

“My JW Friend Needs a Blood Transfusion and Won’t Allow It!”

I have a friend who broke his back riding a motorcycle last week. He needs a blood transfusion so he can have an operation to get the feeling back in his legs. He won’t let them give him blood. How can I show him he’s wrong in a loving manner? I did copy Patrick Zukeran’s article on [Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Trinity](#) to share with his wife who isn’t a Christian. I think she can get the gist of it.

Dear _____,

We at Probe will be praying for your situation. It is all too common among Jehovah’s Witnesses. First of all, I believe there is a law for doctors that if a JW needs blood, they have the right to overrule the wishes of the JW church and family members and give blood. Make sure your doctors are aware of this law. It applies in the U.S.; I don’t know about other countries.

Second, the Bible in the Old Testament law, Leviticus 3:17 and other passages, forbid the eating of blood. Also in Acts 15:20, the apostles wrestled with the whole issue of eating meat with blood. One thing to understand here and make this very clear, eating blood and receiving a blood transfusion are two different things. When you eat blood it goes down the digestive tract into the stomach. When we receive a blood transfusion, it goes into an entirely different system, the cardiovascular system, the blood veins to the heart. We are talking about two different system, one the digestive system and the other the cardiovascular system. The Old Testament law forbids the eating of blood (the digestive tract), but it does not forbid blood transfusion (the cardiovascular tract), to

save a life.

False interpretation of the Watchtower does have its consequences.

“Lord, may you equip _____ to defend your word of truth and give her words of wisdom to share with her JW friends that the life of this man may be saved. Empower _____ to share your truth with love and power. In Jesus’ mighty name. Amen.”

God Bless you _____.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

Jesus in the Qur'an – Muslims Receive a False View

Dr. Zukeran clearly lays out the differences between a biblical view of Jesus and the view brought forth in the Qura'n. He makes a strong case that the biblical reports are supported by historical fact while the Muslim writings were created to strengthen their case. Looking at the birth, the life and the death of Christ he highlights the distinct differences and the case for a Christian view over an Islamic view.

The Debate

Islam and Christianity both recognize Jesus as a significant historical figure. However, they teach contrary doctrines regarding the nature and person of Jesus Christ. Christians have taught from the beginning that Jesus is the divine Son of God. This was not a doctrine invented centuries after the life

of Christ as some allege, but was taught from the beginning by Christ Himself and the church. There is strong evidence that the New Testament was written in the first century, and there are numerous verses proclaiming the deity of Christ (Matt. 1:23; Mark 2:1-12; John 1:1). Old Testament prophecies regarding the nature of the Messiah proclaimed that He would be human as well as divine (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6). Even non-Christian Roman historical works, such as the writings of Pliny the Younger (AD 112) and Celsus (AD 177), acknowledge that the Christians worshipped Christ as God.

✖ Muslims reject the biblical teaching that Christ is the divine Son of God. Islam builds upon the teachings of the Qur'an, which is considered perfect and without error. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was a significant prophet but not the divine Son of God. Muslims reject the doctrine of the Trinity, and, therefore, worshipping Jesus as God is considered *shirk*, or blasphemy (Sura 5:72).

Islam teaches that Jesus Himself never claimed to be the Son of God. Sura 9:30 states, "The Jews call Ezra a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be upon them: how they are deluded away from the truth!" The assertion that God stands against those who believe in the deity of Christ is in contradiction with the Bible. Sura 5:116-117 states:

And behold! God will say [i.e. on the Day of Judgment]: "Oh Jesus, the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?" He will say: "Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Yours. For You know in full all that is hidden. Never did I say to them anything except what You commanded me to say: 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.' And I was a witness

over them while I lived among them. When You took me up, You were the Watcher over them, and You are a witness to all things."

Chapter five of the Qur'an asserts that Christianity taught the worship of Mary as a god. From this passage and others, many Muslims have incorrectly concluded that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the Father, the Son, and Mary. In fact, the New Testament never taught the worship of Mary. Instead it clearly taught that one must worship the Lord God alone (Matt. 4:10). The biblical doctrine of the Trinity never included Mary. The chapter further states that Jesus Himself clearly denied claiming to be the Son of God and would not accept the worship of others. In contrast, the Bible teaches that Jesus claimed to be the divine Son of God and received worship (Jn. 8; Matt. 14:33; 28:17). Sura 5:75 states:

Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than a messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. See how God makes His signs clear to them; yet see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth!

The Qur'an emphatically teaches that Jesus was a prophet and not the divine Son of God. Those who believe Jesus is divine are "deluded."

The Apostle John, writing in AD 90, states in chapter one of his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Apostle Paul, writing his letter to the Colossians in AD 60, states in chapter 2:9, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."

It is apparent that Christianity and Islam teach contrary views of Christ and, therefore, cannot both be true at the same time. In this article I will investigate what the Qur'an teaches regarding the life of Christ and compare it with the

Gospels. Since they teach contrary views, I will examine to see whether the Bible or the Qur'an has the greater weight of evidence to support its teachings on the nature of Christ.

Infancy Narratives of Christ in the Qur'an

What does the Qur'an teach regarding the childhood years of Christ? Not only do the Bible and the Qur'an teach contrary views regarding the nature of Christ, they also record contrary accounts of His early life. The Bible teaches that Jesus was born in Bethlehem during the time of Caesar Augustus and the reign of King Herod over Bethlehem. Jesus was born in a stable because there were no rooms available for Mary and Joseph. On the eve of His birth, shepherds, who were told of his birth by angels, visited him. Later, wise men from the East came and worshipped the child. Herod, threatened by the announcement of a newborn king, sought to kill the child. Joseph fled from Herod, traveled to Egypt, and, after Herod's death, returned to Nazareth where Jesus grew up. The Gospels rely on eyewitness accounts for their source of information.

The Qur'an includes stories regarding the birth and childhood of Christ, but it relies on very questionable sources that are not eyewitness accounts. First, the Qur'an teaches that Jesus was born in the desert under a palm tree. Sura 19 teaches that Mary, feeling the pangs of childbirth, seized the trunk of a palm tree and desired at that moment to die. However, the baby Jesus speaks to her from beneath saying, "Grieve not; for your Lord has provided a rivulet beneath you. And shake towards yourself the trunk of the palm tree: it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon you. So eat drink and cool [your] eye" (Sura 19: 24-25).

This story parallels an account from the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*, which is dated to the early seventh century AD (between AD 600 and 625).[{1}](#) New Testament scholar Dan Wallace

dates this Gospel even later to the eighth to ninth century AD.[\[2\]](#) Wallace's date would push back the date of the Qur'an to several generations after Muhammad. In chapter 20 of this apocryphal work, Joseph and Mary are fleeing to Egypt and come to rest under a tall palm tree. Mary longs to eat the fruit of a palm tree and Joseph states their need for water. It is then the infant Jesus speaks to the palm tree:

Then the child Jesus, with a joyful countenance, reposing in the bosom of His mother, said to the palm: "O tree, bend thy branches, and refresh my mother with thy fruit." And immediately at these words the palm bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary; and they gathered from it fruit, with which they were all refreshed. And after they had gathered all its fruit, it remained bent down, waiting the order to rise from Him who had commanded it to stoop. Then Jesus said to it: "Raise thyself, O palm tree, and be strong, and be the companion of my trees, which are in the paradise of my Father; and open from thy roots a vein of water which has been hid in the earth, and let the waters flow, so that we may be satisfied from thee." And it rose up immediately, and at its root there began to come forth a spring of water exceedingly clear and cool and sparkling. And when they saw the spring of water, they rejoiced with great joy, and were satisfied, themselves and all their cattle and their beasts. Wherefore they gave thanks to God.

Historians and textual scholars such as F. F. Bruce have concluded that Muhammad incorporated this story from the apocryphal *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*.[\[3\]](#)

Another infant narrative from the Qur'an teaches that not long after Jesus' birth, Mary presents the infant to her people, several of whom question her regarding the baby. In her defense she points to the infant, which confuses the people since the child is only an infant. Then to everyone's surprise, the newborn Jesus speaks saying:

I am indeed a servant of Allah, He has given me revelation and made me a Prophet; And He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live. [He] has made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable; So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life [again]. Such was (Prophet) Jesus, the son of Mary. A saying of truth, concerning what they doubt (Sura 19:30-33).

This account teaches that shortly after his birth, Jesus spoke, proclaiming His calling as the prophet of Allah, and defending the innocence of His mother Mary. The source of this story is another pseudo-gospel, the *Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior*.[\[4\]](#) According to Wallace, this apocryphal work was written in the fifth or sixth century AD.[\[5\]](#) This work states:

We have found it recorded in the book of Josephus the Chief Priest, who was in the time of Christ (and men say that he was Caiaphas), that this man said that Jesus spake when He was in the cradle, and said to Mary His Mother, "Verily I am Jesus, the Son of God, the Word which thou hast borne, according as the angel Gabriel gave thee the good news; and My Father hath sent Me for the salvation of the world."

Here we see the parallels between the Qur'an and this apocryphal work. This work specifically mentions the infant Jesus speaking from his cradle, declaring His calling from God.

A third account in the Qur'an records Jesus making birds out of clay and then bringing them to life. Sura 3:49 states:

I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: And I heal those

born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what you eat and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you, if you did believe.

This story of Christ breathing life into clay birds has no parallel in the Gospels. Instead, this story comes from another apocryphal work, *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Historical evidence indicates this Gospel was not written by Thomas; moreover, it was not even written in the lifetime of the apostles. The earliest manuscript of this Gospel dates from the sixth century AD., but most scholars date this work in the late second century.[\[6\]](#) New Testament scholar Wilhelm Schneemelcher writes that the author was most likely not Jewish but a Gentile Christian. He asserts the fact that "the author was of gentile Christian origin may be assumed with certainty, since his work betrays no knowledge of things Jewish."[\[7\]](#)

Another account of Jesus in this *Infancy Gospel* reveals a capricious child who inflicts painful revenge several times on those who cross him in a manner he does not like. Fred Lapham states, "[M]any of the stories in the earlier part of the work are morally offensive and indefensible, showing the growing Jesus to be cruel, callous, and vindictive, and exercising power without regard for the consequences."[\[8\]](#) This account portrays a young Jesus contrary to that in the Gospels. A vengeful and bad-tempered Jesus would be contrary to the description given in Luke which states that he was "filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him" (Lk. 2:40). Also, a child of the character portrayed in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* would not likely be described as growing in "wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Lk. 2:52).

There are several concerns regarding the accounts of Christ in the Qur'an. First, the infancy accounts of Christ contradict the Gospels. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was born in the

desert under a palm tree while the New Testament Gospels teach that Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem in a stable (Lk. 2:7). The infancy narratives in the Qur'an teach that Jesus performed miracles in his infancy and childhood. However, John 2:11 states that Jesus' first miracle was performed in Cana of Galilee at the beginning of His ministry. Since the Qur'an and the Bible present contrary accounts of the life of Christ, both cannot be true at the same time.

What Does the Historical Evidence Support?

The historical evidence strongly confirms the New Testament Gospel accounts. First of all, two of these authors—Matthew and John—were eyewitnesses. Meanwhile, Mark and Luke derived their facts from the apostles themselves. There are numerous facts that support this to be the case. The internal evidence, archaeology, manuscript evidence, quotes from the early Church Fathers, and ancient non-Christian historical works affirm the first century date and historical accuracy of the gospels.[{9}](#)

Muhammad wrote the Qur'an nearly six centuries after the life of Christ. Unlike the Gospel writers who relied on eyewitness sources, Islam's defense is that the angel Gabriel revealed the information to Muhammad. However, the parallels to Gnostic apocryphal works reveal that Muhammad's sources came from a mixture of Christian fables and Gnostic works that were prevalent in Arabia at that time.

Muhammad no doubt had interaction with Christians. There were several Christian communities in Arabia, and he would have also met Christian traders traveling in caravans along the trade routes. Also his first wife, Khadija, had a cousin named Waraqa who was a Christian.[{10}](#) These Christian and Gnostic "Christian" sources told Muhammad stories from the New Testament and also the fables and apocryphal stories spreading at that time. Since Muhammad was illiterate, he was not able

to read and research these sources for himself; instead he relied on second or third hand accounts told to him. As he retold the stories, some of the details were changed due to an incorrect telling, a lapse in memory, or a desire for them to better fit his belief system.

In creating the Qur'an, Muhammad does recount some biblical stories, but he also relies on apocryphal sources written centuries after the eyewitnesses. These works present a Gnostic refashioning of Christ and have shown to be unhistorical in nature. Since they were not derived from apostolic sources and presented a false view of Christ, they were never considered part of inspired Scripture. The evidence strongly favors the New Testament Gospel accounts over the Qur'an. Since the Qur'an presents stories contrary to the Gospels, its historical accuracy and inspiration comes into question. Also, if Muhammad recorded false stories regarding the infant life of Christ, one must also question his understanding of the nature of Christ as well.

In citing apocryphal works as unreliable, one may fairly question whether the Bible quotes apocryphal works. Indeed, there are occasions where the Bible does quote from uninspired sources. One of the most questioned are Jude's references to the *Assumption of Moses* (Jude 9) and the *Book of Enoch* (Jude 14-15). However, these two references do not present a theological or historical problem since they do not present any teaching contrary to biblical revelation. So, although Jude does quote uninspired sources, there is no reason to reject the inspiration of Jude. Although the *Assumption of Moses* and the *Book of Enoch* are apocryphal works, Jude is referencing portions that are true and consistent with other areas of the Bible. Therefore, this does not affect either the doctrine of inspiration or the integrity of Jude's book.

In contrast, the birth and infancy account of Christ in the Qur'an is problematic since it both contradicts the New Testament Gospels and presents a contrary view regarding the

nature of Christ. Therefore, unlike Jude, it is inconsistent with the New Testament, and we must decide whether it is the Qur'an or the Gospels that are in error.

The Life of Christ

The Qur'an speaks on five aspects of Christ's life. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus was a prophet of God but rejects the deity of Christ. However, it does affirm that Christ lived a remarkable life. The Qur'an affirms the virgin birth of Christ (Sura 3:42-47; 19:16-21). The Qur'an affirms the prophetic call of Christ. It also affirms that Christ performed many miracles. The Qur'an affirms that Christ was sinless (Sura 19:16-21). However, it rejects the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and instead teaches that Christ did not suffer physical death but God raised Him up to heaven (Sura 4:158).

What is significant to realize is that, comparing Jesus to Muhammad in the Qur'an, Jesus performs greater works than Muhammad. First, according to the Qur'an, Christ is born of a virgin while there is nothing miraculous regarding the birth of Muhammad. Second, the Qur'an teaches that Christ accomplished many miracles, but Muhammad does not perform any in the Qur'an. The Qur'an teaches that true prophets of God are confirmed by miracles. It teaches that previous prophets Moses and Jesus were confirmed as prophets by their miracles (Sura 7:106-8; 116-119; 5:113). However, when the people ask Muhammad to do so, he refuses, stating that the Jews witnessed miracles from the prophets but remained in unbelief (Sura 28:47-51; 17:90-95). If, according to the Qur'an, God confirmed His prophets through miracles, a question remains as to why He would not confirm Muhammad with the same "seal" of the prophets. This certainly was within God's ability to accomplish.

Contemporary Muslim author Isma'il Al-Faruqi claims that

“Muslims do not claim any miracles for Muhammad. In their view, what proves Muhammad’s prophethood is the sublime beauty and greatness of the revelation itself, the Holy Qur’an, not any inexplicable breaches of natural law which confound human reason.”[\[11\]](#) Muslim scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali admitted that Muhammad did not perform any miracle “in the sense of a reversing of Nature.”[\[12\]](#)

Muslim apologists point to the miracle accounts of Muhammad in the *Hadith*, a record of the sayings of Muhammad. However, the Qur’an is the inspired book of God, and the *Hadith* does not carry the authority of the Qur’an. The *Hadith* was written nearly one to two centuries after the life of Muhammad. Since this follows the pattern historians such as A.N. Sherwin-White have identified of miracle accounts that appear two generations after the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, the alleged miracle accounts in the *Hadith* stand in question. Moreover, the *Hadith* accounts seem to also go against the spirit of Muhammad in the Qur’an who repeatedly refused to perform miracles (3:181–84; 4:153; 6:8–9). It is also significant to note that many Muslim scholars such as Sahih Bukhari, who is considered to be the most reliable collector of the sayings in the *Hadith*, believed the vast majority of the miracle stories to be false.[\[13\]](#)

When pressed to defend the miracles of Muhammad, some point to Muhammad’s night journey in Sura 19 in which he claims to have been transported to Jerusalem and then ascended to heaven on the back of a mule (Sura 17:1). There is no reason to take this passage as referring to a literal trip to heaven as even many Muslim scholars do not take it as such. The noted translator of the Qur’an, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, comments on this passage, noting that “it opens with the mystic Vision of the Ascension of the Holy Prophet; he is transported from the Sacred Mosque (of Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (of Jerusalem) at night and shown some of the Signs of God.”[\[14\]](#) Even according to one of the earliest Islamic traditions,

Muhammad's wife A'isha reported that "the apostle's body remained where it was but God removed his spirit by night."[\[15\]](#) Further, even if this were to be understood as a miracle claim, there is no evidence presented to test its authenticity. Since it lacks testability, it has no apologetic value.[\[16\]](#)

Another miracle is the prophecy of victory at the Battle of Badr (Sura 3:123; 8:17). However, it is a stretch to call this a supernatural miracle. It is common that generals will predict victory over an enemy army to inspire his troops. Also, Muhammad did not prophesy his defeat at the Battle of Uhud a year later.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam teach that God confirms His messengers through miracles. The Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the apostles have the testimony of miracles but this is lacking in the testimony of Muhammad. The miracle testimony of Christ affirms that He was more than a prophet.

The Resurrection

The Qur'an rejects the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ because Muslims believe that Allah would not allow His prophet to die such a shameful kind of death. The Qur'an teaches that Jesus did not die on the cross. Sura 4:157-159 states:

That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God';—But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:— Nay, God raised him up unto Himself; and God is exalted in power, wise;—And there is none of the people of the Book but must believe in him before his death; And on the Day of Judgment He will be a witness

against them.

Muslims believe that Jesus did not die on the cross but escaped death and was taken up to heaven. The phrase “God raised him up unto Himself” is understood to teach that Jesus was taken up alive to heaven, never experiencing death. Based on the phrase, “it was made to appear to them,” orthodox Muslims have traditionally interpreted this to mean that God made someone else look like Jesus, and this person was crucified instead of Christ. There are various views regarding the identity of this substitute. Candidates include Judas, Simon of Cyrene, or a teen age boy.

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus predicted His death and resurrection (Matt. 26:2; Mk. 10:33; 14:8; Jn. 2:19). The Bible records the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which is central to the preaching of the apostles and to Christianity. The Qur’an and the Gospels cannot be true at the same time since they present contradictory accounts. One must examine the historical evidence and determine which account the evidence supports.

There is strong evidence to support the historicity of the Gospels and the fact that they were written by first century eyewitnesses or their close associates.[{17}](#) We also have thousands of ancient manuscripts dated as early as the beginning of the second century, confirming that the Gospels have been accurately preserved.[{18}](#) There are also several non-Christian Roman and Jewish historical works that affirm both the death of Christ and that Christians believed He had risen from the dead. These include the writings of Tacitus, Thallus, Lucian, Josephus, and the Jewish Talmud.[{19}](#) Finally, the preaching of the death and resurrection of Christ began just days after His death on the cross, and has been continuously preached since then for over two thousand years. This account was proclaimed from the beginning, not generations after the resurrection.

The Qur'an's account is not built on historical evidence but rather a commitment to Muslim theology. There is little historical evidence to support the Qur'an in its denial of the crucifixion and resurrection and its assertion that someone else took Jesus' place on the cross. To support their view, Muslims often appeal to the "Lost Gospels." These are the Gnostic Gospels such as the *Gospel of Judas* and others. However, these have proven to be non-apostolic works, written centuries after the life of the apostles. They are not regarded as historically accurate and were written by Gnostics attempting to refashion Jesus in their image.[\[20\]](#)

The death and resurrection of Christ is one of the most reliably recorded events in ancient history. The historical evidence strongly favors the Gospel account. Therefore, the Qur'an would be in error, and its inspiration must, therefore, be questioned.

Conclusion

As we have studied, the Qur'an and the Bible present contrary views on the nature and life of Christ. The Qur'an rejects the deity of Christ and the death and resurrection of Christ. The Qur'an presents stories regarding the infancy of Christ that are contrary to the New Testament and rely on Gnostic apocryphal works as its source. The Qur'an rejects major doctrines and events recorded in the Bible. Since the historical evidence upholds the Gospels, the perfection and inspiration of the Qur'an is in question since its teachings contradict major doctrines and events taught in the New Testament.

That being said, from a survey of the Qur'an, one should realize that even in the Qur'an, Jesus is greater than Muhammad. First, Jesus' titles in the Qur'an are greater. Despite rejecting the deity of Christ, the Qur'an gives Jesus several honorary titles. He is given the titles of Messiah,

the Word of God, the Spirit of God (Sura 4:169-71), the Speech of Truth (Sura 19:34-35), a Sign unto Men, and Mercy from God (Sura 19:21). Although these titles may refer to deity in Christian theology, Muslims do not equate these titles in the same way.

Second, Jesus' miracles in the Qur'an are greater, for the Qur'an affirms several miraculous aspects of Christ's life. The Qur'an affirms the virgin birth of Christ (Sura 19:16-21; 3:37-45). The Qur'an also affirms that Christ performed miracles (Sura 3:37-45; 43: 63-65). The Qur'an also affirms the prophethood of Christ (19:29-31). The Qur'an also affirms that Christ did not die but was raised up to heaven by God (4:158; 19:33). In contrast, according to the Qur'an, there is very little, if anything, supernatural regarding the life of Muhammad.

Even in the Qur'an, Jesus lived a life that is much more extraordinary than Muhammad. Since this is evident in the Qur'an, it would be wise for all Muslims to study the life of Jesus in the Bible. Not only is the Bible an accurate historical record, but it is a text that Muhammad encouraged Muslims to study (Sura 10:94; 2:136; 4:163; 5:56; 5:68; 35:31). Muhammad believed the Bible in the sixth century AD was accurate. We have many ancient New Testaments that predate the sixth century. Examples include the Chester Beatty Papyri (AD 250), Codex Vaticanus (AD 325 – 350), Codex Sinaiticus (AD 340), Codex Alexandrinus (AD 450), the Latin Vulgate (fourth century AD), and Syriac New Testament (AD 508). From these we can be assured that we have accurate copies of the New Testament that predate the sixth century.

I encourage all Muslims, therefore, to read the New Testament and learn what it says about Jesus Christ. One will soon discover that He was more than a prophet; He was indeed the unique Son Of God.

Notes

1. Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 78.
2. Ed Komoszewski, James Sawyer, and Daniel Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 156.
3. F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), 172-73.
4. St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qur'an* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1905), ch. 4, section 3.
5. Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus*, 156.
6. Ronald Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Santa Rosa, CA.: Polebridge Press, 1995), 91-92.
7. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 442.
8. Fred Lapham, *An Introduction to the New Testament Apocrypha* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 130.
9. See Patrick Zukeran, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels," Probe Ministries, 2004, probe.org/historical-reliability-of-the-gospels
10. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1967), 83.
11. Isma'il Al-Faruqi, *Islam* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1984), 20, quoted in Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam : The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 105.
12. Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam : The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 167.
13. Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 169.
14. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, "Introduction to Sura XVII," in *Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an* (Cairo, Egypt: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri, n.d.) 691.
15. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*, 183.
16. Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 2nd ed., 164.
17. Zukeran, "The Historical Reliability of the Gospels."
18. Ibid.

19. Patrick Zukeran, "Jesus in Ancient Non-Christian Sources," Evidence and Answers, bit.ly/18XCiME
20. Patrick Zukeran. "Discerning Fact from Fiction in *The Da Vinci Code*," Evidence and Answers, evidenceandanswers.org/articles/DaVinciCodeA1.pdf

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"Can Christians Practice Buddhism?"

Dear Mr. Zukeran,

As I was searching the net for local Buddhist temples I came across Probe's website and came to [your explanation of the differences between Jesus and Gautama](#). It was very eye opening, and I've never heard it explained that way before. I was raised in a Christian home but am also interested in Buddhism. Do you think there is a way for Christians to also practice Buddhism? Or is that not possible?

Generally speaking, Christianity and Buddhism are built on two different worldviews. So at their foundations they teach contradictory positions. Northern Buddhism usually adheres to a pantheistic worldview while Southern Buddhism and schools like Zen Buddhism teach atheism. Buddhism may have some teachings that agree with Christianity such as some of the ethical teachings, but at the basic level the two have contradictory teachings.

For example, what happens after death? Most Buddhist schools teach reincarnation while the Bible teaches "It is appointed for each person to die once, and then comes the judgment" (Hebrews 9:7). Jesus taught His disciples to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." Buddha taught to relinquish all desires. The Bible teaches that life is found in a relationship with God through Christ. Buddha taught life is about the emptying of the self. Buddhism teaches that man is basically good and the answer to man's problem is enlightenment. The Bible teaches that man is sinful and the answer to his problem is not within him but in a perfect savior who died for his sins, Jesus Christ. So at the foundational issues, the two systems are contradictory.

Can a Christian study about Buddhism? Sure, but as in all things, one must be discerning and measure all teachings with God's word, the Bible.

Thanks for your question.

Patrick Zukeran

"Is Cremation Wrong?"

Is it wrong to cremate the body at death? Most of my family members were cremated.

The practice of cremation is connected with pagan burial practices. Pantheists such as Buddhists and Hindus believe the body is bad and that the true self (sometimes referred to as the soul) is trapped in the body. Therefore, cremation symbolizes the deliverance from the prison house of the body and dissolving of the individual personhood. There are a few occurrences of cremation in the Bible but the reason is that

the body was desecrated (1 Sam. 31:12). Under normal circumstances, Jews and Christians buried the body. For Christians the body is buried because the body is good and created and given by God (1 Cor. 6:19). We also await the resurrection of the body, which will occur when Christ returns and our bodies will be resurrected in their new glorified state (1 Thess 4:16-18).

Having said that, cremation is not the unpardonable sin. God will recreate the body no matter what state it may be in; that is no problem for Him. Burial is the Christian practice for the reasons I stated and as a general rule we want to honor God in our death and burial and not associate with pagan practices. However, there are times where cremation may be necessary or preferred and I am sure God grants grace in those circumstances.

I hope this helps.

Pat Zukeran

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The Tablet of Nabu: Another Confirmation of the Bible

This is a fantastic discovery, a world-class find.

Dr. Irving Finkel, British Museum

The Discovery

A significant discovery related to Biblical history was made in the British Museums great Arched Room which holds nearly 130,000 Assyrian cuneiform tablets.[\[1\]](#) Among the tablets, some

of which date back nearly 5000 years, one tablet in particular, measuring only 2.13 inches wide or about the size of a small cigarette pack, was recently translated by Assyriologist and Professor from the University of Vienna, Dr. Michael Jursa. This cuneiform tablet was dated to 595 BC, or the 10th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

When deciphered it named a high ranking official of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar named *Nebo-Sarsekim*. Nebo-Sarsekim is also named in the Book of Jeremiah 39:1-3. The passage reads:

*This is how Jerusalem was taken: In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army and laid siege to it. ² And on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year, the city wall was broken through. ³ Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and took seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, **Nebo-Sarsekim** a chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officials of the king of Babylon.*

Jeremiah identifies Nebo-Sarsekim as a chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar who was with the King at the siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Jeremiah records that several of Nebuchadnezzar's top officials took seats in the Middle Gate once they broke through the walls of Jerusalem.

The Assyrian tablet identifies Nebo-Sarsekim as the chief eunuch of Nebuchadnezzar, thus confirming Jeremiah's reference. The full translation of the tablet reads:

*(Regarding) 1.5 minas (0.75 kg or 1.65 pounds) of gold, the property of **Nabu-sharrussu-ukin**, the chief eunuch, which he sent via Arad-Banitu the eunuch to [the temple] Esangila: Arad-Banitu has delivered [it] to Esangila. In the presence of Bel-usat, son of Alpaya, the royal bodyguard, [and of] Nadin, son of Marduk-zer-ibni. Month XI, day 18, year 10 [of]*

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.[{2}](#)

The tablet is the financial record of Nebo-Sarsekims gift of gold given to the Temple of Esangila, which was located in the fabled Hanging Gardens of Babylon.[{3}](#) This financial transaction took place in the 10th year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar while Nabu-Sarsekim was serving as the chief officer to Nebuchadnezzar. This was nine years before the siege of Jerusalem. Dr. Jursa states, "It's very exciting and very surprising. Finding something like this tablet, where we see a person mentioned in the Bible making an everyday payment to the temple in Babylon and quoting the exact date, is quite extraordinary."[{4}](#)

The Significance of the Discovery

The significance of this discovery is that the Tablet of Nabu is a text outside of the Bible that confirms Jeremiah's record of Nebo-Sarsekim as a historical figure. Nebo-Sarsekim is not a prominent figure, but the fact that Jeremiah was accurate on details such as these adds considerable credibility to the Book of Jeremiah. If a writer is accurate on minor details like this, we can be confident that other recorded events which may not have archaeological confirmation are also true. Dr Irving Finkel, assistant keeper in the Department of the Middle East stated, "This is a fantastic discovery, a world-class find. If Nebo-Sarsekim existed, which other lesser figures in the Old Testament existed? A throwaway detail in the Old Testament turns out to be accurate and true. I think that it means that the whole of the narrative [of Jeremiah] takes on a new kind of power."[{5}](#)

This discovery of the Tablet of Nabu is yet another among thousands of archaeological findings that confirm characters, places, and events mentioned in the Bible. Not only are major historical figures confirmed, but so have many minor characters such as Nebo-Sarsekim and others also been

confirmed. Dr. Geza Vermes, the eminent emeritus professor of Jewish studies at the University of Oxford, said that such a discovery revealed that “the Biblical story is not altogether invented.” He added, “This will be interesting for religious people as much as historians.”^{6} When a work has so much historical and archaeological confirmation, particularly when it comes to minor details, we can be confident that it is indeed a very accurate historical document. Discoveries such as this tablet continue to confirm the Bible's historical accuracy. Therefore, we can have greater confidence in the historical nature of the events where we may not have extra-biblical corroboration.

Notes

1. Nigel Reynolds, “Tiny Tablet Provides Proof for Old Testament,” *Telegraph.co.uk.*, 13 July 2007, tinyurl.com/2bbcac.
2. Ibid.
3. Dalya Alberge, “Museum’s tablet lends new weight to Biblical truth,” *The London Times* 11 July 2007, www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article2056362.ece
4. Ibid.
5. Nigel Reynolds, “Tiny Tablet.”
6. Dalya Alberge, “Museum’s tablet.”

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“If Everyone Left Unhealthy Churches, Wouldn't Many Shut

Down?"

Dear Mr. Zukeran,

I recently came across your article [Abusive Churches: Leaving Them Behind.](#) In it, you state that "it is best to leave an abusive or unhealthy church."

Why is this a necessary step to take? If everyone were to leave churches considered unhealthy, many churches would shut down as a result. Can you clear this up for me? Thank you.

I stated that leaving an abusive church was the best thing to do. The reason is that it is very difficult to recover or worship the Lord when you are in an abusive church that is dominating your life. Being surrounded in such an environment constantly is not healthy and the atmosphere will affect your outlook. It is like being a fish swimming in an unhealthy aquarium. The more you remain in it, often the more unhealthy you get.

It is also very difficult to change an abusive church since it is structured with no accountability on the leader so it is very unlikely to change. So for your personal health, mentally and spiritually, it is best to leave and enter into a healthy environment and church.

You asked, wouldn't the abusive church shut down if people left? That is correct and that is the best thing that could happen. Abusive churches do a lot of harm to people and to the name of Christ. We do not need abusive churches growing and spreading. We need unhealthy churches to shut down and healthy churches growing and planting healthy churches. That is why I say it is best to leave an abusive church.

Patrick Zukeran

The Tomb of Jesus: A Titanic Discovery or Hype?



Written by Patrick Zukeran

On March 4, 2007, the Discovery Channel aired *"The Lost Tomb of Jesus,"* a special directed by James Cameron, the Oscar winning director of the movie *Titanic*. Cameron based his work on a book released that day, *The Jesus Family Tomb*, by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino. This documentary was based on a discovery made in 1980 in Talpiot, a suburb of Jerusalem where a large tomb containing ten caskets was found. Although scholars and archaeologists at that time did not associate this finding with any New Testament characters, the claim has recently arisen that this is the tomb of the Jesus and several of His family members.

Is this a titanic discovery that could change history, or is this a lot of overblown hype? If this is indeed the tomb of Christ and His remains are in one of the ossuaries, this would be a devastating blow to the New Testament teaching regarding the resurrection of Christ. However, as in other attempts to recreate Jesus, we find ourselves dealing with a flawed theory built on unlikely scenarios, fishy facts, and Hollywood hype.

Scholars Speak

The tomb was discovered in 1980, so we have known about this site for nearly thirty years. Its lack of recognition by the scholarly community as a tomb of significance to New Testament characters is telling. Most scholars did not associate the crypt with Jesus. This includes Professor Amos Kloner who

worked on the tomb and is one of Israel's most prominent archeologists. Kloner states that this was a non-event and dismisses Cameron's efforts as crass profit-seeking.

Likewise, Joe Zias, curator for anthropology and archeology at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem from 1972 to 1997, and the one who personally numbered the Talpiot ossuaries, stated that Cameron is not an archaeologist and that "projects like these make a mockery of the archeological profession."[\[1\]](#)

Finally, William Dever, an expert on near eastern archaeology and anthropology who has worked with Israeli archeologists for five decades, affirms that specialists have known about the ossuaries for years. According to Dever, "The fact that it's been ignored tells you something... It [the film] would be amusing if it didn't mislead so many people."[\[2\]](#)

Newsweek Magazine writes, "Good sense, and the Bible, still the best existing historical record of Jesus of Nazareth, argue against Jacobovici's claims."[\[3\]](#) *Time Magazine* states that Jacobovici's book is "...too dependent on stretched scholarship and conjecture to make its title case."[\[4\]](#) The fact that the top scholars and popular periodicals see no significance regarding the Talpiot tombs and Jesus' life is extremely significant. The lack of endorsement should have us questioning the claims of Cameron and Jacobovici.

Highly Improbably Scenarios

Another reason Cameron's theory should be questioned is that this theory is built on two highly improbable scenarios. The first improbable scenario is the secret marriage of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. This theory was introduced in the novel *The Da Vinci Code*; I have dealt more extensively in a separate article entitled "[Decoding Fact From Fiction in The Da Vinci Code](#)."

Here is a brief overview of why this allegation of a secret

marriage should be rejected. First, the New Testament says nothing of a secret marriage. In fact, all the evidence points against any marital relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. In the Gospels, women are identified with their male counterpart; however, Mary is never paired with Jesus. Rather, she is identified with her hometown of Migdal and is thus known as *Mary Magdalene*. Secondly, at the cross Mary Magdalene is present along with Jesus' mother Mary. In his dying moments, Jesus addresses His mother and cares for her needs but says nothing to Mary Magdalene. It is very strange that He would address His mother but say nothing to His "wife" standing next to her. Although I could continue with more examples, I will end with this: At the resurrection, Mary sees the risen Christ for the first time at the tomb, and she exclaims, "Rabboni!" or "My teacher!" This is a very odd way to address one's "husband," especially if He has just risen from the dead! This exclamation is more fitting as a disciple's response to her Lord. For these reasons, one cannot build a case from the New Testament that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married.

A second important historical source comes from the writings of the Church Fathers. These early Church leaders, who were writing as early as the late first century, say nothing of a marriage between Jesus and Mary. In their writings they say very little of Mary Magdalene and what they do mention of Mary is consistent with the Gospels. This is strange if Mary had been the wife of Jesus. We would expect many essays written debating the nature of their child. How much of the divine nature was passed on to the offspring of Jesus would have been a very significant issue to the early church leaders.

Just as is done in *The Da Vinci Code*, Cameron and Jacobovici appeal to the Gnostic writings found at Nag Hammadi. (For a more extensive treatment, see my article "[Decoding Fact From Fiction in The Da Vinci Code: Part 2](#)") Nearly three generations after the apostles, the Gnostics began to

refashion Jesus into their image. In about the late second century AD, Gnostic Gospels and other alleged apostolic works began to appear, especially in Egypt. At Nag Hammadi, Egypt, a library of Gnostic works was found. These works were written in the late second to fourth century AD, so they could not have been written by the Apostles. They also contradicted major teachings of the New Testament and contained fanciful myths of Jesus. For these reasons, they were never considered as part of the inspired canon of scripture. Cameron appeals to these works, most specifically to the Acts of Philip and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene.

Even within these works, there are only two passages that are referenced, neither of which build a case for a marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. First, in the Acts of Philip, dated from the third century AD, Peter and the other disciples are arguing with Mary regarding information she claims to have received from Jesus which the other apostles did not. It is strange that the disciples argue with the “wife” of Jesus over this. If she had been His wife, they should have expected her to have information they would not. Also, she never appeals to her “marriage” to Jesus as her defense even though that would have been her best argument to silence their complaints.

Second, in the Gospel of Mary, dated from the third century AD, it is alleged that Jesus often “kissed [Mary Magdalene] on the mouth.” This passage is also not compelling for several reasons. First, we do not know if the word “mouth” is the correct word since it is missing in the original text. He could have kissed her on the hand, head, or other area. The subsequent line of the passage states that this offended the disciples. Why would they have been offended if she had been the wife of Jesus? Third, since the physical realm is impure in Gnosticism, sex was thus regarded as impure. Jesus, the “Master Gnostic,” would not have engaged in marital and sexual behavior. Fourth, Mary is described as the “companion of the

savior.” The term “companion” is the Greek word *koinonos*. This word can be used in reference to a wife, but it is used more often to designate a spiritual brother or sister in the faith. The common term for wife is *gyne*. Therefore, even these two passages from sources outside the inspired canon do not build a strong case for a secret marriage.

The second unlikely scenario is the case of the stolen body. New Testament scholars on all sides agree that the tomb site of Jesus was known. In the earliest writings, Mark and John identify Jesus being buried in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Jewish council. Not only was the gravesite known, but it was also found empty on the third day. A few skeptics allege that Joseph of Arimathea was a fictional character. However, this would have been a disaster for the disciples to fictionally create such a high profile figure. The Gospels are written well within the first century AD and were circulated during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, many of whom were looking to discredit the Gospels. (For more information, see the Probe article [*“Historical Reliability of the Gospels.”*](#)) If Joseph of Arimathea had been a fictional creation, it surely and readily would have been found out.

Jesus’ body was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb on Friday evening. In order for Cameron’s theory to be complete, the disciples, or others, would have had to purchase this large gravesite, steal, and rebury Jesus’ body all within a day. Even if this had been accomplished, we must then accept the idea that the Apostles knew of the Talpiot site and lied about the resurrection. This would mean that the Apostles all suffered and led many, including themselves, to brutal deaths for a lie they themselves had perpetuated. This is highly unlikely scenario, for history shows that men will not die for that which they know and can confirm to be a lie.

Also, if they purchased the tomb site, people outside of the eleven disciples would have known about this site. The Jewish

leaders, who were very eager to display the body of Jesus to dispel rumors of his resurrection, would have easily found a tomb with such clear markings. This theory suggesting a secret burial ground unknown to anyone but Jesus' family is untenable given the mindset and influence of His many enemies.

Fishy Facts

Along with these unlikely scenarios are some fishy facts. First, Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus was from Bethlehem and lived in Nazareth. He apparently died years before Jesus' ministry began and was likely buried in Bethlehem or Nazareth, not the Talpiot suburb of Jerusalem. It is not reasonable to conclude that Joseph's body was exhumed and moved to the Talpiot grave within a very short period.

Second, Jesus' earthly father Joseph could not have afforded such a costly tomb. He was a lower class carpenter, and he probably could not have bought such a large tomb and well adorned ossuaries. Some have alleged that the tomb was donated. However, this creates some problems because people outside the apostles would have then known the tomb site. A secret of this magnitude regarding such a high profile person as Jesus would not have remained hidden.

Third, the inscription on the ossuary reads, "*Jesus, Son of Joseph.*" However, early followers did not use that title when addressing Jesus; instead that title was used only by outsiders. Would family members and His loyal disciples have given him that title when they had called him by another title throughout his lifetime?

Fourth, James, the half brother of Jesus and leader of the early church, was buried alone near Jerusalem Temple. Eusebius records that James was buried in Jerusalem near the Temple mount. Burying James in Jerusalem would seem strange since Jesus had died thirty years earlier and the "family tomb" was

supposedly in Talpiot, Jerusalem.

Fifth, other non-family members are also in the tomb. One tomb with the name *Matthew* is believed to be referring to the disciple Matthew, who was not a family member. We must ask why Matthew, a non-family member, is in the tomb with the rest of the family while James, the half brother of Jesus, was buried alone.

Hollywood Hype

Finally, we have what appears to be some Hollywood hype. It appears the statistics cited in the special are a bit exaggerated and misleading. The names on the crypt were very common in that day. The name *Jesus* was popular during that time. *Jesus* is found on 99 other tombs and 22 ossuaries during that time. The name *Joseph* was also found on 218 graves and 45 ossuaries. So it would not be unusual to find ossuaries with the names of *Jesus* and *Joseph* or even *Jesus, son of Joseph*.

Mary was also a common name. Among the graves and ossuaries, one-fourth of the women in Jerusalem during the first century were named *Mary*. Therefore, finding a tomb that has the name *Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary* should not be so surprising given the fact that these were common names.

The statistician Andrey Feuerverger, who arrived at the 600 to 1 probability figure that Talpiot was the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth and his family seems to have backed off that conclusion in an [open letter](#) to fellow statisticians. He says, "I now believe that I should not assert any conclusions connecting this tomb with any hypothetical one of the NT family."[\[5\]](#)

Feuerverger qualifies his conclusion stating that it was built on the assumptions given by Cameron and Jacobovici. One of their key assumptions is that one of the names on the ossuaries ought to be identified as Mary Magdalene. If the

identification of Mary Magdalene with this ossuary is in doubt (which it is), then the statistical probability that this is Jesus' family tomb is unimpressive.

Moreover, the Mary Magdalene connection to the tomb is unclear. The Greek inscription is *Mariamne e Mara*,^[6] which the filmmaker incorrectly translates as "Mary Known as the Master." This translation is possible if translated in Aramaic; however, the inscription is Greek. Most likely it is two names: *Mary* and *Martha*. Richard Bauckham, Professor of New Testament at the University of St Andrews, states that "'Mara' in this context does not mean Master. It is an abbreviated form of *Martha*, probably the ossuary contained two women called Mary and Martha (Mariamne and Mara)."^[7]

Another detail that appears to be hyped is the DNA evidence. It is interesting to note that DNA testing was done on only two ossuaries. If DNA testing had been done on three or four individuals, and that testing did not match the DNA of *Mariamne*, the theory would be destroyed. As it stands, the so-called "DNA evidence" only proves that the bones of an entombed man and woman were from unrelated people. To extrapolate to the notion that they were married is indeed a stretch. Besides, no independent DNA control samples of Jesus or His family members exist with which to compare these DNA "findings."

Conclusion

This theory that the bones of Jesus have been found rests on two highly unlikely scenarios, fishy facts, and some Hollywood hype. For these reasons, we should reject Cameron's attempt to deny the resurrection of Christ and recreate a Jesus contrary both to the New Testament and to history. We should also realize that attempts to refashion Jesus are not new. Attempts to deny the resurrection and remake Jesus have occurred since the time of the Apostles. In fact, I believe that we should be expecting more to come. There seem to be very aggressive

attempts by some liberal scholars to fabricate a different kind of Jesus.

For this reason, Christians must be prepared to defend the true Jesus of the Gospels and history. The wrong Jesus leads to a wrong Gospel. The wrong savior and the wrong message cannot lead one to a relationship with God and eternal life. We must follow the example of the Apostles and Church Fathers to be diligent to defend the true teachings of Christ.

Finally, events like these offer great opportunities to share Christ if we are prepared. Christians must not retreat from these challenges but instead must research and examine their faith and the evidence being presented. When we are equipped, we can offer a sound and compelling case for Jesus Christ.

Notes

1. Lisa Miller and Joanna Chen, "Have Researchers Found Jesus Christ's Tomb?" Newsweek Magazine, 5 March 2007. Accessed at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17328478/site/newsweek/from/ET/.
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3. Miller and Chen.
4. David Van Biema, "Rewriting the Gospels," *Time* Magazine, 14 March 2007, 56.
5. Andrey Feuerverger, Letter to Statistical Colleagues, 8, March 2007, fisher.utstat.toronto.edu/andrey/OfficeHrs.txt
6. L.Y. Rahmani, "A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries: In the Collections of the State of Israel, 1994" Accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/yufzzm>.
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Hell: The Horrible Choice

Dr. Pat Zukeran presents the biblical teaching on hell so that we can present a sound response when challenged.

The Importance of Understanding the Doctrine of Hell

Why study the doctrine of hell? Very few sermons today are preached on this topic, and most Christians try to avoid the subject. However, this is an important doctrine for Christians to understand especially if we are going to share our faith in the postmodern culture that despises this teaching.

Dr. Peter Kreeft and Ron Tacelli write:

Of all the doctrines in Christianity, hell is probably the most difficult to defend, the most burdensome to believe and the first to be abandoned. The critic's case against it seems very strong, and the believer's duty to believe it seems unbearable. . . . Heaven is far more important than hell, we know much more about it, and it is meant to occupy our mind much more centrally. But in a battle an army must rush to defend that part of the line which is most attacked or which seems the weakest. Though other doctrines are more important than this one, this one is not unimportant or dispensable.[\[1\]](#)

Several critics of Christianity grew up in the church but eventually abandoned the faith, and many of them cite the teaching on hell as a key factor. Atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote in his work *Why I Am Not a Christian*:

I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. . .

. I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture: and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take Him as His chroniclers represent Him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that.[\[2\]](#)

Charles Darwin grew up and was baptized in the Church of England. Despite his rejection of Christianity, he was buried in Westminster Abbey. Darwin has pointed to the doctrine of hell as one of the significant reasons for his abandonment of the faith. He stated in his autobiography, "I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my father, brother and almost all my friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine."[\[3\]](#)

I am sure that many of us have friends who find the Bible's teaching on hell to be offensive and use this doctrine to paint the God of the Bible as a cruel and vindictive being. However, most unbelievers' attacks of this doctrine are built on a false understanding of hell. Christians also have difficulty defending the justice of hell with the love of God because we lack a proper understanding of what the Bible teaches. In this article, I will present the biblical teaching on hell so that we can present a sound response when challenged.

The Nature of Hell

Hell is basically a place of eternal separation from God. 2 Thessalonians 1:9 states that those without God "will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power." To be separated from God is to be separated from all that is good. A

person in hell is separated from all the joy, love, and meaning for which we were created. Instead of knowing God as a loving father, one will know God as judge (Romans 2: 5-8). That is the attribute of God an unbeliever will know for eternity.

Many, including Christians, believe that God tortures people in hell. However, a significant thing to note is that in the New Testament, hell is not described as a place of *torture* but rather a place of *torment* (Luke 16:23-28, Revelation 14:11). Torture is inflicted against one's will, while torment is self-inflicted by one's own will. Torment comes from the mental and physical anguish of knowing we used our freedom for evil and chose wrongly. The anguish results from the sorrow and shame of the judgment of being forever away from God and all that is meaningful and joyful. Everyone in hell will know that the pain he or she is suffering is self-induced. The flames of hell are generated by the individual who has rejected God. It is not a place where people are forced against their will to undergo agonizing pain. Unbelievers often use this image to portray God as a cruel and vindictive being. However, the torment of hell comes from the individual who chooses not to love God and now must live with the sorrow of being aware of all that was lost.

One of the most severe punishments leveled on a criminal is the sentence of solitary confinement. One of the reasons this is a feared sentence is that the guilty are left to sit alone in their cells and live with the regret and sorrow of their crimes with no one to comfort or minister to them. Pain comes from within as they wrestle alone with their thoughts and emotions. It must be a horrible realization to see lost forever what could have been.

Such is the anguish of hell. The pain comes from the regret of all that was lost. A person experiences separation from God, the ultimate good. This is why hell is such a horrible place and a horrible choice.

Why Hell Is Necessary and Just

Is hell necessary? How is this doctrine consistent with a God of love? These are questions I face when I speak on the fate of unbelievers. The necessity and justice of hell can be recognized when we understand the nature of God and the nature of man.

Hell is necessary because God's *justice* requires it. Our culture focuses mostly on God's nature of love, mercy, and grace. However, God is also just and holy, and this must be kept in balance. Justice demands retribution, the distribution of rewards and punishments in a fair way. God's holiness demands that He separate himself entirely from sin and evil (Habakkuk 1:13). The author of Psalm 73 struggles with the dilemma of the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. Joseph Stalin was responsible for the death of millions in the Soviet Union, but he died peacefully in his sleep without being punished for his deeds. Since evil often goes unpunished in this lifetime, it must be dealt with at a future time to fulfill God's justice and holiness.

A second reason hell is necessary is that God's *love* requires it. Love does not force itself on an individual, but honors the option of rejecting the love of another. Those who do not wish to love God must be allowed not to do so. Forcing oneself upon another is to dishonor the dignity and right of the individual. Those who do not want to be with God in this lifetime, will not be forced to be with Him for all eternity. It is important to understand that heaven is where God dwells and being the Lord of all creation, He is the heart and focus of heaven. His glory fills the entire realm, and inhabitants of heaven will be in His immediate and intimate presence for eternity. One cannot be in heaven and not know the presence of God. Therefore, those who do not want to be with God in this lifetime will not be forced to be in His presence for all eternity. Instead, God will honor their desire and let them

dwell apart from Him in hell. Love honors the right of the other person to reject that love.

Third, God's *sovereignty* requires hell. If there is no hell, there would be no final victory over evil. If there were no ultimate separation of good from evil, good would not ultimately triumph and God would not be in ultimate control. God declares He will have victory over evil (1 Corinthians 15:24-28 and Revelation 20-22). God will defeat evil by quarantining evil and separating it from good eternally.

The biblical teaching on hell fulfills the justice, holiness, and sovereignty of God and remains consistent with His character of love.

Why Hell?

Hell is also necessary because of the nature of man.

Human *depravity* requires hell. The only just punishment for sin against the eternal God is eternal punishment. God is absolutely perfect and mankind is sinful.

Romans 3:23 states that all are guilty of sin and fall far short of God's perfect standard. Sinful, unrepentant man cannot stand before a holy and perfect God. In order for God to maintain His perfection and the perfection of heaven, sin must be accounted for. For those who have received the gift of God's grace, sin has been cleansed by the payment of Christ's life. Those who have rejected Christ remain guilty of sin. Heaven cannot be a perfect paradise if sin is present. Therefore, man's sin requires separation from God.

Second, human *dignity* requires hell. God created us as free moral creatures, and He will not force people into His presence if they do not want to be there. If a person chooses not to be with God in his or her lifetime, He will respect that decision. In Matthew 23:37-39, Jesus weeps over the city

of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel because they rejected their savior and thus were not willing to accept the love of God. Christ as Lord of creation could have forced His will on His creatures, but instead respected their decision even though it broke His heart.

My grandfather suffered a stroke as the result of high blood pressure, a high level of cholesterol, and a few other ailments. While in the hospital, the doctors recommended a diet and treatment program. However, he found the diet and treatment not to his liking. The doctor explained the treatment and the ramifications if my grandfather would not change his lifestyle. He chose not to follow the doctor's prescription. Even though the doctor knew the serious consequences that would follow, he respected my grandfather's wish and allowed him to return home. In the same way, although God knows the consequences of our choice, He respects our dignity and honors our decision.

Romans 1 states that all have had an opportunity to respond to God's invitation and are therefore without excuse. Human beings are created in God's image and are creatures of incredible value. God does not annihilate beings of value even though they rejected His love. Instead He respects their decision, honors their dignity, and allows them to dwell eternally apart from Him as they have chosen.

God's justice and love plus man's nature requires a hell.

How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?

Recently I was enjoying a pleasant discussion with an atheist named Gus. After answering most of his objections against Christianity, he paused for a moment of contemplation. He then leaned over the table and said, "I find it hard to believe in a God of love who says, 'Love me or I will throw you into the fire!'"

This statement represents a common misunderstanding. God does not send anyone to hell; people choose to go there.

I explained that God is a loving God, and His earnest desire is that all turn from sin and receive His gift of eternal life. 2 Peter 3:9 states, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." God desires all to be saved and has made the way possible by sending His son to die in our place. He invites everyone to accept His free gift of eternal life through Christ.

Since God's desire is that all be saved and He has made this possible for all men, God cannot bear the blame for people going to hell. People go to hell because they knowingly choose to reject His love. C. S. Lewis said, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'" [\[4\]](#)

God's love also keeps Him from imposing His will on individuals. If a person does not want to be with God in this lifetime, He will not force that person to be with Him for all eternity. In other words, the door of hell is locked from the inside.

After a brief moment, Gus asked, "Do people really have a choice since the Bible states that we are all born sinners and cannot help but sin?" I acknowledged that we are born in sin (Psalm 51) and have a bent to sin. However, our sin nature does not force us to sin. We are sinners and it is inevitable that we will disobey God. However, we can avoid sinning and often do so because disobedience to God involves a choice we make. We can choose otherwise. In a similar way although we are on the road to destruction, we can decide to get off that road and choose life.

What about predestination, some may ask? Does that not negate one's ability to choose? There are various views on this doctrine but it does not negate our responsibility to repent. God holds us accountable for our decisions, and this responsibility implies the ability to respond. Although we as finite beings may not fully comprehend this doctrine, that does not excuse us from the choice we must all make about Christ.

The sad news is that all who go to hell could avoid going there, but they make a horrible choice.

Notes

1. Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 282.
2. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1957), 17-18.
3. Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin*, ed. Nora Darwin Barlow, with original omissions restored (N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1993), 87.
4. C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan), 69.

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A Brief Overview of the Gospel of Judas

Dr. Patrick Zukeran explains why the Gospel of Judas poses no threat to the Bible or to Christianity; it only provides insight into early Gnosticism.

Newspaper headlines all over the world reported that the lost *Gospel of Judas* has been recovered and translated. Reporters state that this gospel sheds new light on the life of Christ and His relationship with Judas who may not be the traitor portrayed in the New Testament Gospels. In fact he may be the hero! He is cast as the most senior and trusted of Jesus' disciples who betrayed Jesus at the Lord's request! This gospel further states that Jesus revealed secret knowledge to Judas instructing him to turn Jesus over to the Roman authorities. So rather than acting out of greed or Satanic influence, Judas was faithfully following the orders given to him by Christ. Does the *Gospel of Judas* reveal a new twist to the passion story of Christ? Are there new historic insights that should have Christians concerned?

The *Gospel of Judas* was discovered in 1978 by a farmer in a cave near El Minya in central Egypt. Scholars date this Coptic text to have been written between A.D. 300 and 400.^[1] Most scholars believe the original text was written in Greek and that the original manuscript was written in middle second century.^[2]

The authorship of this gospel is unknown but it is unlikely that Judas or a disciple of Christ wrote it. It represents Gnostic thought that began to flourish around that time. The earliest mention of it is from Irenaeus writing in 180 A.D. who condemned this work as heretical.

The *Gospel of Judas* is similar to the Gnostic literature found in other areas along the Nile, including the Nag Hammadi library that contained nearly forty-five Gnostic texts, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Peter* and other texts.

What is Gnosticism?

Gnosticism flourished from the second to the fourth century A.D. What is Gnosticism? Gnosticism derives its title from the Greek word *gnosis* which means knowledge and refers to the

mystical or secret knowledge of God and the oneness of self with God. Here is a basic summary of Gnostic philosophy.{3}

First, Gnosticism taught the secret knowledge of dualism that the material world was evil and the spiritual realm was pure. Second, God is not distinct from man but mankind is, in essence, divine. God is the spirit and light within the individual. When one understood self, one understood all. Third, the fundamental problem in Gnosticism was not sin but ignorance. The way to attain oneness with the divine was by attaining mystical knowledge. Fourth, salvation was reached by gaining secret knowledge, or *gnosis* of the real nature of the world and of the self. Fifth, the goal in Gnosticism was unity with God. This came through escaping the prison of the impure body in order for the soul of the individual to travel through space avoiding hostile demons, and uniting with God.

In reference to Jesus, Gnosticism taught that Jesus was not distinct from His disciples. Those who attained Gnostic insight became a Christ like Jesus. Princeton University professor of religion Dr. Elaine Pagels writes, "Whoever achieves *gnosis* becomes no longer a Christian but a Christ." {4} So Jesus was not the unique Son of God and a savior who would die for the sins of the world, but a teacher who revealed secret knowledge to worthy followers.

Gnostic philosophy is contrary to Old and New Testament teachings. The Bible is in opposition to Gnostic teaching on fundamental doctrines such as the nature of God, Christ, the material world, sin, salvation, and eternity. Jews and Christians rejected Gnostic teaching as heretical, and the Gnostics rejected Christianity. Gnostic philosophy is what is taught throughout the *Gospel of Judas*. Like other Gnostic literature, there is very little similarity between the *Gospel of Judas* and the New Testament writings. This gospel contradicts the New Testament in major ways.

Contents of the Gospel of Judas

Gnostic philosophy is contrary to biblical Christianity, and the *Gospel of Judas* reflects Gnostic thought rather than biblical theology. An example of Gnostic philosophy is reflected in the mission of Jesus as portrayed in this gospel.

Dr. Marvin Meyer, professor of Bible at Chapman College, summarizes the goal of Jesus' mission according this gospel.

"For Jesus in the *Gospel of Judas*, death is no tragedy, nor is it a necessary evil to bring about forgiveness of sins.... Death, as the exit from this absurd physical existence, is not to be feared or dreaded. Far from being an occasion of sadness, death is the means by which Jesus is liberated from the flesh in order that he might return to his heavenly home, and by betraying Jesus, Judas helps his friend discard his body and free his inner self, the divine self." [\[5\]](#)

In the New Testament, Jesus' mission is clearly stated. He came to die an atoning death for the sins of the world and conquer the grave with His bodily resurrection. This contradicts the Gospel of Judas that teaches Christ sought death to free himself from the imprisonment of his body.

Another Gnostic fundamental teaching is that the problem of man is not sin but ignorance. Jesus is not a savior but a teacher who reveals this secret knowledge only to those worthy of this insight. Judas is considered worthy of this knowledge. Dr. Meyer writes,

"For Gnostics, the fundamental problem in human life is not sin but ignorance, and the best way to address this problem is not through faith but through knowledge. In the *Gospel of Judas*, Jesus imparts to Judas – and to the readers of the gospel – the knowledge that can eradicate ignorance and lead to an awareness of oneself and God." [\[6\]](#)

Another Gnostic teaching is that since the physical world is

evil, God did not create the physical world. Instead, He creates aeons and angels who in turn create, bring order to, and rule over the physical world. Since matter is impure, God does not enter directly into physical creation. In the *Gospel of Judas*, Jesus asks His disciples, "How do you know me?" They are unable to answer correctly. However, Judas answers saying, "I know who you are and where you have come from. You are from the immortal realm of Barbelo."

Barbelo in Gnosticism is the first emanation of God, often described as a mother-father figure. Since God does not enter into the material world because it is impure, Barbelo is an intermediary realm from which the material world can be created without contaminating God.[\[7\]](#)

Barbelo is clearly a Gnostic term and foreign to Christianity. Jesus stated in John 3:13 that He is from heaven. The Greek word is *houranos*. Other times, the New Testament writers see Jesus as sitting at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is from heaven with His Father with whom He dwells eternally.

Reasons the Gospel of Judas is Not Part of the New Testament

There are several reasons we should not consider the *Gospel of Judas* inspired scripture. First, it is written too late to have any apostolic connection. The Apostles of Christ were given the authority to write inspired scripture. One of the requirements for inclusion in the New Testament canon was that the book had to be written by an apostle or a close associate. Since an apostolic connection was necessary, it would have to have been written within the first century. There is compelling evidence that the four New Testament Gospels are written in the first century A.D. (See my article ["Historical Reliability of the Gospels."](#)) The *Gospel of Judas* is written in mid-second century A.D. so it is too late to be apostolic.

Second, inspired literature must be consistent with previous

revelation. God is not a God of error but of truth, and His word would not present contradictory truth claims. The Gnostic philosophy in Judas is inconsistent with Old and New Testament teachings.

The Old Testament teaches that God created the physical universe and Adam and Eve (Genesis 1-3). In the Genesis creation account, God created all things good. So contrary to Gnosticism, God created the physical world and He declared it good.

Gnosticism teaches that God would not create a physical universe because the material world is impure, so God creates aeons and angels. These beings in turn create the physical realm. In the *Gospel of Judas*, Jesus reveals to Judas the creation of the world, humanity, and numerous aeons and angels. The angels bring order to the chaos. One of the angels, Saklas, fashioned Adam and Eve. The Gospel reads:

“Let twelve angels come into the being to rule over chaos and the [underworld]. And look, from the cloud there appeared an [angel] whose face flashed with fire and whose appearance was defiled with blood. His name was Nebro, which means rebel; others call him Yaldabaoth. Another angel, Saklas, also came from the cloud. So Nebro created six angels – as well as Saklas – to be assistants, and these produced twelve angels in the heavens, with each one receiving a portion in the heavens.”

It further states,

“Then Saklas said to his angels, ‘Let us create a human being after the likeness and after the image. They fashioned Adam and his wife Eve, who is called, in the cloud, Zoe.’”

This contradicts the teaching in the Old Testament that God Himself created the universe. Then God created Adam from the earth, and his wife Eve from Adam.

The *Gospel of Judas* contradicts New Testament teaching as well. The Gospel teaches that the body is evil and that Jesus wished to escape His physical body. Jesus instructs Judas saying, "But you (Judas) will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me." Jesus' death through the assistance of Judas would liberate His spirit to unite with God.[\[8\]](#)

However, the New Testament teaches that Jesus did not wish to escape His body. In fact, Jesus taught that His resurrection would be a physical resurrection (John 2:19-22). In Luke 24:39, Jesus makes clear to His disciples that He has a physical body. "See my hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." In John 20 and 21, Jesus reveals it was a physical resurrection of the body that was on the cross. He invites Thomas in chapter 20 to touch His scars. If Jesus rose as a spirit, He would have been guilty of deceiving His disciples.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul teaches a physical resurrection. He explains that Christ rose from the dead and over five hundred witnesses attested to the fact. He then explains that the resurrection body is a physical body but different from our earthly bodies. At the resurrection, Christians will have glorified physical bodies, a clear contradiction to Gnosticism that seeks to escape the impure physical body. Paul did not teach Christians to escape the body, but look forward to the resurrection of the body (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Conclusion

Despite the hype in the media, the *Gospel of Judas* does not affect the historical reliability of the Gospels nor does it pose any threat to the deity of Christ. This gospel cannot be considered inspired scripture like the New Testament books. It was written in the late second century and therefore, not written by an Apostle of Christ or a close associate. Its

teachings contradict previous revelation of the Old and New Testament. It presents very little information that could be considered historical. The *Gospel of Judas* gives us more insight into early Gnosticism, that is all. It presents no historic facts of Jesus that affect the New Testament in any way.

Notes

1. Dan Vergano and Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Long-lost gospel of Judas casts 'traitor' in new light," *USA Today*, 7 April 2006.
2. Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer and Gregor Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas* (Washington D.C.: *National Geographic*, 2006), 5.
3. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 119-141.
4. Pagels, 134.
5. Kasser, Meyer and Wurst, 4-5.
6. Ibid., 7.
7. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbelo
Kasser, Meyer and Wurst, 43.

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"What's a Good Evangelism Training Curriculum?"

Can you recommend any curriculum I could use to train young people in evangelism?

I think one of the best evangelism training out there is "[Becoming a Contagious Christian](#)" by Willow Creek. "Evangelism Explosion" (www.eeinternational.org/) is also another very

good tool.

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