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

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

The Bloody Cross: A Tough Thing to Handle

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

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

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

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

> “Christians are obsessed with blood! They sing about it, declare they are washed in it and even drink it! In this

book you will discover the crazy background to this Christian obsession and the truth about the bloodthirsty God they claim to know and serve."{1}

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yet, this blood-centered good news is a scandal to both those who believe and those who deny it. In fact, the Greek root

word *skandalon* is used for Christ Himself.{3} You see, Jews denied Christ as the Promised One and Gentiles thought it was all nonsense. Nothing has changed for mankind: the choices are either do-it-yourself religion, being too smart for all that, or believing in this radical hope.

The Reason Someone Had to Die

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

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

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

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

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

will die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Paul boiled it down this way: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> "Unfortunately, much of Christian art consists of depicting

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

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

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

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

God's merging of perfect holiness, just retributive punishment and allowance of His Son's execution was actually a beautiful

thing. Francis of Assisi wrote that "love and faithfulness meet together [at the cross]; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven."{9}

But Why a Violent, Bloody Death?

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

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

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

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

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

man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in His own image."{11} Apparently, God has put the price of a man's life as that of another's life.

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

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

One theologian plainly said, "Through this sacrificial system, the people of Israel were being prepared for the incomparable act of sacrifice that was to come in Jesus Christ."{14}

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

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

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

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

Theologian Thomas Oden summarized well our discussion of

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

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

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

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

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

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

> For my pardon, this I see,
> Nothing but the blood of Jesus;

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

15. Colossians 1:19.
16. Revelation 7:14b-17, emphasis mine.

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The Answer Is the Resurrection

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

Making a Defense for Your Living Hope

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

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

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

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

How do we get this living hope? Our hope comes “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”! Jesus’ resurrection is the basis for our hope. If Jesus is not resurrected from the dead, we are of all men most to be pitied.{4} So, any defense of the hope that is within us begins with explaining why someone should believe in the resurrection. The empty tomb is the cornerstone to answering most other objections raised up against the gospel.

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

Evidence for Jesus’ Resurrection

Giving an account for our belief in Jesus’ resurrection is the key to defending the hope within us. Several books have been written on this topic, and you can find a list of them in the transcript of this radio program on our Web site. The evidence for the resurrection as an historical event is so strong that

even Dr. Antony Flew, until recently a noted proponent of atheism, had to admit, “The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It’s outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events.”{5}

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

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

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

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

4. *Angry authorities*. After word of Jesus’ resurrection began to spread, the Jewish authorities wanted to put a stop to

people believing in Him. Producing the body of Jesus would have been the best way to do this. Even with support from the Roman authorities, they were never able to produce a body.

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

6. *Amazed disciples*. After Jesus' arrest, most of His disciples fled. It is clear from their reaction that they despised the cross and were not anticipating the resurrection. Two of his disciples did not recognize the risen Jesus even as He was teaching them the Scriptures related to Himself.{7} Their skepticism and shock showed that they clearly were not part of some preplanned hoax.

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

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

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

10. *Attesting Spirit*. Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit continues to convict unbelievers and assure believers that

Jesus is the risen Son of God.

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

Tearing Down Objections Through the Resurrection

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

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

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

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

2. What difference does God make to my life?

Jesus' resurrection shows that He lives into eternity and that we have the prospect of life beyond this world.{10} Knowing we have a soul that continues beyond this world impacts our perspective on life. As Paul points out, "If the dead are not

raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."{11}

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

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

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

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

4. I am too insignificant for God to love.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' resurrection puts Jesus in a class by Himself. His crucifixion and victory over death clearly show that He is a the only way to God. If there were multiple ways, Jesus would not have gone to the cross. He allowed himself to be subjected to death because it was necessary for our redemption. In addition, Jesus clearly stated that no one comes to the Father except through Him.{16}

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

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

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

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

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates God's active involvement in this world. He predicted it, He planned it, He performed it.

Peter writes, "[you are redeemed] with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you."{19}

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

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

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

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

Notes

1. Scripture references are taken from the NASB95.
2. 1 Peter 1:1-2, 3:8.
3. 1 Peter 1:3-4.
4. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19
5. Gary Habermas, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: An Exclusive Interview with Former British Atheist Professor Antony Flew." Available from the Web site of Biola University at www.biola.edu/antonyflew/.
6. Matt 28:11.
7. Luke 24:13-32

8. 1 Peter 1:21.
9. 1 Peter 1:18-21.
10. 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
11. 1 Cor. 15:32.
12. John 2:22.
13. Rom 5:8-11.
14. John 18:37-38.
15. Rom 1:4-5.
16. John 14:7.
17. James 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
18. Rom 10:9-10.
19. 1 Peter 1:18-20.
20. John 3:16.
21. John 2:22.

Resources on Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

Copan, Paul, and Ronald Tacelli, eds. *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment? A Debate Between William Lane Craig & Gerd Ludemann*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

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Truth You Can Sing About: 5 Christmas Carols

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

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

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

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

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

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

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

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

reconciled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Joy to the World

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

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

No.

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

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

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

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

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

What Child Is This?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Il Est Né Le Divin Enfant

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

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

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

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

This salvation is quite literally Jesus Christ, and we see

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

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

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

May your Christmas be filled with praise.

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

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Truth You Can Sing About – Part 2

When was the last time you thought about the great truth found in Christmas hymns and carols? In this program we focus on the truth of five Christmas carols. Be sure to listen to the

podcast to hear the music for each carol, written just for us, playing underneath the content! Part 1, produced in 2015, featured five different Christmas carols.

The First Noel

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

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

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

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

Is there something in your life you've pursued, *wherever* it went? A person? Stuff? Wealth? Position? Power? The Magi were accustomed to wealth, position and power. But who did they **pursue**? A foreign King. A Jewish King. Why? Well, if they knew about the birth of this Jewish King, then they knew about the Jewish God. And I believe they understood that this Jewish God, was The One True God.

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

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

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

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

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

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

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

Come, All Ye Faithful

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

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

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

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

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

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent

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

as the shadows clear away.

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

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

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

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

Good Christian Men Rejoice (*In Dulci Jubilo*)

Good Christian men, rejoice,
With heart, and soul, and voice;
Now ye hear of endless bliss: Joy! Joy!
Jesus Christ was born for this!
He hath opened the heavenly door,
And man is blessed forevermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!

So what was Christ born for? Or as the hymn goes: What’s the “this?”

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

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

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

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

May your Christmas be filled with praise.

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

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Truth You Can Sing About –

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**.*

O Holy Night

O 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 Star of Bethlehem from a Christian View

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

The Magi and the Star of Bethlehem

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

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

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

At first, this may seem quite unusual for something which

doesn’t even get mentioned in Luke 2, the more familiar account of our Lord’s birth. The star is featured only in Matthew’s brief description of the visit by the magi shortly after Jesus’ birth. I think the prevalence of the star stems from its mysteriousness. For example, what kind of star convinces a group of Gentile wise men to search for the new King of the Jews and actually leads them to Him? Before we explore this puzzle, let’s look at Matthew’s account beginning in Chapter 2 verse 1:

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

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

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

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

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

What Was the Star of Bethlehem?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the world.

Was the Star of Bethlehem the Planet Jupiter?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Shekinah Glory as the Star of Bethlehem

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Thanksgiving Quiz

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

This nation was founded by Christians, and Thanksgiving is a time when we can reflect upon this rich, Christian heritage. But many of us are often ignorant of our country's origins, so we have put together a Thanksgiving quiz to test your knowledge about this nation's biblical foundations. We hope that you will not only take this test and pass it on to others, but we also hope that you will be encouraged to study more about the Christian foundations of this country.

1. What group began the tradition of Thanksgiving?

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

2. Why did they celebrate Thanksgiving?

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

3. When did Thanksgiving become a national holiday?

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

4. Why did the Pilgrims leave Europe?

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

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

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

6. What is the Mayflower Compact?

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

7. What is the significance of the Mayflower Compact?

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

8. What does the Mayflower Compact say?

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

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

The Pilgrims were blown off course and landed at Cape Cod in what now appears to be God's providence. Because their patent did not include this territory, they consulted with the Captain of the Mayflower and resolved to sail southward. But

the weather and geography did not allow them to do so. They encountered “dangerous shoals and roaring breakers” and were quickly forced to return to Cape Cod. From there they began scouting expeditions and finally discovered what is now Plymouth. Had they arrived just a few years earlier, they would have been attacked and destroyed by one of the fiercest tribes in the region. However, three years earlier (in 1617), the Patuxet tribe had been wiped out by a plague. The Pilgrims thus landed in one of the few places where they could survive.{1}

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

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

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

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

Christian Commonwealth in which every area of their lives both civil and ecclesiastical fell under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

12. How did the Pilgrims organize their economic activities?

After the first year, the colony foundered because of the collective economic system forced upon them by the merchants in London. All the settlers worked only for the joint partnership and were fed out of the common stores. The land and the houses built on it were the joint property of the merchants and colonists for seven years and then divided equally.{4}

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

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

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

The legacy of the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving is the legacy of godly men and women who sought to bring Christian principles

to this nation. These spread throughout the nation for centuries.

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

Most historians will acknowledge that America was born in the midst of a revival. This occurred from approximately 1740-1770 and was known as the First Great Awakening. Two prominent preachers during that time were Jonathan Edwards (best known for his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") and George Whitfield. They preached up and down the East Coast and saw revival break out. Churches were planted, schools were built, and lives were changed.

15. How influential were Christian ideas in the Constitution?

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

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

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

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

Young colonists' education usually came from the Bible, the Hornbook, and the New England Primer. The Hornbook consisted of a single piece of parchment attached to a paddle of wood. Usually the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, and religious doctrines were written on it. The New England Primer taught a number of lessons and included such things as the names of the Old and New Testament books, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and John Cotton's "Spiritual Milk for American Babies." Even when teaching the alphabet, biblical themes were used: "A is for Adam's fall, we sinned all. B is for Heaven to find, the Bible mind. C is for Christ crucified, for sinners died."

18. How important was Christianity in colonial higher education?

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

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

Contrary to what many Americans may think, the phrase

“separation of church and state” does not appear anywhere in the Constitution. In fact, there is no mention of the words church, state, or separation in the First Amendment or anywhere within the Constitution. The First Amendment does guarantee freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion.

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

Notes

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

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Bible Literacy Quiz: A Test of Scripture Knowledge

Take this test of basic Bible knowledge to help assess your biblical literacy. This simple quiz examines some of the key

doctrines and events of the Bible. It will give you a good feel for your breadth and depth of Scriptural knowledge.

This article is also available in Spanish.

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

Evangelical pollster George Barna says,

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

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

Take the quiz yourself: click here for a format with the questions and answers separated.

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

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

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

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

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

Esther and Ruth.

4. What are the Ten Commandments?

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

5. What is the Greatest Commandment?

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

6. What is the second Greatest Commandment?

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

7. What is the Golden Rule?

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

8. What is the Great Commission?

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the

very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19,20)

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

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

10. To whom did God give the 10 Commandments?

Moses. (Exodus 20)

11. Which two people did not die?

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

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

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

13. What is the beginning of wisdom?

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

14. Who delivered the Sermon on the Mount?

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 5-7)

15. How did sickness and death enter the world?

Romans 5:12 says that sin entered the world though one man, and death through sin. The fall of man is recorded in Genesis 3, where God’s perfect creation was spoiled by Adam’s sin.

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

Pontius Pilate. (Matthew 27:26)

17. Who are the major prophets?

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

18. What people group is the Old Testament about?

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

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

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

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

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

21. Who was the first murderer?

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

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

Job. (See book of Job)

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

David. (1 Chronicles 29:28)

24. Who was "the weeping prophet?"

Jeremiah.

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

Daniel. (Daniel 6)

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

David and Goliath. (1 Samuel 17)

27. What is the book of Acts about?

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

28. What are epistles?

Letters.

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

Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4)

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

Abraham. (Genesis 22:2)

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

Passover. (Exodus 12:27)

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

Joseph. (Genesis 41:41)

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

Esther. (Esther 2:17)

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

Ruth. (Ruth 4:17)

35. Which angel appeared to Mary?

Gabriel. (Luke 1:26)

36. How did the Lord Jesus die?

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

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

He was raised from the dead. (John 20)

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

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

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

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

40. How did the universe and world get here?

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

41. Where did Satan and the demons come from?

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

42. Who directed the writing of the Bible?

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

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

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

44. Who taught in parables?

The Lord Jesus. (Matthew 13:3)

45. What are parables?

A short, simple story with a spiritual point.

46. Which two animals talked with human speech?

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

47. With which woman did David commit adultery?

Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11)

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

Solomon. (2 Samuel 12:24)

49. Who was the female judge of Israel?

Deborah. (Judges 4:4)

50. Who was the wisest man in the world?

Solomon. (1 Kings 3:12)

51. Who was the first man?

Adam. (Genesis 2:20)

52. Who was the most humble man on earth?

Moses. (Numbers 12:3)

53. Who was the strongest man on earth?

Samson. (Judges 13-16)

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

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

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

Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 2:5)

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

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

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

Jonah. (Jonah 1:17)

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

Malachi.

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

Joshua. (Joshua 10)

60. Who was the first king of Israel?

Saul. (1 Samuel 13:1)

61. Who built the temple in Israel?

Solomon. (1 Kings 6)

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

Levites. (Deuteronomy 10:8)

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

Jericho. (Joshua 6:20)

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

Manna and quail. (Exodus 16)

65. Which two people walked on water?

Jesus and Peter. (Matthew 14:29)

66. Who was the first martyr?

Stephen. (Acts 7)

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

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

68. What is the Lord's Prayer?

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

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

Mary Magdalene. (John 20:16)

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

John the Baptist. (John 14:10)

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

Egypt. (Matthew 2:13-15)

72. What was Christ's first miracle?

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

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

Lazarus. (John 11)

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

Paul. (see book of Acts)

75. Who was Paul’s first partner?

Barnabas. (Acts 13:2)

76. Whom did an angel release from prison?

Peter. (Acts 12)

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

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

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

Isaiah 53.

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

Jacob. (Genesis 32:22-32)

80. Which two pastors did Paul write letters to?

Timothy and Titus.

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

Paul. (Acts 28:5-6)

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

James and Jude. (Matthew 13:55)

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

Luke and Acts. (2 Timothy 4:11)

84. Who had a coat of many colors?

Joseph. (Genesis 37:3)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moses. (Exodus 3)

89. How many sons did Jacob have?

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

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

Esau. (Genesis 25:33)

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

Psalm 23.

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

Peter. (Matthew 26:69-75)

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

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

94. Where is the New Testament “Hall of Faith?”

Hebrews 11.

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

Elijah and Moses. (Mark 9:4)

96. Who is the second Adam?

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

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

Hosea. (Hosea 1:2)

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

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

99. What are supernatural enablings that allow a believer to

serve the Body of Christ with ease and effectiveness?

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

100. Whose tomb was Christ buried in?

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

101. Who wrote the book of Hebrews?

Nobody knows.

102. Which is the "epistle of joy?"

Philippians.

103. What is the book of Revelation about?

The end of the world.

104. Who is the bride of Christ?

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

Note

1. bit.ly/fR8BuA

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Bible Literacy Quiz: Separated Format

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?
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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 though 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 though 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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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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