

# **“Are People in Hell Isolated and Alone?”**

My wife says that if you go to hell, you will be alone and not able to talk to anyone else. We tried to find an answer in the Bible, but we could not find a scripture that said that. I have also heard this from different people. Where is the proof?

Thanks for your question. I have also heard this many times myself. It's interesting to note that C.S. Lewis, the famous Christian apologist, once wrote something to the effect that “Hell is no one but yourself, forever and ever.” On the other hand, Jean-Paul Sartre, the famous French atheistic existentialist philosopher, once wrote that “Hell is other people.” But what does the Bible actually say?

Here are just a few passages to consider:

1. Isaiah 14:3-21: This passage is a taunt against the king of Babylon. What's interesting is the description of the king's reception in Sheol, the place of the dead. Notice such verses as 9-10: “Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come; it arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth; it raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones. They will all respond and say to you, ‘Even you have been made weak as we, you have become like us.’” Thus, this passage seems to indicate some sort of communication between departed spirits in Sheol. How literally this should be taken is, of course, quite difficult to say. Additionally, it must be remembered that, strictly speaking, Sheol is not the same as Hell. In the Old Testament all the dead were believed to reside in Sheol, both the righteous and the wicked. Hell, on the other hand, is a place of eternal punishment only for the wicked. God could redeem a righteous man from the power of Sheol (Ps. 49:15), but there is “No

Exit" from Hell.

2. Luke 16:19-31: In this parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, we learn that Lazarus is received into "Abraham's bosom" at death whereas the rich man goes to Hades. "Abraham's bosom" is pictured as a place of both comfort and honor; Hades is pictured as a place of fire and torment. Strictly speaking, "Abraham's bosom" is not Heaven and Hades is not Hell, but each does seem to be a precursor of the other (i.e. Hades is a sort of pre-hell Hell—see Rev. 20:14). Although the rich man is not said to converse with anyone else in Hades, he does converse with Abraham! In the parable, the two men are able to speak with one another even though a great chasm prevents them from crossing over to one another. Again, it is difficult to know how literally such a parable should be read. Is it an actual description of the afterlife prior to one's final judgment? I'll let you come to your own conclusion on that one!

3. Revelation 20:10-15: This passage does actually deal with the eternal destiny of the unsaved in Hell. In v. 10, we see that Satan, the beast and the false prophet will all be there. In vv. 14-15 we learn that "death" and "Hades" (and presumably all their inhabitants), along with everyone whose name is not found written in the book of life, will be cast into "the lake of fire" (i.e. Hell). Thus, all the unsaved, along with Satan and his demons, appear to be ultimately consigned to the same place of punishment (see Matt. 25:41). But nothing is said about whether these lost souls will have any communication with one another, or even whether they will be able to see one another. In other words, just because they are consigned to the same place of punishment, it does not necessarily follow that they will have any opportunity to communicate with one another. It could be that Hell is analogous to a large number of prisoners, all at the same prison, but all separated from one another in something like solitary confinement! But I honestly don't know.

Thus, to answer your question (which is a good one!), I do not personally think there is enough scriptural evidence to reach a firm conclusion concerning whether or not those in Hell will be utterly alone and unable to communicate or not. I'm sorry I can't answer your question any better, but at least my answer is an honest one!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

©2001 Probe Ministries

---

## **“Bishop Spong is a Hero!”**

Dear Mr. Closson,

I have recently been introduced to Bishop Spong's works, and find them deeply affirming and inspiring! His claims are not speculative, but rather based in logic and a profound knowledge of biblical scholarship. For those of us who will not compromise our integrity with literal biblical interpretations and nonsensical, mythical stories, his works are a “special revelation.”

Our society is overflowing with thinking people who feel alienated from Christianity. Better the church embrace its alienated multitudes, than eventually dwindle into insignificance. The truth should never shy away from new ideas and open discourse. Because in the end, no matter what is said or done, the truth always prevails simply because it is the truth. If Christianity speaks the truth, it should stand up and embrace people like Bishop Spong and the rest of us. Show us the truth we are missing. Instead, I see Christianity

**shying away and hiding behind the security of premodern themes that require unthinking and unquestioning followers.**

**Just thought you might like to know.**

Thanks for the thoughtful response to my [essay on Bishop Spong](#). Your challenge to “show us the truth we are missing” is a reasonable request and one that I would like to respond to. But first I might suggest that one’s approach to the evidence regarding the deity of Jesus Christ or the authority of the Bible (or any religious claim) is greatly affected by the presuppositions one holds regarding the nature of reality itself. Dr. Spong is a product of the enlightenment and approaches the issue with a strong naturalistic bias. His view of biblical scholarship, along with the members of the [Jesus Seminar](#), is filtered through this naturalistic grid that not only rules out supernatural events but placing mankind’s “happiness” (often sexual) as the ultimate good. He is perfectly free to do this, but to claim that this is “Christian” seems to be like trying to place a round peg in a square hole. Whether or not people are alienated by traditional Christian beliefs seem to be beside the point. Jesus himself said that the path is narrow and that many who called him Lord were not part of his kingdom.

It would seem to be far more consistent for Bishop Spong, and others who hold to naturalistic presuppositions, to claim a naturalistic form of humanism and quit using the language and symbols of Christianity as a cover for their humanity-centered (rather than God-centered) ethics.

As for Bishop Spong’s profound knowledge of biblical scholarship, I do not challenge his knowledge of the Bible or his sincerely held convictions about it. I would merely point to the fact that there are those with equal or superior academic credentials who accept the traditional view of the Bible as supernatural revelation, and that it calls individuals to saving faith in Jesus Christ. These scholars

offer a thoughtful alternative to the ideas held by Spong and others of like mind. A couple of books that might interest you are:

*A Passion For Truth, Alister McGrath (InterVarsity Press, 1996)*

*Reasonable Faith, William Lane Craig (Crossway, 1994)*

Thanks again for your comments.

Sincerely,

Don Closson  
Probe Ministries

---

## **“Do Babies Go to Hell?”**

**Do you believe that babies go to hell or not? Please support your answer with Scripture.**

This is an issue that challenges or questions the justice of God. It is a legitimate question, and I must say at the outset we cannot give a total answer. But there are passages in the Bible which shed a great deal of light on the subject. I will try to address the ones that have come to my mind which I think bear directly or indirectly on your question of the innocence/accountability of children.

Generally speaking, we are asking the question, “What do children know and when do they know it? And the key issue here is one of comprehension of, or the understanding of the Gospel message. This is not only true for children, it is true for adults. When Philip saw the Ethiopian eunuch sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah 53, he was instructed by the Holy

Spirit (Acts 8:29) to "Go up and join this chariot." Philip asked him if he **understood** what he was reading. The eunuch replied, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides Me?" (v. 31). Acts 8:32-40 goes on to relate that Philip explained how this Eunuch could become a Christian. He responded and was baptized.

My point in beginning with this incident is because there can be no salvation without an understanding of the gospel message. We find Paul throughout the book of Acts reasoning, debating, contending with people so they might understand the message of salvation. And so children must be old enough to **understand** the gospel, which involves a comprehension of their own personal sin and guilt.

This brings the next question: *At what age would that be?* I am sorry that I cannot give an affirmative answer since the Scripture never pinpoints clearly the exact age when this occurs. The Talmud from ancient times designated age thirteen for boys ("Bar Mitzvah,"—cf. *Judaism*, Arthur Hertzberg, p. 100) and twelve for girls ("Bat Mizvah"). This was the time when Jewish boys and girls became responsible for themselves and were to observe all the rituals, feasts, etc., incumbent upon them as members of the Jewish community. It was also the time when the boys were allowed (called) to read the Torah as full members of the worshipping community.

The confirmation services for the young which are practiced in all Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and some Protestant churches are based on the earlier Jewish traditions above. All of them, including the Jewish community, have traditionally set the "age of accountability at about age twelve.

It is also interesting that Luke records the incident at the temple where a twelve-year-old Jesus lagged behind his family and was found (three days later!) in the temple "sitting amidst the teachers both listening to them and asking them questions. . . And all who heard Him were amazed at His

understanding and His answers.” (Luke 2:46,47).

We can glean from other Old Testament passages additional insights:

1. I Samuel 1:22-18; 3:1-19: Hannah, married to Elkanah, was barren. She made a vow to the Lord that if He would give her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord for lifelong service. God graciously did so, and Samuel was born. Hannah cared for him and told her husband she would not go up to the Tabernacle (at Shiloh) for the annual sacrifice (Day of Atonement) until she had weaned Samuel, saying, *“I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord and stay there forever.”* (1:22).

The weaning of Hebrew (and other ancient) children did not occur until two or three years, and nursing may have extended beyond to perhaps age five. Therefore Samuel was a very young boy when he was dedicated to the service of the temple. Hannah says on this occasion, “For this boy I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him. . . So I have also dedicated him to the Lord; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the Lord. And she worshipped the Lord there.”(1:27,28). We are also told in 2:11 that “the boy ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest.” Verses 2:18-21 indicate that the boy was visited each year by his mother, at which time she would bring him a new, little robe. Several years are indicated in this passage, including the fact that Hannah had given birth to three more sons and two daughters. We can conclude, since Samuel was at least three or four years old when initially brought to the temple, he would at least be nine or ten, and could have been even older (a teenager) when he had his visitation and call from the Lord in I Samuel 3:1-21. The critical verse in this chapter is as follows: “Now Samuel **did not yet know the Lord**, nor had the word of the Lord yet been revealed to him.” (v. 7).

So here again, Samuel could well have been around age twelve

when this event occurred, an incident pointing out a demarcation in his life—of “not knowing” and then “knowing” the Lord.

2. Another passage which marks out this demarcation is found in Nehemiah 8:1-3. After Nehemiah and the Jews had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem they gathered together in worship to hear Ezra the Scribe read the Torah: “And the people gathered as one man, . . .and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of **men, women, and all who could listen with *understanding***. And he read from it before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of **men and women, those who could *understand***; and all the people were **attentive** to the book of the law. . .And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the **sense** so that they **understood** the reading (v.8). By implication, the younger children—those without understanding—were **not** present.

3. Another interesting “accountability” issue is found in the Torah which involves the numbering of the fighting men of Israel in the book of Numbers. We are told in Numbers 1 that Moses was instructed to “take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and their families. . .according to the number of names, every male, head by head **from twenty years and upward**, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel.” (1:2,3). This passage informs us that there were *no teenagers* in Israel’s army. This census was taken at the end of the entire year the Israelites spent at Mt. Sinai where they received the Law, and during which time they built the Tabernacle and organized themselves into a well-defined community. They were now to embark upon the conquest of Canaan. However, they were called upon to postpone that conquest because of their unbelief and disobedience at Kadesh Barnea. God sent them into the wilderness for forty years after their “Reconnaissance” of Canaan by the twelve spies



ended in failure.

After this forty-year exile we read in Deuteronomy 2:14-16, "Now the time that it took for us to come from Kadesh-barnea to (here has been) thirty-eight years; until all the generation of the men of war perished from within the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them. Moreover the hand of the Lord was against them, to destroy them from within the camp, until they all perished."

What is significant here is that those men who perished were those selected for the army forty years earlier whose ages ranged from twenty to age sixty. The Bible says that by thirty-eight years later, all of these men, the men of "unbelief," had now died off, leaving only the new generation which *would* be allowed to enter Canaan. This new "fighting force" would include that original group of males (from age 1 to 19 (which would now be ages 40 to 59) as well as all the males which had been born during the roughly forty years of Wilderness wanderings. So here again, there is an "age of accountability" factor taken into account by the Lord and His servant, Moses. There was no judgment upon this younger group of males. They were allowed to enter Canaan and participate in the conquest of the Land.

There is another passage that touches on this later "age of accountability" from the life of Jehoiachin, II Kings 24:8: "Jehoiachin was **eighteen** years old when he became king. . .and he did **evil** in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done." So here we find an eighteen- year-old king who is viewed by the Lord as being accountable for the evil he had already done.

I put this section in, but I don't personally believe that exempting the "under-twenty-year-olds" at the time of the Exodus is a likely precedent for an age of accountability. Furthermore, we find in the legal regulations of the Torah that a disobedient and unmanageable teenager was responsible

for his actions, and could be stoned to death by the community! This could occur for cursing his parents, violence, drunkenness, adultery, and so forth. So, in my thinking, the ten to twelve year age would seem more likely for an age of understanding or accountability.

4. Another passage which bears upon our question comes from the life of David, and specifically the outcome of his sin with Bathsheba and the premeditated murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite (II Samuel 11 & 12). You will recall that David lusted after Bathsheba's great beauty and committed adultery with her, after which she became pregnant (11:1-5). David gave instructions to have Uriah placed "in the fiercest battle and withdraw from him so that he may be struck down and die." (11:15). After Uriah's death, David brought Bathsheba to his house as his wife, and she bore him a son. (11:27) Nathan the prophet confronts David with his sin and says, "because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die.: Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick." (12:14,15).

The child lingered for seven days and then died. During this time, David prayed and fasted and laid on the ground. When the child died the servants were afraid to tell David, but he saw them whispering and they finally told him, "He is dead." (12:19).

When David heard this, he got up, washed himself, changed his clothes, asked for food and ate. His servants were perplexed by this: while the child lived, David mourned. When the child died, David got up and ate food. They wondered why. David said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who knows, the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live. But now he has died; why should I fast.? Can I bring him back again? ***I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.***"(12:22,23)

David has a view of death and immortality which expresses itself in this incident involving the death of a child. David believes in the after life. In Psalm 23 he concludes by saying: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." So for David there was a place for the dead, including children—the house, or the dwelling place, of the Lord. David also speaks of this in Psalm 16:9,10 where he says, "For thou wilt not abandon (leave) my soul in Sheol (the grave); Neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to see (experience) decay (corruption)." David believes in the resurrection of the body—for himself, and for the Messiah (the Holy One) (see also Acts 13:35). Job says something very similar: "And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is flayed (corrupted) Yet without my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another."

The point of David's perspective is that he believes that the child is still alive and in God's presence, David anticipates that when *he* dies, he will join his little son in the house of the Lord: "I shall go to him."

5. Finally, we have the teachings of Jesus Himself. In Matthew 19:13-15, our Lord says as the children we being hindered from coming near to Him, "*Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these, and after laying His hands on them, He departed. . .*"

Christ has a special love for little children. Why He associates children with the Kingdom of Heaven is because it is the place of the innocent, the blameless. It would appear that Jesus sees children in this light. The whole trend of Scripture seems to teach that the innocents who are too young to sin and too young to accept Christ intelligently (*with understanding!*), are safe in the arms of a just and holy God.

We need never fear about God being unjust. He cannot be. His mercy and justice are from everlasting to everlasting. I therefore conclude, that there will be no children in hell. There will also be no retarded, or otherwise mentally-incapacitated individuals there, those who cannot fully comprehend and understand what Christ has accomplished on their behalf at Calvary.

In summary, I think we can conclude the following:

First, that there is some period of grace afforded the young before they have developed an understanding to fully comprehend the gospel message and its implications for their lives.

Second, there seems to be good scriptural support that all infants, like David's little son, go immediately, in their innocence, into the arms of the Lord.

Third, that the likely range of such an age of "accountability" may occur around the time of puberty.

Fourth, that we are not saying children younger than this "accountability age" commit no sin (as sinful tendencies and acts occur quite early in children), and because of their fallen nature, they do these things spontaneously, things which they have definitely NOT learned from their parents or their friends). What we are saying is that up to the point when they reach clear understanding, they do not come under the judgment of the Law.

I'm sure that much more could be gleaned from the scriptures on this, but these passages came to my mind. At least it's a start at answering your question, D\_\_\_\_. I hope this helps.

Jimmy Williams, Founder  
Probe Ministries

**Yes Sir, that does help. Thanks very much. What you wrote is**

what I've long believed, without really knowing how to defend it biblically.

Now for a follow-up question which seems to spring quite logically from what you wrote: If God exempts from holding accountable for their sins those who are not old enough to have "understanding," and those of any age who are incapable of having "understanding" (such as the mentally retarded), is it also possible, Scripturally speaking, that He exempts in some measure those who have never heard of Jesus at all—judging them perhaps by whatever standard He utilized for those before Christ (lived), both Jews and non-Jews, some of whom certainly gained eternal life, rather than automatically condemning them for not accepting the Savior of whom they never heard?

I would suggest you check the Probe web site and look for three articles which address this question: ["What About the Person Who Never Heard of Jesus,"](#) ["Is Jesus the Only Savior?"](#) and ["Is There a Second Chance to Believe After Death?"](#)

I would say in addition, to your remarks about Old Testament believers, that there were two kinds of people before Christ just as there are two kinds of people now: **believers** and **unbelievers**.

It is helpful for me to think of this in terms of a painting. As early as Genesis 3:15, immediately after the "Disobedience/Fall" God began to reveal His plan of redemption. He speaks there of the "Seed" of a Woman" who would one day **crush** the head of Satan and destroy his power and influence on the earth.

As we move through the Old Testament, God continues, with broad strokes at first, to sketch out the details of Who this Person would be. By the time we get to Malachi, a fairly accurate portrait of Messiah and His Mission has been provided. The New Testament is the fulfillment of that

unfolding from the Old.

Jesus said, "Your Father Abraham **saw my day** (time, era) and rejoiced in it" (John 8:16). Now, what did He see (comprehend, understand)? Not the **whole** picture revealed in the New Testament, but enough information for him to have a basis (God's promise of a Messiah) for his trust, his belief, at that time.

Noah is another example. There is nothing directly mentioned about the Messiah in the Noah narrative (except the fact that the Ark itself is a **type** of Christ—those inside the Ark were saved; those outside the Ark perished), the important principle is that God revealed some things to Noah and asked him to be obedient to them.

We cannot understand this Old Testament Salvation issue unless we see clearly what God was doing. What was He doing from Genesis 3:15 to the end of the Old Testament? He was progressively revealing more and more details about His promised Messiah. Hebrews 1:1-2 says, "God spoke long ago to the fathers by the prophets and in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."

It seems apparent that the Old Testament saints had *some* "light" and they were responsible to respond to it. The CROSS has always been the *basis* for our salvation. Those who came before it looked *forward* in time to when it *would* be fulfilled. Those of us who have lived *after* Jesus's Day look back to that time when it *was* accomplished. This is the *basis* for our salvation. The *means* of our salvation is always *faith*, encompassing all who lived before and all who lived after the Cross who "believed God" and whatever revelatory information they had at that time. And the *results* of our faith are always expressed in being obedient to those things which God has revealed. I hope this information and the other articles I

have recommended you to read will answer your above question.

---

## Do Babies Go to Hell? #2

This is one of those items that, as you know, God has not revealed. Consider this: If we think they don't, that is, that God takes them all to Heaven, then abortion and the killing of those before the so-called age of accountability would be a great way to have more babies go to Heaven. Consider, what percent of those that reach the so-called age of accountability get saved/born again. By aborting and killing the young children we could increase that to 100 percent. This would of course make abortion and murder good.

Thank you for this response to my remarks about the above topic.

First of all, I respectfully disagree with your first statement. It seems to me that, while we do not have a total answer to this question from the Scriptures, I enumerated several lines of thought pertaining to the question, one of which was a clear, biblical example recorded of a child who had died and went to heaven. So I don't think you could say "God has not revealed anything about this issue to us. We do have *some* information and insight from the Scriptures.

So I will restate my conviction that I do believe there are *not*—nor will there ever be—any children in hell.

Secondly, I don't follow your logic in your next statement. Given my view, any infant death—whether from abortion, accident, disease, assault or other causes—does not matter: *All* babies go to heaven. And so aborting children would *not* be a great way to have more babies go to Heaven, as you suggest, since all of them go to Heaven.

Thirdly, you have tacked on to this another issue which must

be kept separate from the above. You say, I think, that we would be doing *some* persons (those who are not going to become Christians after they have reached the age of accountability when they are held responsible to God for their choices and behavior) a big "favor" by aborting them. I hope I am reading you right.

There are several things very wrong about what you propose: (a) I would assume that you believe, as I do, that the "termination of a pregnancy" (i.e., a euphemism for killing and destroying an unborn infant) is murder. This is a violation of the Sixth Commandment (Ex. 20:13). This commandment alone is in opposition to what you suggest. (b) Further, in order to carry out such a task, you would literally have to be God Himself, since you don't know which ones are the "fledgling" non-believers upon whom you are to perform your acts of "mercy." (c) But why stop there? Why not go ahead and do the same with the mentally-impaired? The comatose? The "*non compos mentis*" elderly? Would they not also qualify? Something is wrong with this picture.

Fourthly, you say that carrying out such an enterprise would "make abortion and murder good." This is actually very far from what I view as a Scriptural perspective. Paul asks, "Shall we sin (continue in sin) so that (we can see) grace abound? (Romans 6:1)" In other words, should we take advantage of God's forgiveness of sins through Christ and go on sinning so we can see His marvelous Grace go to work to cover it? Paul says, "God forbid." He elaborates on this later on: "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cleave to what is good (12:9)." Earlier Paul defends his actions against those who were criticizing him and his colleagues, "slanderosly reporting that we say, '*let us **do evil** that **good** may come.*' *Their condemnation is just* (Romans 3:8)." In Psalm 109:3-5 David's words could easily be applied to the unborn: "They have spoken against me. . they have also surrounded me with words of hatred, And fought against me *without cause*. In



return for my love (innocence) they act as my accusers;...Thus they have repaid me *evil for good*. ...and *hatred* for my *love*.” In II Corinthians 13:7,8 Paul says, “Now we pray to God *that you do no wrong*...but that you may *do what is right* . ...For we can do *nothing* against the *truth*, but only *for* the truth.” In Proverbs 17:13 it says, “He who returns evil for good, Evil will not depart from his house.” And “He who *justifies* the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an *abomination* to the Lord (vs. 15,16).” And Moses says, “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you *life* and *death*, the blessing and the curse. So *choose life* in order that you may live, you and your seed, by loving the Lord your God, by *obeying* His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days (Deut. 30:19,20).” And finally, James says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does *not tempt anyone* [to do evil] (James 1:13).”

The principle is pretty clear: **“It is never *right* to do *wrong* in order to do *right*.” “It is never *good* to do *evil* in order to do *good*.”**

I hope this answers your question, \_\_\_\_\_ .

God’s blessings,

Jimmy Williams, Founder  
Probe Ministries

---

## Do Babies Go To Hell #3

First, I want to say that our family has been blessed by the ministry of Probe. I’ve caught up on my mail, and just read the answer to the questions “Do Babies Go to Hell?” There is a passage in Romans that always comes to mind in this regard. It

**is Romans 7:9.**

I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

This is "the" verse that really spoke to me about the existence of an "age of accountability," whatever that age may be. Being a Jew, and a Pharisee at that, I'm sure Paul had a knowledge of the law on some level at an early age. But it wasn't until it "came" to him (he understood it?) that he was accountable, i.e. he "died" (came under condemnation which he knew was worthy of death).

**Just though I'd pass this on. I might not have bothered to respond, not wanting to take time to look up the verse, but I just read Romans 7 this morning so it was "quite" fresh in my mind. And I can never read this without thinking of this point.**

**May the Lord continue to bless your ministry.**

PraiSing Him,

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for your e-mail and comments on Romans 7:9. It really relates to this subject. I am glad you are benefiting from the Probe web site. Thank you for expressing your appreciation, which is a real encouragement to all the Probe Staff.

Jimmy Williams  
Probe Ministries

---

## Do Babies Go To Hell #4

I frequent your web site and have enjoyed it thoroughly. It has helped to shape me and has been a source of God's truth for me. For that I am grateful!! I don't think that once I have ever felt that you have been different than what God's truth says. Below I raise some questions about the recent article about babies' salvation. Please comment to help me understand how you feel. Thanks.

First of all, the Bible says that ". . .all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to our own way. . ." ". . . there is none that doeth good, no not one." These folks that believe that children won't be held accountable for their sins, I believe, don't understand the fallen nature of man and the righteous character of an all-Holy God.

Even David had a handle on this doctrine when he wrote in Psalm 51: "Behold, I was shaped in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me."

It's important to note that the "all" and "everyone" listed above means all people, even babies, born and yet unborn. We are by nature sinful, which means we are spiritually dead and enemies of God. Spiritually-dead people (of any age) cannot make themselves spiritually alive any more than physically-dead people can make themselves physically alive.

Spiritually-dead babies are enemies of God and separated from Him and completely unable to change that situation. The nature of God is that He is totally just and righteous. The Bible says, ". . . I am of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "I will by no means clear the guilty." He had sworn a "thousand" times in Scripture to punish sin wherever He finds it. His justice demands that He do it. He cannot make any exceptions.

So. . .this is why Jesus came to earth to die on the cross. If babies were not going to be held accountable for their sins (and would automatically go to heaven when they die) as this fellow teaches, then Jesus wasn't needed for them. This path would lead us to believe that Jesus came to die only for those who have reached that mystical "age of accountability" and understand their sinful condition and can make a decision regarding the gospel. It is true that as we mature and do become aware of our thoughts and behavior and choices that we will be held accountable for them. Those who assert that the age of accountability is when children become responsible before God, yet none of them seem to know when that age is. Wouldn't it seem important to know that?

One more thing. By stating that we must reach this (unknown) age before we can understand and believe and thus be responsible for our salvation puts some of the credit for our being saved upon US, doesn't it?

The business of enlightening souls and saving same belongs to the Holy spirit. Martin Luther stated, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in God or come to Him. . ." We are saved by God alone. "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

We are accountable for our sins from conception and can only be saved when the Holy Spirit gives us this faith and changes us from spiritually dead to spiritually alive. This is why we embrace Baptism. In I Peter 3:21, Peter states: "Therefore we conclude, that Baptism doth also save us, not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

In Baptism, we are responding to a command of Christ's and the Holy Spirit promises to save us through the water and the Word by this act. What do you think of this?

Thank you for your recent e-mail. I appreciate the fact that you have found benefit from the Probe Website. I am the fellow you refer to who is responsible for writing the e-mail, "Do Babies Go to Hell?"

In your first two paragraphs you mention the fact that from conception babies bear the stamp of sin. I have no problem with this as long as we understand what that means. And what it means is that babies are members of a fallen race (See my discussion on this in E-Mail #1). Sin is passed on genetically from the male. This was why the Virgin Birth was necessary and specifically why Jesus was "without sin." He is therefore the only exception to the general rule.

And I also agree with you that apart from the working of God, all humans are spiritually dead until they hear the Gospel, respond to it and are born again into the family of God.

You say that "spiritually-dead babies (born and unborn) are enemies of God, separated from Him, and are completely unable to change that situation." And I agree with you on the basis of what I have just said above. But I want to ask you a question. Do you then believe that every embryo, every unborn fetus, and all toddlers, let's say, from the beginning of time until now, are actually in hell? What if we add four and five-year olds? Them too? I don't think so. But this is what you are asserting to be true.

I point you back to a review of my original discussion in E-Mail #1 about an alternative to your conclusion and one which has some (not exhaustive) support in the Scriptures. Specifically, I would ask you to focus on David's experience with his newborn son (from Bathsheba) who became sick and died seven days after his birth (II Samuel 11 and 12). After the child has died, David says, "I shall go to him, but he will not return to me (12:22,23)." Now here is a baby that had, as we all do, a sin nature, but *didn't* go to Hell. In Psalm 23 we have a clear indication of where David felt he would be after

death: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." And he anticipated that he would again see his little son.

In your next paragraph you make the assumption that those who have not reached the age of accountability have no need of a Savior. I don't follow your logic. On the basis of your own premise that all in Adam are tainted with sin and are in need of a redeemer, I don't understand why you would say His death would not apply to these young ones as well. You do admit that **"it is true that as we mature and do become aware of our thoughts and behavior and choices that we will be held accountable for them."** That is exactly the point. The primary reason that Christian parents hesitate to explain the Gospel to very young children is because those parents want them to be old enough to fully UNDERSTAND what Jesus did for them.

This leads me on to answer your question about "pinning down" what/when that age might be. I don't think we can arbitrarily pick an exact age for everyone. There are too many variables. But we do know this: there are FOUR components necessary for one to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We find them in Paul's interchange with Lydia in Acts 16:14: "And a certain woman named Lydia. . .was (1) **listening**, and the (2) **Lord opened her heart to respond** to the (3) **things spoken** by (4) **Paul**."

In Acts 9:27-39 we have the account of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was reading Isaiah 53 out loud as he sat in his chariot. Philip ran up and asked him, "Do you **understand** what you are reading? The eunuch answered, "How could I, unless **someone guides** me?" You know the rest of the story. My point here is that even **adults** don't become Christians until they, with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, come to **understand** the gospel and see it with the eyes of faith. Would it be any **less** important for children to have the same understanding?

We also find in the Scriptures times when God **overlooked** sin

under certain circumstances as the redemptive work unfolded through time: “the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness , because of the **passing over** of the **sins** previously committed in the **forbearance** of God (Romans 3:24-25.” (See also Acts 17:30; Romans 5:13,14). You will also find other, similar elements in the first e-mail.

In your next paragraph you indicate you feel special credit is due those who come to a place of accountability to God, and that their use of reason or comprehension somehow negates the work of the Spirit. I point you back to Lydia. NO ONE COMES TO CHRIST WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL. This involves *reason*. And part of that reasoning is to comprehend Romans 6:23—it is, as you mention, by *grace* and not of works, “lest *anyone* might boast.”

You conclude with some comments about baptism, and quote I Peter 3:21. I am not sure why you included this in the discussion, but let me comment: First of all, I am wondering if you are including believer baptism as *part* of the Gospel: that is, you believe one does not become a Christian when he *believes* the Gospel, but rather that you only accomplish when you are baptized. I am assuming that you are not here referring to infant baptism, which, incidentally, is used by some segments of Christendom to do something to *cover* these young ones until they come of an age when they *can* understand the Gospel. I do not personally believe that baptizing an infant with water, without an understanding of the Gospel, accomplishes *anything*. It isn't even mentioned in Scripture.

Further, Paul tells us clearly in Romans 1:16 that he is “not ashamed of the **gospel**, for **it** is the **power** of God **unto salvation for every one who believes.**” And so it is clear that the **Gospel** is the power of God unto Salvation, and *nothing* else. But we find in 1 Corinthians 1:17 that Paul **clearly** distinguishes between the Gospel and Baptism: “For Christ did

not send me to **baptize**, but to preach the **gospel**.” Evidently, Paul does not include baptism as part of the gospel, but rather saw it as the appropriate response of obedience following one’s conversion. Even the verse you quote from Peter must be carefully read: Peter qualifies his statement about baptism by making sure he is not misunderstood. He appears to me to be saying that water will not wash away sin, but rather, in **obedience** to the command of Christ, the believer, in good conscience toward God, gives his answer, or his response, to the truth of the Gospel by submitting to baptism. Baptism is a public testimony of one’s inner commitment to the Person and Work of Christ: “The word is near you, in your **mouth**, and in your **heart**.—That is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you **confess** with your **mouth** Jesus as Lord, and **believe** in your **heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be **saved**; for with the **heart** man **believes**, resulting in righteousness, and with the **mouth** he **confesses**, resulting in **salvation**.”

You asked me to comment on these issues and I have tried to do this as honestly as I can from my understanding of God’s Word. You may not be comfortable with all of my responses, but I have given you my “best shot.”

May the Lord bless you and your family,

Jimmy Williams, Founder  
Probe Ministries

© 2001 Probe Ministries

---



# **“Did Jesus Preach to the Cherokee Indians?”**

Dear Sue,

I heard in a newspaper article a while ago that some time in his life Jesus travelled on a Phoenician sailing vessel to North America and ministered to the Cherokee Indians there. The article said that there was evidence of this because the Cherokee believe in a single, all-powerful God, which is something unusual in Native American religions; that the Cherokee believe many of the same things from the Gospels; and that they had drawings of a man with a beard (who looked like the stereotypical image of Jesus) in their art and that this was strange because no men in the tribe grew beards.

I really don't know if all this is true or not, it seems to be but I know that the newspaper I read this from is not a reliable source and is known for making phony stories to get sales, but I can't help but wonder if this one is true. Have you ever heard anything about this?

You know what you said about the newspaper being known for making up phony stories to get sales? There's your answer. <smile> I'm sure the article gave no documentation for their "story" (written from the perspective of the "Well, it COULD have happened!!" school of "journalism"). That's because there's nothing to it. . . they just stole some ideas from Mormon claims that Jesus came to North America. There is no New World archeology that supports such a claim.

Furthermore, Greek culture had absorbed the Phoenician civilization before Jesus was even born. Alexander the Greek took the Phoenician city of Tyre around 332 B.C. and it was all downhill from there, so the Lord Jesus couldn't have taken a Phoenician sailing vessel anywhere.

It's not surprising that native North American spirituality included the concept of one God—ever hear of the term “the Great Spirit”? Don Richardson's book *The Peace Child* shows that cultures and peoples all over the world are aware of biblical truth that has been handed down since the time of Noah and the tower of Babel when civilizations really began migrating all over the world.

If I were you, I'd stay away from the tabloids.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

---

## **“Is There a Second Chance to Believe After Death?”**

Hi there Jim. We've spoken before and I found it quite helpful. Can I ask you a question on divine judgment? What about those who would come before God and who really weren't HONESTLY sure about it all and didn't become a Christian in life? When they stood in front of Him and God knew how they felt through life...would that be fair to send them to hell? Obviously they would have a sudden change of heart, right? Thanks, Jim.

If I understand you correctly, you are wondering if a person who is skeptical of the claims of Christ throughout life, didn't CLEARLY understand the gospel but you imply if they had, they would have placed their faith in Christ. And then you wonder if once dead and seeing that His claims were genuine, God would be unfair in sending that person to hell.

If I am not clear on your meaning here, please let me know.

First of all, the Bible says that "it is appointed unto man **ONCE** to die and afterwards comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27)." This seems to rule out any idea of a second chance, and the concept of reincarnation as well.

Furthermore, we are told in John 16:8-11 that the Holy Spirit is constantly convicting the world (including your hypothetical person) of "sin, righteousness, and judgment." What this means is that *no one* is left without an opportunity to respond to this prompting of the Spirit, repent, and place their faith in Christ.

And Romans 1:18-20 Paul tells us that God's **wrath** has been revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness (as we see above in the John passage), and "because that which is **known** about God is **evident within** them. . . For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been **clearly seen**, being understood through what has been made, so they are **without excuse**."

Luke 17 also gives us some things which bear on your question. Read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (17:19-31). The crux of the story is that both of these men died. The rich man found himself in hell, and was able to see Lazarus (the poor beggar) in heaven (Abraham's Bosom). The rich man is in torment, and now, "knowing" the truth of things, asks if he could be sent back to earth to talk to his five brothers and warn them so they don't join him in hell. (This is analogous to the man in your hypothetical). Look carefully at the Lord's answer. He tells the man it wouldn't do any good. The Lord says they *have* a witness: Moses and the Prophets. The rich man says, yes, but they would *listen* if someone came back from the dead and *told* them!

Jesus responds by saying if they didn't believe/respond to the light they already had (through Moses and the Prophets), they

wouldn't be persuaded even if someone came back from the dead to tell them! In short, the necessary information and guidance to enter the family of God is available to all during their lifetime. And faith must have an object worthy of its trust. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that "Without **faith** it is **impossible** to please God, for he who comes to God must **believe** that He is, and is a rewarder of those who **diligently seek** Him."

Now what would be fair about giving those who "sat" on the fence, ignored the evidence, and failed to **exercise faith** in Christ, and then, when dead, like the rich man, now **knowing** the truth, (no need to exercise faith) asking for another chance?

There are **no unbelievers** in heaven *or* hell. They are now **all** believers. They know the truth. Unfortunately, those who chose not to respond to all of the "signposts" God has given the world (which could be believed if any person desired), they must face the consequences of their "non-actions." It would not be fair of God to include the man you are suggesting along with those who pleased God by exercising their faith in Christ while faith was still the issue!

I hope this answers your question, \_\_\_\_\_.

Jimmy Williams, Founder  
Probe Ministries

---

# **"Why Didn't God Just Not Create the People Who**

# Wouldn't Believe in Him?"

I have a question about God's omniscience versus the existence of hell. I know the Bible says (and I believe it) that God is good and loving, as well as holy and just. It also says that He is omniscient, knowing the end from the beginning, and knowing from eternity-past the choice that every human being that ever lived/will live will make – either to accept His offer of eternal life, or to reject it.

If both of these statements are true and biblical, my question is this: If God knew (even before creation) that millions of people would make the choice to reject Him (and thus end up in hell by their own choice), why did He simply not create them in the first place? I know this might sound simplistic, but why would He create all of those people who would ultimately reject Him and end up in hell, if He KNEW that would be their final and eternal destination? (A non-Christian friend of mine calls it "a cruel joke.")

This is a tough question. I was tempted to write back and say, "We just don't know," and ultimately that's probably true. "Why" questions are about motives, and unless someone tells us, it's awfully hard to read another person's mind. . . especially God's! But as I thought more about it, I realized that I COULD pass on the observation that our choice is a precious thing to God because choice is the foundation for true love. If God didn't create the people who wouldn't choose Him, then that would be the equivalent of removing the choice.

At any rate, He did, and He knows what He's doing, and I guess we just need to trust Him.

I think we need to see the Lord as reluctantly letting people choose hell instead of gleefully sending them there. He doesn't want ANYONE to perish (2 Peter 3:9), but some insist on it. That's not cruel on His part, it's a way of supporting

our choices.

Nonetheless, the bottom line is that it's a mystery. Non-believers aren't going to trust His heart when they don't trust anything about Him in the first place, are they?

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

---

## **“How Can a Just God Order the Slaughter of Men, Women and Children?”**

I am a Christian and spend time talking with others often about God, but I have been speechless when they bring up the issue, for example, in I Samuel 15:1-3 where God tells His people to destroy the men and the women and children as well. This is difficult to see that as part of His character. Is that a just God? What was He thinking?? I understand that the Amalekites ambushed them when travelling from Egypt but why the women and children?? I would really appreciate your reply. Thank you.

This is indeed a question often asked by critics of the Bible. It is a legitimate question and one that deserves a comprehensive, complete and, hopefully, acceptable answer. So let me see if I can address it.

One of the most important rules of Hermeneutics (the task of interpretation, meaning of a verse or passage of Scripture) is to observe the *context* of what you are seeking to interpret correctly. This is crucial in seeking to answer this question

you have raised. We need to see clearly the historical background and the situation which called for such severe measures to be taken.

### ***Who were the Canaanites?***

Canaan, the Bible tells us, was the fourth son of Ham, who was one of the three sons of Noah. The use of the word "Canaan" stems from the fact that Canaan's descendants populated the land which was later called Palestine, and now is called Israel. Modern Syria is also included and it is roughly the same land which God promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21; Numbers 34:1-12).

The Amalekites which you mentioned were one of several tribes which are often referred to collectively as either Canaanites or Phoenicians. Their language was either Ugaritic or Phoenician, two Semitic dialects close to the Hebrew dialect. Other major "Canaanite" tribes included the Amorites, Jebusites, Hivites, Girgasites, Ammonites, Edomites, and Moabites. The Phoenicians were a sea-faring people who lived along the Mediterranean Coast. They also had colonies which included Cypress, Sardinia, and Carthage.

### ***What were their Religious beliefs and practices?***

Archaeology has given us substantial material about these people, and particularly from their capital city, Ugarit. Thousands of clay tablets have been recovered from Ras Shamra in northern Syria, including the libraries of two great temples dating from the 15th-14th century B.C. Much of this epic literature has to do with their religious practices and their pantheon of gods. Merrill F. Unger notes that Canaanite cultic practices were more base than any other place in the ancient Near East. (*Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p.172). Let me list some of the features of their religious beliefs and practices.

### **The Canaanite Pantheon (of gods)**

A full description of the Canaanite gods has been provided by C. R. Driver, who translated the Ras Shamra tablets found in the ancient city of Ugarit.

## **El**

The head of the Canaanite pantheon. El was generally a rather remote and shadowy figure, but sometimes stepped down from his eminence and became the hero of exceedingly "earthy" myths. He is described as living at a great distance ("a thousand plains, ten thousand fields,") from Canaan, and to this remote spot the gods invariably had to travel when they wished to consult him.

El was called the "father of years," the "father of man," and also the "father bull," i.e. the progenitor of all the gods. He is likened to a bull in the midst of a herd of cows and calves. According to the text, El had three wives: Astarte (goddess of the evening star), Asherah (goddess of the sea and consort to Baal), and Baaltis—all three his sisters. He is a brutal, bloody tyrant, whose acts caused all the gods to be terrified by his decisions. For example, he dethroned his own father ("Heaven, Uranus") and castrated him; he killed his own favorite son, "Iadid," and cut off his daughter's head. The tablets also portray El as seducing two women, whose names are not mentioned, and he allows them to be driven into the desert after the birth of two children, "Dawn" (shahru) and "Sunset" (shalmu). W. F. Albright in the *American Journal of Semitic Languages*, XXXV, comments that the description of the act of seduction of these two women is one of the frankest and most sensuous in ancient Near-Eastern literature.

## **Baal and Mot**

Baal is the great storm-god. He brings the rain, and announces his present with thunder and lightning and, most important of all, the needed rain which would insure a good harvest. He became the reigning king of the gods, and was enthroned on a lofty mountain in the far northern heavens, but faithfully reappears each year to sustain the people. Mot, whose name



means “death,” represents the god of “drought” and “sterility.” In the myth, he is Baal’s chief and continual antagonist. Even Baal must yield to Mot when his time (of the year) comes. When Mot comes, Baal’s time is over and he is ordered to take everything connected with him down into the depths of the earth:

“And you, take your clouds,  
Your wind, your storm, your rains!  
With you take Padriya daughter of the stream.  
With you take Tatalliya daughter of rain.”(67:v:6-11)

The situation could hardly be more clearly described: the season of drought has come, the rain and the clouds have vanished; the streams have dried up and the vegetation languishes. But before Baal descends into the earth, however, he

*“Makes love to a heifer in Debir,  
A young cow in the fields of Shimmt.  
He lies with her seventy-seven times—  
Yea, he copulates eighty-eight times—  
So she conceives and bears a child.”(76:v;18-22)*

## **Anath**

The goddess of fertility. She was considered a divine prostitute. She is represented as a naked woman in the prime of life, standing on a lion, with a lily in one hand and a serpent or two in the other. Often two rams are present to portray her sexual vigor. The female organs are always accentuated.

It is important to bear in mind that these “myths” were ritualistically enacted. Therefore we can assume that ritual bestiality was practiced by the priesthood, and temple prostitution was practiced by the adherents (priestesses) of the Anath fertility cult. Cyrus Gordan has written “that it was no crime for men to copulate with animals in Ugarit is

indicated by the fact that...Baal impregnated a heifer...a myth...enacted ritually by reputable priests... Moreover, the Bible tells us that the Hebrews' pagan neighbors practiced bestiality (Lev. 18:24) as we now know to be literally true from the Ugaritic documents" (Ugaritic Literature, p. 8).

With Baal's seasonal death, his father, El, the chief god, goes into mourning. El descends from his throne and sits in sackcloth and ashes on the ground. He lacerates himself, making cuts on his face, arms chest and back (cf. I Kings 18:28):

"Dead is Baal, the Overcomer  
Absent is the Prince, Lord (Baal) of the Earth (67:VI:9,10)  
He pours the ashes of grief on his head.  
The dust of mourning on his pate;  
For clothing, he is covered with sackcloth,  
He roams the mountain in mourning:  
He mutilates his face and beard.  
He lacerates his forearms.  
He plows his chest like a garden.  
He lacerates his back like a valley  
He lifts his voice and shouts: 'Baal is dead!'  
Woe to the people, Woe to the multitudes of Baal  
I shall go down into the earth." (67:VI:15-24)

Anath, Baal's consort, repeats this cry and copies El's self-mutilation.

How does God, the Bible, portray the Canaanites? The clearest and most comprehensive biblical assessment of the Canaanites is found in Leviticus 18:1-5:

"Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do *what is done in the land of Canaan* where I am bringing you; *you shall not walk in their statutes*

(ways). You are to perform My judgments and keep my statutes, to live in accord with them. I am the Lord your God. So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord."

By inference, everything forbidden in this chapter is simply a description of what the Canaanites were doing. First on the list of forbidden practices is incest, sexual intercourse with blood relatives and in-laws: your father and mother (v.7,8), your sister (v. 9), your daughter (v. 10), your niece (v. 11), your aunt (v.12, 13), your uncle (v.15), your sister-in-law (v.16), any woman or her children (17), polygamy (two sisters-v.18), adultery (your neighbor's wife-v. 20), ritual child sacrifice (v.21), homosexuality, sodomy (v.22), bestiality (animals-v. 23). God summarizes these prohibitions with:

"Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have visited its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and my judgments, and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you; for the men of the land who have been before you have done ALL these abominations, and the land has become defiled; so that the land may not spew you out should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people. Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the Lord your God." (Lev. 18:24-30).

### ***God's Purpose and Intent***

What we observe above is in stark contrast to the cultic practices of the Canaanites, the high standards and

expectations of conduct laid out by the God of Israel for His people. Why is it so important that the Israelites shun these practices of the indigent population, the Canaanites?

Because God is doing something new, something important. He has redeemed his chosen people from Egyptian bondage and is in the process of fulfilling his ancient promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12. The larger plan involves an earlier promise (Genesis 3:15) that there would come a "Seed of the Woman" who would crush Satan and establish a means to undo the damage done in Eden through their disobedience. This plan of redemption is promised, and the remainder of the Old Testament is a working out in history the unfolding of that plan to provide a Savior, a Redeemer, a Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise.

And in Abraham God found a worthy servant who would become the patriarch, the father of a nation through whom Messiah would come, bringing untold blessing and deliverance through his life, death, and resurrection to all those who believe. Redemptive history is a long process. It began in Eden immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, and it will one day end in the New Jerusalem.

God's peculiar people begin with Abraham and his immediate descendants: first Isaac, then Jacob, and then Joseph. These four were the founders, the patriarchs of this new people God was shaping to be the vehicle through which Messiah would come. The Israelites then spent four hundred years in bondage in Egypt until Moses was raised up to deliver them with "a strong hand." Pharaoh finally let them go. They traveled to Mt. Sinai and stayed there a full year. They arrived at Sinai a disorganized mob; they left there a year later an organized host. During that year God revealed to them the constitutional foundations of their heritage and their mission. He spelled out the rules of their conduct, their worship, and how they would live in community. At the end of this year, they were poised east of the Jordan and ready to go into Canaan and take

it by force. But after spying out the land, the fear of the majority with respect to this campaign caused them to shrink back from their task, and God sent them into the wilderness to wander for forty years. The new generation that emerged at the close of this period of divine discipline was finally allowed to go into the Canaan and possess it.

As they prepared themselves for this task, Moses summarized for a second time (the book of Deuteronomy) just what it would take, and what they would have to do. Ironically, the issue of the Canaanites is first spoken of way back in Genesis 15! God is speaking to Abraham and He mentions the problem of the Canaanites. He first speaks of (predicts) the Egyptian bondage which would come, and then He speaks of the deliverance from Egypt, and then He promises the conquest and repossession of the Promised Land. He says:

Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions... And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. Then, in the fourth generation they shall return here (Canaan) *for the iniquity of the Amorite (Canaanites) is not yet **complete*** (Gen. 15:12-16).

What is interesting about this is that the wickedness of the Canaanites is already recognized as a problem 400+ years before God will give the command that the Canaanites are to be slaughtered—men, women, and children! At the time the Lord spoke these words to Abraham (c. 2,000 B.C.), the Canaanites were already corrupt, but they still had a way to go before God, who is a patient, merciful but Holy God, would finally bring judgment upon them. God gave them 400 years to “shape up,” but we find them even more wicked than ever when the Israelites are about to invade (retake) their land!

What is also interesting is that when Jericho was about to be taken, Rahab the prostitute hid the two Israeli spies in her home, lied to the authorities about it, and then helped the spies escape over the wall. While the spies were in her home she said some remarkable things:

“She came up to them on the roof and said to them, I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the Amorites whom you utterly destroyed beyond the Jordan... And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord, your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by the Lord, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with me...and deliver our lives from death.” (Joshua 2:8-13)

Not only Rahab knew of God’s powerful deliverance; she tells us that everyone else knew about these events and were fearful for their lives! The difference between Rahab and the rest of the people of Jericho is that she saw in these mysterious workings none other than the hand of the true God Himself! She repented; she believed! Because of her faith, she is mentioned in Faith’s Hall of Fame (Hebrews 11:31)! My point is that other Canaanites could have responded as she did. Unfortunately, they continued on in their wicked, rebellious ways. The fullness of the “Amorites” is now complete. National judgment is at hand, with Israel as the instrument God will use to put an end to a totally depraved culture.

***Why Such Excessive Slaughter? Why the Women? Why the Children?***

God explains this to us in Romans 1:17-2:2:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all

ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an *image* in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to *impurity*, that their bodies might be *dishonored* among them. For they exchanged the *truth of God* for a lie, and worshipped and served the *creature* rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God *gave them over* to *degrading* passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is *unnatural*, and in the same way also the men *abandoned* the natural function of the woman and *burned in their desire* towards one another, *men with men* committing *indecent acts* and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God *gave them over* to a *depraved mind*, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, *haters of God*, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, with out understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and though they know the ordinance of God, that *those who*

*practice such things are **worthy of death**, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.*

Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you...and we know that the judgment of God *rightfully falls upon those who practice such things.*"

The Romans passage above describes for us in vivid detail how this can happen to a culture. And this is exactly the kind of conditions existing in Canaan as the Israelites approached to conquer the land which had been promised them. God makes it very clear to them the reasons for what they must do and how they must do it:

"Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess nations greater and mightier than you... Know therefore today that *it is the Lord your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you*, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the Lord has spoken to you.

Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of *my* righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' but *it is because of the wickedness of these nations* that the Lord is dispossessing them before you... It is not for *your* righteousness or for the uprightness of *your* heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the *wickedness of these nations* that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn (stiff necked) people!" (Deuteronomy



9:1-6)

God makes it very clear that sometimes things deteriorate so far that a culture or a people reaches a “point of no return.” The remedy is like trying to unscramble an egg. There is just no way back; things have gone too far. The story of the Genesis Flood is “Exhibit One”—a demonstration that He has already done this once on this planet. A good surgeon does not amputate a leg if someone has a severely stubbed toe. But a good surgeon will amputate if the infection is so massive that to refuse to do so would mean the loss of the whole body and person.

R.A. Torrey remarks: “It is appalling that any people should be utterly put to the sword, but it is even more appalling that a society of people should have become so corrupt and debased that such treatment is deemed necessary in the interest of humanity. The Canaanites were a moral cancer threatening the very life of the whole human race. The cancer had to be removed in order to save the body, just as a surgeon inflicts pain and suffering in order to remove a malignant growth in the body (*Difficulties in the Bible*. R.A. Torrey, p. 47).

This is exactly the dilemma God faced as the Israelites are brought back to possess their land. To settle them in the midst of these depraved people is asking for disaster. If the cancer remains, Israel will not survive. For Israel’s survival, the Canaanites will have to go. Israel will be corrupted by their presence and their influence. She will fall away from the Lord Who has loved her and delivered her. Ironically, this is exactly what happened, because while they disposed of most of the inhabitants of Canaan, *they did not remove all of them*. And Israel’s incomplete obedience in this matter actually brought about future, periodic relapses when they *did* cease “following the Lord” and served other gods through the ongoing influence of these pagan tribes.

With respect to the women, the experience of Lot, his wife, and his two daughters dwelling in Sodom is instructive. We are told that if ten righteousness men could have been found in the city, God would spare it from judgment. Judgment fell on the city, indicating ten were not found. Lot was "courting disaster" to be a believer and live in such an environment. As the account indicates, Lot survived the judgment because God graciously warned him to flee the city (this was really based upon God's honoring Abraham's intercession on Lot's behalf), but his wife turned around and looked back toward Sodom. This was her home. She liked Sodom. The immorality didn't bother her. She was still yearning for Sodom when God turned her into a pillar of salt. In some instances, the women are the "prime-movers" in leading the men into sin. Torrey comments: "Though true women are nobler than true men, depraved women are more dangerous than depraved men" (p. 48).

The two daughters were also affected. They had sense enough not to turn around and look at the city, but we find in their immoral, incestuous behavior with their own father later that they were already "damaged goods." This is a good warning for Christian parents. We may choose to live in or near "Sodom" and we ourselves may survive, but it is more than likely our children will not come away unaffected by their exposure to such an unwholesome environment.

With respect to the command to dispose of the children, there is at least one bright spot, severe as it is. Those who adopt children want to do so at the earliest possible age. Why? Because evidence shows that children are early affected by whatever their family system might be. The emotional and physical abuse and wounds inflicted upon them from birth to age five or six leave permanent scars which often cannot be healed. The scars remain, and even the best of environments cannot overcome the negative influences of those early years of development. Even these Canaanite children would have perpetuated the corrupt influence of the Canaanites among the

Hebrew Community, had they been spared.

We have all observed or known of families which are so dysfunctional and corrupt we grieve for their unhappy, confused, and suffering children, and wish to God somehow they could be removed and placed in some loving, caring home where they could feel safe and not suffer at the hands of hostile and even deranged parents. Happily, there are no children in hell. Jesus loves the little children. The one bright spot in this sordid story is that God removed an entire generation of Canaanite children and took them to such a home . . . His home.

Those who struggle the most with the forceful elimination of the Canaanites in this biblical account have a very dim and truncated view of God. We have seen above that God has the right, because of His holiness and His righteousness, to visit judgment upon individuals and nations who have become corrupt and degenerate. The amazing thing is, like with the Canaanites, that He waits so long. Torrey remarks,

“...Those who regard sin lightly and who have no adequate conception of God’s holiness will always find insurmountable difficulty in this command of God, but those who have come to see the awfulness of sin and have learned to hate it with the infinite hate it deserves, and who have caught some glimpses of the infinite holiness of God and have been made in some measure partakers of that holiness, will, after mature reflection, have no difficulty whatever with this command. It is consciousness of sin in our own hearts and lives that makes us rebel against God’s stern dealings with sin (p. 50).”

I hope this in some way helps to address your question,  
\_\_\_\_\_.

God Bless.

Jimmy Williams, Founder

# **“Are the Ideas of the Jesus Seminar Now Catholic Doctrine?”**

I am a philosophy major at Oregon State University where Marcus Borg is a professor. Many of the churches in our community ascribe to his teaching.

Here is my question...I have a dear friend that grew up in an evangelical Catholic home and knows Christ as her personal savior. She has been attending the local Catholic church here in Corvallis and recently has been strongly confronted by one of the deacons on issues surrounding the literalism of the Bible (i.e. the ideas of the Jesus Seminar, taught by Borg). The deacon has been telling her that Biblical non-literalism as Borg teaches is part of Catholic doctrine and part of the Catechism. Is this accurate? Is this indeed an international Catholic teaching or does it depend on the individual parish or person?

I would appreciate any wisdom you might have on this topic. Honestly, it's been really heated here lately, as Borg's new book has just been released. We would love it if either of you (or other speakers from Probe) could come out and do a presentation for all of the confused Christians. There is a strong evangelical movement in Corvallis, but unfortunately, it tends to be strongly anti-intellectual and isn't well respected in the university community. As a student, I want to be able to better understand the critical issues at hand and be able to represent Christ in grace, truth, and love.

Send me whatever thoughts you have...I read article on the Jesus Seminar through Leadership University and that helped, but I really would love even more detailed information if you have any.

Thank you so much for serving as a resource for students of the Word!

Thank you for your recent e-mail concerning the Jesus Seminar. I can empathize with your "dilemma" under the shadow of Marcus Borg at your university.

I don't know if you have checked the Probe Website ([www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org)) or not, but I would direct you to at least two essays: one that I wrote is called [The Jesus Seminar](#), and a second was written by my colleague, Rick Wade, entitled [The Historical Christ](#). You will find good bibliographical info for further study.

I would rather doubt that the tenets of the Jesus Seminar are now officially sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church worldwide. I would recommend that your friend ask for official, written documentation from this priest for his assertion that this is true. I am 99% positive that no such position has been taken by the Catholic church and its biblical scholars. There is too much at stake for the church to take such a radical stand which undermines much of what they have held to be true about Jesus Christ.

If you are looking for someone to come and debate Borg, I would suggest that you contact my good friend Dr. J. P. Moreland and/or Michael J. Wilkins at Talbot Seminary in southern California. They edited a book entitled *Jesus Under Fire* which was published by Zondervan in 1995. Each chapter is written by a evangelical scholar, each of which develops and refutes the major arguments of the Jesus Seminar position.

I have been studying this topic for several years, and following the literature, but these men, as New Testament

Scholars, are current on this issue and have devoted the kind of study and depth necessary to give good account of themselves with a fine scholar like Borg.

I can appreciate your frustration with the general Christian community. Most are not "armed" for the battle of ideas which we face. That is why I left Campus Crusade in 1973 and began Probe Ministries. At the time I gave oversight to the Campuses in the Southwest U.S. The worldview America has come to embrace generally now once existed only on a few campuses: UC Berkeley, San Francisco State, U. of Wisconsin (Madison), Columbia U., and U. of Colorado.

I found myself hard pressed to respond to the questions of these students. So I decided the Lord was calling upon me not to "curse the darkness", but rather "light some lamps!" The early Christians, it is said, were effective because they OUT-THOUGHT and OUT-LOVED the ancient world! In fact, for 250 years after the apostles died off, the church did nothing but try to survive and answer/refute/respond to all the doctrinal challenges which came from the Jewish and Pagan communities without, and from sects and heresies within. They were so busy doing this, that it was not until 325 A.D. (Council of Nicea) that the addressed/clarified the doctrine of the Trinity! The FIRST theology of the early church was APOLOGETICAL theology, and we find ourselves facing the same kind of circumstances and challenges today.

So you hang in there! And tell your friend to do the same. Challenge the priest and don't be bullied by him. If it IS an official position, tell her that I requested that it be documented so I will be able to confirm to others who ask that this is truly official. If I were a betting man (and I am ::::SMILE!::::), your friend will find that no such affirmation of this policy will be forthcoming.

With Warm Regards in Christ,

# **“What Is the ‘Sin Unto Death’?” [Jimmy Williams]**

**I have always been puzzled with 1 John 5:16-17 and the meaning of the “sin unto death.” Can you explain exactly what John is referring to?**

*16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.*

*17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.*

**I would really appreciate any help you can give me on this.**

Thank you for your e-mail and your concerns about “the sin unto death” mentioned in 1 John 5:16-17.

Let me see if I can give you an acceptable answer to your question. In doing so, we will first have to explore a number of factors which come from the Bible. Let me begin with a passage from Hebrews 12:

*“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. . . Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? . . . “All discipline for the moment*

*seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet. . .” (Heb. 12:5-13).*

Whether we are reading the Old Testament or the New, we find that God is at work to create a family for His own pleasure, a company of sons and daughters who will commune with and look to Him for love, provision, guidance, and consolation. In the Gospel of John, chapters 1 and 3 make it clear that when we place our faith in Jesus Christ to be our Savior Who, through His death, can make us presentable to God, we join the family of God through a new spiritual birth and thus embark upon our personal Christian pilgrimage which ends on the day we die.

As newborns in this family, we are admonished by the Word to “Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18), and “as newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may *grow* in respect to salvation” (1 Pet. 2:2).

All children, physical and spiritual, undergo a process of development which involves time. The theological term for this process is “sanctification,” which means the **Christian life**. Along the way, as we saw above in the Hebrews passage, we observe that God, like any good father, disciplines us appropriately when necessary. The goal is *training*, not *punishment*. This training process may occur through circumstances we encounter, and which God allows, or it can come through knowledge of the Bible:

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17).*



We have a vivid example of this process in the Apostle Paul's life. He describes it this way:

*"And because of the surpassing abundance of (my) revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself.... Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness'" (2 Cor. 12:7-9).*

We don't have a clear picture what this "thorn" was. Most believe it was a physical ailment. There is some indication that it may have been an eye problem. But the point I make here is that God may allow all kinds of circumstances into our life which are designed for training purposes. This process is *the normal Christian Life*.

Another good example comes from 1 Corinthians 11:21-31. Paul writes this epistle to address several problems and/or abuses occurring among the church members there. One abuse was that when the believers came together to take communion, some of the members showed up to enjoy the food and some came *drunk*! Paul rebukes them saying, "Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry, and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. . . For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

This passage makes it clear to us that there are consequences to our disobedience. Some of these Corinthian believers evidently are disciplined by God through both illness and even

death ("some of you sleep"). That is *not* to say that all illness and death are divine judgments, but some *are*.

In this particular instance, some of the disobedient Corinthians experienced the "sin unto death." (That is, some of them died).

With this background, we come to the heart of your question. The "sin unto death" is found throughout the Bible and seems to be connected to new eras of biblical history.

Here are some examples where people experienced death through disobedience:

- *Giving of the Law, Mount Sinai: Golden Calf (Exodus 32)*
- *Institution of Levitical Priesthood: "Strange Fire" (Leviticus 10)*
- *Conquest of the Land: Achan (Joshua 7)*
- *Beginning of the Church: Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5)*  
(See also Samson and Saul—God was long suffering with both)

Speaking of the incident in Leviticus 10 where Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered "strange fire" which "consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev. 10:2), Rev. Ray Stedman of Palo Alto Bible Church says:

*This was a sin of presumption, not a sin of ignorance. They knew better and what incense they were supposed to burn. . . they had been told emphatically that God would be offended if they offered incense other than that which he had prescribed.\* Second, it was a sin dealt with severely because it distorted God's revelation of Himself. All of these sacrifices and rituals were intended for us to learn what kind of God He is. Third, God used it to set an example. God is here teaching a lesson—to show how important it was for the priests at the beginning of their priesthood to follow*

*explicitly what God commanded. And it only happened once. Similarly, though the sin of Ananias and Sapphira (deception, hypocrisy) was common among Christians of the early church and common ever since, God never visited death like that again. It is a manifestation of God's love and concern. At the outset, He is wanting to stop this kind of thing from happening again, and He is giving fair warning of the eventual consequences to anyone presumptuous enough to sin deliberately in this way." That is the way we human beings work. Unless an issue is vividly, dramatically, openly, symbolically made clear to us, we'll go right on and do the wrong thing. So God is stopping that, arresting it with his judgment at this point. But he really wants us to learn to refrain for the sake of his glory, not out of fear for our lives. \*(Cf. elaborate instructions on incense, Exodus 30:34-38, particularly v. 38).*

## **Sin Unto Death (1 John 5)**

Now let's look at the passage you have questioned. The first thing to note is the *context*. This major topic from 5:13-18 is prayer. We are given in verses 13-15 that God hears and responds to our prayers. The key word is "*anything*." Then John remembers there *is* an exception: praying for a disobedient, sinning brother or sister in Christ. What to do? How do we pray for that one? Here is the sequence we must keep in mind for such a one as we pray.

First of all, the Apostle John tells us that there is a sin **not** leading to death (physical). In verse 16, he tells us that it is possible for Christians to fall into this sin not leading to death. [See also 1 John 2:1,2—the ideal is to "sin not." But if anyone sins (*and we will*), we have an Advocate, a defense attorney.]

When Christians observe disobedience in brothers and sisters, they *are* to pray for him/her (16b); as a result of these

prayers, God may choose to preserve, prolong, extend the person's physical life (not eternal life, since that life is determined by one's personal faith decision).

This intercession is effective only in the case of sin **not** leading to death (16c): that is, the person has not reached the end limits of God's patience and grace (His "last straw"). See also v. 17 where John says, "All unrighteousness is sin, but there is a sin which is not unto (physical) death."

Secondly, there **is** a sin which results in physical death—the sin unto death (v. 16d): This is the death of a believer characterized by persistent, willful sinning in which "the flesh is destroyed [physical death—1 Cor. 5:1-5] so that the *spirit* might be saved."

John tells us that this is a sin **not** to be prayed for, because God's immutable law concerning this final, "last straw" disobedience is involved and will be unaltered by intercessory prayer (16e), and frankly, we do not know another's heart condition before the Lord. We are not encouraged to speculate about the cause of any believer's untimely death. In our prayer life, we can continue to intercede for a wayward brother or sister, but we are not to draw any conclusions about what may, should, or has happened in regard to a believer's death.

Thirdly, when some Christian we know dies, we might be inclined to ask the question of ourselves, "Was this the sin unto death or not?" John is telling us in this passage not to speculate, because we just don't know.

All through this Epistle (1 John) the Apostle has been addressing sin in the life of the believer—yours and every Christian you know. It is fitting that John portrays the remedy of *habitual* sin on the part of a believer in the context of the new birth. The "black and white" contrast all through 1 John concludes with the same idea, and one that is

also expressed in the book of James:

*“Even so, faith, if it has no works is dead, being by itself. But someone may say, ‘You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ . . . Are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? . . . For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” (James 2:17,18, 20, 26)*

The New Testament clearly teaches that “Faith alone saves (Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5), but saving faith is never alone.”

This leads us to a practical application in observing/evaluating another believer’s life and imperfections. This verse comes to mind: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with *our* spirit that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16). What we learn from this verse is that we can know about *ourselves*, (i.e. that we have the Spirit, that we are born again), but ultimately we cannot know about *another*. In other words, I can know about *me*, but I can’t know about *you*. You can know about *you*, but you can’t know about *me*.

Practically speaking then, we should accept every person’s testimony who claims to be a Christian. Actual Christian behavior is on a spectrum which John describes by saying, “all sin [big and little] is unrighteousness.” Only God can rightly see the totality of a believer’s obedience and disobedience over a lifetime, and rightly judge it. As a loving Father, He may bring discipline to get us “back on track.” 1 John 1 and 2 speak to the way this may be accomplished—God’s grace through the Blood of Christ providing daily cleansing through confession/acknowledgement (1 John 1:9) and thus, further potential opportunity to serve.

Since we cannot see the heart of another, we can only inspect the “fruit” (or lack thereof) we see in a life. The farther a

believer appears to wander away from God, the more “bad fruit” we observe, and the more we wonder about the truthfulness of that believer’s profession of faith. We cannot help being tempted to ask the question: “Is this person *really* a Christian?” We are to go no farther in our evaluation or conclusion; rather, we should *continue our intercession* for him or her.

*John 21: 20-22: “And looking around, Peter saw the disciple whom Jesus loved (John the Apostle) following them. . .and therefore seeing him said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about this man?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? **You** follow me!” (Old Aramaic Expression: “Stick to your knitting!” <smile>).*

I hope this answers your question, \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder  
Probe Ministries

---

## **“Was Reincarnation Ever in the Bible?”**

I have a question about reincarnation. My father recently read this book called *Many Lives, Many Masters* by Dr. Brian Weiss. It is about a psychiatrist who explored the past lives of one of his patients through hypnotic regression.

In the third chapter he claims that reincarnation was in the Bible but was later removed. I quote from the book:

**“There were indeed references to reincarnation in the Old and New Testaments. In A.D. 325 the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, along with his mother, Helena, had deleted references to reincarnation contained in the New Testament. The Second Council of Constantinople meeting in A.D. 553, confirmed this action and declared the concept of reincarnation a heresy.” (p. 35-36)**

**Is this true?**

I would like to answer two issues in your e-mail. The first is about past-lives regression through hypnosis. Our friends at the Watchman Fellowship have a MOST interesting article by their director, James Walker, called “The Day I Hypnotized a Reincarnated Prospector.” The point was to demonstrate to a Dallas Seminary class the powerfully deceptive nature of the cults and the occult. I highly recommend this article: [www.watchman.org/na/chair10.htm](http://www.watchman.org/na/chair10.htm)

Secondly, concerning your question about reincarnation being excised from the Bible. Similar to what your father found in the book he read, a section of Shirley MacLaine’s book *Out on a Limb* records these comments from her New Age mentor, David:

“The theory of reincarnation is recorded in the Bible. But the proper interpretations were struck from it during an Ecumenical Council meeting of the Catholic Church in Constantinople sometime around 553 A.D, called the Council of Nicea. The Council members voted to strike those teachings from the Bible in order to solidify Church control.” [New York: Bantam Books, 1983, pp. 234-5.]

Dr. Paul R. Eddy, Associate Professor of Theology at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota, responds:

“In response to this claim, we must begin by pointing out a few basic historical inaccuracies. First, The Council of Nicea, the first of the seven Ecumenical councils, took place in 325 A.D. It was concerned with the teachings of

Arius and their implications for a correct understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. The documents from this Council offer no evidence that the topic of reincarnation ever came up for discussion, let alone that it was condemned and removed from the Bible. No doubt this claim means to refer, rather, to the fifth Ecumenical Council, held in 553—the Council of Constantinople. The primary purpose of this Council was to ease the tensions in the Church caused by the Council of Chalcedon 100 years previous. Again, there is no evidence whatsoever that the idea of reincarnation was ever discussed, let alone condemned and purged from the Bible. What the reincarnationists are probably referring to here is the condemnation of Origenism, which included belief in the pre-existence of the soul. This should not, however, be confused with the notions of the karmic cycle of reincarnation. This is clear from Origen's own words on this matter when he writes of "the dogma of transmigration, which is foreign to the Church of God not handed down by the Apostles, nor anywhere set forth in the Scriptures." Other early theologians, including Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Gregory of Nyssa, also explicitly rejected the idea of reincarnation. Another problem with this theory is the fact that manuscripts of the Bible exist dating back to the third century. For example, the Bodmer Papyri (dated around 200-225), the Chester Beatty Papyri (dated around 200-250), Codex Vaticanus (dated around 325-350), and Codex Sinaiticus (dated around 340) are all documents written centuries prior to the 533 Council, and none of them reveal any supposed reincarnationist teachings that were removed from later editions of the Bible! Beyond this, it is known that the core canon of the Bible was essentially recognized and acknowledged throughout the orthodox Church as early as the late second and early third centuries, as evidenced by the list contained in the Muratorian Fragment (dated around 170). All of this points towards the impossibility of a conspiratorial purgation of the doctrine of reincarnation—or any other doctrine for that matter—from the Bible during any



of the Ecumenical Councils.”  
[[ittsy.com/focusonthe faulty.com/reincarnation-and-the-bible/](https://focusonthe faulty.com/reincarnation-and-the-bible/)]

I hope you can see that the burden of proof is on the reincarnationists to show us those supposed Biblical passages supporting reincarnation! The idea that the original versions of the Bible containing teachings on reincarnation were all confiscated and burned—another fantasy floating around these days—is merely that, a fantasy. There is no evidence for any myth of reincarnation taught in the Bible, either past or present. Hebrews 9:27 nails that coffin shut: “It is appointed unto man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin