced. In Jeremiah 10, God issues this warning: "Do not learn the way of the nations, and do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens although the nations are terrified by them; for the customs of the peoples are vanity."{37} God is both the Creator and sovereign Ruler of the heavens; people are therefore to trust and fear Him—not what He has made.

Unlike God, astrology is powerless to deliver those who trust in it. In Isaiah 47, "God condemns Babylon and tells of its impending judgment."{38} In verse 13 He says, "Let now the astrologers, those who prophesy by the stars, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you from what will come upon you." But that their efforts would be in vain is clearly seen in the concluding words of the chapter, "There is none to save you."{39} Whatever predictive power astrology has, it is utterly eclipsed by the power of the sovereign Lord who created and rules all things!

Finally, in Deuteronomy 18:10-12, astrology comes under the same condemnation as all other forms of divination. There are likely many reasons for this, but let me mention just one. If the ideas of astrology are largely discredited, what accounts for its sometimes-remarkable predictive power? The Bible, as well as the frank admissions of some astrologers, indicates supernatural, or spiritual, involvement. But if God condemns astrology, what sort of spirits are we talking about? Though it may be unpopular to say so, the Bible suggests they are demons.{40} And it's eerie how many astrologers actually attribute their predictive powers to the wisdom of their spirit guides. One professional astrologer of twelve years confessed: "I never met a really successful astrologer . . . who did not admit . . . that spiritism was the power behind the craft."{41} Could it be that astrology works (when it works) not because of its discredited and contradictory ideas,

but because of the unseen power of the spirit world? If so, God's condemnation of astrology may be partially motivated by a concern to protect people from the influence of such evil spirits.

In conclusion, the heavens do not declare the destiny of man, but the glory of the God who made them.{42} It is God, not the heavens, "who works all things after the counsel of His will."{43}

Notes

1. Lawrence E. Jerome, *Astrology Disproved* (Prometheus Books: Buffalo, NY, 1977), 1, cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, Oregon, 1996), 54.
2. For instance, Ankerberg and Weldon mention a Gallup poll cited by the National and International Religion Report for July 4, 1988, which "estimated that ten percent of evangelical Christians believe in astrology" (Ibid., 54). Additionally, Chuck Colson cites a figure from Wade Clark Roof's book, *Spiritual Marketplace,* indicating that a third of "born again" Christians believe in astrology ("The Feng Shui Way: The Paganization of Our Culture," *Jubilee Extra* [October 2001]: 7).
3. Robert Parry, *In Defense of Astrology: Astrology's Answers to its Critics* (Llewellyn Publications: St. Paul, Minnesota, 1991), 37.
4. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions and the Occult* (Victor Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 1990), 152.
5. Ibid., 154.
6. Ankerberg and Weldon, 58.
7. Boa, 158.
8. Richard Nolle, *Critical Astrology: Investigating the Cosmic Connection* (American Federation of Astrologers: Tempe, AZ, 1980), 22, referenced in Ankerberg and Weldon, Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs, 58.
9. Parry, 24.

10. Ibid., 31.
11. Ankerberg and Weldon, 55.
12. Ibid.
13. Parry, 31-32.
14. Ankerberg and Weldon, 57.
15. Boa, 158.
16. Ankerberg and Weldon, 56.
17. Parry, 88.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Boa, 160.
22. Genesis 25:26.
23. Genesis 25:27.
24. Genesis 27:11.
25. Malachi 1:2-3; see also Romans 9:10-13.
26. Parry, 188.
27. Ankerberg and Weldon, 60.
28. Patrick Grim, ed., *Philosophy of Science and the Occult* (State University of New York Press: Albany, NY, 1982), 33-46; cf. pp. 55-60, referenced in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs,* 60.
29. Ankerberg and Weldon, 60.
30. Ibid.
31. "French Committee Announces Results of Test of So-Called Mars Effect," *Skeptical Inquirer* (January-February, 1995), 62, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs,* 60.
32.Ankerberg and Weldon, 63.
33. Ibid.
34. R.B. Culver and P.A. Ianna, *The Gemini Syndrome: A Scientific Evaluation of Astrology* (Prometheus Books: Buffalo, NY, 1984 Rev.), 169-70, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs,* 63.
35. Joseph F. Goodavage, *Astrology: The Space Age Science* (Signet: New York, 1967), XI, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs,* 64.

36. James Bjornstad and Shildes Johnson, *Stars, Signs and Salvation in the Age of Aquarius* (Bethany House: Minneapolis, MN, 1976), 43, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 67.
37. Jeremiah 10:2-3a.
38. Boa, 161.
39. Isaiah 47:15
40. See in particular Acts 16:16-18.
41. Personal correspondence from Karen Winterburn to John Ankerberg and John Weldon, cited in *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs,* 71.
42. See Psalms 19:1 and 8:3, as well as Genesis 1:16.
43. Ephesians 1:11.

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"What "Does Eating Christ's Flesh and Drinking His Blood Mean?

In John Ch. 6, Jesus says, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you," and that He has eternal life. Can you either give me a good explanation of what this means or point me toward some good resources to learn from?

Thanks for writing. Commentators from different denominations and traditions differ on what this passage means. Some believe that Jesus is here referring to participation in Holy Communion or the Eucharist. But I don't believe that this is His intended meaning, for it would clearly imply that eternal life is received purely through a ritualistic act – and this is quite at odds with the entire testimony of the NT. Indeed,

in this very passage Jesus repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of faith (John 6:35, 40, 47).

I agree with one commentator who wrote, "Flesh and blood here point to Christ as the crucified one and the source of life. Jesus speaks of faith's appropriation of himself as God's appointed sacrifice…". In other words, through faith in Christ we participate in all the benefits of His substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. And through such saving faith we receive the free gift of eternal life.

If you haven't yet visited Bible.org at http://www.bible.org, I would highly recommend this site. They have loads of information about the Bible from a conservative perspective.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

"Why Can't God Just Destroy Those Who Reject Him Instead of Sending Them to Hell?"

Why can't God just destroy people who reject him, cause them to cease to exist instead of sending them to hell where they are tortured for eternity? I know they cannot be a part of God or heaven since God is perfect in all ways, but why not end their existence entirely or just keep them separated for eternity instead of sending them to hell for eternal torment?

Thanks for your question. It's a good one. The Bible indicates

that those who reject the sacrifice of Christ for their sins must pay for their sins themselves. This certainly seems fair and just. The problem comes when we ask why a person who has committed a finite number of sins should be punished forever and ever. This, I will admit, sounds unfair. But the Bible tells us that God is perfectly fair and just. So how can we reconcile this apparent discrepancy?

Some say that any sin committed against the infinitely holy God is worthy of eternal punishment. In other words, it's not so much the number of sins committed that determine the duration of the punishment, it's rather the fact that they have sinned against their Creator, the infinitely good and holy God. To sin against such a One as God deserves eternal punishment, these people would say.

This may be true, but my own view is a bit different. Think about it this way. Through Adam, all human beings are born with a nature that is inclined toward sin, rebellion and disobedience against God. When someone trusts Christ for salvation, they are "born again" as a child of God. They receive the Holy Spirit and will one day be completely freed from the presence and power of sin. The one who rejects Christ, however, will never be free from the presence and power of sin. Thus, the one who rejects Christ will never cease sinning. Even in hell I imagine that men and women will curse and blaspheme God. If this is so, then eternal punishment is just because such people never quit sinning against God. Indeed, the longer they are punished, the more their debt increases.

This, at any rate, is my own opinion about the justice of eternal punishment. I hope it helps a little bit.

The Lord bless and keep you,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“How Can an Omnipresent God be Around Sin and Evil?”

If God is a perfect God who cannot be in the presence of sin because He is so holy, then how can He be an omnipresent God if there is all kinds of sin going on in the world and if there is a hell?

Good question! God cannot look WITH FAVOR upon sin and evil, but He can certainly be in the presence of sinners. This is proven by God’s omnipresence (as you noted), the incarnation of God the Son, and even God’s continued (if temporary) interaction with some of the fallen angels (including Satan – e.g. Job 1-2, etc.).

The limitation is not on God. Sometimes we have this image of God as needing to back off from sin and evil because He can’t allow Himself to be in its presence (rather like Superman avoiding Kryptonite because it weakens him?!). But we would suggest it’s more like the reaction of mold in the presence of bleach, or of anything combustible in the presence of fire: God’s holiness is so consuming and so purifying that unless He restrains Himself (and that only for a time), nothing impure and unholy can remain in HIS presence. It affects the creature, not God.

Hope this clears things up a bit.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“Are People in Hell Isolated and Alone?”

My wife says that if you go to hell, you will be alone and not able to talk to anyone else. We tried to find an answer in the Bible, but we could not find a scripture that said that. I have also heard this from different people. Where is the proof?

Thanks for your question. I have also heard this many times myself. It’s interesting to note that C.S. Lewis, the famous Christian apologist, once wrote something to the effect that “Hell is no one but yourself, forever and ever.” On the other hand, Jean-Paul Sartre, the famous French atheistic existentialist philosopher, once wrote that “Hell is other people.” But what does the Bible actually say?

Here are just a few passages to consider:

1. Isaiah 14:3-21: This passage is a taunt against the king of Babylon. What’s interesting is the description of the king’s reception in Sheol, the place of the dead. Notice such verses as 9-10: “Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come; it arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth; it raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones. They will all respond and say to you, ‘Even you have been made weak as we, you have become like us.'” Thus, this passage seems to indicate some sort of communication between departed spirits in Sheol. How literally this should be taken is, of course, quite difficult to say. Additionally, it must be remembered that, strictly speaking, Sheol is not the same as Hell. In the Old Testament all the dead were believed to reside in Sheol, both the righteous and the wicked. Hell, on the other hand, is a place of eternal

punishment only for the wicked. God could redeem a righteous man from the power of Sheol (Ps. 49:15), but there is “No Exit” from Hell.

2. Luke 16:19-31: In this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, we learn that Lazarus is received into “Abraham’s bosom” at death whereas the rich man goes to Hades. “Abraham’s bosom” is pictured as a place of both comfort and honor; Hades is pictured as a place of fire and torment. Strictly speaking, “Abraham’s bosom” is not Heaven and Hades is not Hell, but each does seem to be a precursor of the other (i.e. Hades is a sort of pre-hell Hell—see Rev. 20:14). Although the rich man is not said to converse with anyone else in Hades, he does converse with Abraham! In the parable, the two men are able to speak with one another even though a great chasm prevents them from crossing over to one another. Again, it is difficult to know how literally such a parable should be read. Is it an actual description of the afterlife prior to one’s final judgment? I’ll let you come to your own conclusion on that one!

3. Revelation 20:10-15: This passage does actually deal with the eternal destiny of the unsaved in Hell. In v. 10, we see that Satan, the beast and the false prophet will all be there. In vv. 14-15 we learn that “death” and “Hades” (and presumably all their inhabitants), along with everyone whose name is not found written in the book of life, will be cast into “the lake of fire” (i.e. Hell). Thus, all the unsaved, along with Satan and his demons, appear to be ultimately consigned to the same place of punishment (see Matt. 25:41). But nothing is said about whether these lost souls will have any communication with one another, or even whether they will be able to see one another. In other words, just because they are consigned to the same place of punishment, it does not necessarily follow that they will have any opportunity to communicate with one another. It could be that Hell is analogous to a large number of prisoners, all at the same prison, but all separated from

one another in something like solitary confinement! But I honestly don't know.

Thus, to answer your question (which is a good one!), I do not personally think there is enough scriptural evidence to reach a firm conclusion concerning whether or not those in Hell will be utterly alone and unable to communicate or not. I'm sorry I can't answer your question any better, but at least my answer is an honest one!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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"My Christian Girlfriend Doesn't Want to Follow My Hindu Faith"

I read Rick Rood's article on Hinduism with interest; I am faced with a dilemma and was hoping if you could offer me some advice and solace. I am a Hindu and have received a proposal from a Christian girl – AG denomination; (she converted from Hinduism 3 years ago).

Whilst my parents expect her to follow my religion after marriage; I am of the view that she can follow her religion but she has to partake in all my Hindu religious activities; and that we have to have a Hindu marriage. I also respect Christianity and she can go to church etc. with myself accompanying her whenever possible.

She has come back to me saying that all the above will be a sin in Christianity and that she will be punished if she participates in my activities. I have been advised by my priest to participate in her activities where possible. I respect her choice of religion coz for me there is only one god; it's just that we all have our own ways of faith.

I also realize that there are other factors like children to be considered here. I like this girl and will find your advice invaluable.

It would also help if you could provide me the details of people who have been in a similar situation. And at the same time it would also help if you could look into the prospects of taking out a "best practices" manual for lets say hindu/christian; christian/muslim marriages etc. which would provide some sort of a guideline.

Thank you for your kind letter. I do not know which article of Rick's that you read, but if you haven't yet read his article entitled, Do All Roads Lead to God? The Christian Attitude Toward Non-Christian Religions I would encourage you to do so. I think it will help you better understand your Christian girlfriend's perspective on participating in your Hindu religious activities.

In the Bible, the second book is called Exodus. In Exodus 20:1-6 the Lord gives His people the first two of the Ten Commandments. These are: 1. To have (or worship) no other gods except the Lord, and 2. Not to make, or worship, any idols or images of anything in all creation. As you can probably see, these first two commandments would make it very difficult for your Christian friend to be faithful to her own religious convictions AND participate in Hindu religious activities.

Christians believe that Jesus is the only way to God. In fact, this is what Jesus Himself claimed in John 14:6. Jesus demands our exclusive devotion and allegiance. We are not allowed to

worship anyone else but the one true God of the Bible.

Although I cannot tell you what to do about marriage, I do know that (statistically speaking) interfaith marriages are much more difficult and face many more problems than do marriages in which both partners have shared religious beliefs. I would encourage both of you to seriously consider these difficulties BEFORE you get married. For example, in what religious tradition will your children be raised? What will they be taught about God, what happens after death, etc.?

Finally, if you're interested in learning what the Bible says about how a person can have a personal relationship with God, please visit the following web page: http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=276. This website also has the entire Bible available for you to read and study if you like.

Thanks again for writing.

Wishing you all the best for your future,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

Was Jesus Really Born of a Virgin?

Aren't Miracles Impossible?

Of the four canonical gospels, there are two, Matthew and Luke, that provide details about the birth of Jesus. The accounts may reflect the unique perspectives of both Joseph

(in Matthew's gospel) and Mary (in Luke's), for there are many differences between the two.{1} However, of the things they share in common, one cannot be missed. They both declare that Jesus was miraculously conceived through the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a young virgin named Mary.{2} Today, some scholars regard the doctrine of Jesus' virgin birth as simply a legendary development of the early church. The story is said to be myth—not history.{3} But if we ask why they think this, we may notice something very interesting. For the virgin birth is usually not rejected on grounds of insufficient historical evidence. Rather, it is more often rejected on the presupposition that miracles are simply impossible.{4} This is quite revealing. For if such scholars really believe that miracles are impossible, then no amount of evidence can convince them that one has actually occurred. Their minds are made up before they examine the evidence. In theory, they view miracle claims as guilty until proven innocent. In actual practice, however, they never reach a verdict of "Not Guilty"!

The belief that miracles are impossible often arises from a naturalistic worldview. Strict naturalism completely rejects any notion of the supernatural.{5} All that exists are atoms and the void.{6} If naturalists are right, it follows that miracles are indeed impossible. While strange things that we do not fully understand may sometimes occur, there must, in principle, be a naturalistic explanation for every event in the universe.

But are such naturalists right? Since my aim in this article is to explore the historicity of Jesus' virgin birth, I will not attempt now to refute naturalism. Instead, I will simply point out that if a personal Creator God exists (and there is good evidence to believe that One does), then miracles are at least possible. For clearly, such a God might choose to intervene in His creation to bring about an effect for which there was no prior natural cause. And that is at least one way

of describing a miracle.

Thus, if a personal Creator God exists, miracles are possible. And if miracles are possible, then Jesus' virginal conception and birth are possible. And if the virgin birth is possible, then the only way we can determine if it actually occurred is by carefully examining the evidence both for and against it. Next we will continue our inquiry by looking at an ancient prophecy that some think actually foretold Christ's virgin birth!

Didn't Matthew Misread Isaiah?

Matthew's gospel tells us that Jesus was conceived through the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit while Mary was still a virgin.{7} He then goes further, however, by declaring that this miraculous event fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy in the book of Isaiah. He writes:

> *Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel," which…. means, "God with us."{8}*

Some scholars are unimpressed with Matthew's interpretation of Isaiah. John Dominic Crossan unequivocally states, "The prophecy in Isaiah says nothing whatsoever about a virginal conception."{9} Did Matthew misread Isaiah?

Let's acknowledge that the original context of Isaiah's prophecy may not be exclusively about the virginal conception of Jesus. The year is 734 B.C. and King Ahaz of Judah is terrified to learn that Aram and Israel have formed an alliance against him. Isaiah is sent to reassure Ahaz that God is in control and that the aims of the alliance will not succeed. Ahaz is told to request a sign from the Lord, a means of confirming the truth of Isaiah's message. But he

refuses!{10} Annoyed at the king's stubbornness, Isaiah declares that the Lord will give a sign anyway: an *almah* (a maiden of marriageable age) will conceive a son and call his name Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey upon reaching an age of moral discernment. But before this happens, the land of the two dreaded kings will be forsaken.{11} Should this prophecy be understood to refer exclusively to Jesus' virginal conception? If so, how does it relate to the promise that the Aram-Israel alliance would soon be broken and their lands forsaken (a promise fulfilled within twelve years time)?{12}

It's quite possible that Isaiah's prophecy had a *dual fulfillment*:{13} initially, in Isaiah's day; and ultimately, at the birth of Jesus. In this view the *almah*, or young maiden of Isaiah's prophecy, is a type of the virgin Mary, who later conceived Jesus through the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit.{14} So although a young woman in Isaiah's day bore a child named Immanuel, Jesus is later recognized by Matthew to also be Immanuel, "God with us" in a new and unprecedented way. Thus, Matthew didn't misread Isaiah. And if this is so, we must continue to consider this prophecy in weighing the evidence for Jesus' virgin birth.

But even if we've correctly explained Matthew's use of Isaiah's prophecy, we must still consider the alleged contradictions in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke. We will address this issue in the next section.

Don't Matthew and Luke Contradict Each Other?

{15} Some scholars see the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke as contradictory. If so, their historical reliability is in doubt, along with their accounts of Jesus' virgin birth. But are these narratives really contradictory? Let's take a closer look.

First, some think Matthew implies that Mary and Joseph resided

permanently in Bethlehem before Jesus' birth, whereas Luke says they lived in Nazareth and only came to Bethlehem for the census.{16} But Matthew never actually tells us the couple's residence before Jesus' birth. He simply says that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just like Luke.{17}

But if Mary and Joseph resided in Nazareth prior to Jesus' birth, then why, after their flight into Egypt, does Matthew seem to suggest that they intended to return to Judea rather than their home in Nazareth?{18} It's helpful to recall that Jesus was "the promised king of David's line."{19} Might not his parents, then, have wished to raise Him in His ancestral home?{20} This is actually quite probable. But regardless of their original intention, let's not forget that Matthew goes on to write that Joseph, being warned in a dream not to settle in Judea, did take his family back to Nazareth after all.{21}

Finally, some think Luke's narrative leaves no room for Matthew's account about the visit of the magi and sojourn in Egypt. These events could only have occurred after Jesus' presentation in the Temple, forty days after His birth.{22} But Luke 2:39, which concludes this presentation, says that when Jesus' parents "had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to . . . Nazareth." This raises a question. Does Luke's statement prohibit an initial return to Bethlehem, thus casting doubt on Matthew's account of the magi and flight into Egypt?

It's important to notice the emphasis in Luke 2:39. It's not so much on when Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth, but rather that they did not return until after they had fulfilled the requirements of the Law.{23} Strictly speaking, Luke 2:39 does not disallow the events recorded by Matthew. Luke may not have known of the visit of the magi and flight into Egypt, or he may have chosen to omit this information. Either way, however, "the silence of one narrative regarding events recorded in another is quite a different thing from actual contradiction."{24} Thus, the virgin birth cannot be dismissed

on the grounds that the infancy narratives are contradictory—they're not.

But aren't we forgetting the most obvious hypothesis of all? Is the story of Jesus' virgin birth simply a myth, comparable to other such stories from the ancient world? We'll examine this question in the next section.

Wasn't the Virgin Birth Story Derived from Pagan Myths?

Not long after Matthew and Luke finished writing their gospels, some scholars began contending that the story of Jesus' virgin birth was derived from pagan myths. Unfortunately, such ideas continue to haunt the Church even today. John Dominic Crossan cites parallels between the deification of Octavius by the Roman Senate and that of Jesus by the early church.{25} In each case, says Crossan, the decision to deify their leader was closely connected with the invention of a divine birth story. The official biography of Octavius claimed the god Apollo in the form of a snake impregnated his mother.{26} Jesus' biographers claimed the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary conceived Him. In Crossan's view, neither story is historically true: "The divine origins of Jesus are…just as…mythological as those of Octavius."{27} The stories simply help explain why these men received divine honors.

Is Crossan's hypothesis plausible? One can certainly find scholars who embrace such ideas. But a careful comparison of the biblical accounts of Jesus' birth with the many miraculous birth stories in pagan literature reveals several important differences.

First, the accounts of Jesus' virgin birth show none "of the standard literary marks of the myth genre."{28} Matthew and Luke are written as history—not mythology. They mention places, people, and events that can be verified through normal

methods of historical and archaeological inquiry. The beginning of Luke's gospel "reads very much like prefaces to other generally trusted historical and biographical works of antiquity."{29} Thus, there is a clear difference in genre between the gospels and pagan myths.

Another difference can be seen in the religious atmosphere of these stories. The pagan myths are polytheistic; the gospels, monotheistic. The miraculous birth stories in pagan literature usually focus on a god's lust for some mortal woman.{30} Since this lust is typically gratified through sexual intercourse, the resulting conception and birth are hardly virginal. We are thus far removed from the description of Jesus' virginal conception in the gospels. There we find no hint that God's love for Mary in any way parallels the lust of Apollo for the mother of Octavius.

These are just two of many differences between the gospel accounts of Jesus' birth and the miraculous birth stories in pagan literature. But even these differences make the theory of pagan derivation unlikely. Remember, this theory requires us to believe that strict moral monotheists, who claimed to be writing history, borrowed some of the crudest elements from polytheistic myths to tell the story of Jesus' birth! Frankly, it's incredible. But could a theory of Jewish derivation still work? We'll conclude with this question.

Wasn't the Virgin Birth Story Derived from Jewish Thought?

Some scholars have speculated that the story of Jesus' virgin birth may have been derived from an imaginative Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament.{31} The story is not historical; it is a literary fiction of early Jewish Christians. It may have resulted from reflection on Isaiah 7:14, which says in part, "Behold, a virgin will be with child." What could be more natural than this verse becoming

the source of inspiration for a legendary tale about the virgin birth of the Messiah?{32}

But would this really have been natural? There's actually no clear evidence that pre-Christian Judaism understood Isaiah 7:14 as a prophecy of the Messiah at all, much less his virginal conception.{33} Indeed, many contend that the Hebrew text of Isaiah says nothing whatever about a virginal conception and birth.{34} But if that is so, it would seem quite unlikely for early Jewish Christians to have read the verse in such a way!

Others believe the translation of Isaiah from Hebrew to Greek, known as the Septuagint, may have provided the initial impulse for such a reading. The Greek text of Isaiah 7:14 translates the Hebrew term *almah*, meaning "a young woman of marriageable age," with the Greek term *parthenos*, meaning "virgin". Could this translation have led some Jewish Christians to conclude that Isaiah was prophesying the virgin birth of the Messiah? And if so, might they have invented the story of Jesus' virgin birth as the alleged "fulfillment" of Isaiah's prediction?

While one can claim that they might have done so, there's no evidence that they actually did. But if not, what could account for early Christianity's understanding of Isaiah 7:14 as a prophecy of the Messiah's virgin birth? Well, the historical reality of Jesus' virgin birth could have done so! After all, it's one thing to think that early Jewish Christians, without any precedent in Jewish thought, would invent the story of Jesus' virgin birth from an imaginative interpretation of Isaiah's prophecy. But it's another thing entirely to think that by beginning with a historically reliable account of Jesus' virgin birth, they eventually concluded that Isaiah had indeed prophesied such an event.{35}

Only the latter hypothesis is supported by evidence. Particularly important in this regard are the gospels of Matthew and Luke. These sources have been shown to be quite

historically reliable. Their accounts of Jesus' birth, though apparently written independently of one another, are free of contradiction. Indeed, apart from an unproven bias against the supernatural, there is little reason to doubt the accuracy of their reports. Thus, there do appear to be adequate grounds for believing that Jesus really was born of a virgin!

Notes

1. Such differences do not, of course, imply contradictions. See the third section for more information.

2. See Matt. 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-35.

3. For instance, John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), writes, "I understand the virginal conception of Jesus to be a confessional statement about Jesus' status and not a biological statement about Mary's body. It is later faith in Jesus as an adult retrojected mythologically onto Jesus as an infant. . ." (23). And again a little later, "Jesus . . . was born . . . to Joseph and Mary." (26)

4. For example, in Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 61, Dr. Craig questions Dr. Crossan about his anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions and whether they do not rule out the possibility of miracles a priori. Dr. Crossan admits that, insofar as miracles are concerned, "[I]t's a theological presupposition of mine that God does not operate that way."

5. Ibid. In fact, although it is difficult to pin him down this appears to be Dr. Crossan's position. At one point in the debate, Dr. Craig asks Dr. Crossan, "What about the statement that God exists? Is that a statement of faith or fact?" Dr. Crossan responds, "It's a statement of faith for all those who make it" (49). But suppose no human beings existed to make

such statements of faith. In order to clarify Dr. Crossan's response, Dr. Craig later asks, "Was there a being who was the Creator and Sustainer of the universe during that period of time when no human beings existed?" Dr. Crossan's answer is quite revealing: "Well, I would probably prefer to say no because what you're doing is trying to put yourself in the position of God and ask…'How is God apart from faith?' I don't know if you can do that. You can do it, I suppose, but I don't know if it really has any point" (emphasis mine, 51). This answer appears to commit Dr. Crossan to an atheistic (and thus strictly naturalistic) worldview.

6. So said the famous Greek atomist philosopher, Democritus of Abdera.

7. See Matt. 1:20-25.

8. Matt. 1:22-23.

9. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography,* 17. He goes on to say, "Clearly, somebody went seeking in the Old Testament for a text that could be interpreted as prophesying a virginal conception, even if such was never its original meaning"(18).

10. See Isaiah 7:1-12.

11. See Isaiah 7:13-16.

12. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978). Ryrie comments, "Within twelve years after this prophecy, Damascus was captured by Assyria (732) and Israel had fallen (722)." (1024)

13. Although some writers object to the notion of a "dual fulfillment" of prophecy, there appear to be other examples of this phenomenon in Scripture. For instance, in Joel 2:28-32 we find a promise of a future outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The prophecy is linked with various cosmic disturbances that will immediately precede the Day of the Lord. Later, in connection

with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter declares, “This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel” (v. 16). He proceeds to quote almost the entire passage of Joel 2:28-32. However, it seems that only the first part of the prophecy, concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, was actually fulfilled in Peter’s day. What’s more, the book of Revelation seems to indicate that the cosmic disturbances mentioned by Joel await a yet future fulfillment (see Rev. 6:12). While scholars have offered various solutions to account for Peter’s use of Joel in Acts 2, it seems best to understand Joel’s prophecy as having some sort of “dual fulfillment”: an initial fulfillment on the day of Pentecost; an ultimate fulfillment before the second coming of Christ. The “dual fulfillment” view has the advantage of preserving the original integrity of the prophet’s message, while at the same time recognizing that some prophecies may be Divinely intended to include more than one fulfillment throughout salvation history. In light of this very real possibility, we should humbly acknowledge that Matthew’s use of Isaiah and Peter’s use of Joel confront us with complex interpretive issues. It is partly for this reason that very capable scholars reach different conclusions about the meaning of these passages. After careful consideration I was inclined toward the “dual fulfillment” position; however, I recognize that others will want to adopt some other perspective.

14. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, 1024.

15. In this section I have relied heavily on the analysis given in J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1971), 192-97.

16. I have chosen to examine some of the more difficult “contradictions.” But it’s important to point out that some of the alleged difficulties are quite easily dealt with. For instance, Luke records that shepherds visited the baby Jesus in response to an angelic announcement (Luke 2:8-20). Matthew, however, tells not of shepherds but of magi, who responded not

to an angelic announcement, but to an astronomical observation (Matt. 2:1-12). But surely there's no contradiction here. After all, it's entirely possible that both the shepherds and the magi visited Jesus! Doubtless the accounts are selective and have not recorded every detail, but this does not mean they are contradictory.

17. Matt. 2:1; Luke 2:1-7.

18. Matt. 2:19-23.

19. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 193.

20. Ibid.

21. Matt. 2:22-23.

22. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 196, explains: "The visit of the magi could hardly have taken place during this forty-day interval; for it would have been impossible to take the child into the Temple when the wrath of the king was so aroused…Evidently, therefore, the flight into Egypt took place immediately after the magi had come; no visit to the Temple could have intervened. If, therefore, the two narratives are to be harmonized, we must suppose that when the presentation in the Temple had been completed, Joseph and Mary returned with the child to Bethlehem, received there the visit of the magi, and then fled into Egypt."

23. Ibid., 196-97.

24. Ibid., 197.

25. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 1-5, 26-28.

26. Peter Jennings, interview with John Dominic Crossan, "The Search for Jesus," ABC Special, June 26, 2000. More general information about this ABC special program can be found at the following URL: http://more.abcnews.go.com/onair/abcnewsspecials/pjr000626_jes

us_promo.html. A conservative, evangelical response to Peter Jennings' ABC special was done by John Ankerberg, "A Response to ABC's The Search for Jesus: Part 1: Questions About His Birth," The John Ankerberg Show (videotape copy), 2001. More general information can be found at John Ankerberg's Web site at: www.ankerberg.com.

27. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 26-27.

28. Norman L. Geisler, "Virgin Birth of Christ," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 763.

29. Craig Blomberg, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 39-40.

30. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 338.

31. This might be referred to as midrash, or midrash pesher, which "is an imaginative interpretation or expansion based on some OT text." B. Witherington III, "Birth of Jesus," in Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, eds. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 60.

32. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 287.

33. Witherington, "Birth of Jesus," 64. See also Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 297.

34. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 288. See also, John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, 17.

35. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, 286-87.

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“Are Pastors Bound to Marry Anyone Who Asks?”

As an ordained Baptist pastor, my question is this: Am I bound by the Bible to marry anyone who asks me to? If a couple comes to me to ask me to marry them, and they tell me they are not saved, but want to get married anyway, should I? If they are living together, am I supposed to marry them just the same? I am confused by what other pastors have told me, and have read scripture, but I still need some advice outside that of my denomination.

Thank you for your letter. As far as I’m aware, you are not biblically bound to marry anyone who asks you to. There are probably other pastors in your immediate area who would be willing to marry such people. If you really feel uncomfortable about it, you could probably refer such people to these other pastors.

However, another Probe staff member made some really good points about this issue. This person’s previous pastor, who had a genuine heart for God and for people, would usually marry unbelievers. His reasoning was as follows:

1. Once married, such people would no longer be living in sin.
2. When they had kids and looked for a church, they’d possibly come back to his.
3. It gave him a chance to share the gospel with them.

Also, if you require such couples to go through pre-marital counseling, it would give you extensive time with them to impart biblical principles about marriage and family.

Finally, marriage is a God-ordained institution for all

people, not just believers. We want people to understand that God takes marriage very seriously and that He will hold them accountable for violating their marriage vows. We also want to be available to those who are struggling with marriage difficulties and contemplating divorce. Ultimately, however, people must bear a personal responsibility before God for what they do (or don't do) with their marriages.

Thus, I personally do not believe that it would be morally wrong for you to marry such people (generally speaking, at least. I suppose there might always be exceptions). However, if you don't feel comfortable before God, I would simply refer the people to another local pastor. You're not morally obligated to marry them either.

Hope this helps a bit.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

Probing the Shroud of Turin

The Gospels and the Shroud

Few historical artifacts generate as much heated controversy as the Shroud of Turin. Some claim it is merely a clever painting; a forger's work of art.{1} Others think it might be the actual burial shroud of Jesus.{2}

The Shroud is a linen cloth 14.25 feet long by 3.5 feet wide. On its surface is the image of a man who appears to be a Jewish crucifixion victim. Could this be Jesus of Nazareth?

While some researchers reject this idea as fanciful, others believe the weight of available evidence points to just such a remarkable conclusion.

In this article we will examine evidence both *for* and *against* the claim that the Shroud of Turin is the actual burial garment of Jesus. My goal is simply to present the evidence. I will leave the verdict to the reader. But where should we begin our inquiry?

If we want to find out if the Shroud may have been the actual burial garment of Jesus, a good place to begin is with an examination of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death. After all, if the evidence on the Shroud is *not* consistent with the Gospels, we can safely conclude that *whatever* the source of the image, it could not be that of Jesus. So how well do the Gospel accounts line up with the image on the Shroud? Are there any obvious inconsistencies or contradictions?

Actually there is remarkable agreement between the two. The Gospels say that Jesus was scourged,{3} crowned with thorns,{4} and crucified.{5} The man's image on the Shroud likewise gives evidence of one who suffered such things. In addition, John's Gospel says that the legs of those crucified with Jesus were broken. However, when the soldiers saw that Jesus was already dead, rather than break His legs they "pierced His side with a spear."{6} Careful examination of the Shroud again reveals consistency with the Gospels on this point. Like Jesus, the man's legs were not broken, but his side appears to have been pierced with a spear.

Of course different researchers interpret such parallels differently. Kenneth Stevenson, a Christian researcher, views such consistency as an important link in determining whether the image might be that of Jesus. But Walter McCrone, a humanistic scientist who rejects miracles, contends that the Shroud is simply a medieval artist's painting.{7}

While the different philosophical commitments of Stevenson and McCrone may have influenced their interpretations of the data, we must still ask which interpretation is correct. Does the Shroud image depict an actual crucifixion victim or is it rather an ingenuous painting? We will address this question next.

The Shroud under a Microscope

One of the most qualified researchers to contend that the Shroud of Turin is merely a painting is Walter McCrone. An expert microscopist and member of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, McCrone has "examined several hundred paintings, by artists from Giotto to Pollock" in order to determine their authenticity.{8} He sums up his own examination of the Shroud this way, "From my experience as a painting authenticator, the shroud is authentic—a beautiful and inspired authentic painting."{9}

McCrone reached this conclusion after examining thirty-two sticky tape samples taken from both image and non-image areas on the Shroud. He later wrote, "I identified the substance of the body-and-blood images as the paint pigment red ochre. . . . The blood image areas consist of another pigment, vermilion, in addition to red ochre. . . . These paints were in common use during the Middle Ages".{10}

These statements give the impression that a careful analysis of the Shroud conclusively demonstrates the image to be merely a painting. However, it's only fair to note that virtually all of McCrone's statements are hotly disputed by other, equally competent, pro-Shroud researchers!

For instance, McCrone tested for blood on the Shroud and claimed to find none.{11} But Professor Alan Adler, a highly skilled chemist, states that the stains on the shroud were from blood.{12} Also, as previously mentioned, McCrone thinks the Shroud image was produced with various paint pigments. But

Kenneth Stevenson notes that the primary statement to which the Shroud of Turin Research Project publicly agreed was that "the image is the result of some cellulose oxidation-dehydration reaction rather than an applied pigment."{13} Finally, although Alan Whanger admits that threads were obtained from the Shroud which *did* have the red ochre pigment observed by McCrone, he claims that these are merely "translocated fibers" from the many copies of the Shroud "that were painted during the Middle Ages."{14} According to professor Whanger, such copies "were laid face down . . . on the shroud" and therefore "have nothing to do with the formation of the shroud images."{15}

Finally, Dr. Max Frei claimed to have "identified key pollens that definitely placed the Shroud in both Palestine and Turkey at some time in the past."{16} Of course, this observation is quite difficult to square with the theory that the Shroud has never been outside of Europe! But McCrone accuses Frei of deception and states, "There were very few pollen grains on his tapes (I examined them very carefully)."{17}

So which expert should one believe? As we'll see, the complexity of this question is increased when one considers rival views of the Shroud's history.

Rival Histories of the Shroud

Both Gary Vikan and Walter McCrone maintain that there is no reliable evidence for the Shroud of Turin prior to the year 1356.{18} Kenneth Stevenson, relying on the work of Ian Wilson, believes the Shroud's history might be reconstructed all the way back to the 1st century!{19} So who's right?

Most scholars agree that the Shroud only became widely known in 1357 when it was exhibited in Lirey, France. Those who think the Shroud is merely a 14th century painting cite Bishop Henri of Poitiers' claim that he actually knew the artist!{20} But those who think the Shroud is older suggest that he may

have only been referring to one of the medieval *copies* of the Shroud. These researchers attempt to reconstruct the Shroud's history via the Mandylion, an ancient cloth supposedly imprinted with the facial image of Christ. They observe that historical descriptions of the Mandylion bear similarity to the image on the Shroud. But what do we know of the Mandylion's history?

It is alleged that Abgar V, a 1st century ruler of Edessa, sent a letter to Jesus requesting healing from leprosy. After Jesus' death and resurrection, a disciple came to Edessa with a cloth "imprinted with the Savior's image."{21} Seeing the cloth, Abgar was cured and Christianity took root in the city.

Although there may be legendary elements in this story, certain historical facts *do* underlie it. For instance, Abgar V *was* ruler of Edessa and tradition links the early evangelization of the city to "a holy image of the Lord."{22}

In 525 the Mandylion was discovered in the walls of Edessa. It was probably hidden there at a time when Christians were being persecuted. In 944 it was taken to Constantinople, but was lost again when the city was sacked in 1204. Later, in 1357, the Shroud was publicly displayed in France. Ian Wilson speculates that the Mandylion and the Shroud are the same object. He suggests that between 1204 and 1357 the cloth was secretly kept by the Knights Templars. If Wilson is correct, a case can be made for dating this cloth to the 1st century.

But there's a problem. The Shroud is a full-body image; the Mandylion was only a facial image. Wilson, however, thinks the Mandylion was probably folded so that only the face was visible. He may be right. Careful photographic analysis reveals that the Shroud may once have been folded as Wilson describes. But this is uncertain.

While other difficulties could be mentioned, the primary problem with a 1st century date for the Shroud is the conflict

with its radiocarbon date of about 1325. We will examine this next.

Carbon 14 An Insurmountable Objection?

In 1988 three laboratories received samples of the Shroud of Turin to be tested with the carbon 14 dating method. The results indicated that the Shroud was a medieval artifact and its date was set at 1325 +/- 65 years. This date is generally considered to be about 95 percent reliable. Thus for many researchers the issue is settled: the Shroud is a medieval relic.

But why isn't everyone convinced? Why do a number of researchers contend that this date may be in error? The chief reason for skepticism concerns the nature and quality of the samples tested. John McRay, a respected scholar and archaeologist, notes that "there is a high probability of sample contamination" which can undermine the carbon 14 dating method.{23} Other scholars have offered a number of reasons why such sample contamination may have affected the dating of the Shroud.

For instance, Kenneth Stevenson notes that the samples were taken from an area of the Shroud just "two to three centimeters from a repair site due to the 1532 fire."{24} Two potential problems result from this. First, what if the sample was *actually part of a repair site*? If this happened a medieval date would be expected, for that was when the repair was made. Second, carbon molecules from the Shroud's silver casing may have altered the cloth's carbon content by becoming mixed with the cloth during the fire. "By not checking out these factors and including them as part of the dating equation, the labs left themselves open for a faulty date".{25}

Another researcher, Dr. Leoncio Garza-Valdes, has discovered a bacterium which produces a clear "bioplastic" coating on many

ancient objects. When he studied samples of the Shroud, he found them to be "covered by the bioplastic coating . . . and by many colonies of fungi."{26} Additionally, Dr. Garza-Valdes claims that hydrochloric acid and sodium hydroxide, the standard cleansing agents used on ancient artifacts, do not remove this bioplastic coating. If he's right, and the Shroud sample included additional carbon 14 atoms from contamination material, a medieval date for the Shroud *might* be misleadingly young.

Of course, none of this *proves* that a medieval date for the Shroud is incorrect. Still, it is worth remembering a statement by Dr. Willy Wolfi, a researcher at one of the labs that dated the Shroud: "The C-14 method is not immune to grossly inaccurate dating when non-apparent problems exist in samples from the field. The existence of significant indeterminate errors occurs frequently."{27} Given such a possibility in the case of the Shroud, the need for further testing seems essential.

How Was the Image Formed?

What process led to the formation of the image on the Shroud of Turin? While this remains something of a mystery, there are only three possibilities: human artistry, natural processes, or supernatural processes.

Walter McCrone maintains the image was painted with red ochre and vermilion.{28} John Heller and Alan Adler disagree. They say the Shroud had too little of either of these pigments for even "one painted drop of blood."{29} Furthermore, Don Lynn and Jean Lorre "discovered that the Shroud's image is nondirectional."{30} That is, it does not appear to have been caused by any hand movement across the cloth. Such observations make the artistic hypothesis at least questionable.

But others think the image was formed naturally. Sam Pellicori

and John German believe it resulted from bodily contact with the cloth over a period of time. But this view also has difficulties. First, it postulates that the darker areas formed by more direct contact with the body over time. As Dr. German explains, the hypothesis was that "the oils in the skin (which Pellicori experimentally demonstrated produced the same fiber degradation we saw on the Shroud) would have longer to migrate into the linen and cover more individual fibrils."{31} This would result in the image being darker at those places where the cloth had longer contact with the skin. But some have argued that, if this were so, the back of the image should be darker than the front—which it's not. In addition, if it did form naturally, then it's at least a bit surprising that no other burial cloth images have yet been found."

If the image resulted from neither art nor nature, could supernatural processes have formed it? Adherents of this view typically believe the image was created by something like a burst of radiant energy, possibly at the moment of Jesus' resurrection. Unfortunately, this hypothesis cannot account for *all* the Shroud image features. Still, supporters observe that the image reveals a dead man in a state of rigor mortis. Yet there is no trace of bodily decomposition on the Shroud. This *may* indicate that the man was removed during rigor mortis, which generally lasts less than forty-eight hours after death. But there are difficulties in supposing the body was removed by human agency. "Since the cloth was loosely attached to the body from the dried blood, any attempt to remove it probably would have damaged the stains. Yet these . . . stains are anatomically correct."{32} Nevertheless, while proponents admittedly have some good arguments, they cannot *prove* that the Shroud offers us an image of the risen Christ.

So we may be left with something of a mystery. We simply don't have enough information to reach absolute certainty about the Shroud. It's important to remember, however, that the truth of Christianity does not depend on whether or not the Shroud is

Jesus' burial cloth. A solid case for the bodily resurrection of Christ can be made with or without the Shroud. Thus, having tried to fairly present some of the evidence, I must now leave you to reach your own verdict on the Shroud.

Notes

1. See Gary Vikan, "Debunking the Shroud: Made by Human Hands," and Walter C. McCrone, "The Shroud Painting Explained," *Biblical Archaeology Review* Vol. 24 No. 6 (November/December 1998), 27-29.

2. Dr. Kenneth E. Stevenson, *Image of the Risen Christ* (Toronto, Ontario: Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 1999). In this section I have relied heavily on Stevenson's research in Image of the Risen Christ, pp. 93-105.

3. John 19:1.

4. Matt. 27:29.

5. Luke 23:33.

6. John 19:32-34.

7. Walter C. McCrone, personal e-mail, October 5, 2000.

8. Walter C. McCrone, "Walter C. McCrone Responds," *Biblical Archaeology Review* Vol. 25 No. 2 (March/April 1999), 66.

9. Ibid.

10. McCrone, "The Shroud Painting Explained," 29.

11. Ibid.

12. Giles F. Carter, "The Chinks in Their Armor," *Biblical Archaeology Review* Vol. 25 No.2 (March/April 1999), 17.

13. Steven Schaferamen, "Comment," *Current Anthropology* 24 (June 1983):301, cited in Stevenson, 73.

14. Alan D. Whanger, “Bolstering the Case for the Shroud,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* Vol. 26 No.3 (May/June 2000), 65.

15. Ibid.

16. Stevenson, 127.

17. McCrone, “Walter C. McCrone Responds,” 66.

18. Vikan, “Debunking the Shroud: Made by Human Hands”, and McCrone, “The Shroud Painting Explained,” 29. Vikan gives the date 1357, McCrone 1356. At any rate, both would agree that there is no reliable documentation for the Shroud prior to 1356.

19. Stevenson, 29-42. I have relied heavily on the historical reconstruction of the Shroud presented by Stevenson in this section.

20. Vikan, “Debunking the Shroud: Made by Human Hands,” and McCrone, “The Shroud Painting Explained,” 29.

21. Stevenson, 34.

22. Ibid.

23. John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991), 34. However, McRay himself appears to accept a medieval date for the Shroud (see p. 221).

24. Stevenson, 118. I have again relied heavily on Stevenson in this section, pp. 107-124.

25. Ibid.

26. Leoncio A. Garza-Valdes, *The DNA of God* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1999), 34, cited in Stevenson, 121.

27. Willy Wolfi, *Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research*, B29 (1987): 1-13, cited in Stevenson, 120.

28. Walter C. McCrone, “The Shroud Painting Explained,” 29.

29. John H. Heller, *Report on the Shroud of Turin* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 194, cited in Stevenson, 187.

30. Stevenson, 188.

31. John D. German, personal e-mail to the author, December 29, 2005.

32. Ibid., 205.

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