

Truth You Can Sing About – Part 3

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

Coventry Carol

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the Bleak Midwinter

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

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

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

Jesus Christ gives us the greatest example of a life of

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

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

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

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

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

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

While Shepherds Watched

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

0 Holy Night

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fall on your knees;

and

Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!

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

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

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

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

The Bloody Cross: A Tough Thing to Handle

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

So what is blood atonement and why does it matter? In historic orthodox Christian thought, God’s Son is at the very center of history doing these things:

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

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

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

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

The Reason Someone Had to Die

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

We are all in a serious spiritual and moral pickle. Biblical Christianity declares that each person ever born is stuck under an irreversible “*sin*drome” for which there is no human answer. History sadly records the habitual and continual effects of sin: oppression, addictions, self-promoting power plays, deceit, war, on and on.

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

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

Ok, but penalties have levels of harshness. Why is death necessary? Scripture spells out clearly the decree that sinners must die. In God's original command He stated, “When you eat of [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you

will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). In Ezekiel the same formula appears slightly reworded: "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Paul boiled it down this way: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No, biblical sacrifice is not a bloodfest, but the way to deal with a sad reality. Put it this way: If God said, “Nah, don’t worry about rebelling against your Creator,” would that be a just and righteous God? Would a deity who fails to punish wrongdoing be worth following? Would His laws mean anything? Yet, we are unable to keep laws, so He steps in to pay that penalty. With His lifeblood. This storyline is utterly unique in the long human history of religions. And the resurrection Christians celebrate shows its truth in actual time and on this dirty earth.

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

God’s merging of perfect holiness, just retributive punishment

and allowance of His Son's execution was actually a beautiful thing. Francis of Assisi wrote that "love and faithfulness meet together [at the cross]; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven." [\[9\]](#)

But Why a Violent, Bloody Death?

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

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

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

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

Again, why is death demanded of God to atone for sin? The grounding for such a claim appears early in the Bible, after the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. In Genesis 9 Yahweh

declares, “I will require a reckoning . . . for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image.”[{11}](#) Apparently, God has put the price of a man’s life as that of another’s life.

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

Substitutionary sacrifice was nothing new for the Jews who unwittingly had the Messiah crucified. From the beginning of God’s dealings with His people, agreements were blood covenants. What else could carry the weight of such momentous things? And, as the book of Hebrews teaches, “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.**”[{13}](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For my pardon, this I see,

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

14. Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 413-414.
15. Colossians 1:19.
16. Revelation 7:14b-17, emphasis mine.

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Bible Literacy Quiz: Separated Format

The original Bible Literacy Quiz can be found [here](#).

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

4. What are the Ten Commandments?

[Answer](#)

5. What is the Greatest Commandment?

[Answer](#)

6. What is the second Greatest Commandment?

[Answer](#)

7. What is the Golden Rule?

[Answer](#)

8. What is the Great Commission?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

10. To whom did God give the 10 Commandments?

[Answer](#)

11. Which two people did not die?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

13. What is the beginning of wisdom?

[Answer](#)

14. Who delivered the Sermon on the Mount?

[Answer](#)

15. How did sickness and death enter the world?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

17. Who are the major prophets?

[Answer](#)

18. What people group is the Old Testament about?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

21. Who was the first murderer?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

24. Who was "the weeping prophet?"

[Answer](#)

25. Who was thrown into the lion's den?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

27. What is the book of Acts about?

[Answer](#)

28. What are epistles?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

35. Which angel appeared to Mary?

[Answer](#)

36. How did the Lord Jesus die?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

resurrection?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

40. How did the universe and world get here?

[Answer](#)

41. Where did Satan and the demons come from?

[Answer](#)

42. Who directed the writing of the Bible?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

44. Who taught in parables?

[Answer](#)

45. What are parables?

[Answer](#)

46. Which two animals talked with human speech?

[Answer](#)

47. With which woman did David commit adultery?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

49. Who was the female judge of Israel?

[Answer](#)

50. Who was the wisest man in the world?

[Answer](#)

51. Who was the first man?

[Answer](#)

52. Who was the most humble man on earth?

[Answer](#)

53. Who was the strongest man on earth?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

60. Who was the first king of Israel?

[Answer](#)

61. Who built the temple in Israel?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

65. Which two people walked on water?

[Answer](#)

66. Who was the first martyr?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

68. What is the Lord's Prayer?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

72. What was Christ's first miracle?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

75. Who was Paul's first partner?

[Answer](#)

76. Whom did an angel release from prison?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

80. Which two pastors did Paul write letters to?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

84. Who had a coat of many colors?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

89. How many sons did Jacob have?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

96. Who is the second Adam?

[Answer](#)

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

[Answer](#)

98. What are the two sacred ordinances that the Lord commanded us to observe?

[Answer](#)

99. What are supernatural enablings that allow a believer to

serve the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness?

[Answer](#)

100. Whose tomb was Christ buried in?

[Answer](#)

101. Who wrote the book of Hebrews?

[Answer](#)

102. Which is the “epistle of joy?”

[Answer](#)

103. What is the book of Revelation about?

[Answer](#)

104. Who is the bride of Christ?

[Answer](#)

Answers

1. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. [Back](#)

2. Most conservative scholars hold that the Pentateuch was written by Moses. [Back](#)

3. Esther and Ruth. [Back](#)

4. 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) [Back](#)

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

6. "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39) [Back](#)

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

8. "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) [Back](#)

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

10. Moses. (Exodus 20) [Back](#)

11. 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) [Back](#)

12. The love of money. (1 Timothy 6:10) [Back](#)

13. The fear of the Lord. (Psalm 111:10) [Back](#)

14. The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 5-7) [Back](#)

15. 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. [Back](#)
16. Pontius Pilate. (Matthew 27:26) [Back](#)
17. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. [Back](#)
18. The Hebrews, who became the nation of Israel. They were descendants of Abraham through Isaac. [Back](#)
19. 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. [Back](#)
20. Eight: Noah and his wife, his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. (Genesis 7:13, 1 Peter 2:5) [Back](#)
21. Cain, who killed his brother Abel. (Genesis 4:8) [Back](#)
22. Job. (See book of Job) [Back](#)
23. David. (1 Chronicles 29:28) [Back](#)
24. Jeremiah. [Back](#)
25. Daniel. (Daniel 6) [Back](#)
26. David and Goliath. (1 Samuel 17) [Back](#)
27. The early years of the church, as the gospel begins to spread throughout the world. [Back](#)
28. Letters. [Back](#)
29. Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4) [Back](#)
30. Abraham. (Genesis 22:2) [Back](#)
31. Passover. (Exodus 12:27) [Back](#)

- 32. Joseph. (Genesis 41:41) [Back](#)
- 33. Esther. (Esther 2:17) [Back](#)
- 34. Ruth. (Ruth 4:17) [Back](#)
- 35. Gabriel. (Luke 1:26) [Back](#)
- 36. He gave up His life while being crucified. (John 19:18) [Back](#)
- 37. He was raised from the dead. (John 20) [Back](#)
- 38. He ascended bodily into heaven. (Acts 1:9-11) [Back](#)
- 39. 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." [Back](#)
- 40. 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. [Back](#)
- 41. 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) [Back](#)
- 42. The Holy Spirit. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21) [Back](#)
- 43. In heaven. (Philippians 2:6-11, 1 Corinthians 15:49) [Back](#)
- 44. The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 13:3) [Back](#)
- 45. A short, simple story with a spiritual point. [Back](#)
- 46. The serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:3) and Balaam's donkey (Numbers 22:28) [Back](#)
- 47. Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11) [Back](#)

48. Solomon. (2 Samuel 12:24) [Back](#)
49. Deborah. (Judges 4:4) [Back](#)
50. Solomon. (1 Kings 3:12) [Back](#)
51. Adam. (Genesis 2:20) [Back](#)
52. Moses. (Numbers 12:3) [Back](#)
53. Samson. (Judges 13-16) [Back](#)
54. Israel was taken into Assyria (2 Kings 17:23), and Judah into Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:20). [Back](#)
55. Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 2:5) [Back](#)
56. Elijah and Elisha. (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 6) [Back](#)
57. Jonah. (Jonah 1:17) [Back](#)
58. Malachi. [Back](#)
59. Joshua. (Joshua 10) [Back](#)
60. Saul. (1 Samuel 13:1) [Back](#)
61. Solomon. (1 Kings 6) [Back](#)
62. Levites. (Deuteronomy 10:8) [Back](#)
63. Jericho. (Joshua 6:20) [Back](#)
64. Manna and quail. (Exodus 16) [Back](#)
65. Jesus and Peter. (Matthew 14:29) [Back](#)
66. Stephen. (Acts 7) [Back](#)
67. Judas betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave. (Matthew 26:14-15) [Back](#)
68. 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) [Back](#)

69. Mary Magdalene. (John 20:16) [Back](#)

70. John the Baptist. (John 14:10) [Back](#)

71. Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15) [Back](#)

72. He turned water into wine at the wedding at Cana. (John 2:11) [Back](#)

73. Lazarus. (John 11) [Back](#)

74. Paul. (see book of Acts) [Back](#)

75. Barnabas. (Acts 13:2) [Back](#)

76. Peter. (Acts 12) [Back](#)

77. The building of the Tower of Babel. (Genesis 11) [Back](#)

78. Isaiah 53. [Back](#)

79. Jacob. (Genesis 32:22-32) [Back](#)

80. Timothy and Titus. [Back](#)

81. Paul. (Acts 28:5-6) [Back](#)

82. James and Jude. (Matthew 13:55) [Back](#)

83. Luke and Acts. (2 Timothy 4:11) [Back](#)

84. Joseph. (Genesis 37:3) [Back](#)

85. They made an idol in the form of a golden calf. (Exodus 32) [Back](#)

86. 66: 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. [Back](#)
87. 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." [Back](#)
88. Moses. (Exodus 3) [Back](#)
89. Twelve. They were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. (Genesis 35:22) [Back](#)
90. Esau. (Genesis 25:33) [Back](#)
91. Psalm 23. [Back](#)
92. Peter. (Matthew 26:69-75) [Back](#)
93. He washed the disciples' feet. (John 13:5) [Back](#)
94. Hebrews 11. [Back](#)
95. Elijah and Moses. (Mark 9:4) [Back](#)
96. The Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:45-49) [Back](#)
- 97 Hosea. (Hosea 1:2) [Back](#)
98. Baptism (Matthew 28:19,20) and Communion, or the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). [Back](#)
99. Spiritual gifts. (Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:8-13, 1 Peter 4:10-11) [Back](#)
100. Joseph of Arimathea. (Matthew 27:57-60) [Back](#)
101. Nobody knows. [Back](#)

109. Philippians. [Back](#)

103. The end of the world. [Back](#)

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

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The Causes of War

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

The Accusation

Sam Harris, the popular author and atheist, says that “for everyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict.”[\[1\]](#) Writing for the Freedom from Religion Foundation, fellow atheist Richard Dawkins adds, “Only the willfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today.”[\[2\]](#) Speaking more bluntly, one British government official has said, “theocrats, religious leaders or fanatics citing holy texts . . . constitutes the greatest threat to world peace today.”[\[3\]](#)

War is the ultimate act of intolerance, and since intolerance is seen as the only unforgivable sin in our postmodern times, it's not surprising that those hostile to religion would charge people



holding religious convictions with the guilt for causing war.

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

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

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

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

The Connection Between Religion and War

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

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

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

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

Hitler's obsession with violence is well known, but the

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

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

Meic Pearce argues that "most wars, even before the rise of twentieth century's secularist creeds, owed little or nothing to religious causation."[\[6\]](#) Considering the great empires of antiquity, Pearce writes that "neither the Persians nor the Greeks nor the Romans fought either to protect or to advance the worship of their gods."[\[7\]](#) Far more ordinary motives were involved like the desire for booty, the extension of the empire, glory in battle, and the desire to create buffer zones with their enemies. Each of these empires had their gods which would be called upon for aid in battle, but the primary cause of these military endeavors was not the advancement of religious beliefs.

Invasions by the Goths, Huns, Franks, and others against the Roman Empire, attacks by the Vikings in the North and the Mongols in Asia were motivated by material gain as well and not religious belief. The fourteenth century conquests of Timur Leng (or Tamerlane) in the Middle East and India resulted in the deaths of millions. He was a Muslim, but he

conquered Muslim and pagan alike. At one point he had seventy thousand Muslims beheaded in Baghdad so that towers could be built with their skulls.[\[8\]](#)

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

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

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

Islam and Christianity

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

Although Christianity has been used to justify forced

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

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

Much evidence can be corralled to make this point. Muhammad himself spoke of the necessity of warfare on behalf of Allah. He said to his followers, "I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no God but Allah.'" [{11}](#) Prior to conquering Mecca, he supported his small band of believers by raiding caravans and sharing the booty. Soon after Muhammad's death, a war broke out over the future of the religion. Three civil wars were fought between Muslims during the first fifty years of the religion's history, and three of the four leaders of Islam after Muhammad were assassinated by other Muslims. The Quran and Hadith, the two most important writings in Islam, make explicit the expectation that all Muslim men will fight to defend the faith. Perhaps the most telling aspect of

Islamic belief is that there is no separation between religious and political authority in the Islamic world. A threat to one is considered a threat to the other and almost guarantees religiously motivated warfare.

Pacifism or Just Wars?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

1. Meic Pearse, *The Gods of War* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.
2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 14.
5. Ibid., 31.
6. Ibid., 53.
7. Ibid., 54.
8. Ibid., 55.
9. Ibid., 134.
10. Ibid., 58.

11. Ibid., 59.
12. Ibid., 173.
13. Ibid., 175.
14. Ibid., 173.
15. Ibid., 180.
16. Ibid.

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3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth

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

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

These experiences during the holidays warm my heart.



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

Let me share it with you. It's rather simple. It's easy to remember because it comes entirely out of Matthew's second

chapter. It's not long and involved either—just three points.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus Born in Bethlehem

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

to win favor, influence, and gain a following.

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

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

Jesus' Flight to Egypt

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

“So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

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

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

prophecy.

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

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

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

Jesus, Genocide Survivor

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

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

“Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: ‘A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she

refused to be comforted, because they were no more.'”

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

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

What are the chances Jesus would fulfill this prophecy this specifically? And as we discussed before, if Jesus were no more than a charlatan attempting to self-fulfill these prophecies, how could a man orchestrate something as large-scale as the death of all the baby boys in a village? Plus the Bible records that was Herod’s idea. And remember, Herod didn’t want Jesus around. Herod was attempting to eliminate potential competition for his throne.

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

do.

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

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A Christian Worldview Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment

Steve Cable examines the Second Amendment from a biblical perspective.

In today's America, the Second Amendment invokes intense arguments regarding its meaning and application. Events like the Newton school, the Aurora movie theater, and the Tucson shopping center shootings bring sorrow to our minds and prayers to our lips. Some say the way to prevent these tragedies is to remove the right for individuals to own and carry firearms. Others argue that firearms carried by responsible individuals could have prevented much, if not all, the carnage of these mass shootings.

Any discussion of the Second Amendment should begin by making sure we are familiar with the wording and the original meaning of this part of our Bill of Rights. The Second Amendment states: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Although we can reasonably



assume the authors of the Bill of Rights and the people of that day felt that this was an unambiguous statement, it is not the case today.

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

In all likelihood, the authors intentionally combined these two thoughts. The states could not muster a militia of their people unless the people were allowed to keep arms. This view is supported by people involved in crafting and/or approving the Bill of Rights. Samuel Adams wrote, “The said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to . . . prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms.”^{3} Similarly, Noah Webster wrote, “Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in American cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be on any pretense, raised in the United States.”^{4}

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

The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?

As discussed above, those responsible for the Second Amendment

intended to ensure individuals could bear firearms legally. What concerns led to this original amendment to our constitution?

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

The Federalists, who had the majority of delegates to the convention, were wrong in assuming that most people would agree with their hands-off approach. This situation led to many of the states ratifying the Constitution with the stipulation that a bill of rights be added. The right to bear arms was a common component of these stipulations. As James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, "The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation . . . forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition . . . The several kingdoms of Europe . . . are afraid to trust the people with arms."[\[5\]](#)

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

States Bill of Rights.

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

The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?

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

In the most recent ruling of 2008, the court ruled the amendment confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense. It also determined that the clause concerning a well-regulated militia does not limit the part which clearly states an individual's right to keep and bear arms. Thus, the Court affirmed the "individual rights theory" of interpretation.

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

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

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

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

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, we are told to pray for those in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life with all godliness and dignity. Our Constitution indicates that we are to take up arms as necessary to protect a government supporting godliness and dignity. It is reasonable to preclude those without a sane concept of a quiet and peaceful life from accessing firearms, which would always be a small minority of the populace.

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Ignored?

To this point, we have laid out the history and the status of our right to bear arms. We have three possible responses: 1) accept and obey this law, 2) ignore it as counter to God's

greater law, or 3) work to repeal the law. Let us first consider the question, "Is this a law that we should ignore?"

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

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

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, we see that we should pray for such a society because "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." As citizens of this nation, the Second Amendment makes it clear that we have a responsibility to protect our rights from those who would attempt to abuse their position, to maintain our freedoms including our freedom to live godly lives and share Christ freely.

In 2 Peter 2:13-14, we are to submit "for the Lord's sake to every human institution," whether to a king or his representatives. Within our structure of government, we submit to our Constitution and its principles. The Second Amendment calls for us (if needed) to be armed and ready as individuals to participate in a state militia or, in the absence of a

militia, to act as individuals to protect our liberty. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that this also confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes.

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

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?

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

Many innocent people have been killed by deranged individuals and criminals with guns; at the same time, we cannot remember a time when American citizens were called to the streets to protect our Constitution. Have we reached a point where the nature of today's weapons and our society make the Second Amendment a detriment?

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

What is the problem with repealing the Second Amendment? To have no guns among the citizenry, the government must be very proactive in removing guns from society as a whole. Guns must be removed from those not inclined to obey— a very

difficult task as evidenced by the prevalence of alcohol during Prohibition. If accomplished, the government must assume unprecedented powers which may be fine as long as the Constitutional is not usurped. But if a future government decides to do so, there will be nothing to stop it.

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

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

According to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, in the last days, swords will be beaten into plowshares and nations will no longer lift up the sword against other nations. We are clearly not in those last days now. Keeping the Second Amendment in place highlights our commitment to a government "of the people, by the people and for the people," while we wait for Christ's bodily return.

Notes

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

2. Ibid.

3. Philip Mulivor, *Proclaiming Liberty: What Patriots and Heroes Really Said about the Right to Keep and Bear Arms*, Brightman Press, New York, 2011 quoting Samuel Adams,

Amendment introduced on 6 Feb. 1788 in the Massachusetts ratifying convention, qtd. *In Debates and Proceedings in the Convention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Held in the Year 1788*

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

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

6. Romans 13:4

7. Luke 22:35-38

8. John 18:10

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Christmas Articles



Various articles about Christmas by Probe staff members.

[Why the Stories of the Virgin Birth Fit Together](#) [Tom Davis]

Tom Davis answers the charge that the two nativity accounts in the gospels contradict each other, showing how well they complement each other by contributing details from two

different perspectives.

[A Christmas Quiz](#) [Dale Taliaferro]

A quiz concerning the Christmas story from a biblical perspective.

[3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth](#) [Paul Rutherford]

Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth.

[The Star of Bethlehem](#) [Dr. Ray Bohlin]

What was the Star of Bethlehem? Some people suggest it was an astronomical conjunction of planets and stars. But it might have been the Shekinah Glory, a physical manifestation of God's presence on earth.

[Christmas Film Favorites](#) [Todd Kappelman]

Todd Kappelman highlights some favorite films of the Christmas season, encouraging Christians to enjoy the films while separating the sacred from the secular: *A Christmas Carol*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

[Truth You Can Sing About: 5 Christmas Carols](#) [Steven Davis]

Probe Radio producer Steven Davis wrote the scripts providing devotional insights into five Christmas carols, and his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis wrote and performed the music underneath.

[Truth You Can Sing About: Part 2](#) [Steven Davis]

Probe Radio producer Steven Davis wrote five more scripts providing devotional insights into five Christmas carols, and his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis wrote and performed the music underneath.

[Truth You Can Sing About: Part 3](#) [Steven Davis]

For the third year in a row, Steven Davis and his son Jon Clive Davis collaborated on a new look at five Christmas

carols, accompanied throughout each day's broadcast by new compositions of each carol.

[The Theology of Christmas Carols](#) [Dr. Robert Pyne]

A look at the theology behind five Christmas carols: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Joy to the World, O Little Town of Bethlehem, and O Holy Night.

[Christmas SHINY!](#) [Sue Bohlin]

The visible presence of God in the Old Testament—the Shekinah glory—shows up again at Christmas. No wonder we like shiny, sparkly things that remind us of the glory of heaven!

[Is Christmas Necessary?](#) [Jerry Solomon]

Christians have had to respond to the customs of the surrounding culture since the beginning of the church. In the end, though, Christmas is necessary only in terms of its historical and theological content.

[Reincarnation: The Christmas Counterfeit](#) [Sue Bohlin]

Sue blogs that Jesus is the only person who had a life before His birth, which we celebrate at Christmas.

[Celebrating Christmas Wrongly?](#) [Sue Bohlin]

Sue suggests that our motives are what determines whether we're celebrating Christmas right or not.

[Loving God Through Xmas Music?](#) [Sue Bohlin]

Sue Bohlin suggests that believers practice discernment as we listen to Christmas music, putting each song in the right category and allowing each category to point us to Christ.

[Why I Won't Apologize For Watching Hallmark Christmas Movies](#) [Sue Bohlin]

Cultivating a biblical worldview, seeing everything through the lens of creation|fall|redemption, has led Sue to see how the happy endings of Hallmark movies point to the Ultimate Happy Ending in the book of Revelation.

[The Christmas Story: Does It Still Matter?](#) [Rusty Wright]

Christmas often means time with family, hectic shopping, parties, cards and gifts. But what about the first Christmas? Why is the original story the baby in a manger, shepherds, wise men, angels important, if at all? The answer may surprise you.

[The First Christmas Wreath](#) [Jimmy Williams]

The founder of Probe Ministries examines the role of the wreath in Christmas.

[The Great Light](#) [Jimmy Williams]

A short essay on the role of light at Christmas.

[The Stable](#) [Jimmy Williams]

Jimmy Williams examines the symbolic and prophetic role of the stable in Christmas.

[Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?](#) [Rusty Wright]

Have you ever missed a great opportunity because you weren't listening carefully? Twenty centuries ago some clues to impending good news of monumental import eluded most folks. Fascinating prophecies of Jesus' birth and life bring revealing insights into your own life today.

Why the Stories of the Virgin Birth Fit Together

Tom Davis answers the charge that the two nativity accounts in the gospels contradict each other, showing how well they complement each other by contributing details from two different perspectives.

It is December again, the time of year that western culture

celebrates Christmas. Historically Christians claimed that Jesus was born on December 25 as early as the late second century.^{1} The primary biblical and historical sources for Jesus' birth are found in Matthew chapters 1 and 2, and Luke chapters 1 and 2. These chapters tell us the history of God becoming one of us through the virgin conception and birth of Jesus. The birth of Jesus is important because it is the beginning of God fulfilling his promise to send a savior to Israel. Many opponents of Christianity reject these stories as myths or fanciful stories. Their view is that these stories are made up to fulfill prophecy. They claim that these accounts are two completely different stories that are incompatible with each other.

Some Alleged Problems

One skeptic in particular, New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman, claims that "The problem is that some of the differences between Matthew and Luke are very difficult to reconcile with one another."^{2} When reading objections like this it sounds as if the early Christians were not aware that the four Gospels were not identical in the way that they told the story of the life of Jesus.

However, the early Christians were aware that each Gospel tells us about the life of Jesus from a particular point of view. When these stories are examined, they complement each other and give a more complete account of the birth of Jesus. The end process of examining these issues and giving a complete account is called a harmony. The first harmony, the Diatessaron, was written by a Christian named Titian around A.D. 170. ^{3}

Ehrman raises an issue that he thinks is irreconcilable: "Where was Joseph and Mary's home town?"^{4} Ehrman points out that Luke says Joseph and Mary live in Nazareth and have to travel to Bethlehem because of a census, while Matthew does not mention them living in Nazareth before the birth of Jesus.

But is this really a contradiction? No! Luke tells us about the things that happened in Nazareth while Matthew chooses not to address those things.

Ehrman points out that there are wise men in Matthew, but there are shepherds in Luke.[{5}](#) But Luke tells us that the shepherds visited Jesus on the night of his birth, while Matthew says that the wise men came some time, probably more than a year, after Jesus was presented at the Temple.

Ehrman also points out that Matthew tells us Herod wants to kill Jesus, while Luke tells us Caesar wants a census taken.[{6}](#) But these are not contradictory claims. There is no reason to say that if one happened the other could not.

We have seen in a brief overview how the claim that the stories of Jesus' birth in Matthew and Luke are not compatible with one another can be resolved. But how do the stories fit together? I will summarize the narratives in Matthew and Luke, then combine the narratives to show that when they are combined they fit together to make one fuller narrative.

Matthew's Narrative (Matthew 1:18-2:23)

As I summarize the birth narrative in Matthew, who is visited by angels? Who is making the decisions? From whose perspective is the story being told? These questions help tell us who is the possible source of the story.

Matthew begins his narrative with Joseph. Joseph and Mary were engaged to be married. In ancient Israel, engagements lasted a year. Mary is pregnant before they are married. Joseph does not want to marry Mary, but also does not want to disgrace her family. He decides to make the divorce private.

While Joseph was thinking these things over, an angel from God tells him that Mary's pregnancy is an act of God. Joseph will have a son, and the son's name will be Jesus. Jesus will save his people from their sins.

When Joseph wakes up he changes his mind and marries Mary. Joseph and Mary do not have sexual relations and she is a virgin when her son is born. They named their son Jesus as the angel instructed Joseph. Matthew tells us that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Later, some Magi, probably from Persia, show up looking for the one who was born King of the Jews. These Magi claim to have seen this king's star, so they came to worship him.

King Herod does not like the news that the Magi bring. He is the king and there is no room for another king. So Herod goes to the chief priests and the scribes to find out where the Christ is supposed to be born. They search the scripture and tell Herod that the Christ will be born in Bethlehem. Herod tells the Magi that the new king was born in Bethlehem. Herod asks the Magi to stop by on their way back to Persia and tell him where the new king will be found so he can go and worship him too. However, Herod wants to kill this new king, because he is the king and there will not be another king.

As the Magi are approaching Bethlehem they see the star again. The star leads them to the house where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus are staying. The Magi worship Jesus and give him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The Magi are warned in a dream not to go back to see Herod, so they go back to Persia without stopping in Jerusalem.

An Angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him that Herod wants to kill Jesus, and that he needs to go to Egypt to escape Herod. Joseph wakes up and takes Mary and Jesus to Egypt.

Herod realizes that the Magi went back to Persia without telling him where the new king was born. Herod is furious! He sends soldiers into Bethlehem with orders to kill every boy under the age of two.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus live in Egypt until Herod dies. Then,

an angel appears to Joseph in a dream and tells him to return to Israel. Joseph wants to return to Judea, but he is afraid the new ruler, Archelaus, will kill Jesus so he moves to Nazareth.

Notice that in Matthew the narrative focuses on Joseph's role in the events surrounding Jesus' birth. Matthew 1 gives Jesus' genealogy through Joseph's lineage. The narrative begins with Joseph having to decide whether he should divorce Mary, or continue with their engagement and marriage. Joseph is visited by an angel in his dreams three times. This focus on Joseph suggests that this narrative is told from Joseph's point of view. Next I will summarize Luke's narrative.

Luke's Narrative (Luke 1:5-2:52)

As we did with Matthew, ask, who is the main character in the story? Who does the story focus on?

Zechariah, a priest faithful to God, had no children because his wife, Elizabeth, could not have children. Zechariah was selected to enter the sanctuary of the Temple to burn incense when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Gabriel tells Zechariah that Elizabeth will become pregnant and they will have a son who is to be named John. Zachariah is skeptical, so Gabriel makes him unable to speak. As Gabriel said, Elizabeth becomes pregnant.

Six months later Gabriel is sent to Nazareth to visit a virgin, Mary. Mary is engaged to Joseph. Gabriel tells Mary that she has found favor with God and she will conceive and have a boy who is to be named Jesus. Mary does not understand how this can be. Gabriel explains that it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, who happens to be Mary's cousin. When Mary arrives John, who is not yet born, recognizes that Mary's child, Jesus, is the coming Messiah. Elizabeth is

filled with the Holy Spirit and recognizes that Mary's child will be blessed.

Elizabeth gives birth to John. After John was circumcised her neighbors and relatives wanted to name the child after Zechariah. Elizabeth tells them the child is to be named John. This causes an argument among the people because he has no ancestor named John. Zechariah regains his speech and ends the discussion by proclaiming that his son's name is John. This amazes the people and news of this spread throughout Judea.

Mary is back in Nazareth when Caesar calls for a census. Joseph, her husband, is from the lineage of David, who is from Bethlehem. This means that Joseph and Mary have to travel to Bethlehem for the census. While they are there, Mary gives birth to Jesus. Mary wraps Jesus in blankets and lays him in a manger because there is no room in the guest room.

There were shepherds in the area who were watching over their flocks of sheep. Suddenly an angel from God appeared to them. This frightened the shepherds. The Angel told them not to be afraid. He brought them good news, the Messiah was born in Bethlehem. Then a group of angels appeared proclaiming, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth to people he favored."

When the angels leave, the shepherds decide to go to Bethlehem to see the child. When they arrive, they find Mary, Joseph, and the baby in a manger just like the angels told them they would. The shepherds tell Joseph and Mary about the visit of the angels and what they said about the child. The shepherds leave praising God. Mary continues to think about these things.

After eight days Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple to be circumcised. While at the Temple Joseph and Mary are approached by Simeon, who has been told by the Holy Spirit that he would see the Messiah before he died. Simeon shares

this with Mary and Joseph, telling them that Jesus would be a light to the Gentiles and would bring glory to Israel. Then Anna, a prophetess, comes to see Jesus in the Temple. Anna thanks God and tells the people about Jesus.

After all the requirements of the law were fulfilled, Mary and Joseph return to Nazareth.

Notice that in Luke, the angels appear to Mary. Luke includes Mary's journey to visit Elizabeth, and that John and Jesus are relatives on Mary's side of the family. The genealogy in Luke 3 goes through Heli, who is Mary's father. Luke's account of the birth of Jesus seems to come from Mary's perspective.

Combining the Stories

Finally I will place the two stories together to make one story. Do the transitions from Luke to Matthew, or from Matthew to Luke, flow smoothly? Are there any contradictions or irreconcilable differences?

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When we combine both narratives we can see that we have two narratives that are told from two different perspectives. These differing perspectives lead to an emphasis on different details. When the accounts are harmonized we can see that these details are not contradictory, they are complementary. The narratives fit nicely together, like the pieces of a puzzle, to make a more complete larger picture of the events surrounding the birth of Jesus.

Conclusion

God became one of us. God did what he promised he would do in the Old Testament. The conception and birth of Jesus is the beginning of the defeat of death and sin. Jesus' birth is directly tied to His death and resurrection. The power of sin, death, and Satan is broken. This is the reason that Christians celebrate this event every year. As the angels said, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors." (Luke 2:14 SCB)

Notes

1. "The traditional date for the birth of Christ from as early

as Hippolytus (ca. A.D. 165-235) has been December 25th.”
Hoehner, Harold W. *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 25.

2. Ehrman, Bart. *Jesus: The Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 1999), 36.

3. Thomas, Robert, L. *A Harmony of the Gospels with Explanations and Essays*. (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 269.

4. Ehrman, 37.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

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A Christmas Quiz

Dr. Dale Taliaferro's 38-question quiz concerning the Christmas story from a biblical perspective.

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

1. Can you name the parents of Jesus?

- a. Mary (Matt. 1:16; Luke 1:31, 2:6-7).
- b. God (Luke 1:32, 35).
- c. Joseph (by adoption) (Matt 1:16, 19-20, 24-25).

2. Where did Joseph and Mary live before they were married?

- a. Mary—In Nazareth (Luke 1:26-27).
- b. Joseph—In Nazareth, presumably (Luke 2:4).



3. What was the name of the angel who appeared to Mary?

Gabriel (Luke 1:26).

4. Where did Joseph and Mary live after their marriage?

Nazareth (Luke 2:4-5, 39).

5. Where was Mary when the angel appeared to her?

In Nazareth, inside some structure or building (Luke 1:26, 28).

6. Whom did Mary visit immediately after Gabriel appeared to her?

Elizabeth, her relative (Luke 1:36).

7. How far along in her pregnancy was Elizabeth when Gabriel appeared to Mary?

Six months (Luke 1:26, 36).

8. How long did Mary stay with Elizabeth?

About three months (Luke 1:56).

9. Why didn't Mary stay to celebrate the birth of John?

Probably fear of stoning, since she was pregnant and beginning "to show."

10. How far along in her pregnancy was Mary when she broke the news to Joseph?

At least three months (Luke 1:38-39, 56).

11. Why were Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem?

To be enrolled for the taxes (Luke 2:1-3).

12. Why did Mary accompany Joseph?

a. A practical reason (she was well along in her pregnancy).

b. A biblical-prophetical reason (Micah 5:2).

13. What determined the city to which each Jew had to travel in order to be taxed?

Lineage. Joseph had to go to the city of David since he was of "the house and family of David." (Luke 2:3-4).

14. Who, then, would be in Bethlehem?

- a. Joseph's relatives—descendants of David (Luke 2:3-4).
- b. Possibly Mary's relatives also (Luke 3:31-32).

15. How did they travel?

Probably in a caravan (cf. Luke 10:30-37, esp. 30). The Scripture doesn't say anything about their journey to Bethlehem.

16. Why couldn't Joseph and Mary find space in the inn?

Probably because Joseph's relatives rejected them and wouldn't give up their space (Luke 2:5; cf. Luke 1:61, 2:5; John 8:41).

17. Who were the first people to come to see Jesus according to Scripture?

Shepherds (Luke 2:8, 15-16).

18. What chorus did the angels sing to the shepherds?

None. They said, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men of good will" (Luke 2:14).

19. What sign did the angels tell the shepherds to look for?

The baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger (Luke 2:12, 16-17).

20. What was the manger?

A feeding trough made of stone.

21. In what way do the meaning of the Hebrew term for Bethlehem and the sign given by the angels prepare us for Jesus' later ministry?

- a. Bethlehem means "house of bread," which correlates with Jesus' Bread of Life discourse (John 6:22-65).
- b. Jesus was wrapped in swaddling clothes—the same kind of clothes He would be buried in (John 19:40).

22. What happened eight days after Jesus' birth?

His circumcision (Luke 2:21).

23. What happened 32 days after Jesus' circumcision (40 days

after Jesus' birth)?

Mary's ceremonial purification and Jesus' redemption (Luke 2:22-24).

24. What are two reasons that Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem?

a. To fulfill the Law—Jesus' redemption and Mary's purification (Luke 2:22-23).

b. To fulfill prophecy (the personal prophetic revelation given to Simeon) (Luke 2:25-32, esp. 26).

25. Where did Joseph and Mary go after the purification ceremony?

Nazareth (Luke 2:39).

26. What are magi?

Politically powerful scholars and astronomers ("king-makers").

27. How many wise men came to see Jesus?

Scripture does not say, but Augustine and Chrysostom say twelve. Another tradition names three: Melchior (Shem's descendant), Caspar (Hem's descendant), and Balthasar (Jopheth's descendant).

28. How many gifts did the wise men bring and to whom did they present their gifts?

At least one gift from each wise man. They presented the gifts—plural in number—to Jesus. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh designate appositionally the kinds of gifts, not the number (Matt 2:1-2, 11).

29. What was curious about the star?

It was not constant (Matt. 2:2, 10).

30. How did Herod use the star?

He calculated the age of the child by the length of time it had been appearing and reappearing (Matt 2:7, 16). The wise men did not discourage this thinking.

31. Where were Jesus, Mary, and Joseph when the wise men reached them?

- a. In a house, not the stable (Matt 2:11).
- b. In Nazareth. The impression given in Matthew 2 is that of a hurried, immediate escape for all (Luke 2:39). Thus there was no time to fulfill the law or the prophetic utterance (cf. no. 24).

32. How old was Jesus at this time?

Two months to two years.

33. In what year was Jesus born?

Five or four B.C. (Herod died in March or April of 4 B.C.)

34. How long was Jesus in Egypt with His parents?

From one month to over one year.

35. How did Joseph and Mary finance the trip to Egypt?

Probably with the gifts of the magi.

36. Where was Jesus raised upon His return to Israel?

Nazareth (Matt 2:23).

37. How old was Jesus when He *began* His ministry?

Thirty-three to thirty-four years old (born 5 to 4 B.C., began ministry A.D. 29). Luke 3:23 tells us he was "about thirty"; the Greek indicates a rough (rather than close) estimate.

38. How old was Jesus when He died?

Thirty-seven to thirty-eight years old, depending on whether His ministry was three or four years in length.

Why I Won't Apologize For Watching Hallmark Christmas Movies

I've decided to take the "guilty" out of "guilty pleasure" when it comes to watching Hallmark Christmas movies.

This cultural icon has become fodder for endless jokes and even sermon illustrations. Yes, they are completely formulaic and the always-happy endings are entirely predictable. What keeps us watching are the "getting there" details of maneuvering the journey through falling in love and overcoming obstacles and the inevitable misunderstandings that are shortly and inevitably resolved. ("Whew! That was a close one!" said no one ever.)

But there is such a deeply satisfying resolution in every movie that makes the obligatory happy ending seem not obligatory at all. Just . . . *right*.

I found myself thinking about the sweet satisfaction of every movie that makes my spirit hum with joy, looking for the "something deeper" that I sensed was waiting to be discovered.

Then I remembered the Really Big Picture about the true nature of reality that God has presented to us in His word. The story of God rescuing man winds its way from Genesis to Revelation with lots of plot twists along the way, but there is an unimaginably Ultimate Happy Ending in the final book. The true story of the battle of good and evil ends with justice and rightness. Evil is finally contained and punished in the Lake of Fire, and True Love—God's love for His beloved people—Wins.

There's even a wedding! The Lamb of God, Jesus, takes His bride, the Church, as His wife.

The reason Hallmark Christmas movies are so satisfying is that they resonate with the Big Story where there is such a happy ending we can't even begin to imagine it.

Here's the ending, from Revelation 21:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

The real Happy Ending means no more death or mourning or crying or pain. One final wiping away of our tears, and then an eternity in new bodies where tear ducts will only be useful for tears of overwhelming joy.

It's always a secular Christmas in Hallmark movies, where Jesus is never mentioned. It's always about "the Christmas spirit" and "Christmas magic." But the happy endings are still legitimate because, like all good stories, they point to ultimate reality where Jesus is King and He will make all things right.

And now, if you'll excuse me, there are more movies to watch.

This post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/2019/12/18/why-i-wont-apologize-for-watching-

[hallmark-christmas-movies/](#) on December 17, 2019