

“What About Believers Who Stop Believing in Christ?”

I saw [your response to a question](#) regarding Hebrews and the warning of falling away. The thing is, I've known people who stopped believing in Christ, and then were restored to faith. How does this go together with these verses? Even missionaries like Adoniram Judson, Isobel Kuhn and John Newton all had times of rebellion in their younger years. And so did I; even though I grew up in a Christian home, I denied my faith in Christ at age 17—I sort of lived as a “Secret Christian” because of my Muslim fiancée at the time. At that time I didn't even know how bad it was. Because I wasn't born again or knew of repentance I never felt convicted of sins before. It's now been three years later, and I recently experienced a hatred for sin and a true faith in the sacrifice of Jesus (a faith beyond just mental acknowledgement). Does that mean I'm beyond hope?

I'm a little confused also because the verses you say refer to not true believers. My question also is, would a Jew really leave Judaism to become a nominal Christian at that time? I doubt one could say that they were nominal Christians who were in danger of falling away, when I know how much it means to leave one religion for Christianity in a country with mostly people who belong to false religion. To leave their faith to convert to Christ meant to sacrifice all—it would be like a Muslim converting and losing his family just by some superficial faith . . . that's why I feel like it didn't make sense to say the Jews who fell away were just superficial believers?

These are some very important (but also difficult) questions. We must honestly admit the difficulty, I think, as we nonetheless strive to understand (and believe and obey) what the Bible teaches. My own view is basically this:

First you ask: "I've known people who stopped believing in Christ, and then were restored to faith. How does this go together with these verses?"

If these people were true believers, and have been restored to genuine faith in Christ, then they are saved. If "[eternal security](#)" of the believer is true (i.e. once saved, always saved), then they were always saved (since first trusting Christ for salvation). If this doctrine is false, then it appears that they have been graciously restored to faith (and salvation). Either way, if they are trusting Christ for salvation (and their faith is genuine), then they are saved.

Of course, it's also possible that they weren't initially true believers at all. Sometimes people think they are Christians because they go to church, or believe in God, or because they have been baptized, or something else. But they may never have truly trusted Christ for salvation. One cannot lose what one never had. In this case, such people are not really saved at all until they truly trust Christ for salvation. And this may not actually happen until after some period of rebellion.

Indeed, you say of yourself, "Because I wasn't born again or knew of repentance I never felt convicted of sins before. It's now been three years later, and I recently experienced a hatred for sin and a true faith in the sacrifice of Jesus (a faith beyond just mental acknowledgement). Does that mean I'm beyond hope?"

Of course you're not beyond hope! You have trusted in Christ for salvation and you are saved! But it doesn't sound like you were saved before this (even though you may have grown up in a Christian home). In other words, it doesn't sound like you ever really left the faith, because it doesn't sound to me like you were saved until recently. And the same would almost certainly be true of Adoniram Judson and John Newton. By the way, Christians continue to struggle with sin after salvation, but that is a different matter from completely abandoning the

faith.

Finally, no, I do not think that a Jew would abandon Judaism to become a nominal Christian (except possibly under extreme duress). But people may become lax in their faith over time. And such people could potentially abandon their faith to return to Judaism. Note: I'm not saying this actually happens. But it could. And if it were to happen, then such a person might indeed forfeit salvation (if "eternal security" is false, which is debatable).

This is how I see the matter. I tend to think that eternal security is true, and that a believer cannot lose salvation. But other disagree with this view and it is always possible that they are right and that I am wrong. Regardless, however, it is God's intention to save those who come to Him through His Son. And we are definitely secure in Christ. The only way a believer could lose salvation (if such a thing is even possible) is by committing apostasy and rejecting Christ, and then persisting in this rejection until overtaken by physical death.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“What Is the ‘Sin Unto Death’?” [Michael Gleghorn]

What is the sin unto death, according to 1 John 5:16-17? [If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death,

he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.]

The passage does not tell us what sort of sin leads to death, nor does it tell us what sort of death is in view here (e.g. physical or spiritual).

In my opinion, it seems best to understand the “death” in view here as physical, not spiritual. We actually have examples in the Bible in which believers sinned so grievously that God took their lives (see, for example, Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Corinthians 11:30 [in the context of verses 17-34]).

If your version of the Bible has the indefinite pronoun “a” before sin in these verses, you should know that this has been added by translators and need not be supplied in the translation. In other words, John is not necessarily talking about a particular sin. Rather, he is probably speaking of a category of sins which could (if committed) lead to physical death. This would be due to God’s judgment on the believer’s sin.

One final point. If this understanding is correct, it need not be understood to mean that the believer whose sin leads to physical death is therefore spiritually lost. The judgment would be upon the believer’s life in this world. It would not imply that such a believer also forfeits heaven. The believer so judged by God would still be saved. But he would probably be like one of those believer’s described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:15—“he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” Such a believer is saved, but appears to have suffered the loss of all possible heavenly rewards. If this is correct, then salvation is not at issue here, but rather the loss of rewards that could have been earned through obedience. Of course, salvation itself is by

grace through faith, and not by our works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

I hope this helps. This is basically how I would understand the passage in 1 John.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“Are There Non-Christian Sources Denying Jesus Lived?”

I was just reading Michael Gleghorn's article [Ancient Evidence for Jesus from Non-Christian Sources](#). Are there any non-Christian sources saying Jesus didn't live? How reliable are they?

Are there any non-Christian sources agreeing that Jesus did live, but making claims about Him which oppose or contradict what is said in the New Testament?

Thanks for your letter. Yes, on both counts. But notice that my article is dealing with *ancient* evidence for Jesus. This is the best evidence available, for it is closest in time to the actual life of Jesus. Thus, concerning your first question, the non-Christian sources which say that Jesus didn't live would all be very late. I'm not sure what the earliest such source is, but such sources would not be considered reliable. Such sources occasionally appear in our day, though this is very much a minority opinion among scholars. The fact is, the

evidence for the life of Jesus is just too good to be competently denied. Those who deny that Jesus ever lived are really taking an extremely implausible (and even irrational) position.

Concerning your second question, there are a number of ancient sources along these lines. Such sources are not as ancient as the New Testament gospels or other New Testament documents (e.g. the letters of Paul, Peter, John, etc.). But such sources do exist. For one thing, some of the sources mentioned in my program would fall under this category. Think of some of the things said about Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud or in Lucian. But there would also be sources like the [Gospels of Thomas](#), Peter, Mary Magdalene, Philip, etc, as well as other such ancient sources. Here it's important to note that such sources are not as old as the New Testament documents, which were written in the first century. These documents typically date to the third and fourth centuries—long after the New Testament was written (and long after the writings of Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, etc.). Also, these documents are typically characterized by a Gnostic theology, which presents an unbiblical view of Jesus. The church fathers (teachers and leaders in the early church) were wise to reject these books from the New Testament canon. Although they claim to be written by people like Mary Magdalene, Philip, Thomas, etc., they were not written by the early Christian disciples who bore these names. For more information on these subjects, please see my article [Redeeming the Da Vinci Code](#) for a much fuller explanation.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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“Did the Church Create the Bible?”

What would you say to a Catholic person who said “the church created the Bible”?

In a very real sense, the person who says this is basically correct. But some qualifications are also needed.

First, the church did not create the Old Testament. These books preceded the church by quite a bit (assuming the church began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2).

Second, it's important to remember that the New Testament books (like those of the Old Testament) are both a divine and human creation. The books were authored by human beings, but their writings were superintended by the Holy Spirit (this is the doctrine of [inspiration](#)).

Third, it's important to remember that Protestants and Roman Catholics have a slightly different [canon](#) of Scripture. That is, Catholics include some books (e.g. the [Apocrypha](#)) which Protestants do not include in the canon of Scripture (i.e. authoritative, divinely inspired books).

However, once we make these qualifications, it is evident (I think) that the New Testament was written (and brought into its present canonical form) by the church. These writings weren't written by non-Christians after all, but by believers—who are part of the church. The same would go for the process of canonization. Of course, God was providentially guiding those leaders who ultimately decided which books should (and should not) be part of the New Testament. But the fact remains that this was also a decision of the church.

As a “bare bones” statement, then, I think the person who says this is essentially correct.

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

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“Should We Give Our Tithes Directly to the Pastor?”

A lady in our church said that God said to give all of our tithes and offerings to the pastor for him personally. He gets a weekly salary and works outside the church. Something did not feel right to give my tithes directly to a man and not to God’s house per se. Am I wrong to feel not right in my spirit?

It’s a bit difficult to know precisely what to say in a situation like this, since I am not familiar with all the details. However, you may be right to feel some discomfort in your spirit about this. Suffice it to say that while the laborer is worthy of his wages (Luke 10:7), there should also be some structure for accountability. (Titus 1:7 indicates that those in church leadership are stewards over God’s flock, and 1 Cor. 4:2 requires that stewards be found faithful.) It seems to me that there should be a group of leaders in the church who wisely and prayerfully make decisions regarding the use and allocation of church finances. This is what the church seems to have already done by providing a weekly salary to the minister for his services. At any rate, it seems to me that money should be given to the church and then wisely distributed by a group of leaders in the church. From the money given to the church, then, the pastor’s salary would be

paid, other church workers might be paid, missionaries might be supported, the poor might be helped, etc. This, it seems to me, is the wisest and safest way to handle the church's resources. So without knowing all of the details in this particular case, I am inclined to agree with your assessment of the situation.

Shalom,
Michael Gleghorn

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“Does God Hear African Prayers?”

I live in Nairobi, Kenya, and I have several questions about prayer. 1) Why does it take such a long time to answer our prayers? I have been asking God to give me sponsors to go to Bible College and I have been fasting all the time. 2) Why do many, many people in Africa suffer so much more than white people? Does God hear African prayers?

You ask some very important (and very profound) questions. As I think about your questions, they seem to fall into two categories: 1. Questions concerning petitionary prayer (i.e. making requests of God, or asking Him for something) and 2. Questions concerning the problem of evil and suffering.

Concerning prayer, I can safely begin by saying, Yes, God does hear the prayers of Africans. But if this is true, you want to know why it takes God so long to answer your requests. Now as I'm sure you already realize, I really cannot answer this

question—for God has not told me why He is waiting to answer your request. However, there are a number of things that can be said about why (in general) God may take a long time to answer a person's request. First, of course, the answer may simply be "No." Just as we wouldn't give our children everything they asked for, so also God doesn't give His children everything they ask for. Of course, if His answer to a particular request is "No," then we can (and must) trust that He has very good, loving, and wise reasons for answering in this way.

Second, God's answer might be "Yes; but you need to wait." This can be hard to hear, of course. But again, my children sometimes ask me for something (like a snack) to which my answer is, "Yes; you can have a snack. But not right now. You need to wait until after dinner." In the same way, God sometimes has us wait a while before giving us what we have asked for. In my own case, I prayed that God would provide a particular kind of woman to be my wife. I prayed nearly every day for ten years before He finally granted my request. So sometimes, God does intend to grant our request, but he first requires that we wait a while. We can learn a lot of important spiritual lessons about trusting God, being patient, persevering in prayer, and so forth, as we wait upon the Lord. I'm not saying this is easy. But God wants to develop us into certain sorts of people. And one of the ways He does this is by having us wait a while before He grants our request. After all, for many of us, if God granted our requests immediately, we wouldn't appreciate what He has given us nearly so much. By having us patiently and prayerfully wait upon Him for a time, before granting our requests, we often come to appreciate much more the blessings God has given us.

Third, God might be willing to grant a particular request immediately, but does not do so because we are harboring unconfessed sin in our hearts. We all struggle with sin in many ways. If we don't confess our sins, but continue to

pursue that which the Lord hates, He may think it better not to grant us our request.

There are other reasons why God might not immediately grant a request as well. Some of these you can find in my article ["Problems and Promises of Petitionary Prayer."](#) I think you would find this article helpful, especially the last two sections on "Qualifying Christ's Promises."

Having said all of this, however, I want to reiterate that I do NOT personally know why God has not yet granted your request. Whatever the reason, we all need to learn to trust in the wisdom, love, and goodness of God toward us in Christ, whether He grants our requests quickly, slowly, or not at all. He has very good reasons for doing things as He does and we need to learn to trust Him.

Now concerning your second question, why so many people in Africa suffer so much more than white people, I must (once again) honestly confess that I do not know. This would be yet another instance of the problem of evil and suffering in the world. How can we reconcile the existence of an all-good, all-loving, all-powerful God (like Christians believe in) with all the evil and suffering in the world?

Now I want to be clear, Christian philosophers and theologians have proposed very good answers to questions such as these. But these answers essentially aim to show that God can have very good, morally sufficient reasons, for allowing the evil and suffering that He does—even if we have no idea what those reasons are. As you can see, therefore, these answers (even if they're successful) will not be able to explicitly tell you why so many people in Africa suffer so much. Unless God tells us the answer to such a question, we simply do not know. And it would be dishonest for me to tell you otherwise.

Having said this, however, I do like what the Christian philosopher William Lane Craig has to say about such matters.

He, along with many others, points out that there is a very strong statistical correlation between the amount of suffering in a particular area of the world and the number of people coming to Christ for salvation. That is, he observes that in those places where there is a lot of suffering, there are often a lot of people coming to Christ for salvation. But in that case, one of the very good reasons that God might have for allowing suffering and evil, is that it ends up being a very effective means of moving men and women to give their lives to Christ that they might be saved. And this, it is crucially important to note, ends up insuring THEIR ETERNAL WELL-BEING.

In this respect, it's important to bear in mind that this life is not all there is. People will continue to exist after they die physically either in fellowship and communion with God in heaven, or eternally deprived of such fellowship and communion in hell. If God knows that more people will freely repent of their sins and turn to Christ for salvation if He allows suffering to enter their lives, then (somewhat ironically) the most loving thing He can do is allow suffering to enter these peoples lives. For by doing so, God knows they will repent, trust in Christ for salvation, and be saved. And this means they will have all eternity to enjoy God, without any pain or suffering. If you would like to read more on the problem of evil, here are some links to articles you might find helpful: 1. [The Problem of Evil](#), 2. [Christ and the Human Condition](#), and 3. [The Value of Suffering](#). My colleague Sue Bohlin has also provided her speaking notes for a message [When God Says No: Reasons For Unanswered Prayer](#) at Bible.org.

At any rate, a great deal more could be said about the questions you have raised, _____. For the questions you have raised are very profound questions. But hopefully, this brief answer will give you some help and comfort as you continue to wrestle with these issues. As I have said, I really cannot specifically answer your questions. These are questions which

no one knows the answer to but God—and it's very important to honestly say so. However, the Christian tradition does offer genuine wisdom in thinking through questions of this sort. And I've tried to share a bit of that with you in this letter.

Michael Gleghorn

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“From Flat Earth to Lot's Daughters—Major Questions on God”

Several very broad questions that have plagued many through the years were asked by young lady from the U.K.:

- 1) **The Bible reflects that we live on a flat earth, does it not?**
- 2) **Why did God allow such terrible violence in the Old Testament?**
- 3) **Why does the bible degrade the women unequal to men?**
- 4) **The Bible says that women should not have authority over man or teach in 1 Timothy 2:12? Isn't that God being [unfair] to women?**
- 5) **Why did Lot offer up his daughters to be gang raped? Why did God allow Lot's daughters to later have sex with their father? I don't understand why a loving God will allow this?**
- 6) **Was God being evil when He killed all the firstborn in Egypt?**

Hello _____,

Thanks for your letter. Please allow me to briefly respond to your questions in the order in which you asked them:

1. The Bible nowhere teaches that we live on a flat earth. While some might say that the Bible's use of poetic language implies such a thing, this would be to seriously misread and misinterpret biblical poetry.

2. This is a question related to the problem of evil. Please see response #5 below.

3. The New Testament teaches that men and women are equal in Christ. Paul writes unequivocally, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Both men and women are made in the image and likeness of God and, hence, have intrinsic worth and dignity (Genesis 1:27). But this equality in worth and value before God does not mean that men and women have the same function in the world or role in the church.

4. So I don't think that 1 Tim. 2:12 is teaching that women are not equal to men in worth and dignity before God. Paul has already taught that they are in Galatians 3:28. Rather, this verse shows that men and women have different roles to play in the body of Christ. The sexes have different roles and responsibilities. Hence, women (and not men) are honored with bringing children into the world (and thus Eve is called the mother of all the living in Genesis 3:20). Further, they are encouraged to teach other women (Titus 2:4) as well as children. This verse (and others like it) speaks to that authoritative teaching ministry of the church (when it is gathered together as the church, with both men and women present) which God has committed to men. It does not mean that a woman cannot instruct men in all sorts of arenas (including college and university settings, etc.) outside this special teaching function in the church. Paul is speaking to a very limited area of teaching in the church which God has given to

men. Women have other teaching functions in the church and (as I said) they can also teach all they want outside the church. But God has entrusted what we might call the "pulpit ministry" of the church to men.

5. This also, it seems to me, is a question which can be subsumed under the problem of evil. I think the correct answer to questions such as this is, first, to point out that such behavior contradicts (and is contrary to) God's revealed moral will. In other words, it is sin. All human sin must be laid at the feet of human beings, for these are the ones committing such vile acts. God does not force man to misbehave and do evil. Rather, mankind freely chooses such abominable behavior. God, indeed, is the One who has graciously provided a way of escape for all men in Christ. And hence, all men and women are called upon to repent of their sins and place their hope and faith in Christ for salvation. Those who refuse to repent and place their trust in Christ for salvation will be held fully accountable before God for their sins. This is a situation that we are all strenuously called upon to avoid by fleeing to the refuge (in Christ) which God has graciously made available to all men and women. But those who refuse God's free offer of salvation in Christ will be held fully accountable for all the sin and moral evil which they have committed.

6. Now, as to God's killing the first born of Egypt, we must bear in mind a few things. First, as the Author and Giver of life, God has the right both to give and take life as He sees fit. Indeed, He does this all the time. But according to the Bible, physical death does not end our personal, conscious existence. Rather, our existence continues into the afterlife. And if (as I believe) all those that die before reaching an age of moral accountability before God (whatever that age might be) are saved, this sovereign act of God would have brought many of these people to a much better place—a place of everlasting joy and peace in the presence of God—a place they might never have seen had they been permitted to

live out their days on earth. [See also our article [Do Babies Go to Hell?](#)] Secondly, all these deaths could have been avoided if Pharaoh would have yielded his own arrogant will to God's and let God's people go free (as he was repeatedly told to do). Pharaoh witnessed several miracles of God and was given repeated opportunities to obey and let God's people go. Unfortunately, he refused—with the result that both he and his people were made to endure several more plagues until he finally relented and allowed God's people (whom he had enslaved, after all) to go free. It's always important to bear in mind the “much-bigger” picture of what we read in the Bible.

I hope these answers prove helpful to you in your ongoing spiritual pilgrimage. Each of these answers could be (and has been) developed at much greater length by Christian scholars—and I would encourage you to explore such answers in articles and books. But this is all I can say over email, for time is very limited.

God bless you _____!

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

“Are Calvinism and Arminianism Both Biblical?”

Calvinism and Arminianism: is either one Biblical? Can they both be Biblical? Should the differences between Arminian and Calvinistic theology really be of that great of concern as long as both teach that the Lord is sovereign and we are all sinners and the only way to the Lord is through Jesus Christ

and the atoning sacrifice He made on the cross?

You ask a very good question and (of course) who you ask will determine the sort of answer you receive. Yes; many Calvinists view Arminianism as “false doctrine” and are often very condescending in the way they discuss it. (Of course, Arminians are also quite capable of being condescending toward Calvinists too.) Personally, I think this is unfortunate. This is a very important discussion and the competing viewpoints definitely have something to learn from each other.

Regarding your question, both perspectives view themselves as perfectly “biblical.” Adherents of either system will want to affirm that their view is most consistent with the teaching of Scripture. If they thought otherwise, they would change their view.

Of course, both systems cannot be correct in all the details (though they could both be wrong in *some* of the details). In this sense, they cannot both be “biblical” in the sense that they both get everything right according to Scripture. The disagreements between the two systems are significant and they cannot both be right in all the particular views that they affirm (although they could both be wrong in certain respects).

The differences should concern us (even though there is much in which both systems would agree). The differences are significant. Calvinists deny libertarian freedom; Arminians affirm it. Calvinists embrace a different definition of “total depravity” than Arminians. Both groups disagree about the nature of election, the extent of the atonement, and whether or not a true believer can lose his/her salvation. These differences (and others as well) are significant enough to be of concern to all true believers.

At any rate, this is a huge and complex issue (as you’ve probably come to see). Let me conclude by recommending what I

consider to be a really great book that deals with these issues (although the author takes something of a “mediating” position between the two). The book is called *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*. It is written by the Baptist theologian Kenneth Keathley and was published in 2010. You can find the book on Amazon.

Keathley’s book is one you definitely want to read if you’re concerned about these issues. Personally, I think his particular version of a “Molinist” approach offers the best way out of the labyrinth. I hope you find it helpful.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“Is Quantum Physics Legitimate or Spiritually Dangerous?”

Michael, thank you so very much for your insightful articles about [Reiki](#). My father was an excellent medical doctor and surgeon and after retiring, he was led into Reiki and he is always trying to push this on us. His three adult Christian children all have known from the start that this was not of the Lord and have rejected it. Now he is advocating Quantum Physics as the answer to life even though he claims to be a Christian. Have you written anything about Quantum Physics or can you give me just a couple of scriptural reasons why it is

off-base? I imagine that they are the same as the reason for Reiki.

Thanks for your kind and encouraging letter. I'm glad to hear that the article on Reiki was helpful to you. Concerning quantum physics, this is a legitimate and highly-developed branch of contemporary physics. Any difficulties with quantum physics would not be due to the legitimate scientific work being done. However, difficulties with quantum physics do arise, and these can usually be traced back to two sources of origin.

In the first place, the vast majority of people who mention quantum physics have very little idea of what it is they're actually talking about. They may have read a popular-level book or two on the subject (or they may not have even done that). With this bit of new knowledge they may then make all kinds of far-fetched and dubious claims. The problem is, they usually don't know what they are talking about and it is difficult for anyone to challenge them (because not many people have a deep enough knowledge of this important field of physics to do so). In particular, quantum physics has been embraced by many non-Christian Eastern religious movements (or religious movements influenced by such philosophies) as a means of showing that physical reality is paradoxical, or illogical, etc. This often fits in with their religious claims, but many of these views are based on misunderstandings, misappropriations, and misinterpretations of quantum physics—and hence are not to be accepted uncritically.

Secondly (and this is very important), there are MANY DIFFERENT interpretations of what the mathematics and experimental science behind quantum physics is actually telling us about the nature of physical reality. This is terribly important to understand, but sadly, most people are not aware of this. Many of the "wild and crazy" ideas which people propound with an appeal to quantum physics are based on

a particular interpretation of the mathematical and physical evidence. But the problem with this is that there are numerous competing interpretations, each one of which adequately accounts for the data, but many of which would NOT result in the same strange views of the physical world. And here's the kicker: we do NOT know which interpretation is the right one! Hence, as you can easily imagine, many of the strange ideas which are based on a particular interpretation of quantum physics may be incorrect, simply because the interpretation upon which these ideas are based is incorrect!

For more on quantum physics from an informed Christian perspective, please check out some of William Lane Craig's materials on his website [here](#). These are the search results from "quantum physics" on his website. Craig is a world class Christian philosopher and theologian, who is intimately acquainted with the issues in contemporary physics. You might also want to refer your father to Craig's work. His website has scholarly and popular-level articles, podcasts, debates with leading atheists, etc. I would highly recommend Craig's work.

I hope this is helpful. May the Lord richly bless you in your service for Him!

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Posted Nov. 28, 2012

“How Could a Holy God Make

Prophets Lie?"

Please explain the text of 2 Chronicles 22:18-22. The Lord put a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets to lie. How does that conform to God's holy nature?

Thanks for your question. This story is recounted in both 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18. The question, as you rightly ask, is how such a story can be consistent with God's holy nature?

There are a number of important observations to make about this passage. First, observe that in 1 Kings 22:1-12, Ahab asks Jehoshaphat if he would be willing to go to war with him to retake Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat agrees, but wants first to inquire of the Lord. Ahab brings out 400 false prophets, who tell him what he wants to hear. It is clear that these are not true prophets of the Lord because Jehoshaphat asks Ahab if there isn't a prophet of the Lord that they might yet inquire of (see vv. 7-8). This is important, for Ahab has essentially attempted to call a bunch of false prophets before him who will merely tell him what he wants to hear (and has already decided to do).

Second, notice what happens when Micaiah (a true prophet of the Lord) is called. Of course, initially Micaiah sarcastically tells the king what the false prophets are also saying. It's clear that he says this sarcastically because the king reminds him to only tell him the truth in the name of the Lord. At this point, Micaiah, the true prophet of the Lord, tells the king the whole truth of God; namely, that the king's venture will not succeed and that the king himself will die in battle. In other words, the Lord, through His true prophet, tells the king the whole truth at this point. He even tells the king that He has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of the king's (false) prophets. The Lord, through Micaiah, here tells King Ahab the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but

the truth.

Third, notice that Ahab disregards the true prophet of the Lord, spurns his advice, and instead willfully chooses to follow the advice of his false prophets (the very prophets that Micaiah has just told him are speaking lies and falsehoods). The Lord has actually told Ahab the whole truth, but Ahab chooses to follow the advice of lying false prophets, rather than the advice of Micaiah, a true prophet of the Lord (as Ahab himself acknowledges Micaiah to be—see v. 8).

Notice, then, that God nowhere lies to Ahab here. In fact, he pointedly reveals to Ahab the whole awful truth about what will happen if Ahab goes ahead with his plans. It's true, of course, that God does permit deceptive spirits to speak through Ahab's false prophets. But it's important to remember that He reveals this truth to Ahab through His true prophet, Micaiah. It's also important to bear in mind that, given God's sovereignty over everything that happens, whenever lies are told or evil spirits (or men) do something, God has sovereignly permitted them to do so. God created human beings and angels as free, rational, morally responsible creatures. Since such creatures are truly free, they are free to do good or evil. Whenever a free creature chooses to do something evil, God must sovereignly permit that creature to do so. However, as we see repeatedly in the Bible, God can take even the evil and sinful choices of His creatures, and bring about good from them (remember the story of Joseph and his brothers; see, in particular, Genesis 50:15-21).

In conclusion, then, although much more could be said, this is how I would briefly attempt to interpret this fascinating story. I hope this is helpful to you. God bless you!

Shalom in Christ,

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