A Biblical Point of View on Sharia Law – Kerby Anderson Booklet

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of the dangers inherent in Islam's sharia law, which threatens to invade U.S. cities.

Sharia law is once again in the news. Back in 2010, Sharia (shah-REE-uh) law was in the news because Oklahoma approved a law that would amend the state constitution to prevent the consideration of Sharia law in state courts. However, a federal judge declared the law was unconstitutional.



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This time the focus is on the state of Texas because of a desire by Muslim leaders in Collin County to build a 40-acre EPIC City project. The East Plano Islamic Center and the developers have received lots of attention and at least five investigations from state officials. The project would include a new mosque, more than 1,000 single and multi-family homes,

a Muslim faith-based school, senior housing, an outreach center, commercial developments, sports facilities, and a community college.

Governor Greg Abbott posted on X that “The proposed EPIC compound in Collin Co. has serious legal issues. A dozen state agencies are investigating it, the Attorney General will look into it, and legislators are considering laws to restrict it, as well as laws to prevent foreign adversaries from buying land in Texas.”

On one side are the developers and a Texas representative (Salman Bhojani, who is the first Muslim elected official in Texas history) who say this is a violation of religious freedom and evidence of anti-Muslim hysteria. On the other side are Collin County residents, including a retired police lieutenant (Douglas Deaton, who testified that an Islamic enclave is already operational and has been for almost 12 years).

It is worth taking a moment to understand what Sharia law is. This is important no matter what happens in this Texas community or in others with increasing Muslim communities. American law isn’t going to be challenged by Sharia law, but we can discuss what has been happening in the Middle East and some European countries as a cautionary tale.

What is Sharia Law?

A foundational practice of Islam is the implementation of sharia into the legal structure. Sharia is a system of divine law, belief, or practice that is based upon Muslim legal interpretation. It applies to economics, politics, and society.

Sometimes the world has been able to see how extreme the interpretation of sharia can be. Muslims have been put to death when they have been accused of adultery or

homosexuality. They have been put to death for leaving the religion of Islam. And these are not isolated examples.

Christians are persecuted in Muslim countries. Each year, the organization Open Doors publishes its World Watch List that identifies where Christians are persecuted. Over the last few years, nine of the top ten countries that practice extreme persecution of Christians are Muslim countries.

Treating Jews and Christians differently under sharia law is justified in the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an talks about "people of the book." Sura 9:29 says, "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Prophet, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."

Muhammad made a distinction between infidels, who were pagans and polytheists, and the "people of the book," who had received revelations from the prophets (Moses, Jesus). The latter group is protected in one sense because they have received these revelations. But they are also guilty because (according to Islam) they have distorted these teachings and rejected the teaching of Muhammad. Although this status was originally given only to the "people of the book," it was later extended to other religions (Sikhs, Zoroastrians, etc.).

Because of their guilt, Islamic teaching stipulates that Jews and Christians may live in a Muslim country, but not as equals to other Muslims. Usually this means that they may not participate in the government. They may practice their religion, but with many restrictions. For example, they were not allowed to have any external manifestations of worship (procession with the cross, ringing bells).

These restrictions are another part of the verse that requires the *dhimmis* [historical non-Muslim subjects living in an

Islamic state] must “feel themselves subdued.” In the past this has meant: (1) that they could not prevent a fellow Christian from converting to Islam, (2) that they could not erect a cross on their church building, and (3) that they must dress in a certain way that would identify them as Jews or Christians.

Finally, they must pay the *jizya*, which is the poll tax required from every dhimmi. In earlier times, this was a major source of income for the Muslim government from dhimmi who paid both the personal tax and the land tax.

The Qur’an teaches (Sura 2:256) that “there is no compulsion in religion.” But is that really so? It depends upon your definition of compulsion. A closer look at Islamic law demonstrates a veiled threat that many believe is tantamount to compulsion. For example, Muhammad instructed his followers to invite non-Muslims to accept Islam before waging war against them. If they refused, warfare or second-class status would follow. They would be inferiors in the Muslim social order and pay the jizya as required in Sura 9:29. If they pay it, they may live, but if they refuse to pay it, warfare will ensue.

Sharia Law and Apostates

It is difficult for a Muslim to leave the faith of Islam. A Muslim is considered part of a larger community of Muslim believers.

When a Muslim decides to leave the faith, there are repercussions in the family and community.

The family is embarrassed and will even lose respect within the Muslim community. The mosque feels it has failed in its duty and lost a member to ignorance and idolatry.

The Qur’an teaches that an apostate Muslim faces the wrath of Allah (Sura 47:25-28). Sharia law in many countries treats

apostasy as the unforgivable sin and therefore punishable by death.

Many Muslim countries have laws against apostasy. Islam teaches that once you are a Muslim, you are always a Muslim. Leaving the Muslim faith can have harsh consequences, including death.

Sharia Law and Women

There is great confusion about the status of women within Islam. While it is true that many Muslims do respect and honor women, it is not true that those ideas can be found in the Qur'an. Here are just a few passages that illustrate the way women are to be treated.

According to the Qur'an, women are considered inferior to men: "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other" (Sura 4:34).

The Qur'an restricts a woman's testimony in court. Her testimony is worth half as much as that of a man (Sura 2:282).

The Qur'an teaches that a son's inheritance should be twice that of a daughter's: "Allah thus directs you as regards your children's inheritance; to the male, a portion equal to that of two females" (Sura 4:11).

Islam sanctions polygamy (with up to four wives) as well as sex- with slave women: "If we fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if we fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one, or a captive that your hand possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice" (Sura 4:3).

Wives are subject to their husbands. If wives are disloyal or disobedient, the Qur'an sets forth their punishment. The husband is first to admonish them, then not sleep with them,

and third to beat them lightly. Essentially, wives are subject to the control of their husbands (Sura 2:223; 4:34). The veiling and seclusion of women has been part of the Muslim culture since the beginnings of Islam. In the Qur'an, Muhammad commands his wives and daughters to draw veils around them. This has been applied to all Muslim women. The veil would allow them to be recognized but not molested (Sura 33:59).

The Qur'an teaches that women must "lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof: that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers" (Sura 24:31).

In some Muslim countries, women cannot drive, nor can they leave their home without being accompanied by a male family member. Human rights groups report that women in Saudi Arabia who
are not accompanied by a man who is either their husband or a close relative, can be arrested for prostitution or other moral offenses.

Sharia Law and the Constitution

Sharia law is very different in many respects from the laws established through the U.S. Constitution and the laws established through English common law. To prevent sharia law from being implemented in America, a number of state legislatures have bans on sharia law. Voters in other states have approved a ban that has been struck down by a federal appeals court.

Although opponents argue that these sharia law bans are unnecessary, various studies have found
significant cases of sharia law being allowed in U.S. courts. One report with the title, "Shariah Law and the American State Courts" found significant cases of sharia law in U.S. courts

just from their small sample of appellate published cases. When they looked at state courts, they found additional cases in the trial courts and more in the appellate courts. A few judges are making decisions deferring to sharia law even when those decisions conflict with the U.S. Constitution and the various state constitutions.

How should we respond to the increased use of sharia law in America? One simple way to explain your concern to legislators, family, friends, and neighbors is to remember the numbers 1-8-14. These three numbers stand for the three amendments to the U.S. Constitution that contradict the use of sharia law.

The First Amendment says that there should be no establishment of religion. Sharia law is based on one religion's interpretation of rights. The First Amendment prohibits the establishment of any national religion (including Islam).

The Eighth Amendment prohibits "cruel and unusual punishment." Most Americans would consider the penalties handed down under sharia law to be cruel and unusual.

The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees each citizen equal protection under the Constitution. Sharia law does not treat men and women equally, nor does it treat Muslims and non-Muslims equally. This also violates the Constitution.

It is easy to see why we don't need sharia law in America.

Additional Resources

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Islam*, Point of View Ministries, 2020.

Kerby Anderson, *Understanding Islam and Terrorism*, Cambridge, OH: Christian House Publishers, 2017.

Joel Rosenberg, *Inside the Revolution*, Carol Stream, IL:

Tyndale House, 2009.

Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled*, Washington: San Francisco, Encounter, 2002.

Open Doors, World Watch List 2025, www.opendoors.org/en-us/persecution/countries/

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A Biblical Point of View on Islam

Kerby Anderson provides a basic understanding of Islam with suggestions for how Christ-followers can share their faith with Muslims.

The second largest religion in the world, and one of the fastest growing religions, is the religion of Islam. Although we hear so much about it in the news, many Christians don't know much about Islam and don't know how to share the gospel with a Muslim. Whole books have been written on these subjects, but here is a short summary with recommended books so you can learn more.

Islam is a monotheistic religion based upon the holy book, the Qur'an, which its followers believe was sent by God through the angel Gabriel to the prophet Muhammad. Additional teachings are also recorded in the *Hadith*.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Although the beliefs of Muslims vary, all believe in what are called the “Five Pillars of Islam.” These provide a summary of the practices of this religion.

1. *Shahadah*: The first pillar is recitation of the creed: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.” This statement is the foundation for all other beliefs in Islam. It is what makes someone a Muslim. Those who convert to Islam are to recite the creed. It is generally believed that you must recite this creed in the presence of two witnesses in order to formally convert to Islam.

2. *Salat*: The second pillar is the daily practice of prayer. Muslim prayer may be done individually or in community, but the prayers are required five times each day (dawn and sunrise, noon and mid-afternoon, mid-afternoon to sunset, sunset to twilight, and from twilight to dawn).

In Muslim and Western countries where there is a mosque, a prayer leader climbs to the top of the minaret in the mosque and calls the believers to prayer. He chants in Arabic, “God is great. There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. Come to prayer. Come to prayer. Come to success in this life and the hereafter.”

3. *Zakat*: The third pillar is almsgiving, which is mandated giving to the poor and needy within society. The Qur’an requires that each Muslim give 2.5 percent of their income to the poor or to the spread of Islam. The collected funds are used for building and supporting mosques, for printing the Qur’an, and for the advancement of Islam.

4. *Sawm*: The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast during the ninth lunar month of the Muslim calendar. This is significant in the Muslim calendar for two reasons.

First, this is the time when Muhammad is said to have received

the first of his revelations from God. Second, it is also the time when he and his followers made their historic trek from Mecca to Medina.

During this month, Muslims in good health are required to abstain from all food, drink, smoking, and sexual intercourse during daylight hours. This month-long fast promotes the Muslim's self-discipline, dependence on Allah, and compassion for the needy.

5.*Hajj*: The fifth pillar is a pilgrimage to Mecca that occurs during the last month of the Muslim year. Every able-bodied Muslim is to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once during his life. Pilgrims travel to Mecca, which is the holiest city in Islam and the birthplace of Muhammad. Only Muslims may enter Mecca. The focal point of Mecca is the Ka'bah which is an ancient stone building (thirty feet wide and forty feet long). A black stone (believed to be a meteorite) is set in the corner. The Ka'bah existed before the time of Muhammad. He taught that their worship had been corrupted and removed the idols from the Ka'bah and instituted Muslim worship of Allah in its place.

Major Divisions of Islam

Islam is not a monolithic system. Though all Muslims draw their inspiration from Muhammad and the teachings in the Qur'an, there are many identifiable groups and movements within Islam.

The most significant division is between Sunni and Shi'a Islam. The Sunnis comprise about eighty to ninety percent of all Muslims. They draw their name from the fact that they look both to the Qur'an and to the "Sunna" in establishing proper Muslim conduct. The Sunna is the recorded behavior or example of Muhammad and of the early Muslim community. There are many subdivisions among the Sunnis, but they all identify themselves as Sunni.

Sunnis currently control the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. They adhere to the five pillars of Islam and take a strong stand on the successor to Muhammad. This leader will be the caliph who will govern Islam and provide theological direction to all Muslims, including the interpretation of sharia law. These caliphs have ruled continuously until the Ottoman Empire fell.

The other major group of Muslims is the Shi'ites. They compose about ten percent of all Muslims. They reside mainly in southern Iraq and in Iran. The word Shi'ite means "partisan," and refers to the fact that Shi'ites are "partisans of Ali." Ali was the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad and one of the early caliphs. The Shi'ites believe that the leader of Islam should be a descendant of Ali, whom they believe possesses a special divine anointing for this task.

A third group of Muslims are the Sufis. They seek a mystical experience of God, rather than a merely intellectual knowledge of Him. Sufi Muslims are the mystics in Islam. They believe that the soul can rise to Allah during prayer and other spiritual exercises. Although they also read the Qur'an, they read it in a different way than other Muslims. They believe that it is an allegory of our soul's union with Allah.

Muslim Beliefs

When you are witnessing to a Muslim, it is important to remember that their beliefs about God, Jesus, and the Bible are very different from a Christian's view. They may have many misconceptions, and you may have certain misconceptions about what they believe. It is therefore important to ask questions about what they believe and help them understand what the Bible actually teaches. Here are a few basic theological beliefs.

It has often been fashionable to hear people say that, "Christians and Muslims worship the same God." It is

understandable that people might say that. Both Islam and Christianity are monotheistic, even though a foundational difference is the Christian belief in the Trinity.

The most foundational doctrine in Islam is monotheism. This doctrine is encapsulated in the creed: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.” Because of this strong emphasis on monotheism, Muslims reject the idea that God could be more than one person or that God could have a partner. The Qur’an teaches that Allah is one God and the same God for all people. Anyone who does not believe this is guilty of the sin of *shirk*. According to Islam, God cannot have a partner and cannot be joined together in the Godhead with other persons. Muslims therefore reject the Christian idea of the Trinity.

Muslims and Christians also differ in their understanding of the nature and character of God. Islam teaches that Allah is distant, transcendent, and unknowable. He is separate from His creation. He is exalted and far removed from mankind. While we may know His will, we cannot know Him personally. By contrast, Christianity teaches the fatherhood of God. Jesus taught in the Lord’s Prayer that we may address God as “our Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). Christians can have a personal relationship with God through Christ.

Muslims also have a different view of Jesus. The Qur’an refers to Jesus as “the Messiah” or “the Christ.” But Muslims reject the idea that God could have a Son. By contrast, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. God is heard from heaven declaring, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 17:5). Also, believers are called children of God: “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God” (1 John 3:1).

Witnessing to Muslims

Muslims usually believe that the Bible has errors in it. You

should be prepared to answer such objections. But you can even begin with what is taught about Jesus in the Qur'an. They accept that He is the Messiah and the Christ. And they honor him as one of the greatest prophets. In Sura 3:42-55, the Qur'an also teaches that:

(1) Mary was chosen by God,
(2) Jesus was born of a virgin,
(3) Jesus is the Messiah,
(4) Jesus has power over death, and
(5) Jesus knows the way to heaven.

The Qur'an also teaches that a proper Muslim must read the Old and New Testaments, known as the Before Books (Sura 4:136). And it teaches that those who observe the teaching of the Torah and the Gospels may go to heaven (Sura 5:6566). Many Muslims feel this gives them permission to read the Bible. You can give them a Bible and suggest they read the gospel of John.

When you witness to Muslims, be sure you talk about the love of God. Most Muslims believe that Allah is distant and unknowable. Christianity offers them the possibility of knowing God personally. This is attractive to Muslims.

A seminary conducted a survey of six hundred former Muslims who had become Christians. One of the most significant factors involved in the conversions of these former Muslims was the emphasis on the love of God and the intimacy that believers can have with God as their heavenly Father. This was an important factor in drawing these former Muslims to Christ, so make sure you talk about the love of God.

Another factor was eternal security. A Muslim never really knows whether he or she will be saved due to their good works on earth. The Bible teaches that we can know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13). We are saved by grace through faith, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). The bad news is that

the works Muslims do will not enable them to enter into heaven. The good news is that God gave his Son so that they would not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

Additional Resources

Kerby Anderson. *Understanding Islam and Terrorism: A Biblical Point of View*. Christian Publishing House, 2017.

Ergun Caner and Emir Caner, *Unveiling Islam*. Kregel, 2002.

Norman Geisler. *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*. Baker, 2002.

Nabeel Qureshi. *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*. Zondervan, 2016.

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UFOs and Alien Beings – A Christian Worldview Response

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

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

A Tale of Two Hypotheses

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

First, however, it's essential to note that most UFOs (unidentified flying objects) become IFOs (identified flying objects). John Spencer, a British UFO researcher, estimates that as many as 95 percent of received UFO reports "are turned into IFOs and explained satisfactorily."{1} For example, the report might be found to have been a clever prank or to have some natural explanation. Planets, comets, military aircraft, and rockets (among many others) have all been mistaken for UFOs. But even if 99 percent of UFO reports could be satisfactorily explained, there would still be thousands of cases that stubbornly resist all natural explanations. These are called *residual* UFO reports.

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

The interdimensional hypothesis agrees "that some UFOs are real phenomena that may exhibit physical . . . effects."{3}

However, unlike the extraterrestrial hypothesis, this view does not believe that UFOs and alien beings come from somewhere else in our physical universe. So where *do* they come from? Some suggest that they come from some other universe of space and time. But others believe that they come from some other dimension entirely, perhaps a spiritual realm.{4}

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

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

The Extraterrestrial Hypothesis

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

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

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

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

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

The Interdimensional Hypothesis

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

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

1. Residual UFOs generate no sonic booms when they break the sound barrier, nor do they show any evidence of meeting with air resistance.
2. They make impossibly sharp turns and sudden stops.
3. They send no detectable electromagnetic signals.

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

suggest some kind of intelligence behind these phenomena.

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

The Occult Connection

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

In 1969 Lynn Catoe served as the senior bibliographer of a publication on UFOs researched by the Library of Congress for the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research. After a two-year investigation, in which she surveyed thousands of documents, she drew explicit attention to the link between UFOs and the occult. She wrote, "A large part of the available UFO literature . . . deals with subjects like mental telepathy, automatic writing and invisible entities . . . poltergeist manifestations and 'possession.' Many . . . UFO reports . . . recount alleged incidents that are strikingly similar to demonic possession and psychic phenomena."{15} Veteran UFO researcher John Keel agrees. After surveying the literature on demonology he wrote, "The manifestations and occurrences described in this imposing literature are similar if not entirely identical to the UFO phenomenon itself."{16} The bizarre claim of alien abduction may lend some credibility to these remarks.

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

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that abduction is often physically and emotionally painful, Mr. Strieber tends to believe that its purpose is ultimately benevolent. When integrated correctly, the abduction experience can provide a catalyst for spiritual growth and development. Still, he candidly admits that he is really not sure precisely *who* or *what* these beings actually are, and he continues to warn that many of them are indeed hostile and malevolent.{18} In light of this, one can't help wondering about the experiences related in Mr. Strieber's books. If his encounters with aliens were not merely hallucinatory, or due to some mental disorder, isn't it at least possible that his sinister visitors really were demons? As noted above, many UFO investigators would indeed consider this (or something very much like it) a genuine possibility.

Another Gospel?

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

which you received, let him be accursed" (1:8-9). Evidently, the purity of the gospel was deeply important to Paul.

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

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

A deficient Christology, combined with an acceptance of biblically forbidden occult practices like mediumistic

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

Notes

1. John Spencer, ed., *The UFO Encyclopedia* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), s.v. "identified flying objects (IFOs)," cited in Hugh Ross, Kenneth Samples, and Mark Clark, *Lights in the Sky & Little Green Men* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2002), 25.
2. Jerome Clark, *The UFO Encyclopedia,* 2d ed., vol. 1 (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1998), s.v. "Friedman, Stanton Terry," cited in Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky,* 31.
3. Ross, et al., 32.
4. Ibid., 109.
5. Ibid., 34.
6. Ibid., 39.
7. Ibid., 57.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. Ibid., 109.

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12. Ibid., 69.
13. Ibid., 69-70.
14. Ibid., 116.
15. Lynn Catoe, *UFOs and Related Subjects: An Annotated Bibliography* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), p. iv (prepared under Air Force Office of Scientific Research Project Order 67-0002 and 68-0003), cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's and Other Supernatural Phenomena* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), 17.
16. John A. Keel, *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* (New York: Putnam's, 1970), p. 215; cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's*, 18.
17. Whitley Strieber, *Transformation: The Breakthrough* (New York: Morrow, 1988), p. 181; cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *The Facts on UFO's,* 23.
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20. Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky,* 150.
21. Ibid., 164.

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Four Killer Questions: Power

Tools for Great Question-Asking

Sue Bohlin provides helpful information for use in helping sharpen the question-asking skills of fellow believers as well as in evangelism. These "understanding questions" help Christians sharpen their biblical worldview and help unbelievers delve into the inconsistencies of their own worldview.



Dr. Jeff Myers of Bryan College and Summit Ministries shares our passion for helping others develop a biblical worldview. One of the tools he offers in developing critical thinking skills is how to use the right question at the right time.

He suggests four "killer questions" to help anyone think critically.{1} The first question is, *What do you mean by that?* In other words, define your terms. The second question is, *Where do you get your information?* The third is, *How do you know that's true?*, and the fourth killer question is, *What if you're wrong?*

Dr. Myers tells this story:

"A friend took a group of third graders to the Denver Museum of Natural History.

"Before he took them inside, he knelt down on their level and said, 'Kids, if anybody in this museum tells you anything, I want you to ask them, *how do you know that's true?*' Giving this question to a third grader is the intellectual equivalent of giving them a surface-to-air missile. These kids walked into the museum; all they knew was, Ask: *How do you know that's true?*

"A paleontologist was going to show them how to find a fossil.

Apparently they had intentionally buried a fossil down in the soil sample and she said, ‘We’re going to find it.’ Very clever, right? No, not with this crowd. ‘Cause they started asking questions like, ‘Well, how do you know there’s a fossil down in there?’ ‘Well, because we just know there’s a fossil down there.’ ‘Why do you want to find it?’ ‘Well, because we want to study it.’ ‘Why do you want to study it?’ ‘We want to find out how old it is.’ Well, how old do you think it is?’ ‘About 60 million years old.’

“‘Lady, how do you know that is true?'”

“She patronized them. She said, ‘Well, you see, I’m a scientist, I study these things, I just know that.’ They said, ‘Well, how do you know that’s true?’ Anytime she said anything at all they just asked, ‘How do you know that’s true?’ What happened next proves that truth is stranger than fiction. She threw down her tools, glared at these children, and said, ‘Look, children, *I don’t know, OK?* I just work here!'”{2}

Question #1: What do you mean by that?

The first question is, *What do you mean by that?* You want to get the other person to define his terms and explain what he is saying. If you don’t make sure you understand what the other person means, you could end up having a conversation using the same words but meaning very different things.

When I was a new believer, I was approached on the street by some people collecting money for a ministry to young people. I asked, naively, “Do you teach about Jesus?” They said, rather tentatively, “Yesss. . . .” I gave them some money and asked for their literature (which was in the reverse order of what I should have done). Only later did I learn that they did indeed teach about Jesus—that He was the brother of Satan! I wish I had had this first killer question back then. I would have asked, “What do you teach about Jesus? Who is He to you?”

Get the other person's definition. Let's say you're talking to a neighbor who says, "I don't believe there is a God." Don't quarrel with him: "Oh yes there is!" "No, there's not." Second Timothy 2:24-25 says not to quarrel with anyone. Just start asking questions instead. "What do you mean by 'God'? What's your understanding of this God who isn't there?" Let him define that which does not exist! You may well find out that the god he rejects is a mean, cold, abusive god who looks a lot like his father. In that case, you can assure him that you don't believe in that god either. The true God is altogether different. If it were me, at this point I wouldn't pursue the existence of God argument, but rather try to understand where the other person is coming from, showing the compassion and grace of God to someone bearing painful scars on his soul.

Let's say someone says she is for a woman's right to choose abortion. You can ask, "What do you mean by 'woman'? Only adult women? What if the baby is a girl, what about her right to choose? What do you mean by 'right'? Where does that right come from?" Do you see how asking *What do you mean by that?* can expose problems in the other person's perspective?

Question #2: Where do you get your information?

The question *Where do you get your information?* is particularly important in today's culture, where we drown in information from a huge array of sources. Information is being pumped at us from TV, radio, music, Websites, email, blogs, billboards, movies, and conversations with people who have no truth filters in place at all. Consider the kind of responses you could get to the question, *Where do you get your information?*

"I heard it somewhere." Well, how's that for reliable? Follow with another killer question, *How do you know it's true?*

"Everybody says so." That may be so, but is it true? If you

say something loud enough, often enough, and long enough, people will believe it's true even if it isn't. For example, "everybody says" people are born gay. Doesn't everybody know that by now? That's what we hear, every day, but where is the science to back up that assertion? Turns out, there is none. Not a shred of proof that there is a gay gene.

Someone else may say, "I read it somewhere." So ask, in a legitimate newspaper or magazine? Or in a tabloid? Elvis is not alive, and you can't lose twenty-five pounds in a week. You might have read it somewhere, but there is a word for that kind of writing: *fiction*.

Did you see it on the internet? That could be a single individual with great graphics abilities pumping out his own totally made-up stuff. Or it could be a trustworthy, legitimate website like Probe.org.

Did you see it on TV? Who said it, and how trustworthy is the source? Was it fact, or opinion? Be aware of the worldview agenda behind the major media outlets. Former CBS reporter Bernard Goldberg exposed the leftist leanings of the media in his book *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*. Most of what you see on TV is what the Bible calls "the world," and we are to be discerning and skeptical of the values and information it pumps out.

Don't be fooled by someone sounding confident and self-assured. Many people feel confident without any basis for feeling that way. Ask, *Where do you get your information?* It's a great killer question.

Question #3: How do you know that's true?

The third killer question is, *How do you know that's true?* This is probably the most powerful question of them all. It puts the burden of proof on the other person.

Most people aren't aware of what they assume is true; there's

simply no other way to see the world. They often believe what they believe without asking if it's true, if it aligns with reality. If you respectfully ask killer questions like *How do you know that's true?*, all of a sudden it can begin to occur to folks that what they believe, they believe by faith. But where is their faith placed?

Sometimes, the kindest thing we can do for people is gently shake up their presuppositions and invite them to think.

The reigning philosophy in science today is materialism, the insistence that the physical universe is all that exists. Something is only real if it can be measured and quantified. We need to ask, *How do you know* there is nothing outside the matter-space-time-energy continuum? *How do you know* that the instruments of physical measurement are the only ones that matter? *How do you know* there isn't something non-physical, which cannot be measured with physical measuring tools? If all you have is a ruler, how do you measure weight? (And if all you have is a ruler, and someone wants to talk about weight, it would be easy to deny there is such a thing as weight, only height and length, a lot like the materialists' insistence that since we can't measure the supernatural, it doesn't exist.)

At the heart of the debate over stem cell research is the question of the personhood of a human embryo. Those who insist that it's not life until implantation need to be asked, *How do you know that's true?* It's genetically identical to the embryo ten minutes before implantation. How do you know those are only a clump of cells and not a human being?

Postmodern thought says that no one can know truth. This philosophy has permeated just about every college campus. To the professor who asserts, "No one can know truth," a student should ask, *How do you know that's true?* If that sounds slightly crazy to you, good! A teacher who says there is no truth, or that if there is, no one can know it, says it

because he or she believes it to be true, or they wouldn't be saying it!

We get hostile email at Probe informing us of how stupid and biased we are for believing the Bible, since it has been mistranslated and changed over the centuries and it was written by man anyway. When I ask, "How do you know this is true?", I don't get answers back. Putting the burden of proof on the other person is quite legitimate. People are often just repeating what they have heard from others. But we have to be ready to offer a defense for the hope that is in us as well.{3} Of course, when we point to the Bible as our source of information, it's appropriate to ask the killer question, "How do you know that's true?" Fortunately, there is a huge amount of evidence that today's Bible is virtually the same as the original manuscripts. And there is strong evidence for its supernatural origins because of things like fulfilled prophecy. Go to the "Reasons to Believe" section of Probe.org for a number of articles on why we can trust that the Bible is really God's word.

There are a lot of mistaken, deceived people who believe in reincarnation and insist they remember their past lives. Shirley MacLaine claims to have been a Japanese Geisha, a suicide in Atlantis, an orphan raised by elephants, and the seducer of Charlemagne.{4} Here's where this killer question comes in. If you lose your life memories when you die, *how do you know* your past lives are real? When you're born into a new body and your slate is wiped clean, *how do you know* it's you?

So many people have embraced a pragmatic, expedient standard of, "Hey, it works for me." "It works for me to cheat on my taxes, as long as I don't get caught." "It works for me to spend hours on porn sites late at night since my wife doesn't know how to check the computer's history." "It works for me to keep God in his corner of the universe while I do my own thing; I'll get religious later in life." Well, *how do you know* it works? You haven't seen the whole, big picture. You

can’t know the future, and you can’t know how tomorrow’s consequences will be reaped from today’s choices.

Let me add a caveat here. The underlying question behind *How do you know that’s true?* is really, “Why should I believe you?” It can be quite disconcerting to be challenged this way, so be sure to ask with a friendly face and without an edge in your voice.

Question #4: What if you’re wrong?

One benefit of this question is that it helps us not to “sweat the small stuff.” There are a lot of issues where it just doesn’t matter a whole lot if we’re wrong. If you’re agonizing over a restaurant menu, trying to figure out the best entree, what if you’re wrong? It doesn’t matter. You can probably come back another time. If you can’t, because you’re traveling and you’ll never have another chance, is it going to wreck your life? Absolutely not.

Many of our youth (and, sadly, adults as well) believe that having sex is just part of being social. Many of them believe that sex qualifies as recreation, much like going to an amusement park. They need to be challenged: *What if you’re wrong?* Besides the high probability of contracting a number of sexually transmitted diseases, there is the ongoing heartache of the discovery that “casual” sex isn’t, because of its lasting impact on the heart.

The ultimate question where this matters is, *What do you believe about God?* What do you do with Jesus’ statement “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by Me”?{5} What if you believe there is no God, or that you can live however you want and God will let you into heaven because you’re not a mass murderer? We need to ask, *What if you’re wrong?* You will be separated from God forever!

It’s only fair for Christ-followers to ask that of ourselves.

What if *we're* wrong? What if we're actually living an illusion that there is a God and a purpose to life? I would say, "You know what? I still lived a great life, full of peace and purpose and fulfillment. Ultimately, if there were no God, it wouldn't matter—nothing would matter at all!—but I still loved my life. Either way, if I'm right or I'm wrong, I win."

These four killer questions are powerful to spark meaningful conversation and encourage yourself, and others, to think critically. Use them wisely, be prepared for some interesting conversations . . . and have fun!

Notes

1. Our fellow worldview apologist Bill Jack of Worldview Academy (www.worldview.org) has also popularized these "killer questions," but they go back all the way to Socrates.
2. "Created Male and Female: Biblical Light for a Sexually Darkened World" conference sponsored by the International Council for Gender Studies, October 10-12, 2003.
3. 1 Peter 3:15.
4. www.fortunecity.com/emachines/e11/86/duncan2.html
5. John 14:6.

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Mormon Doctrine of Jesus: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran looks at a Mormon view of Jesus, comparing it to an authentic Christian perspective. He finds that the Mormon view is not supported by the biblical text.

Jesus a Procreated Being?

The Mormon Church claims to have restored the true teachings of Jesus. In this article, we will compare the Mormon doctrine of Jesus to the New Testament.

The New Testament teaches that Jesus, God the Son, is eternal and has no beginning. However, Mormonism teaches that Jesus is a procreated being, the literal offspring of God the Father and one of His heavenly wives. According to Mormon theology, God the Father, Elohim, dwells on a planet with His many spirit wives producing numerous spirit children who await to inhabit physical bodies so that they too may one day ascend to godhood as their parents did. Jesus is believed to be the firstborn spirit child of Elohim. The *Doctrine and Covenants*, one of the four sacred books of Mormonism states, "Christ, the Firstborn, was the mightiest of all the spirit children of the Father."{1} The *Gospel Principles,* which is the manual of the Mormon Church, states, "The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ."{2} James Talmage, one of the early apostles of the church wrote, "[A]mong the spirit-children of Elohim, the firstborn was and is Jehovah or Jesus Christ to whom all others are juniors."{3}

According to the Mormon view, Jesus is not unique from the rest of mankind. He is simply the firstborn spirit child. The *Doctrine and Covenants* states, "The difference between Jesus and other offspring of Elohim is one of degree not of kind."{4} That is why Mormons refer to Jesus as elder brother. James Talmage wrote, "Human beings generally were similarly existent in spirit state prior to their embodiment in the flesh. . . . There is no impropriety, therefore, in speaking of Jesus Christ as the Elder Brother of the rest of mankind."{5}

Mormon doctrine deviates significantly from the Bible, which teaches that Jesus is eternal and not procreated. Although Mormons teach that Jesus is eternal, what they mean is that He

existed as a spirit child prior to His incarnation. Being an offspring of Elohim means He was created at some point in time.

To support their view, Mormons appeal to John 3:16, which states Jesus is the "only begotten." The Greek word used there is *monogenes,* which means "unique" or "one of a kind." It does not mean procreated, but emphasizes uniqueness.

Mormons also appeal to Colossians 1:15, which calls Christ the "Firstborn over all creation." The Greek word for firstborn is *prototokos*, meaning "first in rank, preeminent one." It carries the idea of positional supremacy. Christ is the firstborn in the sense that He is preeminent over all creation. Renowned Greek scholar, the late F.F. Bruce, wrote on how the term was used during the time in which Paul wrote. "The word firstborn had long since ceased to be used exclusively in its literal sense, just as prime (from the Latin word *primus*—first) with us. The Prime Minister is not the first minister we have had; he is the most preeminent. . . . Similarly, firstborn came to denote (among the ancients) not priority in time but preeminence in rank."{6} Psalm 89:27 in the Septuagint calls David the firstborn. We all know David is not the first-born son in his family, nor is he the first king of Israel. "Firstborn" here is a title of preeminence.

These Bible verses do not support the teaching that Jesus is a procreated being. The Bible further teaches Jesus is an eternal being. He had no beginning.

Colossians 1:17 states, "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Christ as the eternal Son of God existed before all creation. Since Christ is "before all things," He did not depend on anyone or anything for His creation or existence.

John 1:1 shows Jesus is eternal and has no beginning. John wrote, "In the beginning *was* the word." Scripture indicates

that the universe was not created in time, but that time itself was created along with the universe.{7} In other words, time was not already in existence when God created the world. The world was created with time rather than in time. Back before the beginning mentioned in Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1 lay a *beginningless* eternity.{8} The verb *was* is in the imperfect tense, indicating continued existence. So Jesus did not come into existence at some point in eternity past, He always existed. There has never been a point where He was not in existence.

In John 8:58 Jesus tells the religious leaders, "Before Abraham was born, I am." Jesus is identifying Himself as the eternal God, quoting the words from Exodus 3:14. For this reason the Jews were seeking to stone Him for the crime of blasphemy. The words "I am" or "Yahweh" in the Hebrew language is the verb, to be. This name conveys the meaning of eternal self-existence. Yahweh, whom Jesus is identifying with, is eternal and beyond the realm of time. Abraham came to exist at a point in time, but Jesus never had a beginning. He is uncreated and eternal. Since the Bible teaches the eternal nature of Christ, He cannot be a procreated being as Mormon doctrine teaches.

Lucifer and Jesus

According to Mormon theology, God the Father lives on a planet with His spirit wives procreating spirit children who await physical bodies to inhabit. As we learned earlier, Jesus is the first son born to Elohim. God the Father had numerous other offspring, which included Lucifer. This makes him a spirit brother of Jesus and of all human beings. Mormon theologian LeGrand Richards writes, "Satan was just as much a man in the spirit world, as were those spirits who have been given bodies through birth in this world."{9}

Mormonism teaches that Jesus and Lucifer were involved in planning mankind's eternal destiny. In order to attain godhood

like our heavenly parents, the spirit children needed to leave the presence of their heavenly Father, inhabit a physical body, and live a worthy life. Elohim knew that mankind would sin and thus require a savior to pay for sin and show us how to return to our heavenly father. At the heavenly council, Jesus and Lucifer proposed their plans. Lucifer offered to go to earth and be the savior but he wanted to force everyone to be saved and do everything himself. Jesus desired to give man the freedom of choice. The Father chose Jesus' plan. Angered by the decision, Lucifer persuaded one third of the spirit children to rebel and a war in heaven took place between Satan's forces and Jesus and His followers. Lucifer was defeated, cast out of heaven, and denied the right to inhabit mortal bodies.{10} Without the ability to attain physical bodies, exaltation to the Celestial kingdom is impossible. He became known as Satan and his followers became the demons who now exist on earth as spirits opposing God's work.

Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, "The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the worlds was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the savior of mankind."{11}

The Bible teaches that Jesus is not the spirit brother of Lucifer or of human beings. Lucifer is an angel and part of the created order. Ezekiel 28:13-19 reveals that Lucifer, in contrast to Jesus, is a created cherub angel. Colossians 1:16 tells us that Christ is the Creator of all things, including the angelic realm. The words "thrones", "dominions", "principalities" and "powers" were used by rabbinical Jews to describe different orders of angels. In Colossae, there was a problem of worshipping angels. Christ had been degraded to their level. Paul's argument here is that Christ is superior to the angels for Christ created them. Lucifer falls into this category of a created angel, thus making him a created being.

Hebrews 1:4 also reinforces the fact that Jesus, being God the Son, is superior in nature to the angels. Christ is Creator, while Lucifer is creature, two totally different classes and they cannot be spirit brothers as Mormonism teaches.

The Incarnation of Christ

The Mormon doctrine of Jesus deviates from biblical teaching regarding the preincarnate life of Christ. It also deviates in its teaching on the incarnation of Jesus. Mormonism teaches that Jesus' incarnation was the result of sexual relations between the flesh and bone Heavenly Father and Mary. Jesus is the only earthly offspring so conceived. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, "Christ was begotten by an Immortal Father in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers."{12}

He also writes, "God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; He was born in the same personal, real and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about this paternity; He was begotten, conceived, and born in the normal and natural course of events, for He is the Son of God, and that designation means what it says."{13}

James Talmage wrote, "Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His mission in the flesh."{14}

Mormon theology teaches that the Father was the main person involved in Mary's conception, not the Holy Spirit. Joseph Fielding Smith wrote, "Christ is not the Son of the Holy Ghost, but of the Father."{15} Mormon Historian Stephen Robinson states, "Mary was in some unspecified manner made pregnant by God the Father, through the power of the Holy

Spirit."{16} Dr. Robinson attempts to remain faithful to Mormon theology and the Bible, but his attempt falls short.

The Bible makes it clear: Jesus was conceived as the result of a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, not a physical union with the Father. John 4:24 says that God is spirit. He is not a resurrected man.

Luke 1:35 states, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." The Holy Spirit's supernatural work in Mary's body enabled Christ—eternal God—to take on human nature. Jesus thus had a dual nature. He was fully God and fully man. Mormons reject this teaching.

Stephen Robinson writes, the "unbiblical doctrine of the two natures in Christ was added to historic Christianity by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D."{17} This might be a consistent conclusion for Mormonism, but it is contrary to the Bible. Throughout the Gospels Jesus showed His humanity: He was hungry, He got tired, and His human body experienced death. However, He also revealed His divinity, demonstrating omnipotence (Colossians 1:17), omniscience (John 2:25), eternity (John 1:1), and omnipresence (Matthew 28:20).

There is a wide separation between the Mormon doctrine of the incarnation of Christ and what the Bible teaches.

The Atoning Work of Christ

Another key area in which Mormon theology deviates from biblical teaching is their view of the atoning work of Christ. To understand this, we must understand the Mormon view of the fall. According to Mormon theology, Adam was given two conflicting commands by God: one to become mortal and the other not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; out of which mortality, children, and death would result. Adam chose to eat of the fruit for it was the only way salvation could come to mankind.{18} As a result of the fall, Adam and

Eve left their purely spiritual state and became physical beings. Mortality and child bearing would provide the way to exaltation and godhood. Man then inherited a dual nature, one physical and the other spiritual.{19}

Jesus' death is believed to have atoned for only Adam's sin, leaving us responsible for our sins.{20} Adam's act brought mortality and death. The result of Jesus' atonement is that all humankind will be resurrected. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, "Unconditional salvation, that which comes by grace alone without obedience to gospel law, consists in the mere fact of being resurrected."{21} The Second Article of Faith states, "We believe that men are responsible for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression."{22}

In Mormon theology, there is a distinction between general salvation—resurrection for all, and individual salvation which refers to exaltation. Mormonism teaches that that we have all attained universal resurrection as a result of Jesus' death, but we must now earn our own place in heaven by doing all we can do.

Mormonism teaches there are three levels of heaven: telestial is the lowest level, the terrestrial, and celestial. The resurrection of Christ allows non-Mormons entrance to the telestial or terrestrial kingdom. All Mormons desire the celestial level where they attain exaltation to godhood. Attaining to this level depends on their life here on earth. The Mormon Church and Joseph Smith play the major roles in achieving exaltation. The *Gospel Principles* tell us that Jesus "became our savior and He did His part to help us return to our heavenly home. It is now up to each of us to do our part and become worthy of exaltation."{23}

The Bible does not equate salvation with resurrection. Jesus' death provides atonement for all of humanity (Isaiah 53:6), but salvation is contingent on one's response to Christ's atoning work. Salvation applies only to those who accept

Christ's work on the cross. It is not universal as in Mormonism.

All mankind will be resurrected, but it is at the resurrection that some will be condemned to hell and others to eternal life in God's presence (Rev. 20:11-15). Those who reject Christ will not be saved (John 3:18). So resurrection is not equated with salvation.

Finally, individual salvation is by faith alone, not by works. (Ephesians 2:8-9) It is through faith in Jesus alone that one receives the full measure of the gift of salvation. The Bible does not teach three levels of glorification. There is only eternal life with Christ, or eternal separation from God.

Jesus the Polygamist?

As we have studied, the Mormon doctrine of Jesus deviates from the Jesus of the Bible in several key areas. Another unique teaching of Mormonism on the life of Christ is in regards to His marital state. Mormonism teaches that while on earth, Jesus was married to at least three women. Although Mormons today try to distance themselves from this teaching, it is clearly a part of their historical record. Orson Hyde, one of the original Twelve Apostles of the Mormon Church and who was ordained by Joseph Smith, cites the gospel of John when he writes, "Jesus was the bridegroom at the marriage of Cana of Galilee, and He told them what to do. Now there was actually a marriage; and if Jesus was not the bridegroom on that occasion, please tell who was. I shall say here, that before the Savior died, He looked upon his own natural children as we look upon ours."{24}

Mormonism teaches that Jesus was not only married, but He had a family. In a speech given by Hyde in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, he exclaimed, "I discover that some of the Eastern papers represent me as a great blasphemer, because I said, in my lecture on marriage, at our last conference, that Jesus

Christ was married at Cana of Galilee, that Mary, Martha, and others were His wives, and that He begat children. All that I have to say in reply to that charge is this—they worship a Savior that is too pure and holy to fulfil the commands of his Father. I worship one that is just pure and holy enough 'to fulfil all righteousness;' not only the righteous law of baptism, but the still more righteous and important law 'to multiply and replenish the earth.' Startle not at this! For even the Father Himself honored that law by coming down to Mary, without a natural body, and begetting a Son; and if Jesus begat children, He only 'did that which He had seen His Father do.'"{25}

This would be consistent with Mormon theology, since marriage is a requirement for exaltation to godhood.{26}

According to the New Testament, there is no evidence to indicate that Jesus was married or that He had children. It is even more inconceivable that He would enter into a polygamous relationship, for it was not God's intended will for marriage. (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5, and 1 Timothy 3)

Our study reveals that the Jesus of Mormonism is not the Jesus of the Bible. The Mormon view of Jesus teaches that He was not eternally God, that He was procreated as the first spirit child of the Father, He is a spirit brother of Lucifer, and was begotten of the Father through physical relations with Mary. For these reasons, we cannot consider the Mormon teachings on Christ to be consistent with the New Testament.

Notes

1. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:21-23.
2. *Gospel Principles*, 11.
3. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 425.
4. *Doctrine and Covenants* 93:21
5. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 426.
6. F.F. Bruce, *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids,

MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979) quoted in The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 126.
7. Harold Kuhn, "Creation," in B*asic Christian Doctrines*, ed. Carl F. Henry. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983.), 61, quoted in The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 100.
8. Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdman's Publishing Co. 1983), 996, quoted in The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1998), 100.
9. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and Wonder* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Publishng Company), 277.
10. *Gospel Principles*, 16-17.
11. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* 193.
12. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 546-547.
13. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 742.
14. James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 466.
15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1975), 1:18-20.
16. Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*, 135.
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18. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 47.
19. "Church News" in *Deseret News*, July 31, 1965, 7.
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Mormon Doctrine of God: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran examines the Mormon doctrine of God from a Christian perspective. Is their view of God consistent with the biblical view?

Monotheism or Polytheism?

The Mormons consider themselves to be Christian, but many question this claim. In this article we will investigate the teaching of Mormonism regarding the doctrine of God and compare it with Biblical teaching.

Mormon doctrine is derived from four primary sources. The first is the Bible; the second are the sacred texts of Mormonism, the *Book of Mormon, The Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price.* The third comes from the writings of the founder of the church Joseph Smith, and the fourth is the writings of church leaders, especially the church presidents who are considered to be inspired prophets of God. In regard to the God of the Bible, Stephen Robinson, chairman of the Department of Ancient Scriptures at Brigham Young University, writes, "The Latter-day Saints (should) be considered worshipers of the one true God."{1} He also states, "The Latter-day Saints accept unequivocally all the biblical teachings on the nature of God."{2}

Christianity has taught monotheism from its foundation, the belief in the existence of one God. Mormonism believes in the existence of a plurality of gods. According to Mormonism,

there are an infinite number of planets like earth in the universe, each with their god or gods who were once men who have evolved into godhood. Mormon theologian and Apostle Bruce McConkie states, "[A] plurality of gods exist . . . there is an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods."{3}

Joseph Smith wrote, "In the beginning, the head of the gods called a council of the gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and (the) people in it."{4}

The *Pearl of Great Price* states in the Book of Abraham, "And they (the gods) said: let there be light and there was light. And they (the gods) comprehended the light, . . . and the gods called the light Day and the darkness they called Night. . . ." In these two chapters, the plural designation "gods" is used over fifty times.

Although they believe that numerous gods exist, Mormons consider themselves to be monotheists because they focus their worship exclusively on the Godhead of this earth. With this being the case, a more accurate description of Mormon practice is *henotheism*, a form of polytheism that stresses a central deity.

The Bible clearly teaches monotheism. This truth is taught in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Isaiah writes about God, "Before me there was no god formed, nor will there be one after me." There was no god created before or any to come for there is only one God. Later he adds, "You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock: I know not one." God knows of no other, not because God is limited in knowledge, but because there is no other like Him in existence.

Doctrine of the Trinity

Christians and Mormons share many similar theological terms. We both refer to God, salvation, and heaven. However, the words often have radically different meanings. Such is the case with the doctrine of the Trinity. Biblical Christianity teaches there is one God eternally coexisting in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As we will see, the Mormon view of the Godhead is quite different.

The Mormons reject the traditional Christian view of the Trinity as being in error. Joseph Smith wrote,

> Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God [anyhow]—three in one and one in three. . .It is curious organization All are crammed into one God according to sectarianism (Christian faith). It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster. (Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 372)

Church president James Talmage stated, "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are as distinct in persons and individualities as are any three personages in mortality."{5}

Mormons believe that there are an infinite number of planets, each with their own god or gods. On this earth, there are three separate gods, God the Father or Elohim, Jehovah or Jesus the son, and the Holy Ghost who make up the Godhead. Instead of Trinitarian, *tritheistic* would be a better word to describe Mormon belief. Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie states, "There are three Gods— the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."{6} He further explains that, "[T]hree separate personages—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a god, it is evident, from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of gods exists. To us,

speaking in the proper finite sense, these three are the only gods we worship."{7}

Jesus is believed by Mormons to be the literal offspring of the Father. The Mormon Church teaches that "Jesus Christ is the son of Elohim both as (a) spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed his mission in the flesh. . . ."{8}

The Bible teaches that there is only one true God, not three separate gods. Deuteronomy 6:4 states, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." God has revealed Himself in three coeternal and coequal persons of the same substance or essence, however, distinct in subsistence. The Bible reveals that all three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—have the attributes of deity. All three have existed for eternity, took part in creation, and play a role in salvation. The whole, undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three Persons.{9}

God Was Once a Man

As we discussed earlier, Mormon theology teaches that there is a plurality of gods. All gods were once mortal men on other planets who, through obedience to the commands of their God, attained exaltation or godhood. All Mormon men have the potential of attaining godhood as well. God's progression from man to God is clearly stated throughout Mormon literature. Joseph Smith wrote:

> God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! . . . I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. . . . He was once a man like us; yea that God himself, the Father dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself

> did. . . .{10}

Brigham Young, the second president taught "[T]hat God the Father was once a man on another planet who 'passed the ordeal we are now passing through. . .'"{11} The *Doctrine and Covenants* states, "God is a glorified and perfected man, a personage of flesh and bones. Inside his tangible body is an eternal spirit." (130:22)

Jesus is believed to have been a mortal man who attained godhood and showed that all men can do the same. The goal of every Mormon man is to achieve exaltation to godhood. Bruce McConkie states, "That exaltation which the saints of all ages have so devoutly sought is godhood itself."{12} Joseph Smith exhorted all Mormon men to strive for this goal. He stated,

> Here then, is eternal life— to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you. . . .{13}

The Mormon Church teaches that if a couple marries according to Mormon ceremony, and each lives an obedient life, they may attain godhood at the resurrection. The *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches,

> [Y]e shall come forth in the first resurrection; . . . and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths . . . (and you) shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to (their) exaltation." (132)

The passage concludes, "Then they shall be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting because they continue. . . . Then they shall be gods because they have all power, and the angels are subject to them." (132:20)

The Bible teaches that God has always been God. Psalm 90

states, “From everlasting to everlasting you are God.” God did not evolve from mortal man. Isaiah 43 reveals, “Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.” This verse destroys any hope of any man thinking he may become a god.

Celestial Parenthood

In Mormon theology, there are three levels of heaven, terrestial, tellestial, and celestial. It teaches that almost everyone will make it to the first level, terrestrial, but Mormons seek entrance to celestial heaven, because there they are exalted to godhood. Once a man is exalted to godhood, he and his wife will reproduce offspring for eternity. These spirit children will in turn inhabit physical bodies and have the opportunity to become gods as well. This privilege is reserved for those who go through the sacred marriage ceremony in the Temple and live in obedience to Mormon teachings.

As we discussed previously, the Mormon book *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches that Mormons who marry within the context of the church, and remain obedient, shall be resurrected together. They shall then inherit thrones and kingdoms and are then declared gods because they will then rule together for eternity. Church president James Talmage adds, “[W]e are to understand that only resurrected and glorified beings can become parents of spirit offspring . . . and the spirits born to them in the eternal worlds will pass in due sequence through the several stages or estates by which the glorified parents have attained exaltation.”{14}

God the Father is, therefore, believed to be married to God the Mother, and together they are producing spirit children. Bruce McConkie states, “An exalted and glorified man of holiness could not be a Father unless a woman of like glory, perfection, and holiness was associated with him as a Mother. The begetting of children makes a man a father and a woman a mother whether we are dealing with man in his mortal or immortal state.”{15}

All men and women are thus the offspring of this heavenly union. James Talmage wrote, “God the Eternal Father, whom we designate by the exalted name-title ‘Elohim,’ is the literal Parent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and of the spirits of the human race.”{16}

The Bible teaches that God the Father is not married. Isaiah 46:9 states, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God; and there is none like me.” The Bible teaches that men and women who receive Christ as their savior will be glorified and live eternally in the presence of God. However, they will never be equal to God, nor will they be married. If marriage were essential to attain exaltation, it seems strange that Paul would write in 1 Corinthians 7, “It is good for a man not to marry.” When Jesus was questioned about the state of marriage in eternity he said, “When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, they will be like the angels in heaven.” The covenant of marriage is for our earthly existence only. The Bible does not teach a doctrine of celestial parenthood.

God is a Physical Being

Christianity teaches that God is immaterial. Mormonism teaches that God has a physical body. The Mormon *Doctrine and Covenants* teaches, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s, the Son also. . . .”{17} Brigham Young wrote, “We cannot believe for a moment that God is destitute of body, parts, passions, or attributes.”{18}

Although John 4:24 clearly teaches that God is spirit, Mormons like Bruce McConkie teach that this is a mistranslation of the text. He writes:

> False creeds teach that God is a spirit essence that fills the immensity of space. . . . In a vain attempt to support this doctrine, formulated by councils in the early days of the great apostasy, it is common for apologists to point to

> the statement in the KJV Bible, which says, “God is a Spirit.” The fact is that this passage is mistranslated: instead the correct statement, quoted in context reads: “For unto such hath God promised his Spirit. And they who worship him, must worship in spirit and in truth.”{19}

However, there is no justification for McConkie’s translation. The KJV translation of “God is a spirit” is misleading; modern translators are more accurate rendering the passage “God is spirit.” The Greek construction and word order place the emphasis on the essential character of God; thus the essence of true worship must be on God’s terms and in accord with his nature.{20} Jesus further taught in Luke 24:36-43, “[A] spirit does not have flesh and bones.” 1 Timothy 1:17 states, “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God.” God is invisible because He is immaterial. 1 John 4:12 and John 1:18 tell us that no one has seen God. The second of the Ten Commandments forbids anyone from making an image of God, partially because nothing physical could accurately reflect God, who is immaterial. If God created the universe, as the Bible teaches, He could not be a physical being.

Scripture often uses anthropomorphic language, attributing human characteristics to God to help describe God’s activities. Psalm 17 pleads, “Keep me (Lord) as the apple of your eye, hide me in the shadow of your wings.” Mormons have used this kind of language to prove that God has a physical body. In doing so they ignore the use of figurative language. God no more has a physical eye than He has wings and feathers.

God also revealed Himself in temporary physical forms that men could understand called theophanies. Examples are the burning bush, the fiery cloud in Exodus, and the unique incarnation of Christ. God the Son humbled Himself and took on human form. He was not a pre-existent spirit-being, waiting for a body, as the Mormons teach. John 1 reveals that the Son was God from eternity and became a man to redeem humanity. We must conclude, based on our study of the doctrine of God, that

Mormonism and traditional Christianity are indeed two different religions.

Notes

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2. Ibid., 103.
3. Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, (Salt Lake: Bookcraft, 1991), 576-577.
4. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), 349; quoted in Walter Martin, Kingdom of the Cults, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), 220.
5. James Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book Company, 1984), 37.
6. McConkie, 317.
7. McConkie, 576.
8. Talmage, 421.
9. Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1988), 54.
10. Smith, 321.
11. Brigham Young, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 29.
12. McConkie, 321.
13. Smith, p. 345-347. Also quoted in McConkie, 321.
14. Talmage, 426.
15. McConkie, 516.
16. Talmage, 421.
17. *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:22.
18, Young, 29.
19. McConkie, 218.
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Examining the Book of Mormon – A Christian View

The book of Mormon needs to be evaluated by the light of scripture and its purported evidence for its reliability. Dr. Pat Zukeran shows that the bad character of the book's witnesses, the lack of archaeological support, and internal errors reveal it to be the flawed work of man, not God.

The Mormon Story

Some people believe the *Book of Mormon* is a new revelation from God given to Joseph Smith. Mormons recognize it as divinely inspired and equal in authority to the Bible, but others have reason to doubt its claims.

Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt wrote in 1851, "The *Book of Mormon* claims to be a divinely inspired record. . . . This book must be either true or false. . . . If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever planned upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions who will sincerely receive it as the word of God. . . . If true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it."{1}

In this article, we will take a look at internal and external evidences for the *Book of Mormon* to see if it should be considered inspired writing.

The *Book of Mormon* is said to be a record of two ancient Jewish civilizations that migrated to America. The Jaredites left Babylonia during the building of the Tower of Babel in approximately 2,250 B.C. After establishing a civilization in America that lasted two thousand years. They eventually

succumbed to corruption and apostasy and were judged by God and destroyed.

The second group of Jews left Jerusalem in 600 B.C. before the Babylonian exile during the reign of King Zedekiah. This group crossed the Pacific and landed on the west coast of South America. Lehi and his son Nephi led these righteous Jews. This group eventually divided into two warring camps, the Nephites and the Lamenites and spread throughout North and South America. The Lamenites were cursed with dark skin because of their evil deeds and were the forefathers of the American Indians.{2}

Latter-day Saints believe that during the end of the 4th century A.D. the Nephite prophet general Mormon and his son Moroni, compiled the records of these two civilizations using the Reformed Egyptian language and recorded them on gold plates. Moroni hid the plates in the hills of Cumorah near Palmyra, New York to be revealed at a later time. The Lamenites eventually destroyed the Nephites in 421 A.D. on the Hill Cumorah. The Lamenite civilizations continued to degenerate and had forgotten their Jewish history. When Columbus found them centuries later, they had become as the *Book of Mormon* describes them, a "filthy and a loathsome people." (*Book of Mormon* 5:15)

Does the *Book of Mormon* qualify as divinely inspired scripture? In determining the answer, we will take a critical look at several key issues. First we will look at the nature in which Joseph Smith received his revelations. Second, we will investigate the character of the author and the key witnesses. Third, since the *Book or Mormon* claims to be a historical work, we will see if there is evidence to support this claim. Finally, since the *Book of Mormon* says it is the most perfect book ever written, we will examine it to see if it contains any false precepts. Let's examine the Book to see if it is an inspired ancient historical record or a nineteenth century product.

Origin of the *Book of Mormon*

Mormons believe Moroni appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823 as a glorified resurrected being, and delivered to him the golden plates from their hiding place in the Cumorah hills. Using an occult seer stone, Smith translated the history of the Lamenites and Nephites into the *Book of Mormon*.{3}

In studying the origin of the *Book of Mormon*, we must first investigate the issue of the canon of scripture. Christians believe the canon is closed with the 66 books of the Bible. There are no more revelations outside these books. Here are some reasons why.

First the authority to write the Holy Scripture was given to the Old Testament prophets of God and the New Testament Apostles of Christ. The last apostle died at the end of the first century A.D. and there has not been anyone who fulfills the qualifications for apostleship since then.

Second, the canon is confirmed to be closed by Judaism, Jesus, the Apostles, and the early church. According to the writings of eye witnesses—Emma Smith (one of Joseph Smith's wives), William Smith (his brother), and David Whitmer (one of the three key witnesses), Smith used a common occult practice of crystal gazing.

In 1877 David Whitmer wrote,

> I will now give you a description of the manner in which the *Book of Mormon* was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was

> his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the *Book of Mormon* was translated by the gift and power of God and not by any power of man."{4}

Emma Smith wrote to her children, "In writing for your father, I frequently wrote day after day. . . . He sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us."{5} So according to these accounts, Joseph Smith received his revelations word for word and used a seer stone.

By contrast, the Bible was not given to us in a word for word dictation form, nor is there a case of any biblical writer using an occult object to receive revelations from God. Mormons point to the use of the Urim and Thummim but their purpose was quite different. The Urim and Thummim were used for a time by the Aaronic priests only to gain answers of Yes or No from God to particular questions. Lots were cast to discern God's will, not to receive content for revelation. Finally, we must understand, the Aaronic priesthood and its practices are replaced by the finished work of Christ (Hebrews 7:12). Occult methods, such as crystal gazing, are forbidden in the Bible (Deuteronomy 18:9-14, Leviticus 19:26, 31). Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie even denounces using objects to gain new revelation. He condemns Hiram Page, one of the witnesses of the *Book of Mormon* for using a seer stone to gain new revelations. Joseph Smith obtained his revelations contrary to the method of inspiration received by the biblical Prophets and Apostles.

Character of the 11 Witnesses

Joseph Smith claims that after he translated the plates, he returned them to the angel Moroni. Therefore, there is no way to verify the veracity of the plates or Smith's translation.

Smith's only defense of his account is the eleven men who signed statements claiming to have seen the golden plates. Therefore, the credibility of Smith's account rests on the testimony of these eleven witnesses. There are three key witnesses who claim to have seen the angel show the golden plates to them. The remaining eight allege to have seen the plates but not the angel. The LDS church asserts these men never denied their testimony. However, when we examine the lives of the witnesses, we find they were untrustworthy, wavering, and gullible witnesses.

Six of the eleven witnesses, including the three key witnesses were eventually excommunicated from the church. Former Mormon President Ezra Taft Benson summed up the legacy of the eleven witnesses this way. "Six of the original Twelve Apostles selected by Joseph Smith were excommunicated. The three Witnesses to the *Book of Mormon* left the church. Three of Joseph Smith's counselors fell—one even helped plot his death. . . . The wolves among our flock are more numerous and devious today than when President Clark made a similar statement [in 1949]."{6}

Let us first examine the character of the three key witnesses since their testimony is the most important. In a letter dated December 16, 1838, Joseph Smith stated this about the three key witnesses and John Whitmer, one of the eight. "John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris are too mean to mention."{7}

Martin Harris' testimony shows him to be a gullible and unstable man. He changed his religious conviction approximately thirteen times. He had joined several Christian denominations and other cult groups that include the Universalists, Strangites, and the Shakers. {8}(Ankerberg, 196) In *Doctrine and Covenants*, Joseph Smith gave revelations in which he denounces Martin Harris and calls him a "wicked man."{9} The Mormon leaders published an article in the *Elder's Journal*, a Mormon publication edited by Joseph Smith,

in which they accused Harris guilty of "swearing, lying, cheating, swindling, drinking, with every species of debauchery. . ." (*Elders Journal*, August, 1838, 59).{10} Here the leaders of the Mormon Church strongly criticize the character of Harris.

Oliver Cowdery was also shown to be a very gullible man. He was led astray by Hiram Page, one of the eight witnesses who himself claimed to have divine revelations from his own seer stone. Although Joseph Smith denounced Hiram as a false teacher, Smith stated "to our grief, however, we soon found that Satan had been lying in wait to deceive. . . . Brother Hiram Page had in his possession a certain stone, by which he obtained certain 'revelations' . . . all of which were entirely at variance with the order of God's House, . . ."{11} Despite Smith's condemnation, Oliver Cowdery joined Page's movement. Not only was he a gullible man, he was also indicted on several accounts of fraudulent business practices. The Mormon Church in a letter wrote, "During the career of Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer's bogus money business, it got abroad into the world that they were engaged in it. . . . We have evidence of a very strong character that you are at this very time engaged with a gang of counterfeiters, coiners, and blacklegs . . ."{12} Cowdery was eventually excommunicated and he later joined the Methodist Church.

David Whitmer wrote, "God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens, and told me to 'separate myself from among the Latter- day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, so should it be done unto them." In the spring of 1838, the heads of the church and many of the members had gone deep into error and blindness. . . . About the same time that I came out, the Spirit of God moved upon quite a number of the brethren who came out, with their families, all of the eight witnesses who were then living (except the three Smiths) came out; . . ."{13} Here David Whitmer denounced the Mormon Church and encouraged people to follow his example and the example of the

other witnesses and leave the church.

Joseph Smith in response attacked the character of David Whitmer. Smith stated, “God suffered such kind of beings to afflict Job . . . this poor man who professes to be much of a prophet, has no other dumb ass to ride but David Whitmer, to forbid his madness when he goes up to curse Israel: and this ass not being of the same kind as Balaam’s . . . he brays out cursing instead of blessings. Poor ass!”{14}

The character and life of the eleven witnesses to the *Book of Mormon* are very different from the Apostles of Christ. None of the Apostles wavered in their defense of Christ, even though all suffered and most died for their faith. The Apostles remained consistent in their teaching and never fell into any type of apostasy. Their lives were marked by honesty and integrity. They were never indicted for any criminal activity except for preaching Christ. The character of the *Book of Mormon’s* eleven witnesses does not strengthen Smith’s defense but cast further doubt on its authenticity.

Archaeology and the *Book of Mormon*

According to the *Book of Mormon*, Jews migrated from the Middle East to Central and South America and established great civilizations on the continents of North and South America. The *Book of Mormon* states that large cities were built so that by 322 A.D. “The whole face of the land had become covered with buildings and the people were as numerous almost as it were the sand of the sea.” (Mormon 1:7) Thirty-eight cities are specifically mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*. Also in the final battle between the Nephites and Lamenites, 230,000 Nephites were killed near the hills of Cumorah in New York.

With such a vast population and cities, one would expect to find numerous archaeological evidences to substantiate such large civilizations. However, there is no evidence to validate the claims of the *Book of Mormon*. Despite expeditions financed

by the Mormon Church, archaeologists have concluded the *Book of Mormon* is not historical but a work of fiction.

The Smithsonian Institute in a letter to the Mormon Church states, "The Smithsonian Institution has never used the *Book of Mormon* in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian Archaeologists see no connection between the archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the Book."{15}

The National Geographic Society writes, "With regard to the cities mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*, neither representatives of the National Geographic Society nor archaeologists connected with any other institution of equal prestige have ever used the *Book of Mormon* in locating historic ruins in Middle America or elsewhere."{16}

Even Mormon archaeologists admit there is no conclusive evidence. Dr. Hugh Nibley, a Mormon apologist, states in his book *Since Cumorah* that no real archaeological proof for the Nephite civilization exists. He writes regarding the Nephites, "All that we have to go on to date is a written history . . . there is nothing whatever that an anthropologist or archaeologist as such can say about the *Book of Mormon*."{17}

Dee Green, professor of anthropology at Weber State University and a respected Mormon scholar states, "The first myth we must eliminate is that *Book of Mormon* archaeology exists . . . no *Book of Mormon* location is known with reference to modern topography. Biblical archaeology can be studied because we do know where Jerusalem and Jericho were and are, but we do not know where Zarahemla and Bountiful (nor any other location for that matter) were or are. It would seem that a concentration on geography should be the first order of business, but . . . years of such an approach has left us empty-handed."{18}

Another prominent Mormon scholar is B.H. Roberts. He was described as one of the most valiant writers and speakers in defense of the *Book of Mormon*. However, after years of

research he concluded at the end of his life that the *Book of Mormon* was a fictional work created by Joseph Smith. He wrote, "the evidence I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history, that they come upon the scene separated by long periods of time, and among a race which was the ancestral race of the red man of America."{19}

Another prominent defender of the *Book of Mormon* was Thomas Ferguson, who was president of the New World Archaeological Foundation, which was funded by Bringham Young University and the Mormon Church. He hoped to discover archaeological support for the *Book of Mormon*. In 1962 he announced, "Powerful evidences sustaining the book are accumulating."{20} However, after years of research and many fruitless expeditions, his original hopes were shattered.{21} He eventually wrote,

> With all these great efforts, it cannot be established factually that anyone, from Joseph smith to the present day, has put his finger on a single point of terrain that was a *Book of Mormon* geographical place. And the hemisphere has been pretty well checked out by competent people I must agree with Dee Green, who has told us that to date there is no *Book of Mormon* geography. I, for one, would be happy if Dee were wrong.{22}

In contrast, biblical archaeology has provided thousands of discoveries that have confirmed biblical references. Hundreds of ancient civilizations, artifacts, historical records and inscriptions have been discovered that prove the historical accuracy of the Bible. Archaeological discoveries confirming biblical accounts have been acknowledged by Christians as well as skeptics. Foremost Middle East archaeologist Dr. William Albright wrote, "Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history."{23} When asked if archaeology confirms the accuracy of the New Testament, scholar John McCray states, "Oh, there

is no question that the credibility of the New Testament is enhanced."{24} A historical faith should have historical proofs. Historical research has led both Christians and skeptics to affirm the historicity of the Bible. However, historical research has proven damaging for the *Book of Mormon*.

Errors in the *Book of Mormon*

Mormons claim the *Book of Mormon* is the most perfect book ever written. Joseph Smith stated, "I told the brethren that the *Book of Mormon* was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than any other book."{25}

Is Joseph Smith's claim true? Errors in the B*ook of Mormon* should cause one to question its divine inspiration.

In studying the *Book of Mormon*, one soon finds numerous historical, geographical, and scientific errors. First, in Mormon 9:32 the *Book of Mormon* claims to have been written in Reformed Egyptian, but Egyptologists say this language does not exist. Second, in Alma 7:10, Jerusalem is called a land or country when it is a city. In Alma 46:15 the saved in America take on the name Christian in 73 B.C. In the Bible, believers are not called Christian until 50 A.D. in Acts 11:3. Nephi 17:7 teaches that leprosy occurred in America in 34 A.D. but no cases of leprosy here are known until 1758. Mormon 9:2 and other references teach that the Indians had official records, scrolls, and other writings, but historical research shows no such records were kept. (Mormon 5:23, 3 Nephi 9:18, 12:18)

Not only are there historical errors, but there are false teachings as well. Alma 24:16 teaches that burying swords deep in the earth will keep them bright. Basic science proves that burying steel objects causes decay and rust. 2 Nephi 13:24 teaches that baldness is caused by sin. Other absurdities include the teaching that God curses Indians with dark skin

and anyone who marries an Indian will be cursed (2 Nephi 5:21 Jacob 3:3-9, Mormon 5:15-17, Alma 3:6-10). However, when Indians accept the Mormon teaching, they will become white and delightsome. (2 Nephi 30:5-7)

There appear to be internal contradictions also. In 3 Nephi 9:18, Jesus allegedly preached to the Nephites who fled Jerusalem in 600 B.C. with concepts communicated in the Greek language. But the Nephites are said to have written and spoken in Reformed Egyptian. Therefore, they would have no knowledge of Greek since Alexander, who lived in the 4th century, had not Hellenized the world yet. Jesus preaching to the non-Greek Nephites declaring, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," would have not made any sense. Moreover, Joseph Smith and the Mormons claim the gold plates from which the *Book of Mormon* was translated had no Greek or Latin in them.{26} However, Alpha and Omega are Greek, not Egyptian terms. Even stranger is that the French word "adieu" is used as a farewell in Jacob 7:27.

In contrast to the *Book of Mormon,* the Bible proves to be historically accurate and internally consistent. It also does not have the absurd teachings that we find in the *Book of Mormon*. The evidence appears to point to the fact that the *Book of Mormon* is not an ancient historical text, but an 18th century work created by Joseph Smith.

Notes

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2. Joseph Smith, *Book of Mormon*. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), Introduction page.
3. Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*. (Salt Lake: Bookcraft, 1991), 98.
4. David Whitmer, "An Address to All Believers in Christ by a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon" (1887 reprint, Concord, CA: Pacific Publishing Company, 1972),

12, quoted in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *What do Mormons Really Believe?* (Eugene, OR.:
Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 167-168.
5. *The Saints Herald*, May 19, 1888, 310, quoted in Ankerberg and Weldon, *What do Mormons Really Believe?*, 167-168.
6. Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson,* (Salt Lake City, UT.: Bookcraft, 1988), 89.
7. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Volume 3, 232.
8. John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Mormonism.* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), 196.
9. Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants* 3:12-13 & 10:7.
10. Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism,* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 96.
11. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Volume 1, 109-110, quoted in Tanner, 96.
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14. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Volume 3, 228, quoted in Tanner, 97.
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16. Ankerberg & Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Mormonism,*
184.
17. Tanner, 138-139.
18. Ibid., 139-140.
19. B.H. Roberts, *Studies in the Book of Mormon,* (Urbana, Il.: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 243, quoted in Richard Abanas, *One Nation Under Gods,* (New York, NY: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002), 76.
20. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *One Fold and One Shepherd* (1962), 263, quoted in Tanner, 140.
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Response of Thomas Ferguson to the Norman and Sorenson Papers," 4, 7, 29, quoted in Abanas, 77.
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25. *Book of Mormon,* Introduction page.
26. Times and Seasons, 4:194; J.N. Washburn, Contents, Structure and Authorship of
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The Mormon Veneer

Having spent many hours of conversation with those in Mormon leadership, Don Closson considers some of the theological assumptions behind today's evangelical-sounding Mormon

proponents.

The Need for Precision

Recent events have helped to pull Mormonism from the fringe of American culture to a place much closer to mainstream thinking about religion and family. Mitt and Ann Romney's campaign for the presidency is only one factor among many contributing to a changing perception of Mormons and their beliefs. For instance, in March of 2011 a musical called *The Book of Mormon* opened on Broadway depicting Mormon missionaries in Uganda. It went on to win multiple awards including nine Tonys and a Grammy. We have also seen the production of popular cable TV programs depicting both real and fictional polygamous families in ways that make them much less controversial. The result is that modern and historical Mormonism seems a little less foreign or isolated from our everyday experiences.



A 2012 Pew Research Center poll found that while eight in ten Americans said they learned little or nothing about the beliefs of Mormons or about the church itself during the past presidential election, it found that Americans are now more likely to describe Mormons as "good people," "dedicated," and "hardworking."{1} This adds to the evidence that Mormonism has gained a favorable mainstream standing among typical Americans. This growing acceptance of individual Mormons adds to the perception that Mormonism itself is less controversial and perhaps different from other self-labeled Christian groups in only a denominational sense. Some, even in our Bible Churches, feel that we have been too harsh on Mormons and should seek to find common ground rather than point out distinctive theological differences that keep us apart.

While finding common ground is an important part of sharing our faith in any setting, it is essential that when talking with Mormons we clearly distinguish between Mormon and traditional Christian beliefs. This is because both traditions

place Jesus Christ at the center of worship and theology, creating an appearance of commonality when, in fact, little exists. The rest of this article will make these differences explicit.

Our society's heavy emphasis on tolerance places pressure on Christians to be more accepting of other belief systems, to focus more on loving people and less on insisting that our beliefs are in some sense universally true. However, it is possible to express love for people without sacrificing the truth that the gospel of Jesus Christ stands on. In the end, it is neither loving nor honest to sacrifice the good news found in the New Testament in the name of a redefined tolerance that refuses to admit that real differences divide orthodox Christianity from Mormon beliefs.

The Person of Christ

Mormons are highly offended when others question whether or not they are Christian. They point out that in 1830 Joseph Smith initially named their religious movement the Church of Christ and that Christ is at the center of every Latter-day Saints Sacrament service. So let me begin by acknowledging that Mormons do place *a* Jesus Christ at the center of their theological system and that I do not doubt for a minute the sincere faith of my Mormon friends in the Jesus taught by the Mormon Church. However, this leaves us with the problem of defining who this Mormon Jesus is. After all, it is the object of our faith that saves us, not faith itself.

The Mormon view of Jesus is dramatically different from the traditional view held by Christians for the last two thousand years. Although we use the same names to identify him—Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, and the Word—and we agree on many of His sayings and actions, we differ widely on what kind of being He is. This is important if we are to place our salvation in His hands.

Mormons believe that all conscious entities—God the Father, Jesus the Son, angels, and humanity—are the same kind of beings. As Mormon Apostle John Widtsoe has written, "God and man are of the same race, differing only in their degrees of advancement."{2} They also believe that everyone on earth has existed from eternity past, first as disembodied intelligences, then as spirit beings born of God the Father and an unnamed Goddess, and finally incarnated into bodies of flesh and bone. It is interesting to note that, although Jesus is God the Father's firstborn son, Satan and all of humanity are His spiritual brothers and sisters.

The only difference between you, me, and Jesus is that He has advanced further along the path of spiritual progression to Godhood than we have. According to Latter-day Saints teachings, Jesus is a god today because of His obedience to our heavenly Father and Mother, and to a set of eternal spiritual guidelines. What makes Mormonism dramatically different from traditional Christian belief is that it teaches that we, too, can become Gods just as Jesus has. In fact, it is the Father's, or Elohim's, desire that we all become gods and have our own spirit children just as He has.

Are we the same kind of being as God the Father and Jesus Christ? Since Mormons accept the Bible as revelation from God, is this what the Bible teaches? We need to grasp that Jesus is different from every other living thing in the universe, and very different from the way He is represented by the Later-day Saints.

The Latter-day Saints teach that all of humanity is essentially the same kind of being as Jesus, just not as spiritually advanced. Rather than saying that Jesus is God in the flesh, they would emphasize that He is a man of flesh who has become a god. Mormons also reject the doctrine of the Trinity, the idea that there is one God, one being, revealed in three Persons. Instead, they teach that there are three separate beings united in purpose in the Godhead—Father, Son

and Holy Spirit—who cooperate together in order to accomplish the Mormon plan of salvation.

As a result of this thinking, Mormons teach that Elohim in the Old Testament refers to the Father, while Jehovah or Yahweh refers to Jesus. But is this supported by the Bible? The OT uses Jehovah and Elohim as interchangeable titles for the Godhead, of which both the Father and Jesus are part. Deuteronomy 6:4 is a good example of this. It reads, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD [Jehovah] our God [Elohim] is one LORD [Jehovah]." It would be difficult to make this verse fit the Mormon view. Using their ideas it would have to be translated "Hear, O Israel: Jesus our Father is one Jesus." This doesn't make sense, especially if Jesus and the Father are two discrete beings.

The Mormon view runs into more difficulty in the New Testament. I asked a Mormon Bishop to confirm that Mormons believe that all sentient beings existed from eternity past, which he agreed to. Then I asked him to read Colossians 1:16-17 which states that Jesus created all things visible and invisible, that He existed before all things, and that all things are held together in Him. At this point I asked him to tell me which idea about Jesus he believed, that we have all lived in eternity past with Jesus or that Jesus made all things and was before all things. He thought for a moment and then replied that both statements are true. At which point I suggested that these are mutually exclusive ideas; we cannot have lived in eternity past with Jesus while at the same time Jesus was before us and made us. He finally admitted that when faced with logical contradictions like this he has to trust in what his prophet Joseph Smith taught.

This is a pretty important idea. Either Jesus is eternally God who, with the Father and Spirit, brought into existence all things and holds all things together moment by moment as the Bible teaches, or He is merely a human being who happens to be more spiritually advanced than we are.

The Atonement of Christ

If you ask a Mormon what he is trusting in for salvation, he will most likely say that it is the atoning suffering and death of Jesus Christ in the garden called Gethsemane and on the cross. They also believe that there is no other hope by which we can be saved. Although this sounds pretty good to an evangelical's ears, these words mean something quite different than what traditional Christianity teaches.

According to the Latter-day Saints, Christ's death and suffering made it *possible* to be saved from sin, *if* we do our part.{3} What this means becomes clearer when we read a parable given to explain what Christ's death accomplished in a chapter on the atonement in the Mormon book *Gospel Principles*.

The parable tells of a foolish man who ignored warnings about going too far into debt. Although he made payments along the way, he could not pay the debt in full when it came due. The creditor (God the Father) appeared and threatened to repossess all that the man owned and throw him into prison. The man begged for mercy, but the Father was only concerned about justice and the law. The parable weaves a picture of two eternal ideals, mercy and justice, in conflict.

Christ is depicted as a friend of the debtor who knew him to be foolish but loved him anyway. As mediator, Jesus stands before the Father and says "I will pay the debt if you will free my friend from his commitment so he may keep his possessions and not go to prison." Sounds good so far, but then Jesus turns to the debtor and says, "If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?" And then he adds, "You will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible."

Although mercy is offered in the Mormon view, the word *grace* is nowhere to be found. This isn't a parable that teaches grace and forgiveness; it's a description of a loan being

refinanced. Mormons believe that trusting in Jesus' atonement creates a path to salvation in that it provides for our resurrection and the forgiveness of past sins. However, to reach exaltation or complete salvation, in their view, one must earn it through celestial marriage, tithing, attending sacrament meetings, and sustaining the current Prophet, among other responsibilities.

Rather than earning our salvation, Paul teaches grace in Galatians 2:16, writing, "And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."

The Priesthood

We come now to what Mormons believe to be at the heart of their theological system, the priesthood. They argue that along with the birth of their church in 1830 came a restoration of a priesthood that had been lost since the end of the apostolic period around A.D. 100. According to the Mormon Church, one cannot receive the Holy Spirit, be baptized or be married for time and eternity without proper priestly authority.

Mormons teach that priesthood power literally created heaven and earth; it is the power and authority of God himself. Mormon men can tap into this power, eventually obtaining to two levels of priesthood. At the age of twelve, most Mormon boys are ordained as deacons of the Aaronic priesthood. By the time they are finished with secondary school, most have become elders within the priesthood order of Melchizedek. Throughout these years Mormon young men receive training, usually prior to the beginning of each school day, for various offices or positions within the two priesthood levels.

Mormons believe that every miracle in the Bible is an example

of priesthood power. This is problematic for evangelicals. First, we don't associate miracles with priests. In the Old Testament it was usually prophets who performed miracles, not priests. In the New Testament, miracles are performed by Jesus and his disciples without mention of a specific priesthood. In fact, Peter says that all believers as priests{4} and their function, according to Paul, is to proclaim the gospel of God.{5}

The book of Hebrews teaches that the Mosaic covenant along with the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood was passing away because it was useless for making us righteous or holy. The author tells us of a better covenant and a better priest entering the picture as a result of Christ's ministry. We now have a new covenant in Christ's blood and Jesus is our permanent, perfect, and eternal high priest, replacing the limited imperfect priests of the Mosaic covenant.{6} Nowhere are the followers of Christ told to train for or to seek entry into a priesthood. And Jesus is the only person given the title of priest according to the order of Melchizedek in the New Testament.

Although Mormons and Christians use similar language to describe their faith, they represent two very different belief systems. Mormons see themselves as eternal creatures working their way towards becoming gods and populating a planet with their offspring in the future. Traditional Christians draw a clear line between the creator and creation. We are not gods and will never become one.

Notes

1. www.pewforum.org/Christian/Mormon/attitudes-toward-mormon-faith.aspx accessed on 12/21/12.

2. Apostle John Widtsoe (Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel through the Ages*, SLC: Stevens and Wallis, 1945, p. 107).

3. *Gospel Principles*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, SLC, Utah, 1997, p. 75.

4. 1 Peter 2:9-10.

5. Romans 15:16.

6. Hebrews 8:6-7.

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The Qur'an From a Christian Perspective

Steve Cable provides a biblical understanding of Islam's holy book, drawing on James White's book What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an {1}. *Christians interacting with Muslims will benefit from a basic understanding of the development and the teaching of the Qur'an.*

Introduction and Background



Beginning with the basics, we need to understand how the Qur'an came into our possession and how it is viewed by most Muslims. The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was born in Mecca around AD 570 and began to receive instruction leading to the religion of Islam at the age of 40 in AD 610. "The classical belief is that while [the Qur'an's] entirety was "sent down" in one night, the Night of Power, but Muhammad himself

received it piecemeal over twenty-two years."{2} Muhammad did not receive a written version as Joseph Smith claimed to have received for the Book of Mormon. Rather he memorized what was told him by the Angel Gabriel and passed it on to certain followers.

The popular Muslim belief is summarized in a recent guide to Islam as follows: "The Qur'an is the literal word of God, which He revealed to His Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It was memorized by Muhammad, who then dictated it to his Companions. They, in turn, memorized it, wrote it down, and reviewed it with the Prophet Muhammad. . . . Not one letter of the Qur'an has been changed over the centuries."{3}

"From the position of Sunni Islamic orthodoxy, the Qur'an is as eternal as Allah himself. It is the very Word of God, without even the slightest imperfection. The finger of man has no place in it, as the book held reverently in the hand today is an exact copy of a tablet in heaven upon which the Qur'an has been written from eternity past."{4}

How this view holds up to a critical review of the history of Muhammad and the early days of Islam following his death will be addressed later in this document. For now it is important to understand that to a devout Muslim, the Qur'an in its original Arabic is above analysis and above question, for it is a matter of faith that it has been perfectly transmitted and maintained. Note the Qur'an exists only in Arabic. Even though most Muslims depend upon a translation for their access to the teachings of the Qur'an, Muslims still would say the Qur'an itself is not translatable and the public prayers must also be done in Arabic.

It is interesting to realize that the Qur'an in multiple places states that Allah "sent down the Torah and the Gospel" as works that serve as guidance to mankind. One cannot help but wonder, why God would send down the Torah and the Gospels when the Qur'an existed from eternity past and according to

Muslim thought supersedes and corrects misconceptions men developed from reading these earlier texts. Why didn't God protect the Gospels in the same way as the Qur'an?

In what follows, we will look at where teachings of the Qur'an are counter to the truth of the Bible and to the historical facts. We will also consider how the current Qur'an came into existence, asking why the creator of the world would pass down his truth in such an uncontrolled fashion.

The Qur'an and Biblical Beliefs

Most Muslims, if they know anything about Christianity, will point to three primary problems with our faith:

1. the Trinity,
2. the resurrection of Jesus, and
3. the corruption of the Scriptures.

Is there anything taught in the Qur'an that causes them to reject the Christian concept of trinity?

In his book, James White describes the key Islamic belief in this way, "Ask any sincere follower what defines Islam, and they will answer quickly *tawhid*, the oneness of Allah, as expressed in Islam's great confession, "I profess that there is only one God worthy of worship and Muhammad is His messenger." . . . Without *tawhid*, you have no Islam."{5}

Interestingly, the word *tawhid* in that form does not appear in the Qur'an just as the word trinity does not appear in the Bible. They are words to describe a concept clearly taught in those two books. The difference between these two words is a major difference between these religions. The Islamic concept of tawhid is that Allah **has only** and **can only** exist in one form, the creator of the universe. The Christian understanding is that the one God is expressed in three ways or persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All the persons of God

were involved in the creation of this universe and reflect the full nature of God. The Bible is very clear that the Trinity is one God as shown for example in 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6:

> "There is no God but one . . . for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."

In Islam, the most feared of all sins is called *shirk*, associating anyone, or anything with Allah. A person who dies in this state of idolatry cannot be forgiven. In Islamic thought, Allah is free to forgive any other sin if he so desires, but he will not forgive anyone who dies in idolatry.

This teaching causes the Trinity to become an unforgivable sin for Christians. "Many Muslims believe that the doctrine of the Trinity and, in particular, the worship of Jesus is an (unforgivable) act of *shirk*. This has led many of them to conclude that Christians, as a group, are bound for hell."{6}

The Qur'an attempts to address the Trinity but does it show knowledge of the concept so that the criticisms offered are accurate and meaningful? "The reason for the question is self-evident: If the Qur'an is the very words of Allah without admixture of man's insights or thoughts, then it would follow inevitably that its representations will be perfectly accurate and its arguments compelling."{7}

What does the Qur'an say about the Trinity? First, it holds up monotheism as the correction for the false Christian claim of the "three." By holding to this concept of the "three," Christians are actually polytheists, denying that God is one. The author of the Qur'an does not understand that Christians are saying there is one God who manifests in three distinct forms or persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the misunderstanding goes much further than this. The Qur'an is very clear that the "three" are the Father, the Son, and

Mary. As stated in Surah 5:116,

> And when Allah said: "O Jesus son of Mary! Did you say to mankind: 'Take me and my mother for two gods other than Allah?'" He said: "Transcendent are you! It was not mine to say that of which I had no right. . ."

And this view is reiterated in the Islamic commentaries, the *hadith*. "Nothing in the Qur'anic text actually addresses the essence of Christian faith, even though it is painfully clear the author thought he was doing so."{8}

White believes this distinction helps us respond to the oft-asked question, "Is Allah the same god as Yahweh?" Although Muslims make reference to the one God of Abraham, they deny the witness of the incarnation and the resurrection. Thus denying the entirety of the Christian faith. "If worship is an act of truth, then Muslims and Christians are not worshiping the same object. We do not worship the same God."{9}

So, we see the Qur'an misrepresents the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and relegates Allah to a lower status than omnipotent God by declaring that Allah is not capable of appearing in multiple forms.

The Qur'an, Jesus and Salvation

As we consider what Muslims are taught in the Qur'an, we next look at the second stumbling block in their view of Christianity: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The Qur'an has quite a bit to say about Jesus as a prophet of God, specifically stating He was not God and was not crucified. The name of Jesus appears 25 times in the Qur'an, almost always as *Isa ibn Mariam*, i.e. Jesus the son of Mary. Jesus is presented as the result of a miraculous virgin birth. In the Qur'an, Surah 3:47, it is written, "She said, My Lord!

How can I have a child, when no man has touched me? He replied, "such is the will of Allah. He creates what He will. When He decrees a thing He only says: 'Be!' and it is."{10}

The question of how Jesus came to be is an important topic for comparison. First, we see the Qur'an says that Allah created Jesus by declaring His existence and having Him born of a virgin. Second, we understand that the author of the Qur'an believed Christians teach that Jesus came into being as the child of a physical, sexual union between God and Mary. Third, Christianity actually teaches that Jesus was the preexistent creator of the universe (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16-17), always and fully God, who became fully man being born of a virgin. Note that the primary difference between the Qur'an's view of Jesus' birth and a biblical view of Jesus' birth is not the role of Mary, but rather the Qur'an says that Jesus was created at His human conception and the Bible clearly states that Jesus is eternal and was not created but rather took on a new form at his birth:

> Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

The words attributed to Jesus in the Qur'an, beginning with words spoken from the crib, are not found in any source from the 1st through 5th centuries. "But the Muslim understanding is that no such historical foundation is needed for lengthy portions of narrative for its words to be true. This is the Qur'an. It has been preserved. For the large majority, that ends the discussion, even when the same believers will then embrace historical criticism to question the value of His words in the Gospels."{11}

When it comes to the cross, the Qur'an stands firmly and

inalterably against the mass of historical evidence and the almost universal view of the populace of itsday. This Qur'anic view is not sprinkled throughout the teaching, but rather appears in only one verse, namely Surah 4:157–

> "They slew him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them; and those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge of it except the pursuit of a conjecture; [but] certainly they slew him not. But Allah raised him up to Himself."

This verse stands alone in the Qur'an and surprisingly without commentary in the hadith literature as well. This verse, written six hundred years after the events, in a place far removed from Jerusalem, takes a position counter to the gospel texts from the first century and counter to six centuries of Christian teaching. In more recent times, various Muslim apologists have surmised various tales to build upon this one verse. For example, some Muslims believe that someone else died on the cross and Jesus fled to India to continue his ministry there.{12} Regardless of what unsubstantiated fairy tales one conjures up to support its claim, this verse is based on no historical knowledge of the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus.

"This suggests the author did not have even the slightest knowledge of the centrality of God's redeeming act in Christ on the cross. . . The Qur'an places itself, and all who would believe in it, in direct opposition not only to the Gospels but also everything history itself says on the subject. The question must be asked: Who, truly, is following mere conjecture here? Those who were eyewitnesses on the Hill of the Skull outside Jerusalem? Or the author of the Qur'an, more than half a millennium later?"{13}

Without the cross, salvation in the Qur'an comes through an unknowable mixture of predestination, good works, and the capricious will of Allah. "In Islam, forgiveness is an

impersonal act of arbitrary divine power. In Christianity, forgiveness is a personal act of purposeful and powerful yet completely just divine grace."{14}

One cannot attribute these differences between the Qur'an and the New Testament to a minor corruption of the biblical text as they reflect the core themes of these books.

Corrupting the Gospels

As discussed above, most Muslims have been taught there are three primary problems with our faith: the Trinity, the resurrection of Jesus, and the corruption of the scripture. We have dealt with the Trinity and the resurrection of Jesus. Now let us turn to the corruption of scripture.

Most Muslims will affirm to you that the Christian scriptures cannot be relied upon because they have been changed and corrupted over the years and do not reflect the true message of Jesus. But is this affirmation what is taught by the Qur'an, and does it have any basis other than hearsay?

The Qur'an is very clear that the messages sent to the prophets of the Bible are to be believed. For example, Surah 3:84 says, "We believe in Allah . . . and that which was sent down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes; and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have surrendered." Or as stated in a hadith, "Therefore, faithful Muslims believe in every Prophet whom Allah has sent and in every Book He revealed, and never disbelieve in any of them."{15}

Very clearly, the Qur'an states that what was given to the Old Testament prophets and to Jesus was the truth of God. It is not just the prophets themselves who were from the Lord, for the Qur'an states that Allah "sent down the Torah and the Gospel" as works that serve as "guidance to mankind." If this

is the case, why do Muslims not interpret the Qur'an in light of the truth from the Gospels, assuming that Allah's truth never changes?

In contrast, it is a virtual pillar of Islamic orthodoxy to hold that the Bible has undergone significant revisions so much as to make them totally unreliable and thus, useless to a modern day Muslim. As James White puts it, "Muslims around the world are taught that the Jews and the Christians altered their Scriptures, though there is no agreement as to when this took place. If anything unites Islamic apologists, it is the persistent assertion of Qur'anic perfection in contrast to the corrupted nature of the Bible, particularly the New Testament."{16}

This position certainly makes sense from a human perspective. For if one takes the position presented by the Qur'an that we are to believe every word of the Bible, then the huge differences between the theology of the New Testament and the theology of the Qur'an leave one little choice: either reject the Qur'an as not from God, or assume that all of the differences are the result of some massive corruption of the message of the Bible. The normal assumption taught to Muslims today is this corruption happened early on, perhaps even with the apostle Paul.

However, the preponderance of verses in the Qur'an which address this issue point to the corruption as being a distortion of the meaning (not the words) of the text. One example is found in Surah 3:78, "And there is a party of them who distort the Book with their tongues, that you may think that what they say is from the Book, when it is not from the Book." As White observes, "We must conclude that the now predominant claim of the biblical texts themselves, having undergone major alteration and corruption, is a later polemical and theological perspective not required by the Qur'anic text itself. It comes not from the positive teachings of Muhammad but through the unalterable fact of the Qur'anic

author's unfamiliarity with the actual biblical text."{17}

As noted by a Christian, Al-Kindi, writing to a Muslim around AD 820, "The situation is plain enough; you witness to the truth of our text—then again you contradict the witness you bear and allege that we have corrupted it; this is the height of folly."{18}

In Surah 5:47, we are urged as Christians to judge by what Allah has revealed in the Gospels. If this admonition has any meaning at all, it must assume that Christians had access to a valid gospel in the 7th century during the life of Muhammad. What Christians had as the Gospels in the 7th century is what we have as the Gospels today. In fact, "each canonical gospel we read today we can document to have existed in that very form three centuries before Muhammad's ministry. A Christian judging Muhammad's claims by the New Testament and finding that he was ignorant of the teachings of the apostles, ignorant of the cross, the resurrection . . . and meaning of the gospel itself, is simply doing what the Qur'an commands us to do in this text."{19}

Thus, while modern Muslims claim the Bible is corrupt and unreliable, the Qur'an appears to teach that the scriptures available to Jews and Christians during Muhammad's day were correct and should be followed; as long as one did not reinterpret the meaning into something that was not really said. However, doing so would lead one to the conclusion that the Qur'an was written by someone who was not knowledgeable concerning Jewish and Christian scripture.

The Perfection of the Qur'an

As noted earlier, one of the primary objections Muslims voice toward Christianity is their belief that our Scriptures have been changed and corrupted while the Qur'an in Arabic is exactly the words given to Muhammad fourteen hundred years

ago. Does this belief stand up to impartial scrutiny?

The modern Muslim view of the Qur'an does not allow for the critical examination of sources and variations as has been done for the New Testament. Many bible scholars such as Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Daniel Wallace{20}, point out that the large number of ancient manuscripts from different locations and times give us a richness of sources allowing us to identify the original text of the Christian New Testament with a high degree of confidence. Muslims on the other hand are relying on a specific follower, Uthman the third Caliph, who was purported to have assimilated the correct version and to have ordered the destruction of all other versions.

If the Qur'an is a perfect representation of the message from Allah, what accounts for the differences in multiple accounts of the same story recorded in the Qur'an? For example, four different Surahs contain the story of Lot in Sodom. Each recounting of the story is different from the others even when quoting what Lot said to the Sodomites. Thus we have Muslims pointing to differences in accounts among the Gospels but ignoring accounts of the same events throughout the Qur'an which differ in detail, order, and content.

When we find this type of variation in the Gospels, we recognize that each gospel was written by a different author with a different perspective inspired by the Holy Spirit. But if the Qur'an was preexistent in heaven and given to one man by one angel, one would not expect these types of variants. But as James White notes, "We could provide numerous examples of parallel passages all illustrating with clarity that the serious Muslim exegete must face the reality that the Qur'anic text requires exegesis and harmonization."{21}

In addition to these troubling passages recounting different versions of the same events, we also find legendary stories about the life of Jesus which do not appear in any of the known accounts from the first century. White points out, "The

Qur'an fails to make any differentiation between what is clearly legendary in character and what is based on the Hebrew or the Christian Scriptures. Stories that developed centuries after the events they pretend to describe are coupled directly with historically based accounts that carry serious weight and truth content. . . . This kind of fantastic legendary material is hardly the kind of source that can be trusted, and yet the Qur'an's author shows not the slightest understanding of its nature and combines them with historical materials."{22}

In addition to the inconsistencies in retelling stories and the incorporation of legends generated centuries after the actual events, we also should consider whether the current Qur'an is the perfectly accurate version of the earliest version supposedly shared verbally by Muhammad with certain followers. The common Islamic claims are strong and clear:

"The Qur'an is the literal word of God, which He revealed to His Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It was memorized by Muhammad, who then dictated it to his Companions. They, in turn memorized it, wrote it down, and reviewed it with the Prophet Muhammad . . . Not one letter of the Qur'an has been changed over the centuries."{23}

"It is a miracle of the Qur'an that no change has occurred in a single word, a single [letter of the] alphabet, a single punctuation mark, or a single diacritical mark in the text of the Qur'an during the last fourteen centuries."{24}

Interestingly, the hadiths give us early insight into one view of how the written Qur'an was collected and who was involved. At the time Muhammad died, there was no written version of the Qur'an. It was carried about in the minds of a set of men called the Qurra, each of whom had memorized at least a portion of the Qur'an. However, a number of these Qurra were being killed in battles, raising the prospect that a significant portion of the Qur'an might be lost. According to one hadith, Zaid bin Thabit undertook the task of collecting a

written version.

“To many outside the Muslim faith, the Qur’an’s organization looks tremendously haphazard and even Islamic literature notes how one surah can contain materials Muhammad gave at very different times in his life. Many Muslims assume Muhammad was behind this organization, but there is little reason to believe it. Zaid and his committee are far more likely to have been responsible.”{25}

Eighteen years later the third Caliph, Uthman, charged Zaid and others with rewriting the manuscripts in perfect copies. In the process of doing this, Zaid reportedly found at least two more passages that he had missed in his earlier compilation. Once this was accomplished, “Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur’anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt.”{26}

Not every scholar agrees that this story from a hadith is accurate and many suggest a much later date after AD 705 for the compilation of the Qur’an we find today. Whether it was Uthman or some later compilation effort, since the eighth century, we have had a fairly stable text for the Qur’an with few variants. “Muslims see this as a great advantage, even an example of divine inspiration and preservation. In reality, just the opposite is the case. When a text has a major interruption in transmission, one’s certainty of being able to obtain the original text becomes limited to the materials that escape the revisionist pen. For the Muslim, Uthman had to get it right, because if he was wrong, there is little hope of ever undoing his work.”{27}

Al-Kindi, the Christian apologist writing around AD 820, had much to say on the formation of the Qur’an. He records that multiple versions were collated during the time of Uthman stating, “One man, then, read one version of the Qur’an, his neighbor another, and differed. One man said to his neighbor:

"My text is better than yours," while his neighbor defended his own. So additions and losses came about and falsification of the text."{28} According to Al-Kindi, this situation caused Uthman to take his action while his rivals, such as Ali (Muhammad's cousin and the 4th Caliph), created and kept their own manuscripts. Al-Kindi listed alterations and changes made to the earlier documents in creating Uthman's version. One of the reasons Al-Kindi had access to this type of information was the open warfare between the Sunnis and the Shiites, led to charges and countercharges of corruption.

Al-Kindi concludes his discussion stating, "You know what happened between Ali, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, how they hated each other and quarreled and corrupted the text; how each one tried to oppose his neighbor and to refute what he (had) said. Pray, how are we to know which is the true text, and how shall we distinguish it from the false?"{29}

As White states, "It is self-evident that no matter how stable or even primitive the Uhtmanic tradition is, it is not the only stream that can claim direct connection to Muhammad and the primitive period of Qur'anic compilation. The greatest concern for any follower of Muhammad should be what he said (or what he received from the Angel Gabriel), not what an uninspired Caliph later thought he should have said."{30}

The study of manuscripts shows beyond all possible question that the Qur'an was neither written down in perfection in the days of Muhammad, nor was it never altered or changed in its transmission.

White concludes his study with this thought, "When we obey the command of Surah 5:4 and test Muhammad's claims in the light of the gospel, of history, and of consistency and truthfulness, we find him, and the Qur'an to fail these tests. The Qur'an is not a further revelation of the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The author of the Qur'an did not understand the gospel, did not understand the Christian faith,

and as such cannot stand in the line of Moses to Jesus to Muhammad that he claimed."{31}

Notes

1. James White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an*, Bethany House Publishers, 2013.
2. Ibid, p. 24.
3. Ibrahim, I. A., *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam*, Houston: Darussalam, 1997, p. 5.
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5. White, p. 59.
6. White, p. 68.
7. White, p. 75.
8. White, p. 98.
9. White, p. 72.
10. *The Majestic Qur'an: An English Rendition of Its Meanings*, 4th ed.
11. White, p. 113
12. Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, www.alislam.org/library/books/jesus-in-india/ch2.html.
13. White, p. 142.
14. White, p. 158.
15. Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Riyadh, Darussalam, 2003, 2:204.
16. White, p. 171.
17. White, p. 180.
18. Newman N. A., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, Hatfield PA, Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993, 498-99.
19. White, p. 186.
20. Dr. Daniel Wallace, Executive Director of CSNTM & Senior Professor of NT Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, speaking at Prairie Creek Baptist Church on August 30, 2015.
21. White, p. 229.
22. White, p. 237-8.
23. Ibrahim, p. 5.
24. Kazi, Mazhar, *130 Evident Miracles in the Qur'an*, Richmond

Hill, ON, Canada, Cresecnt, 1997, p. 42-43.
25. White, p.258.
26. Sahih Al-Bukhari, 6:510.
27. White, p. 262.
28. This portion of Al-Kindi's apology is found in Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries*, 455-459.
29. Ibid.
30. White, p. 271.
31. White, p. 286.

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Probe Survey 2020 Report 6: Nothing in Particulars and Biblical Views

Steve Cable analyzes Probe's 2020 Survey, examining beliefs of 'Nothing in Particulars' on salvation, biblical worldview, and sexual issues.

We want to examine the Unaffiliated and particularly those who selected Nothing in Particular (NIP) as their religious preference. As noted in the first article of this series{1}, some researchers earlier in this century posited that many of the Nothing in Particulars were actually part of the Christian majority in America and would return to the fold as they aged. However, as shown in that article, this idea has not materialized as the young adults aged. Rather, the percentage of NIPs in each age group has grown as the age group has aged.

In this report, we will see how very different the beliefs of

the NIPs are from those taught in the New Testament. We will look at this in three separate areas:

1. Salvation through Christ Alone.
2. A Biblical Worldview
3. Attitudes Concerning Sexual Issues

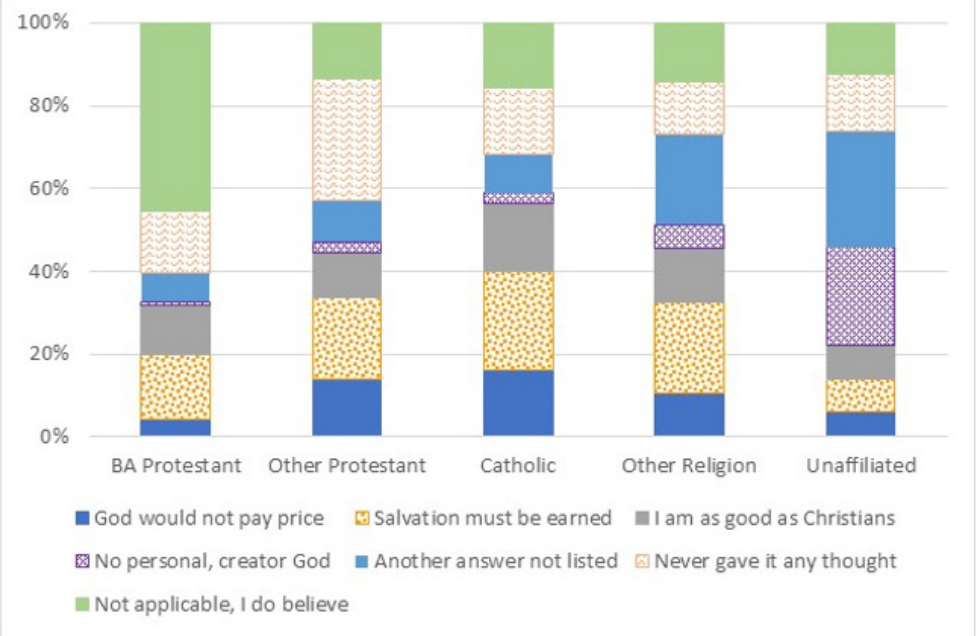
In these three areas, we will discover that most NIPs disagree with biblical teaching on these topics.

Reasons for Not Believing in Salvation Through Christ Alone

One question asked was “What keeps you from believing that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone?” Particularly for the Unaffiliated, we want to know whether it is a lack of knowledge or some other reason. When asked this question, the respondents could select from the following answers:

1. Never gave the question any thought.
2. Don’t believe that God would take upon Himself the penalty for my sin.
3. Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned.
4. I am clearly as good as Christians I know so I should be accepted by God if they are.
5. There is no personal, creator God.
6. Another answer not listed here.
7. Not applicable, I do believe.

Figure 1 What keeps you from believing in salvation through Jesus alone: Ages 18 - 39

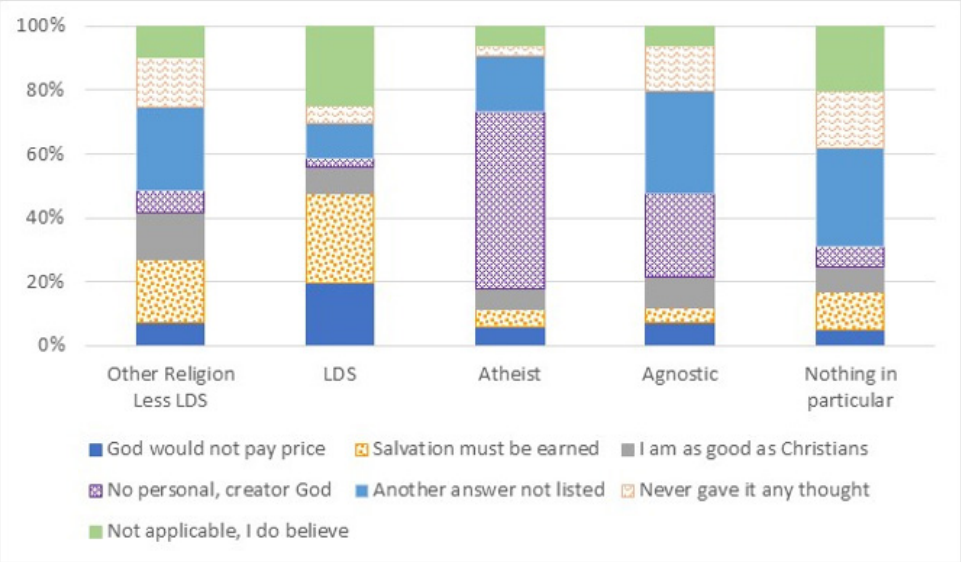


First let's consider how the various religious groups answered this question as shown in Figure 1. This data has already been discussed in Report #4. But in the current discussion, we want to focus on Other Religion and Unaffiliated. Respondents from Other Religions were most likely to select either "salvation must be earned" or "another answer not listed." A smaller percentage, just over 10%, selected "I am clearly as good as Christians I know. That answer appeared to be irrelevant to them.

On the other hand, the two largest segments selected by the Unaffiliated were "no personal, creator God" and "another answer not listed." Both groups had about 15% of their number select "Not applicable, I do believe."

To get a better understanding of what drives these results, we dove further into the makeup of each of these two groups. The results are shown in Figure 2.{2} We divided Other Religions into the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and all other non-Christian religions. We divided the Unaffiliated into Atheist, Agnostic and Nothing in Particular. As shown, the LDS respondents are much more likely than other religions to select "salvation must be earned," "I do believe," and "God would not pay the price." Almost one quarter of the LDS selected "I do believe" which explains how the Other Religion category showed about 15% with that answer. So we see that a strong majority of LDS people believe that they must do something more than believing in Christ to achieve salvation. At the same time, a significant minority believe in salvation through faith in Christ alone.

Figure 2 What keeps you from believing in salvation through Jesus alone: Ages 18 - 39



The Atheist subgroup follows our expectations. A majority (> 55%) don't believe in Jesus as savior because they do not believe in any God at all. When we add in "another answer not given," about three quarters of the Atheists are covered.

Moving to Agnostics, we see that a strong majority selected either "no God" or "another answer not given." Adding in "I never gave it any thought," we cover about three quarters of the Agnostics.

The Nothing in Particular group (NIPs) has a significantly

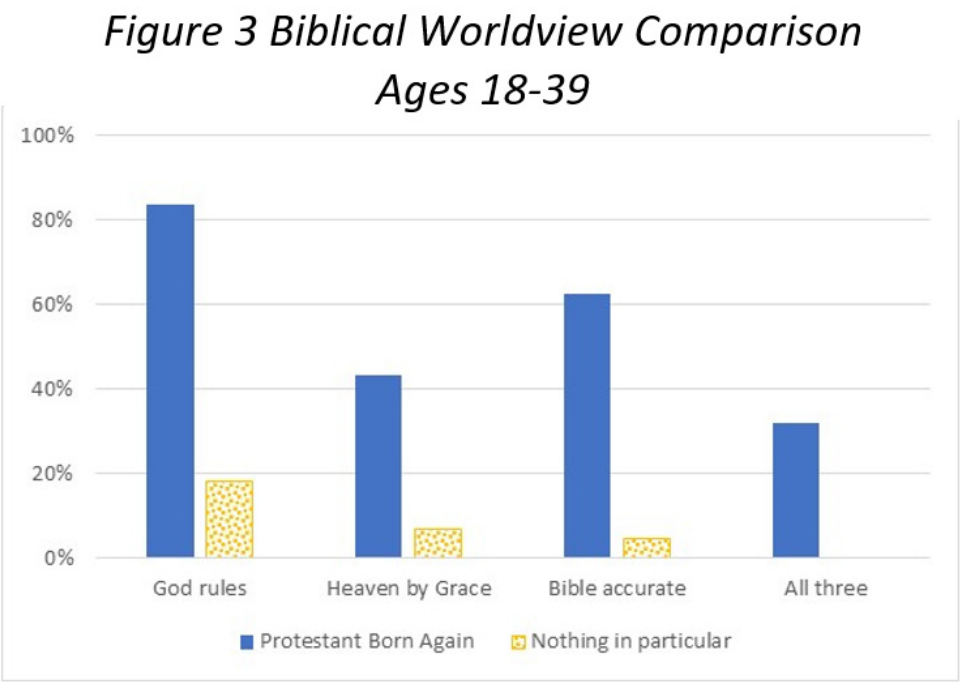
different range of answers. About one in five say they do believe in salvation through faith in Christ. This number is significantly higher than Atheist and Agnostics, but it still leaves four out of five who say they do not believe. Almost one half of them selected “another answer not given” or “I never gave it any thought.”

So, there are about one fifth of the NIPs who might have a somewhat Christian view of salvation. However, less than 3% of this group claim to be born-again. And of course, four fifths of this group say they do not belih3eve in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. So, an overwhelming majority of the NIPs clearly are not born-again or evangelical Christians.

NIPS and a Subset of a Biblical Worldview

How do those who claim their religion is “Nothing in particular” stand in accepting a subset of the Basic Biblical Worldview discussed in earlier articles? The subset consists of the following three questions:

1. Which of the following descriptions comes closest to what you personally believe to be true about God: **God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today**{3}
2. The Bible is totally accurate in all its teachings: **Strongly Agree**
3. If a person is generally good enough or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven: **Disagree Strongly**



Let's compare the results for Born-again Protestants and those who claimed to be Nothing in Particular. As shown in Figure 3, for each of the questions those agreeing with a biblical worldview among the Nothing in Particulars is a small fraction of those among Born-again Protestants. When we combine the three questions together, we see one out of three Born-again Protestants vs. no NIPs. Certainly, some of these NIPs came from an evangelical background, but none of them interviewed in our survey ascribe to a basic evangelical worldview as adults. As noted in our first report, one in three orn-again Protestants is a disappointing percentage ascribing to these biblical worldview questions, but it is certainly dramatically better than the Nothing in Particular group.

NIPs and Biblical Sexual Morality

On another front, we compare views on biblical sexual morality held by Born-again Protestants and Nothing in Particulars. To do this, we will consider three of the questions from our survey as listed below.

1. Sex among unmarried people is always a mistake: from **Agree Strongly** to Disagree Strongly
2. Viewing explicit sexual material in a movie, on the internet, or some other source is:

- **a. To be avoided**
- b. Acceptable if no one is physically or emotionally harmed in them.
- c. A matter of personal choice
- d. Not a problem if you enjoy it
- e. Don't know

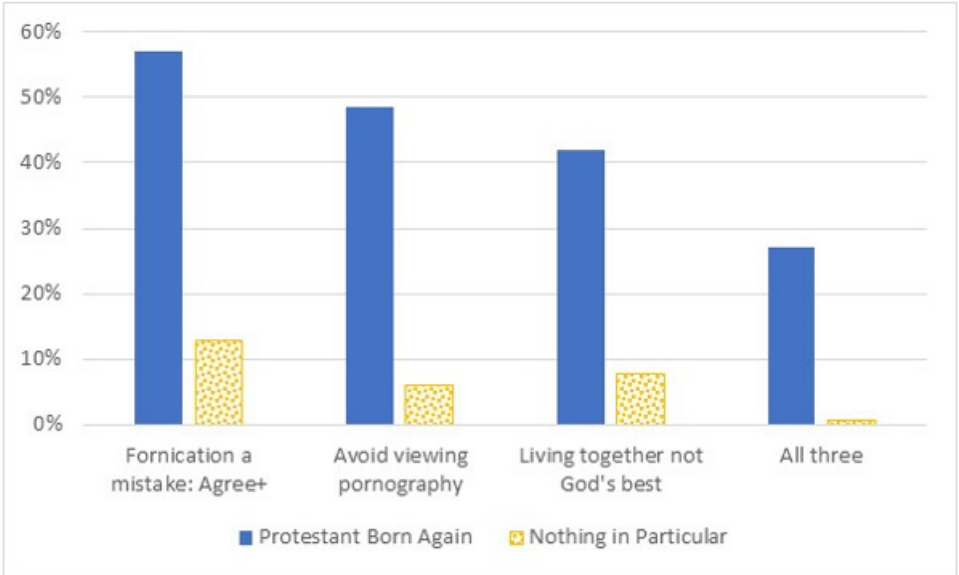
3. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:
    - a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
    - b. Just makes sense in today's cultural environment.
    - c. Will have a negative effect on the relationship.
    - **d. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God.**

For this comparison, we are looking for the following answers:

1. Either Agree Strongly or Agree Somewhat
2. To be avoided
3. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God

The results from our survey are shown in Figure 4. Once again, we see a large difference between these two groups. Clearly, the NIPs do not ascribe to a biblical view

Figure 4 Comparison of Sexual Morality
Ages 18 - 39



on sexual morality. The majority of Born-again Protestants do not ascribe to those beliefs either, but a significant minority of them do.

Summary

As discussed above, we find that the Nothing in Particular group have

- less than one in five who say they are trusting in Christ for their salvation,
- none who accept a simple three question take on a biblical worldview and
- almost none who accept a biblical view on sexuality.

In each of the age groups considered in our surveys, the percentage of respondents selecting a NIP affiliation has grown as the age groups have grown older. There is no indication that any significant number of them are returning to or turning to an Evangelical Christian perspective.

Clearly for the upcoming decade a critical question for the Evangelical church is, How do we reach the Unaffiliated and especially the Nones with the good news of the gospel? Since the vast majority of NIPs do not accept the authority of the Bible, we need to b e prepared to share with them why we can believe the Bible is an accurate communication from the Creator of this universe. In particular, that the biblical account of the death resurrection of Jesus is an accurate historical account. One source to use in this task is our article "The Answer is the Resurrection"{4} which can be found on the Probe website.

Notes

1. Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020
2. As we dive down into these subgroups remember that the smaller number of respondents of each type reduce the accuracy

as we apply our limited sample to the entire group across the United States. In this case, we surveyed 68 LDS, 178 Other Religions not LDS, 124 Atheist, 167 Agnostic, and 245 Nothing in particular (between 18 and 39 years old).
3. Other answers to select from: God created but is no longer involved with the world today; God refers to the total realization of personal human potential; there are many gods, each with their different power and authority; God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach; there is no such thing as God; and don't know.
4. The Answer Is the Resurrection: Sharing Your Faith in Christ (probe.org)

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