“Did Mary Remain a Virgin After Jesus was Born?”

A Catholic friend and I (Protestant) were having a discussion about the differences in our beliefs, specifically the virginity of Mary. While we have no disagreement that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit in Mary, we do disagree about Mary’s ongoing virginity. It’s my understanding that Catholics believe (1) Mary remained a virgin the rest of her life; (2) she was sinless; and (3) she was assumed into heaven, circumventing death. My contention was (1) Jesus had brothers and sisters, so Mary could not have remained a virgin; (2) the Bible states that Jesus was the only person to walk the earth sinlessly; and (3) Mary died a normal (human) death and is in heaven, just like believers after Jesus’ death. I’m not trying to change his beliefs, but I would like some outside source of information on these topics.

The problem with these issues is that Protestants only accept Scripture as the basis for our authority, and Catholics accept Scripture AND Tradition as the basis for their authority, with Tradition often winning out. The three disputed doctrines you mention (and you’re mainly right except for the doctrine of the Assumption: Mary’s death is not disputed. The doctrine of the Assumption says her body was taken into heaven after death) are all based on Tradition.

The “Catholic in the pew” is often committed to what the Church teaches because that’s all they know and they are taught that the Church’s teachings are infallible and not to be questioned. Logic doesn’t get in the way. For instance, I remember a discussion with a Catholic lady about Mary’s supposed sinlessness. When I brought up the Magnificat, Mary’s wonderful prayer in Luke where she says, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,” pointing out that only a sinner needs a savior, the other lady

dismissed it, saying, “Oh, she was just being holy.” End of discussion. Logic doesn’t get in the way.

The question I would bring up is, What happens when Scripture—which is inspired and inerrant—contradicts Tradition? Asking that kind of question can serve as a seed-planting ministry in your friend’s life.

Bigger than the Catholic doctrine issue, and predating even the birth of Christ, is the philosophical underpinnings of these three beliefs. Many of the Church fathers accepted Plato’s teachings about the nature of reality, which are that only the unseen, spirit realm is important; the material realm is evil and unimportant. (The other, opposite philosophy at the time, and which still drives a great deal of Western thought, is from Aristotle, who taught that the material world is more important than the unseen realm of ideas.)

Plato taught that the mind and spirit was good and the body was base or bad. Many people, including many of the church fathers, took this belief and arrived at the conclusion that sex is evil, even in marriage, because it is a bodily function. Thus, because they wanted to believe Mary was sinless, the church decided that she had to stay a virgin because sex with Joseph would have been evil. Most non-Catholic theologians believe that Mary and Joseph had a normal marriage, producing several children which are mentioned in texts such as Matt. 13:55 (“Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?”). This “material is bad” idea is also behind the belief that she could not have experienced the decay of deathlike the rest of mortals, which spawned the idea of her assumption into heaven.

I suggest you check out this web site for further information: www.reachingcatholics.org/

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“My Boyfriend and I Are Committed to Each Other, So Why is Sex Sinful?”

My boyfriend and I have both have been faithfully committed to each other for 4 years. He is now questioning the issue of fornication and is having a hard time in dealing with this issue. He believes that it is a sin to have sex out of marriage.

I agree, but I believe that we are committed to each other, and in God’s eyes I am committed 100%. The only difference is that we are not legally married. We do plan to marry, maybe in a few more years. We do not live together. Please help me understand why do I see it OK??

Dear _____,

I would gently take issue with your choice of words. If you and your boyfriend are not married, you may like each other and even love each other, but you are not in a committed relationship. A committed relationship is marriage. Right now all you have is strong feelings and good intentions. God’s standard for what makes sex holy and right and not sinful is a marriage relationship, which means you have gone through a wedding, a public declaration of commitment that makes you a new social unit in the eyes of the community.

I’m glad you care about this issue. But how can you say you

are committed in God's eyes when He has already told us what He thinks? In God's eyes you are committing fornication, because you are not married. It really is that black and white.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"What is a Christian Perspective on War?"

Is there anywhere in the Bible where God or Jesus speaks or justifies the Christian needing to go to war? I know we are to obey those who are in control of the government, unless the demands go against biblical principles. I also have read the various passages concerning loving our enemies and blessing those who persecute us. But what of war? What about the issues of defending our homes for the cause of freedom, right to worship, or when others infringe on the rights of those living in other countries?

There are essentially three Christian views concerning war:
Activism – it is always right to participate in war.
Pacifism – it is never right to participate in war.
Selectivism – it is right to participate in some wars.

Most Christians generally hold to the third position. This led to the development of what has come to be known as the just war criteria.

A just war would include the following elements:

• Just cause (defensive war)

• Just intention (just peace)

• Last resort (negotiations)

• Formal declaration

• Limited objectives

• Proportionate means

• Noncombatant immunity

There are a number of books that have been written on this subject of war and the Christian. Here is a short list of books that you might find helpful.

• Clouse, Robert. *War: Four Christian Views*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, revised 1991.
• Holmes, Arthur, ed. *War: Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, revised 1991.
• Payne, Keith and Payne, Karl. *A Just Defense*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987.
• Schaeffer, Francis; Bukovsky, Vladimir; and Hitchcock, James. *Who Is For Peace?* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983.

Kerby Anderson

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"Why Did God Create a Flawed

World Where Eve Could Eat the Forbidden Fruit?”

I found Rick Rood’s article on The Problem of Evil helpful in some way, but I was hoping to find some additional information. No where in my search have I seen anyone address the issue of why God allowed Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge. Surely God knew Eve would be tempted by Satan (the serpent). Why did he allow this? Surely he must have known this would be the downfall of his creation, Earth? And subsequently the root of all pain, hate, and evil to come in the world, both behind and ahead of us. If God had intended for us to live in a Paradise here on Earth, he never would have permitted this event to occur, indeed the event that destroyed what civilization could have been. Instead, God MADE it necessary to save us from ourselves through Jesus. WHY WAS THIS NECESSARY? WHY THE DRAMA? IS GOD SO LONELY AND SELFISH HE CONCOCTED THIS FANTASTIC REALITY SO THAT MANKIND WOULD LOVE AND REVERE HIM? TO THINK THAT WE COULD ALL BE HAPPY AND LOVING AND TOGETHER AS A PEOPLE HERE ON EARTH, RATHER THAN THE CESSPOOL WE HAVE TODAY, MAKES ME SCREAM OUT IN ANGER AT THE GOD WHO SAYS HE LOVES US.

THE EVIDENCE THAT GOD IS NOT ALL POWERFUL AND ALL LOVING IS ON TV. DOES GOD LIKE THE ATTENTION? IS ANY ADVERTISING GOOD ADVERTISING FOR HIM?

It seems to me God wanted this to happen—he made it happen. He WANTS us to suffer, in order to be driven TO Him. That must be the only way he figured we would love and come to Him? I’ve heard that God does not need us. But surely he does, or he would not have introduced pain and suffering to the world to drive us to him. Without it, why would we need him, goes the argument.

We have the perfect Villain—Satan—to blame everything bad on.

But Satan did not create Adam and Eve. Satan did not make the Tree. And where was God when the Serpent came sliding in in? Did God not know Eve would eat it? TO ME, THIS IS THE MOST CRUCIAL QUESTION IN ALL OF HUMANITY. Assuming God is all knowing, he knew what would happen, the chaos for all time it would bring, and chose to do nothing. Or rather, let it happen. Had God stepped up at the crucial moment, we would all be loving and happy and together here on Earth, JUST AS IT WAS INTENDED. GOD MADE THE WORLD WHAT IT IS TODAY. GOD CREATED MAN'S HEARTS, GOD IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THAT HAPPENS. UNLESS YOU BELIEVE SATAN IS ON PAR AT EQUAL STRENGTH WITH GOD, THEN GOD HAS TO BE ACCOUNTABLE. IT'S TIME RESPONSIBILTY WAS PLACED WITH THE RIGHTFUL OWNER.

Hi _____,

I will be happy to talk to you about this, but first I have a question: do you have any children?

Sue Bohlin

Thank you for your response, I really do appreciate it. No, I don't have any children. I smell an analogy using children coming….Something like "As a parent, we do things in the best interest of our children, and it is only until later in life that those same children understand the actions that were taken…". One analogy I have heard puts God in the example as the parent and us as the children. I would never have children until I was able to resolve these questions in my own mind and heart. Otherwise I am sure I would pass on the same frustration about God to my family.

After even more thought, I guess the Root of my problem/question is creation, and specifically why God created a flawed world intentionally. I use the word "flawed" in the sense that he

- ***Knowingly created an access point for evil for all the world (apple tree)***

- *Had foreknowledge Eve would eat from it*
- *Knew that eating from it would result in Sin throughout mankind*
- *That the sin would cause great suffering to all of God's People*
- *That it would be necessary for God to "save" the world through his Son*

Is God so selfish he would intentionally and knowingly cause all this so we would "choose" him through the salvation in Jesus and 2) He must have known it would turn out like this (the hell that is our world today).

I must sound like a maniac, but I'm 29, well educated, catholic raised and partially practicing, with a good heart. I want to love God, but when I am honest with myself I realize I don't. In fact I hate the person I have concluded God to be. I love Jesus, and of course do believe he died for my sins. My problem is with the Father, and why this grand scheme to make everyone love him was necessary. He could have designed us that way. I finally stopped prayer almost entirely 3 years ago, because I would get so mad and angry at God during prayer—because I would find myself 1) praying for the same stuff with no result 2) many of the things I was praying about were caused by God (natural disasters, human suffering, etc.) When I say human suffering is caused by God, of course I understand free will and that people cause suffering. I hold God accountable for allowing evil and pain and suffering to exist.

Hope this provides you with a little more insight into my problem. If you are able to assist or offer a new perspective that would be great. Thank You.

Dear _____,

I believe the answer to your question is the fact that God has a very big plan for creation that we cannot see from our vantage point in space and time. He knew before He created anything, what would be the best way to get to His final desire, which is to provide a Bride for His Son. Just as any man wants a woman to marry him freely and out of love and commitment and support, the Lord Jesus wanted a Bride who chose Him freely. The only way to have a Bride who chose Him freely was to create people who could also choose freely to reject Him.

Could God have made people who couldn't have chosen NOT to love Him? No. Love means choice, and the other alternative would have been to create automatons who were programmed to behave in a certain way. If I read your e-mail correctly, you believe God could have made a world in which we were "happy and loving and together as a people here on earth," but He didn't and you're mad at Him for that. People without choice cannot be happy and loving. (Have you ever used a word-processing program that automatically changes what it thinks are misspellings and punctuation errors? No matter what you type, the program rearranges your letters, removing your choice. I don't know about you, but "happy and loving" doesn't describe me when I growl, "That's not what I meant! Let me type things MY way!"<smile>)

I would suggest that an ant colony is busy and productive, ant-wise, but they are not happy and loving. They ARE together, but in the scope of eternity, what does it matter? Their behavior is programmed, but there is no depth to any of it.

God created a world in which the people WERE happy and loving and together, and they chose to trash it. I guess you don't have any trouble accepting that reality; if I'm not mistaken, what you want is all the benefits of Eden without the choice to trash it. I can certainly understand that! □ But you also haven't seen the end of the story, either, when everything is

made right again, and that's exactly what we will have. I respectfully suggest that that's the part you're missing. The big picture where God restores creation to its original perfect state. I also respectfully suggest that the evidence of the world today that God is not all-powerful and all-loving, is actually evidence that God is very patient. He's not finished yet. He's allowing a certain amount of pain and suffering—which He will redeem, every bit of it—because there is a larger purpose behind it. Our inability to see it doesn't mean it's not there.

I asked if you if you had children because this is one of the things we can learn about God as parent when we have children. I passionately love my children, but I allowed them to experience pain of immunizations and school tests and other things they hated because I had a larger purpose for them besides preventing discomfort and pain in their lives. For instance, now that my son is in college, he's glad I made him do his homework in 5th grade although he sure didn't at the time. I never lost sight of the big goal, of maturity, because I am his mother who loves him and wants the best for him. God never loses sight of His big goal either.

You have a lot of company in being angry with God for allowing pain and suffering to exist. In fact, many wise people have said that pain and suffering is the single biggest evidence that God is not good. Or that He doesn't exist. (But then, if there were no God, and we evolved by chance, then where did we get this idea that life is unfair and broken? Life just IS, according to that worldview. But we are haunted by the sense that things should be much better than they are. And sure enough, God has revealed that we live in a fallen and broken world that is so much less than what He originally created for us. We're the ones who blew it.)

But you're not there; you know God exists, and you apparently resent Him for being a bad God for allowing life as we know it.

I’m afraid all I have to offer you is what God has revealed to us: that there IS a bigger plan, than He will make all the pain and suffering worth it some day. If you insist that there was a way for God to create people who could freely choose to either love Him or ignore/hate Him AND there be no chance for pain and suffering in the exercise of that choice, then I guess you will continue to be irreconcilably angry. You may as well fume over God not making a “square circle” or “light-filled darkness.” God is a powerful God, but He is not able to create nonsense.

You know that Jesus came to earth and was tortured and died to pay the penalty for our sin. And bless you, you love Him for it. Jesus coming into the midst of our suffering and pain is the clearest indication of the Father’s heart there is. He didn’t do or say a single thing that was not the Father’s will, and to see Jesus is to see the Father. So to hate the Father and love the Son is inconsistent. They are one God with one heart. It cost the Father everything to let the Son pay for our sins, and it cost the Son His life. That’s how valuable we are to Them.

The bottom line here, _____, is that what you want God to have done is something He couldn’t do. He couldn’t make a world for Him to lavish with His love that didn’t include the ability to reject that love. Otherwise creation would have been pointless, and God never does anything pointlessly.

May I suggest, humbly, that you try a prayer again, even though it’s been three years, and ask God to show you what you’re not getting? Ask Him to open your eyes to see the truth about Him and His ways? And ask Him to help you deal with your anger? He’s not intimidated by it; He fully understands your frustration. And He’d love to relieve you of the burden of that anger and replace it with His peace.

I hope this helps, even a little.

Sue Bohlin

Posted July 2002

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"Is There A Verse About Casting One's Seed in the Belly of a Whore?"

All my life I've heard that somewhere in the Bible there was a statement to the effect, "It is better to cast your seed in the belly of a whore than spill it on the ground." This alleged statement was a topic of discussion with some of my friends today, including one unbeliever who adamantly stated a preacher had told him that such a statement was contained in the Bible. I have previously attempted to research the existence of this very statement through computer searches to no avail (which was really no surprise to me). Can you comment?

There is no such verse in the Bible, although it seems to be a biblical "urban legend." The reference to spilling one's seed on the ground comes from Genesis 38:9:

> Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife, he wasted his seed on the ground in order not to give offspring to his brother.

I like the way David Guzik explains this passage in his commentary:

> When Onan's brother died, the levirate custom of that time

> (which was codified into law in Deuteronomy 25:5-10), was that if a man died before providing sons to his wife, it was the duty of his unmarried brothers to "marry" her and to give her sons. The child would be considered the son of the brother who had died, because really the living brother was acting in his place. This was done so that the dead brother's name would be carried on; but also, so that the widow would have children who could support her. Apart from this, she would likely live the rest of her life as a destitute widow. Onan refused to take this responsibility seriously; he was more than happy to use Tamar for his own sexual gratification, but he did not want to give Tamar a son that he would have to support, but would be considered to be the son of Tamar's late husband Er. Onan pursued sex as only a pleasurable experience; if he really didn't want to father a child by Tamar, why did he have sex with her at all? He refused to fulfill his obligation to his dead brother and Tamar. Many Christians have used this passage as a proof-text against masturbation; indeed, masturbation has been called "onanism." However, this does not seem to be the case here; whatever Onan was doing, he was not masturbating! This was not a sin of masturbation, but a sin of refusing to care for his brother's widow by giving her offspring, and of a selfish use of sex.

(From www.blueletterbible.org)

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

P.S. I have received emails from people *absolutely convinced* that they had heard such a verse in church at some point in the past. I promise, having personally read every word of the Bible several times over, there is no such verse. But there *is* such a thing as faulty memory. . .

“What About Those Who Cannot Believe?”

There were small children on the planes that were crashed in the 9-11 attacks on America. What happens to a baby or young child who dies? Do they go to heaven or hell?

When a young child dies, the bereaved parents will often ask, “Where is my baby now? Will my child go to heaven? The Bible does not give us a definitive answer to these questions; however, several statements seem to indicate that heaven is the destiny of those who can’t believe.

The critical issue is what God will do in His justice to those who were not able, because of age or mental inability, to respond to His revelation. If they are saved, how are they saved and on what basis are they saved? Wouldn’t the logic that says a child is saved say the same for an adult? In order to answer these questions, let us look at a few basic biblical principles.

First, God is loving (1 John 4:16), good (Nah. 1:7), just (Zeph. 3:5), compassionate, and gracious (Psalm 103:8). He “wants all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4) and does not want “anyone to perish” (2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, it is inconceivable that God would damn an innocent child who is incapable of belief.

When we use the word innocent in this context we are not implying that the one who cannot believe is free from sin. The Bible clearly teaches that even infants inherit a sinful nature (Psalm 51:5; Rom. 5:12, 18-19). Their salvation comes not from being innocent from sin but rather from their ignorance of God’s revelation.

Second, Christ's death on the cross for our sins was for all of us unless we refuse to accept it. God gives us the ability to decide. This means that we can either accept or reject God's love for us.

But what about those who are unable to accept or reject God? We must first realize that everyone (including those who cannot believe) is lost (Luke 19:10), perishing (John 3:16), condemned (John 3:18), and under God's wrath (John 3:36). We must also realize that Christ's death on the cross paid the debt of sin for us. His death appeases God's wrath (Rom. 5:9), and this provision is available to all unless they reject it. As Robert Lightner says in *Heaven for Those Who Can't Believe*, "Since rejection of the Savior is the final reason why men go to Hell, those who do not reject Him because they are not able to make a conscious decision enter Heaven on the basis of the finished work of Christ." [Robert P. Lightener, *Heaven for Those Who Can't Believe* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1977), 20.]

Third, there are examples in the Bible that seem to support the notion that children who die are bound for heaven. In 2 Samuel 12:22-23 David learned of the death of this son by Bathsheba. In this relationship with Bathsheba David broke four of the Ten Commandments: he coveted, he stole, he committed adultery, and he committed murder. As punishment, his child was to die. However, when he learned that the child had died, he took heart that his son was in heaven. He said, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

In Luke 18:16-17, Jesus used children as an object lesson for the kind of faith that leads to eternal life. He taught that the kingdom of God belongs to such as they (Luke 18:16) and that each believer must accept the kingdom of God as a little child (Luke 18:17). He further taught that God was "not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (Matt. 18:14).

Fourth, there are no biblical references that even hint that children will be in hell. While there are many references to adults in hell, there are none to children. This is admittedly an argument from silence. But in other passages in which the context might warrant such a reference, none is found. Consider, for example, the accounts of the death of mankind in the Flood (Gen. 7:21-23), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-25), the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt (Exod. 12:29-30), the destruction of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:3), and the slaying of the little boys in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).

The character of God is such that He would not damn to hell those who cannot believe. Further, Christ's death on the cross paid the debt of man's sin and is available to all unless they reject it. We can declare with some certainty that those who cannot believe go to heaven when they die.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

"Is It True that Some NT Documents Were First Written in Aramaic/Syriac and THEN in Greek?"

I have been asked what is wrong with this bible by George Lamsa which is a translation from the Aramaic of the Peshitta. It claims greater accuracy than KJV since it is based on the eastern texts, which they claim are older than the OT Hebrew texts and that the NT texts were written originally in Aramaic

since the common language of that area was and is in some areas still Aramaic. The differences that this bible translation points out between KJV and Aramaic have no major change in doctrine. How reliable are the eastern texts? And why are they not mentioned or discounted in textual criticism works?

Thank you for your e-mail requesting information on your question about the Bible translation of George Lamsa based on ancient Syriac Texts, and in particular, the *Syriac Peshitta*.

While I am not personally familiar with this work, or what it claims for itself, I am somewhat knowledgeable in textual criticism. So I will give you a quick response to your questions.

Syriac is the language which was spoken in the general area of modern Syria and Iraq, extending on the west (just east of the coastal area then known as Phoenicia—modern Lebanon) to the Euphrates River on the east. The two major cities were Antioch and Damascus. As you know, early on the first Christian expansion from Jerusalem was into this area with the Church at Antioch where Peter, Barnabas, Paul, and others ministered and at which the name "Christians" was first used historically (to our knowledge-Acts 11:26).

It was because of this growth of the Christian Church that there developed a need for a translation of the Bible into the Syriac language, an Aramaic dialect. It, along with Hebrew and Arabic, are all related Semitic languages. Merrill Unger notes that the *Peshitta* is the product of many hands, and the exact date of its origin is unknown. He also says that it came into existence after 150 A.D., an accepted date when the Syriac Church became a visible presence in the region. It is generally accepted that most of its Old Testament Books were translated from the Hebrew by around 200 A.D. Most scholars believe that the origin of this tradition came from the hands of Christian Jews.

The *Peshitta*‘s Pentateuch follows very closely the Massoretic Text (tenth century A.D.) of our Old Testament while other portions are clearly translated from the Greek Septuagint, the accepted translation of the Old Testament for Greek-speaking Jews and Christians of the time.

I would have to see your sources which claim the Syriac translations are earlier, and therefore have greater accuracy than the texts underwriting the King James Bible, before I feel I can fully answer your question. What *are* the sources? All of my sources clearly point to the fact that the *Peshitta*, in the form we have come to know it, developed (at least for the New Testament) a good bit later than their Greek originals. That is not to say that there is no manuscript evidence prior to the Massoretic era.

Further, both the *Syriac Peshitta* and the KJV are based most strongly upon the Eastern Family of (Greek-speaking) texts (*Textus Receptus*). The KJV is based primarily on this text Family because the bulk of manuscript evidence available in 1607 in England and Holland for scholars to work with was constituted mainly of this Eastern body of texts.

Additional, more recent manuscript evidence, such as *Siniaticus* (Aleph) and *Codex Vaticanus* (B), along with other Western Texts, have brought additional light to textual criticism of the N.T., and convinced most scholars (Westcott, Hort, Nestle, and most others) that the Nestle’s (critical) text is based on earlier and a more accurate rendering of the text than the *Textus Receptus* (though, as you point out, none of the variables—be it *Textus Receptus*, Nestle’s Text, or the *Peshitta*—affect any major doctrinal teaching of the eastern text.

Now apart from Matthew, which some scholars believe was originally translated into Aramaic and only second into our Greek version, I know of no higher critical scholarship which can substantiate that all of the New Testament Texts were

written in Aramaic first. It would not make sense for the Epistles to first have been written into Syriac because Paul was not writing any of his letters to people who spoke Syriac (Aramaic).

It might make sense for the four gospels, but I am not aware of any textual critical sources which try to document Aramaic origins for them, with the exception of a persistent tradition spoken of by two early church fathers, Papias and Irenaeus, that Matthew did in fact write something in Aramaic first which may be embodied within his Greek gospel. There is little doubt that prior to the writing of the four Gospels, there was an oral or spoken tradition circulating as the Apostles fanned out and began to speak of Jesus. Most scholars point to this oral tradition as the best explanation for the overlapping of material in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

The two primary languages spoken in Palestine during Jesus' time were Aramaic and Greek, and, with the coming of the Romans to that area, some Latin. Formal Hebrew was still read in the synagogues, but everyday communication was expressed in Aramaic. It is not likely that Jesus taught or conversed in Greek (though He and the Apostles appear to be familiar with the Greek Septuagint). Therefore, there *is* an Aramaic base to the Gospel material, since this was the language of Jesus and the Apostles.

How reliable are the eastern texts? If by "Eastern" we mean the Greek Texts and the Syriac Texts (but we could also add Coptic and Armenian, though they come later), we find that they all flow from common sources: either the Hebrew (and the little bit of Aramaic we find in the Old Testament), or the Koine Greek of the New Testament world (which produced both the (1)Greek Translation [Septuagint] of the Old Testament, (2) the original New Testament Documents themselves, and (3) those writings of the earliest Church Fathers (who all wrote in either Greek (Eastern) or Latin (Western). We find precedent for this in the New Testament writers themselves

who, with the possible exception of Luke, most assuredly all spoke Aramaic but wrote their letters in Greek. Another factor pointing to an original Greek text is the presence throughout the Gospels of explanations for Aramaic words/expressions. These would not be necessary if the original text had be rendered in Aramaic.

And so we could say that the Eastern Family corpus is highly reliable and true to the text 95% of the time. But the same could be said of the Latin Texts. AND the King James Bible. The KJV is a very good translation, but we have gleaned additional, earlier textual evidence since 1607 which has made us reconsider how the KJV translators rendered certain portions of the text. Its framers could only translate from the manuscript evidence available to them.

Textually speaking, there is little manuscript evidence to substantiate an Aramaic precedent over the Greek. There are however, ten different Syriac manuscript sources which have survived, dating from the fifth to the tenth centuries A.D. The earliest, a palimpsest written in the 4th or 5th century, is the oldest extant manuscript which is a representative of the Old Syriac translation (which probably originated around 200 A.D). All of these manuscripts give evidence of having borrowed from pre-existing sources—the Hebrew, the Greek Septuagint, or the Massoretic tradition.

By far the best Aramaic specimen of the *Syriac Peshitta* is found in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and dates from the sixth or seventh century A.D. Close behind is one in the British Museum in London which dates from the ninth or tenth century A.D. I have looked at this codex and taken pictures of it.

Finally, in answer to your question about the silence of "Eastern" texts, this is not a good designation, since "Eastern" includes both Syriac and Greek manuscript traditions. They are essentially the same. You are mistaken in

stating that the eastern texts are not mentioned, or they are discounted in textual critical apparatus. As you can see from my summary above, they *are* there. All extant manuscript sources relating to the Syriac family of texts are noted. Thus, to my knowledge, the Syriac family of texts are not ignored in the literature.

My recommendation is that you should find in your area a good theological seminary (with a strong commitment and high regard for the scriptures themselves), and check out the section of the library which deals with Old and New Testament Criticism, and sources which refer to the *Syriac Peshitta*.

I hope this gives a satisfactory response to your questions.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

"I Don't Know How to Answer this Biblical Argument Against Eternal Security"

I have been debating a Christian online about whether salvation is permanent, which I believe it is. This person brought up two verses to which I don't know how to respond, 2 Peter 2:20-21:

> ***For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness,***

> ***than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.***

I looked in a couple of commentaries as well as in *When Critics Ask* (by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe) and they either said nothing about it or they didn't address the issue at hand.

You have brought up a great question! The security of every believer is a critical issue in the Christian life. John 10:28-30 assures us that if we are given eternal life by God through Jesus Christ, no one can snatch us from the Father's hand. Romans 8:28-39 also guarantees that nothing in all of reality can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

With that said, there is the issue of the "apparent" problem passages. Of them, 2 Peter 2:20-21 seems a real nasty one. But upon reading the entire epistle from Peter, one can see that the people in question are false teachers. Peter's perspective, as that of Jude in Jude 19, is that these false teachers were not truly Christian. As Jude puts it, they are "worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit." Most likely these teachers publicly professed Christ as their Lord, but their subsequent rejection verified their unchanged spiritual condition.

The Bible as a whole teaches that believers are securely held in God's hand. But let us be careful not to judge others because of what we see or don't see. Challenge one another in perseverance to bear fruit, but leave the final judgment to the word of God that is "able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Thanks so much for your insightful question. God gives understanding to those who seek it as if searching for buried treasure and precious silver. (Proverbs 2:3-5}

Kris Samons

“Do Hindus Believe in Our Jesus?”

I have a question about Hinduism. I just had a conversation with someone who claims to be Hindu, yet believe in Christianity as well. He said that salvation in Hinduism is not only by karma (or karm, as he called it), but also by dharm, which he referred to as the acknowledgment of God being God. He also said karm was what good you have done, and didn’t talk about consequences of it. He said that wasn’t as much doctrine as mis-interpretation. He was saying that they believe in the same Jesus, but there’s no way this could be true. I wish we could have talked longer, but this wasn’t possible. My question is this: are any of these claims found in their scripture?

Thanks for your question about Hinduism. Hinduism is a very diverse collection of religious/philosophical beliefs. It’s very common to meet two Hindus who completely contradict one another. That being said, it’s not a surprise to hear some of the things that you heard from your Hindu friend.

One of the yogas (ways to reach human potential) of Hindu thought is called bhakti. This type of yoga is the personal devotion a person can have in any given form of the Deity. Many Hindus think Christianity is a great means by which to devote oneself to God. It already has a rigorous set of beliefs and practices in place that can be used as a road to ultimate liberation. Huston Smith says, “Many Hindus acknowledge Christ as a God-man, while believing that there

have been others, such as Rama, Krishna, and the Buddha."

Allow me to make some observations. First of all, if you meet a Hindu who believes in Jesus, consider this a great place to find common ground. Don't be discouraged. The next step is to find out just what he or she believes about Him. It's possible that this person may be a true believer in Christ. Remember, God is not just the God of "western" thought. But it's also possible that he or she believes in a different Jesus, influenced by a pantheistic worldview. Does he think Jesus is just one of many ishtas (forms of the divine)? If so, then why would Jesus claim to be the only way to God in John 14:6? If the Scriptures are called to question, then what other resources do they use to believe that Jesus was even an ishta in the first place? If his Jesus is not the Jesus of the Bible, then it might be a great idea to find out just where he's getting his concepts of Him. Also you might bone up on why there's warrant for belief in the inspiration of the Bible and the person of Jesus in the Bible. See our Web site for all sorts of information and helps (Theology and Philosophy Topics)

I would also suggest you read up on Hindu thought a bit. I'd say the best bet is to form a relationship with this Hindu and talk to him. There may or may not be any textual source for his beliefs. Unlike the religions of the West, Hinduism doesn't have an authoritative text to refer to for all their beliefs. They have some helpful texts, such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita. These are the most well known and accessible texts for understanding the religion and philosophy of Hindus. But neither of them will talk about Jesus, per se (being written before His time). I suggest Huston Smith's book *The World's Religions* or S.A. Nigosian's *World Religions: A Historical Approach*. I pray that you'll have plenty of discussions with this person and that God would use you to sharpen one another (you to be a better disciple, him to be a disciple of the one true God).

Kris Samons
Probe Ministries

“I Am a Wiccan—Are You Saying I’m Going to Hell?”

I am a 16. I was searching through the web when I found your web site on the Occult, naturally I was interested so I read through it. I found all of the information to me quiet intriging. I am a practioner of Wicca. I am a wiccan. I have been for the past year. I am not a worshiper of satan nor do I inflict bodily harm opon myself through rituals. I do not believe in one all mighty god, rather I believe in many gods and godesses. I am a believer of faith, I worship all things, the dead, trees, inanimate or not. I do not use rituals to gain, or hinder others. I simply use them to help or support things I love, like a protection spell while a loved one is on a trip and away from the family. I also ask the Lord and Lady to look over a loved one as they make there last journy. I do not believe in Heaven or Hell. I believe in personal “heavens” and personal “hells.”

Your site has given me the impression that your view is that if you are not a pure christian you are going to “hell.” You must worship a certain way and do certain things to be “saved?” Am I right in saying this? I was just wondering on your personal views on Wiccanism. I am curious about your opinions. Please feel free to e-nail me back. I would greatly appreciate it.

Blessed be,

_____

Hello _____,

Thank you for taking the time to write us.

Yes, you read our views correctly. What we believe is definitely not politically correct. We believe that there is one God, that He has interacted with our world (which He created), and that He communicated true truth to us. Part of that truth is that there is only one way to be reconciled to Him, and that is by trusting in His Son Jesus to save us from our sin problem and to equip us for life as He intended it in this world, and for heaven when we die.

We do realize that it is far more appealing to believe that there are many ways to God or god, however one defines him/her/it, all equally valid. However, just as you can't live in the real world under that type of "all preferences are equally valid, all truths are equally true" misbeliefs, we believe that spiritual reality doesn't abide by those lies either. For instance, many people say they believe that physical reality is mere illusion, but you don't find them meditating on railroad tracks. And many people say they create their own truth, but they all seem to agree that "red means stop," or they don't live too long!

Let me try to reframe a common misunderstanding of hell. When Jesus was on earth, He claimed to be God. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." One of the implications of that statement is that life is found in a relationship with Him. Apart from Jesus, there is no life, only death, which means separation from the source of life. Heaven isn't so much a place as it the fullness of *relationship* with a real Person—God. So being "saved" is not about jumping through religious hoops; it is about being rescued from an eternity of destruction and death where people are separated from life, which is only found in Jesus.

You said you don't believe in one almighty God, but various

gods and goddesses. Are they real? What evidence do you have that they exist? If you are trusting in imaginary friends, wouldn't you want to know that? On the other hand, Jesus was a real, historical Person who made astounding claims that are ridiculous if they are not true, and the only way to be reconciled to God if they are. (He also said He was the only way to the Father. Again, that is an arrogant and presumptuous thing to say—unless it's true.)

So hell is not a place where an angry, vengeful God laughs as he sends people who wouldn't jump through his hoops. Hell exists because God made us to be in a love relationship with Him, and He will not, cannot, force us to love Him. It has to be freely chosen. Since life is only found in God, hell is the place for people who would not accept His offer of love and friendship. And since there is no life apart from God, hell is a place of everlasting death and destruction because there is no life where there is no relationship with God.

You asked about our view of Wicca: it is not the same as Satanism, but it is another false religion based on lies and misbeliefs that are designed to draw people away from the true God. We believe that Wicca ultimately comes from the mind of the literal, evil being called Satan who hates God and hates people and lies to them so that they will suffer like he does. And while you may well be a gentle, kind and wonderful person, the kind of person that all of us at Probe would love to have as our next-door neighbor, we believe that without a personal relationship with the one true God through His Son Jesus Christ, you cannot experience life as He intended for you to live in this life, your sins will separate you from a holy God forever, and you cannot go to heaven when you die.

I do pray that because God loves you as much as He does, He will do whatever it takes to show Himself to you in a way that is sufficiently intimate to your heart that you will KNOW that it is Him pursuing you with a strong but gentle divine love.

And I pray you will experience His blessing on your life.

Most sincerely,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries