“If the Trinity Doctrine is Correct, Then Why Isn’t It in the Bible?”

Okay, smart guy. . .if the Trinity doctrine is correct, then why do Catholic encyclopedias themselves admit that it was never taught in the bible? Why does Jesus say that God is greater than he is? Why did Jesus pray to God if God is Jesus? If Jesus died on the stake, how could he bring himself back to life in three days?

Thank you for your recent inquiry. Let me see if I can shed some light on the things you have questions about. You ask:

> *If the Trinity doctrine is correct, then why do Catholic encyclopedias themselves admit that it was never taught in the Bible?*

You have misinterpreted what they said. What is *not in the Bible* is the use of the term “trinity.” It, like many other terms, is a theological designation descriptive of what is *taught* in the Bible. And this concept of a tri-partite Being comes from many places in Scripture, from both Old and New Testaments.

Perhaps the most important is found in Matthew 28:18-20. From the very beginning, the early church baptized in the name of the “Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost” because it was one of the last things Jesus told his disciples to do: “And Jesus said, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

This practice of baptizing converts in the three names of the

Godhead was faithfully followed by the Apostles as they spread out to proclaim the Gospel in the first century, and the practice was still in effect at the time of the first major church council at Nicea (A.D. 325). In fact, this was the major topic under consideration. It was here that what we know as the "Doctrine of the Trinity" was hammered out by these church leaders who searched the scriptures and shaped what they believed to be the truth about the Godhead.. I point this out simply to emphasize that the practice of the Church reflected a universal acceptance of the concept of the Trinity for almost 300 years before the Church got around (because of persecution under the various Roman Emperors) to clarifying and resolving this issue at Nicea.

I think it is also important, in light of your question, for you to know something about this historic Council. Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, called this council, paid the expenses to bring 318 bishops (out of 1,800) from all over the Roman Empire to the little town of Nicea (which is near Constantinople), and served as both host and moderator during the deliberations, which lasted about six weeks.

Most of the bishops present were from the Eastern Mediterranean (Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Damascus, Ephesus) and they spoke Greek. In fact, only seven bishops represented the Western church, those who spoke Latin. Each major city throughout the Roman Empire had a bishop, and the bishops from the prominent cities I just named, by sheer representation, dominated the Council. So if anyone was responsible for coming up with the Trinity it was the Eastern church, not the "Catholic" church.

The elderly Bishop of Rome (who at that time was not considered a pope, but one bishop among equals), chose not to come himself due to illness. He did, however, send two of his associates.

All branches of orthodox Christianity—Eastern Orthodox,

Protestant, and Roman Catholic, have universally accepted the conclusions of the Council of Nicea concerning the Trinity, namely, that the scriptures clearly teach God is One in Essence, but three in personality: unified, but also distinct. Incidentally, the term "catholic," for the first three or four centuries, was used to describe the *entire* church, the *universal* body of Christians sprinkled throughout the Greco-Roman world. At that time "Catholic" had nothing to do with the city of Rome. (_____, if you want more specific examples from scripture which teach a trinitarian God, let me know).

> *Why does Jesus say that God is greater than he is? Why did Jesus pray to God if God is Jesus?*

Consider John 1:1-4: "In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of Men."

This passage also addresses part of your first question as well. Note that there are two terms used in verse one: "the Word," and "God." What does it say about the Word?

"The Word **was**" – the Word existed in the beginning (Eternity Past)
"The Word was **with** God" – (Greek, *pros*, "face-to-face with")
"The Word **was** God." – (Full Deity. . .or God Himself).

Whoever the Word was, the Word possessed (1) eternal existence like God, (2) had face-to-face fellowship with God, and (3) is designated AS God.

Who was the Word? John 1:14 tells us: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." That's Jesus. The second person of the Trinity came and dwelt among us. He became the God-Man. Jesus was just as

much man as if He had never been God, and just as much God as if He had never been man. . .two natures distinct, but linked together in one Person.

As a true human, Jesus had feelings, grew to manhood (cf. Luke 2:52), could become weary, thirsty, depressed, and die a human death. When Jesus said, “I thirst” on the cross, He was speaking from His humanity. When He said things like, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or “Rise, take up your bed and walk,” He was speaking from His deity.

In Christ’s humanity, while here on earth, the Father WAS greater, because now Christ was relating to God the Father, not only out of the equality He possessed with His Father in eternal existence, eternal fellowship, and full deity, but now also relating to Him as a man. This also answers your question about why Jesus prayed to the Father. The answer is simple: Jesus was praying from His humanity. He was a man with normal human emotions. He felt the need to pray as all men do.

_____, your questions have focused entirely on the divine nature of Christ, but His humanity is equally important for us. Consider this passage from Philippians 2:6-11: “Who, although He existed in the form of God, He did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped (competed for), but He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond servant, made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the Name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father…”

The total uniqueness of Christ as the God-Man is absolutely necessary for human salvation. He is the Mediator Who, through His death, provides for us a bridge, or access, to God if we

will accept it. And His humanity is necessary to accomplish this, because *Deity doesn't die:* "Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, 'Sacrifice and offering (animals) Thou hast not desired, But a body (His humanity) Thou hast prepared for me. . .Behold, I have come to do thy will, O God.'" (Hebrews 10:5-7)

Further, the scripture makes it clear that the entire plan of redemption to bring about the salvation of human beings involved the entire Trinity. In fact, all the great acts of God throughout the scriptures involved the active participation of the Godhead:

- Creation of the Universe (Ps. 102:25; Col. 1:16; Job 26:31)
- Creation of Man (Gen. 1:1-3, 2:7; Colossian 1:16; Job 33:4)
- The Incarnation (Luke 1:30-37)
- Baptism of Christ (Mark 1:9-11)
- Christ's Death on the Cross (Psalm 22; Romans 8:32; John 3:16, 10:18; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 9:14)
- Christ's Resurrection (Acts 2:24; John 10:18; I Peter 3:10)
- Inspiration of Scripture (II Timothy 3:16; 1:10,11; II Peter 1:21)

To each of the above events, the scriptures ascribe an active participation by each member of the Trinity.

> *If Jesus died on the stake, how could he bring himself back to life in three days?*

If Jesus is God as well as man, He would have no trouble rising from the dead. The verses cited above (See Resurrection) indicate that Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit were all actively involved in the process of bringing Him back to life.

I might also add that historically, it is undisputed that during the early centuries there was rapid growth and a dramatic impact by Christianity across the Roman Empire. It is very difficult to explain this, if you just leave a dead Jew hanging on a cross. Nothing short of His actual resurrection can explain the boldness and unfailing commitment of the first disciples to proclaim it so, and, who were, with few exceptions, called upon to seal their affirmation to the truth of this event with their own, violent martyrdoms.

_____, I have taken some time to try to answer your questions. They are all good and important questions. And I hope you can see that there are good answers to these questions. But what is most important is if you really want them and believe them. Your note sounded angry, or hurt. Perhaps you have been "burnt" in the past by some who claim to be Christians but who have deeply disappointed you. I hope not to do that.

And I hope this information is helpful to you, _____. I am a busy man, but if you sincerely want answers to your questions, I definitely have time for that. The ball is in your court.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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Why Did God Allow Animals to be Eaten and Sacrificed?

Why did God allow animals to be sacrificed and to eat other animals if He loves His creation? They are innocent. (I am not

an animal rights activist. I am a Christian.)

I think the answer must first be addressed in the reality with which we find ourselves. The cosmos according to Christians was created by God. In the early chapters of Genesis we find that everything God created is expressed over and over as being something GOOD.

The Cosmos is made up of minerals, plants, animals, and humans, the lower to the higher. We are told that only man was created in God's image. That does not mean the rest of creation is of NO value, but there is a hierarchy involved. We are told that all of the created order was intended for man. And that he was to have dominion over it. This does not mean the exploitation of everything for selfish purposes. But God provided a food chain involving plants and animals for man.

We see in the Hindu culture a good example of what happens to a culture when the food chain is distorted. Hindus, with their doctrine of reincarnation, believe that animals are just as valuable as human beings, and some, in a former life, may have actually been human beings. Therefore, all devout Hindus are vegetarians.

What makes this difficult is that now scientists are moving toward the position that even PLANTS have consciousness! Does God love the flora any less than the fauna He created? That leaves us with a diet for our existence totally dependent upon rocks!

Man was never intended to "rape the resources." Having "dominion" meant for man to be good stewards of the plant and animal world. "The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof," says the psalmist. (Ps. 24:1) We don't own the earth; we are to be good stewards of it.

The scriptures are filled with indications of God's love for that which He created. Jesus notices the beautiful lilies of the field. Men are not to abuse their animals, but rather care

for them with kindness, not with harshness. He takes notice of every sparrow who falls to the ground in death. God explicitly states that one purpose of plants and animals was to provide food for man. He even gave some instructions about *which* animals we were to eat and which we should not.

Consider this verse: Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not *worth much more than they?* (Matt. 6:27). Jesus goes on to say, "Do not be anxious saying, 'What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink?'…for…your heavenly Father *knows* that you have *need* for all these things." (Matt. 6:31-32).

Your question springs out of a matrix of thought which is very popular in the modern world. . .that all life is sacred (I agree). But the further notion held forth today is that the life of a dolphin or a sea otter or a spotted owl is equal in value to a human being.

The Bible does not teach this equality. Jesus didn't teach it, as we see above. All life is sacred because it came from the hand of God. But it is not all equal in value. Man is set apart as the recipient for which it was intended.

Those who would remove this distinction do not elevate man. If there is nothing special about man (which appears to be true in so many ways), then man is dragged down to the status of beast or animal, and an "open season" on man to cure overpopulation problems would make as much sense as an open season on whitetail deer each fall here in Texas to thin out the one half million which inhabit this state. My point here is that once you remove this line, man is not special in any sense and there is no reason we shouldn't live like the rest of the animals on the planet: "survival of the fittest." Hitler understood this. . .and practiced it!

I don't think you would agree that this is a solution to the

problem.

Does this help any?

Sincerely,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

“How Do We Know Christ Rose from the Dead? And Who Wrote the Bible?”

I have been struggling within myself for nearly all my life as to whether to believe that Christ actually rose from the dead. For without that fact, Christianity is an empty promise. So I ask myself, “What evidence is there?” The Bible is the only source of documentation we have to examine. I have often asked and never received an answer, as to exactly who wrote the Bible. The New Testament appears to have been written (opinions differ) from 75 to 400 years after Jesus was to have been around. Who put the pen to the paper on the originals? Who wrote the Old Testament? And when? Jesus was using a copy. Who compiled all the books of the O. T.? Why were they compiled before the coming of Christ? Did they come from a common geographical area, or were different continents involved? What language was used?

I hear statements like “They found hundreds of complete copies of the Bible in jars in the Dead Sea caves.” I try to envision how many thousands of papyri must have been preserved for that to be true. Do you have some light on this subject?

Thank you for your recent e-mail requesting answers regarding the Resurrection, and how the Old and New Testaments came to be developed.

I will try to give you an answer on each of your questions.

> I have been struggling within myself for nearly all my life as to whether to believe that Christ actually rose from the dead. For without that fact, Christianity is an empty promise. So I ask myself, "What evidence is there?"

There are a number of components that would suggest Christ actually rose from the dead. I believe this to be an historical event.

I liken the Resurrection to a space probe to Mars or Venus. Once it is launched, it is on the way to its destination upon the basis of the powerful impetus from its origination.

There is no doubt that something monumental must have occurred around 32 A.D.!

I would suggest you go back to the Probe Web site and you will find essays speaking to this issue. We suggest these:

The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?
Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?
Who's Got the Body?
Jesus Must Have Risen: Disciples' Lives Changed
Cruci-fiction and Resuscitation
A (Not So) Brief Defense of Christianity

There are many good reasons to believe this event actually occurred.

You cannot explain the origination of Christianity if you leave a dead Jew hanging on a Cross. The cowardice of the disciples was immediately replaced with a boldness and an affirmation, declaring that Christ arose from the Dead, and eleven of "the Twelve" sealed their belief in this event with

the spilling of their own blood, becoming the first Christian martyrs.

The idea that they all got together and conjured this up among themselves is preposterous! They would not have died for what they knew was a lie. In effect, the rapid and dramatic spread of Christianity through out the Greco-Roman World is a second "booster" which changed the world that was. And we are still feeling the impact!

> The Bible is the only source of documentation we have to examine. I have often asked and never received an answer, as to exactly who wrote the Bible. It appears to have been written (opinions differ) from 75 to 400 years after Jesus was to have been around.

I'm not sure where you got the idea that the New Testament was developed in a time frame from "75-400 years." This is definitely not accurate, and needs clarification.

What we do have over those four centuries is a great deal of manuscript evidence of the New Testament. We need to start with the first century A.D., the century when all of the New Testament documents were written.

To do this, we need to establish and delineate the time frames of events, from the birth of Christ to the end of the first century A.D.

JESUS: Let's start with His life. The span of his life begins around 6 B.C. We have a very firm date for Herod the Great. He died in 4 B.C. So, given the two years allowed for his order to slaughter the first born male infants up two years old in Bethlehem, Jesus' birth could have occurred as early as 6 B.C. Doing the math suggests that Jesus may have been 38 years old when He was crucified. (The date for the crucifixion by most scholars is fixed at 32 A.D.)

Our first consideration is the time span from Christ's

resurrection to the end of the book of Acts. As you probably know, Acts is “Volume 2” (Luke’s Second Treatise) whch follows his first Treatise, The Gospel of Luke.

You may remember that at the end of the Book of Acts, Luke is still Paul’s traveling companion, and they are both still alive and ministering. The dates for the writing of these are 58 A.D. for Luke and 66-67 A.D. for Acts.

We have a pretty firm date for the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in Rome at the hands of Nero in 68 A.D. He served as Emperor from 50 to 68 A.D. If so, his suicide occurred in the same year he executed Peter and Paul.

Now you must recognize that the Four Gospels, Acts, and all the Epistles (letters) were written by the late Sixties, with John’s Gospel and his three Epistles of John and his Book of Revelation coming a little later, around 90-95 A.D.

And even before any of the New Testament documents were written down, we know that there was an oral tradition already circulating: that is, a verbal collection of the sayings, stories, and actions of Christ.

CHURCH FATHERS: We also know that about 100 A. D. we have two epistles written by Clement, one of the early bishops of Rome. He wrote both of them to the Church at Corinth at just about the time John was writing the Book of Revelation. He speaks with some authority to them and perhaps other bishops and churches. And in these letters, there are indications that he was familiar with some of the writings and teachings of the Apostle Paul. You will remember that Paul gave instructions in some of his epistles, asking that the churches he wrote to should copy his epistles and send them to the other churches for instruction and encouragement.

All of this is to say, that the books which make up our New Testament were all written and being passed around and being copied within the first century A.D.!

Now it is true that we do not have one original scrap (we call the original the "autograph") of any of the New Testament documents. But we do have, through the combined writings and citations of the Church Fathers from 100 to 400 A.D., an enormous amount of material. With the exception of a few verses, we are able to reconstruct the entire New Testament from the Scripture quotations of the Church Fathers!

Let me give you an example. Let's say you were a teacher and you wrote the Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) on the chalk board. Then you had all of your students copy those 18 verses in their notebooks. After they had done so, let's say you went back to the chalk board and erased the Prologue you wrote. Now, have we lost the Autograph? Yes. We have lost the original, but we have 25 copies of it that we can compare with each other and see where there might be a misspelled word, or a missing phrase or sentence, etc.

And this is what we call the science of "Textual Criticism." Obviously, the earliest extant manuscripts are the most valuable to us. For example, I was recently in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, Ireland and saw some of the most ancient manuscripts, portions of the New Testament (papyrus) which date back to the beginning of the second century (the 100s). You would be amazed at how much of the New Testament is in that library, from the second to the fourth Centuries! You could probably get the whole layout on the Web. (Please see my essay "Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?"). I was able to see with my own eyes, what I had always wanted to see, a little fragment from the Gospel of John (18:31-33) which is dated at 120 A.D. We have an actual fragment that is only about 24 years old from the time John wrote his gospel in 96 A.D.

So, you ask: "Who put the pen to the paper on the originals?" We have supplied the answer above. The authors begin with Matthew and end with John (the book of Revelation). And as stated above, the autographs, the original documents, were all

written in the first century A.D. And again may I say that one little scrap of Scripture from the second century is more valuable that 10,000 paperback copies of *Good News for Modern Man*?!

OLD TESTAMENT: Now let's turn to the Old Testament. You ask,

> Who wrote the Old Testament? And when? Jesus was using a copy. Who compiled all the books of the O. T.? Why were they compiled before the coming of Christ? Did they come from a common geographical area, or were different continents involved? What language was used?

First of all, we need to realize that while the Old and New Testaments are linked, they developed from two different time contexts: Judaism, and the Greco/Roman world. They spoke different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic/Greek and Latin). They lived in different places. They developed different cultures. And while they overlap in time to a small extent, the Jewish heritage is much older than the Greco/Roman world of Jesus' time.

The Hebrews (Jews) begin to appear in the Middle East at around 2000 B.C. (or 4,000 years from our time). Abraham, the Father and Founder, was living in Ur near where the mouths of the Tigris & Euphrates rivers flow into the Persian Gulf. The broader "Holy Land" would include Modern Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Gaza, and Arabia: these constitute what we now know as Palestine, or Israel.

We begin to see archaeological indications of a definite the presence of Hebrews in the 1500 & 1400 B.C.

As language and phonetics developed, there came to be several distinct, Semitic dialects, out of which came the Hebrew alphabet and other cognate strains (Phoenician, Arabic, Ethiopic, Hebrew and Aramaic) throughout the Middle East.

At the time of the Exodus, we learn that Moses, educated by

the Pharaoh in Egypt, was a man of letters. You may remember that Jesus alluded to this in John 5:46: “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for He wrote of me.”

As the Jews began to settle in Israel, they became powerful. All along they recorded their history, either in writing or by oral tradition. The Old Testament books are a diverse collection of different kinds of Hebrew literature. All of this literature was preserved by creating scrolls from sheep or goat skins (synagogues all over the world still use them) upon which the precious documents were copied and preserved.

The creation of the official Old Testament canon we know today all came together around the sixth century B.C. (the historical time of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah).

THE SEPTUAGINT: Because of the spread of the Greek language (thanks to Alexander the Great), in 250 B.C. Jewish scholars felt the need to translate the Old Testament into Greek so the common people could read it. Jesus knew and read the Biblical Hebrew of the Scrolls when he read in the synagogues. And He no doubt spoke Aramaic (same Hebrew alphabet) to His disciples and to the crowds that gathered.

The value of the Septuagint is that we can examine the Greek translation of the O.T. by these scholars to see how the Hebrew text was rendered into Greek by these translators at that time.

DEAD SEA SCROLLS: Now a word about the Dead Sea Scrolls. You say,

> *I hear statements like ‘They found hundreds of complete copies of the Bible in jars in the Dead Sea Caves’. I try to envision how many thousands of papyrus must have been preserved for that to be true. Do you have some light on this subject*

Yes, I do. Let me explain. When the Qumran Scrolls were first discovered, there was a great deal of excitement that we would find significant links to the four Gospels and clear connections to Jesus and the New Testament. But after study over six decades, there does not seem to be much overlap. I have been to Qumran, seem the caves, and I have read the entire translation of all the material that has been gathered and translated. (See Ceza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*).

And I can tell you that no such "hundreds of complete copies of the Bible have been found in jars in the Dead Sea caves." There are many thousands of fragments, some as small as postage stamps with a few Hebrew words on them. Today, Qumran scholars continue to study the fragments, designated from each cave/location, and it is just one big puzzle-like task of trying to link one to another. It is a long and tedious process that will not be completed for a long, long time. And many fragments desired are either lost, overlooked, or stolen to sell.

The benefits of Qumran lie in the Old Testament fragments which can be compared with the Septuagint and the Hebrew Texts of the Synagogues. The outstanding example is the comparison of the Book of Isaiah. What is striking is the fact that there is very little variance between the two texts. The famous Qumran scroll and the official, Massoretic text used in synagogues today have a 95% agreement.

So, let's summarize the sequence of the development of the O.T.:

2000 B.C.	Authors begin writing, preserving literary heritage
465-424 B.C.	O.T. writings are gathered and the Canon formed (Ezra)
280-250 B.C.	Septuagint translation (Greek)

150 B.C.	Qumran Community (Essenes) Originated in the north (Damascus). Persecution drove them south to Qumran. (Dead Sea Scrolls)
45-96 A.D.	N.T. We have still another confirmation of the Old Testament text: all the O.T. verses which are quoted by the N.T. authors.

You can, and should have a certainty about this. _____, I hope this helps answer your questions.

Sincerely and warm regards,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

P.S. At one time in my life (college years), I was where you seem to be right now. I considered myself a Christian because I lived in America and hadn't killed anybody! But I came to understand that I was not a real Christian, and I didn't know how to become one. I finally understood what God was requiring of me, and I acted upon it. I find that most people don't know how to become a Christian. There are many in the pews who assume they are, but that can't explain why. That is a dangerous perspective.

If you want to explore this, I would suggest that you read two of my essays in this order:

"A Moral Life Won't Get Us to Heaven"
"The Most Important Decision of your Life."

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“If Jehovah Isn’t the Real Name of God, What Is?”

When the Bible was translated, the interpreter translated the name of God as “Jehovah.” My main question is, What was the original name of God? Because I read that his name was translated wrong, and that his real name is YAOHU. Is this true?

Thank you for writing. I will try to explain this to you with the following information:

God is referred to in the Bible by many names, but the primary three are:

Elohim
Translation: “God,” as in Genesis 1:1: “in the beginning God created…”

Yahweh
Translation: “Lord,” as in Psalm 23:1: “The Lord is my Shepherd…”

Adonai
Translation: “Ruler, Master, Lord,” as in Psalm 35:23: “my God (Elohim) and my Lord (Adonai).”

We need to understand the rendering of these three names of God as we find them in our Bibles today, whether in English, Spanish, and all other modern translations. But we must first understand some things about the development of the Hebrew language.

First of all, ancient Hebrew was distinctive, in that there were two traditions which were involved in the handing down of the Hebrew text as we know it today. One was written (Kethiv), and the other was oral, spoken (Qere).

Up until the Tenth Century A.D., all Hebrew written texts in existence and available (for study, worship) had one distinguishing feature: the text consisted of consonants only. In other words, there were no vowels! But since there was also an oral tradition, the Jews who spoke Hebrew knew what the vowels were and just supplied them as they read the text.

Examples in English: McDnlds=McDonalds; prkwy=parkway; frwy=freeway.

Around 906 A.D., a group of Hebrew scholars at Tiberias (on the Sea of Galilee) known as the Massoretes developed a system of little "dots" and "dashes" representing all of the vowel sounds. These were superimposed upon the written Hebrew text at that time. The Massoretes were concerned that the Hebrew language would be lost, as fewer and fewer people knew and spoke it. So these scholars took steps to make sure that all future generations of Jews would be able to speak the language accurately since they would now have a written record of the ancient vowel sounds. All of our modern Hebrew translations are based upon the work of the Massoretes.

Now let's look back at our three names of God.

The term *Elohim* has always meant "God," but is not germane to our discussion of your question.

The issue of *Jehovah* is derived from the other two primary names of God.

The term *Yahweh* is always translated by the word "Lord." But we must understand that every time a Rabbi or any Jew was reading any portion of the Old Testament and came upon this written word "YHWH", he orally said "Adonai," not "Yahweh." The reason for this is that the Jews considered the written term YHWH so sacred that it should never be spoken or expressed with the lips.

That is the reason why, when they were reading (speaking) and

came to “YHWH,” they always substituted “Adonai” and spoke it instead. This has been practiced by the Jews back to Jesus’ time, and long before.

Now, where does “Jehovah” come from? Well, what were the Massoretes to do when they were adding their vowel-system to the written Hebrew text and they came upon the word, “YHWH?” Since no Jew had ever heard or known the true pronunciation of this most sacred of names for the Hebrew God, they put there the identical vowel-pointings which are rendered for Adonai!

In reality, the Jews were just doing what they had always done: they spoke “Adonai” every time they read “YHWH” in the text.

The vowel sounds in Adonai are “OH” and “AH.” Thus, “Yahweh” becomes “YHO VAH” (rendered in English as “Jehovah”).

Most scholars have concluded that the term “YHWH” is actually based upon the “to be” verb in Hebrew, “HYH” (HAYAH). The future tense of this verb is YHWH (Yahweh). They refer back to the passage in Exodus where God is actually asked His name. Moses says, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I shall say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now, they may say to me, ‘What is His Name?’ What shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM;” and He said, “Thus you shall say to the Sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.'”

I hope this answers your question. You can see from this explanation that the issue was not that someone translated it wrong. It was done with reverent intention. I hope this answers your question adequately.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

This e-mail also came in with a similar question:

This message is in reference to using the word "Jehovah" to mean the God of the Bible. I assume you know that it is YHWH with the vowel points for "Adonai" added. This was to remind the Torah reader to say "Adonai" instead of YHWH, which was (and is) considered sacred to the Jews. I do not see how one can use a hybrid of two names for God and still be correct. If someone were to call me "Jasen" with different vowels inserted, I probably would not respond. I understand God is an omniscient, compassionate God that knows our shortcomings and misunderstandings, but if we can do it right, shouldn't we?

Your questions about the relationship of YHWH, Adonai, and Jehovah have to do with the tradition of the Jews and their reverence for the name of Yahweh, which comes from Exodus 3:13 when Moses asked God to tell him what he should say when Pharoah and the Egyptians inquired as to who had sent him (Moses) on his mission of deliverance. Remember, the Lord told Moses to take his shoes off because he was on "holy ground."

God's answer was, "I AM THAT I AM." Actually, the word YHWH is a form of the "to be" verb in Hebrew, "eyeheyeh." It ties into the idea in the New Testament where Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Before Abraham was (existed), **I AM** (that is, I continually exist)" (John 8:58-59). The Hebrew translation is "underived existence."

Unger's Bible Dictionary says that "this custom which had its origin in reverence, and has almost degenerated into a superstition, was founded upon an erroneous rendering of Lev. 24:16, from which it was inferred that the mere utterance of the name constituted a capital offense. According to Jewish tradition, it was pronounced but once a year by the high priest on the Day of Atonement when he entered the Holy of Holies; but on this point there is some doubt." (p. 565).

This reverence carried over into the Jewish thinking about the awe, fear, and reverence to which God was entitled. The Jews scrupulously avoided every mention of it. The true

pronunciation of it was known to the Hebrews, but has been entirely lost. They continued to write YHWH in the text, but when pronouncing the text always substituted another name for God, usually Adonai.

You are right in your explanation that the Jews used the vowel pointing of Adonai to YHWH, from which we get the English word, “Jehovah,” hence the form Yehowah and name Yehvh. There is a strong possibility that the name Jehovah was anciently pronounced as Yahweh, like Iabe of the Samaritans. But I must remind you that the entire vowel pointing system did not come into use until the 10th century A.D. This was designed by the Massoretes located at Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee, and their desire was to weld together two traditions of the Old Testament text at that time: the KETHIV (written text) and the QERE (spoken, oral tradition).

Let me explain it this way. Until the tenth century A.D., the written Hebrew text contained only consonants. The reason for this is that those who spoke Hebrew knew what the vowels were. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day knew the Old Testament by heart, from Genesis to Malachi. This had nothing to do with literacy or education. This is the oral tradition. Even today many Muslims can quote the entire Koran by memory. Since the Jews had this oral tradition, they knew the Scriptures and they knew what the vowel sounds were.

Let me give you an example: Read these modified English words: blvd=boulevard; pkwy=parkway; McDnlds=McDonalds, and so on.

What the Massoretes did was to devise a vowel pointing system which was superimposed over the written, consonantal text. The reason for doing this was to bring these two traditions together and stabilize the text for perpetuity so that the language would not be lost. Amazingly, this same Hebrew is now in operation in Israel. And when you seen modern Hebrew written, the vowels are again omitted as in ancient times, because Jews who read and speak Hebrew know what vowels are to

be supplied.

My point with all this is that long before the vowel pointings (which seem to be hanging you up) were created, the Jews were *already* referring to YHWH as "Adonai." This goes way back in the Jewish tradition, even before the time of Christ. The Qumran community (Dead Sea Scrolls) also had this practice.

In summary, the action of substituting Adonai for YHWH had little to do with the vowel pointing you mention, and everything to do with an ancient practice of the Jews (in respect or perhaps superstition) not to utter the sound of the "ineffable Tetragrammaton" (YHWH cf. *Websters Dictionary*). The practice is not, in reality, a "hybrid" of the two names, as you suggest, but rather a substitution of the one for the other. Your analysis of the vowel pointing is accurate as a means of reminding/warning the reader not to utter "YHWH" after the 10th century A.D. , but we have no knowledge or of any such indicator provided in the written Hebrew text giving such a warning prior to the Massoretic tradition.

I hope this answers your question.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Published June 2003

See Also *Probe Answers Our Email*:

- "Is It Wrong to Speak of God as Jehovah?"
- "Jehovah Is the Only Name of God!"
- "Why Did the Jews Not Say God's Name Aloud When He Never Said Not To?"

“Why Does Mark’s Gospel Omit the Resurrection and the Virgin Birth?”

If Jesus really did rise from the dead, why didn’t Mark say he saw him after the fact? Is Mark not the first gospel written? If I had hung around with a guy for three years and then seen him after he had died I would certainly write about it. Also, why does Mark not mention the virgin birth? If it were so important why didn’t Paul mention it?

Your first question alludes to a textual problem in the manuscript evidence for the end of the book—namely verses 9-20 of the last chapter (Mark 16:8-20). These twelve verses *do* give an account of the resurrection of Christ. The controversy comes about in that two of the earliest (almost complete) manuscripts we have—(Sinaiticus and Vaticanus [dated mid-300’s A.D.]—*omit* the verses. What is also true is that the scribes who wrote these two codices *left some blank space* after verse 8, indicating that they *knew* of a longer ending to the Gospel of Mark, but they did not have it available from the manuscripts they were copying.

Most all other manuscripts and early versions (translations into other languages) include vs. 9-20. Even earlier evidence is found among the Early Patristic Fathers (the church leaders which followed immediately after the Apostles’ deaths), substantiating that these twelve verses were not only known two hundred years *before* Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, but that there was support for their inclusion (since they each quoted authoritatively from the “disputed” passage (cf. Justin Martyr, *Apology 1.45,* ca. A.D.145; Tatian, *Diatessaron*, ca.

A.D. 170; and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.10.6 ca. A.D. 180).

Your second question alludes to the fact that Mark was the first gospel written. This is generally accepted, although there is still a persistent argument among textual critics that Matthew may have written his gospel in Aramaic *first* (which was later translated into Greek).

Your third comment about Mark is based on a wrong assumption. Mark was *not* one of the Twelve Disciples, and therefore he didn't "hang around with Jesus for three years." What do we know about Mark, or John Mark, as he is also called? There is some scriptural evidence that the home in Jerusalem where Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover in the Upper Room the night before the crucifixion, and the place where they gathered for prayer (Acts 1:13) after Jesus was laid in the tomb, was the home of John Mark and his parents (Acts 12:12).

Also, there is an unusual event, unique to Mark's Gospel, found in Mark 14:51-52. The preceding verses describe the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the fact that "Everyone deserted Him and fled, as Jesus had predicted," (cf. Mk. 14:27 and 14:50), including Peter. Immediately following this, Mark records the incident of a young man following Jesus, "wearing nothing but a linen sheet (a sleeping garment) over his naked body; and they seized him. But he left the linen sheet behind, and escaped naked" (Mk. 14: 51,52).

The Greek word used to describe him, *neoniskos*, indicates a young man in the prime of his life, from late teens to late thirties. Most interpreters believe that this young man was John Mark. After Jesus and the disciples had celebrated the Passover and left for Gethsemane, John Mark removed his outer cloak and went to bed wrapped in a linen sleeping garment. Apparently a servant awakened him and made him aware of Judas' betrayal scheme, and he made his way to Gethsemane, not bothering to dress, which is where the incident occurred. He

would hardly have mentioned such an incident unless it had a special significance for him as a turning point in his life.

This is the same John Mark that accompanied Paul and Barnabas later on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). This is also the same John Mark that brought about a strong contention between Paul and Barnabas as they discussed whom they would take on their **second** missionary journey (Acts 15:37-40). Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again, but Paul resisted this, because apparently John Mark, still a young man, had found the first missionary journey too "tough" and he "deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work" (Acts 15:38). So Barnabas took Mark, and Paul took Silas, resulting in two missionary teams. As he had formerly discipled Paul (the new convert), Barnabas, a builder of men, now turned his attention to discipling John Mark.

Later on, we find that Mark became the travelling companion of the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 5:13) and Peter speaks affectionately of him as "my (spiritual) son, Mark" (1 Peter 5:13). This indicates that Mark was probably converted by Peter. Even Paul later had a change of heart toward Mark, saying of him to Timothy, "Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is *useful to me* for ministry (2 Timothy 4:ll)"

Let me at this point discuss the four gospels a little, as their authorship and *purpose* bear directly upon your next questions.

With regard to authorship, the crucial factor of credibility was *eyewitness* testimony: that is, the writers of the gospels either had to have personally witnessed these events or they had to have an intimate association of and verification from those who had witnessed these events (from the baptism of John to the Resurrection).

Both *Matthew* and *John* qualify because they were both among the

twelve disciples. Though not an apostle, *Mark* had the best opportunity in his mother's house in Jerusalem and his personal connection with Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and other prominent disciples for gathering the most authentic information concerning the gospel history. And we also know that Mark was the travelling companion of Peter, who is the real eyewitness reflected throughout Mark's gospel. The document has been called by some the "Gospel of Peter"!

Papias, a Church Father, mentions Mark in the early 100's as the "interpreter" of Peter, "writing down" the personal reminiscences of Peter's discourses/sermons delivered over the course of their journeys together. Clement of Alexandria, a little later in the second century, informs us that "the people of Rome were so pleased with Peter's preaching that they requested Mark, his attendant, to put it down in writing, which Peter neither encouraged nor hindered."

We learn that *Luke,* though not an eyewitness, was the travelling companion of the apostle Paul on some of his later missionary journeys. Of the four gospels, his gospel reaches the highest level of scholastic and literary quality, and his Prologue (Luke 1:1-4) gives clear indication that he gave careful consideration to the compiling of eyewitness sources available to him: "—just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word have handed them down to us" (1:2). His treatment of contemporary places, people and events in the secular Roman world have a high degree of accuracy when compared with non-biblical, historical material.

There is good evidence that both Luke and Matthew may have used Mark's gospel as a source (or a common corpus of material which preceded Mark), as well as other oral or written sources. Since the genealogy of Jesus in Luke's gospel appears to be that of Mary, there is a strong possibility that the source for Luke's beginning chapters which record events concerning Christ's birth came directly from His mother.

Luke visited all the principal apostolic churches from Jerusalem to Rome. He met Peter, Mark, and Barnabas at Antioch, James and his elders at Jerusalem, Philip and his daughters at Caesarea, and he had first hand access and benefit to all the information which Paul himself had received by revelation or collected from personal contact with all his fellow apostles and other first generation disciples.

The four gospels are eyewitness portraits of the life and events of Jesus Christ. They do, however, reveal somewhat different purposes with respect to emphasis. The Gospel of *Matthew* without doubt was intended for the Jewish community and a primary focus on Jesus as the *Messiah* who historically fulfilled the prophetic predictions and promises mentioned throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Gospel of *Luke* portrays Christ as the "Son of Man," that is, with an emphasis on the *humanity* of Christ, and it was written primarily to the Gentile world.

The Gospel of *John* has yet a different focus. John clearly identified that his primary purpose was to prove that Jesus was *God Himself*. When John wrote his gospel near the end of the first century, Gnostics and other sects were beginning to question the divine nature of Christ, and John's major intent in his Gospel was to answer these critics.

The Gospel of *Mark* was written to demonstrate Christ as the *Servant:* "For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Nativity accounts in Matthew and Luke make sense, because they would be important to establish both Messianic and human lineage. It does not, however, suit Mark's purpose, as the lineage of a "slave" or a "servant" is unimportant. This answers your question about why one would not expect Mark to mention the virgin birth in his gospel. It did not suit his purpose.

Your final question was why Paul did not mention the Virgin Birth. I believe he does. In Galatians 4:4 we have these words: “But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, **made, born of** *(ginomai*—originating, coming from) **a woman**, born under the Law.” Now obviously every person born is “born” of a woman. So what is Paul referring to? He is referring specifically to two promises from the Old Testament, specifically, Isaiah 7:14 and Genesis 3:15. The Isaiah passage says: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a (miraculous) *sign*: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel (God With Us).” Matthew 1:23 cites the fulfillment of this messianic promise. The sign *is* the virgin birth.

Genesis 3:15 contains the first messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. After Adam and Eve’s disobedience God pronounces three judgments: upon Adam, Eve, and Satan. Addressing Satan in the verse God says: “I will put enmity (a barrier) between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; And *he* shall bruise (crush) your head, and you shall bruise *his* heel.”

Following quickly after the entrance of sin comes the promise of a solution. God promises that a way will be found to undo and to rectify the consequences of their disobedience. It will involve the promise of a “seed” which is referred to by the personal pronoun “He.” A conflict or battle is described which will occur at some future time and will result in a mortal blow to Satan’s *head* and a non-mortal wound to the “seed’s” *heel*.

Speaking to the disciples of His coming death, Jesus said, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. . . Now my soul has become troubled: and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ But for *this purpose* I came to this hour. . .*Now* judgment is upon this

world; *now* the ruler (Satan) of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.' But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die" (John 12:23-33). This passage describes the mortal blow Christ inflicted upon Satan by His death and resurrection: "He shall crush your head."

The passage also alludes to the bruising, suffering and death Christ endured on the Cross—something that our Lord dreaded here, and earlier in His prayer to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Save Me from this hour; let this cup pass from Me." But in order for "the Seed of the woman" to triumph over sin, it was necessary for Him to suffer at the hands of Satan: "You shall bruise his heel."

The "enmity" or "barrier" between Satan's seed (those now contaminated by sin) and the woman's seed **is** the *virgin birth*.

Mary was that elect woman, a virgin, from whom the One Seed came. He was to be the seed of the woman, not of Adam, the man: "And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I know no man?" And the Angel said to her, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason that holy thing born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34-35).

The Virgin Birth, therefore, is *very* important, because without it, Jesus would be just another human being like you and me, and He would in no way qualify to be a Redeemer for even *one* sinful human being, much less for *all* humans. Shepard has observed:

> *"No convincing evidence against the Virgin birth of Jesus . . .can be found in the New Testament. The difficulty of accounting for His life on any other ground is greater than the difficulty of accepting the Virgin birth as a fact." (J.W. Shepard, The Christ of the Gospels. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946, p. 1).*

Apart from this explanation, the context of Paul's words in Galatians 4:4 are meaningless. He is simply referring to the broader, messianic context understood by all the Jewish community when they referred to "the woman."

_____, I hope this material will help answer the questions you raised.

Sincerely yours,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Posted Dec. 28, 2002

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"Is It True that Some NT Documents Were First Written in Aramaic/Syriac and THEN in Greek?"

I have been asked what is wrong with this bible by George Lamsa which is a translation from the Aramaic of the Peshitta. It claims greater accuracy than KJV since it is based on the eastern texts, which they claim are older than the OT Hebrew texts and that the NT texts were written originally in Aramaic since the common language of that area was and is in some areas still Aramaic. The differences that this bible translation points out between KJV and Aramaic have no major change in doctrine. How reliable are the eastern texts? And why are they not mentioned or discounted in textual criticism

works?

Thank you for your e-mail requesting information on your question about the Bible translation of George Lamsa based on ancient Syriac Texts, and in particular, the *Syriac Peshitta*.

While I am not personally familiar with this work, or what it claims for itself, I am somewhat knowledgeable in textual criticism. So I will give you a quick response to your questions.

Syriac is the language which was spoken in the general area of modern Syria and Iraq, extending on the west (just east of the coastal area then known as Phoenicia—modern Lebanon) to the Euphrates River on the east. The two major cities were Antioch and Damascus. As you know, early on the first Christian expansion from Jerusalem was into this area with the Church at Antioch where Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and others ministered and at which the name "Christians" was first used historically (to our knowledge-Acts 11:26).

It was because of this growth of the Christian Church that there developed a need for a translation of the Bible into the Syriac language, an Aramaic dialect. It, along with Hebrew and Arabic, are all related Semitic languages. Merrill Unger notes that the *Peshitta* is the product of many hands, and the exact date of its origin is unknown. He also says that it came into existence after 150 A.D., an accepted date when the Syriac Church became a visible presence in the region. It is generally accepted that most of its Old Testament Books were translated from the Hebrew by around 200 A.D. Most scholars believe that the origin of this tradition came from the hands of Christian Jews.

The *Peshitta*'s Pentateuch follows very closely the Massoretic Text (tenth century A.D.) of our Old Testament while other portions are clearly translated from the Greek Septuagint, the accepted translation of the Old Testament for Greek-speaking

Jews and Christians of the time.

I would have to see your sources which claim the Syriac translations are earlier, and therefore have greater accuracy than the texts underwriting the King James Bible, before I feel I can fully answer your question. What *are* the sources? All of my sources clearly point to the fact that the *Peshitta*, in the form we have come to know it, developed (at least for the New Testament) a good bit later than their Greek originals. That is not to say that there is no manuscript evidence prior to the Massoretic era.

Further, both the *Syriac Peshitta* and the KJV are based most strongly upon the Eastern Family of (Greek-speaking) texts (*Textus Receptus*). The KJV is based primarily on this text Family because the bulk of manuscript evidence available in 1607 in England and Holland for scholars to work with was constituted mainly of this Eastern body of texts.

Additional, more recent manuscript evidence, such as *Siniaticus* (Aleph) and *Codex Vaticanus* (B), along with other Western Texts, have brought additional light to textual criticism of the N.T., and convinced most scholars (Westcott, Hort, Nestle, and most others) that the Nestle's (critical) text is based on earlier and a more accurate rendering of the text than the *Textus Receptus* (though, as you point out, none of the variables—be it *Textus Receptus*, Nestle's Text, or the *Peshitta*—affect any major doctrinal teaching of the eastern text.

Now apart from Matthew, which some scholars believe was originally translated into Aramaic and only second into our Greek version, I know of no higher critical scholarship which can substantiate that all of the New Testament Texts were written in Aramaic first. It would not make sense for the Epistles to first have been written into Syriac because Paul was not writing any of his letters to people who spoke Syriac (Aramaic).

It might make sense for the four gospels, but I am not aware of any textual critical sources which try to document Aramaic origins for them, with the exception of a persistent tradition spoken of by two early church fathers, Papias and Irenaeus, that Matthew did in fact write something in Aramaic first which may be embodied within his Greek gospel. There is little doubt that prior to the writing of the four Gospels, there was an oral or spoken tradition circulating as the Apostles fanned out and began to speak of Jesus. Most scholars point to this oral tradition as the best explanation for the overlapping of material in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

The two primary languages spoken in Palestine during Jesus' time were Aramaic and Greek, and, with the coming of the Romans to that area, some Latin. Formal Hebrew was still read in the synagogues, but everyday communication was expressed in Aramaic. It is not likely that Jesus taught or conversed in Greek (though He and the Apostles appear to be familiar with the Greek Septuagint). Therefore, there *is* an Aramaic base to the Gospel material, since this was the language of Jesus and the Apostles.

How reliable are the eastern texts? If by "Eastern" we mean the Greek Texts and the Syriac Texts (but we could also add Coptic and Armenian, though they come later), we find that they all flow from common sources: either the Hebrew (and the little bit of Aramaic we find in the Old Testament), or the Koine Greek of the New Testament world (which produced both the (1)Greek Translation [Septuagint] of the Old Testament, (2) the original New Testament Documents themselves, and (3) those writings of the earliest Church Fathers (who all wrote in either Greek (Eastern) or Latin (Western). We find precedent for this in the New Testament writers themselves who, with the possible exception of Luke, most assuredly all spoke Aramaic but wrote their letters in Greek. Another factor pointing to an original Greek text is the presence throughout the Gospels of explanations for Aramaic words/expressions.

These would not be necessary if the original text had be rendered in Aramaic.

And so we could say that the Eastern Family corpus is highly reliable and true to the text 95% of the time. But the same could be said of the Latin Texts. AND the King James Bible. The KJV is a very good translation, but we have gleaned additional, earlier textual evidence since 1607 which has made us reconsider how the KJV translators rendered certain portions of the text. Its framers could only translate from the manuscript evidence available to them.

Textually speaking, there is little manuscript evidence to substantiate an Aramaic precedent over the Greek. There are however, ten different Syriac manuscript sources which have survived, dating from the fifth to the tenth centuries A.D. The earliest, a palimpsest written in the 4th or 5th century, is the oldest extant manuscript which is a representative of the Old Syriac translation (which probably originated around 200 A.D). All of these manuscripts give evidence of having borrowed from pre-existing sources—the Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint, or the Massoretic tradition.

By far the best Aramaic specimen of the *Syriac Peshitta* is found in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and dates from the sixth or seventh century A.D. Close behind is one in the British Museum in London which dates from the ninth or tenth century A.D. I have looked at this codex and taken pictures of it.

Finally, in answer to your question about the silence of "Eastern" texts, this is not a good designation, since "Eastern" includes both Syriac and Greek manuscript traditions. They are essentially the same. You are mistaken in stating that the eastern texts are not mentioned, or they are discounted in textual critical apparatus. As you can see from my summary above, they *are* there. All extant manuscript sources relating to the Syriac family of texts are noted.

Thus, to my knowledge, the Syriac family of texts are not ignored in the literature.

My recommendation is that you should find in your area a good theological seminary (with a strong commitment and high regard for the scriptures themselves), and check out the section of the library which deals with Old and New Testament Criticism, and sources which refer to the *Syriac Peshitta*.

I hope this gives a satisfactory response to your questions.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

"The Archaeological Evidence for the Bible is Non-Existent!"

The archaeological evidence of the Bible is scarce. In fact, it is non-existent. After 200 years of Christian archaeologists digging up the whole Middle East, they haven't found any proof of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, Hebrew Slaves or the Ten Plagues. NONE!!! And this from a nation of people who wrote EVERYTHING down in stone!! And Sinai has no proof of any large group of people travelling through it EVER!!! The first evidence correlating to the biblical story doesn't appear in Canaan archaeology until around 100 years before the Babylonian Captivity (around 600 BC).

This lack of evidence includes persons such as David and Solomon who should be recorded in other nations and supposedly lived relatively close to those who wrote the Bible in the

Babylonian Captivity around 500 B.C.

In the words of Shakespeare, “Methinks thou dost protest too much.” It is true that we would like to have more archaeological evidence than we now have. But of course, from an archaeologist’s perspective, this is always the case. Further, your assertion that ***no*** evidence exists, is an overstatement which cannot be substantiated. And it is not accepted by the majority of those scholars who are active in the Levant. I would suspect that you are reading a narrow spectrum of archaeologists who support your desired conclusions. And there are many European and Israeli archaeologists along with Christian ones who do not share your opinion nor that of those you apparently are reading. Let me give you some examples from these scholars who feel there is substantial evidence mitigating against such a pessimistic stand.

Egypt

I will start here, because there is no doubt that we see clear evidence of Egyptian culture, language, etc., imbedded in both the Old Testament and archaeology. As you may know, the *lingua franca* (official language) used by Heads of State and commerce was Akkadian cuneiform. Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt all conversed with each other in this language. It is a northern Semitic language. If the Israelites actually spent 400 years as slaves in Egypt, we would expect this familiarity of Egyptian language and culture among the Israelites. And if Moses was a real person—a Hebrew brought up in the Royal Egyptian family—he would have probably been tri-lingual, and able to converse in Hebrew, Egyptian and Akkadian.

Exodus, Sinai

We find abundant evidence of an Egyptian heritage and influence throughout the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges. As stated above, we would like more archaeological corroboration

to clearly identify Biblical names, places, events, etc. For some areas the evidence is strong. For others, it is either sparse, or nonexistent. I will elaborate on this later in considering Jerusalem, but will state here the premise that an *absence* of archaeological data does not necessarily mean there is none. Perhaps we have the *wrong site* (historical Mt. Sinai is an example). Or perhaps we just haven't dug in the *right place*. To argue vigorously from "silence" is not strong proof.

We do have some indications of Egyptian influence on two biblical elements: the Tabernacle/construction described in Exodus 25-27; 36-38, and the arrangement of the Israelite travel/military camp. The order of the camp and the order of the march are laid out in great detail in Numbers 2. Much of what Egyptian archaeologists have discovered pertaining to the above find many similarities in the structures/construction/arrangement of the various war camps of the Pharaohs.

The desert Tabernacle of the Bible (Exodus 26) is described as one of elaborate design of gold, silver, bronze, wood, linen, goats' hair and leather. It so happens that this desert tent is also the centerpiece of every Egyptian war camp, but it serves as Pharaoh's personal, special tent, not a religious shrine.

The best example comes from a famous battle (at Kadesh) between Ramesses II and the Hittite nation around 1275 B.C. This is one of the most momentous battles in antiquity and the best documented…at Thebes, Karnak, Luxor, Abydos and Abu Simbel—on papyrus and stone, in both poetic and prose forms. The best pictorial is found at Abu Simbel. The parallels between Ramesses' camp and the biblical Tabernacle, beginning with the dimensions, are striking.

- *The camp forms a rectangular courtyard twice as long as it is wide.*

- *The main entrance is located in the middle of the short walls.*
- *A road from the entrance leads directly to a two chamber tent: a reception compartment and directly behind it Pharaoh's chamber. It too has a 2:1 ratio.*
- *The tent and camp lie on an east/west axis with the entrance on the east.*
- *In pharaoh's inner tent is representation on each side of the winged falcon god Horus.*
- *Their wings cover the pharaoh's golden throne in the same manner that the wings of the Cherubim covered Yahweh's golden throne/ark (Exodus 35:18-22).*

Given your assumption that the Old Testament didn't materialize until the Persian period (fifth century B.C.), we would expect Mesopotamian influence, but we do know from several palatial reliefs found at Nineveh that the Assyrians had a *very different* form of military camp. The camp's perimeter is always *oval* in shape and the form of the king's tent bears little resemblance to the Tabernacle. Where would these sixth century B.C. "authors" come up with this accurate, Egyptian-oriented detail/description seven centuries removed?

I won't elaborate on this (unless you want documentation), but the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, its design, materials, and portability, so graphically designed in Exodus 25:19-22, is also mirrored in Egyptian funerary structures to a high degree of detail.

Another remarkable example is to compare three cities mentioned in Numbers 22 (Dibon); Numbers 13:22; Joshua 10:36,37; Judges 1:10 (Hebron); and Judges 4-5 (Qishon). These passages all describe a well-known, well-traveled road (the Arabah) in the Transjordan from the southern tip of the Dead Sea to the plains of Moab (opposite Jericho). This is not to be confused with the great north-south Kings Highway (also mentioned in the Bible) which stretched from northern Arabia

to Syria.

Although Thomas Thompson and other "Rejectionists" claim these cities didn't exist in the late Bronze Age II (1400-1200 B.C.), we have extra-biblical evidence that they *did*. You may know that the Pharoahs recorded, along with their achievements and military exploits, maps and the names of roads, geographical data, etc. We get a rather full picture of this road over time by several pharaohs who mention/describe this specific road on their victory monuments.

The first comes from Thutmosis III (1504-1450 B.C)., who mentions four towns/cities along this road which are also found in the Bible: Iyyim, Dibon, Abel, and Jordan. The second and third come from Amenophis III (1387-1350 B.C.) and Ramesses II (c. 1379-1212 B.C.)—found on the west side of the great hall at Karnak. He mentions two of the names found in the Bible. Further evidence comes from the Moabite stone (ninth century B.C.).

I could go into more detail about this if you are interested, but to summarize what I'm saying, there is evidence from independent and varied sources that such places existed several centuries *before* the proposed dates of the Exodus. Consider this comparison:

Late Bronze Egyptian Name	**Biblical Name**	**Modern Name**
(Yamm) ha-Malach	Melah ("Salt")	Yam ha-Melach
Iyyin	Iyyin	Ay
Heres/Hareseth	Heres/Hareseth	Kerak (CH = K)
Aqrabat		al-Aqraba
Dibon/Oartho	Dibon	Dhiban
Iktanu		Tell Iktanu
Abel	Abel-shittim	Tell Hammam
Jordan	Jordan	Jordan (River)

If you will look at Numbers 33:45-50, you would have to say in

light of the above that this is a pretty impressive and credible piece of ancient historical writing, and most Bible scholars still consider it so. Its exacting specificity and precision of detail strongly indicates that the ancient historian who wrote it had at least had *sources* that accurately preserved the memory of a road (and cities along its route) used in very early times dating clear back to Late Bronze Age II.

On the face of it, we would have to reject Thomas Thompson (et al.)'s conclusion that *no* such cities existed at the proposed time of the Exodus. The places mentioned in the Biblical accounts did in fact exist at the time. None of these pieces of information were fabricated centuries later. There would be no purpose to include them (or make them up).

Israelites

I am not going to spend any time trying to convince you that Moses was an historical person, but I would like to refer you to an Egyptian stele in the temple at Thebes which gives us the earliest known mention of Israel. It is a 7.5 foot high funerary monument of Pharaoh Merneptah, who ruled from 1213 to 1203 B.C. As you may know, these monuments outlined a Pharaoh's lifetime accomplishments and were written (or dictated) by him for his tombstone prior to his death. He refers to conquering Israel (among others) and says, "Israel is laid waste, his seed (people) is not." Israel is referred to as "a people," that is, they were already known and acknowledged as a distinct ethnic group at that time! In my mind, this reference provides persuasive, early evidence against those who argue that there was not a distinct people called the Israelites until after the Babylonian Captivity in the sixth century B.C. (600 years later—ridiculous!)

I will be discussing the Amarna Letters (14th century B.C.) in another context later, but will here state that a people designated as the "Hab(or p)iru" (i.e., Habiru) in the Amarna

Letters (14th Century B.C.) is still considered by many scholars to be a possible, additional mention of the Hebrews.

Another substantial line of evidence comes from discoveries of a new community in the central hill country of Canaan which sprang up late in the 13th to the 11th centuries B.C. Some 300 small, agricultural villages are now known. They are new in the archaeological record and have certain identifying characteristics which include the layout of the village and the signature (Israel: four-room houses, pottery, and the absence of pig bones, which are numerous at other sites in trans-Jordan, and the coastal towns [Philistines, Phoenicians]). The above layouts of village and town fit exactly the biblical descriptions found in Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. These newcomers also brought with them new agricultural technology not evidently known heretofore by the Canaanites living there when the Israelites arrived. And it has been pointed out that this new community did not *evolve* over time (natural, gradual population increase), but rather, migrated into the area more rapidly, and they almost exclusively chose *new* sites to build, instead of taking over existing Canaanite dwellings, and well away from their urban areas.

This new people introduced the terracing of hills for their agricultural needs, which were carefully designed with retaining walls (rock) to take advantage of all rainfall (as well as available springs) coming down to these areas of rocky, sloping terrain. These villages stretch all the way from the hills of the lower Galilee in the north to the Negev in the south. Population estimates at the end of the Bronze age in this area numbered 12,000 (13th century) but grew rapidly to about 55,000 in the 12th century B.C., and then to about 75,000 in the 11th century B.C.

As I mentioned above, another uniqueness in these settlements is that their food system was found by archaeologists to be void of pig bones in excavated remains. This is another

indication of a particular, ethnic/religious community. And religiously, there is also a complete absence of any kind of temple, sanctuary, or shrine, and also of any stone idols (deities). This assemblage is sufficiently homogeneous and distinctive to warrant *some* kind of designation, or label. If not Israel, *WHO?* Archaeologist William Dever has suggested naming this 12th to 11th century assemblage of individuals as "proto-Israelites."

David, Solomon, and Jerusalem

As you may know, there is a hot debate going on among archaeologists concerning the tenth century B.C., the purported time of the United Kingdom under David and his son, Solomon. Are they historical figures, or did some author(s) invent these mythical persons centuries later? And what can be said about Jerusalem? There is very little archaeological evidence to substantiate that it existed in the tenth century B.C. as described in the Bible. This has led a small group of archaeologists to conclude David and Solomon never existed, and Jerusalem was not the thriving royal capital of the Israelites. I will develop this in more detail later, but I first want to say again that an *absence* of evidence does not necessarily and automatically bring us to conclude *nothing* was going on in the tenth century B.C. at Jerusalem. This is an argument from silence. There are alternative explanations. First of all, the most likely place where Jerusalem's public buildings and important monuments would be located is on the Temple Mount, which for obvious reasons (Arab occupation), cannot be excavated. Thus, the most important area for investigation to uncover possible confirmation for David and Solomon is off limits to us.

Secondly, even those areas which *are* partially available to excavate—the ridge known as the City of David, for example—was continuously settled from the tenth to the sixth centuries B.C. Destructions leave a distinct mark in the archaeological record. But where there is continuous occupation (i.e.

conqueror after conqueror) we would not expect to find remains of earlier building activity for the simple reason that Jerusalem was built on terraces and bedrock. Each new conqueror destroyed what was underneath, robbed and reused stones from earlier structures, and set its foundations again on solid rock.

We mostly have Herod to thank for our present inaccessibility to what lies underneath the flat, massive platform of today's Temple Mount when he began construction in 20/19 B.C. To accomplish this task of leveling, it is estimated that roughly 1.1 million cubic feet of rock was removed from the northeast corner and was used in the southeastern corner to first fill in a portion of the Kidron Valley and then raise up 150 feet from bedrock with fill to level that side!

So we would not expect to find abundant remains of earlier strata (though there are a few indications [capitals, columns, masonry] of Herod's Temple). For these reasons it is dangerous and misleading to draw negative inferences from the lack of archaeological evidence.

Fortunately, however, we *do* have another means of testing what was happening in Jerusalem even *before* the tenth century B.C. It comes from the Amarna Letters (14th century B.C.) where Jerusalem (referred to as "Urusalim") is specifically mentioned. These 300 documents, written in Akkadian cuneiform, are mostly diplomatic correspondence from local rulers in Canaan to two Pharoahs—Amenophis III [1391-1353] and Amenophis IV (also known as Akhenaten) [1353-1337]. At this time Canaan was under Egyptian hegemony, and Jerusalem was ruled by a local king, or vassal.

It is clear from these documents that 400 years *before* our century in question (tenth century B.C.), Jerusalem was a capital city over a considerable area, and we are told it had a palace, a court with attendants and servants, a temple, and scribes who had charge of diplomatic correspondence with

Egyptian authorities. Six letters were sent by the king of Jerusalem to the pharaohs, which confirm a diplomatic sophistication of his court and the quality of his scribe.

Apart from these crucial letters, we find the *archaeological* evidence to confirm this history both *opaque* and *nil*. Scholars would never have guessed from their excavations of Jerusalem that any scribal activity took place there in Late Bronze Age II. We should not be surprised at this, however. From the standpoint of location, elevation, climate, water sources, and defense, Jerusalem is, and always has been, by far the most choice and desirable place for occupation and settlement. That being the case, we should be surprised if we found *no* indication of ancient activity there.

The truth of the matter is we must realize how little has been recovered; and perhaps how little can ever be recovered from ancient Jerusalem. There is very little from the 17th century, the 16th century, 15th, 14th, 13th, 12th, 11th, 10th, or the 9th century B.C.! Or to put it in other terms, we have little archaeological evidence of Jerusalem for the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age I or from the first couple of centuries of Iron Age II—a period of a *thousand* years!

But it isn't totally void of evidence. The "Stepped Stone" Structure on the eastern ridge of the city of David, the oldest part of Jerusalem, is a mammoth, five-story support for some unknown structure above it. It measures 90 feet high and 130 feet long. The dates given to it by archaeologists range from the late 13th to the late 10th centuries. But whatever the exact date will turn out to be within these centuries, this structure shows that Jerusalem could boast of an impressive architectural achievement(s) and had a population large enough to engage in such huge public works projects. This structure dates to David's time, or earlier. Contrary to some archaeologists who claim "no evidence," some 10th century pottery has been found, though not in great abundance (which holds true for all the other centuries at Jerusalem). Milat

Ezar also dates a black juglet found which dates to the tenth century. Ezar also dates the fortifications and gate just above its location as also tenth century B.C.

Granted, the Jerusalem of the United Monarchy was not as grand or glorious as Herod's Jerusalem, but the alternative conclusion that the city was abandoned for a thousand years on the basis of the paucity of archaeological evidence, seems to me to be very improbable. And I reach this conclusion, not on any Biblical evidence, but quite apart from it.

A further example comes from the fifth century B.C., and specifically the rebuilding of the Temple and walls of Jerusalem by Ezra and Nehemiah after the Babylonian captivity (when the Persians allowed the Jews to return). The Temple is assumed not to have been anything beyond a very modest structure. In fact, it was never even referred to by the Jews as the "Second Temple" and was demolished when Herod began his project in the first century B.C. But there is little doubt that Nehemiah's wall *was* constructed, even though almost no trace of it has been found in excavations. Jerusalem of the Persian period is known only from fills and building fragments and is mainly identified because it is sandwiched between the debris from the Iron Age and the Hellenistic periods. This is another example of the difficulty in recovering strata that developed peacefully and did not end with some catastrophic construction, and thus another caution against drawing negative conclusions from negative archaeological evidence. I will come back to this with some conclusions after we have considered David and Solomon.

David and Solomon

With respect to David, until recently no historical, archaeological evidence has been available to deny or confirm if he lived. But in 1993, the discovery by excavator Avraham Biran of a stone slab (and two additional fragments of same) at the ancient Tel Dan near Mt. Hermon contains an extra-

biblical reference to David. The specific words are “Beth David,” or, “House of David.” This is a formulaic term frequently used, not just by Israel, but by all peoples throughout the Levant to describe a particular dynasty—their own, or other States (political entities). A small group of archaeologists have rejected it out of hand, and some have even suggested that it is probably a forgery *planted* by Avraham Biran himself! In reality, the inscription was found, *in situ*, in *secondary* use, that is, reused and inserted into the outer wall of a gate that was destroyed in the eighth century B.C. by the Assyrians. Paleographically, experts date it to the ninth century B.C.

The discovery of this artifact presents a terrible problem for the archaeologists you appear to have been reading, because this is a non-Israelite source, outside the Bible, that refers to the dynasty, or “House” of David.

There are two other possible indications (not yet conclusive) which mention David. Kenneth Kitchen (University of Liverpool) makes a strong case for a mention of David by pharaoh Sheshonq I in the tenth century B.C. It is in the temple of Amun at Karnak. This pharaoh is mentioned in I Kings 14:25 (Hebrew: *Shishak*). The exact letters are *dvt*. In the transliteration of words from one Semitic language to another, **d** and **t** are often used interchangeably. We have a clear example of this from the sixth century B.C. in a victory inscription of an Ethiopic ruler who is celebrating his triumphs. He quotes two of David’s Psalms (19 and 65), and the reference is *unmistakably* to the Biblical king David. Here too the **t** is used rather than the **d**. Granted, this is sixth century, but it shows an Ethiopic king was aware of and refers to David as a real person and two of his literary efforts.

An additional reference comes from the Moabite Stone (which is not yet completely deciphered). It is also called the Mesha Stele, which is contemporaneous with the Tel Dan inscription (ninth century B.C.) Andre Lemaire, the eminent French

paleographer, believes he has detected a reference to the House of David on the Mesha Stele.

With respect to Solomon, we can pretty well document when he ruled (and) died by comparing the King Lists of the Assyrians and the Egyptians with each other as well as with various kings of Judah, of Israel, of Egypt, and Assyria mentioned in Kings, Chronicles, and the Prophets of the O.T.

Astronomy helps us here. The Assyrians recorded a solar eclipse during the reign of Assur-dan III, and modern astronomers have calculated a firm date that it occurred in 763 B.C. We have from Assyria a record of 261 continuous years, with names and dates of kings as well as the noting of any important events which occurred during each year. We thus have a "peg" for a long line of Assyrian rulers from 910 to 649 B.C.

There is no controversy about the *Divided* kingdom. At some historical time (Solomon's death—930 B.C.) the United Kingdom split, with Reheboam, Solomon's son, ruling as king of Judah in the south, and simultaneously, Jeroboam I assumed rule of northern Palestine and became the first king of Israel.

Solomon's son, Rehoboam (his reign: 931-913 B.C.) is not mentioned by name in Egyptian or Assyrian records (like Ahab Jehu, and Jereboam, etc), but we have a very clear and accurate Egyptian chronology of the ten kings of the XXII Dynasty, beginning with Shoshenq I (Shisack in Hebrew)'s invasion of Israel (926,925 B.C.) during the time of Reheboam's reign. (Cf. I Kings 14:35,36; II Chronicles 12:1-9 where this king and this event are recorded.) Both Egyptian and Bible chronologies mirror one another!

We are talking history here. The Bible records this invasion during Rehoboam's reign. Shoshenq chronology confirms the event. And if we can point with accuracy to an event which occurred at the very time the Bible designates Reheboam and

his reign, what assumptions should we come to about the history immediately preceding it? If Rehoboam is an historical figure, why do we assume arbitrarily that his father (Solomon) is a fictitious/mythical character just because we haven't yet been fortunate enough to find archaeological confirmation? Until recently we have said the same thing for a time about many of the items/people/places mentioned above. Again, lack of evidence does not equal "myth."

In the ninth century B.C., Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) mentions two kings of Israel: Ahab (872-853 B.C.) in 853 B.C.and Jehu (841-818 B.C.) in 841 B.C. Using the Assyrian dates, we can count back the years from 853 B.C. 78 years and arrive at the year of Solomon's death and the beginning of the reigns of both Reheboam and and Jeroboam I (931/930 B.C.) The Biblical chronology *mirrors* these dates. Now, without written records of some kind, how could this clever author(s) of the fifth century B.C., who purportedly conjured up all of this, create such a detailed chronology with such accuracy?

I am not going to go into more detail about Solomon which ties into the hot debate over the tenth century B.C. These involve for example Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor which the Bible attributes to Solomon with their impressive renovations during this century. We are told in the Bible that Solomon married pharaoh's daughter and gave Gezer to him as her dowry (1 Kings 3:1; 7:8; 9:16,24; 11:1). This Pharaoh was probably Siamun (979-960 B.C.).

In summary, all indications are that Solomon's life took place in the middle of the tenth century B.C. (970-930). Using the Egyptian and Assyrian king lists, which agree with the Biblical royal chronologies, we can pinpoint Solomon's death: 930/931 B.C. We find at this time that the pharaohs were marrying their daughters to various foreign rulers. There is no reason to reject the premise that mini-empires such as David's and Solomon's could flourish in the centuries between 1200-900 B.C. when the power of the two great empires (Egypt

and Assyria) began to and did wane.

I do not think one can make a good case that some Hellenistic writer from 300 B.C. would possess the resources/information at that late date to write with such accuracy of the United Kingdom as we find from the biblical sources.

I have borrowed liberally from a host of archaeologists to respond to your question. I have not taken the time to document/footnote all this material which has come from numerous, well-known archaeologists from Europe, Israel, and the U.S.A.

If you would read a wider spectrum of scholars you will find the vast majority reject your major premise on these areas. I can document all of this if necessary.

Jimmy Williams
Probe Ministries

"Is There a Version of the Bible that Agrees with the Chester Beatty Manuscripts?"

I read your article on early Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Someday I would like to make my own translation of the Bible using these early manuscripts. God willing I hope to someday attend Dallas Theological Seminary. Since p45 p46 p47 p66 p75 [of the Chester Beatty Papyrus group] contain almost all of the New Testament, is there a version/translation of the Bible that agrees with these manuscripts?

Thank you for your e-mail. And thank you for informing me you

have read my essay, "Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?"

I commend you on your desire to learn the Koine Greek of the New Testament so that you may be able to translate it in the original language. I myself attended Dallas Theological Seminary (1960-64) and received my Th.M. degree. I have never regretted that I went there.

I believe that at DTS you are given the largest "shovel" with which to dig into the Scriptures. I have continued to study Old and New Testaments in the original languages now for forty years. I never fail to see something that blesses me and gives richer clarity and meaning to my understanding of the text.

Now let me respond to your question about the Chester Beatty Papyrus group.

P 45 was originally a codex which contained all Four Gospels and the Book of Acts. Unfortunately, what we HAVE are two leaves of Matthew, seven of Luke, two of John, and thirteen of Acts.

P 46 consists of eighty-six nearly perfect leaves, out of a total of 104, which contain Paul's epistles. Philemon and the Pastoral Epistles (I & II Timothy, Titus are missing, but Hebrews is included.

P 47 contains Revelation 9:10 to 17:2, except one or more lines is missing from the top of each page. So this is a little under half of the book of Revelation.

These three volumes are dated at the early 200s A.D. Mr. Beatty found these papyrus leaves in Egypt in 1930 and bought them from an antiquites dealer.

There are also portions of seven manuscripts of the Old Testament as well as some extra-canonical writings.

Photographic facimilies have been created for each page and are available for study. All of the verses which we have from

them have been edited by Frederic Kenyon. The have also been made available in the critical text of Erwin Nestle's translation of the New Testament (title: *Novum Testamentum Graece*).

Most modern versions/translations of the New Testament in English are based upon this text, so the Chester Beatty Material is imbedded within the translation wherever extant material was available to impact or contribute to the text.

This entire work is based on a compilation mostly of the Chester Beatty material, but also includes the other ancient Greek documents of the New Testament.

I would recommend that you buy Nestle's Greek Text of the New Testament, start learning Greek, and you will be reaching your stated objective, since the Chester Beatty material is there. You could check with the American Bible Society (the actual publisher is Wurtt.Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, Germany). Or, contact the nearest theological seminary to your home, and go to their bookstore. They will have it or they can order it. I do not think you will find it in a Christian bookstore (although they may be able to find and order it for you.)

I believe this is a good first step. Looking at the Cheaster Beatty facsimilies would be a daunting and discouraging venture unless you were well versed in the Greek of the Bible.

I hope this answers your question.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

“If the Biblical Documents Are So Reliable, How Do You Explain the Differences?”

Dear Mr. Williams,

I read your article, “Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?” and I have a question about the Massoretic tribes. If the Massoretes counted the characters (letters) in each text as you stated to verify the total number of alephs, beths, gimels, etc., in the original document, and if they also counted to be sure that the middle character was the same in the copy as in the original, how is it that the Qumran scroll of Isaiah 53 had 17 additional characters that are different from the Massoretic text? Did they just forget how to count?

The accuracy of the Massoretic documents is given by your article as evidence for the bibliographic authenticity of the Old Testament. This accuracy is based upon your description of their methods in copying documents. Finally, the scrolls found at Qumran are compared to available and historically more recent copies, on the assumption that the same methods were used in copying both sets.

If the Qumran scrolls are practically identical with the previously available documents, or so the argument goes, then we can rest assured that the Massoretic tradition of impeccable copying has been carried on faithfully throughout the millenia, and that—by implication—our own Bibles have been translated from accurate texts.

In fact, the details of exactly how the Massoretes maintained accuracy by counting characters, finding the middle character of the copy and the original, etc., tell us that either the Massoretes did not make create the Qumran scrolls, or their method changed over the years; or they never used the

character-counting method in the first place.

Without the original insistence that we know how the Massoretes kept accurate copies, the strong similarity between the previously available and more recent documents, and the Qumran scrolls which were more ancient documents, would have been a convincing argument for the accurate translation or "Bibliographical authenticity" of Scripture.

With that detail of Massoretic method, however, your argument falls apart. This bothers me all the more, as I realize I have used the same argument in the past myself. Can't we do better than this?

Thank you for your e-mail. First of all, I must point out an error in your analysis. You ask, "How is it that the Qumran scroll of Isaiah 53 had 17 additional characters that are different from the Massoretic text?" You misread what I said in my essay on the Reliability of the Biblical Documents about the variants. The 17 additional characters were not in the Qumran text; they are in the Massoretic text. In other words, over the thousand years between the two texts, these 17 additional characters were added by scribes. But I refer you back to my essay and my comments about how inconsequential they really are with regard to the text and its meaning. Does that change anything for you? I will come back to this, but a larger question you pose has to do with the transmission of the text over 3,000+ years.

The answer to your concern has to do with the historical development of copying the Hebrew text. Let me begin with some info about the Massoretes.

They flourished in the tenth century A.D. We don't have to guess that this procedure of "counting characters" was being practiced at that time—we know that it was. And in order for the Massoretes to have such a remarkable agreement with the Qumran scrolls (we use the term "scrolls"—there are a few, but

the bulk of the material are fragments) tells us that there must have been a similar rabbinic tradition stretching back a thousand years to the time of Christ and Qumran. We know this counting method was in operation in the tenth century, but we do not know how far this practice goes back, or when it was first implemented. But for there to be such close agreement in tenth century A.D., care for the preservation and accuracy of text had to be practiced by scribes from the first to the tenth century A.D. So this answers part of your question.

Preservation of Hebrew life and religious practice really got going after the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) when Titus destroyed it. The major center of rabbinic tradition after 70 A.D. developed at Tiberius, a city on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. It was here, after the temple was destroyed and the Jews were dispersed from Jerusalem, that the Rabbis began to rethink and preserve Jewish life and religion. Many areas of Jewish thought and religious practice developed over that time, and it was here that the later Massoretes would live.

You need to read a little bit more on what was actually going on at Qumran. This group of Jews is identified by most scholars with the “Essenes.” The basis of this acceptance among most scholars comes from extant testimony of three contemporary writers, Josephus (A.D. 37-c.100), Pliny (A.D. 61-113), and Philo (c. 20 B.C.-50 A.D.). The information from these writers about the Essenes fits very well with what we know about the Qumran Community.

Originating in Syria around 200 B.C., this monastic community was really a “splinter” group which rejected some of the teachings of the main Jewish tradition which were in force from c. 200 B.C. to the wars fought against the Romans (A.D. 68-73). Around 75-50 B.C. they moved to Qumran. Archaeology seems to indicate that the Romans destroyed the Qumran community after the fall of Jerusalem, and probably during the two years they were trying to take Masada. No further archeological evidence appears there after the first century,

and Josephus says all of the inhabitants—men, women, children—were killed by the Romans.

I don't know how familiar you are with the Dead Sea Scroll materials, but I will focus on the actual copies and fragments which relate only to the biblical text. A study of this material includes both biblical and the non-biblical texts (which are made up mostly of either commentaries on the 39 OT books in the Protestant Bible, and commentaries on the Apocryphal books, or of texts about the history and governance of the Qumran Community).

As a protest movement, Qumran did many things differently from those main-stream Jews practicing their religion in Jerusalem/Palestine prior to 70 A.D. I would strongly suggest that you read *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* by Geza Vermes (Penguin Press). I have read them all. Without going into detail, Vermes points out that, while the Essenes highly prized the Hebrew scriptures, and studied and copied them diligently, their process for doing so was much more fluid than what we find in the Massoretic tradition. There are different textual traditions at work in a number of O.T. books, but perhaps the most interesting is the Book of Jeremiah. These are not major, but some sections are placed in a different order, and by this time the tradition of the Septuagint (the Greek Translation of the O.T.) also provides another and somewhat different text which was also translated back into Hebrew!

The major value of the Qumran texts is that they allow us to get 1000 years closer to the originals than the Massoretic text allowed before 1947 (when the scrolls were first discovered). As far as the Hebrew Text is concerned, from c. 1000 AD to our time, changes in the Hebrew text are literally non-existent. The Hebrew texts as we know them have changed little since the Massoretes wrote them down a thousand years ago. We actually have copies of the Hebrew text which date to the 10th Century.

Now I go back to your question concerning the variants in Isaiah 53. Perhaps my correction of your interpretive error above has solved this problem. You seem to be outraged that there were 17 variables which crept in to Isaiah 53 over a thousand years. I would ask you to look again at my essay on the Biblical Documents and study the nature of those variants! They are insignificant! In light of what I have said above about the Qumran community and the more fluid nature of their handling of Scriptural material, the amazing thing to me is how clean and void the Massoretic text still is of variants when compared with the Qumran texts!

In order for the Massoretes to have possessed such manuscripts in their day with only slight variations from the Qumran text, we can be sure of one thing: I say again the major rabbinic tradition of the first century (after the Temple was destroyed) must have already been treating the copying of Scripture with great care. Otherwise, the Massoretes ten centuries later would not have had access to such a text so pure that only seventeen little non-essential variants had crept into Isaiah 53 over a thousand years! And remember, the Qumran texts were not available to these Massoretic Rabbis. The Qumran texts were still buried in the caves by the Dead Sea, waiting to be discovered a thousand years later!

To sum up, not only do we have two Hebrew texts a thousand years apart, we also have two traditions, the Massoretic tradition/text and the Qumran tradition/text. Both of these Jewish traditions developed out of the same era: c.200 B.C.-73 A.D. While these two flourishing Jewish communities had many things in common, they were, at the time, pretty much estranged, if not outright enemies. Their differences are fairly well-defined from the data that we have available.

Obviously, the biblical texts at Qumran came from the other community, because there was no Qumran sect until c.200-150 B.C. The fact that the biblical textual material at Qumran contains an Isaiah text (for example) of such quality would

also be an indication, or a “pointer” that the Hebrew texts were being carefully copied at the time when the Qumran group acquired their copies of the Old Testament scriptures! So you have to ask the question, “From what text (manuscript, copy) of Isaiah, for example, did the Qumran scribes have to copy?” We don’t know. But what we do know is what their copy looked like, because we can go to Jerusalem and into the Shrine of the Book and see it!

_____, I don’t see where my argument falls apart. Have I missed something here? Let me hear from you. . . .

Jimmy Williams
Founder, Probe Ministries

The question I am posing is, What do we know about the authenticity of the Bible, based on the written records. As far as I can see you are telling me that the Massoretic tradition does not extend backwards in history to the creation of the original documents. Therefore the accuracy with which the Massoretes worked is relevant if, and only if, we accept that between the original documents and the Massoretic tradition, which I believe you say spans something like ten centuries, somehow accuracy was maintained.

I believe you have information on the Massoretic tradition, and on the Qumran work also. I believe you do not have information on the period from the original creation of the manuscripts, up to the Massoretic time.

I am not trying to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Bible. I have my own reasons for believing that it is the word of God. However, the argument which you have put forward is false. We cannot believe that today’s Bible is accurate just based on your argument; because it has nothing to do with the link between the original manuscripts and the stuff that the Massoretes had to work with.

There’s no clear link between the original documents and the hands of the first Massoretic scribe, unless I’m missing something.

Dear _____,

I think you are missing something. Let me run through it again.

You conclude by saying “there is no clear link between the original documents and the hands of the first Massoretic scribe.” First, let’s get the chronology clearly in mind. There are many indications of “links,” and I will list them in reverse order:

Massoretic text	Tenth Century A.D	Hebrew
Syriac Peshitta	Third Century A.D.	Aramaic/Syriac: Very early.
Latin Vulgate	Fourth Century A.D.	Jerome Translation (386 A.D.)
Qumran Scrolls	First Century A.D.	Aramaic and Old Hebrew
Septuagint	Third Century B.C.	Greek
Ezra/Nehemiah	Fifth Century B.C.	
Era of the Prophets	Eighth to Fifth Century B.C.	
Kings & Chronicles	Eighth to Fifth Century B.C.	
Wisdom Literature	Tenth to Fifth Century B.C.	
Exodus/Judges	Twelfth to Tenth Century B.C.	

Now we have no extant material of any Old Testament text. None of the original, actual documents have survived. But we do

have the above textual traditions in various languages, which all contain translations of the Hebrew text. This leads us to consider the possible elements, times, traditions, communities which were involved in the development and transmission of the Hebrew text from the original autographs to the present.

And you have to remember that the texts of the Old Testament (when the original documents were actually created) were a "work in progress" over many centuries. Within the Bible itself, we find numerous indications of both oral and written documentation being preserved and passed on clear back to the Pentateuch, and throughout the historical books, the wisdom literature, and the prophets beginning with the eleventh and tenth centuries B.C.

We can go back to the fifth century B.C., for example, at that time when Ezra and Nehemiah brought the Jews back to Jerusalem from their captivity in Babylon and rebuilt the temple and the city walls. The Bible records there was a great revival at that time which included the rediscovery of written biblical documents which were read aloud to the people. This indicates an even earlier source which the Jews, the Qumran community and later the Massoretes would later benefit from in the preservation of the text. If these were written materials at that time, it suggests that there must have been even earlier textual material already present among the Jews.

Another source is available to us for comparison which comes from the third century B.C—the very important source for comparison comes from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). Due to Hellenistic influences in the Middle East, many Jews now spoke Greek. The date of the Septuagint's creation may have been as early as 280 B.C. We can compare this translation with Qumran and the Massoretic texts and find that it agrees in all essentials with the Hebrew Manuscripts. Again, we must conclude that this Greek translation of the third century B.C. could only have been produced from the Hebrew texts that were available to them at

the time these scholars set about to render the Hebrew text into the Greek language.

So I believe that your charge that there are no clear links from the original autographs to the Massoretic tradition is not defensible. No matter which text material we look at, the remarkable thing about all of these different translations when compared is the fact that agreement reaches about 95%, and none of the variants, interpolations, additions, etc., do anything to change the substance and meaning of the Hebrew text.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

"Do Babies Go to Hell?"

Do you believe that babies go to hell or not? Please support your answer with Scripture.

This is an issue that challenges or questions the justice of God. It is a legitimate question, and I must say at the outset we cannot give a total answer. But there are passages in the Bible which shed a great deal of light on the subject. I will try to address the ones that have come to my mind which I think bear directly or indirectly on your question of the innocence/accountability of children.

Generally speaking, we are asking the question, "What do children know and when do they know it? And the key issue here is one of comprehension of, or the understanding of the Gospel message. This is not only true for children, it is true for adults. When Philip saw the Ethiopian eunuch sitting in his

chariot reading Isaiah 53, he was instructed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:29) to "Go up and join this chariot." Philip asked him if he **understood** what he was reading. The eunuch replied, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides Me?" (v. 31). Acts 8:32-40 goes on to relate that Philip explained how this Eunuch could become a Christian. He responded and was baptized.

My point in beginning with this incident is because there can be no salvation without an understanding of the gospel message. We find Paul throughout the book of Acts reasoning, debating, contending with people so they might understand the message of salvation. And so children must be old enough to **understand** the gospel, which involves a comprehension of their own personal sin and guilt.

This brings the next question: *At what age would that be?* I am sorry that I cannot give an affirmative answer since the Scripture never pinpoints clearly the exact age when this occurs. The Talmud from ancient times designated age thirteen for boys ("Bar Mitzvah,"—cf. *Judaism*, Arthur Hertzberg, p. 100) and twelve for girls ("Bat Mizvah"). This was the time when Jewish boys and girls became responsible for themselves and were to observe all the rituals, feasts, etc., incumbent upon them as members of the Jewish community. It was also the time when the boys were allowed (called) to read the Torah as full members of the worshipping community.

The confirmation services for the young which are practiced in all Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and some Protestant churches are based on the earlier Jewish traditions above. All of them, including the Jewish community, have traditionally set the "age of accountability at about age twelve.

It is also interesting that Luke records the incident at the temple where a twelve-year-old Jesus lagged behind his family and was found (three days later!) in the temple "sitting amidst the teachers both listening to them and asking them

questions. . .And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers." (Luke 2:46,47).

We can glean from other Old Testament passages additional insights:

1. I Samuel 1:22-18; 3:1-19: Hannah, married to Elkanah, was barren. She made a vow to the Lord that if He would give her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord for lifelong service. God graciously did so, and Samuel was born. Hannah cared for him and told her husband she would not go up to the Tabernacle (at Shiloh) for the annual sacrifice (Day of Atonement) until she had weaned Samuel, saying, *"I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord and stay there forever."* (1:22).

The weaning of Hebrew (and other ancient) children did not occur until two or three years, and nursing may have extended beyond to perhaps age five. Therefore Samuel was a very young boy when he was dedicated to the service of the temple. Hannah says on this occasion, "For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him. . .So I have also dedicated him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the Lord. And she worshipped the Lord there."(1:27,28). We are also told in 2:11 that "the boy ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest." Verses 2:18-21 indicate that the boy was visited each year by his mother, at which time she would bring him a new, little robe. Several years are indicated in this passage, including the fact that Hannah had given birth to three more sons and two daughters. We can conclude, since Samuel was at least three or four years old when initially brought to the temple, he would at least be nine or ten, and could have been even older (a teenager) when he had his visitation and call from the Lord in I Samuel 3:1-21. The critical verse in this chapter is as follows: "Now Samuel **did not yet know the Lord**, nor had the word of the Lord yet been revealed to him." (v. 7).

So here again, Samuel could well have been around age twelve when this event occurred, an incident pointing out a demarcation in his life—of "not knowing" and then "knowing" the Lord.

2. Another passage which marks out this demarcation is found in Nehemiah 8:1-3. After Nehemiah and the Jews had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem they gathered together in worship to hear Ezra the Scribe read the Torah: "And the people gathered as one man, . . .and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of **men, women, and all who could listen with *understanding*.** And he read from it before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of **men and women, those who could *understand*;** and all the people were **attentive** to the book of the law. . .And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the **sense** so that they **understood** the reading (v.8). By implication, the younger children—those without understanding—were **not** present.

3. Another interesting "accountability" issue is found in the Torah which involves the numbering of the fighting men of Israel in the book of Numbers. We are told in Numbers 1 that Moses was instructed to "take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and their families. . .according to the number of names, every male, head by head **from twenty years and upward,** whoever is able to go out to war in Israel." (1:2,3). This passage informs us that there were *no teenagers* in Israel's army. This census was taken at the end of the entire year the Israelites spent at Mt. Sinai where they received the Law, and during which time they built the Tabernacle and organized themselves into a well-defined community. They were now to embark upon the conquest of Canaan. However, they were called upon to postpone that conquest because of their unbelief and disobedience at Kadesh Barnea. God sent them into the wilderness for forty years

after their “Reconnaissance” of Canaan by the twelve spies ended in failure.

After this forty-year exile we read in Deuteronomy 2:14-16, “Now the time that it took for us to come from Kadesh-barnea to (here has been) thirty-eight years; until all the generation of the men of war perished from within the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them. Moreover the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from within the camp, until they all perished.”

What is significant here is that those men who perished were those selected for the army forty years earlier whose ages ranged from twenty to age sixty. The Bible says that by thirty-eight years later, all of these men, the men of “unbelief,” had now died off, leaving only the new generation which *would* be allowed to enter Canaan. This new “fighting force” would include that original group of males (from age 1 to 19 (which would now be ages 40 to 59) as well as all the males which had been born during the roughly forty years of Wilderness wanderings. So here again, there is an “age of accountability” factor taken into account by the Lord and His servant, Moses. There was no judgment upon this younger group of males. They were allowed to enter Canaan and participate in the conquest of the Land.

There is another passage that touches on this later “age of accountability” from the life of Jehoiachin, II Kings 24:8: “Jehoiachin was **eighteen** years old when he became king. . .and he did **evil** in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done.” So here we find an eighteen- year-old king who is viewed by the Lord as being accountable for the evil he had already done.

I put this section in, but I don’t personally believe that exempting the “under-twenty-year-olds” at the time of the Exodus is a likely precedent for an age of accountability. Furthermore, we find in the legal regulations of the Torah

that a disobedient and unmanageable teenager was responsible for his actions, and could be stoned to death by the community! This could occur for cursing his parents, violence, drunkenness, adultery, and so forth. So, in my thinking, the ten to twelve year age would seem more likely for an age of understanding or accountability.

4. Another passage which bears upon our question comes from the life of David, and specifically the outcome of his sin with Bathsheba and the premeditated murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (II Samuel 11 & 12). You will recall that David lusted after Bathsheba's great beauty and committed adultery with her, after which she became pregnant (11:1-5). David gave instructions to have Uriah placed "in the fiercest battle and withdraw from him so that he may be struck down and die." (11:15). After Uriah's death, David brought Bathsheba to his house as his wife, and she bore him a son. (11:27) Nathan the prophet confronts David with his sin and says, "because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die.: Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick." (12:14,15).

The child lingered for seven days and then died. During this time, David prayed and fasted and laid on the ground. When the child died the servants were afraid to tell David, but he saw them whispering and they finally told him, "He is dead." (12:19).

When David heard this, he got up, washed himself, changed his clothes, asked for food and ate. His servants were perplexed by this: while the child lived, David mourned. When the child died, David got up and ate food. They wondered why. David said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live. But now he has died; why should I fast.? Can I bring him back again? ***I shall go to him*****, but he will not return to me."**(12:22,23)

David has a view of death and immortality which expresses itself in this incident involving the death of a child. David believes in the after life. In Psalm 23 he concludes by saying: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” So for David there was a place for the dead, including children—the house, or the dwelling place, of the Lord. David also speaks of this in Psalm 16:9,10 where he says, “For thou wilt not abandon (leave) my soul in Sheol (the grave); Neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to see (experience) decay (corruption).” David believes in the resurrection of the body—for himself, and for the Messiah (the Holy One) (see also Acts 13:35). Job says something very similar: “And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is flayed (corrupted) Yet without my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another.”

The point of David’s perspective is that he believes that the child is still alive and in God’s presence, David anticipates that when *he* dies, he will join his little son in the house of the Lord: “I shall go to him.”

5. Finally, we have the teachings of Jesus Himself. In Matthew 19:13-15, our Lord says as the children we being hindered from coming near to Him, *“Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these, and after laying His hands on them, He departed. . .”*

Christ has a special love for little children. Why He associates children with the Kingdom of Heaven is because it is the place of the innocent, the blameless. It would appear that Jesus sees children in this light. The whole trend of Scripture seems to teach that the innocents who are too young to sin and too young to accept Christ intelligently (*with understanding!)*, are safe in the arms of a just and holy God.

We need never fear about God being unjust. He cannot be. His mercy and justice are from everlasting to everlasting. I therefore conclude, that there will be no children in hell. There will also be no retarded, or otherwise mentally-incapacitated individuals there, those who cannot fully comprehend and understand what Christ has accomplished on their behalf at Calvary.

In summary, I think we can conclude the following:

First, that there is some period of grace afforded the young before they have developed an understanding to fully comprehend the gospel message and its implications for their lives.

Second, there seems to be good scriptural support that all infants, like David's little son, go immediately, in their innocence, into the arms of the Lord.

Third, that the likely range of such an age of "accountability " may occur around the time of puberty.

Fourth, that we are not saying children younger than this "accountability age" commit no sin (as sinful tendencies and acts occur quite early in children), and because of their fallen nature, they do these things spontaneously, things which they have definitely NOT learned from their parents or their friends). What we are saying is that up to the point when they reach clear understanding, they do not come under the judgment of the Law.

I'm sure that much more could be gleaned from the scriptures on this, but these passages came to my mind. At least it's a start at answering your question, D____. I hope this helps.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Yes Sir, that does help. Thanks very much. What you wrote is

what I've long believed, without really knowing how to defend it biblically.

Now for a follow-up question which seems to spring quite logically from what you wrote: If God exempts from holding accountable for their sins those who are not old enough to have "understanding," and those of any age who are incapable of having "understanding" (such as the mentally retarded), is it also possible, Scripturally speaking, that He exempts in some measure those who have never heard of Jesus at all—judging them perhaps by whatever standard He utilized for those before Christ (lived), both Jews and non-Jews, some of whom certainly gained eternal life, rather than automatically condemning them for not accepting the Savior of whom they never heard?

I would suggest you check the Probe web site and look for three articles which address this question: "What About the Person Who Never Heard of Jesus," "Is Jesus the Only Savior?" and "Is There a Second Chance to Believe After Death?"

I would say in addition, to your remarks about Old Testament believers, that there were two kinds of people before Christ just as there are two kinds of people now: **believers** and **unbelievers**.

It is helpful for me to think of this in terms of a painting. As early as Genesis 3:15, immediately after the "Disobedience/Fall" God began to reveal His plan of redemption. He speaks there of the "Seed" of a Woman" who would one day **crush** the head of Satan and destroy his power and influence on the earth.

As we move through the Old Testament, God continues, with broad strokes at first, to sketch out the details of Who this Person would be. By the time we get to Malachi, a fairly accurate portrait of Messiah and His Mission has been provided. The New Testament is the fulfillment of that

unfolding from the Old.

Jesus said, “Your Father Abraham **saw my day** (time, era) and rejoiced in it” (John 8:16). Now, what did He see (comprehend, understand)? Not the **whole** picture revealed in the New Testament, but enough information for him to have a basis (God’s promise of a Messiah) for his trust, his belief, at that time.

Noah is another example. There is nothing directly mentioned about the Messiah in the Noah narrative (except the fact that the Ark itself is a **type** of Christ—those inside the Ark were saved; those outside the Ark perished), the important principle is that God revealed some things to Noah and asked him to be obedient to them.

We cannot understand this Old Testament Salvation issue unless we see clearly what God was doing. What was He doing from Genesis 3:15 to the end of the Old Testament? He was progressively revealing more and more details about His promised Messiah. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, “God spoke long ago to the fathers by the prophets and in may portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”

It seems apparent that the Old Testament saints had *some* “light” and they were responsible to respond to it. The CROSS has always been the *basis* for our salvation. Those who came before it looked *forward* in time to when it *would* be fulfilled. Those of us who have lived *after* Jesus’s Day look back to that time when it *was* accomplished. This is the *basis* for our salvation. The *means* of our salvation is always *faith*, encompassing all who lived before and all who lived after the Cross who “believed God” and whatever revelatory information they had at that time. And the *results* of our faith are always expressed in being obedient to those things which God has revealed. I hope this information and the other articles I

have recommended you to read will answer your above question.

Do Babies Go to Hell? #2

This is one of those items that, as you know, God has not revealed. Consider this: If we think they don't, that is, that God takes them all to Heaven, then abortion and the killing of those before the so-called age of accountability would be a great way to have more babies go to Heaven. Consider, what percent of those that reach the so-called age of accountability get saved/born again. By aborting and killing the young children we could increase that to 100 percent. This would of course make abortion and murder good.

Thank you for this response to my remarks about the above topic.

First of all, I respectfully disagree with your first statement. It seems to me that, while we do not have a total answer to this question from the Scriptures, I enumerated several lines of thought pertaining to the question, one of which was a clear, biblical example recorded of a child who had died and went to heaven. So I don't think you could say "God has not revealed anything about this issue to us. We do have *some* information and insight from the Scriptures.

So I will restate my conviction that I do believe there are *not*—nor will there ever be—any children in hell.

Secondly, I don't follow your logic in your next statement. Given my view, any infant death—whether from abortion, accident, disease, assault or other causes—does not matter: *All* babies go to heaven. And so aborting children would *not* be a great way to have more babies go to Heaven, as you suggest, since all of them go to Heaven.

Thirdly, you have tacked on to this another issue which must

be kept separate from the above. You say, I think, that we would be doing *some* persons (those who are not going to become Christians after they have reached the age of accountability when they are held responsible to God for their choices and behavior) a big "favor" by aborting them. I hope I am reading you right.

There are several things very wrong about what you propose: (a) I would assume that you believe, as I do, that the "termination of a pregnancy" (i.e., a euphemism for killing and destroying an unborn infant) is murder. This is a violation of the Sixth Commandment (Ex. 20:13). This commandment alone is in opposition to what you suggest. (b) Further, in order to carry out such a task, you would literally have to be God Himself, since you don't know which ones are the "fledgling" non-believers upon whom you are to perform your acts of "mercy." (c) But why stop there? Why not go ahead and do the same with the mentally-impaired? The comatose? The *"non compos mentis"* elderly? Would they not also qualify? Something is wrong with this picture.

Fourthly, you say that carrying out such an enterprise would "make abortion and murder good." This is actually very far from what I view as a Scriptural perspective. Paul asks, "Shall we sin (continue in sin) so that (we can see) grace abound? (Romans 6:1)" In other words, should we take advantage of God's forgiveness of sins through Christ and go on sinning so we can see His marvelous Grace go to work to cover it? Paul says, "God forbid." He elaborates on this later on: "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cleave to what is good (12:9)." Earlier Paul defends his actions against those who were criticizing him and his colleagues, "slanderously reporting that we say, '*let us* ***do evil*** *that* ***good*** *may come.' Their condemnation is just* (Romans 3:8)." In Psalm 109:3-5 David's words could easily be applied to the unborn: "They have spoken against me. . they have also surrounded me with words of hatred, And fought against me *without cause*. In

return for my love (innocence) they act as my accusers;…Thus they have repaid me *evil for good*. …and *hatred* for my *love.*" In II Corinthians 13:7,8 Paul says, "Now we pray to God *that you do no wrong*…but that you may *do what is right* . …For we can do *nothing* against the *truth*, but only *for* the truth." In Proverbs 17:13 it says, "He who returns evil for good, Evil will not depart from his house." And "He who *justifies* the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an *abomination* to the Lord (vs. 15,16)." And Moses says, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you *life* and *death*, the blessing and the curse. So *choose life* in order that you may live, you and your seed, by loving the Lord your God, by *obeying* His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days (Deut. 30:19,20)." And finally, James says, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does *not tempt anyone* [to do evil] (James 1:13)."

The principle is pretty clear: **"It is never *right* to do *wrong* in order to do *right*." "It is never *good* to do *evil* in order to do *good*."**

I hope this answers your question, _____ .

God's blessings,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Do Babies Go To Hell #3

First, I want to say that our family has been blessed by the ministry of Probe. I've caught up on my mail, and just read the answer to the questions "Do Babies Go to Hell?" There is a passage in Romans that always comes to mind in this regard. It

is Romans 7:9.

> I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

This is “the” verse that really spoke to me about the existence of an “age of accountability,” whatever that age may be. Being a Jew, and a Pharisee at that, I’m sure Paul had a knowledge of the law on some level at an early age. But it wasn’t until it “came” to him (he understood it?) that he was accountable, i.e. he “died” (came under condemnation which he knew was worthy of death).

Just though I’d pass this on. I might not have bothered to respond, not wanting to take time to look up the verse, but I just read Romans 7 this morning so it was “quite” fresh in my mind. And I can never read this without thinking of this point.

May the Lord continue to bless your ministry.

PraiSing Him,

Dear _____,

Thank you for your e-mail and comments on Romans 7:9. It really relates to this subject. I am glad you are benefiting from the Probe web site. Thank you for expressing your appreciation, which is a real encouragement to all the Probe Staff.

Jimmy Williams
Probe Ministries

Do Babies Go To Hell #4

I frequent your web site and have enjoyed it thoroughly. It has helped to shape me and has been a source of God's truth for me. For that I am grateful!! I don't think that once I have ever felt that you have been different than what God's truth says. Below I raise some questions about the recent article about babies' salvation. Please comment to help me understand how you feel. Thanks.

First of all, the Bible says that ". . .all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to our own way. . ." ". . . there is none that doeth good, no not one." These folks that believe that children won't be held accountable for their sins, I believe, don't understand the fallen nature of man and the righteous character of an all-Holy God.

Even David had a handle on this doctrine when he wrote in Psalm 51: "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me."

It's important to note that the "all" and "everyone" listed above means all people, even babies, born and yet unborn. We are by nature sinful, which means we are spiritually dead and enemies of God. Spiritually-dead people (of any age) cannot make themselves spiritually alive any more than physically-dead people can make themselves physically alive.

Spiritually-dead babies are enemies of God and separated from Him and completely unable to change that situation. The nature of God is that He is totally just and righteous. The Bible says, ". . . I am of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "I will by no means clear the guilty." He had sworn a "thousand" times in Scripture to punish sin wherever He finds it. His justice demands that He do it. He cannot make any exceptions.

So. . .this is why Jesus came to earth to die on the cross. If babies were not going to be held accountable for their sins (and would automatically go to heaven when they die) as this fellow teaches, then Jesus wasn't needed for them. This path would lead us to believe that Jesus came to die only for those who have reached that mystical "age of accountability" and understand their sinful condition and can make a decision regarding the gospel. It is true that as we mature and do become aware of our thoughts and behavior and choices that we will be held accountable for them. Those who assert that the age of accountability is when children become responsible before God, yet none of them seem to know when that age is. Wouldn't it seem important to know that?

One more thing. By stating that we must reach this (unknown) age before we can understand and believe and thus be responsible for our salvation puts some of the credit for our being saved upon US, doesn't it?

The business of enlightening souls and saving same belongs to the Holy spirit. Martin Luther stated, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in God or come to Him. . ." We are saved by God alone. "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

We are accountable for our sins from conception and can only be saved when the Holy Spirit gives us this faith and changes us from spiritually dead to spiritually alive. This is why we embrace Baptism. In I Peter 3:21, Peter states: "Therefore we conclude, that Baptism doth also save us, not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

In Baptism, we are responding to a command of Christ's and the Holy Spirit promises to save us through the water and the Word by this act. What do you think of this?

Thank you for your recent e-mail. I appreciate the fact that you have found benefit from the Probe Website. I am the fellow you refer to who is responsible for writing the e-mail, “Do Babies Go to Hell?”

In your first two paragraphs you mention the fact that from conception babies bear the stamp of sin. I have no problem with this as long as we understand what that means. And what it means is that babies are members of a fallen race (See my discussion on this in E-Mail #1). Sin is passed on genetically from the male. This was why the Virgin Birth was necessary and specifically why Jesus was “without sin.” He is therefore the only exception to the general rule.

And I also agree with you that apart from the working of God, all humans are spiritually dead until they hear the Gospel, respond to it and are born again into the family of God.

You say that “spiritually-dead babies (born and unborn) are enemies of God, separated from Him, and are completely unable to change that situation.” And I agree with you on the basis of what I have just said above. But I want to ask you a question. Do you then believe that every embryo, every unborn fetus, and all toddlers, let’s say, from the beginning of time until now, are actually in hell? What if we add four and five-year olds? Them too? I don’t think so. But this is what you are asserting to be true.

I point you back to a review of my original discussion in E-Mail #1 about an alternative to your conclusion and one which has some (not exhaustive) support in the Scriptures. Specifically, I would ask you to focus on David’s experience with his newborn son (from Bathsheba) who became sick and died seven days after his birth (II Samuel 11 and 12). After the child has died, David says, “I shall go to him, but he will not return to me (12:22,23).” Now here is a baby that had, as we all do, a sin nature, but *didn’t* go to Hell. In Psalm 23 we have a clear indication of where David felt he would be after

death: “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” And he anticipated that he would again see his little son.

In your next paragraph you make the assumption that those who have not reached the age of accountability have no need of a Savior. I don’t follow your logic. On the basis of your own premise that all in Adam are tainted with sin and are in need of a redeemer, I don’t understand why you would say His death would not apply to these young ones as well. You do admit that **“it is true that as we mature and do become aware of our thoughts and behavior and choices that we will be held accountable for them.”** That is exactly the point. The primary reason that Christian parents hesitate to explain the Gospel to very young children is because those parents want them to be old enough to fully UNDERSTAND what Jesus did for them.

This leads me on to answer your question about “pinning down” what/when that age might be. I don’t think we can arbitrarily pick an exact age for everyone. There are too many variables. But we do know this: there are FOUR components necessary for one to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We find them in Paul’s interchange with Lydia in Acts 16:14: “And a certain woman named Lydia. . .was (1) **listening**, and the (2) **Lord opened her heart to respond** to the (3) **things spoken** by (4) **Paul**.”

In Acts 9:27-39 we have the account of Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was reading Isaiah 53 out loud as he sat in his chariot. Philip ran up and asked him, “Do you **understand** what you are reading? The eunuch answered, “How could I, unless **someone guides** me?” You know the rest of the story. My point here is that even **adults** don’t become Christians until they, with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, come to **understand** the gospel and see it with the eyes of faith. Would it be any **less** important for children to have the same understanding?

We also find in the Scriptures times when God **overlooked** sin

under certain circumstances as the redemptive work unfolded through time: “the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness , because of the **passing over** of the **sins** previously committed in the **forbearance** of God (Romans 3:24-25.” (See also Acts 17:30; Romans 5:13,14). You will also find other, similar elements in the first e-mail.

In your next paragraph you indicate you feel special credit is due those who come to a place of accountability to God, and that their use of reason or comprehension somehow negates the work of the Spirit. I point you back to Lydia. NO ONE COMES TO CHRIST WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL. This involves *reason*. And part of that reasoning is to comprehend Romans 6:23—it is, as you mention, by *grace* and not of works, “lest *anyone* might boast.”

You conclude with some comments about baptism, and quote I Peter 3:21. I am not sure why you included this in the discussion, but let me comment: First of all, I am wondering if you are including believer baptism as *part* of the Gospel: that is, you believe one does not become a Christian when he *believes* the Gospel, but rather that you only accomplish when you are baptized. I am assuming that you are not here referring to infant baptism, which, incidentally, is used by some segments of Christendom to do something to *cover* these young ones until they come of an age when they *can* understand the Gospel. I do not personally believe that baptizing an infant with water, without an understanding of the Gospel, accomplishes *anything*. It isn’t even mentioned in Scripture.

Further, Paul tells us clearly in Romans 1:16 that he is “not ashamed of the **gospel**, for **it** is the **power** of God **unto salvation for every one who *believes*.**” And so it is clear that the ***Gospel*** is the power of God unto Salvation, and *nothing else*. But we find in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that Paul **clearly** distinguishes between the Gospel and Baptism: “For Christ did

not send me to **baptize**, but to preach the **gospel**." Evidently, Paul does not include baptism as part of the gospel, but rather saw it as the appropriate response of obedience following one's conversion. Even the verse you quote from Peter must be carefully read: Peter qualifies his statement about baptism by making sure he is not misunderstood. He appears to me to be saying that water will not wash away sin, but rather, in **obedience** to the command of Christ, the believer, in good conscience toward God, gives his answer, or his response, to the truth of the Gospel by submitting to baptism. Baptism is a public testimony of one's inner commitment to the Person and Work of Christ: "The word is near you, in your **mouth**, and in your **heart.—**That is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you **confess** with your **mouth** Jesus as Lord, and **believe** in your **heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be **saved**; for with the **heart** man **believes**, resulting in righteousness, and with the **mouth** he **confesses**, resulting in **salvation.**

You asked me to comment on these issues and I have tried to do this as honestly as I can from my understanding of God's Word. You may not be comfortable with all of my responses, but I have given you my "best shot."

May the Lord bless you and your family,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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