

# 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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# 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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# 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.

# The Death of Charlie Kirk and the Threat to Freedom of Speech, Universities, and National Peace

I remember where I was when I heard that Charlie Kirk had been shot. I was on my way to a chiropractic appointment. I normally listen to podcasts when I am driving, but that day I decided to see what the talk shows were discussing on the AM channels. I turned on the radio to hear Sean Hannity saying that Charlie Kirk had been shot and was at the hospital in serious condition. When I arrived at the chiropractor's office, I was surprised when my chiropractor asked me if I heard about the shooting. I was surprised that he heard about it. I was driving home when I heard that Charlie had died.

I did not know Charlie Kirk personally. I never met him. However, the news of what happened disturbed me deeply for several reasons. My first ministry job was as an intern for the Baptist Student Ministries. I remember manning tables and talking to whoever would stop by. The local atheist club invited me to go to their meeting to give them an apologetics talk. I was in their club with three friends, and about fifteen atheist students, discussing apologetic arguments. I never thought that I was in danger. If I was not in any danger on that day, why was Charlie Kirk in danger holding his public event on a university campus freely exchanging ideas with the students?

As I stated, I did not know Charlie Kirk, but I did know about his ministry. I saw some videos of him debating students at his "Prove Me Wrong" events. I saw that Charlie Kirk could handle himself well in those discussions, and that he was respectful to the other person. He allowed the other people

time to make their points and lay out their arguments, and he challenged and refuted their argument. Charlie Kirk boldly proclaimed the Gospel, argued religious and political issues such as the resurrection and abortion, and refuted opposing arguments in a public forum. This is what got Charlie killed.

Charlie Kirk's assassination should disturb you for three reasons (other than the fact that he was a person who should not have been murdered). First, his death shows that there is a threat to the First Amendment. Second, his death shows that universities may not be safe spaces for the free exchange of ideas. Third, the left and the right might be taking us towards a second civil war. None of these things are certainties, but the threat is strong enough that we should be aware of it.

The part of the first amendment that is threatened by Charlie Kirk's assassination is the free speech clause, "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech." One of the reasons that people came to the United States early in our country's history is because we allowed people to express their political and religious opinions. Liberals and conservatives should care about this. If society restricts public discussion or declares that certain topics are off limits, the common public is excluded from discussions concerning public policy and many other topics. One of the foundational principles that our country was founded on was free speech. The founding fathers did not want the government restricting public speech because they knew the impact from laws restricting speech critical of political leaders and royalty in England and other European nations. The people were oppressed because they had no say on certain issues that impacted their lives. Free speech at least allows for the ideas and policies of the government to be challenged publicly.

The University of Bologna is the first university in the historical record. The purpose of the university was to train

future civil and religious leaders. Later training in certain subjects was required for certain professions. For scholars to discuss these issues they had to have the freedom to discuss controversial issues, and they had to be safe from harm while discussing issues. The university became a place where controversial ideas could be discussed openly. This is the activity that Charlie Kirk was engaging in when he was shot and killed. This means that Charlie Kirk's murder was intentionally, or unintentionally, an attack on the university as a place where controversial issues can be debated. This shooting puts the university system in jeopardy. Are scholars and students allowed to debate issues or not? If the answer is no, then freedom of thought and speech is undermined. If the answer is no, certain ideas are not allowed to be discussed, and speech can be policed.

Since I started paying attention to politics, the nature of political debates has become more contentious. There will be a certain amount of contention and conflict in politics because that is the nature of politics. Political discussions have become more contentious since the 2016 elections. This contention has led to an increase in political violence over the issues of race, marriage, LGBTQ issues, and abortion. There have been riots in Portland, Washington D.C., and many other cities that lead to buildings being burnt. No matter your view of the January 6th riot over the ratification of the 2020 election, the event is a sign that tolerance of opposing views is decreasing. One of the reasons people were coming to the United States was because they were not allowed to speak out against their leaders in the country that they were leaving. Unless we can find a way to discuss our differences without killing, physically attacking, rioting, or damaging public and private property, it becomes more and more probable that this will lead to a civil war.

Political violence has increased over the last 25 years. Liberals and conservatives are becoming more likely to use

violence against fellow countrymen because they will not tolerate disagreement over certain issues. As Christians, how should we respond? We should not stop speaking the truth and challenging evil. Paul wrote, "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Ephesians 5:11). By speaking out against the "unfruitful works of darkness" we are being faithful to God. Christianity has a long history of speaking out against immoral and evil things. We cannot stop because the darkness threatens us with violence.

If we do not speak out against what is evil and stand for what is good, we will be held accountable for God. The law of Leviticus states, "If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity" (Leviticus 5:1). God does not want his people to remain silent and allow what is evil to go unchallenged. We must respond to evil and injustice by speaking out against it.

Christians are not called to respond to violence with violence. I am not claiming that Christians should not defend themselves against assault or protect others. The issue here is that Christianity will not spread by using violence. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11). Satan is not defeated by violence. If Christians become violent Satan wins. Instead, we should expect to be persecuted, slandered, and attacked when we speak out against evil and proclaim the Gospel. Christian brothers and sisters, the kingdom of God does not advance the way earthly nations advance. The kingdom of God spreads by the proclamation of the gospel, helping those that are in need, and remaining faithful during times of danger and persecution. At this uncertain time, we must remain faithful to God and

proclaim the Gospel of Jesus.

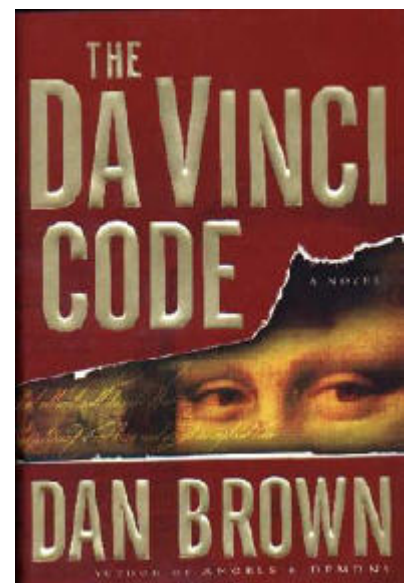
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## What Happened at Nicaea

*The identity of Jesus of Nazareth is central to the beliefs of Christianity. Christianity does not call a person to join a philosophy, or a set of practices. Sure, there are philosophical ideas and practices that are consistent with Christianity. However, the central part of the Christian faith is a call to be in a relationship with Christ Jesus. Christian apologist Michael Ramsden once remarked, "Without Christ the Christian is left with the letters I A N and Ian cannot help you." While this is simplistic, saying it does convey the importance of Jesus to the Christian religion. This is exactly the question that many bishops were called to answer in the city of Nicaea in A.D. 325.*

Some skeptics claim that no one claimed that Jesus was not seen as divine until the council of Nicaea. In 2003 this view was popularized in Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code* and in the movie that followed. In this novel Brown uses a fictional story to make factual claims about the origin of Christianity and the person of Jesus. While investigating a murder, several of Brown's characters make some disturbing discoveries. One character states, "Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...A great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless." [\[1\]](#) Another character says that "Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries after Jesus'



death.”{2} While most of Brown’s claims have been disregarded, the claim that the divinity of Jesus was something invented is still floating around. So it is still important to understand what happened at the Council of Nicaea.

One interpretation of the Council of Nicaea is that it was a “local dispute...eventually judged by the ecumenical councils.”{3} The result is that the issue of this local dispute was influenced by cultural issues that was then imposed on all Christians by an ecumenical council. An examination of the facts reveals that this interpretation is the result of imposing philosophical presuppositions onto the historical narrative instead of looking at the facts.

Before the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine was praying when he saw a cross in the heavens with the inscription, “CONQUER BY THIS.” Constantine had that sign painted on the shields of all his soldiers before the battle. Constantine won the battle and became co-emperor of the Roman Empire with Licinius. From that point Constantine worked to promote the Christian religion in the Roman Empire.

In 318 Arius, a presbyter (priest or elder) in Alexandria, began to teach that Christ was a divine being that was created by the Father. Christ then created the world. This view made Christ “a kind of divine hero: greater than an ordinary human being, but of a lower rank than the eternal God.”{4} The Bishop of Alexandria disagreed with this view. The conflict led to a council meeting in Alexandria where Arius was excommunicated. Arius, who had the support of Eusebius, the Bishop of Nicomedia, spread his teachings through the empire. Several more meetings were held, but the controversy continued.

Constantine believed that it was his duty to promote unity in the Christian religion for the sake of the empire. Constantine wrote “My design then was, first, to bring diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as

it were, of settled uniformity ...and, second, to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world, then suffering under the power of grievous disease.”{5} Constantine called the council of Nicaea to “adjudicate the meaning of Jesus’ divinity”{6}so that there could be cultural unity in the empire. The controversy may have started as a local dispute between a bishop and a presbyter, but it spread through the empire and caused enough division to get the attention of the empire. This was not just a local dispute any more, and involved more than just cultural influence. Theological questions that defined the very nature of Christianity were at the heart of the controversy.

Arius’ argument had a logical component, and a component based on Scripture. The logical argument, or “logic of monotheism,”{7} focused on the Father’s unity. Arius reasoned that if God was perfect, transcendent, and changeless, and the sustainer of all things, then everything and everyone is separate from God. If everyone is separate from God, then Jesus is separate from God. Jesus has a special role in creation and redemption but cannot be God because there is only one God. This means that Jesus is a created being. Because Jesus was created, he is subject to change. Therefore, Jesus was not God.

To popularize his argument, Arius wrote easily memorized, catchy songs set to familiar tunes, which allowed his teachings to spread across the empire. One song had the lyrics:

And by adoption had God made the Son  
Into an advancement of himself.  
Yet the Son’s substance is  
Removed from the substance of the Father:  
The Son is not equal to the Father,  
Nor does he share the same substance.{8}

Arius also used Scripture as part of his argument. Arius

identified wisdom with Christ. He cited Proverbs 8:22 which says, "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old." Jesus states that "the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Luke states that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). This indicates that Jesus changed, something God cannot do. Paul writes that Jesus is "the firstborn among many brothers" (Romans 8:29). Paul also states that Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn among all creation" (Colossians 1:15). Arius argued that these verses meant that Jesus was the first created being. John writes, "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Paul writes to Timothy about God, "who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:16). Arius taught that these verses taught that God was totally set apart from creation, which includes the Son.

Arius' opponents thought that he was "reading meaning into innocent passages." [\[9\]](#) To show this, these bishops looked to the Scripture to find their own proof texts. Paul writes of Jesus "though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6). This verse identifies the Son with the Father. John opens his Gospel with, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Jesus was not only *with* God, he *was* God. The author of Hebrews writes that Jesus "is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by his word and his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is identified as the exact imprint of the Father and the sustainer of the universe. Paul calls Jesus the "Lord of Glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8). The author of Hebrews states that "Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus does not change and neither does the Father.

The opponents of Arius countered his argument that Proverbs 8 showed that wisdom was created by pointing to verse 30, "Then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily in his delight, rejoicing before him always." They argued that this verse showed that wisdom was always with God.

The orthodox bishops also responded with an argument called the "logic of salvation."[\[10\]](#) The argument is that if Christ is not truly God, then Jesus cannot save mankind from sin. If Jesus is less than God, and is subject to sin, then his sacrifice is insufficient to redeem mankind of their sin. Paul taught this when he wrote, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ cannot make us the righteousness of God if he is not of the same substance as the Father.

In his novel Brown portrays the outcome of the Council of Nicaea as coming down to a close vote. The vote was 300 to 2. In any election this would have been called a landslide. The council instated what later became the Nicene Creed. Its statement is as follows:

We believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
begotten from the Father before all ages,  
God from God,  
Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made;  
of the same essence as the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven;  
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,  
and was made human.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered and was buried.

The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.

He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again with glory  
to judge the living and the dead.

His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life.

He proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.

He spoke through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,  
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

Constantine did not decide that Jesus should be made a God, nor did he participate in the vote. The deity of Jesus was not what was at issue at this council either. The issue before the council was the nature of Jesus' relation to the Father.

The Council of Nicaea may have decided against Arius' view, but the controversy was not over yet. The Arians were exiled after the council. Eusebius of Caesarea was recalled after writing a theology that made Constantine the "earthly image of the *Logos*." [\[11\]](#) Arius was recalled from exile after giving a statement of faith that Constantine did not understand, but died unexpectedly the day before taking communion with the faithful.

Athanasius took the office of bishop of Alexandria after Alexander, the previous bishop, died. Athanasius was

Alexander's advisor at the time of the council in 325. Athanasius did not welcome the Arians back into the Church, putting him in conflict with Constantine. The Arians tried to dispose of Athanasius at Tyre in 335. Athanasius was accused of abusing clergy that disagreed with him and of cutting off food to Constantinople by instigating a dock strike. Constantine banished Athanasius to Trier in Gaul.

When Constantine died, Athanasius and Marcellus, who taught that the Father and the Son were of a similar substance, were allowed to return from exile. The Eastern Empire was ruled by Constantius, and the West by Constans. The Nicene Creed was still the official doctrine, but the Arians outnumbered the orthodox Christians. To advance their cause the Arians convinced Constantius to banish Athanasius and Marcellus again. In 340 Bishop Julius recalled Athanasius and Marcellus. Marcellus' teachings were declared orthodox. However, in 341 there was a council at Antioch that rejected the teachings of Arius and Marcellus. Athanasius was not allowed a hearing at the council. The creed that was affirmed by this council excluded Arianism and condemned Marcellus. Constans and Constantius decided to call a council in Sardica. This council ended in schism between the eastern and western parts of the Empire. Athanasius abandoned Marcellus and was allowed to return to Alexandria.

In 350 Constantius gained control over the western Empire. He allowed the Arians power in the Church. Bishops were forced to turn on Athanasius. In 356 Athanasius was banished again. A creed was published in 357 that banished the philosophical language that was used in Nicaea. Basil, Marcellian's successor, taught that the Son was of the same substance as the Father; this development was encouraging to Athanasius.

When Emperor Justine ascended to power, he permitted all exiles to return. A council was held in 362 in Alexandria where the Nicene Creed was affirmed. Another council was held in 381 in Constantinople where a modified version of the

Nicaea Creed was affirmed and all bishops were assured that the three persons of the Trinity were not three Gods. Three persons formed the one Triune God. It took 66 years of conflict after the Council of Nicaea for the Church to reach a conclusion about the issue.

There were four main affirmations that resulted from the Council of Nicaea. First, Christ was “very God of very God.”[{12}](#) Jesus is God in the same sense that the Father is God. Second, Christ is “of one substance with the Father.”[{13}](#) On this point the distinction was one Greek letter. Arianism taught that Jesus was of a similar substance (*homoiousios*) with the Father. Athanasius and the orthodox Christians believed that Jesus was of the same substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. It can be said that the whole dispute was over one letter. Third, Jesus was “begotten, not made.”[{14}](#) Fourth, Jesus “became human for us men, and for our salvation.”[{15}](#) Without the work of Jesus there is no salvation of mankind.

Athanasius spent most of his life defending the truth of Christian doctrine. He was exiled five times. He placed himself on the line to fight the good fight. Athanasius deserves to be remembered as one of the greatest theologians and defenders of the truth. Even when his name is forgotten, the fruit of his work will remain.

There are many misconceptions about the Council of Nicaea in the larger culture. Constantine did not decide to declare Jesus divine. He called a council to attempt to resolve a dispute among Christians. From Constantine’s point of view, the stability of the Empire stood on the stability of the Christian religion. The Christians did not decide to declare that Jesus was divine at this council. This was a belief that was already held by the majority of Christians. The primary question that was being discussed transcended cultural boundaries. If Christ is fully God, then this transcends all cultural boundaries. If Christ is fully God, then all of

mankind will be united once again to worship their king.

## Notes

1. Quoted by Hank Hanegraaff and Paul L. Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishing 2004), 15.
2. Ibid. 32.
3. Virginia Burrus and Rebecca Lyman, "Shifting the Focus of History," in *A People's History of Christianity Vol. 2: Late Ancient Christianity*, Ed. Virginia Burrus, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 18.
4. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 100.
5. Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), 51.
6. Ibid. 48.
7. Ibid. 54.
8. Ibid. 53.
9. Ibid. 54.
10. Ibid. 55.
11. Tim Dowley, Ed. *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 169.
12. Noll, 57.
13. Ibid. 58.
14. Ibid. 58.
15. Ibid. 58.

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# Bible Literacy Quiz: A Test

# of Scripture Knowledge

*Take this test of basic Bible knowledge to help assess your biblical literacy. This simple quiz examines some of the key doctrines and events of the Bible. It will give you a good feel for your breadth and depth of Scriptural knowledge.*

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).



It's alarming to us at Probe Ministries to see the drop in biblical literacy among Americans. Growing numbers of people don't know what the Bible says, even the most basic foundational truths and people and facts.

Evangelical pollster George Barna says,

Over the past 20 years we have seen the nation's theological views slowly become less aligned with the Bible. Americans still revere the Bible and like to think of themselves as Bible-believing people, but the evidence suggests otherwise. Christians have increasingly been adopting spiritual views that come from Islam, Wicca, secular humanism, the eastern religions and other sources.[\[1\]](#)

That's because we're not reading and studying the Bible. If we don't know what God says is truth, it makes us vulnerable to believing a lie.

Take the quiz yourself: click [here](#) for a format with the questions and answers separated.

**1. Who wrote the first four books of the New Testament?**



Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

## **2. Who wrote the first five books of the Old Testament?**

Most conservative scholars hold that the Pentateuch was written by Moses.

## **3. What two Old Testament books are named for women?**

Esther and Ruth.

## **4. What are the Ten Commandments?**

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife—or anything that belongs to your neighbor. (Exodus 20:2-17)

## **5. What is the Greatest Commandment?**

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37,38)

## **6. What is the second Greatest Commandment?**

"Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)

## **7. What is the Golden Rule?**

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Matthew 7:12)

## **8. What is the Great Commission?**

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19,20)

## **9. What was the test of a prophet, to know that he was truly from God?**

He had to be 100% accurate in his prophecies. The penalty for a false prophet was death by stoning. (Deuteronomy 18:20-22)

## **10. To whom did God give the 10 Commandments?**

Moses. (Exodus 20)

## **11. Which two people did not die?**

Genesis 5:24 says that Enoch, who was Noah's great-grandfather, “walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” The other was the Old Testament prophet Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind with a chariot and horses of fire. (2 Kings 2:11)

## **12. What is the root of all kinds of evil?**

The love of money. (1 Timothy 6:10)

## **13. What is the beginning of wisdom?**

The fear of the Lord. (Psalm 111:10)

## **14. Who delivered the Sermon on the Mount?**

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 5-7)

## **15. How did sickness and death enter the world?**

Romans 5:12 says that sin entered the world through one man,

and death through sin. The fall of man is recorded in Genesis 3, where God's perfect creation was spoiled by Adam's sin.

**16. Who was the Roman governor who sentenced Christ to death?**

Pontius Pilate. (Matthew 27:26)

**17. Who are the major prophets?**

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

**18. What people group is the Old Testament about?**

The Hebrews, who became the nation of Israel. They were descendants of Abraham through Isaac.

**19. What happened while the Lord Jesus was in the desert for 40 days?**

He was tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1) Hebrews 4:15 tells us that He was tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

**20. How many people were on Noah's ark?**

Eight: Noah and his wife, his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. (Genesis 7:13, 1 Peter 2:5)

**21. Who was the first murderer?**

Cain, who killed his brother Abel. (Genesis 4:8)

**22. Which person was afflicted with terrible trials but trusted God through it all?**

Job. (See book of Job)

**23. Who was Israel's most well-known and well-loved king?**

David. (1 Chronicles 29:28)

**24. Who was “the weeping prophet?”**

Jeremiah.

**25. Who was thrown into the lion’s den?**

Daniel. (Daniel 6)

**26. Who were the two people in the famous fight with a stone and a sling?**

David and Goliath. (1 Samuel 17)

**27. What is the book of Acts about?**

The early years of the church, as the gospel begins to spread throughout the world.

**28. What are epistles?**

Letters.

**29. On what occasion was the Holy Spirit given to the church?**

Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4)

**30. Whom did God command to sacrifice his only son?**

Abraham. (Genesis 22:2)

**31. What was the Old Testament feast that celebrated God’s saving the firstborn of Israel the night they left Egypt?**

Passover. (Exodus 12:27)

**32. Who was the Hebrew who became prime minister of Egypt?**

Joseph. (Genesis 41:41)

**33. Who was the Hebrew woman who became Queen of Persia?**

Esther. (Esther 2:17)

**34. Who was the pagan woman who became David's great-grandmother?**

Ruth. (Ruth 4:17)

**35. Which angel appeared to Mary?**

Gabriel. (Luke 1:26)

**36. How did the Lord Jesus die?**

He gave up His life while being crucified. (John 19:18)

**37. What happened to Him three days after He died?**

He was raised from the dead. (John 20)

**38. What happened to the Lord Jesus 40 days after His resurrection?**

He ascended bodily into heaven. (Acts 1:9-11)

**39. What should we do when we sin, in order to restore our fellowship with God?**

1 John 1:9 tells us, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

**40. How did the universe and world get here?**

Genesis 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." We are told further in Colossians 1:16 and 17 that the Lord Jesus Christ was the one who did the creating.

**41. Where did Satan and the demons come from?**

Satan was originally the best and the brightest angel, but he sinned in his pride, wanting to be God. Some of the angels followed him, and these "fallen angels" were cast out of heaven. (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28)

**42. Who directed the writing of the Bible?**

The Holy Spirit. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21)

**43. Where was the Lord Jesus before He was conceived in Mary?**

In heaven. (Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Corinthians 15:49)

**44. Who taught in parables?**

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 13:3)

**45. What are parables?**

A short, simple story with a spiritual point.

**46. Which two animals talked with human speech?**

The serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:3) and Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:28).

**47. With which woman did David commit adultery?**

Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11)

**48. Which one of their sons succeeded David as king?**

Solomon. (2 Samuel 12:24)

**49. Who was the female judge of Israel?**

Deborah. (Judges 4:4)

**50. Who was the wisest man in the world?**

Solomon. (1 Kings 3:12)

**51. Who was the first man?**

Adam. (Genesis 2:20)

**52. Who was the most humble man on earth?**

Moses. (Numbers 12:3)

**53. Who was the strongest man on earth?**

Samson. (Judges 13-16)

**54. Where were the two nations of God's people taken into captivity?**

Israel was taken into Assyria (2 Kings 17:23), and Judah into Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:20).

**55. Which cupbearer to a foreign king rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem?**

Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 2:5)

**56. Who were the two Old Testament prophets who worked miracles?**

Elijah and Elisha. (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 6)

**57. Which Old Testament prophet spent three days in the belly of a great fish?**

Jonah. (Jonah 1:17)

**58. What is the last book of the Old Testament?**

Malachi.

**59. For which Israelite commander did the sun stand still?**

Joshua. (Joshua 10)

**60. Who was the first king of Israel?**

Saul. (1 Samuel 13:1)

**61. Who built the temple in Israel?**

Solomon. (1 Kings 6)

**62. Which of the twelve tribes of Israel served as priests?**

Levites. (Deuteronomy 10:8)

**63. Which city fell after the Israelites marched around it daily for seven days?**

Jericho. (Joshua 6:20)

**64. What did God give the Israelites to eat in the wilderness?**

Manna and quail. (Exodus 16)

**65. Which two people walked on water?**

Jesus and Peter. (Matthew 14:29)

**66. Who was the first martyr?**

Stephen. (Acts 7)

**67. Who betrayed Jesus to the priests, and for how much?**

Judas betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. (Matthew 26:14-15)

**68. What is the Lord's Prayer?**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matthew 6:9-13)

**69. Who was the first person to see the risen Lord?**

Mary Magdalene. (John 20:16)

**70. Which prophet and cousin of the Lord was beheaded?**

John the Baptist. (John 14:10)

**71. To what country did the young Jesus and His parents escape when Herod was threatening His life?**

Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15)

**72. What was Christ's first miracle?**

He turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana. (John 2:11)

**73. Which one of the Lord's personal friends did He raise from the dead?**

Lazarus. (John 11)

**74. Who was the greatest missionary of the New Testament?**

Paul. (see book of Acts)

**75. Who was Paul's first partner?**

Barnabas. (Acts 13:2)

**76. Whom did an angel release from prison?**

Peter. (Acts 12)

**77. Which event caused God to splinter human language into many tongues?**

The building of the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11)

**78. Which chapter of an Old Testament prophet's book gives a detailed prophecy of the Messiah's death by crucifixion?**

Isaiah 53.

**79. Who wrestled all night with the Lord and was left with a permanent limp?**

Jacob. (Genesis 32:22-32)

**80. Which two pastors did Paul write letters to?**

Timothy and Titus.

**81. Who was hailed as a god when he was bitten by a snake but nothing bad happened?**

Paul. (Acts 28:5-6)

**82. Which two New Testament writers were brothers of the Lord Jesus?**

James and Jude. (Matthew 13:55)

**83. Which two New Testament books were written by a doctor?**

Luke and Acts. (2 Timothy 4:11)

**84. Who had a coat of many colors?**

Joseph. (Genesis 37:3)

**85. In what sin did Aaron lead the Israelites while his brother Moses was up on the mountain talking to God?**

They made an idol in the form of a golden calf. (Exodus 32)

**86. How many books are there in the entire Bible?**

66: 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament.

**87. What's the difference between John the Baptist and the John who wrote several New Testament books?**

John the Baptist was a prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of God was near in preparation for his cousin Jesus' ministry. The John who wrote the gospel of John, the epistles—1, 2 and 3 John—and Revelation, was one of the twelve apostles and one of those closest to the Lord, along with Peter and James. He called himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

**88. Who saw the Lord appear to him in a burning bush?**

Moses. (Exodus 3)

**89. How many sons did Jacob have?**

Twelve. They were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. (Genesis 35:22)

**90. Who gave up his birthright for a bowl of stew?**

Esau. (Genesis 25:33)

**91. Which Psalm starts out, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want?"**

Psalm 23.

**92. Who disowned the Lord Jesus three times before a cock crowed?**

Peter. (Matthew 26:69-75)

**93. What did the Lord do just after the Last Supper to demonstrate His love and humility?**

He washed the disciples' feet. (John 13:5)

**94. Where is the New Testament "Hall of Faith?"**

Hebrews 11.

**95. Who appeared with the Lord Jesus in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration?**

Elijah and Moses. (Mark 9:4)

**96. Who is the second Adam?**

The Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49)

**97. Which Old Testament prophet married a prostitute because God told him to?**

Hosea. (Hosea 1:2)

**98. What are the two sacred ordinances that the Lord commanded**

**us to observe?**

Baptism (Matthew 28:19,20) and Communion, or the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

**99. What are supernatural enablings that allow a believer to serve the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness?**

Spiritual gifts. (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:8-13, 1 Peter 4:10-11)

**100. Whose tomb was Christ buried in?**

Joseph of Arimathea. (Matthew 27:57-60)

**101. Who wrote the book of Hebrews?**

Nobody knows.

**102. Which is the "epistle of joy?"**

Philippians.

**103. What is the book of Revelation about?**

The end of the world.

**104. Who is the bride of Christ?**

The church—that is, all who have trusted Him for salvation. (Ephesians 5:25-27, Revelation 19:7-8)

**Note**

1. [bit.ly/fR8BuA](http://bit.ly/fR8BuA)

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# George Washington and Religion

*Kerby Anderson presents a compelling argument for the view that George Washington was a devoted Christian rather than a deist. He points to Washington's insistence on the importance of services for his soldiers, his personal church attendance, his prayer life and his commitment to the spiritual upbringing of his godchildren.*

## Background

What was George Washington's view of religion and in particular of Christianity? The historical perspective used to be that Washington was a Christian and orthodox in most of his beliefs. But the modern view has been that he was either a lukewarm Anglican or more likely a Deist.



I want to look at some new research that argues for the traditional view and against the modern view of George Washington's religion. One book is *Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of our Country*.[\[1\]](#) It is written by Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute and winner of the Templeton Award) and Jana Novak. Another book, written by Peter Lillback with Jerry Newcombe, is *George Washington's Sacred Fire*.[\[2\]](#)

George Washington was born into a Virginia family of moderate wealth and was exposed to various religious activities: lessons in religion, regular prayer, Sunday school attendance, and reverence for God. His mother had a daily ritual of retiring with a book of religious readings.

By the time he was a teenager, Washington had already assumed serious responsibilities as a professional surveyor and then

as a major in the Virginia militia. His adventures in the wild lands gave him invaluable lessons about the military, Indians, and the British. Years later in a speech to the Delaware chiefs, Washington said, "You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are."[\[3\]](#)

He studied the Bible as well as the writings of ancient heroes. The busts and portraits at Mount Vernon demonstrate this. There are busts of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden, and Frederick II of Prussia. In the dining room are portraits of the Virgin Mary and St. John.

Washington's own stepgranddaughter "Nelly" Custis saw him as a religious man. She wrote this to one of Washington's early biographers:

It was his custom to retire to his library at nine or ten o'clock, where he remained an hour before he went to his chamber. He always rose before the sun, and remained in his library until called to breakfast. I never witnessed his private devotions. I never inquired about them. I should have thought it the greatest heresy to doubt his firm belief in Christianity. His life, his writings, prove that he was a Christian. He was not one of those who act or pray, "that they may be seen of men." He communed with his God in secret.[\[4\]](#)

In what follows we will look at the evidence for George Washington's faith as it surfaced in his letters and actions as general and president.

## **Deism vs. Christianity**

Pick up a book about George Washington written during the nineteenth century, and you will probably see that he is described as being a Christian. However, if you pick up a book

written in the last seventy years, it will describe him as a Deist. Why the change?

The turning point seems to be a study by historian Paul F. Boller, Jr. entitled *George Washington and Religion*. His conclusion can be summarized in a single sentence: To the “unbiased observer” George Washington appears as a Deist, not a devout Christian.<sup>{5}</sup> Most historians since Boller accepted this idea and were less likely to assert that Washington was a Christian.

What do we mean by “Deism”? Deism is the belief that God is merely a watchmaker God who started the universe but is not involved in the affairs of humans and human history. One definition of Deism is that “There is no special providence; no miracles or other divine interventions intrude upon the lawful natural order.”<sup>{6}</sup>

Was George Washington a Deist? He was not. It is worth noting that even historian Paul Boller admitted that religion was important to Washington as a leader. Boller writes, “he saw to it that divine services were performed by the chaplains as regularly as possible on the Sabbath for the soldiers under his command.”<sup>{7}</sup> We might reasonably ask, Why would chaplains be important to a Deist?

Boller even admits there are testimonials of Washington’s church attendance. This is important since many historians even go further than Boller and assert that Washington did not even attend church as a mature adult.

Michael Novak admits that some of the names Washington often used for God *sound* Deist, but that does not mean that he was a Deist. In fact, his prayers for God’s action were just the opposite of what you might hear from a Deist. Washington believed God favored the cause of liberty and should be beseeched to “interpose” his action on behalf of the Americans. He called for public thanksgiving for the many ways

in which Americans experienced God's hand in key events in our history.

Washington used more than eighty terms to refer to God, among them: Almighty God, Creator, Divine Goodness, Father of all mercies, and Lord of Hosts. The most common term he used in his writings and speeches was "Providence." When he did so, he used the masculine personal pronoun "he." Washington never refers directly to God as an "it," as he does occasionally with Providence. God is personal.[\[8\]](#)

If we look at the history of the eighteenth century, there were many with orthodox religious beliefs who sometimes used the philosophical language of the enlightenment. Washington was a Christian, even though he often used terms for God associated with Deists.

## **A Religious Nation Goes to War**

There has been some dispute about how religious America was during the Revolutionary War. There was a shortage of churches and clergy (especially along the paths of westward migration). But we should also remember that this War of Independence followed the First Great Awakening.

At the first meeting of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia (September 1774), the first motion from the floor was for prayer to seek guidance from God. But there was resistance, not because of the prayer, but because of the theological disagreements among the members (Anabaptist, Quakers, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians). Sam Adams settled the dispute by saying he was no bigot and could pray along with any minister as long as he was a patriot.[\[9\]](#) I have in my office a picture of a painting showing George Washington praying with men like Patrick Henry, John Jay, and Richard Henry Lee.

At the second meeting, they proposed that Washington be

appointed commander in chief of the Continental Army. He did not think he was equal to the command but accepted it. He wrote his wife, "I shall rely, therefore, confidently on that Providence, which has heretofore preserved and been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return safe to you in the fall."[{10}](#) At the time, Washington was the only man on the continent in uniform since no Continental Army yet existed. To the British, he was the supreme traitor, in open rebellion to the King. His neck was at risk, and the American independence depended on him.

One event that George Washington believed showed God's providence was the Battle of Long Island in 1776. Washington and his men were trapped on Brooklyn Heights, Long Island. The British were poised to crush the American army the next day and that would have been the end of the rebellion. Washington planned a bold move and began evacuating his troops under the cover of darkness using everything from fishing vessels to rowboats. But there was not enough time to accomplish the task. When morning came, the fog of night remained and only lifted in time for the British to see the last American boat crossing the East River beyond the reach of their guns. You can read more about this miraculous event in Michael Novak's book, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*.[{11}](#)

Washington also required chaplains for the Continental Army, and personally took time for prayer. He forbade his troops under pain of death from uttering blasphemies, even profanity. He called upon them to conduct themselves as Christian soldiers because the people demanded it.[{12}](#)

Washington's actions during the Revolutionary War demonstrate his Christian character.

# First in War and First in Peace

In his eulogy for George Washington, Henry Lee said he was “First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.” We could also say the Washington demonstrated Christian character both in war and in peace.

While fulfilling his duties as general, he came to be known as a “nursing father.” This is a biblical phrase (Num. 11:12, Is. 49:23 KJV) that appears in many of the tributes to Washington after his death. He brought together very diverse groups to fight the Revolutionary War by bridging ethnic and social divisions. This ranged from the regiment from Marblehead, Massachusetts (that included men of mixed race, blacks, and Indians), to the Virginian and southern aristocrats to the yeomen in hunting shirts from western Virginia.

One of his orders stated that “All chaplains are to perform divine service tomorrow, and on every succeeding Sunday. . . . The commander in chief expects an exact compliance with this order, and that it be observed in future as an invariable rule of practice—and every neglect will be consider not only a breach of orders, but a disregard to decency, virtue and religion.”[\[13\]](#)

Washington grew even more explicit as the war dragged on: “While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of a Christian.”[\[14\]](#)

Washington lost a great deal of money during the war by paying for things out of his own pocket and by refusing a salary. He happily returned to Mount Vernon and spent happy years with his wife. But the constitutional convention in 1787 brought him to elective office. He was elected as president by unanimous vote in 1789.

In his inaugural address, Washington said, "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency."

He issued a thanksgiving proclamation in 1789 in which he asserted "the duty of all nations" in regard to God. His thanksgiving proclamation of 1795 proclaims there are signs of "Divine beneficence" in the world. And in his farewell address, he reminded Americans that "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."

Washington demonstrated Christian character in war and in peace.

## **Washington as Christian: Pro and Con**

Let's summarize the arguments historians make about Washington's religious faith. Those who believe that George Washington was a Deist and not a Christian usually make the following observations.

First, Washington never took communion at Sunday services. Second, he refused to declare his specific beliefs in public. Third, he rarely used the name of Jesus Christ in private correspondence and in public utterances. Finally, while he believed in God and had an awareness of Providence in his life, it all seems more like a Greek or Roman view of fate.

Michael Novak's response to these observations is helpful. "All these objections have a grain of truth in them. Still, they are consistent with Washington's being a serious Christian who believed that he had a public vocation that required some tact regarding his private confessional life."[\[15\]](#) Novak adds:

It is not at all unusual for public men in pluralistic American life to maintain a notable reserve about their private convictions. They do not burden the public with declarations of their deepest beliefs, whose general force they trust their actions will sufficiently reveal. In the public forum, they happily give to Caesar what is Caesar's and in the private forum, to God what is God's.{16}

What are some of the reasons to believe Washington was a Christian? First, he religiously observed the Sabbath as a day of rest and frequently attended church services on that day. Second, many report that Washington reserved time for private prayer. Third, Washington saved many of the dozens of sermons sent to him by clergymen, and read some of them aloud to his wife.

Fourth, Washington hung paintings of the Virgin Mary and St. John in places of honor in his dining room in Mount Vernon. Fifth, the chaplains who served under him during the long years of the Revolutionary War believed Washington was a Christian. Sixth, Washington (unlike Thomas Jefferson) was never accused by the press or his opponents of not being a Christian.

It is also worth noting that, unlike Jefferson, Washington agreed to be a godparent for at least eight children. This was far from a casual commitment since it required the godparents to agree to help insure that a child was raised in the Christian faith. Washington not only agreed to be a godparent, but presented his godsons and goddaughters with Bibles and prayer books.

George Washington was not a Deist who believed in a "watchmaker God." He was a Christian and demonstrated that Christian character throughout his life.

## Notes

1. Michael Novak and Jana Novak, *Washington's God: Religion,*

*Liberty, and the Father of our Country* (NY: Basic Books, 2006).

2. Peter Lillback, with Jerry Newcombe, *George Washington's Sacred Fire* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006).

3. Novak, *Washington's God*, 93.

4. Ibid., 136.

5. Lillback, *Sacred Fire*, 28.

6. Novak, *Washington's God*, 110.

7. Lillback, *Sacred Fire*, 28.

8. Ibid., 577.

9. Novak, *Washington's God*, 123.

10. Ibid, 64.

11. Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2002).

12. Novak, *Washington's God*, 30-31.

13. Ibid., 90.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 219.

16. Ibid., 219-220.

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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
5. Gary Habermas, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: An Exclusive Interview with Former British Atheist Professor Antony Flew." Available from the Web site of Biola University at [www.biola.edu/antonyflew/](http://www.biola.edu/antonyflew/).
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.
21. John 2:22.

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## Historical Cycles

*Kerby Anderson provides an overview of four world-changing cycles: a political/cultural cycle, a generational cycle, a technological cycle, and a financial cycle.*

Are there cycles in history? Yes, even though there is a linear trajectory in history, there are generational cycles we can observe. No doubt you have heard the phrase: "Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, weak men create hard times." Or you may have heard: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." And you may have heard the phrase "the fourth turning" that

predicts a crisis at the end of a four-fold cycle.

We are going to look at four of the most often quoted cycles: a political/cultural cycle, a generational cycle, a technological cycle, and a financial cycle. Today we take for granted democracy, capitalism, and the industrial revolution. These political, economic, and technological realities were not always in our world but came about because of revolutions.



One of the most significant revolutions took place 250 years ago. Andrew Wilson talks about this in his book, *Remaking the World*. He describes 1776 as “a year that witnessed seven transformations taking place—globalization, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the Great Enrichment, the American Revolution, the rise of post-Christianity, and the dawn of Romanticism.”

Some of the events in 1776 we know. That was the year the Declaration of Independence was ratified. It was the year when Adam Smith published the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. It was also the year of James Watt’s invention of the steam engine that spawned the industrial revolution. Both capitalism and the industrial revolution led to a significant increase in life expectancy and the rise of social development.

In this article as we discuss each of these four cycles, we should remember this interesting fact: all these cycles seem to be converging today. The last time these cycles converged in 1776, the world changed.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”

What does the future hold? Only God knows. As the song goes, “He’s got the whole world in His hands.” We may not know the

future, but we can trust in the One who knows the future.

I think we are likely headed for a massive change in the future. But it is difficult to predict what political event or economic spark might inflame our world. Therefore, we should all be in prayer for our leaders and prepare ourselves for possible turmoil ahead.

## Political/Cultural Cycle

Let us look at what appears to be an eighty-year political/cultural cycle. (It actually seems to average out to about 84 years). Go back to 1848 and you have Karl Marx publishing the *Communist Manifesto* and other works. The political and social impact of his Marxist perspective swept through Europe, changed the political structure of many countries, and is still an influence today. This idea not only introduced a new way of viewing the world but was also responsible for removing the monarchy from most nation states.

Another important political change happened 84 years later in the 1930s. In Europe, you have the rise of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. In this country, you had the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt who signed into law a significant number of New Deal programs that vastly expanded the scope of government and are influential in our lives today. It is worth remembering that the federal government wasn't as large as it is today. Roosevelt was responsible for the creation of so many of the alphabet soup of programs and federal agencies. The following decades were the era of big government.

If you add another 84 years, you come to 2016. In Europe, you have the political battle known as Brexit and the beginning of some populist uprisings. In this country, you also had the rise of populism and a reaction to the size and scope of big government. That was best illustrated by the election of Donald Trump.

It was also a time of turmoil. In Europe, we had the farmer protests in the Netherlands and the yellow jacket protests in France. In the U.S., we had BLM protests and Antifa protests.

There is also a longer cycle that describes the rise and fall of empires. General John Glubb notices that most empires last about 250 years. If you apply that to the U.S., you find that we are entering the end of that cycle. One key date is 1776. That not only marks the beginning of the nation (Declaration of Independence) but the promotion of capitalism (Adam Smith and the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*). By the way, if you go back about 250 years before that you come to the Protestant Reformation that began when Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the Wittenberg Door.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for a massive change in the future.

## **Generational Cycle**

We now turn to looking at a generational cycle.

More than a quarter century ago, William Strauss and Neil Howe wrote their bestselling book, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*. In it, they argued that history could be understood as coming in turnings, which have cycles of four. Each cycle spans a length longer than human life, roughly 80 to 100 years. That unit of time was what the ancients called the saeculum. These four turnings of the saeculum comprise the historical rhythm of growth, maturation, entropy, and destruction.

The first turning is a High – an upbeat era of strengthening institutions and weakening individualism. That is when a new

civic order develops and the old values decay. The second turning is an Awakening – which is a passionate era of spiritual upheaval. This is when the civic order comes under attack from new values. The third turning is an Unraveling – which is a downcast era of strengthening individualism and weakening institutions. This is when the old civil order decays and new values develop. The fourth turning is a Crisis – which is a decisive era of secular upheaval. The values regime propels the replacement of the old civil order with a new one.

The authors predicted that political, economic, and social upheavals would rattle the United States in and around the 2020s. The 2008 economic crisis and the changes just described from 2016 seemed to support the predictions made in the book.

Last year, Neil Howe wrote *The Fourth Turning Is Here*. The title tells it all. We are in crisis as illustrated by a government that does not seem to function, low public trust in just about any institution, political polarization, moral and legal chaos, and a collapse of families. He reminds us of the Abraham Lincoln quote that “a house divided against itself cannot stand” and that the government “will become all one thing, or all the other.” He also reminds us of other fourth turning crises in America: World War II, the Civil War, and the American Revolution.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for a massive change in the future.

## **Technological Cycle**

Let's look at a technological cycle.

There appears to be about a fifty-year technological cycle, in which we see important technological revolutions. In the late 18th century, we saw the beginnings of what today we refer to as the industrial revolution. Most people lived on farms. This revolution brought people out of the farms into the cities and factories.

Fifty years later was the age of steam and railways that changed the world significantly. Up until that time, we had manpower and horsepower. Trains that run on steam and steam ships changed the world in significant ways. Now people could move faster and carry heavier loads over a longer distance.

Fifty years after that we had steel and electricity. Steel was important in buildings. Brick buildings could only be a few stories high. Steel allowed designers to create skyscrapers and to build bridges over larger sections of water. Electricity literally lit up the dark night and provided numerous conveniences that we take for granted today.

Fifty years after that we had oil, automobiles, and a revolution in mass production. Automobiles provided people with the ability to go wherever they wanted without having to walk, ride a horse, or catch a train. Advances in mass production enhanced the industrial revolution and made possible the vast array of products available to us today.

By the 1970s, we came into the age of information and telecommunications. This came about with the development of the transistor and then the microchip. Our digital world developed because of these inventions.

Today, we find ourselves in a world of fast computers, [artificial intelligence](#), and [genetic engineering](#). We have social media, but we also have social media censorship. We have creative graphics, but we also have deep fakes and growing questions about [what is real and what is fake](#). We can genetically treat and cure diseases, but we can also

[genetically engineer humans](#). How much of this will be driven by politics or economics? It is worth noting this latest technological cycle raises significant questions and also coincides with the political cycles and the generational cycle.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for a massive change in the future.

## Financial Cycle

In this article we have looked at four important historical cycles. Now we conclude by covering a financial cycle. You will notice that some of the financial cycles parallel the technological revolutions.

America moved from an agricultural society to an industrial economy to an information society.

If you look at the wealth cycles of nations, you notice something interesting about which currency was dominant. The financial superpower changes over time, on average about 100 years. Perhaps you have seen a chart that shows these changes:

Portugal – Portuguese Real (15th century)

Spain – Spanish Real (16th century)

Netherlands – Dutch Guilder (17th century)

France – Franc (18th century)

Britain – Pound sterling (19th century)

U.S. – U.S. dollar (20th century)

Where are we today? The U.S. and other countries around the world are experiencing a debt crisis. One significant reason for this is the fact that the dollar is no longer “good as

gold.” For 5,000 years, money was gold. But protecting it and transporting it was difficult. Banks and nations held the gold and created paper certificates that represented the value. Sometimes, the amount of paper currency was not always backed by gold.

The greatest problem came in the 20th century. In 1944, the Bretton Woods conference fixed gold at \$35 per ounce. But by 1971, President Nixon closed the gold window and we have seen over the last fifty-plus years that the value of the dollar has continually declined. Also, the possibility of the U.S. dollar remaining the reserve currency in the world is questionable.

At the same time, this country and other countries are facing a significant debt crisis. It is easy to spend more when all you need to do is print more money. That leads to inflation and a devaluation of your currency.

When faced with a debt crisis, you only have a few options. You can default on the debt, which some nations have done. You can tax the citizens, but there isn’t enough wealth in any nation to cover the size of those national debts. You could cut spending, but few politicians would ever consider that option. Instead, most countries (including the U.S.) print more money. Unfortunately, that can only last for so long. Just look at Weimar Germany or Zimbabwe or Venezuela.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.”

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for a massive change in the future.

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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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