

Truth You Can Sing About – Part 3

Probe radio producer Steven Davis provides spiritual truth in five Christmas carols, backed by new music written and performed by his son Jon Clive Davis.

Coventry Carol

Songs about Jesus' birth have been close friends with Christmas for generations, but when's the last time you thought about the great truth found in these Christmas hymns and carols? In this article we're highlighting five Christmas songs, and first up is *Coventry Carol*.



**Herod the King in his raging charged he hath this day,
His men of might in his own sight all children young to slay...**

Following a star, Magi arrive in Jerusalem, and ask Herod where they can find this new born King of the Jews. Herod rouses his biblical scholars to research this, and they find in Micah (5:2):

But as for you, Bethlehem . . . too little to be among the
clans of Judah,
from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of
eternity.

This King was a much bigger deal than Herod ever would be. Still, Herod chooses to inform the Magi, encouraging them to return and tell him where they found this King, so that he too could "Worship Him (Matthew 2:8)."

But God knowing his heart, warns the Magi to return home another way. When Herod found out he was furious, and

instructed his soldiers to kill all the baby boys two years old and younger. A second prophecy is fulfilled from Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more." (31:15)

It was this event which stirred the writing of the hauntingly beautiful *Coventry Carol*. Even though this is a dark and tragic theme, we need to know and to feel the entire context surrounding the birth of Christ.

One child born, and who knows how many dozens, if not hundreds, were slaughtered.

2000 years later, few would respond to Christ as Herod did; but to even do something as "harmless" as ignore Him, places you at eternal risk. So, how do you respond to the Christ?

In the Bleak Midwinter

**Enough for Him, whom Cherubim worship night and day,
a breastful of milk and a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom Angels fall down before,
the ox and ass and camel which adore.**

The third verse speaks to something we often forget, especially when it comes to applying it. The Christmas narratives from the Gospels, prophecies and subsequent teaching speak plainly and forcefully to the deity and humility of Christ. The Apostle Paul explains it well:

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. (Philippians 2: 6-8 NLT)

Jesus Christ gives us the greatest example of a life of

humility, first by laying aside His “divine privileges,” then humbled Himself further by dying for our sins on the cross. Going from the non-stop worship of the cherubim to mother’s milk and a bed of hay was entirely within His character. As was the stark contrast between angels falling prostrate before Him to simple barnyard beasts adoring Him.

Perhaps God’s greatest goal for your life and for mine is to make us like Jesus. Paul tells us in Romans: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Romans 8:29) So do you think humility would be part of that process for us? Of course.

The author of the song Christina Rossetti wraps up her verses with an application:

Yet what I can I give Him, give my heart.

Humility is what brings us to Christ. Will you give your heart to Him this Christmas?

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

**God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of
comfort and joy.**

Even though this is one of the oldest Christmas Carols still being sung today, it offers a unique blending of historic and contemporary perspectives.

The first and last verses are for us (the contemporary perspective), while the middle verses are about shepherds, angels, the Christ Child, and His mother Mary. Let’s look at the verses which apply to you and me.

The first line tells us how we are to rest merry and are not

to dismay. How can we do that? Because Christ was born to save. The angel said: "Do not be afraid" (Luke 2:10). In other words, don't be dismayed. And, "there has been born for you a Savior" (Luke 2:11), which allows us to rest merry. We learn more from Matthew 1:21, "He will save His people from their sins." So not just saved—but saved from our sins.

The next line talks about how "we were gone astray." Isaiah 53 shows us how far we've gone astray, listing the things Christ has done for us: bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; chastised for our peace, and His wounds healed us. And after all Christ has done for us, it says: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way." Despite this, the Lord "Laid on him the iniquity of us all."

What typically is the last verse, with the contemporary perspective, says:

Now to the Lord sing praises, all you within this place.

That's what you do when the Son of God has come into the world, to save you from your sins.

While Shepherds Watched

While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground,

An angel of the Lord came down, and glory shone around.

"Fear not," said he for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind

"Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind."

Well, there's no doubt from the title it's all about the shepherd's perspective of what happened the night Christ was born.

When you compare the lyrics of the carol with Luke 2, you discover that the shepherd's perspective in this song is

extremely Biblical. Examine all the main points from the Gospel narrative, and you find them in the song: the cast, the location, angelic appearance, fear, angelic announcement, new location, signs, chorus, praise.

Now a word about the cast, and their perspective. *They were shepherds!* But wait, wasn't this the birth of the Son of God? King of kings and Lord of Lords? Why would God make such a stellar announcement to the working class? Two reasons:

The first reason is found in both Luke 2 and the first verse of the song. Here's Luke's account: "And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'" This good news was for ALL the people.

The second reason the shepherds were the recipients of such good news was pride. Had the message been brought to the elite, the royal, the upper class, do you think they would have shared such a great message with those of us less fortunate? Probably not. We wouldn't have access to their social circles. Why would they seek us out to share this good news? Pride would have cut the Good News off from the rest of the world.

God did not want this message to miss anyone. Christ came humbly, and his announcement came humbly. After all, *God so loved the **world**.*

0 Holy Night

**0 holy night! The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.**

Long lay the world in sin and error pining. Although one

rarely “pines” anymore, as I read this line, I feel the hopelessness and helplessness pressing in. In the seventh chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans, he said: “And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t . . . I am a slave to sin.” Yeah, that’s hopeless.

Speaking of slavery, the third verse declares: **Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother; and in His name all oppression shall cease.** In 1847, when the lyrics were written, slavery was rampant, especially in these United States. And a century and a half later, oppression still hasn’t ceased. Why?

Well, Paul said it in the previous passage: “I am a slave to sin.” We are *all* slaves to sin . . . until Christ breaks those chains.

The result of Christ breaking the chains of oppression is found in the choruses:

Fall on your knees;

and

Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!

Christ humbled Himself to embrace our human weaknesses, and humbled Himself even further, unto death on the cross. And our response is to fall on our knees in humility and praise. I wonder if humility has a place in breaking the chain of oppression. Seems to work for Jesus.

This program’s scripts were written by the producer of Probe Radio, Steven Davis. The music was composed and performed by his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis. May your Christmas be filled with praise!

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Truth You Can Sing About – Part 2

When was the last time you thought about the great truth found in Christmas hymns and carols? In this program we focus on the truth of five Christmas carols. Be sure to listen to the podcast to hear the music for each carol, written just for us, playing underneath the content! [Part 1](#), produced in 2015, featured five different Christmas carols.

The First Noel

**And by the light of that same star
Three wise men came from country far;
To seek for a King was their intent,
And to follow the star wherever it went.**

The first two verses speak about angels and shepherds; the remaining verses speak of three Wise Men.



Tradition gives us their names, but not only do we *not* know their names (because the Bible doesn't mention them), we don't even know if there *were* three. We assume three because of the number of gifts mentioned.

But the point of this carol is not about a number, or gifts; it's about the **commitment** of these Magi: *"To seek for a King was their intent, and to follow the star wherever it went."*

Is there something in your life you've pursued, *wherever* it went? A person? Stuff? Wealth? Position? Power? The Magi were accustomed to wealth, position and power. But who did they

pursue? A foreign King. A Jewish King. Why? Well, if they knew about the birth of this Jewish King, then they knew about the Jewish God. And I believe they understood that this Jewish God, was The One True God.

To choose to follow the King was and is counter-cultural, and oftentimes is perceived as foolish. But the WISE men didn't care. They chose to follow the star *wherever it went*, until they found . . . Him. Do you know who to follow? Are you willing to look for Him with that same kind of commitment?

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

**Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.**

“You will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of God Most High. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end.”
(Luke 1:31-33)

It's been about 400 years since Israel had heard from the Lord, and within six months, the angel Gabriel came down twice to speak of Messiah's birth. When Mary heard those words, Scripture mentions how she treasured them in her heart. The big thing: she's going to be pregnant! (Well, and that He was a King.) But the first thing Gabriel told Mary was to name Him Jesus; and we learn from another angelic vision that Jesus would live up to His name: “[F]or He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21)

Mr. Wesley got it right; the first line of this verse is, "Born Thy people to deliver." The advent we celebrate now is for the One Who has delivered us from our sins. The advent we still expect is when He will rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, forever.

May Christ rule in *your* heart . . . forever.

Come, All Ye Faithful

**Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.**

Singer/Songwriter Michael Card was explaining how it was difficult for the disciples to see **Christ as God**. Seeing Him as man—standing five-foot something, walking, eating and drinking with them everyday—was easy. But for us, the opposite is true—seeing Him as God is easier; but **Christ as man**, is a bit more difficult.

One of the reasons to celebrate His birth, is to give us a tangible and "In Time" beginning of One who is everlasting. And so like the hymn, we **can** come before Him in our hearts and minds, see Him lying in a manger in a barn. We can rejoice how the Word became flesh, and, we can rejoice that He laid down that life, to save us.

John 1 reveals the author's inspiration: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) But how is it we come to adore Him? John tells us in a few verses earlier: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12)

Will you receive that right, and greet Christ the Lord today?

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent

Rank on rank the host of heaven
spreads its vanguard on the way,
as the Light of light descendeth
from the realms of endless day,
that the powers of hell may vanish
as the shadows clear away.

When the author of the hymn composed this verse he must have had Isaiah 9:2 in mind: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." He must have visualized the host of heaven in a vanguard invading the earth, and leading the Son of God to His incarnation in a glorious, dazzling, and blinding display. All who worshiped darkness were put on notice: the light of the world had come into the world.

And the light is still here, which is why the shadows are being cleared away and the powers of hell will vanish: "You are the light of the world . . . Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14, 16)

"But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, who called you out of darkness into his own marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9)

Will you come out of your darkness and into His light?

Good Christian Men Rejoice (*In Dulci Jubilo*)

Good Christian men, rejoice,
With heart, and soul, and voice;

**Now ye hear of endless bliss: Joy! Joy!
Jesus Christ was born for this!
He hath opened the heavenly door,
And man is blessed forevermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!**

So what was Christ born for? Or as the hymn goes: What's the "this?"

"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep . . . If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." (John 10:7,9)

Christ not only opened the door, He **IS** the door. He's the **only door** to Heaven, and to our Father in Heaven: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:6)

When Christ died upon the cross, **He did it for you**, so that you would have a way into heaven, and experience endless, eternal bliss. "Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne." (Hebrews 11:3) He was willing to die **for the joy** that was awaiting Him; of accomplishing His Father's will, and making a way for you, to the Father.

The door is open. Listen, you could be hearing the songs of Heaven.

May your Christmas be filled with praise.

This program was written by Probe Radio producer, Steven Davis, whose blog is [Singing With the King](#). The music was composed and performed by his son and Mind Games Camp graduate, Jon Clive Davis.

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Truth You Can Sing About: 5 Christmas Carols

When was the last time you thought about the great truth found in Christmas hymns and carols? Probe Radio producer Steven Davis focuses on the theology of five Christmas carols. The podcast features new music for each carol written by Steven's son and Probe's Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis.



Hark the Herald Angels Sing

**Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!”**

Charles Wesley penned these words in the early 1700's. And this hymn is filled with inspiration and insight.

The 1st line tells us who delivers this great message: the angels.

The 2nd line reveals Who is the content: the Christ child.

The 3rd line shows results of this miraculous birth: peace and mercy incarnate came to earth.

But the 4th line exclaims what has happened—that which mankind had been incapable of doing, and centuries of sacrifices could not accomplish: God and sinners were finally and fully

reconciled.

Reconciliation literally means “according to change.” The situation between God and man had to be changed; both parties were at enmity with one another, and we needed to be reconciled.

“This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body.” (Colossians 1:21-22)

“We were God’s enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God’s friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ’s life!” (Romans 5:10)

On that angel-filled night, we became witnesses to the first step of this reconciliation: the Son had come in the flesh to earth! And that’s the point of the Incarnation—God became man so that He could reconcile us to Himself, and that was the miraculous, wondrous Christmas Change.

Don’t miss what the Apostle Paul and Wesley were saying about our condition: we were sinners and we were enemies. But now, because of Christ, we are reconciled.

When you consider His birth this Christmas season, may you be wondrously changed.

0 Come, 0 Come Emmanuel

**0 come, 0 come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, 0 Israel.**

Emmanuel: *God with us*. This was not a new concept, for Israel knew and saw on numerous occasions that God was “with” them:

“Praise the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the wonderful promises he gave through his servant Moses. May the Lord our God **be with us** as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us or abandon us.” (1 Kings 8)

“Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria nor because of all the horde that is with him; for the one **with us** is greater than the one with him. With him is only an arm of flesh, but **with us** is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles.” (2 Chronicles 32)

“The LORD of hosts is **with us**; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.” (Psalm 46)

During the exodus God was with them as seen in a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of smoke by day. His presence was with them in the Holy of holies. And at times His presence was with them in battle.

But Emmanuel being **with us** is different.

John tells us in his gospel, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14)

And Paul continues in his letter to Timothy: “Here is the great mystery of our religion: Christ came as a human. The Spirit proved that he pleased God, and he was seen by angels. Christ was preached to the nations. People in this world put their faith in him, and he was taken up to glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16)

The Son of God has appeared, and that is a reason for Israel—and us—to rejoice.

Joy to the World

Joy to the world! The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing!

I love this carol. It is indeed joyous, and is rightfully sung as such. But is the world joyous? Will Earth receive her king? Will every heart prepare Him room?

No.

And that greatly saddens me. There are those who worship other gods, and will find no joy in His coming. There are those who think Him a myth and will not receive Him. There are those who think Him irrelevant or undeserving, and will not make room for Him. For these . . . there is no joy.

Part of the reason there is no joy is our fault—the Church’s fault. Do we judge instead of love? Are we inconsistent? Do we preach legalism rather than forgiveness? And though we understand the Truth, do we wield it as a weapon rather than share it with grace?

For those who may have ended up on the receiving end of our hypocrisy, I am so sorry. But don’t let our failings get in the way of you seeing a loving heavenly Father, and His Son, dying for your sins.

Scripture tells us that “at the name of Jesus every knee will bow of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:10-11) So we **will** kneel and confess Christ, either because we love Him and find our joy in Him, or because we have to, and we find only fear.

Listen to the music; listen to the words; and discover The One who loves you this Christmas. He came for you; and He brings you joy!

What Child Is This?

**So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh,
Come, peasant, king, to own him.
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone him.
Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The babe, the Son of Mary.**

In the verse preceding this one, there's a question asked, which has to do more with you and me, than the shepherds and wise men who are part of this story: *Why lies He in such mean estate, where ox and ass are feeding?* That's a 19th century way of saying, "Why was Jesus born in a barn?" So then comes my question: "Why was the King of Kings born in a barn?" The answer comes in this last verse: *Come peasant, king, to own Him.*

The Apostle Paul had an opportunity to speak with the philosophers in Athens on Mars Hill, and his speech explains this invitation to all:

"As I was going through your city and looking at the things you worship, I found an altar with the words, 'To an Unknown God.' You worship this God, but you don't really know him. So I want to tell you about him. This God made the world and everything in it. He is Lord of heaven and earth, and he doesn't live in temples built by human hands. He doesn't need help from anyone. He gives life, breath, and everything else to all people. God has done all this, so that we will look for him and reach out and find him." (Acts 17)

Peter, after having a vision from God, said, "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him." (Acts 10:34)

A barn would give access to everyone; a palace—where a king *should* be born—would have guards and ministers and red tape and bureaucracy to negotiate; and those who would have seen and heard the angels would have never been able to see the One of Whom the Angels sang.

The angels sang the song for you. Don't miss seeing Him.

Il Est Né Le Divin Enfant

Chorus:

**He is born, the divine Christ child.
Play on the oboe and bagpipes merrily.
He is born, the divine Christ child.
Sing we all of the Savior's birth.**

**Through long ages of the past,
Prophets have foretold his coming;
Through long ages of the past,
Now the time has come at last.**

You probably noticed this was a French carol by the title. The above is but one of a multitude of translations, which bespeaks of its long and celebrated life in English performances.

Verse 1 talks about prophets and prophecy, and now is the time. That is a rather famous phrase in the New Testament. For He says, "At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you." Behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation.'" (1 Corinthians 6)

This salvation is quite literally Jesus Christ, and we see

this truth beginning in the above lyric, and concluded by the writer of Hebrews:

Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets. And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names." (Hebrews 1:1-4)

Do you understand what an awesome privilege it is for you to be born in this time? No waiting for many days and many prophecies to be fulfilled. This song is a celebration: the Savior has come into the world, and now is the time. So what are you doing "Now"?

May your Christmas be filled with praise.

The music for this program was composed and performed by my son and Probe Mind Games Camp alumnus, Jon Clive Davis.

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3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth

Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide

surrounding His birth.

Pine scent inside my home, the quick defensive tightening of my skin as I walk outside into the cold brisk air, and then the reflexive opposite – the slow relaxation of my whole body as I stand in front of a fire warming myself.

These experiences during the holidays warm my heart.



As we look toward Christmas and hear the nativity story this season, I want to share with you one conversation starter I use to defend my faith.

Let me share it with you. It's rather simple. It's easy to remember because it comes entirely out of Matthew's second chapter. It's not long and involved either—just three points.

Skeptics ridicule the Bible for its many supposed "errors," "holes," and "inconsistencies." They conclude that it's unreliable. Sharing this quick three-point apologetic can assure them that the Bible is reliable and can be trusted.

If the Bible makes three prophecies and then records the fulfillments of those prophecies, don't you think that makes the book at least a little bit credible? That's what you can do citing just the Christmas story from Matthew 2.

You might be tempted to dismiss this, saying it doesn't matter. But here's why the reliability of Scripture matters. IF Scripture can be trusted, AND what it is says is true, then some of the recorded teachings of Jesus could radically alter your life.

In Matthew 10:39 Jesus said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Or Luke 14:27, "Whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me

cannot be My disciple.”

Does that mean the disciple of Jesus has to lose his life?!!
In a sense, yes.

How's that for radical?! If the Bible is reliable, then that means your life is at stake. Literally. That's not exaggeration: your physical life and your spiritual life. Both.

So there's a lot at stake then, if what the Bible says is true. Let's take a look, then, shall we?

Matthew's account of the Christmas story records three distinct fulfillments of prophecy: Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth. We'll consider these one at a time.

Jesus Born in Bethlehem

Your life hangs in the balance of the Bible's reliability. That's why this discussion matters—whether or not the Bible is reliable. The Christmas story from Matthew 2 offers strong evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we get into the first of three instances in the Christmas story that point to the miraculous fulfillment of prophecy strictly surrounding Jesus' birth—namely the location of His birth, Bethlehem.

The gospel writer, Matthew, begins chapter two telling the story of the Magi—the fabled wise men from the East who came to worship the King of the Jews. They arrive in Jerusalem, the Jewish capital city, expecting to find the baby King. They are disappointed, but redirected to Bethlehem by King Herod's chief priests. Why? Because those priests had read the prophet Micah who foretold the Messiah, the coming King, would come out of Bethlehem.

In Matthew 2:6, the writer is quoting the prophet Micah 5:2.

You may have known Jesus was born in Bethlehem. That's a pretty widely known fact, which is also why it's a great place to start this conversation to make a case for the Bible's reliability. It might sound like this.

"You know Jesus was born in Bethlehem, right?" you could begin. "Well, did you know that was prophesied hundreds of years prior?" Don't worry about trying to remember the citation. Just focus on it being fulfilled prophecy. You can always look up the reference later if you want to. If you want extra credit, go for the prophet's name, Micah.

Some skeptics may grant that Jesus indeed fulfilled prophecy, but that he did so intentionally. That is, skeptics basically charge Jesus with reading the Hebrew prophets, and then deliberately fulfilling as many as he possibly could in order to win favor, influence, and gain a following.

However, this is difficult to achieve when you haven't been born yet! How could he possibly have deliberately fulfilled anything when he wasn't deliberating anything at all? He wasn't conscious, and didn't even exist yet in the flesh.

So no, Jesus could not have fulfilled this prophecy by Himself in order to deceive and manipulate. What are the chances Jesus' birthplace would fulfill prophecy? Not likely!

Jesus' Flight to Egypt

The second fulfillment of prophecy recorded in Matthew 2 (the Christmas story), is Jesus' flight to Egypt. Practically overnight Jesus' father, Joseph, moves his family out of the country—out of Israel and into Egypt. Here's the text. Matthew 2:14-15.

"So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until

the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."

International travel back then was not what it is today. Modern conveniences ease travel today and increase comfort, yet it still remains difficult for us. Joseph and Mary, however, risked their very lives in order to relocate internationally. This effort was not undertaken lightly. Joseph was, after all, under orders from an angel.

Question: what do you think are the chances an ancient near-eastern middle-class laborer would embark upon world travel with only a moment's notice? He risked the life of his fiancée. He risked the life of his (adoptive) child, not to mention his own. This kind of journey was highly unusual. So it seems unlikely this scenario would have played out under other circumstances—that it was mere coincidence to fulfill prophecy.

When compared to non-biblical prophecy, this one seems awfully specific. It names the country out of which he is called—Egypt—not something vague like "foreign country." No. The prophet Hosea mentions Egypt specifically in chapter 11:1. Further it mentions the gender of the child—a male child, a son.

The specificity of the prophecy and the unlikely nature of the event occurring on its own both point to divine orchestration. This was no accident. The fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus' birth make the Bible seem a lot more reliable.

Your life is in the balance of the Bible's reliability. The teachings recorded in this book can save your life. The bigger question is, will you believe them? Do you want to be saved? Do you believe Jesus is Lord and accept His sacrifice on the cross to save you from sin? (If so, please email me at paul@probe.org.) I want to hear from you.

Jesus, Genocide Survivor

Three fulfilled prophecies recorded by Matthew chapter two—in the Christmas story—underscore the reliability of this controversial ancient text. The Christmas story is evidence that the Bible is true.

Today we consider the third prophecy Jesus' birth story fulfills: namely, that there would be a genocide killing babies. Here's the text from Matthew 2:16-18.

“Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.’”

The gospel writer, Matthew, is quoting a prophecy of Jeremiah. To decode this passage, first keep in mind that Rachel, Jacob's wife, was mother to Israel's twelve tribes, and here she is a kind of symbolic mother for all of Israel. The second point to note is that Ramah is located in Bethlehem.

With that in mind, the prophecy foretells of Israel's mothers crying in Bethlehem, mourning the loss of their children. The author draws our attention to the amazing accuracy of this prophecy. Not only does he get right the who and the what—the moms and their weeping because of the lost babies, but he also correctly prophesies the small village! Incredible.

What are the chances Jesus would fulfill this prophecy this specifically? And as we discussed before, if Jesus were no more than a charlatan attempting to self-fulfill these prophecies, how could a man orchestrate something as large-scale as the death of all the baby boys in a village? Plus the

Bible records that was Herod's idea. And remember, Herod didn't want Jesus around. Herod was attempting to eliminate potential competition for his throne.

The genocide ordered by the Jewish king, an event that is part of the Christmas story of Jesus' birth, fulfills prophecy. In so doing it shows the Bible is reliable. That's a big deal because the Bible records the story of a very important man—one whom you need to know: Jesus.

Conclusion

We've been discussing how the Christmas story indicates the Bible is true. We've done that by considering three instances recorded in Matthew 2 that fulfill Old Testament prophecy.

First, the prophet Micah prophesied the coming Ruler would come out of Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2:1 records that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Second, the prophet Hosea prophesied that the Messiah would be called out of Egypt. Jesus' father Joseph moved infant Jesus to Egypt to flee the coming baby genocide. When it was safe, Joseph was instructed in a dream to return. So Jesus was called out of Egypt. (Matthew 2:14)

Then thirdly, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied all the mothers in Bethlehem would mourn the loss of their children. Matthew 2:16 records that after King Herod learns the news of Jesus' birth, he orders all infant boys in Bethlehem killed.

What are the chances of one man fulfilling ALL of those prophecies? Not likely! If you want more, read Josh McDowell's book *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict*. He records 61 prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. In it he quotes professor Peter Stoner who calculated the probability of Jesus fulfilling just eight prophecies. He illustrates the likelihood this way. Cover the state of Texas in two feet of silver dollars. Mark just one silver dollar. Now choose one silver dollar at random

from anywhere in the state. The chances of picking up the marked silver dollar on the first try are the same as Jesus fulfilling just eight Old Testament prophecies. Not happening!

We have good evidence that what the Bible records is accurate. It will stand up to criticism that Jesus attempted to fulfill prophecy on his own, to position himself as a teacher with authority, influence, or to gain a following. But the fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy we discussed cannot be intentionally self-fulfilled. They either occurred before He was born, or were entirely out of His control.

Do you now believe in Jesus because you listened to this? Email me. I'd love to hear from you (paul@probe.org). Are you already His disciple? God has a unique purpose for your life, only you can fulfill. You are his ambassador. Share the good news. Your life is not the only one at stake. Your neighbor's is too. Have you shared with him or her yet? Take your next step of faithfulness today, whatever that is. I am praying you do.

You now have a great conversation starter to help you get there. The Christmas story is tremendous evidence for biblical truth.

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Thanksgiving Quiz

Kerby Anderson offers a quiz concerning the origins of American Thanksgiving.

This nation was founded by Christians, and Thanksgiving is a time when we can reflect upon this rich, Christian heritage. But many of us are often ignorant of our country's origins, so

we have put together a Thanksgiving quiz to test your knowledge about this nation's biblical foundations. We hope that you will not only take this test and pass it on to others, but we also hope that you will be encouraged to study more about the Christian foundations of this country.

1. What group began the tradition of Thanksgiving?



A day of thanksgiving was set aside by the Pilgrims who founded Plymouth Colony. This colony was the first permanent settlement in New England. The Pilgrims were originally known as the Forefathers or Founders. The term *Pilgrim* was first used in the writings of colonist William Bradford and is now used to designate them.

2. Why did they celebrate Thanksgiving?

Life was hard in the New World. Out of 103 Pilgrims, 51 of these died in the first terrible winter. After the first harvest was completed, Governor William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving and prayer. By 1623, a day of fasting and prayer during a period of drought was changed to one of thanksgiving because the rain came during their prayers. The custom prevailed in New England and eventually became a national holiday.

3. When did Thanksgiving become a national holiday?

The state of New York adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom in 1817. By the time of the Civil War, many other states had done the same. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln appointed a day of thanksgiving. Since then, each president has issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation for the fourth Thursday of November.

4. Why did the Pilgrims leave Europe?

Among the early Pilgrims was a group of Separatists who were members of a religious movement that broke from the Church of England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1606 William Brewster led a group of Separatists to Leiden (in the Netherlands) to escape religious persecution in England. After living in Leiden for more than ten years, some members of the group voted to emigrate to America. The voyage was financed by a group of London investors who were promised produce from America in exchange for their assistance.

5. How did the Pilgrims emigrate to the New World?

On September 16, 1620, a group numbering 102 men, women, and children left Plymouth, England, for America on the Mayflower. Having been blown off course from their intended landing in Virginia by a terrible storm, the Pilgrims landed at Cape Cod on November 11. On December 21, they landed on the site of Plymouth Colony. While still on the ship, the Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact.

6. What is the Mayflower Compact?

On November 11, 1620, Governor William Bradford and the leaders on the Mayflower signed the Mayflower Compact before setting foot on land. They wanted to acknowledge God's sovereignty in their lives and their need to obey Him. The Mayflower Compact was America's first great constitutional document and is often called "The American Covenant."

7. What is the significance of the Mayflower Compact?

After suffering years of persecution in England and spending difficult years of exile in the Netherlands, the Pilgrims wanted to establish their colony on the biblical principles they suffered for in Europe. Before they set foot on land, they drew up this covenant with God. They feared launching their colony until there was a recognition of God's

sovereignty and their collective need to obey Him.

8. What does the Mayflower Compact say?

“In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland king, defender of the faith, etc., Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia, do by these present solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends foresaid, and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod the 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign Lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland.”

9. Why didn't the pilgrims sail to the original destination in Virginia?

The Pilgrims were blown off course and landed at Cape Cod in what now appears to be God's providence. Because their patent did not include this territory, they consulted with the Captain of the Mayflower and resolved to sail southward. But the weather and geography did not allow them to do so. They encountered “dangerous shoals and roaring breakers” and were quickly forced to return to Cape Cod. From there they began scouting expeditions and finally discovered what is now Plymouth. Had they arrived just a few years earlier, they would have been attacked and destroyed by one of the fiercest tribes in the region. However, three years earlier (in 1617), the Patuxet tribe had been wiped out by a plague. The Pilgrims

thus landed in one of the few places where they could survive.[{1}](#)

10. What role did the lone surviving Indian play in the lives of the Pilgrims?

There was one survivor of the Patuxet tribe: Squanto. He was kidnapped in 1605 by Captain Weymouth and taken to England where he learned English and was eventually able to return to New England.[{2}](#) When he found his tribe had been wiped out by the plague, he lived with a neighboring tribe. When Squanto learned that the Pilgrims were at Plymouth, he came to them and showed them how to plant corn and fertilize with fish. He later converted to Christianity. William Bradford said that Squanto “was a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation.”[{3}](#)

11. Were the colonists dedicated to Christian principles in their lives on days other than Thanksgiving?

The Pilgrims were, and so were the other colonists. Consider this sermon by John Winthrop given while aboard the Arabella in 1630. This is what he said about the Puritans who formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony: “For the persons, we are a Company professing ourselves fellow members of Christ. . . . For the work we have in hand, it is by a mutual consent through a special overruling providence, and a more than an ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ to seek out a place of Cohabitation and Consortship under a due form of Government both civil and ecclesiastical.” They established a Christian Commonwealth in which every area of their lives both civil and ecclesiastical fell under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

12. How did the Pilgrims organize their economic activities?

After the first year, the colony foundered because of the collective economic system forced upon them by the merchants in London. All the settlers worked only for the joint

partnership and were fed out of the common stores. The land and the houses built on it were the joint property of the merchants and colonists for seven years and then divided equally.[\[4\]](#)

When Deacon Carver died, William Bradford became governor. Seeing the failure of communal farming, he instituted what today would be called free enterprise innovations. Bradford assigned plots of land to each family to work, and the colony began to flourish. Each colonist was challenged to better themselves and their land by working to their fullest capacity. Many Christian historians and economists today point to this fundamental economic change as one of the key reasons for the success of the Pilgrims at Plymouth.

13. What has been the significance of the Pilgrims and their legacy of Thanksgiving?

On the bicentennial celebration of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, Daniel Webster on December 22, 1820, declared the following: "Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary."

The legacy of the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving is the legacy of godly men and women who sought to bring Christian principles to this nation. These spread throughout the nation for centuries.

14. How were Christian principles brought to the founding of this republic?

Most historians will acknowledge that America was born in the midst of a revival. This occurred from approximately 1740-1770 and was known as the First Great Awakening. Two prominent

preachers during that time were Jonathan Edwards (best known for his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") and George Whitfield. They preached up and down the East Coast and saw revival break out. Churches were planted, schools were built, and lives were changed.

15. How influential were Christian ideas in the Constitution?

While the Constitution does not specifically mention God or the Bible, the influence of Christianity can plainly be seen. Professor M.E. Bradford shows in his book *A Worthy Company*, that fifty of the fifty-five men who signed the Constitution were church members who endorsed the Christian faith.

16. Weren't many of the founders non-Christians?

Yes, some were. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin are good examples of men involved in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence who were influenced by ideas from the Enlightenment. Yet revisionists have attempted to make these men more secular than they really were. Jefferson, for example, wrote to Benjamin Rush that "I am a Christian . . . sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others." Franklin called for prayer at the Constitutional Convention saying, "God governs the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his notice?" While they were hardly examples of biblical Christianity, they nevertheless believed in God and believed in absolute standards which should be a part of the civil order.

17. How important was Christianity in colonial education in America?

Young colonists' education usually came from the Bible, the Hornbook, and the New England Primer. The Hornbook consisted of a single piece of parchment attached to a paddle of wood. Usually the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, and religious doctrines were written on it. The New England Primer taught a

number of lessons and included such things as the names of the Old and New Testament books, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and John Cotton's "Spiritual Milk for American Babies." Even when teaching the alphabet, biblical themes were used: "A is for Adam's fall, we sinned all. B is for Heaven to find, the Bible mind. C is for Christ crucified, for sinners died."

18. How important was Christianity in colonial higher education?

Most of the major universities were established by Christian denominations. Harvard was a Puritan school. William and Mary was an Anglican school. Yale was Congregational, Princeton was Presbyterian, and Brown was Baptist. The first motto for Harvard was Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae (Truth for Christ and the Church). Students gathered for prayer and readings from the Scriptures every day. Yale was established by Increase Mather and Cotton Mather because Harvard was moving away from its original Calvinist philosophy and eventually drifted to Unitarianism. The founders of Yale said that "every student shall consider the main end of his study to wit to know God in Jesus Christ and answerably to lead a Godly, sober life."

19. If Christianity was so important in colonial America, why does the Constitution establish a wall of separation between church and state?

Contrary to what many Americans may think, the phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear anywhere in the Constitution. In fact, there is no mention of the words church, state, or separation in the First Amendment or anywhere within the Constitution. The First Amendment does guarantee freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion.

The phrase is found in a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to

Baptist pastors in Danbury, Connecticut in 1802 in which he gave his opinion of the establishment clause of the First Amendment and then felt that this was “building a wall of separation between church and state.” At best this was a commentary on the First Amendment, from an individual who was in France when the Constitution and Bill of Rights were drafted.

Notes

1. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), Chapter XI.
2. Bradford Smith, *Bradford of Plymouth* (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1951), 189.
3. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 81.
4. Marshall Foster, *The American Covenant* (Thousand Oaks, CA: The Mayflower Institute, 1992), 86-87.

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The Causes of War

Meic Pearse's book The Gods of War gives great insight into the charge that religion is the cause of most war. History shows this is not true: the cause of most war is the sinful human heart, even when religion is invoked as a reason.

The Accusation

Sam Harris, the popular author and atheist, says that “for everyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict.”^{1} Writing for the Freedom from Religion Foundation, fellow atheist Richard Dawkins adds, “Only the

willfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today.”[\[2\]](#) Speaking more bluntly, one British government official has said, “theocrats, religious leaders or fanatics citing holy texts . . . constitutes the greatest threat to world peace today.”[\[3\]](#)

War is the ultimate act of intolerance, and since intolerance is seen as the only unforgivable sin in our postmodern times, it’s not surprising that those hostile to religion would charge people holding religious convictions with the guilt for causing war.



This view is held by many others, not just despisers of religion. A 2006 opinion poll taken in Great Britain found that 82% of adults “see religion as a cause of division and tension between people. Only 16% disagree.”[\[4\]](#)

To be honest, religion has been, and remains, a source of conflict in the world; but to what degree? Is it the only source of war, as its critics argue? Is it even the primary source? And if we agree that religion is a source of war, how do we define what qualifies as a religion? This leads to another question. Are all religions equally responsible for war or are some more prone to instigate conflict than others? Once these issues are decided, we are still left with one of the most difficult questions: How does a religious person, especially a Christian, respond to the question of war?

When confronted with the accusation that religion, and more importantly, Christianity, has been the central cause of war down through history, most Christians respond by ceding the point. We will argue that the issue is far too complex to merely blame war on religious strife. A more nuanced response is needed. Religion is sometimes the direct cause of war, but other times it plays a more ambiguous role. It can also be argued, as Karl Marx did, that religion can actually restrain

the warring instinct.

In his provocative new book, *The Gods of War*, Meic Pearse argues that modern atheists greatly overstate their case regarding religion as a cause for war, and that all religions are not equal when it comes to the tendency to resort to violence. He believes that the greatest source for conflict in the world today is the universalizing tendencies of modern secular nations that are pressing their materialism and moral relativism on more traditional cultures.

The Connection Between Religion and War

When someone suggests a simple answer to something as complex as war, it probably is *too* simple. History is usually more complicated than we would like it to be.

How then should Christians respond when someone claims religion is the cause of all wars? First, we must admit that religion can be and sometimes is the cause of war. Although it can be difficult to separate political, cultural, and religious motivations, there have been instances when men went off to war specifically because they believed that God wanted them to. That being said, in the last one hundred years the modern era with its secular ideologies has generated death and destruction on a scale never seen before in history. Not during the Crusades, the Inquisition, nor even during the Thirty Years War in Europe.

The total warfare of the twentieth century combined powerful advances in war-making technologies with highly structured societies to devastating effect. WWI cost close to eight and a half million lives. The more geographically limited Russian Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 resulted in nine million deaths. WWII cost sixty million deaths, as well as the destruction of whole cities by fire bombing and nuclear devices.

Both Nazi fascism and communism rejected the Christian belief that humanity holds a unique role in creation and replaced it with the necessity of conflict and strife. By the end of the nineteenth century, Darwin's ideas regarding natural selection and survival of the fittest had begun to affect philosophy, the social sciences, and even theology. Darwin had left us with a brutal universe devoid of meaning. The communist and fascist worldviews were both firmly grounded in Darwin's universe.

Hitler's obsession with violence is well known, but the communists were just as vocal about their attachment to it. Russian revolution leader Leon Trotsky wrote, "We must put an end once and for all to the papist-Quaker babble about the sanctity of human life." Lenin argued that the socialist state was to be "a system of organized violence against the bourgeoisie" or middle class. While critics of the Russian Tsar and his ties with the Orthodox Russian Church could point to examples of oppression and cruelty, one historian has noted that when the communists had come to power "more prisoners were shot at just one soviet camp in a single year than had been executed by the tsars during the entire nineteenth century."[\[5\]](#)

So, religion is not the primary cause of warfare and cruelty, at least not during the last one hundred years. But what about wars fought in the more distant past; surely most of them were religiously motivated. Not really.

Meic Pearce argues that "most wars, even before the rise of twentieth century's secularist creeds, owed little or nothing to religious causation."[\[6\]](#) Considering the great empires of antiquity, Pearce writes that "neither the Persians nor the Greeks nor the Romans fought either to protect or to advance the worship of their gods."[\[7\]](#) Far more ordinary motives were involved like the desire for booty, the extension of the empire, glory in battle, and the desire to create buffer zones

with their enemies. Each of these empires had their gods which would be called upon for aid in battle, but the primary cause of these military endeavors was not the advancement of religious beliefs.

Invasions by the Goths, Huns, Franks, and others against the Roman Empire, attacks by the Vikings in the North and the Mongols in Asia were motivated by material gain as well and not religious belief. The fourteenth century conquests of Timur Leng (or Tamerlane) in the Middle East and India resulted in the deaths of millions. He was a Muslim, but he conquered Muslim and pagan alike. At one point he had seventy thousand Muslims beheaded in Baghdad so that towers could be built with their skulls.[\[8\]](#)

More recently, the Hundred Years War between the French and English, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars were secular conflicts. Religious beliefs might have been used to wrap the conflicts with a Christian veneer, but promoting the cause of Christ was not at the heart of the conflicts.

Pearce argues that down through the millennia, humanity has gone to war for two main reasons: greed expressed by the competition for limited resources, and the need for security from other predatory cultures. The use of religion as a legitimating device for conflict has become a recent trend as it became less likely that a single individual could take a country to war without the broad support of the population.

It can be argued that religion was, without ambiguity, at the center of armed conflict during two periods in history. The first was during the birth and expansion of Islam which resulted in an ongoing struggle with Christianity, including the Crusades during the Middle Ages. The second was the result of the Reformation in Europe and was fought between Protestant and Catholic states. Even here, political motivations were part of the blend of causes that resulted in armed conflict.

Islam and Christianity

Do all religions have the same propensity to cause war? The two world religions with the largest followings are Christianity and Islam. While it is true that people have used both belief systems to justify armed conflict, are they equally likely to cause war? Do their founder's teachings, their holy books, and examples from the earliest believers encourage their followers to do violence against others?

Although Christianity has been used to justify forced conversions and violence against unbelievers, the connection between what Christianity actually teaches and these acts of violence has been ambiguous at best and often contradictory. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians told to use violence to further the Kingdom of God. Our model is Christ who is the perfect picture of humility and servant leadership, the one who came to lay down his life for others. Meic Pearce writes, "For the first three centuries of its history, Christianity was spread exclusively by persuasion and was persecuted for its pains, initially by the Jews but later, from 63, by the Romans." [{9}](#) It wasn't until Christianity became the de facto state religion of the Roman Empire around AD 400 that others were persecuted in the name of Christ.

The history of Islam is quite different. Warfare and conflict are found at its very beginning and is embodied in Muhammad's actions and words. Islam was initially spread through military conquest and maintained by threat of violence. As one pair of scholars puts it, there can be no doubt that "Islam was cradled in violence, and that Muhammad himself, through the twenty-six or twenty-seven raids in which he personally participated, came to serve for some Muslims as a role model for violence." [{10}](#)

Much evidence can be corralled to make this point. Muhammad himself spoke of the necessity of warfare on behalf of Allah. He said to his followers, "I was ordered to fight all men

until they say, 'There is no God but Allah.'" [\[11\]](#) Prior to conquering Mecca, he supported his small band of believers by raiding caravans and sharing the booty. Soon after Muhammad's death, a war broke out over the future of the religion. Three civil wars were fought between Muslims during the first fifty years of the religion's history, and three of the four leaders of Islam after Muhammad were assassinated by other Muslims. The Quran and Hadith, the two most important writings in Islam, make explicit the expectation that all Muslim men will fight to defend the faith. Perhaps the most telling aspect of Islamic belief is that there is no separation between religious and political authority in the Islamic world. A threat to one is considered a threat to the other and almost guarantees religiously motivated warfare.

Pacifism or Just Wars?

Although most Christians advocate either pacifism or a "just war" view when it comes to warfare and violence, Pearse argues that there are difficulties with both. Pacifism works at a personal level, but "there cannot be a pacifist state, merely a state that depends on others possessed of more force or of the willingness to use it." [\[12\]](#) Some pacifists argue that humans are basically good and that violence stems from misunderstandings or social injustice. This is hardly a traditional Christian teaching. Pearse argues that "a repudiation of force in all circumstances . . . is an abandonment of victims—real people—to their fate." [\[13\]](#)

Just war theory as advocated by Augustine in the early fifth century teaches that war is moral if it is fought for a just cause and carried out in a just fashion. A just cause bars wars of aggression or revenge, and is fought only as a last resort. It also must have a reasonable chance of success and be fought under the direction of a ruler in an attitude of love for the enemy. It seeks to reestablish peace, not total destruction of the vanquished, and to insure that

noncombatants are not targeted.

However, even WWII, what many believe to be our most justified use of force, failed to measure up to this standard. Massive air raids against civilian populations by the Allies were just one of many violations that disallow its qualification as a just war. As Pearse argues, “war has an appalling dynamic of its own: it drags down the participants . . . into ever more savage actions.”[{14}](#)

How then are Christians to think about war and violence? Let’s consider two examples. In the face of much violent opposition in his battle for social justice, Martin Luther King said, “be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. . . . We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win *you* in the process.”[{15}](#) Reform was achieved, although at the cost of his life, and many hearts and minds have been changed.

However, another martyr, German minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, rejected pacifism and chose to participate in an attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler, mainly because he despaired that an appeal to the hearts and minds of the Nazis would be effective.

Neither King nor Bonhoeffer were killed specifically for their faith. They were killed for defending the weak from slaughter, as Pearse puts it. Perhaps Pearse is correct when he argues, “If Christians can . . . legitimately fight . . . , then that fighting clearly cannot be for the faith. It can only be for secular causes . . . faith in Christ is something for which we can only die—not kill. . . . To fight under the delusion that one is thereby promoting Christianity is to lose sight of what Christianity is.”[{16}](#)

Notes

1. Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.

2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 14.
5. Ibid., 31.
6. Ibid., 53.
7. Ibid., 54.
8. Ibid., 55.
9. Ibid., 134.
10. Ibid., 58.
11. Ibid., 59.
12. Ibid., 173.
13. Ibid., 175.
14. Ibid., 173.
15. Ibid., 180.
16. Ibid.

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The Scandal of Blood Atonement: “Why All the Blood and Cross-Talk, Christian?”

The story of Jesus’ death and resurrection raises accusations that Christianity is obsessed with blood. Many believers struggle with this too. Byron Barlowe explores the biblical reasons for the focus on Christ’s blood and why its shedding was necessary.

The Bloody Cross: A Tough Thing to Handle

Easter season is all about the death and resurrection of Christ—which centers on the blood sacrifice He endured. Christianity is called a bloody religion, focusing on the execution of Jesus Christ on a cross. Why is this true and what does it mean when we say His blood atones for our sin?



Millions of Americans—and billions of Christians around the world—celebrated the death and Resurrection of Christ during Passion Week and Easter Sunday. The topic was everywhere from sermons to a CNN docudrama titled *Finding Jesus: Faith, Fact, Forgery*.

You may have questions about all the talk of “the blood of Christ” and songs saying things like “Jesus’s blood washed away my sins.” This bloody theme does raise understandable concerns that are shared by believers, seekers and skeptics alike.

In fact, more and more skeptics are posting on the Internet things like this book promotion:

“Christians are obsessed with blood! They sing about it, declare they are washed in it and even drink it! In this book you will discover the crazy background to this Christian obsession and the truth about the bloodthirsty God they claim to know and serve.”[\[1\]](#)

In this article, we’ll discuss whether these charges are true and fair and explain the doctrine of blood atonement.

Again, even many Christians—including me—have wondered deeply about all the biblical imagery of shed blood, what some call the Crimson Thread of Scripture. I mean the grotesqueness of Old Testament animal sacrifice and the belief in Jesus’s torturous slaying as the core of salvation. Radical stuff for modern ears.

So what is blood atonement and why does it matter? In historic

orthodox Christian thought, God's Son is at the very center of history doing these things:

- reconciling man to God,
- ransoming humans from slavery to sin and well-deserved death and
- justly recompensing God for the horrific offense of rebellion and disobedience to Him.

Thankfully, the gospel (or good news) is simple. The Bible claims, "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."[{2}](#)

The bottom line for all people is this: out of Christ's death came the hope of eternal life—and His resurrection proved this. Our sin caused God's Son to suffer and die. By grace, through faith, we can benefit. Otherwise, we suffer eternally for staying with the cosmic rebellion that started in a perfect Garden long ago.

Yet, this blood-centered good news is a scandal to both those who believe and those who deny it. In fact, the Greek root word *skandalon* is used for Christ Himself.[{3}](#) You see, Jews denied Christ as the Promised One and Gentiles thought it was all nonsense. Nothing has changed for mankind: the choices are either do-it-yourself religion, being too smart for all that, or believing in this radical hope.

The Reason Someone Had to Die

Why did anybody have to die? God's justice and holiness demands a death penalty for the sinner.

We are all in a serious spiritual and moral pickle. Biblical Christianity declares that each person ever born is stuck under an irreversible "*sin*drome" for which there is no human

answer. History sadly records the habitual and continual effects of sin: oppression, addictions, self-promoting power plays, deceit, war, on and on.

Now for a reality check: no moral order, either in a family, a company, military unit or society survives ambiguity or failure to enforce laws. Just ask the victims of unpunished criminals set loose to perpetrate again. If the Creator were to simply wink at sin or let people off scot-free, where would justice be? What kind of God would He be?

God is holy and He called Himself the Truth. There is no way God would be true to Himself and the moral order He created and yet fail to punish sin. Such impunity would mock justice. As one theologian puts it, "Pardon without atonement nullifies justice . . . A law without penalty is morally unserious, even dangerous."

Ok, but penalties have levels of harshness. Why is death necessary? Scripture spells out clearly the decree that sinners must die. In God's original command He stated, "When you eat of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). In Ezekiel the same formula appears slightly reworded: "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Paul boiled it down this way: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

God's justice and holiness demand death for sin. Blood must be shed. Detractors of the cross tend to underestimate sin and know nothing of its offense to a holy God. Everyone wants justice—for others.

Ok, so what does a just and holy God do with impure, treasonous creatures He made to bear His image? God was in a quandary, if you will.

Yet, even in the Garden, He was already hinting at a plan to reconcile this dilemma. "God so loved the world" that he sent down His own Son as a man to pay the death penalty. [{4}](#)

Thomas Oden writes, "God's holiness made a penalty for sin necessary . . . Love was the divine motive; holiness [was] the divine requirement. [Romans 5:8 reads] 'God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us'. [And as Romans 8 teaches,] This love was so great that God 'did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all' (Romans 8:32)."[{5}](#)

Christ's Death and Resurrection Was Unlike Other Religious Stories: It Was All for Love

God's morally just demand for a death-payment is not the same as pagan gods, who maliciously demanded sacrifices. True for one big reason:

Isn't this crucifixion thing simply about a grouchy god acting all bloodthirsty, as some atheists like popular author Richard Dawkins say? Should good people find this repugnant? One unbelieving critic wrote,

"Unfortunately, much of Christian art consists of depicting the sufferings and agony of Jesus on the Cross. This reflects the obsession of Christianity with the Crucifixion . . . "Crosstianity" [in the contemptuous words of one skeptic]. The obsession with 'our sins' having been 'washed away by the Blood of the Lamb' would be regarded as evidence of a serious mental illness . . . but when this is an obsession of millions of people it becomes 'religious faith'."[{6}](#)

Wow! Did you know that you, if you are a believer, are part of an insane global crowd? This vividly illustrates the scandal of the cross: "which is to them that are perishing foolishness" as the Apostle Paul described it.[{7}](#)

No, biblical sacrifice is not a bloodfest, but the way to deal with a sad reality. Put it this way: If God said, "Nah, don't

worry about rebelling against your Creator,” would that be a just and righteous God? Would a deity who fails to punish wrongdoing be worth following? Would His laws mean anything? Yet, we are unable to keep laws, so He steps in to pay that penalty. With His lifeblood. This storyline is utterly unique in the long human history of religions. And the resurrection Christians celebrate shows its truth in actual time and on this dirty earth.

Pagan myths of savior gods who rise from the dead have only a surface resemblance to the biblical resurrection. Such deities are more like impetuous and tyrannical people than the one and only Yahweh. The biblical God’s love fostered the unthinkable: set up a sacrificial system for a one-of-a-kind people—the Israelites—that served as a foretelling of His *coup de grace*: dying in man’s place as the spotless sacrificial Lamb. What a novel religious idea that only the true God could dream up! Theologian Thomas Oden says it this way: “It was God who was both offering reconciliation and receiving the reconciled.”[\[8\]](#)

God’s merging of perfect holiness, just retributive punishment and allowance of His Son’s execution was actually a beautiful thing. Francis of Assisi wrote that “love and faithfulness meet together [at the cross]; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.”[\[9\]](#)

But Why a Violent, Bloody Death?

I get that death was demanded of someone to pay for sin. So why a bloody suffering and execution? Why the constant shedding of blood?

Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* hit movie theaters in 2004 to mixed reviews. It earned its R-rating for gory bloodshed and, ironically, became a cultural scandal itself. Seems that the bloody realism was too much for both soft-core Christians and high-minded unbelievers. But this vividly

poignant portrayal of Christ's blood-stained Passion did raise a good question.

When it came to saving mankind, why the shedding of blood? Could God not have found another way? Church Father Athanasius believed that, if there were a better way to preserve human free will and still reconcile rebellious man to a holy God, He would have used it. Apparently, Christ's suffering and death was the only solution.

The Apostle Paul summarized Christ's entire earthly ministry this way: He "humbled Himself and became obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:8). At the cross, "human hate did all the damage it could do to the only Son of God."[{10}](#) God used the realities available to Him, including the masterfully grim method of crucifixion, honed to a fine art by Roman pagans who viewed human life as dispensable.

Again, why is death demanded of God to atone for sin? The grounding for such a claim appears early in the Bible, after the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. In Genesis 9 Yahweh declares, "I will require a reckoning . . . for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image."[{11}](#) Apparently, God has put the price of a man's life as that of another's life.

The highlight of Christ's death was its substitutionary sense. The Apostle Peter wrote, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."[{12}](#) Justice, fairness, reality itself demanded a bloodguilt payment for sin. Christ paid it.

Substitutionary sacrifice was nothing new for the Jews who unwittingly had the Messiah crucified. From the beginning of God's dealings with His people, agreements were blood covenants. What else could carry the weight of such momentous things? And, as the book of Hebrews teaches, "Indeed, under

the law almost everything is purified with blood, and ***without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.***"[\[13\]](#)

One theologian plainly said, "Through this sacrificial system, the people of Israel were being prepared for the incomparable act of sacrifice that was to come in Jesus Christ."[\[14\]](#)

His suffering, death and resurrection conquered sin and neutered the fear of death. Only blood could clean sin; only God's Son's blood could do it perfectly and forever.

Here's the scandal we spoke of: only a perfect sacrifice would do for washing mankind's sins away and reconciling us back to God.

Beautiful Obsession: God Was Glad to Allow This Brutality for Us!

God said it was His pleasure to pay the death penalty with His own self, in the Person of His son. Christianity's so-called blood-obsession is a beautiful picture of perfect divine love.

Theologian Thomas Oden summarized well our discussion of Christ's blood atonement. He wrote, "Love was the divine motive; holiness the divine requirement. 'God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8)."

Such claims trump the understandable disgust of doubters. But the red blood leads to clean white.

Chick-fil-A restaurant employees are trained to say, "My pleasure" when serving customers. Imagine God saying that to believers regarding the cross of Christ! Paul explains in his letter to the Colossian church that "it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness of deity to dwell in Him . . . having made peace *through the blood* of His cross . . . He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death . . ."[\[15\]](#)

God was glad to stand in as the essential scapegoat to restore us to right relations with Himself, to buy us back from slavery to sin, fear and death, and to abolish sin and its effects. This doesn't sound like a bloodthirsty tyrannical deity demanding a whipping boy or abusing his own child, as some acidly accuse. "My pleasure" brings in new dimensions of lovingkindness and servant-heartedness.

But wait, there's more! Scripture lists lots of wonderful effects created by the blood of Christ. These include forgiveness, propitiation or satisfaction of God's righteous wrath, justification or being made right, reconciliation with God, cleansing, sanctification, freedom from sin, and the conquest of Satan.

Yes, you could say that Christianity is blood-obsessed. As accused, even its hymns often focus on the benefits bought at the highest of prices: the life of the God-Man Himself. One famous hymn goes:

For my pardon, this I see,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my cleansing this my plea,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

This beautiful blood obsession finds its highest hope in Revelation. The following is a prophecy about persecuted believers:

"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have *washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb* . . . For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."[\[16\]](#)

Maybe the revelations here are as crazy as skeptics say. The foolishness of God. We believe they are the most glorious story ever told.

Notes

1. Promotion at Amazon.com for *Obsessed with Blood: The Crazy Things Christians Believe*, Book 1, by Ex-Preacher.
2. 1 Peter 3:18, NASB.
3. Romans 9:33, 1 Corinthians 1:23, 1 Peter 2:8.
4. John 3:16.
5. Oden, Thomas, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), 405.
6. Meyer, Peter, "Why I Am Not a Christian". Serendipity blog. Accessed 2-27-17, www.serendipity.li/eden/why_i_am_not_a_christian.htm.
7. 1 Corinthians 1:18.
8. Ibid., 414.
9. Ibid., 405.
10. Ibid., 389.
11. Genesis 9:4-6.
12. 1 Peter 3:18.
13. Hebrews 9:22-23, emphasis mine.
14. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 413-414.
15. Colossians 1:19.
16. Revelation 7:14b-17, emphasis mine.

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The Answer Is the Resurrection

Steve Cable shows us that the resurrection is the key apologetic for those seeking to evangelize. As we share our faith, understanding the evidence for the resurrection helps prepare us to answer questions raised by a seeker after the truth.

Making a Defense for Your Living Hope

A key verse for our ministry at Probe is 1 Peter 3:15 where Peter writes, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”[{1}](#)

I want to encourage you to make this verse a motivator for your own walk as an ambassador for Christ. You might say, “I am not equipped to make a defense. Surely, this verse is talking to pastors and people like the researchers at Probe.” A deeper look at Peter’s letter shows us that this is not the case. Peter makes it clear that these instructions are for all Christians.[{2}](#) In addition, Peter wrote this verse in the imperative tense, meaning that it is a command, not a suggestion.



Okay. I want to be ready to give an account for the hope that is in me, but I need be clear on what that hope is. Fortunately, Peter answers that for us in chapter 1 where he writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”[{3}](#)

So, our hope is a living hope for an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven. If I am to make a defense for this hope of eternal life, I need to be able to explain why I believe that the source of this hope has both the capability and the motivation to follow through on this offer.

How do we get this living hope? Our hope comes “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”! Jesus’ resurrection is the basis for our hope. If Jesus is not

resurrected from the dead, we are of all men most to be pitied.[{4}](#) So, any defense of the hope that is within us begins with explaining why someone should believe in the resurrection. The empty tomb is the cornerstone to answering most other objections raised up against the gospel.

In the remainder of this article, we will look at evidence for the resurrection and how a defense of the resurrection is the foundation for answering many of the objections raised against Christianity.

Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

Giving an account for our belief in Jesus' resurrection is the key to defending the hope within us. Several books have been written on this topic, and you can find a [list](#) of them in the transcript of this radio program on our Web site. The evidence for the resurrection as an historical event is so strong that even Dr. Antony Flew, until recently a noted proponent of atheism, had to admit, "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events."[{5}](#)

One help to remembering the overwhelming evidence is to think of the ten A's attesting to Jesus' resurrection:

1. *Accurate predictions.* Both the Old and New Testaments contain predictions of Jesus' death and resurrection. Numerous times in the Gospels, Jesus told his disciples and the Jewish authorities that He would rise to life after three days in the earth. In John 2, at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus told this to the Jewish leaders. It made such an impression on the disciples, that verse 22 tells us, "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had

spoken.”

2. *Attesting miracles.* Jesus’ resurrection was not a sudden miraculous cap to an otherwise unremarkable life. Jesus had consistently demonstrated His authority over the material universe from turning water into wine, to walking on the water, to healing the sick, to raising Lazarus from the dead. His resurrection is consistent with the power He demonstrated during His earthly ministry.

3. *Agonizing death.* Jesus had numerous opportunities to avoid a fatal confrontation with the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. No one is going to go through a Roman scourging and crucifixion as a hoax. Jesus submitted to the cross because it was necessary to pay for our sins and He knew that He had the authority to conquer death.

4. *Angry authorities.* After word of Jesus’ resurrection began to spread, the Jewish authorities wanted to put a stop to people believing in Him. Producing the body of Jesus would have been the best way to do this. Even with support from the Roman authorities, they were never able to produce a body.

5. *Absent body.* The chief priests set a guard around Jesus’ tomb to make sure the body was not stolen by his disciples. Those guards knew their lives could be at stake if they failed in their duty, but on the third day Jesus was gone. Once they regained their senses, the guards “reported to the chief priests all that had happened.”[{6}](#) Why did they take this risk? Because they knew that there was no body to recover. No one has ever found any credible evidence that the body of Jesus was anywhere to be found on this earth.

6. *Amazed disciples.* After Jesus’ arrest, most of His disciples fled. It is clear from their reaction that they despised the cross and were not anticipating the resurrection. Two of his disciples did not recognize the risen Jesus even as He was teaching them the Scriptures related to Himself.[{7}](#)

Their skepticism and shock showed that they clearly were not part of some preplanned hoax.

7. *Agreeing eyewitnesses.* After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to over five hundred people. They testified to His resurrection. We do not have a record of anyone disputing their testimony, saying “I was there with them and it was a hoax.”

8. *Apostolic martyrs.* People don't die for something they know to be a hoax. Yet, many of these eyewitnesses accepted death rather than deny the resurrection of Jesus.

9. *Agnostic historians.* Contemporary, non-Christian historians reported that Jesus was reputed to have risen from the dead and that his followers were willing to die rather than recant their belief in Jesus.

10. *Attesting Spirit.* Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit continues to convict unbelievers and assure believers that Jesus is the risen Son of God.

We don't have to believe in the resurrection in *spite* of the facts. Instead, we believe in the resurrection in *light* of the facts. If you can defend your belief in the resurrection, then you are already positioned to respond to other questions people may have about your faith. In fact, you can respond to objections by asking, “Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus?” If the answer is no, then you may want to focus on the evidence for the resurrection as a foundation for addressing their other concerns.

Tearing Down Objections Through the Resurrection

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is the key to making a defense for our living hope. Let's consider some common objections to Christianity, and see how the resurrection can

be the starting point for a reasoned response.

1. Is there a God still active in this universe?

Jesus' resurrection shows there is a power that transcends the physical universe. A transcendent God is the only power that can override decay and death. As the apostle Peter wrote, "[God] raised [Jesus] from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." [{8}](#)

Jesus' resurrection declares God's active involvement in this world. He planned it from the beginning and He performed it at the appointed time. [{9}](#)

2. What difference does God make to my life?

Jesus' resurrection shows that He lives into eternity and that we have the prospect of life beyond this world. [{10}](#) Knowing we have a soul that continues beyond this world impacts our perspective on life. As Paul points out, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." [{11}](#)

But if the dead are raised, then we need to live with eternity in mind. It becomes a top priority to know the one who controls eternity, God.

3. Is the Bible really God's revelation? Every religion has their holy books.

Jesus' resurrection confirms that Jesus is the source of truth. He knows which holy book is actually a revelation from God. Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the Old Testament. He promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles as they shared His teaching through the New Testament. The Gospel of John states, "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." [{12}](#)

If Jesus' resurrection caused His disciples to believe the Bible, it is certainly sufficient to cause me to believe.

4. I am too insignificant for God to love.

Jesus' resurrection shows the depth of God's love for you. Without the crucifixion there would be no resurrection. His crucifixion cries out "God loves you!" Romans tells us that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." [{13}](#)

Being singled out for God's love makes you very significant in His universe.

5. How can anyone know the truth about life and death?

Jesus' resurrection gives Him firsthand knowledge. He has been beyond death and returned. His knowledge transcends this physical universe. Jesus gives us an eyewitness for eternal life. He told Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world. . . . For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth." [{14}](#)

Jesus testifies to the truth regarding eternal life. We can trust His testimony because of the resurrection.

6. Why should I believe that Jesus is God's divine Son?

Jesus' resurrection conquered the grave. No mortal can claim victory over decay and death.

He said that "I and the Father are one." His victory over death confirms His claim, crying out through the ages "He is God!" As Paul proclaims in Romans, "[Jesus] was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." [{15}](#)

7. Aren't there many ways to God? Can Jesus be the only way?

Jesus' resurrection puts Jesus in a class by Himself. His crucifixion and victory over death clearly show that He is the only way to God. If there were multiple ways, Jesus would not have gone to the cross. He allowed himself to be subjected to death because it was necessary for our redemption. In

addition, Jesus clearly stated that no one comes to the Father except through Him.[{16}](#)

8. How can I possibly be forgiven for my sins?

Jesus' resurrection validates His claim to have victory over sin and death. The ultimate result of sin is death, and Jesus conquered death.[{17}](#) In Romans chapter 10 we learn "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."[{18}](#)

Belief in Jesus' resurrection is a central part of saving faith.

9. Why should I believe God is involved in His creation? I don't see God making much difference in this world.

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates God's active involvement in this world. He predicted it, He planned it, He performed it. Peter writes, "[you are redeemed] with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you."[{19}](#)

10. How can a loving God allow all of the evil in this world?

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates a loving God redeeming a world degraded by evil. If there were no evil, Jesus would not have had to conquer death through the cross. If God was not loving, He would not have sent Jesus into the world to redeem us.[{20}](#) Looking at His death and resurrection, we know without a doubt that there is evil in this world, yet we are still loved by a God with power over death. Evil and love coexist because God valued us enough to create us in His image with a genuine capability to choose to turn our backs on Him. Making us unable to choose evil would have made us unable to love removing the greatest attribute of His image.

Once someone accepts the resurrection, many other barriers to accepting Christ are torn down. Whatever the question, the answer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

May what John said of the disciples be true of us as well: "So when He was raised from the dead, . . . they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." [\[21\]](#)

Notes

1. Scripture references are taken from the NASB95.
2. 1 Peter 1:1-2, 3:8.
3. 1 Peter 1:3-4.
4. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19
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6. Matt 28:11.
7. Luke 24:13-32
8. 1 Peter 1:21.
9. 1 Peter 1:18-21.
10. 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
11. 1 Cor. 15:32.
12. John 2:22.
13. Rom 5:8-11.
14. John 18:37-38.
15. Rom 1:4-5.
16. John 14:7.
17. James 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
18. Rom 10:9-10.
19. 1 Peter 1:18-20.
20. John 3:16.
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Resources on Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

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A Christian Worldview Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment

Steve Cable examines the Second Amendment from a biblical perspective.

In today's America, the Second Amendment invokes intense arguments regarding its meaning and application. Events like the Newton school, the Aurora movie theater, and the Tucson shopping center shootings bring sorrow to our minds and

prayers to our lips. Some say the way to prevent these tragedies is to remove the right for individuals to own and carry firearms. Others argue that firearms carried by responsible individuals could have prevented much, if not all, the carnage of these mass shootings.

Any discussion of the Second Amendment should begin by making sure we are familiar with the wording and the original meaning of this part of our Bill of Rights. The Second Amendment states: “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Although we can reasonably assume the authors of the Bill of Rights and the people of that day felt that this was an unambiguous statement, it is not the case today.



Some believe that the phrase “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms” creates an individual constitutional right. This view is referred to as the “individual right theory,”^{1} that legislative bodies are precluded from prohibiting firearm possession. Others argue that the phrase “a well-regulated Militia” means that it was only intended to restrict Congress from legislating away a state’s right of self-defense. This view is called the “collective rights theory.”^{2}

In all likelihood, the authors intentionally combined these two thoughts. The states could not muster a militia of their people unless the people were allowed to keep arms. This view is supported by people involved in crafting and/or approving the Bill of Rights. Samuel Adams wrote, “The said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to . . . prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms.”^{3} Similarly, Noah Webster wrote, “Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in American cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute

a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be on any pretense, raised in the United States.”[\[4\]](#)

Does a Christian worldview provide guidance for our views on the Second Amendment? The Bible does not talk about guns, but does it provide instruction on this issue? In 1 Peter, we learn that governments bear the sword to implement justice. Under our Constitution, we, the people, are ultimately the ones who bear the sword to ensure justice.

The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?

As discussed above, those responsible for the Second Amendment intended to ensure individuals could bear firearms legally. What concerns led to this original amendment to our constitution?

To understand, we should review the context for the introduction of the Bill of Rights. When the Constitution was sent to the states for ratification in 1787, two groups formed around adding a bill of rights to the Constitution, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The Federalists supported the Constitution as written, believing that any attempt to list certain rights as remaining with individuals or states would be interpreted as making other rights subject to the federal government. The Anti-Federalists believed it was important to clearly state key fundamental rights over which the federal government would have no jurisdiction. Neither group was arguing against any of the Bill of Rights, but rather whether it was more effective to be silent or to list them explicitly.

The Federalists, who had the majority of delegates to the convention, were wrong in assuming that most people would agree with their hands-off approach. This situation led to many of the states ratifying the Constitution with the stipulation that a bill of rights be added. The right to bear arms was a common component of these stipulations. As James

Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, “The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation . . . forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition . . . The several kingdoms of Europe . . . are afraid to trust the people with arms.”[\[5\]](#)

When the first Congress met, James Madison presented a bill of rights before the members of the House. The first Congress converted these into twelve amendments which were sent back to the states for ratification in September of 1789. The language which would become the Second Amendment was essentially unchanged from that offered by Madison. On March 1, 1792, Thomas Jefferson announced the ratification of the United States Bill of Rights.

In Romans, Paul wrote, “But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for (governing authorities) do not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.”[\[6\]](#) However, if government officials hold all power, those who would control us will seek that power by taking over the government. In our constitutional system, the people are the ultimate governing authorities and thus are given the right to bear arms to protect the nation against those who would take over for the practice of evil.

The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?

As noted previously, two different thoughts arose in interpreting the Second Amendment, namely the “individual rights theory” and the “collective rights theory.” Which view is supported by the Supreme Court?

In the most recent ruling of 2008, the court ruled the amendment confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense. It also determined that the clause concerning a well-regulated

militia does not limit the part which clearly states an individual's right to keep and bear arms. Thus, the Court affirmed the "individual rights theory" of interpretation.

Remember, the framers of the Second Amendment were aware that guns held by individuals could be used for criminal activity. They felt that protecting individual liberty was more important than trying to create a perfectly safe environment. However, it should not be interpreted that everyone should have equal access to firearms. The Court has supported laws which 1) restrict those with mental problems or a criminal background in acquiring guns and 2) limit general access to specific types of weapons for mass destruction.

The difficult question is, when does the government cross the line into the realm of interfering with a person's rights? First, what is meant by arms; does it include tanks, RPGs, etc.? Second, what could legally preclude a person's right to bear arms? What type of personality or personality disorder makes it dangerous to others for you to carry a gun?

On the first question, the answer is not defined by what is needed for hunting or protection from thieves. From the perspective of the Founding Fathers, it needs to be weapons such that if a sufficient number of people possess them, the government is unable through the force of an army to impose any unconstitutional burdens upon the people. The Court's position is that rifles and handguns are sufficient and that the government has the right to control other types of weapons.

The second question is equally difficult: how does one determine who is sane enough to have the right to bear arms? The Court has allowed this to be defined in terms of mental deficiencies, mental problems and a criminal background.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, we are told to pray for those

in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life with all godliness and dignity. Our Constitution indicates that we are to take up arms as necessary to protect a government supporting godliness and dignity. It is reasonable to preclude those without a sane concept of a quiet and peaceful life from accessing firearms, which would always be a small minority of the populace.

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Ignored?

To this point, we have laid out the history and the status of our right to bear arms. We have three possible responses: 1) accept and obey this law, 2) ignore it as counter to God's greater law, or 3) work to repeal the law. Let us first consider the question, "Is this a law that we should ignore?"

As spelled out in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, Christians are to uphold the laws of our land. Although no specific governmental system is promoted in the New Testament, we appreciate a system that protects our ability to worship God consistent with 1 Timothy 2:1-2. We support protecting the individual religious freedom offered by this country. At the same time, we want to limit robbery, murder and mayhem. How do these potentially conflicting desires relate to our view of the Second Amendment?

Remember, its underlying purpose is to ensure that our freedoms as individuals and as states are never trampled on by the federal government or others. The framers of the Constitution were worried about the tendency of large governments to attempt to consolidate their power at the expense of freedom. As Christians, we should desire to live in a society where we are free to worship God and share our faith with others.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, we see that we should pray for such a society because "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight

of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." As citizens of this nation, the Second Amendment makes it clear that we have a responsibility to protect our rights from those who would attempt to abuse their position, to maintain our freedoms including our freedom to live godly lives and share Christ freely.

In 2 Peter 2:13-14, we are to submit "for the Lord's sake to every human institution," whether to a king or his representatives. Within our structure of government, we submit to our Constitution and its principles. The Second Amendment calls for us (if needed) to be armed and ready as individuals to participate in a state militia or, in the absence of a militia, to act as individuals to protect our liberty. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that this also confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes.

Clearly, the right to bear arms as defined in our Constitution and explained by Supreme Court rulings is not counter to biblical teaching. Therefore, we are to act in accordance with this amendment to our Constitution. Whether we should try to repeal this law is discussed below.

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?

If the Second Amendment creates more harm than good, we can support repealing it. The main argument for this position is that guns are used by some to harm the innocent. If guns are freely available to the citizenry, does the harm done outweigh the value envisioned by the Second Amendment?

Many innocent people have been killed by deranged individuals and criminals with guns; at the same time, we cannot remember a time when American citizens were called to the streets to protect our Constitution. Have we reached a point where the

nature of today's weapons and our society make the Second Amendment a detriment?

One group argues that if private ownership was illegal and strictly enforced, it would severely limit gun violence. An opposing view believes the problem is actually worsened by the lack of gun ownership by the public. If more law abiding citizens were armed and prepared to respond, the number of people killed would drop due to the deterrent effect.

What is the problem with repealing the Second Amendment? To have no guns among the citizenry, the government must be very proactive in removing guns from society as a whole. Guns must be removed from those not inclined to obey— a very difficult task as evidenced by the prevalence of alcohol during Prohibition. If accomplished, the government must assume unprecedented powers which may be fine as long as the Constitutional is not usurped. But if a future government decides to do so, there will be nothing to stop it.

Swords were used to kill people in Jesus' day. Did Jesus rail against the presence of swords and demand that no one but soldiers should carry them? No, in fact, he told His disciples that he who had no sword should buy one because of the troubled days ahead.[{7}](#) Peter was carrying his sword in the garden when Jesus was arrested.[{8}](#) While Jesus kept Peter from interfering with His arrest, Jesus did not use that situation to initiate a "sword control" campaign.

Perhaps a more sensible way to control gun violence would be to encourage law-abiding citizens to carry weapons, particularly in public areas. This approach creates a deterrent against the insane, the criminal, and a future government gone amok.

According to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, in the last days, swords will be beaten into plowshares and nations will no longer lift up the sword against other nations. We are clearly

not in those last days now. Keeping the Second Amendment in place highlights our commitment to a government “of the people, by the people and for the people,” while we wait for Christ’s bodily return.

Notes

1. *Second Amendment*, Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second_amendment

2. Ibid.

3. Philip Mulivor, *Proclaiming Liberty: What Patriots and Heroes Really Said about the Right to Keep and Bear Arms*, Brightman Press, New York, 2011 quoting Samuel Adams, Amendment introduced on 6 Feb. 1788 in the Massachusetts ratifying convention, qtd. *In Debates and Proceedings in the Convention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Held in the Year 1788*

4. Ibid., Noah Webster, “An Examination of the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution.” *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States Published During Its Discussion by the People 1787-1788*.

5. Ibid., James Madison, “Paper 46,” *The Federalist Papers*.

6. Romans 13:4

7. Luke 22:35-38

8. John 18:10

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The Star of Bethlehem from a

Christian View

Dr. Ray Bohlin looks at the familiar story of the star of Bethlehem and provides several possible ways that God created this sign announcing the birth of the Christ. From a Christian worldview perspective, we know a bright light in the sky was able to lead the magi to the Christ child. Dr. Bohlin considers several ways God may have chosen to announce the coming of the Christ.

The Magi and the Star of Bethlehem

*O, Star of wonder, star of night
Star of royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

This familiar and haunting chorus from the Christmas carol, "We Three Kings of Orient Are," introduces us to what seems to be the only ubiquitous biblical symbol during the Christmas season, the star of Bethlehem.



This Christmas, as you look over the Christmas cards in the stores or in your own burgeoning collection from family and friends, you will see one very constant element. Whether the scene depicts the nativity, a backyard nature scene, a Christmas tree, or just Santa making deliveries, if the nighttime sky is included, somewhere in the picture, eliciting warm and happy emotions, is a star. The star dominates the nighttime sky with its size and brightness and its long tail pointing to the earth. The star has almost become the signature which says, "This scene reflects a Christmas theme."

At first, this may seem quite unusual for something which doesn't even get mentioned in Luke 2, the more familiar account of our Lord's birth. The star is featured only in

Matthew's brief description of the visit by the magi shortly after Jesus' birth. I think the prevalence of the star stems from its mysteriousness. For example, what kind of star convinces a group of Gentile wise men to search for the new King of the Jews and actually leads them to Him? Before we explore this puzzle, let's look at Matthew's account beginning in Chapter 2 verse 1:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him" (Matt. 2:1-2, NASB).

A couple of things to note: first, these events take place after Jesus' birth; second, this was in the days of Herod the king; third, the magi arrived from an area east of Jerusalem (probably in the vicinity of Babylon or Persia); fourth, they already knew they were looking for the newborn King of the Jews, but the exact location eluded them; and fifth, it was viewing His star from their home in the east that led them on this journey.

After consulting with King Herod and finding out from chief priests and teachers that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, the magi set out for the 5 mile trip south to Bethlehem. We pick up Matthew's narrative in verse 9:

And having heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh (Matt. 2:9-11, NASB).

Here we see that Matthew appears to describe the star as

moving, as leading the magi to Jesus. There is clearly more than one magi, but only tradition holds that there were three—presumably because of the three gifts. These Gentile wise men worship the King whom the star has led them to. In the rest of this essay, we will explore the nature of this strange star and what it could have been.

What Was the Star of Bethlehem?

The Gospel of Matthew states that the star informed the magi of the birth of the King of the Jews and actually led them to Bethlehem once they had arrived in Jerusalem. The star of Bethlehem has been the subject of scholarly discussion ever since the first centuries after Jesus' birth. Some believed it was a supernova explosion, others a comet or a conjunction of planets associated with specific constellations that would herald the birth of a king in Israel. Some have suggested that none of these astronomical events can adequately account for all that Matthew tells us within the context of his worldview. In this discussion, I will be investigating the more common explanations to see if we can come to some understanding as to just what the magi saw 2,000 years ago.

When Matthew quotes the magi as telling Herod that they observed the new King's star rising in the east, this can be interpreted as a new star, something never observed before. This has led some scholars to believe that the star of Bethlehem was a nova or supernova. A nova is a white dwarf star that literally explodes. The explosion may increase the brightness of the star a thousand to a million times its previous brightness, making a previously invisible star, visible. A nova, however, does not last very long. The initial blast of the explosion may only be observed for a few months before the star shrinks to a remnant of its previous brightness and disappears altogether.

There are numerous problems with this view. First, although

there was a "new star" recorded by the Chinese in the constellation Capricorn in March-April of 5 B.C. that lasted only 70 days, there is nothing to connect this event with the birth of a King in Israel. Second, and perhaps most troublesome, nova do not move.

This leads to a discussion of a different astronomical event that may be associated with the "new star" (a comet) recorded by the Chinese in 5 B.C. The Chinese would not have distinguished a comet from a nova since all they recorded was something new in the sky that was temporary. A comet has the advantage of a tail that can appear to be pointing in a direction which may have guided the magi. In addition, a comet moves! A comet can even disappear as it moves behind the sun and reappear as it comes out from behind the sun. A major objection is that the Chinese make no mention of the "new star" moving. Another problem is that comets are cyclical with a predictable periodicity. For instance, Halley's comet appears every 76 years. If the star of Bethlehem were a comet, we would most likely have observed it again and been able to extrapolate back to the time of Christ to see if there is a match. Unfortunately, the only one to come close is Halley's comet which appeared in 12 B.C., a date that is impossibly early.

One could always claim that the comet was one with a very long periodicity or one that has since disappeared from our solar system. This is certainly possible, but it does not really help the discussion. One might as well appeal to a purely supernatural occurrence that cannot be verified scientifically. There is no difference. And though comets were usually interpreted as heralding sweeping changes, the changes were usually for the worse and there is no way, once again, to connect these events to the birth of a king in Israel. Next, I will look at planetary conjunction, the most popular suggestion at planetarium shows during the Christmas season.

Did the Star of Bethlehem Result from a Triple Conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter?

The bright star usually seen hovering over Nativity scenes depicted on numerous Christmas cards actually dominates nearly every nighttime Christmas panorama. As I stated earlier, the Star of Bethlehem is just about the only ubiquitous biblical symbol associated with Christmas. The reason probably has to do with the mystery surrounding what this star was. Earlier, I showed the unreasonableness of the star being a comet or supernova explosion. If you were to attend a planetarium show concerning the star of Bethlehem, they would most likely present the idea that the star was a triple conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in the year 7 B.C. followed by a massing of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars in 6 B.C. Realizing that planetarium shows view Scripture as something less than historically accurate, it is still necessary to ask if this indeed could have been the Star of Bethlehem.

In the early 17th century the great astronomer and Christian, Johannes Kepler, calculated that a triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn had occurred in 7 B.C. While Kepler did not believe this to be the actual Star of Bethlehem, it may have alerted the magi to the coming star. 7-4 B.C. have become the usual dates for fixing the birth of Christ since Herod the Great's death, the Herod mentioned by both Matthew and Luke in their birth narratives, is well established in 4 B.C. Therefore, Jesus had to have been born in the few years prior to 4 B.C. since He started his three-year public ministry around the age of 30 (Luke 3:23) and His death is usually fixed between 27-30 A.D.

So just what is a triple conjunction, and why would it be significant to the birth of a King in Israel? A planetary conjunction is what happens when two planets come in close proximity to one another. A triple conjunction refers to when three separate conjunctions of the same two planets occur

within a one year period. Triple conjunctions can be predicted, but they do not occur with regularity. There have been only 11 such triple conjunctions since 7 B.C. and the interval between them varies between 40 and 338 years.

The triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 B.C. was seen in the constellation Pisces in the months of May, September, and December. This provides sufficient time for the magi to see the first conjunction, begin their trip west to Judea, visit Herod by the second conjunction or at least soon afterwards, and perhaps not reach Bethlehem until the third conjunction when it is said to have appeared in the southern sky, and Bethlehem is just south of Jerusalem. Remember how the magi rejoiced to see the star again as they departed Jerusalem for Bethlehem. Ancient astrologers associated Jupiter with royalty or even a ruler of the universe. Saturn was associated with Palestine or even with the deity who protected Israel. And Pisces was associated with the nation of Israel. Later a massing of Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn occurred again in Pisces in 6 B.C. It seems feasible then that this triple conjunction followed by the massing of the three planets in Pisces could indicate to the magi that a King of Israel and a Ruler of the Universe was about to be born in Israel.

While this seems to wrap things up rather nicely, there are significant problems. First, Jupiter and Saturn never were close enough to be confused as a single object. Matthew definitely describes a singular star. Perhaps more importantly, the use of astrology is necessary to interpret these astronomical signs properly. The Old Testament, particularly, mocks astrologers in Isaiah 47:13-15 and several times in Daniel (1:20, 2:27, 4:7, and 5:7). Jeremiah 10:1-2 seems to forbid astrology outright. The use of astrology is clearly outside the worldview of Matthew as he penned his gospel. It seems woefully inconsistent for the Lord to use astrology to herald the incarnation and birth of His Son into

the world.

Was the Star of Bethlehem the Planet Jupiter?

In this discussion, I have considered a nova, a comet, and a triple conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn as the Star of Bethlehem between 7 and 4 B.C., and none have seemed to be satisfactory. In 1991, Ernest Martin published a book titled, *The Star That Astonished the World*. His major thesis is that Herod died in 1 B.C. and not 4 B.C. If 4 B.C. is the wrong date for Herod's death, then everything must be reevaluated.

While there are many lines of evidence that Martin uses to make his point, a critical issue is a lunar eclipse that occurred just prior to Herod's death. According to the Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, on the night of a lunar eclipse, Herod executed two rabbis. Herod himself died soon afterwards, just before Passover. Martin points out that the lunar eclipse of March 13, 4 B.C., was only a 40% partial eclipse and barely visible. Also he reconstructs the events between the eclipse and Herod's death, about 4 weeks, and determines there was not enough time for all these things to take place. However, Martin has located a total lunar eclipse on January 10, 1 B.C., twelve and a half weeks prior to Passover.

If we assume that Martin's date for the death of Herod is correct, then the years 3 and 2 B.C. can be added to the search parameters for the Star of Bethlehem. Martin points out that the planet Jupiter passes through a series of conjunctions over the course of these two years indicating that Jupiter is the star of Bethlehem.

Remember that Jupiter is considered the royal star. Well, in 3 B.C., Jupiter came into conjunction with Regulus, the star of kingship, the brightest star in the constellation of Leo, the

first of several such conjunctions over the next year. Leo was the constellation of kings, and it was also closely associated by some with the Lion of Judah. This is beginning to look interesting. "The royal planet approached the royal star in the royal constellation representing Israel."(1) In addition, on September 11, 3 B.C., Jupiter was not only very close to Regulus, but the sun was in the constellation Virgo. Hmmm, the royal planet in conjunction with the royal star while the sun is in a virgin. September 11, 3 B.C., is also the beginning of the Jewish New Year. There seems to be an awful lot coming together here.

But what about the star appearing to stop over Bethlehem? Planets will actually appear to do just that as they reach the opposite point in the sky from the sun as they travel east across the sky. They will stop, reverse directions for a few weeks, stop again, and head east once again. It's called a retrograde loop. Jupiter performed a retrograde loop in 2 B.C. and was stationary on December 25, during Hanukkah, the season of giving presents.

Just in case you are ready to proclaim the mystery of the Star of Bethlehem solved, remember that this whole scenario rests on Herod dying in 1 B.C. rather than in 4 B.C. The majority of historians and biblical historians can't accept this critical revision. If Herod indeed died in 4 B.C., all of these coincidences I just reviewed are just that, coincidences. Also, as I mentioned earlier, the use of astrological meanings is contrary to the worldview of Matthew. There is another option that has become very popular, and I'll discuss it next.

The Shekinah Glory as the Star of Bethlehem

So far in this essay, I have discussed several naturalistic explanations for the Star of Bethlehem: a nova or exploding star, a comet, a triple conjunction of the planets Jupiter and

Saturn in 7 B.C., and the planet Jupiter as it traveled in the constellation Leo in 3-2 B.C. Each of these astronomical events represents a natural occurrence that God used to announce the birth of His Son. One of the major problems has been that in order to interpret any of these signs, one would have to use astrological meanings for these events and their locations in the night sky to reach the conclusion that a new King of the Jews has been born—something that is foreign to the biblical worldview. Perhaps there was a physical “star” that gave off real light but indeed was new but not reflected by any astronomical event.

Remember that Jesus’ birth was the ultimate coming of the presence of God in the midst of His people. How was God’s presence manifested elsewhere in the Bible? Moses saw a burning bush that was not consumed and God spoke to him from the bush. Again in Exodus, Moses was allowed to see God’s backside and afterwards his face shone with light so bright that the other Israelites could not look on his face. The Israelites were led through the desert by a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When Jesus was transfigured He shone with a light as bright as the sun. When Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, Saul was blinded by the light which the others with him saw as well. When God was imminently present, a bright light was associated with His presence.

The Shekinah Glory denotes the visible presence of God. This presence was real, and the physical manifestation was real. Remember that Saul was blinded by the light. The Lord often announces His presence by a very physical manifestation of bright light. What better way to announce the coming of Jesus, God’s Son, the second Person of the Trinity than by a special light that is not some mere improbable astronomical event, rather an expression of the Shekinah glory, God’s divine presence among men?

Astronomer Sherm Kanagy and theologian Ken Boa advance this thesis in their as yet unpublished manuscript, *Star of the*

Magi. One of their strong emphases is the necessity to try to interpret the text of Matthew from first century Jewish perspective. They reject the idea that any astrological meaning could have been on Matthew's mind concerning this star. It is certainly fair to wonder, therefore, what this star was and how the magi interpreted it as a star signifying the birth of the King of the Jews. Kanagy and Boa reveal that Kepler concluded that the star was not some astronomical event and was a light that appeared in the lower atmosphere and therefore was not visible to everyone. But how did the magi interpret the star? This admittedly is the weakest part of the interpretation. The text gives no real hints. Magi were simply wise men of the east, not necessarily astrologers. They were Gentiles whose presence in the context of Matthew's Messianic gospel hints at the eventual spread of the gospel beyond the Jews. But how did they know what the star meant? We can only assume there was selective revelation. Only Paul understood the voice from the light, though all who were with him saw the light. Only Moses was allowed up on Mt. Sinai to receive the Law. Only Peter, James, and John were present at the transfiguration, and they were told to keep it to themselves until Jesus rose from the dead. Manifestations of God's presence with men often were accompanied by selective revelation. Perhaps the meaning of the "star" was only revealed to the magi though others could actually see the "star."

Well, what was it, an astronomical event or the Shekinah Glory, manifesting God's presence among men? In my mind the mystery remains. Perhaps that is how God intends it to be.

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