

“I Have Some Questions About What Happens After Death”

I have read one of your publications titled [“What Happens After Death?”](#) In the section “One Minute After Death” you make this statement:

“What happens when we breathe our final breath? The Bible teaches what will occur. First our immaterial soul and spirit will be separated from our physical body. Second, we will immediately receive the judgment that will determine our eternal destiny. Those who have trusted in Christ’s payment on the cross for our sins will enter into eternal life in the presence of God.”

My questions are these:

a) It sound that the judgment of man is by batch, for not all men died at the same time (from Adam to our time). My question is: Does this mean that there are already people now in heaven (paradise) and there are already people cast to hell?

b) Does this mean that there are already people now in paradise and that they have seen our Lord and His son Jesus Christ.

c) Since you are using Revelation 20:11-15, my question is: What do you mean by “first resurrection” and “thousand-year reign” in Revelation 20:5?

d) In 2 Thessalonians 4:16, What do you mean by “dead in Christ shall rise first” relative to the thousand-year reign and judgment day?

Thanks for reading the article. Here are some answers for you.

a) It sound that the judgment of man is by batch, for not all

men died at the same time (from Adam to our time). My question is: Does this mean that there are already people now in heaven (paradise) and there are already people cast to hell?

Yes, there are souls in heaven and hell now. When we die, our soul separates from the body and goes to heaven or hell.

b) Does this mean that there are already people now in paradise and that they have seen our Lord and His son Jesus Christ.

Yes, those in heaven are in the presence of the Lord.

c) Since you are using Revelation 20:11-15, my question is: What do you mean by "first resurrection" and "thousand-year reign" in Revelation 20:5?

At the rapture, when Christ returns for the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), the bodies of the "dead in Christ" are resurrected in the new glorified state and unite with their souls. Then those who are alive and in Christ are raptured and join the saints in heaven. After the seven years of tribulation when God's wrath is poured out on the earth, the bodies of those martyred for Christ in the Tribulation and the bodies of the Old Testament saints are resurrected in their glorified state. The resurrection of the bodies of all those in Christ, Old and New Testament saints, is the first resurrection, the resurrection unto life. After the resurrection of the saints comes the thousand-year rule of Christ on the earth.

The second resurrection is the resurrection of all those not in Christ, and they are judged and sentenced to hell (Revelation 20:11-15). This occurs after the thousand year rule of Christ.

d) In 2 Thessalonians 4:16, What do you mean by “dead in Christ shall rise first” relative to the thousand-year reign and judgment day?

Presently, those who are in Christ (or Christians) are in the presence of the Lord. The souls of Christians are in heaven. At the rapture when Christ returns for the church, the bodies of these believers will be resurrected from the dead and unite with their souls. Their resurrected bodies will be glorified and eternal as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 15.

Thanks for asking your questions. I will use these questions on my radio show in the future.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

“When Are We Truly Forgiven, at the Cross or at Confession?”

Some Christian writers have claimed it's unnecessary for Christians to ask for God's forgiveness since all our sins (pre- and post-conversion, past and future) were forgiven when Christ said “It is finished” (John 19:30). But two scriptures seem to contradict this: Jesus' model prayer instructs us to pray for forgiveness for ourselves (Luke 11:4), and he says in Matthew 6:15 that God will not forgive us (assuming “us” refers to believers, as he is addressing his disciples) if we do not forgive others. When do you consider that we are truly forgiven, at the cross or when we confess our sin (1 John

1:9)?

Great question!

I think it's frankly obnoxious to teach that we don't have to ask for forgiveness when we sin. One follower of one of these writers you mention carried it so far as to make a personal vow that he didn't ever have to say "I'm sorry" or "Please forgive me" when he hurt anyone because after all, his sins were forgiven at the Cross! (Need I elaborate on what that did to his marriage and family and workplace relationships???)

There is a difference between knowing we were forgiven at the cross, and experientially RECEIVING that forgiveness after we sin. It's like the difference between standing at the bottom of a waterfall, thirsty, with our cup upside down. . . and turning the cup right side up to receive the water.

Forgiveness was offered to everyone at the Cross, but we don't experience it until we confess our sins and receive it by faith (turning our cups right side up). The question of when we are truly forgiven depends on if you're looking at it from God's perspective or from ours. God-wise, we were forgiven before we even knew we needed forgiveness. Man-wise, we are forgiven when we receive it.

Also, receiving forgiveness afresh when we sin is what reconnects our broken relationship with God and with others. Confession and forgiveness are intrinsically related to fellowship and intimacy.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“The Doctrine of the Trinity is Stupid”

I want to make it clear that I am not a Jehovah's Witness, yet when considering this Nicean doctrine, it way amazes me how people can define the form of a God that Jesus confirmed that no one had seen at any time, neither have we seen his shape, what makes it rather annoying is that people seem to patronize you and in the process try and undermine one's faith in a loving God. I have a question for you.

Is God subject to Jesus as Jesus is subject to God?

I believe that there is God and he reveals himself in these last days by his Word (Jesus), Hebrews 1:1-2. Where do you see Jesus sending God to do something or the Holy Spirit telling God to do something? Jesus said he could do nothing of self, Jesus confirmed that the Holy Spirit can do nothing of self, but all power belongs to God.

In the book of Corinthians 14:11-24, you would see that there is a time when the power that was given and I stress that word given to Jesus will be submitted on to God. I wish for once you Trinitarians will allow the Holy Spirit to reveal who God is by his Son and not through pulpits.

Frankly speaking if you have to have the Holy Spirit reveal all things you would find the doctrine is stupid, and hey if the Jehovah Witness is right in this instance so be it, even in the time of Christ our Lord he acknowledged the Pharisees to be right in at least one instance, it didn't do anything to his pride, and I believe that that is the example we must follow.

Thank you for your response. I believe you have misunderstood the doctrine of the Trinity. Simply stated it is, There exists one God who has revealed Himself in three distinct persons,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We see throughout scripture the Father is called God. However, the Son is called God as well, John 20:28, Matthew 1:23, Titus 2:13 and many other passages. The Son is worshipped, has authority over areas only God has authority over. The Son shares in the attributes only God can have. The Holy Spirit is also called God, Acts 5:3-4, Romans 8, Genesis 1:2, Matthew 28:19. All three are equal in nature yet there is an economy among the persons of the Trinity. The Son submits to the Father and the Holy Spirit submits to the Son. 1 Corinthians 11:3 states, "...the head of every woman is man..." Does that mean that women are inferior to men? By no means, men and women are equal in nature, yet there is an economy of headship and submission in marriage, where the man is head over his wife. In the same way God the Father is head over God the Son. They are equal in nature, but different in position as illustrated in marriage.

Regarding the fact that no one has seen God, you are quoting John 1:18. "No one has seen God, only the begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father." This verse means, no one has seen God as He really is in all His glory and splendor. There are several passages in the Bible where men have seen God. Exodus 24:9-11, Deuteronomy 34:10. However, they did not see Him in His full glory but in a veiled form that could be withstood. Same with Jesus, He is God the Son revealed in veiled form. Regarding this verse, the JW's have been dishonest in their translational work. The Greek reads, "*Theon oudies eoraken popote monogeneies theos...*" they translate it "No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten god..." Why do they use a little "g"? They do this to make it match their theology, but this is dishonest translation. They feel they can justify using a little "g" because *theos* has no article or is anartharous. However, in the beginning of the verse "God" or the Greek *Theon* is also anartharous, it has no article. So the JW's should translate it "No one has seen god" but they do not. They use a capital "G." Once again, dishonest translation by the Watchtower. When you honestly look at this verse, it

supports the deity of Christ, He is God the Son incarnate as stated in John 1:1. The translation properly reads, "No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten God (capital G) who is in the bosom of the Father has made him known".

Thanks for your inquiry.

Patrick Zukeran

Probe Ministries

"Which Is It: Man's Free Will or God's Omniscience?"

A friend of mine posed this question to me. I would like to pass it along for your reflection:

When we say that God "knows the future", are we saying that He possesses knowledge of all future events? My premise is that in order for free will for Man to exist, then it is impossible for God to know all future events. In other words, these concepts are mutually exclusive. If that is true, then which one exists – free will in humans, or knowledge by God of all future events? (Or is my premise wrong?) My opinion is that free will exists, and therefore God cannot know all future events. Furthermore, Christians should not be troubled by the concept of a God that does not possess knowledge of all future events. They should rest assured that – one way or another – He will execute His plan and carry out His promises.

Thanks for any insights that I could pass along to him.

This is a big issue in theological circles today—sort of the “God version” of the “what did he know and when did he know it?” question. The debate over the extent of God’s foreknowledge is called “open theism.” (Check out Rick Wade’s article called [“God and the Future”](#)).

But I can tell you what we believe. God does, indeed, know every single detail of the future, which is why the Bible contains accurate prophecy of future events—because not only did God know they would (and will) happen, but because He is sovereign, He superintends them.

I think many people misunderstand the concept of “free will,” which is not a biblical term. The reality is that while we have the ability to make truly significant choices, we don’t have truly “free” will. You cannot, for example, choose to wake up tomorrow morning in China when you go to bed in Chicago. Or wake up speaking Chinese when all you know is English. You cannot choose to be a different gender than what God made you. (Yes, I’m aware of sex-change operations and know people who’ve had them—we’re not even going there! <smile>) But we can make choices that make a difference: for example, in our attitudes, in who we marry and most importantly, which God we serve. We have limited freedom in our choices, and God does not force us to choose things His way; He respects our choices. But we do not have totally free will.

I think your friend misunderstands the concept of God’s sovereignty (“one way or another – He will execute His plan and carry out His promises”) if he thinks that God can have a plan and execute it if He doesn’t know everything that’s going to happen. You can’t have it both ways. A God who is not omniscient cannot be sovereign. A sovereign God MUST be omniscient.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“God is a Child-Killer!”

This is about your mentioning that the bible says abortion is a sin. Then I would say that God should also not abort the unborn. But when he drowned the world, he aborted thousands of sinless unborn children.

So!!!!!! don't talk about abortion. (That is if you believe in the ark nonsense!)

We have over 5 billion people in this world, and when there will be more, there will be famine, and those people that listened to you will come after you, and demand an explanation. And then your home made GOD will not be there to help you. He never was there anyway. He is a figment of your imagination. Those people have been black mailed by your teachers and the teachers before them, but the time of reckoning is not that far off. You have leached enough monetarily of them. Your Churches are becoming emptier.

PS. In 2 Kings 2:23,24– he kills 42 Children by sending 2 she-bears to rip them apart, because they called an old man a baldhead. This has not a thing to do with abortion: But it shows that if there was a God like the Bible describes, He does not like children at all. I could give you many more text to this effect, but I had my say.

I can tell you are very angry. I don't know what caused your anger, but whatever it was, I'm sorry.

Since you have arrived at the point of decided that there is no God, then it seems to be inappropriate and pointless to be angry at people who believe in Him. Because if there truly is no God, then the Bible is a man-made book of myths, and all the stories in it are meaningless. And if there is no God, then you have no basis for outrage at anything that anyone says about anything at all because there is no ultimate meaning or purpose in life. And if there is no meaning or purpose in life, why waste your time getting angry at other people's false beliefs? You may as well rage at the fact that the sky is blue or that there are 24 hours in the day. None of it matters in the end anyway.

But I think underneath your insistence that there is no God, you probably know better, and He may have allowed something painful to happen for which you are angry at Him. I'm sorry for that.

And if nothing happened, you've lived a great and charmed life but you're angry anyway, then I'm sorry for that too, because it's sad to be angry for no reason. Uses lots of energy that could be used for other things.

Concerning the 2 Kings passage you mention, "children" is an unfortunate translation. It should really be translated "young men" like the majority of the other times this word appears in scripture. Their disrespectful taunt of God's prophet incurred the discipline of God because He is holy and His prophet is holy, and treating God and His prophet with contempt is a very serious sin. God loves children, but He is also holier than we can really imagine with our puny little minds. I don't know the answers to all the questions that bother you about God's actions in the Bible, but I do know that He is bigger than our questions, and we don't have all the facts that would allow us to fully understand why an immense and powerful and holy God would do things that make us shake our heads and wonder about.

But I do know He loves us. Even when doing hurtful things,

like drowning the world. Just like a cancer surgeon can be loving even when he's cutting into people's bodies to take out cancerous growths.

Thank you for writing.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Does Calvinism Make People into Choiceless Puppets?”

When I look at the doctrine of predestination from the Calvinistic perspective I seem to come to the same final conclusion. It appears to me that in the Calvinistic approach, man is only an observer. Which would mean that my actions, thoughts, hopes, dreams, relationships, etc., are all meaningless. I call man an observer because, according to Calvin, ALL is predetermined.

There is no “choice.” There is double predestination. Life would end up being deterministic and fatalistic. I am merely a linear program executing my own destruction. What's the use in doing anything? To me love then becomes meaningless. More importantly, how do I know for sure that I am really one of the “chosen”? Since every part of my being is totally deprived, how do I know if I really believe what I need to believe since my intellect is deprived also? I have talked to some Calvinists about this. They seem to ignore the philosophical problems I pose and move on without ever answering my questions. I get the old “That's the way it is,” answer. It appears to me that if you follow Calvin's view to

its logical extreme, man becomes only an observer who can affect nothing. My problem arises when I conclude that if this is the case, then God sends a person to Hell for sins that God determined and orchestrated for the observer to "commit." Why would God hold me responsible for a sin that He "programmed" me to commit? Perhaps I am misunderstanding Calvinism but this is the way I see it. Please correct me if I am mistaken. Thank you for your time. Sorry about the length of my question. I am in search of knowledge. I have changed my mind many times on this issue. HELP!

You ask a very important question. Unfortunately, it cannot be adequately answered in an e-mail (not by me, at any rate). I will attempt to sketch out a few lines of thought for your consideration, but let me also recommend a couple books that might help you think through some of these issues in a little more detail. On the side of what might be called "theistic determinism" you may want to look at Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of the Will*. On the other hand, Norman Geisler's *Chosen but Free* presents a position which some might call "moderate Calvinism," insofar as he does not embrace all five points of Dortian Calvinism and argues for genuine, self-determining, human freedom and responsibility. There are also some good articles in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* on "Calvinism," "Predestination," and "Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism". In my response, I will simply try to set forth a few passages from the Bible which seem to shed some light on this difficult and controversial issue.

In the first place, there are certainly verses which teach that God "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). Without doubt, then, God is sovereign and is providentially guiding history to its predetermined end. But as W.S. Reid (himself a Calvinist) correctly observes in his article on "Predestination" in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, "At this point the question arises of the possibility of individual freedom and responsibility if God is

absolutely sovereign. How can these things be? Yet the Scriptures repeatedly assert both. Joseph's remarks to his brothers and Peter's statement concerning Christ's crucifixion highlight this fact (Gen. 45:4ff.; Acts 2:23). Man, in carrying out God's plan, even unintentionally, does so responsibly and freely" (871). This statement makes it plain that at least some Calvinists do indeed make room for a degree of genuine human freedom and responsibility, while at the same time affirming the full and unmitigated sovereignty of God. Although it may certainly be a mystery (at least from man's perspective) how both of these things can be simultaneously true, I agree with Reid that the Bible does indeed "repeatedly assert both."

But doesn't the Fall of man affect human freedom? Indeed it does! Before the Fall, man's will was perfectly free both to obey and disobey God. However, after the Fall the freedom to obey was lost (whether partially or completely need not concern us here). Nevertheless, through His gift of salvation (including both regeneration and sanctification), God is restoring this original freedom in His people (2 Cor. 3:16-18). In addition, however, it must also be kept in mind that even unregenerate men are acting freely when they sin. They freely CHOOSE to sin because their nature is now depraved, fallen and sinful. But when someone becomes a new creature in Christ, the freedom to do good and obey God is, to some degree, restored. And through the process of sanctification, God is progressively restoring this freedom in His children more and more.

Again, as Norman Geisler points out in his article on "Freedom, Free Will, and Determinism" in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, even fallen man retains a degree of genuine human freedom. This is taught in many passages of Scripture (e.g. Matt. 23:37; John 7:17; 1 Cor. 9:17; 1 Pet. 5:2; Philem. 14). Thus, even if it is not fully explicable (for man at any rate), the Bible clearly teaches both Divine

Sovereignty and a degree of genuine human freedom and responsibility. Indeed, in some passages, both ideas appear virtually side by side. For instance, in Prov. 16:9 we read, "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." Passages such as this may teach that man has a measure of self-determination, while at the same time indicating that what man freely chooses is also (on some level) directed by God.

Finally, the Scriptures clearly indicate that God is graciously working in His people "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). I don't think that this work of God should be viewed as a coercion of our wills. Rather, it seems to me that it would be more properly understood as a persuading and empowering of our wills so that we freely choose to do what God wants us to do. We may not have chosen to do such things apart from this work of God in our lives, but it is nonetheless WE OURSELVES who choose them in response to this gracious work. In a similar way, Satan is described as "working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2) with the result that fallen, unregenerate men "want to do the desires" of the devil (John 8:44). But of course even here such men freely choose to follow Satan in his disobedience and rebellion against God (even if unconsciously). In addition, one must also keep in mind that even Satan's sin and rebellion against God is part of the plan and purposes of God (though freely chosen on Satan's part). And while Satan can only carry out his malicious intentions to the extent that God permits (see Job 1-2 and 2 Cor. 12:7-9), they are nonetheless Satan's (NOT God's) malicious intentions.

Thus, the biblical position (as I see it) affirms BOTH Divine Sovereignty AND some degree of genuine human freedom and responsibility. There is, I will certainly grant, a mystery here, but (at least in my opinion) no contradiction. Man is finite in his understanding and limited in his actions by time and space, but God is infinite in His understanding and not

limited in His actions by time and space. It is therefore not unreasonable to think that what man may be incapable of comprehending (e.g. Divine Sovereignty and human freedom operating simultaneously and harmoniously) might nonetheless still be true. I therefore think that we are safest to stick closely to the express affirmations of Scripture, even if we cannot formulate a mathematically precise explanation of the relationship between Divine Sovereignty and human freedom. The Scriptures seem to affirm both and we must be content with this. This, at any rate, is my opinion on the matter.

Wishing you God's richest blessings!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Did Christ's Sinlessness Begin Only After His Baptism?”

I recently heard someone state that Jesus did what all children do: lie, steal, etc. When I confronted him on this, he stated that the sinless life of Christ didn't begin until after His baptism. Is there a particular individual (i.e., Aquinas, etc) or a particular group that espoused this belief? I want to bring this up with the person again.

Thanks for your question. It's difficult to know where this person got this information. They obviously didn't get it from any of our canonical gospels (or any other canonical text). It

could be that this person imbibed such ideas from reading something like the (fictional) Infancy Gospel of Thomas—which does portray the young Jesus as quite mischievous, temperamental, and even deadly! But no scholar of any persuasion regards this gospel as giving us historically reliable information about the young Jesus.

Bottom line: the person who made this statement needs to give some account of how they know this. Where did they get this information? How reliable is their source of information? Why do they believe their view is correct? If they don't have good grounds for saying or believing such things (and they most certainly don't), then they need to be shown the error of their ways. The Bible affirms that Jesus was without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5; Heb. 4:15; etc.). It does not say that He was sinless from His baptism on.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“How Did the Church Recognize Which Books Were Inspired by God?”

Please elaborate on this statement from your article on [The Da Vinci Code](#): “...the Canon gradually took shape as the church recognized and embraced those books that were inspired by God.”

How did the church “recognize” which books were inspired by

God? Did the church, therefore, consider other texts not to be “inspired by God”? Can you suggest any material that refers to the above?

Thank you for your thoughtful question and for visiting our web site.

Below is a document that I composed from information found in F. F. Bruce’s book *The Canon*. I highly recommend his work if you are interested in digging deeper into the subject of canonicity.

Other works were used by the early church (Didache and Shepherd of Hermas) but were not equated to scripture. Later writings were weighed against the Apostles’ teachings and rejected or read accordingly.

Sincerely,

Don Closson

The Canon

From *The Canon of Scripture* by F. F. Bruce

“That the New Testament consists of the twenty-seven books which have been recognized as belonging to it since the fourth century is not a value judgment; it is a statement of fact. Individuals or communities may consider that it is too restricted or too comprehensive; but their opinion does not affect the identity of the canon. The canon is not going to be diminished or increased because of what they think or say: it is a literary, historical and theological datum.”[\[1\]](#)

Bruce defines the criteria for canonicity in chapter 21 of his book; he includes the following items:

Apostolic Authority – All of the NT writings contained a degree of apostolic authority. This could be established by

direct apostolic appointment (those chosen directly by Jesus), writing on behalf of one with apostolic authority (Mark writing on behalf of Peter), or being a member of Jesus' family (James & Jude). The *Acts of Paul*, which was written in the middle of the second century, was orthodox but the author had no apostolic authority and it was a work of fiction. Bruce also points out that any book known to be pseudonymous [written by a person other than the attributed author] would not have been included in the canon.

Antiquity – The writing must belong to the apostolic age. Anything written later, although useful and theologically accurate (Shepherd of Hermas) would not be considered canonical. "Writings of a later date, whatever their merit, could not be included among the apostolic or canonical books." {2}

Orthodoxy – Any writing considered to be part of the canon must be theologically consistent with the apostolic faith. This faith rested upon the undisputed apostolic writings and the teachings established in those churches founded by the apostles. The Bishop of Antioch (199 AD) named Serapion had *The Gospel of Peter* removed from books that were read in the church of Rhossus when he discovered that it included a docetic (heretical) view of Christ. Docetism and Gnosticism were two views of Christ that competed with the orthodox apostolic teachings in the early church.

Catholicity – Only those works that were received by the greater part of the catholic or universal church could be acknowledged as canon. This might be combined with the notion of traditional use. Bruce writes, "If any church leader came along in the third or fourth century with a previously unknown book, recommending it as genuinely apostolic, he would have found great difficulty in gaining acceptance for it: his fellow Christians would simply have said, 'But no one has ever heard of it!'" {3}

Inspiration – Canonicity and inspiration have been closely connected in the minds of Christians since the early days of the church. Even when apostolic authority was questioned (as with Mark and Luke) works were accepted because they were considered authoritative (inspired, God breathed) and trustworthy witnesses to the saving events of Christ’s ministry.

Notes

1. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 250.
2. Ibid., p. 259.
3. Ibid., p. 263.

Edited by Don Closson, Probe Ministries, 2004

See related posts for more relevant articles and answers to questions.

“Did Egypt Once Worship the One True God?”

Recently I heard somewhere, that there was an early period of time when Egypt worshipped our one true God. The person who said this, said it may have occurred immediately after the Exodus. Can you give me any support or documentation for this idea?

Thanks for your question. Most likely, the person who made this comment was referring to Amenhotep IV (Akhenaton), the “heretic” pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty, who began to rule

about 1380 B.C. He moved his capital from Thebes to a city he called Akhetaten (i.e. Tell el-Amarna). G. Herbert Livingston writes, "The new pharaoh replaced the high god Amun of Thebes with Aten (Aton), the sun disk, and replaced his throne name with Akhnaton (Ikhnaton)" (*The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment*; 40).

Although some scholars refer to Akhenaton as Egypt's first monotheistic pharaoh, it's important to understand that his "monotheism" was definitely NOT the same as that of the Hebrews. The god Aton was essentially identified with the physical disk of the sun; the God of the Bible is not to be identified with anything in His creation (see Exodus 20:1-6). Livingston writes, "Aton was purely a nature entity and, curiously, the pharaoh continued to regard himself as a god, too" (119). Thus, Akhenaton did NOT worship the one true God. He was not a biblical monotheist.

However, your source is correct about the time period in which these events occurred. As previously noted, Akhenaton began to reign about 1380 B.C. Although there is some room for scholarly disagreement, the Exodus likely took place around 1446-1436 B.C. Thus, Akhenaton would have become pharaoh shortly after this time.

Almost any book on ancient Egyptian history will mention Akhenaton. I took some of the information above from the following source: G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1987).

Hope this helps.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Can a True Believer Commit the Unforgiveable Sin?”

Can a true believer turn away from God at some point and eventually commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? I don't believe a true Christian would be capable of that no matter how far they strayed because one saved, always saved, but I need verses to support my opinion to share with someone else.

Thank you for your question. The “unpardonable sin” of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the three synoptic Gospels: Matthew 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-29, and Luke 12:10. Historically, these verses have aroused a great deal of anxiety and fear, especially in those with a sensitive conscience. But what do these sayings mean?

In my opinion, the two best positions are the following:

1. This sin is committed when someone willfully attributes the work of God the Holy Spirit to Satan.
2. This sin is simply willful and persistent rejection of, and lack of faith in, the person and work of Christ.

If the first option is correct, some would hold that it is not even possible to commit this sin today. In this view, this sin could only have been committed while Christ was physically present on earth and performing miraculous feats through the power of the Holy Spirit. Others would hold that the sin can be committed today; nevertheless, there is a pretty large consensus among evangelical Christians that a true believer could never commit this sin. After all, Peter says that all true believers “are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5). And Paul tells the Philippian believers that he

is “confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

Although I may certainly be wrong, I honestly prefer the second view. Please notice that if this view is correct, a true believer could not possibly commit this sin by definition. While I could list many reasons why I prefer this view, let me mention just a few.

First, it is by far the easiest way to make Scriptural revelation self-consistent. For instance, we know that persistent unbelief is an unpardonable sin. But Jesus says that all sins and blasphemies will be forgiven except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-29). Logic, then, seems to require that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is persistent unbelief.

Second, notice the progression of ideas in Matthew 12:30-33. Jesus begins by stating the importance of being rightly related to Him (v. 30). He then describes the unpardonable sin (vv. 31-32). He then seems to present His listeners with a choice: “Either make the tree good...or make the tree bad; for the tree is known by its fruit” (v. 33). Could Jesus be offering those who had spoken against Him in v. 24 (they are the ones He is speaking to – v. 25), an opportunity to repent (i.e. change their minds about His identity) and become rightly related to Him in v. 33? If so, it would seem to indicate that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is persistent unbelief. And the cure is faith, leading to forgiveness.

Third, although Mark’s parenthetical explanation in 3:30 could be taken as evidence of the first view; nevertheless, I see in it evidence for the second view as well. After all, if they were saying that Jesus “has an unclean spirit” (v. 30), it certainly indicates that they did not believe Him to be who He actually was (and is). Thus, this statement is consistent with simple unbelief in the person of Christ.

Finally, why doesn't John mention this sin? It certainly seems like it would have been important. But what if he did mention it, but simply described it differently? Look at John 16:8-9. Jesus is speaking of sending the Holy Spirit after His ascension. Notice what He says of the Holy Spirit: "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me..." The Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning the sin of unbelief, or lack of personal faith, in Jesus! Could the persistent rejection of the Holy Spirit's conviction, and the willful refusal to believe in Jesus, thus be blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? That, at any rate, is my opinion. Thus, by definition, it is absolutely impossible for a true believer to commit this terrible sin. It can only be committed by someone who persistently rejects the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit, choosing to remain in their unbelief.

Additionally, this ties in very well with what is said in other parts of the New Testament concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. All true believers receive the Holy Spirit (Rom.8:9, 14). The Holy Spirit testifies that believers are God's adopted children (Rom. 8:16). The indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life is said to be permanent (John 14:16-17), a pledge or "down-payment" of an eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14). Indeed, the Holy Spirit is said to "seal" believers "for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30)!

Just a very few of the many good passages on the security of the believer can be found in Rom. 8:28-39; John 10:27-30; and 1 John 5:9-13. But my own favorite is John 6:35-40. Read this passage carefully. Notice v. 37, that the one who comes to Jesus will certainly not be cast out. Notice that Jesus came to do the will of His Father (v. 38). But what was His Father's will? That the Son lose none of those who come to Him (v. 39)! But think about this. If Jesus loses even a single

one who truly comes to Him for salvation, then He has not fulfilled the Father's will! But this is impossible for Jesus always does what is pleasing to His Father (John 8:29). Thus, it is impossible that Jesus will lose any who come to Him for salvation. Thus, Christians cannot commit the unpardonable sin.

Hope this helps. God bless you!

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