“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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"Is There a Second Chance to Believe After Death?"

Hi there Jim. We've spoken before and I found it quite helpful. Can I ask you a question on divine judgment? What about those who would come before God and who really weren't HONESTLY sure about it all and didn't become a Christian in life? When they stood in front of Him and God knew how they felt through life…would that be fair to send them to hell? Obviously they would have a sudden change of heart, right? Thanks, Jim.

If I understand you correctly, you are wondering if a person who is skeptical of the claims of Christ throughout life, didn't CLEARLY understand the gospel but you imply if they had, they would have placed their faith in Christ. And then you wonder if once dead and seeing that His claims were genuine, God would be unfair in sending that person to hell. If I am not clear on your meaning here, please let me know.

First of all, the Bible says that "it is appointed unto man ONCE to die and afterwards comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27)."

This seems to rule out any idea of a second chance, and the concept of reincarnation as well.

Furthermore, we are told in John 16:8-11 that the Holy Spirit is constantly convicting the world (including your hypothetical person) of "sin, righteousness, and judgment." What this means is that *no one* is left without an opportunity to respond to this prompting of the Spirit, repent, and place their faith in Christ.

And Romans 1:18-20 Paul tells us that God's **wrath** has been revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness (as we see above in the John passage), and "because that which is **known** about God is **evident within** them. . .For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been **clearly seen**, being understood through what has been made, so they are **without excuse**."

Luke 17 also gives us some things which bear on your question. Read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (17:19-31). The crux of the story is that both of these men died. The rich man found himself in hell, and was able to see Lazarus (the poor beggar) in heaven (Abraham's Bosom). The rich man is in torment, and now, "knowing" the truth of things, asks if he could be sent back to earth to talk to his five brothers and warn them so they don't join him in hell. (This is analogous to the man in your hypothetical). Look carefully at the Lord's answer. He tells the man it wouldn't do any good. The Lord says they *have* a witness: Moses and the Prophets. The rich man says, yes, but they would *listen* if someone came back from the dead and *told* them!

Jesus responds by saying if they didn't believe/respond to the light they already had (through Moses and the Prophets), they wouldn't be persuaded even if someone came back from the dead to tell them! In short, the necessary information and guidance to enter the family of God is available to all during their lifetime. And faith must have an object worthy of its trust.

Hebrews 11:6 tells us that "Without **faith** it is **impossible** to please God, for he who comes to God must **believe** that He is, and is a rewarder of those who **diligently seek** Him."

Now what would be fair about giving those who "sat" on the fence, ignored the evidence, and failed to **exercise faith** in Christ, and then, when dead, like the rich man, now **knowing** the truth, (no need to exercise faith) asking for another chance?

There are **no unbelievers** in heaven *or* hell. They are now **all** believers. They know the truth. Unfortunately, those who chose not to respond to all of the "signposts" God has given the world (which could be believed if any person desired), they must face the consequences of their "non-actions." It would not be fair of God to include the man you are suggesting along with those who pleased God by exercising their faith in Christ while faith was still the issue!

I hope this answers your question, _____.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Are the Ideas of the Jesus Seminar Now Catholic Doctrine?

I am a philosophy major at Oregon State University where Marcus Borg is a professor. Many of the churches in our community ascribe to his teaching.

Here is my question…I have a dear friend that grew up in an evangelical Catholic home and knows Christ as her personal savior. She has been attending the local Catholic church here in Corvallis and recently has been strongly confronted by one of the deacons on issues surrounding the literalism of the Bible (i.e. the ideas of the Jesus Seminar, taught by Borg). The deacon has been telling her that Biblical non-literalism as Borg teaches is part of Catholic doctrine and part of the Catechism. Is this accurate? Is this indeed an international Catholic teaching or does it depend on the individual parish or person?

I would appreciate any wisdom you might have on this topic. Honestly, it's been really heated here lately, as Borg's new book has just been released. We would love it if either of you (or other speakers from Probe) could come out and do a presentation for all of the confused Christians. There is a strong evangelical movement in Corvallis, but unfortunately, it tends to be strongly anti-intellectual and isn't well respected in the university community. As a student, I want to be able to better understand the critical issues at hand and be able to represent Christ in grace, truth, and love.

Send me whatever thoughts you have…I read article on the Jesus Seminar through Leadership University and that helped, but I really would love even more detailed information if you have any.

Thank you so much for serving as a resource for students of the Word!

Thank you for your recent e-mail concerning the Jesus Seminar. I can empathize with your "dilemma" under the shadow of Marcus Borg at your university.

I don't know if you have checked the Probe Website (www.probe.org) or not, but I would direct you to at least two

essays: one that I wrote is called The Jesus Seminar, and a second was written by my colleague, Rick Wade, entitled The Historical Christ. You will find good bibliographical info for further study.

I would rather doubt that the tenets of the Jesus Seminar are now officially sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church worldwide. I would recommend that your friend ask for official, written documentation from this priest for his assertion that this is true. I am 99% positive that no such position has been taken by the Catholic church and its biblical scholars. There is too much at stake for the church to take such a radical stand which undermines much of what they have held to be true about Jesus Christ.

If you are looking for someone to come and debate Borg, I would suggest that you contact my good friend Dr. J. P. Moreland and/or Michael J. Wilkins at Talbot Seminary in southern California. They edited a book entitled *Jesus Under Fire* which was published by Zondervan in 1995. Each chapter is written by a evangelical scholar, each of which develops and refutes the major arguments of the Jesus Seminar position.

I have been studying this topic for several years, and following the literature, but these men, as New Testament Scholars, are current on this issue and have devoted the kind of study and depth necessary to give good account of themselves with a fine scholar like Borg.

I can appreciate your frustration with the general Christian community. Most are not “armed” for the battle of ideas which we face. That is why I left Campus Crusade in 1973 and began Probe Ministries. At the time I gave oversight to the Campuses in the Southwest U.S. The worldview America has come to embrace generally now once existed only on a few campuses: UC Berkeley, San Francisco State, U. of Wisconsin (Madison), Columbia U., and U. of Colorado.

I found myself hard pressed to respond to the questions of these students. So I decided the Lord was calling upon me not to “curse the darkness”, but rather “light some lamps!” The early Christians, it is said, were effective because they OUT-THOUGHT and OUT-LOVED the ancient world! In fact, for 250 years after the apostles died off, the church did nothing but try to survive and answer/refute/respond to all the doctrinal challenges which came from the Jewish and Pagan communities without, and from sects and heresies within. They were so busy doing this, that it was not until 325 A.D. (Council of Nicea) that the addressed/clarified the doctrine of the Trinity! The FIRST theology of the early church was APOLOGETICAL theology, and we find ourselves facing the same kind of circumstances and challenges today.

So you hang in there! And tell your friend to do the same. Challenge the priest and don’t be bullied by him. If it IS an official position, tell her that I requested that it be documented so I will be able to confirm to others who ask that this is truly official. If I were a betting man (and I am ::::SMILE!::::), your friend will find that no such affirmation of this policy will be forthcoming.

With Warm Regards in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Man in Search of Himself

A study of man's nature, origin, value and perfectibility raises significant, important questions. Is he the "measure of all things" and made just "a little lower than the angels"? Or has he been reduced to his biochemical components, the quintessence of dust itself? Is it even possible for a man to know "himself"? Is he the glory or the shame of the universe? Or both? Does he even belong here, or is he an interloper—the missing link between his primal ancestors and the really humane being of tomorrow? Is man different from animals and things? How so? And if so, how and why is he different? These are some of the questions considered in this essay, the answers to which create a great divide among people and how they view the reality we all share.

Difference in Degree or Kind?

First of all, if man is to be considered different or unique, how so? Is it a difference in *degree* or *kind*?

Difference in Degree

Some would argue today that man is only different in degree, like the size of the angles in obtuse triangles are different from each other, or like the difference of molecular motions observed in hot and cold water, or the difference between 1 and 100. The concept of difference in degree *only* is at the heart of original Darwinian theory, which sees man as arising from non-man. According to this view, then, man is different only in degree, not kind, from animals, plants, and things.

Others would modify this view, suggesting that observable distinctions or kinds are really only apparent in the complexities of organic and inorganic development on the planet, and the passage from one qualitative state to another is synthesized with an underlying continuum of degrees which

lead to threshold. For example, the link between liquid H_20 and gaseous H_20 is a change in temperature. Or the link between acidic solutions (colorless) and basic solutions (pink) is a color indicator, the change of pH. Lorenz and other ethnologists would view man in this light, an observable expression of the continuing processes of mutation and selection. The primatologists doing language studies with chimps and gorillas are conducting their research primarily under the same assumption.

Both of these views have some devastating consequences to man, who continues to resist their implications. The first view suggests that things and animals may assume what has up until now been considered exclusively "human" rights. Adler points this
out in by quoting John Lilly:

> *The day that communication is established the [dolphin] becomes a legal, ethical, moral and social problem. . .They have reached the level of humanness as it were! (Brackets mine)*{1}

Of robots, Adler cites a similar conclusion by Michael Scriven:

> *If it [a robot] is a person, of course it will have moral rights and hence political rights. (Brackets mine).*{2}

The mixed imagery of man, machines, and animals portrayed in the "bar scene" of *StarWars* was getting at the same thing, depicting a world where this distinction was removed. And such historians as Arnold Toynbee and Lynn White argue that this very exclusivity of man for rights now denied to animals and robots is that which has brought about an arbitrary and destructive dichotomy between man and the rest of nature:

> *Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and*

> *Asia's religions, not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.*
>
> *When the Greco-Roman world was converted to Christianity, the divinity was drained out of nature and concentrated on a single transcendent God. Man's greedy impulse to exploit nature used to be held in check by his awe, his pious worship of nature. Now monotheism, as enunciated in Genesis, has removed the age-old restraint.{3}*

Failure to remove this "dichotomy," they say, has caused men to live *above* nature and to exploit it for selfish ends. Their solution is to erase it and invite man to become "one" again with nature. Herein lies part of the present attractiveness of Eastern, monistic thought to the contemporary Western mind.

It is, however, noteworthy that attempts to eliminate the dichotomy have brought about varying results in both East and West. In the West, the dignity and value of human life has generally lessened in importance during the past 100 years. This despairing theme has been a dominant force in art, music, drama, and literature of the twentieth century. One of the uncomfortable but inescapable by- products of technological advancement and the exactitudes of scientific measurement is pointed out by Adler, who predicts a new (or old?) kind of dichotomy which divides human *from* human:

> *We can, therefore, imagine a future state of affairs in which a new global division of mankind replaces all the old parochial divisions based upon race, nationality, or ethnic groups—a division that separates the human elite at the top of the scale from the human scum at the bottom, a division based on the accurate scientific measurement of human ability and achievement and one, therefore, that is factually incontrovertible. At this future time, let the population pressures have reached that critical level at which emergency*

> *measures must be taken if human life is to endure and be endurable. Finish the picture by imagining that before this crisis occurs, a global monopoly of authorized force has passed into the hands of the elite—the mathematicians, the scientists, and the technologists, not only those whose technological skill has mechanized the organization of men in all large scale economical and political processes. The elite are then the de facto as well as the de jure rulers of the world. At that juncture, what would be wrong in principle with their decision to exterminate a large portion of mankind—the lower half, let us say—thus making room for their betters to live and breathe more comfortably?{4}*

Thus, Planet Earth becomes the private playground of the planned, the privileged, and the perfect!

The second view is equally unacceptable for two reasons, one of which is related to the material just stated. How can value and dignity originate from the Arbitrary? Is a liquid more valuable than a gas? This approach is a merely subjective, decision-making process which asserts that dignity and value exist on one side of the threshold and not on the other. Utilitarians would answer the question in teleological fashion, saying, "It all depends upon the context: what is happening, what is needed, and what is intended."

Unhappily, the underlying assumption in this answer is an optimistic, flattering one which idealizes man and his intentions. History has not yet confirmed this. Man will not always do the good and right thing, even when he knows what it is. We will return to this issue later. Another consideration is that of the reversibility of this approach. With no compelling reason for advance, man could undergo a "devolutionary" process as easily as an "evolutionary" one.

Difference in Kind

A third possibility is that man is truly different from animals and things; he is different in *kind*. By definition, we mean that with respect to some property, two things differ in that one *has* the property and the other *lacks* it. A triangle and a square are different in kind, though both are geometric designs. The same can be said of the differences between a zero and a one, or man and non-man. In making this distinction, it is important to remember that "difference" does not imply "better" or "worse"; therefore other criteria are necessary before there would be legitimate reason to treat people better than things or animals. Are such criteria present? This is a crucial question.

It appears that in defining the question of man's place and purpose (if any) on the planet, one available option is to view man, along with animals, plants and things, as the accidental result of impersonal, cosmic processes. Under such an assumption, man therefore could not possess any superior claim to dignity and value. In fact, values in this line of reasoning must be relegated to the realm of *what is*, since there *is* nothing else. In true Sarterian fashion, man is condemned to be free—all is permitted and possible. The process is ultimately and totally arbitrary. "Ought" is only opinion, whether expressed publicly or privately by a majority or a minority. Thomas Huxley himself admitted that evolution leads to "bad" ethics.{5}

Ethics built upon nature, it would seem, must ever face the difficulty of how to move from the *descriptive* to the *prescriptive* and still maintain its own consistency as a system. Konrad Lorenz attempted to answer this by asserting that human behavior traits and "values" are linked to human physiology, and they have simply been passed on because of their survival value.

An alternative answer to the above is that *all* things—plants, animals, and people—are valuable, not because they have so designated themselves to be, but because they are the true and

real (though finite) expressions of an Infinite Creator. Their value has been assigned to them by a transcendent One. Man thus has worth and is different because his creator ascribed it to him. No one questions man's "downward" relationship, his identification and similarities to animal, plant and thing. Granted, he shares his "finiteness" with them, and in varying degrees of complexity, his biochemical make-up.

But is this man's *only* relationship? Is it possible that man's differences, dissimilarities, and dignity can never find adequate explanations "downward" but might find their source in a second "upward" relationship? This would be the main difference between the Monist (materialism) and the Dualist (theism/transcendence). Both have their philosophical and theological difficulties. The monist must find his solution within the box he has created by his position (the *cosmos*, observable reality, and nothing beyond).

The dualist claims there *is* something outside the box, but human reason and sense perception cannot tell you much (if anything) about it. Both positions are faced with a dilemma of sorts. It would seem that the criteria to establish special, human value is not possible within the framework of monism, and would only be possible in dualism if the "Transcendent One," the Creator, through self-disclosure (revelation), had made this human value assessment known to us.

The Uniqueness of Man

If we grant the assumption that man is different in kind—qualitatively different, in what ways is he so? The late Francis Schaeffer often used a term to describe this difference: the "mannishness" of man. This uniqueness falls into several areas, including the anatomical, physiological, cultural, psychological, and moral.

Physical

Anatomically, man's erectness is unique. There is no observed evolution between primates and man. Primates don't have feet; they literally have four hands. Primates also lack a circulatory system which would support an erect animal. Man, on the other hand, possesses knees that lock. His head is balanced on his shoulders. His spine is curved in four places for comfort in a wide variety of positions. His arms are short and his legs are long. Primates have the opposite proportions.

Man's erectness has therefore freed him, but not to the extent that it explains his dominance over the entire animal kingdom. In fact, man has dominated in ways totally unrelated to nature's way of achieving dominance. Man is basically defenseless. He has no dependable instincts (by comparison), no sharp teeth, claws, camouflage or wings. He is physically weak. A 120-pound monkey is three to five times as strong as a man.{6}

Jose Delgado points out that even man's brain cannot explain his dominance. His brain is large, but whales and elephants have larger brains. Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon had larger brains. Whale brains are more convoluted than human ones. Monkeys are very intelligent, but they demonstrate little ability to dominate any intra-species animal.{7}

Other physiological uniquenesses include man's eating habits. He can eat nearly every type of food and is nourished by it. He is only 20% efficient and hence eats four times as much as is needed. He is also in a class by himself with respect to thermoregulation. In the cold, his body applies vaso-constriction, tightens skeletal muscles, shivers, and withdraws surface fluids. In the heat, man is truly unique in his thermogenic sweat glands over his body. The hypothalamus responds to a .01% rise in blood temperature. Horses, on the other hand, sweat only in response to stress and adrenalin in the blood. And primates (nearest to man?) are poor

thermoregulators.

Man is also susceptible to disease and slow to heal. He is unique in that his tight skin demands sutures when cut. As a sexual being, he can breed anytime and for a variety of reasons. Ovulation and heat do not necessarily coincide. He interbreeds easily with all members of his species. He is also unique in his nakedness and his “wasp” waist.{8}

Cultural

Culturally, man is global in his habitat. The adaptability explained above is largely responsible for this. He makes tools and fire; he uses language with concepts. He is creative, a maker of art. From the dawn of his history, he appears to have been religious. He is a social creature. His young are long in maturing, thus calling for high, enduring family commitment. The male is (or can be) a part of the family.

Psychological

Philosophers, biologists, and psychologists all have to come to grips with the problems involved in trying to explain all that we observe about man in terms of just physical origins and causes. To encompass the entire realm of the human powers of reasoning, the complicated strata of human emotions, the apparent use of “free will,” as well as the more irrational elements of human behavior within a purely physical explanation seems heroic, to say the least. Recent attempts to eliminate all distinctions between humans and higher animals, and therefore hoping to explain man entirely in terms of what is physical or animal, are far from conclusive.

A major effort has been made to demonstrate, for example, that

the use of language, long considered man's exclusive and ultimate claim to distinction within the animal kingdom, is now possible among the primates.{9} Chimps have been taught the American Sign Language for the Deaf and are reported to be using sentences and grammar as they put "sign" blocks in proper order, or punch out the correct order of signs on a computer keyboard.

What is being demonstrated thus far by these language studies is not language, but signaling behavior. . .the proper response to a physical stimulus. Many animals, including pigeons, dogs, cats, horses, rats, etc., use this behavior. Whales and dolphins are known to possess communicative abilities superior to monkeys (are whales a nearer relative to man?). But all of these animals fail to use actual concepts, which are the true test of language and grammar. While a chimp can learn "triangular" as a concept, there is still a physical stimulus to which the animal can relate. A true concept like "political science" can only be learned by man. Grammatical structure in chimps or the playing of a complicated song on a little piano by a pigeon are examples of chaining sequences, or shaping behavior by operant condition *a la* B.F. Skinner. The animal need not understand or grasp the pattern in order to use it. Further, chimps who have been given the tools of communication progress to a limit, and no farther. In other words, a chimp may be taught to communicate to some extent, but once trained, he has very little to say!{10}

In the area of man's emotions, studies have tried to show that emotions are totally produced by what is happening psychochemically in the body. But some research demonstrates that other factors enter in and affect the emotions. Drug studies with adrenalin produced different (joyful or sad) emotional states in subjects who experienced the same drug states, but different (euphoric or melancholic) social contexts. Human mental states, to some extent, apparently transcend physical states.{11}

Physiological models of brain function stress the idea that parts of the brain give rise to and control bodily motions, thoughts, and emotional states. Experiments where rats are eating out of control, or raging bulls are stopped dead in their tracks by brain manipulation, are used to demonstrate the absence of free choice, or self-control among animals or humans.{12}

Skinner felt that the environment "pushed the buttons" on man's computer brain. In either case, man's will is not to be considered to in any sense "free." When the buttons are pushed (from within or without), man and beast will behave accordingly and predictively.

And yet, even in the animal experiments, one wonders if the conclusions are accurate. How can the purely "mechanical" nature of even an animal's mental state be measured? A viewing of the film shows that when the bull charged Delgado in the bull ring, the electric jolt to the implanted electrodes in its head stopped the animal in its tracks, and it appeared to be stunned as if shot. The bull then wheeled around in bewilderment and pain; it did not turn into "Ferdinand" and begin to sniff the flowers!

Brain research with respect to human will is even more conclusive. Brain mechanisms apparently influence, but do not exclusively determine, human behavior, since moral and social factors have been known to overrule brain damage or brain control. A woman who experienced a damaged hypothalamus gained nearly 100 pounds after her accident, but one day she looked in the mirror and did not like what she saw. She went on a diet and lost the weight.{13}

Another woman suffering with epilepsy was able to override her emotions and her desire to get up and attack her doctor when he stimulated her amygdula with a brain probe. Other factors came to bear on her aggressive tendencies and modified her response. She admitted she felt like it, but she didn't do

it![{14}]

These two cases indicate that there are elements present within the human brain which transcend and sometimes do override what the physical parts command or demand. Human behavior can never be reduced and totally explained by physical brain function. Something more is present and inexplicable.

Moral

We now come to an assessment of the moral nature of man. There seem to be three basic positions offered to explain human moral notions or inclinations. And all three accept that man has this unique capacity. . .to distinguish right from wrong. The first is one that views man as **morally neutral at birth**. This was John Locke's view, that man enters the world morally ignorant with a "blank tablet." And therefore man's personality and his moral notions are shaped exclusively by his personal experiences and his environment.

J. B. Watson, the father of behaviorism, embraced this view when he said,

> *Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specific world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggar man and thief.[{15}]*

In "ink blotter" fashion, then, this view sees man's personality development as extremely malleable, and capable of being shaped dramatically by environmental forces. We do not here deny the strong force that environment can and does play in shaping a human being. But the question must be asked, however: Can *all* personality development be traced to

environmental factors? Is there no genetic contribution whatsoever beyond that of providing the "empty tablet?" And how "blank" is blank? Doesn't it seem that though a conscience must be educated as to specifics of moral behavior, the "tablet" already possesses a moral capacity to comprehend and differentiate moral alternatives? These questions constitute and remain major criticisms of behaviorist theory.

A second view of man presupposes man as essentially good, or on his way to *being* good. In the 19th century, Tennyson spoke to this issue when he wrote:

> *Move upward, working out the beast,*
> *And let the ape and tiger die.{16}*

It is well to remember that this view of Tennyson's was not inspired by Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, because it would not be written until ten years after Tennyson wrote these words in his poem, "In Memoriam." He, like many others, was caught up in the optimistic tide of the Industrial Revolution. His contemporary, Herbert Spencer, sounded a similar note when he said,

> *"The inference that as advancement has been hitherto the rule, it will be the rule, it will be the rule henceforth, may be called a plausible speculation. But when it is shown that this advancement is due to the working of a universal law; and in virtue of that law it must continue until the state we call perfection is reached, then the advent of such a state is removed out of the region of probability into that of certainty. . .*
>
> *As surely as a blacksmith's arm grows large and the skin of a laborer's hand becomes thick; . . .as surely as passion grows by indulgence and diminishes when restrained; . . .so surely must the things we call evil and immorality disappear; so surely must man become perfect." (emphasis mine){17}*

This spirit of optimism for an improving moral future was reinforced a little later by Darwin and others. With confidence about the progress of tomorrow, Darwin said:

> *Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of equally inappreciable length. And as Natural Selection [notice capital letters] works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental environments will tend to progress towards perfection. (comment mine)*{18}

H.G. Wells looked to the future with the same optimism when he wrote in his *Short History of the World*:

> *Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realize our boldest imaginations. . .in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we have known, going on from strength to strength in an ever widening circle of adventure and achievement? What man has done, the little triumphs of his present state. . .form but the prelude to the things that man has yet to do.*{19}

Two world wars and accompanying aftermath shook Wells, the Huxleys, C.E.M. Joad, Bertrand Russell, and many others to the core. Optimism turned to discouragement and then to disillusionment. Wells would later write:

> *Quite apart from any bodily depression, the spectacle of evil in the world—the wanton destruction of homes, the ruthless hounding of decent folk into exile, the bombings of open cities, the cold blooded massacres and mutilations of children and defenseless gentlefolk, the rapes and filthy humiliations and, above all, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment, and fear to a world from which such things had seemed well nigh banished. . .has come near to breaking my heart.*{20}

Ironically, many leading humanistic psychologists (including

such notables as Karl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Eric Fromm, Rollo May) who watched thirty or forty more years of the twentieth century pass by with Koreas and Vietnams, iron and bamboo curtains, cold and hot wars, famines, atrocities, etc., still do not recognize, admit, nor share Well's perspective, but rather have chosen to ignore the lessons of those years. This galaxy of individuals would still tenaciously hold to the basic conviction that man is **essentially and basically good.** Maslow, considered to be the father of Humanistic Psychology, wrote these words just before the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and the Vietnam War. Speaking of human nature he said:

> *Since this inner nature is good or neutral rather than bad, it is best to bring it out, to encourage it rather than suppress it. If it is permitted to guide our life, we grow healthy, fruitful and happy.{21}*

And yet Maslow, with all his optimism, at the same time was forced to acknowledge a apparent weakness in man to demonstrate his goodness and how it might be brought into life experience consistently:

> *There are certainly good and strong and successful men in the world. . .But it also remains true that there are so few of them, even though there could be so many more, and that they are often badly treated by their fellows. So this, too, must be studied, this fear of human goodness and greatness, this lack of knowledge of how to be good and strong, this inability to turn one's anger into productive activities, this fear of feeling virtuous, self-loving, respect-worthy.{22}*

This brings us to the third view concerning man's moral nature, which sees him as **possessing some innate and ever-present propensity to self-centeredness and pride**. Plato early on recognized the presence and power of evil in human beings

when he said: “There is a dangerous, wild, and lawless kind of desire in everyone, even the few of us who *appear* moderate.” (emphasis mine){23} Aristotle admitted the same when he observed that most people did not pursue the good:

> *Their nature is to obey by fear, rather than by right shame; and they do not abstain from the bad because it is wrong, but because of the possible punishment. They live by emotion and pursue those pleasures that are related to emotion, and the means to these pleasures.{24}*

The entire Bible and all of the Church Fathers certainly take this view, although man’s cruelty is juxtaposed with a nobility which he is deemed to possess, and which is asserted to have resulted from being created in God’s image (*Imago Dei*). It is this second concept of nobility and goodness which provides a possible explanation for all those things mentioned above which distinguish and set man apart from all other animals, plants and things. Worship, rational thought, language, moral notions, and creativity are all components stemming from his upward link, not his supposed evolutionary past.

On through history we find other leading thinkers echoing this third view: Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* saw man as self-centered, competitive, stubborn, forgiving of himself and condemning others:

> *For all men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses, that is their passions and self-love through which every little payment appeareth a great grievance; but are destitute. . .of those prospective glasses. . .to see afar off the miseries that hang over them. (emphasis mine){25}*

Karl Marx shared the same perspective in describing “egoistic” man:

> *Thus, none of the so-called rights of man goes beyond egoistic man as he is in civil society, namely an individual withdrawn behind his private interest and whims separated from the community.{26}*

Sigmund Freud also acknowledged man's aggressive tendencies:

> *I adopt the standpoint. . .that the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man, and I return to my view that it constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization. (emphasis mine){27}*

B.F. Skinner denies any "innate" disposition, but he does speak about the future with foreboding unless great environmental changes are made:

> *It is now widely recognized that great changes must be made in the American way of life. Not only can we not face the rest of the world while consuming and polluting as we do, we cannot for long face ourselves while acknowledging the violence and chaos in which we live. The choice is clear: either we do nothing and allow a miserable and probably catastrophic future to overtake us, or we use our knowledge about human behavior to create a social environment in which we shall live productive and creative lives and do so without jeopardizing the chances that those who follow us will be able to do the same.{28}*

Skinner's contemporary, ethologist Konrad Lorenz, ignores possible solutions for the future through environmental changes, and simply acknowledges the fact that man's "inherited aggressive tendencies" are yet to be brought under control. To Lorenz, man is not finished; he's still under construction.{29}

We have considered the three major views concerning man's moral nature: man as (1) neutral, (2) basically good, and (3)

morally flawed or deficient. In the light of our discussion and abundant observations of man's behavior—both past and present—the third view appears to be the most accurate.

To those who seek to address this issue, both its causes and proposed solutions vary greatly. They do, however cluster around several key ideas:

First, the evolutionists, like Lorenz above, argue that humans have had **insufficient time** to eliminate the primal aggressions from our evolutionary past. To them, it is a vestigial problem. Darwin, Lorenz, and much of humanistic psychology would fall into this category. Geneticists could also fit here, some of whom would perhaps like to help by speeding the process along.

One question that comes to my mind is if man is a part of Nature, as the evolutionist insists, then how has it come about that a method which is so successful in dealing with one part of Nature—the world *outside* of man—has failed so miserably in dealing with the other part of Nature—that which lies *within* him?

Second, a large group holds to the premise that a **proper environment** is the answer to man's moral ills. Plato would create his *Republic*. Hobbes would argue for a *Commonwealth*, Karl Marx a "classless" society, and Skinner would alter the environment through beneficent "planners." It might be well to remember that chuck roast sitting out on the counter *decays*. But what happens when it is placed in the freezer? It still decays, but at a much slower rate. Environment may check, or even improve certain behaviors, but there is growing evidence that, like the bacteria within the meat, man's basic moral problem is internal.

A third view would focus on **education** of some sort. Beginning with the Greek thinkers and up to Freud and Maslow, there are those who say man should be actively involved in the pursuit

of the good—knowledge and self-understanding. The assumption is that if a man *knows* or is shown what is good, he will *do* it. At this juncture, man unfortunately and negatively displays his uniqueness from animals. Where animals readily alter their behavior through simple "trial and error" methods, man will persist in repeating all kinds of behaviors detrimental to himself and others!

The point of agreement with each of these three views is that man's moral deficiency is the result of something lacking. The evolutionist says *time* is lacking. Behaviorists say a *proper environment* is lacking; the educators say that *knowledge* is lacking. But the crux of rightly assessing the moral nature of man is not what is lacking, but what is present and persistent about his behavior over the millenia. The Fall of man was down.{30}

In this regard, John Hallowell comments on Reinhold Niebuhr's insights:

> *One of America's most astute thinkers, Reinhold Niebuhr, has recalled to our consciousness a fact which both liberalism and Marxism have ignored with almost fatal consequences to our civilization. Evil, he points out, is something real, not an appearance only, and the proper name for it is sin. Its locus is not in institutions, which are but a reflection of human purposes, but in human nature itself. It is pride, self-righteousness, greed, envy, hatred and sloth that are the real evils and the ones from which social evils spring. When man is thwarted in his attempts to realize justice it is because he is thwarted by his own sinful predisposition. The recognition of this inherent predisposition to sin helps to explain why the best laid plans of men never quite succeed (emphasis mine).{31}*

Every academic discipline has a name for this problem of man:

> ***Biology** calls it "primitive instinct" or "primal aggression"*

> ***History** calls it "class struggle"*
> ***Humanities** calls it "human weakness" or "hubris"*
> ***Sociology** calls it "cultural lag"*
> ***Psychology** calls it "emotional behavior"*
> ***Philosophy** calls it "irrational thinking"*
> ***The Bible** calls it **sin**.*

The teachings of Jesus Christ underscore the truth of this internal flaw in man:

Do you not see that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach and is eliminated. . .That which proceeds out of a man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from *within* and defiles the man.{32}

While largely unpopular at present, until society again comes to accept and embrace this assessment by the Founder of Christianity as the most accurate and true picture of human nature, no real progress can be made toward the building of a really "Great" society, much less a Global Community devoid of malice. And by their very nature, methodology, and presuppositions, science and philosophy will never recognize this truth, even when their own findings point in this direction, for they will not accept what God has revealed nor can they discover the truth by their own methods of inquiry.

Fifty years ago, from the decks of the great battleship, *U.S.S. Missouri*, General Douglas MacArthur accepted the unconditional surrender of the Japanese with these words:

> *We've had our last chance. If we will not devise some greater*

> *and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. The problem is basically theological, and involves the spiritual recandescence and improvement of human character, that will synchronize with our matchless advances in science, art, literature, and all the cultural and material developments of the past 2,000 years. It must be of the spirit, if we are to save the flesh (emphasis mine).{33}*

MacArthur's prescription for humanity's future was essentially a religious one.

And at the dawn of the 21st century, little progress has been made. We live in a much more unstable and troubled world today than existed sixty years ago even when Hitler and the Japanese were at the pinnacle of their power.

When one observes what is happening throughout the world right now, one must conclude that, in spite of great technological and economic advances, three fourths of the planet is still functioning at the Medieval Level:

- Ethnic Cleansing (a euphemism for genocide).
- Poverty and Famine.
- Governmental corruption and Moral Failure.
- IRS Quota Incentives.
- Ecclesiastical Corruption and Moral Failure.
- Conquest.
- Human Rights abuses, particularly of Women and Children.
- Child and Spousal Abuse.
- Gun Control.
- Lawlessness and Crime.
- Sexual deviants and predators.
- Serial Killers.
- Pornography.
- Prostitution.
- Slavery (Yes, it still exists).
- Corrupt Judicial and Prison Systems.

- Unprincipled, Capricious Juries.
- Drug Traffic.
- Environmental and Ecological Abuse and Corruption.
- Endangered Species.
- Global Warming.
- Weapons of Mass Destruction for Sale!
- Deforestation.
- Over-fishing/depletion of Marine Life.
- Aids and other Killer viruses.
- Reality of Chemical warfare.
- Terrorism—at home and abroad.
- Nuclear Reactors.
- Waste Products.
- Contamination.
- Teen Pregnancy.
- Slaughter of the Innocents.
- Babies for Sale!
- Fetal Tissue and Organs for Sale!
- Sperm Banks of the Rich and Famous for Sale!
- Divorces outnumber Marriages.
- Disintegration of Healthy Family Systems.
- Welfare Mothers.
- AWOL Dads.
- Drive-by shootings and Road Rage.
- Juvenile Killers.
- Teen Suicide.
- Race motivated Crimes.
- Patriot Groups.
- Ku Klux Klan.
- Skinheads.
- Cult Groups.
- Goddess Worship.
- Witchcraft.
- A Media which panders to the baser elements of humanity: Increased Nudity, Sex, Violence, and Filthy Language.
- Same for Advertisements.
- Dearth of Role Models—in Politics, Sports, Music, and

Film.
- Ditto Dads, Moms, Brothers, Sisters, Uncles, Aunts, andGrandparents.

Reflecting on the above reminds me of an observation made by someone. The person commented that it was easier for him to believe in the existence of the Devil than to believe that God exists!

The Raging Planet. It would be comforting if we could say that the above behaviors did not include the United States of America. But that is not the case. While the U.S. does not face many of the severe problems and abuses which plague much of the globe, she does, in numerous ways, contribute to the moral instability of the rest of the world. Admired and hated at the same time, America continually sends a mixed message to her neighbors. She has been both a blessing and a curse to the rest of the world, and it is not yet apparent which path she will ultimately choose.

But what *can* be said, in spite of the above, is that she and her citizens are still impacted by the Judeo-Christian heritage which the colonists brought with them from the other side of the Atlantic. The moral and spiritual mindset which they owned as part of their very lives, laid the foundation stones upon which they intended to, and did live in this new land. We today are still being impacted and conditioned by the values they brought with them. By nature, we still largely think and behave within the framework they left us. This was a legacy of honesty, integrity, hard work, individualism, fair play, dependability, and personal freedom.

Much of this behavior is still evident in America. But what is slipping away, the crucial ingredient that makes it all work, is the spiritual dimension in American life. MacArthur said "It must be of the *spirit* if we are to save the flesh." Jesus said, "All these evil things proceed from *within* and defile the man."

A young father was reading the newspaper and came across a map of the world. He decided to have some fun with his small son. Taking scissors, he cut out the various countries of the world and said to his son, “Bobby, here’s a puzzle for you. Take these pieces and put the world back together.” The father resumed his reading of the morning paper, and, surprisingly, in less than a minute, the little boy came back and said, “Daddy, come look! I’ve put the world back together!” The father was amazed that his little son could have accomplished this task so quickly. He asked, “Good for you, Bobby. How did you do it so fast?” The little boy said, “Well, I turned the pieces over and on the back was the picture of a man. I put the *man* together, and the world was right!”

Perhaps we should try it. Nothing else has worked.

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"How Can a Just God Order the Slaughter of Men, Women and Children?"

I am a Christian and spend time talking with others often about God, but I have been speechless when they bring up the issue, for example, in I Samuel 15:1-3 where God tells His people to destroy the men and the women and children as well. This is difficult to see that as part of His character. Is that a just God? What was He thinking?? I understand that the Amalekites ambushed them when travelling from Egypt but why the women and children?? I would really appreciate your reply. Thank you.

This is indeed a question often asked by critics of the Bible. It is a legitimate question and one that deserves a comprehensive, complete and, hopefully, acceptable answer. So let me see if I can address it.

One of the most important rules of Hermeneutics (the task of interpretation, meaning of a verse or passage of Scripture) is to observe the *context* of what you are seeking to interpret correctly. This is crucial in seeking to answer this question

you have raised. We need to see clearly the historical background and the situation which called for such severe measures to be taken.

Who were the Canaanites?

Canaan, the Bible tells us, was the fourth son of Ham, who was one of the three sons of Noah. The use of the word "Canaan" stems from the fact that Canaan's descendants populated the land which was later called Palestine, and now is called Israel. Modern Syria is also included and it is roughly the same land which God promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21; Numbers 34:1-12).

The Amalekites which you mentioned were one of several tribes which are often referred to collectively as either Canaanites or Phoenicians. Their language was either Ugaritic or Phoenician, two Semitic dialects close to the Hebrew dialect. Other major "Canaanite" tribes included the Amorites, Jebusites, Hivites, Girgasites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Moabites. The Phoenicians were a sea-faring people who lived along the Mediterranean Coast. They also had colonies which included Cypress, Sardinia, and Carthage.

What were their Religious beliefs and practices?

Archaeology has given us substantial material about these people, and particularly from their capital city, Ugarit. Thousands of clay tablets have been recovered from Ras Shamra in northern Syria, including the libraries of two great temples dating from the 15th-14th century B.C. Much of this epic literature has to do with their religious practices and their pantheon of gods. Merrilll F. Unger notes that Canaanite cultic practices were more base than any other place in the ancient Near East. (*Unger's Bible Dictionary,* p.172). Let me list some of the features of their religious beliefs and practices.

The Canaanite Pantheon (of gods)

A full description of the Canaanite gods has been provided by C. R. Driver, who translated the Ras Shamra tablets found in the ancient city of Ugarit.

El

The head of the Canaanite pantheon. El was generally a rather remote and shadowy figure, but sometimes stepped down from his eminence and became the hero of exceedingly "earthy" myths. He is described as living at a great distance ("a thousand plains, ten thousand fields,") from Canaan, and to this remote spot the gods invariably had to travel when they wished to consult him.

El was called the "father of years," the "father of man," and also the "father bull," i.e. the progenitor of all the gods. He is likened to a bull in the midst of a herd of cows and calves. According to the text, El had three wives: Astarte (goddess of the evening star), Asherah (goddess of the sea and consort to Baal), and Baaltis—all three his sisters. He is a brutal, bloody tyrant, whose acts caused all the gods to be terrified by his decisions. For example, he dethroned his own father ("Heaven, Uranus") and castrated him; he killed his own favorite son, "Iadid," and cut off his daughter's head. The tablets also portray El as seducing two women, whose names are not mentioned, and he allows them to be driven into the desert after the birth of two children, "Dawn" (shahru) and "Sunset" (shalmu). W. F. Albright in the *American Journal of Semitic Languages, XXXV,* comments that the description of the act of seduction of these two women is one of the frankest and most sensuous in ancient Near-Eastern literature.

Baal and Mot

Baal is the great storm-god. He brings the rain, and announces his present with thunder and lightning and, most important of all, the needed rain which would insure a good harvest. He became the reigning king of the gods, and was enthroned on a lofty mountain in the far northern heavens, but faithfully reappears each year to sustain the people. Mot, whose name

means “death,” represents the god of “drought” and “sterility.” In the myth, he is Baal’s chief and continual antagonist. Even Baal must yield to Mot when his time (of the year) comes. When Mot comes, Baal’s time is over and he is ordered to take everything connected with him down into the depths of the earth:

> “And you, take your clouds,
> Your wind, your storm, your rains!
> With you take Padriya daughter of the stream.
> With you take Tatalliya daughter of rain.”(67:v:6-11)

The situation could hardly be more clearly described: the season of drought has come, the rain and the clouds have vanished; the streams have dried up and the vegetation languishes. But before Baal descends into the earth, however, he

> *“Makes love to a heifer in Debir,*
> *A young cow in the fields of Shimmt.*
> *He lies with her seventy-seven times—*
> *Yea, he copulates eighty-eight times—*
> *So she conceives and bears a child.”(76:v;18-22)*

Anath

The goddess of fertility. She was considered a divine prostitute. She is represented as a naked woman in the prime of life, standing on a lion, with a lily in one hand and a serpent or two in the other. Often two rams are present to portray her sexual vigor. The female organs are always accentuated.

It is important to bear in mind that these “myths” were ritualistically enacted. Therefore we can assume that ritual bestiality was practiced by the priesthood, and temple prostitution was practiced by the adherents (priestesses) of the Anath fertility cult. Cyrus Gordan has written “that it was no crime for men to copulate with animals in Ugarit is

indicated by the fact that…Baal impregnated a heifer…a myth…enacted ritually by reputable priests… Moreover, the Bible tells us that the Hebrews' pagan neighbors practiced bestiality (Lev. 18:24) as we now know to be literally true from the Ugaritic documents" (Ugaritic Literature, p. 8).

With Baal's seasonal death, his father, El, the chief god, goes into mourning. El descends from his throne and sits in sackcloth and ashes on the ground. He lacerates himself, making cuts on his face, arms chest and back (cf. I Kings 18:28):

> "Dead is Baal, the Overcomer
> Absent is the Prince, Lord (Baal) of the Earth (67:VI:9,10)
> He pours the ashes of grief on his head.
> The dust of mourning on his pate;
> For clothing, he is covered with sackcloth,
> He roams the mountain in mourning:
> He mutilates his face and beard.
> He lacerates his forearms.
> He plows his chest like a garden.
> He lacerates his back like a valley
> He lifts his voice and shouts: 'Baal is dead!'
> Woe to the people, Woe to the multitudes of Baal
> I shall go down into the earth." (67:VI:15-24)

Anath, Baal's consort, repeats this cry and copies El's self-mutilation.

How does God, the Bible, portray the Canaanites? The clearest and most comprehensive biblical assessment of the Canaanites is found in Leviticus 18:1-5:

> "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do *what is done in the land of Canaan* where I am bringing you; *you shall not walk in their statutes*

(ways). You are to perform My judgments and keep my statutes, to live in accord with them. I am the Lord your God. So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord."

By inference, everything forbidden in this chapter is simply a description of what the Canaanites were doing. First on the list of forbidden practices is incest, sexual intercourse with blood relatives and in-laws: your father and mother (v.7,8), your sister (v. 9), your daughter (v. 10), your niece (v. 11), your aunt (v.12, 13), your uncle (v.15), your sister-in-law (v.16), any woman or her children (17), polygamy (two sisters-v.18), adultery (your neighbor's wife-v. 20), ritual child sacrifice (v.21), homosexuality, sodomy (v.22), bestiality (animals-v. 23). God summarizes these prohibitions with:

"Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have visited its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and my judgments, and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you; for the men of the land who have been before you have done ALL these abominations, and the land has become defiled; so that the land may not spew you out should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people. Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the Lord your God." (Lev. 18:24-30).

God's Purpose and Intent

What we observe above is in stark contrast to the cultic practices of the Canaanites, the high standards and

expectations of conduct laid out by the God of Israel for His people. Why is it so important that the Israelites shun these practices of the indigent population, the Canaanites?

Because God is doing something new, something important. He has redeemed his chosen people from Egyptian bondage and is in the process of fulfilling his ancient promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12. The larger plan involves an earlier promise (Genesis 3:15) that there would come a "Seed of the Woman" who would crush Satan and establish a means to undo the damage done in Eden through their disobedience. This plan of redemption is promised, and the remainder of the Old Testament is a working out in history the unfolding of that plan to provide a Savior, a Redeemer, a Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise.

And in Abraham God found a worthy servant who would become the patriarch, the father of a nation through whom Messiah would come, bringing untold blessing and deliverance through his life, death, and resurrection to all those who believe. Redemptive history is a long process. It began in Eden immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, and it will one day end in the New Jerusalem.

God's peculiar people begin with Abraham and his immediate descendants: first Isaac, then Jacob, and then Joseph. These four were the founders, the patriarchs of this new people God was shaping to be the vehicle through which Messiah would come. The Israelites then spent four hundred years in bondage in Egypt until Moses was raised up to deliver them with "a strong hand." Pharaoh finally let them go. They traveled to Mt. Sinai and stayed there a full year. They arrived at Sinai a disorganized mob; they left there a year later an organized host. During that year God revealed to them the constitutional foundations of their heritage and their mission. He spelled out the rules of their conduct, their worship, and how they would live in community. At the end of this year, they were poised east of the Jordan and ready to go into Canaan and take

it by force. But after spying out the land, the fear of the majority with respect to this campaign caused them to shrink back from their task, and God sent them into the wilderness to wander for forty years. The new generation that emerged at the close of this period of divine discipline was finally allowed to go into the Canaan and possess it.

As they prepared themselves for this task, Moses summarized for a second time (the book of Deuteronomy) just what it would take, and what they would have to do. Ironically, the issue of the Canaanites is first spoken of way back in Genesis 15! God is speaking to Abraham and He mentions the problem of the Canaanites. He first speaks of (predicts) the Egyptian bondage which would come, and then He speaks of the deliverance from Egypt, and then He promises the conquest and repossession of the Promised Land. He says:

> Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions… And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. Then, in the fourth generation they shall return here (Canaan) *for the iniquity of the Amorite (Canaanites) is not yet* ***complete*** (Gen. 15:12-16).

What is interesting about this is that the wickedness of the Canaanites is already recognized as a problem 400+ years before God will give the command that the Canaanites are to be slaughtered—men, women, and children! At the time the Lord spoke these words to Abraham (c. 2,000 B.C.), the Canaanites were already corrupt, but they still had a way to go before God, who is a patient, merciful but Holy God, would finally bring judgment upon them. God gave them 400 years to "shape up," but we find them even more wicked than ever when the Israelites are about to invade (retake) their land!

What is also interesting is that when Jericho was about to be taken, Rahab the prostitute hid the two Israeli spies in her home, lied to the authorities about it, and then helped the spies escape over the wall. While the spies were in her home she said some remarkable things:

> "She came up to them on the roof and said to them, I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the Amorites whom you utterly destroyed beyond the Jordan… And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord, your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by the Lord, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with me…and deliver our lives from death." (Joshua 2:8-13)

Not only Rahab knew of God's powerful deliverance; she tells us that everyone else knew about these events and were fearful for their lives! The difference between Rahab and the rest of the people of Jericho is that she saw in these mysterious workings none other than the hand of the true God Himself! She repented; she believed! Because of her faith, she is mentioned in Faith's Hall of Fame (Hebrews 11:31)! My point is that other Canaanites could have responded as she did. Unfortunately, they continued on in their wicked, rebellious ways. The fullness of the "Amorites" is now complete. National judgment is at hand, with Israel as the instrument God will use to put an end to a totally depraved culture.

Why Such Excessive Slaughter? Why the Women? Why the Children?

God explains this to us in Romans 1:17-2:2:

> "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all

ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an *image* in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to *impurity*, that their bodies might be *dishonored* among them. For they exchanged the *truth of God* for a lie, and worshipped and served the *creature* rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God *gave them over* to *degrading* passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is *unnatural*, and in the same way also the men *abandoned* the natural function of the woman and *burned in their desire* towards one another, *men with men* committing *indecent acts* and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God *gave them over* to a *depraved mind*, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, *haters of God*, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, with out understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and though they know the ordinance of God, that *those who*

> *practice such things are* ***worthy of death***, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.
>
> Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you…and we know that the judgment of God *rightfully falls upon those who practice such things.*"

The Romans passage above describes for us in vivid detail how this can happen to a culture. And this is exactly the kind of conditions existing in Canaan as the Israelites approached to conquer the land which had been promised them. God makes it very clear to them the reasons for what they must do and how they must do it:

> "Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you… Know therefore today that *it is the Lord your God who is crossing over* before you as a *consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you,* so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has spoken to you.
>
> Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of *my* righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' but *it is because of the wickedness of these nations* that the Lord is dispossessing them before you… It is not for *your* righteousness or for the uprightness of *your* heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the *wickedness of these nations* that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order *to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*
>
> Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn (stiff necked) people!" (Deuteronomy

9:1-6)

God makes it very clear that sometimes things deteriorate so far that a culture or a people reaches a "point of no return." The remedy is like trying to unscramble an egg. There is just no way back; things have gone too far. The story of the Genesis Flood is "Exhibit One"—a demonstration that He has already done this once on this planet. A good surgeon does not amputate a leg if someone has a severely stubbed toe. But a good surgeon will amputate if the infection is so massive that to refuse to do so would mean the loss of the whole body and person.

R.A. Torrey remarks: "It is appalling that any people should be utterly put to the sword, but it is even more appalling that a society of people should have become so corrupt and debased that such treatment is deemed necessary in the interest of humanity. The Canaanites were a moral cancer threatening the very life of the whole human race. The cancer had to be removed in order to save the body, just as a surgeon inflicts pain and suffering in order to remove a malignant growth in the body (*Difficulties in the Bible.* R.A. Torrey, p. 47).

This is exactly the dilemma God faced as the Israelites are brought back to possess their land. To settle them in the midst of these depraved people is asking for disaster. If the cancer remains, Israel will not survive. For Israel's survival, the Canaanites will have to go. Israel will be corrupted by their presence and their influence. She will fall away from the Lord Who has loved her and delivered her. Ironically, this is exactly what happened, because while they disposed of most of the inhabitants of Canaan, *they did not remove all of them.* And Israel's incomplete obedience in this matter actually brought about future, periodic relapses when they *did* cease "following the Lord" and served other gods through the ongoing influence of these pagan tribes.

With respect to the women, the experience of Lot, his wife, and his two daughters dwelling in Sodom is instructive. We are told that if ten righteousness men could have been found in the city, God would spare it from judgment. Judgment fell on the city, indicating ten were not found. Lot was "courting disaster" to be a believer and live in such an environment. As the account indicates, Lot survived the judgment because God graciously warned him to flee the city (this was really based upon God's honoring Abraham's intercession on Lot's behalf), but his wife turned around and looked back toward Sodom. This was her home. She liked Sodom. The immorality didn't bother her. She was still yearning for Sodom when God turned her into a pillar of salt. In some instances, the women are the "prime-movers" in leading the men into sin. Torrey comments: "Though true women are nobler than true men, depraved women are more dangerous than depraved men" (p. 48).

The two daughters were also affected. They had sense enough not to turn around and look at the city, but we find in their immoral, incestuous behavior with their own father later that they were already "damaged goods." This is a good warning for Christian parents. We may choose to live in or near "Sodom" and we ourselves may survive, but it is more than likely our children will not come away unaffected by their exposure to such an unwholesome environment.

With respect to the command to dispose of the children, there is at least one bright spot, severe as it is. Those who adopt children want to do so at the earliest possible age. Why? Because evidence shows that children are early affected by whatever their family system might be. The emotional and physical abuse and wounds inflicted upon them from birth to age five or six leave permanent scars which often cannot be healed. The scars remain, and even the best of environments cannot overcome the negative influences of those early years of development. Even these Canaanite children would have perpetuated the corrupt influence of the Canaanites among the

Hebrew Community, had they been spared.

We have all observed or known of families which are so dysfunctional and corrupt we grieve for their unhappy, confused, and suffering children, and wish to God somehow they could be removed and placed in some loving, caring home where they could feel safe and not suffer at the hands of hostile and even deranged parents. Happily, there are no children in hell. Jesus loves the little children. The one bright spot in this sordid story is that God removed an entire generation of Canaanite children and took them to such a home . . . His home.

Those who struggle the most with the forceful elimination of the Canaanites in this biblical account have a very dim and truncated view of God. We have seen above that God has the right, because of His holiness and His righteousness, to visit judgment upon individuals and nations who have become corrupt and degenerate. The amazing thing is, like with the Canaanites, that He waits so long. Torrey remarks,

> "…Those who regard sin lightly and who have no adequate conception of God's holiness will always find insurmountable difficulty in this command of God, but those who have come to see the awfulness of sin and have learned to hate it with the infinite hate it deserves, and who have caught some glimpses of the infinite holiness of God and have been made in some measure partakers of that holiness, will, after mature reflection, have no difficulty whatever with this command. It is consciousness of sin in our own hearts and lives that makes us rebel against God's stern dealings with sin (p. 50)."

I hope this in some way helps to address your question, _____.

God Bless.

Jimmy Williams, Founder

“I Fear I Have Committed the Unforgiveable Sin!”

I went through a very tough time about ten years ago. My best friend (besides my loving parents), my great-grandmother, died. I’ve never been closer to anyone before or since her, but I let her down on her death bed. I was bitter towards God for taking her, and upset my job was adding pressure to my life. One night at work, I blew up at God. I don’t remember all I said to Him, but it was really bad, and at that time I meant it.

Some time passed and I realized I was wrong. I asked God to forgive me, but I never had the feeling that I was forgiven. One day I was in a Christian bookstore and read about the “unpardonable sin.” Several articles I read afterwards seemed to say I hadn’t committed this horrible sin, but the seed of doubt was there. I have asked others about this, and have usually been “convinced” that I had not or could not have committed this sin, but after some time passes, the doubts come back in and it puts me back where I started.

I have asked Jesus to take control of my life since, but I just don’t feel his presence. I long to feel the presence of God in my life, but I don’t know what I should do. I am not sure of my original salvation. When I ask Jesus to come in and take control of my life, nothing happens.

Can you help me with these questions? Thanks for whatever help you can give me on this.

Thank you for your e-mail and your concerns about blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Let me see if I can help you.

First, what is “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”?

Most have taken the view that Jesus’ statements in Matthew 12:31,32 must be interpreted in an *historical* context—that is, what was actually occurring at that time and place when the Pharisees accused Him of casting out demons in the power of Satan. They blasphemed God (the Holy Spirit) by attributing God’s work and power to Satan. The purpose of the Holy Spirit was to authenticate the Messianic claims of Christ by demonstrating the presence of divine power through the various miracles recorded in the Gospels (see also Mark 3:28-30).

Part of Jesus “humbling Himself” involved the voluntary giving up, or emptying Himself of, the direct use of His divine attributes as the Second Person of the Trinity (cf. Phil.3:5-8). Rather, Jesus lived by faith, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit Who came to authenticate Christ’s Messianic claims to that particular generation, and specifically, the Jews. Immanuel had come: “God with us.”

The Pharisees chose to reject that conclusion. They could not deny the miracles; they only questioned the *source* of the power. In ascribing Christ’s actions as something empowered by Satan, they were blaspheming the Holy Spirit’s efforts to demonstrate that God Himself was in their presence!

One can only blaspheme God when God is present (Jesus). Lewis Sperry Chafer said,

> *“To say that attributing works that men may be doing in the power of the Spirit to Satan is the same offense as to go utterly beyond what is written. . . It is impossible for this particular sin to be committed today.”*

In other words, to ascribe the healing ministry of Oral

Roberts or Benny Hinn as Satan's work, for example, would *not* be blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, as neither of these men is claiming to be God or Messiah.

Furthermore, the many places in the Gospels where Jesus says, "Whosoever will, may come," are *without any other qualification.* And nowhere in Scripture is the gospel preached with the one caveat that "whosoever" means *everyone but those who have committed the "unpardonable sin."*

In that first century context, those actual Pharisees, and other unbelievers or scoffers, stood in the presence of God, robed in human flesh, as He performed miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. But when they came to the conclusion that all of this was being done through satanic power, they blasphemed against God Himself—**an unpardonable sin!**

Could any human beings in history have more light and grace from God than to actually be in the *presence* of the Messiah while he healed people, and come up with such an abominable explanation or conclusion?

By way of application, however, each one of us since the time Jesus walked the roads of Palestine is in danger of committing an unpardonable sin. It is the sin of rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts Who testifies of Christ's sacrificial death on our behalf and gently nudges us to respond in faith to what He has done for us.

Jesus promised over and over that He would send the Holy Spirit to authenticate His Messianic claims. And Jesus said that "When He comes, He will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father. . . and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged (John 16:8-11)." Clearly, here Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would continue to do through the centuries, all over the world, the same thing He was doing

wherever Christ went during His three years of public ministry: testifying to the truth of Christ's Messianic claims and calling for true repentance and the acknowledgement that we have sinned and are in need of a Savior, that our (human) righteousness is inadequate to make us presentable before a Holy God, and that judgment is sure: *There will be a "pay day" someday.*

We are accountable for our actions and our choices. And it is the task of the Holy Spirit (Jesus tells us in these verses) to convict men and women of sin, (lack of) righteousness, and judgment. Every person in history who has heard the gospel message is faced with the same choice that those Pharisees had who were eye-witnesses to His miracles: we can turn in repentance and faith to Christ, or we can reject the testimony of the Holy Spirit to our hearts, and, in so doing, we HAVE committed an unpardonable sin, because we have rejected the only provision God has made for our salvation—Christ Himself (John 3:18,36; Acts 4:12).

Therefore, getting angry at God, or making a swear word out of the Holy Spirit (although it is curious, and perhaps instructive, that in all the profanities of humankind, we never hear anyone using the third Person of the Trinity as a swear word!), is **not** committing blasphemy in the "unpardonable" sense implied in Matthew 12.

To blaspheme God, to take His Name in vain, whether Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, is sin, but it is not an unpardonable sin. When Paul speaks of the Law (the Ten Commandments), from which we are freed of condemnation through Christ's death, he implies that Christ's blood has covered ALL of the commandments which we have broken, including taking God's name in vain.

"The doubts come back," you say. When doubts do come, particularly when they involve a questioning of the integrity of God's Word, that is, what He said, and whether He can be

trusted, Christians must learn to recognize the presence of the enemy of our souls. In the Garden of Eden, Satan said, "Has God said? . . .If you eat . . .you will be like God." Or when Jesus was tempted: Satan quoted scripture three times *out of context* to serve his own ends—to destroy Jesus and keep Him from the Cross. We can expect our enemy will try to do the same with us. Ephesians 6 talks about taking upon us the whole armor of God so we are enabled to stand against him.

In light of your questions, most pertinent is Paul's exhortation "And above all, take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one (6:16)." When the flaming arrows, "darts of doubt," come, we hold up the shield of faith to stop them and to protect ourselves. We believe what *God* has said is true, not what our *feelings* say are true. We choose to believe Him regardless of how we feel.

The great majority of people who fear they have committed the "unpardonable sin" really have not. If anyone has a desire to repent and turn to Christ, that of itself is an indication (proof?) that he/she has *not* committed it. We have Jesus' own word for it that "anyone who will come to Me I will in no way cast out or away (John 6:37)."

You mention that you doubt your original salvation. Again, it is not based on how you feel, or whether you sense His presence. It is more like marriage. If someone were to ask me if I am married, I wouldn't say, "Well, I *feel* kind of married today." Or "I feel my wife's presence, therefore I must be married." No. My certainty about my marriage is based on a commitment I made to her many years ago, and I am still living in the light of that commitment.

The very fact that you are concerned about your salvation and are anxious that you come to certainty about it is a *sign* of spiritual *life!* Non-believers aren't concerned about not going to heaven or having their sins forgiven. They do not reach out

to Christ as you indicate you have. If I came to the door of your home and rang the doorbell, and you opened it, invited me in, sat me down in the living room and then excused yourself every few minutes, walked back to the front door and kept inviting me in, over and over again, when I was already inside and sitting on the couch, wouldn't that be rather foolish? Because I came in the first time you invited me to enter!

Perhaps this is your problem. You indicate you have reached out and accepted Christ as your Savior and you want to have Him direct your life. Perhaps you need to just stop going to the door and saying "please come in," but rather thank Him that He **has** come in because you asked Him and He promised! Faith is when you stop saying "please" to God and you start saying "Thank You."

You have concerns about "letting down your great-grandmother." It is obvious you loved this dear woman very much. Perhaps she was trying to share with you her love and concern for your life and desiring to help you see your need for Christ. If I am reading you correctly in what you are saying, because of your job and other things, along with the "unfairness" of God taking someone so dear to you, these event made you BITTER instead of BETTER. You railed at God. You got angry at Him. It might be encouraging for you to know that you're in good company. Moses got angry and frustrated with God. So did David. Read the Psalms. Here are real people struggling with the same kinds of questions and disappointments you have described. God is a big Boy. He laughs at the collective hatred and railing of the entire earth. (See Psalm 2: "Why do the heathen rage? He will have them in derision.")

If He can handle world-wide wrath, He can handle your episode with Him. He is a God of tender mercies. He "pitieth His children," the Bible says. Your anger made you feel guilty, and you felt that God pulled away from you. But this is not so. God remains the same. I read somewhere, "If God seems far away, guess who moved?" But you can go to Him and start anew.

He holds no grudges. He readily forgives. He desires and is eager to walk more closely with you if only you would step toward Him and get better acquainted. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us come BOLDLY to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”

You might begin in the Gospel of John. Just start reading it. Begin to grow in your faith and the doubts will not be as strong.

With regard to your great grandmother: From *your* vantage point you no doubt feel there is some unfinished business with her and you don’t know what to do about it. You loved her and you disappointed her, and then she died. The Lord brings this verse to my mind: “I have no greater joy than to hear my children walk in truth.” (3 John 4).

I believe our departed loved ones are conscious some way of what is taking place here on earth. I believe your great-grandmother is probably aware of your steps of growth toward a solid commitment to Christ, toward a life that is not “tossed about by every wind of doctrine,” (Ephesians. 4:14; James 1:6), toward a life not focused upon the past with regret and failure which is “hanging you up” and sapping your days, but rather a life focused on Christ and His goodness, and His willingness to forgive, as I am sure your loved one has also already forgiven.

Now it is time for you to forgive yourself. Accept God’s forgiveness. Know that you will be bringing joy to the Lord, and to your great-grandmother as well, by settling these issues we have discussed. Do *not* let the enemy rob you of the sweet joy of feeling accepted and close to the Lord and to your great-grandmother as well!

I hope this helps.

Your Brother in Christ,
Jimmy Williams, Founder

“What Do We Do When Critics Point to the Atrocities of the Crusades?”

This is a great website. I have benefited from the strong biblical perspectives you provide here and on AFR Radio station KAMA in Sioux City, Iowa.

What I am looking for is accurate info regarding the Crusades. Everywhere I turn, some “bible basher” is criticizing Christianity for all the people it has murdered in the name of religion. . .the Crusades is ONE of those examples that is thrown in our faces. We want to know how to intelligently respond with FACTS.

What do you have that could help?

Dear _____:

Thank you for your recent e-mail regarding the Crusades. Let me see if I can give you some help on this.

To begin with, a Christian response to charges like this one must be honest with the facts of history. The truth of the matter is that the historical, institutional Church and true, Biblical Christianity have not always been synonymous. There is no way that we should try to defend or excuse those times and incidents where the Church has erred from her calling and failed to emulate and model the teachings of its Founder. In short, the Christian Church, in all of its forms—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant—has a “checkered”

past. Where the church has failed, we must agree with our critics. The Pope's recent apology in Jerusalem for the Church's failure to take the lead in preventing the Holocaust is a current example.

But we should also know our history, and the Crusades is a good case in point. Most critics of our faith make sweeping generalizations about the Church's failure in a certain issue or event (like the Crusades) and assign to her *all* the blame. Another tactic is to just ignore other factors which might interfere with the case they are trying to make against Christianity.

This is not a new problem. Tertullian, one of the early church fathers (c.200 A.D.) complained that whether the Tiber flooded, or there was an earthquake, or a famine, etc., Rome's answer was, "The Christians to the Lions!"

It is important for us in historical analysis to make a clear distinction between the ideals, teachings, and practices of Our Lord and the lives, and often questionable behavior, of all professing Christians—be they ecclesiastical bodies, "Christian" nations, or individuals. In short:

> Renaissance popes are **not** Christianity; St. Francis of Assisi **is.**
> Pizarro and Cortez are **not** Christianity; Bartolome de Las Casas **is.**
> Captain Ball, a Yankee Slaver, is **not** Christianity; William Wilberforce **is**.

And when we come to the Crusaders, we find we are faced with a "mixed multitude." First, we have the Pope, who, along with his colleagues, thought it shameful the Holy Land was possessed by the infidel. Secondly, we have genuine parishioners, from peasants to nobles, who sincerely desired to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. These tens of thousands went with a true spiritual purpose (many died on the way) and

are not guilty of the charge above. And third, we have a large contingent of men who were motivated by two primary things: economic gain, and the automatic promise from the Church that they could "skip" Purgatory" and be assured of heaven if they "took up the Cross" and died fighting in their mission to reclaim the Holy Land for Christianity. This Christian "*Jihad*" could be said to have promised "All this, and heaven too!"

If you want a good book about this, I would recommend a readable volume simply entitled *The Crusades* by Zoe Oldenbourg. You should be able to get it in any library. It was published in 1966 by Pantheon Books. Oldenbourg is a Russian Jewess who lived much of her life in Paris.

This book almost reads like a novel and is fascinating.. Before she begins her account she gives a marvelous description of what western Europe was like at the time of the Crusades. Conditions were, at the time, just the opposite from what they are today. Now, the wealth and industry is in the West, while the Middle East is blighted and "third-worldish" (excepting huge wealth in the East held by the few who control vast oil holdings), then, it was the West that was blighted and primitive, while the Middle East possessed vast wealth and contained great, opulent cities.

Many of the Crusading Knights who joined the Crusades were second and third sons, who were not entitled to an inheritance because of the practice of *primogeniture*—the exclusive right of the first born to a Father's Estate. From the "get-go" these men demonstrated their prime motive for joining the Crusade: economic gain.

From beginning to end, the Crusades are truly a trail of tears. . .from the (1) pogroms in various cities where thousands of Jews died at the hands of the Crusaders as they journeyed East toward the Holy Land, to the (2) "peeling off" of many knights as the great cities of the Levant were reached [Edessa, Tarsus, Aleppo, Damascus, Antioch, Acre. Some of them

never even got to Jerusalem! Greedily, they captured a city by force, put themselves in charge, and lived in new-found luxury], to (3) the capture of Jerusalem and the complete massacre of all its inhabitants—both Jews and Muslims, to the (4) other sorry Crusades that followed, the last of which, when the Crusaders found themselves at the gates of Constantinople, decided to just attack and sack *it* instead!

Other "black marks" which critics pounce on include: (1) virulent anti-Semitism, practiced by Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and even Protestant (including Martin Luther himself), (2) the Inquisition, (3) the torture and burning of heretics and witches, (4) the practice of slavery, (5) the treatment and destruction of native populations [the Irish, the Indians of the Americas, the African Tribes, the island populations in both Oceans], (6) treatment of women, and (7) all "Religious" wars.

Here again we cannot defend the actions of "Christian" people. We must quickly agree with our critics. At the same time, we must press home the idea *that the Church is* ***not*** *our model. . .* ***Jesus*** *is.* Where His teachings and His personal example have been followed many positive things have helped to change society in such ways that much of the world is still benefiting from His impact. Even the critics have to recognize this.

I will close with these quotes written by three eminent historians, R.R. Palmer, Roland H. Bainton, and W.E.H Lecky:

> "It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the coming of Christianity. It brought with it, for one thing, an altogether new sense of human life. For the Greeks had shown man his mind; but the Christians showed him his soul. They taught that in the sight of God, all souls were equal, that every human life was sacrosanct and inviolate. Where the Greeks had identified the beautiful and the good, had thought ugliness to be bad, had shrunk from disease and

imperfection and from everything misshapen, horrible, and repulsive, the Christian sought out the diseased, the crippled, the mutilated, to give them help. Love for the ancient Greek, was never quite distinguished from Venus. For the Christians who held that God was love, it took on deep overtones of sacrifice and compassion." (Palmer)

"The history of Christianity is inseparable from the history of Western culture and of Western society. For almost a score of centuries Christian beliefs, principles, and ideals have colored the thoughts and feelings of Western man. The traditions and practices have left an indelible impression not only on developments of purely religious interest, but on virtually the total endeavor of man. This has been manifest in art and literature, science and law, politics and economics, and, as well, in love and war. Indeed, the indirect and unconscious influence Christianity has often exercised in avowedly secular matters—social, intellectual, and institutional—affords striking proof of the dynamic forces that have been generated by the faith over the millenniums. Even those who have contested its claims and rejected its tenets have been affected by what they opposed. Whatever our beliefs, all of us today are inevitable heirs to this abundant legacy; and it is impossible to understand the cultural heritage that sustains and conditions our lives without considering the contributions of Christianity.

"Since the death of Christ, his followers have known vicissitudes as well as glory and authority. The Christian religion has suffered periods of persecution and critical divisions within its own ranks. It has been the cause and the victim of war and strife. It has assumed forms of astonishing variety. It has been confronted by revolutionary changes in human and social outlooks and subjected to searching criticism. The culture of our own time, indeed has been termed the most completely secularized form of culture the world has ever known. We live in what some have called

> the post-Christian age. Yet wherever we turn to enrich our lives, we continue to encounter the lasting historical realities of Christian experience and tradition." (Bainton).
>
> ". . .[T]he greatest religious change in the history of mankind took place under the eyes of a brilliant galaxy of philosophers and historians who disregard as contemptible powerful moral lever that has ever been applied to the affairs of men." (Lecky, *History of European Morals*).

Hope this helps answer your question, _____.

Jimmy Williams
Founder, Probe Ministries

P.S. I'll have to dig out the reference sources for Palmer and Bainton, but wanted to get this to you now.