Are We Significant in This Vast Universe? – The Evidence Supports Belief in God

Steve Cable considers the question of why we could possibly be important in such a vast universe. Current research shows that there are reasons why God needed such a vast universe to house life on this planet. Understanding this idea can make it an apologetic for our faith rather than a fact which detracts from our faith. Science is the study of God's creation and the more we delve into it the clearer the hand of God becomes.

Why Is the Universe So Vast? Are We Truly Insignificant?

What do you feel when you look at the night sky? Awe? Insignificance? Adoration? Recently, my wife and I took three Ph.D. students from China for an overnight outing at a lake in West Texas. One of the things that impressed them most was the opportunity to view the night sky on a moonless night. Due to "light pollution," people in most cities can only make out a few hundred stars with the naked eye. These young women had never seen the night sky as King David did when he declared, "The heavens declare the glory of God!" (Psalm 19:1, NASU). They were so taken by the stars and the Milky Way that they spent several hours lying on the dock, looking up at the night sky.



These students were not Christians, and I was glad to have an opportunity to use what we know about the stars to talk to them about the overwhelming evidence for a Creator who is intensely interested in humans. However, another host may have used the same night sky to argue that if there is a God, we must not be

very significant to God. Which view is correct? In this article, we will look into the Bible *and* into current scientific theories to better equip us to answer this important question.

According to the Bible, the transcendent Creator of this universe made humans in His own image as the focal point of His creation. Skeptics of a biblical worldview often point to the vastness of the universe as evidence that humans cannot be the focal point of a theistic creation. The famous astronomer, author, and television personality Carl Sagan put it this way:

> Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.{1}

Famous physicist Stephen Hawking wrote, "Our Solar System is certainly a prerequisite for our existence . . . . but there does not seem to be a need for all these other galaxies."{2}

In other words, why would God create this huge universe, if He was primarily interested in His relationship with one species occupying a tiny planet?

I think this is a reasonable question. After all, based on observations from the Hubble Telescope, the current best estimate for the number of stars in the observable universe is

5 times 10 to the 22nd power; that is a 5 with 22 zeros after it. How many stars is that? Well, if you were to count one star every second, it would take you only fifteen hundred trillion years to count them. These stars are spread over billions of light years. Amazingly, all of these stars account for only about 1% of the total mass of the universe. Why did God create such a vast universe, placing us on a single small planet with no reasonable hope of ever traveling beyond our

solar system? Does the size of our universe run counter to a biblical worldview?

A Biblical Perspective of Humankind and the Vast Heavens

If God is the Creator of the universe, and the Bible is revelation directly from God, then accurate observation of the universe will ultimately prove to be consistent with His revelation. By combining the general revelation of science with the special revelation of the Bible, we should be rewarded with a greater understanding of the nature of our Creator and His intentions for mankind. Let's see if this is true in addressing the vastness of the universe.

First let's consider what God's special revelation for us, the Bible, has to say about the vastness of the universe. The Bible often refers to God's creative work in "stretching out the heavens" and filling it with stars (e.g. Job 9:8, Zechariah 12:1). A review of Bible passages on the stars and the heavens reveals a number of reasons why a vast universe is consistent with humans being the most significant part of creation.

We need to realize that creating a vast universe is not harder for God than creating a smaller universe. God brought the universe into existence out of nothing. He had no limits on the amount of matter and energy created. Consequently, it is meaningless to say that it would be a tremendous waste for God to create so many lifeless galaxies. The concept of waste only applies when there is a limited supply. When there is an unlimited supply, you can use all you desire; there is plenty more where that came from.

Within this vast universe, God placed earth in potentially the only place in the universe capable of supporting advanced life. There are many aspects of the universe that are hidden

from the casual observer, but the vastness of the heavens is not one of them. God created the earth and positioned it in an ideal place so that humans could observe the vastness of the heavens and the enormous number of stars. The Bible points out at least five purposes for humans observing this vast universe:

1. *To reveal His majesty and power.* Job refers to this understanding as he reflected on his sufferings stating,

> Who commands the sun not to shine,
> And sets a seal upon the stars;
> Who alone stretches out the heavens
> And tramples down the waves of the sea;
> Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades,
> And the chambers of the south;
> Who does great things, unfathomable,
> And wondrous works without number.
> Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him;
> Were He to move past me, I would not perceive Him.
> Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him?
> Who could say to Him, "What are You doing?" (Job 9:7-12).

Later, God confronts Job with His lack of understanding the full power and majesty of His Creator:

> Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
> Tell Me, if you have understanding, ...
> Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
> Or loose the cords of Orion?
> Can you lead forth a constellation in its season,
> And guide the Bear with her satellites?
> Do you know the ordinances of the heavens,
> Or fix their rule over the earth? (Job 38:4, 31-33).

As we see in this passage, God intentionally did creative, wondrous works without number so that we could glimpse His greatness.

2. *To emphasize our insignificance without God.* The vastness of the heavens highlights how insignificant humans are apart from God's concern for us. The primary lesson that Job learned through his experience was that we are in no position to critique God's actions over His creation. God's creation is so vast that any significance we have comes solely from God's choice to be concerned with us. Job stated it this way: "Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?" (Job 40:4)

King David was the most significant person in Israel during his reign, but when he considered the vastness of God's creation he acknowledged our insignificance:

> When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
> The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
> What is man that You take thought of him,
> And the son of man that You care for him (Psalm 8:3-4)?

3. *As a measure of His loving kindness toward us.* God uses the vastness of the heavens to help us understand the magnitude of His love for us, stating, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:11).

God's love for us is greater than the billions of light years which separate us from the most distant galaxies.

4. *As a picture of His faithfulness and forgiveness.* In a similar way, God uses our inability to completely grasp the breadth and depth of the universe to emphasize spiritual truths. Through Jeremiah, God promised a new covenant where He will remember our sins no more. God used the vastness of the heavens to convey His promise to never cast those in the new covenant away from Him with these words,

> Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured
> And the foundations of the earth searched out below,
> Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel

> For all that they have done," declares the LORD (Jeremiah 31:37).

Even today astronomers recognize that the universe we can observe is much smaller than the state of the universe as it exists today. Due to the finite speed of light, it is impossible to directly observe the current size of the universe or count the exact number of stars. Just as the heavens can never be measured, God will never cast us off from His presence.

5. *As a reminder that our understanding is limited.* Our Creator understands the universe from one end to the other and from the beginning of time to its end. As humans, we are just beginning to probe its mysteries. So, God reminds us, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

It is clear that God intended us to observe and study the stars and the heavens. As a part of God's general revelation, the magnitude of the universe speaks to His greatness. Through God's special revelation, we see God using the vastness of His creation to teach us lessons about who we are and how we relate to Him. For a Creator who was willing to sacrifice His only Son on the cross for our redemption, it would be child's play to create a vast universe solely for our instruction. With this understanding, the vastness of the universe becomes a testament to our importance to God rather than evidence of our insignificance.

A Scientific Perspective of Humankind and the Vast Universe

If God is the Creator of the universe and the author of the Bible, accurate observation of the universe will ultimately prove to be consistent with His revelation. By combining the

general revelation of science with the special revelation of the Bible, we should be rewarded with a greater understanding of the nature of our Creator and His intentions for mankind.

In his book *Why the Universe is the Way It Is*{3}, Hugh Ross points out a number of areas where combining the latest observations of astronomy and physics with biblical theology provides us with fuller answers for some of the tough questions of life. One area he focuses on is the question we have been examining: "Does the vastness of this universe mean that we are insignificant and/or accidental?"

If we assume, as most skeptics and seekers would, that the physical laws of this universe have remained constant from the beginning of the universe until now, then the current state of scientific knowledge points to three reasons why the universe must occupy the mass and volume that it does in order for advanced carbon based life to exist on this planet.

1. *The exact mass of the universe was necessary for life supporting elements to exist*. Life requires heavier elements such as oxygen, carbon, and nitrogen. These elements are produced in the nuclear furnaces of stars. If there were less mass in the universe, only lighter elements such as helium would be produced. If there were more mass, only heavier elements, such as iron, would be produced. In fact, the amount of mass and dark energy in the universe must be fine tuned to less than one part in 10 to the 60^{th} power, or one part in one trillion trillion trillion trillion trillion, to have a universe that can create a life supporting solar system and planet.

2. *The exact mass of the universe was required to regulate the expansion of the universe to allow the formation of the sun and the solar system.* Amazingly, it turns out that the same total mass that results in the right mix of life supporting elements also results in the right amount of gravity to dampen the expansion of matter across the surface of the space-time

continuum to allow the formation of stars like the sun which are capable of supporting a planet like earth. If the universe were expanding faster, stars and solar systems would not form. If the universe were expanding slower, giant stars and black holes would dominate the universe. Once again the total matter in the universe is fine tuned to support life. And what an amazing coincidence: the number that creates the right mix of elements also creates the right expansion rate. This dual fine tuning is much less likely than achieving the financial returns guaranteed by Bernie Madoff!

3. *The vast volume of the universe is required to give the earth just the right amount of light and other electromagnetic radiation to support life and not destroy it.* Life not only requires a planet with the right mix of elements orbiting the right kind of sun in just the right solar system; it also requires a "just right" galactic environment. Astronomers has discovered what they call "the galactic habitable zone" for our Milky Way galaxy at a distance of about 26,000 light years from the center of the galaxy. Any planet closer to the center will experience deadly radiation levels. Any planet further away from the center would lack the mix of heavy elements necessary for advanced life. But the vast majority of this habitable zone is inside one of the uninhabitable spiral arms of the galaxy. Since stars revolve around the galactic center at a rate different than the spiral arm structure based on their distance from the center of the galaxy, most solar systems pass through deadly spiral arms over the course of time. Our solar system occupies a very special place as Hugh Ross points out: "The solar system holds a special position in the Milky Way . . . the one distance from the core where stars orbit the galaxy at the same rate as its spiral arm structure does."{4}

Once again we are faced with a divine "coincidence": the same fine-tuned distance required to safely place a habitable planet is also the exact distance required to keep that planet

out of the deadly spiral arms.

Not only must the earth be located far from the center of the Milky Way, the Milky Way must be located far enough away from other galaxies to maintain the stability of its spiral structure. Many aspects of the Milky Way appear to be very rare or unique in the universe.

As you can see, a logical application of current scientific orthodoxy based on the Big Bang and constant natural laws overwhelmingly supports the view that the vastness of the universe does not imply that human life is unremarkable and insignificant. On the contrary, the most reasonable conclusion from the evidence is that life on this planet is the primary purpose behind the vastness of our universe. Both the Bible and the results of scientific observation agree: our vast universe is the work of a Creator who considers life on earth as very significant.

Consequently, we don't have to convince a seeker that the world is much younger than it appears in order to answer the question, "Are we significant to our Creator?" We can say, "Whether you look to the teaching of the Bible or you look at the current prevailing models from the scientific community, the answer is definitely yes!" The important question is, "Is it possible to know more about my Creator and have a relationship with Him?" Beginning with the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can explain how to have an eternal relationship with God and why we believe the Bible is the reliable source of information about our Creator and our universe.

• Check out our article "The Answer is the Resurrection" at Probe.org for more information on using the resurrection to respond to key questions from seekers.
• For more information on topics related to the origins of our universe and other science topics, check out our Faith and Science section.

• For further discussion on the age of the universe see "Christian Views of Science and Earth History" in our Faith and Science section.
• For further discussion of how the age of the universe debate relates to this discussion see Appendix A: Theology vs. Science or Theology plus Science? and Appendix B: Apologetics and the Age of the Universe.

Notes

1. Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space* (New York: Random House, 1994).
2. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam, 1988).
3. Hugh Ross, *Why The Universe Is The Way It Is* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008).
4. Ross, *Why The Universe Is The Way It Is*, 66.

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Mind Games Camp (radio transcript)



Camp Overview

There’s one thing we do here at Probe that is my favorite part of ministry. Our Mind Games Camp is a week-long, total immersion, give-it-all-we’ve-got experience for high school and college students that changes minds and hearts forever.



Beautiful Camp Copass in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area is surrounded by a lake on three sides and it feels very seclude—even though it’s not far from the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport, so students can easily fly in. We teach Christian students how to think biblically on a wide range of subjects: understanding how others think as they understand their worldviews, how they can know that Christianity is true, creation and evolution, human nature, the differences between guys and girls, the problem of evil and the value of suffering, campus Christianity, and even how to watch a movie with their brain turned on. They learn about a compassionate but biblical view of LGBT, different views of science and Earth-history, and genetic engineering.

Returning campers get to experience what is always a highlight for our students, a special alumni track with new lectures in an intimate, personal setting. The alumni always tell the first-timers what an amazing difference it makes to come back a second or even third time, because they get so much more out of the conference than they ever thought possible.

The Probe teachers don’t just give the lectures, though; we continue conversations at meals where we eat and visit with the students instead of each other. We break up into discussion groups to help the students process what they’re learning in the sessions. There is free time every afternoon and evening to hike, swim, play basketball or card games, read or nap. Or of course, just hang out with new friends. The students are delighted to meet other thinking Christians from all over the country, students eager to think and grow in their faith as they learn to love God with their minds

together. They enjoy getting to know us as the instructors, too. We're not only available the whole week; we look for opportunities to engage in conversations that will encourage and affirm what God is doing in the minds and hearts of these precious young people.

We talk about Mind Games in this article, but you can go to our website, MindGamesCamp.com, and check out our videos, a typical week's schedule, and lots of other information. In the next sections you'll hear a little bit from several instructors, and also from several of our Mind Games alumni.

Sneak Peek of Probe Lectures

Here are snippets from lectures of four of our Probe Mind Games instructors:

Here's Dr. Ray Bohlin speaking on "Christian Views of Science and Earth History":
So, what are these three views we're going to talk about? Well first, there is the recent, or literal, view, then there's what I call Progressive Creation, then there's what I call Theistic Evolution or what is now, the term now used is Evolutionary Creation. OK . . . so what kind or form of analysis we going to apply here?

Sue Bohlin on "God, Gender and Transgender":
Masculinity reflects the strong Father heart of God, to use His strength to love us by protecting us and providing for us. So I love this idea of the Father heart of God, especially when you have a father wound, because of a father either not being there, or not loving you well, not connecting with you well. So often God our Father says, 'I will be your Father. Come to Me, let Me show you what a father is supposed to be."

Todd Kappelman on "How to Watch a Film":
The Need for Interpretation, Matthew Arnold: this is where we start getting some of our rules that we look at when we look

at a film. When interpreting a film, one should ask these following questions: first, number one. How important is life to the director, writers, etc., and are the tough issues dealt with or avoided? This goes to the seriousness of a film. I mean, are we watching a romantic comedy, are we watching a film, drama, of somebody overcoming heroin?

Tom Davis on "The Deity of Christ"
Are all religions basically the same? And we have a law of logic called the law of non-contradiction. To kind of put this in somewhat symbolic terms, A cannot be non-A. You can evaluate the consistencies of things, you can tell if all religions are the same with this law.

Comments from Alumni, Part 1

This week we're talking about our memorable, life-impacting, week-long summer Mind Games Camp. But you don't have to take our word for it. Consider what some of our alumni have to say:

Anna:
Mind Games is a brilliant camp. It has wonderful professors who are very knowledgeable in so many subjects like philosophy and science and theology, and it's so wonderful to get their perspectives on the Bible, and to hear about their spiritual walks, and to hear things that you wouldn't normally hear in your Sunday School class or in church. It's very spiritually enriching not only because of the sessions you'll be going to, but also because of the environment you're in. You're surrounded by like-minded Christians who also love the Lord, so you're with people that can sharpen you as iron sharpens iron. All the sessions have so much information that you can learn things from; they help you with evangelism, they help you with confidence in your own faith, they help you with discipleship. It's so helpful, there's so many things I've learned every single year, I've learned a new thing-so many new things every single year at Mind Games.

Jona:
Looking at the topics, I was terrified because I would be putting myself in a position where I could be wrong, put myself in a position where I challenge all my worldviews, even worse I'll be surrounded by people who are way smarter than me, or have way more experience than me. And what I realized this year is that there is nothing more liberating than being ready to be wrong.

Blaine:
Out of all the events that I've had this year, this was probably one of the ones I looked forward to the most. Last year I had such an great time and made amazing memories and connected with tons of people, and I got to see some of them this year, and as I was going through the camp I learned a lot more as we dove deeper into the topics and revisited them, and as I grew closer and gained connections with some new people and some alumni, it felt like I was growing closer to a family. And it was just really fun overall.

Comments From Alumni, Part 2

Aiden and Gideon keep coming back because they love it so much!

Aiden:
This is my third year. Every year always blows me out of the water because there is a certain level of connection, a certain level of deepness and humanity that you don't get to see outside of this camp. It's incredible to me just how deep you can get with complete strangers in a week. it's just really powerful to me, that God has blessed this camp, that God has blessed the teachers and the professors (I don't know what you prefer to go by) but like the continuing and consistent level of love and care and just connection is what draws me to this camp and what keeps me coming. And so if I had to say one thing about this camp, that this camp was probably one of the most impactful things in my life

Gideon:
This has been my fourth year attending Mind Games and this has impacted my life so many facets, seen and unseen. It has been a really great experience to get to know people my age, have peers, because in my life I really haven't had very many peers of equal anything it's been more mature and spiritual-and it's been rather difficult just being a person who loves God and striving for more, and this camp has really let me be able to become who I want to be and not just who I would have been. And this camp has really allowed me to become more like Jesus. I truly believe that, and I'm convinced of that.

Why Go to Mind Games?

We now know that three out of four high school seniors who had been part of a church youth group drop out of church within a year.{1} One reason for this is that they don't own their faith; they don't know that Christianity is true, and they don't know why it's true. They tend to equate faith with a warm fuzzy feeling that doesn't stand up to the challenges of life. Many students are afraid to express their doubts so they never learn that there are good, solid answers to their questions. They are sensitive to the disconnect that happens when those who profess to be Christ-followers act no differently from unbelievers.

For over thirty years, Probe's Mind Games conferences have been preparing young people for the challenges to their faith. In that time, we have witnessed firsthand the incredible thirst for a reliable trustworthy faith. Again and again we hear that some had despaired of ever finding something like Mind Games. The conference consistently exceeds expectations, and students often tell us they wish they had brought their friends.

Alumni from these summer conferences have gone on to become leaders on their campuses, the government and the military.

This week-long immersion truly changes lives, giving them a new confidence in their God, His Word, and in their role as His ambassadors. We know this because some of them come back as alumni a second or third year, and because they contact us years later and let us know how Mind Games continues to impact them.

Mornings start with an informal devotional by Probe staff and a time of prayer. They receive twenty-five hours of instruction using video clips, role play, Q and A, and other teaching techniques. They connect with each other and process what they're learning in small groups. We as staff get to know and truly love them.

Mind Games Camp is best for those who have finished their junior or senior years of high school, and for college freshmen and sophomores. [Note: especially motivated students younger than that are welcome, though!] Please go to MindGamesCamp.com, and check out videos. You can look at a typical schedule, and find out all the details. And then register someone you love. It will make a difference in time and eternity.

Notes

1. Steve Cable, Is This the Last Christian Generation? probe.org/is-this-the-last-christian-generation/

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The Answer Is the

Resurrection

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

Making a Defense for Your Living Hope

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



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

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

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

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

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

Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

Giving an account for our belief in Jesus' resurrection is the key to defending the hope within us. Several books have been written on this topic, and you can find a list of them in the transcript of this radio program on our Web site. The evidence for the resurrection as an historical event is so strong that even Dr. Antony Flew, until recently a noted proponent of atheism, had to admit, "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events."{5}

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

1. *Accurate predictions*. Both the Old and New Testaments

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

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

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

4. *Angry authorities*. After word of Jesus' resurrection began to spread, the Jewish authorities wanted to put a stop to people believing in Him. Producing the body of Jesus would have been the best way to do this. Even with support from the Roman authorities, they were never able to produce a body.

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

one has ever found any credible evidence that the body of Jesus was anywhere to be found on this earth.

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

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

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

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

10. *Attesting Spirit*. Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit continues to convict unbelievers and assure believers that Jesus is the risen Son of God.

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

Tearing Down Objections Through the Resurrection

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

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

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

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

2. What difference does God make to my life?

Jesus' resurrection shows that He lives into eternity and that we have the prospect of life beyond this world.{10} Knowing we have a soul that continues beyond this world impacts our perspective on life. As Paul points out, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."{11}

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

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

Jesus' resurrection confirms that Jesus is the source of truth. He knows which holy book is actually a revelation from God. Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the Old Testament. He promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles as they

shared His teaching through the New Testament. The Gospel of John states, “So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.”{12}

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

4. I am too insignificant for God to love.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates God's active involvement in this world. He predicted it, He planned it, He performed it. Peter writes, "[you are redeemed] with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you."{19}

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

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates a loving God redeeming a world degraded by evil. If there were no evil, Jesus would not have had to conquer death through the cross. If God was not loving, He would not have sent Jesus into the world to redeem us.{20} Looking at His death and resurrection, we know without

a doubt that there is evil in this world, yet we are still loved by a God with power over death. Evil and love coexist because God valued us enough to create us in His image with a genuine capability to choose to turn our backs on Him. Making us unable to choose evil would have made us unable to love removing the greatest attribute of His image.

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

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

Notes

1. Scripture references are taken from the NASB95.
2. 1 Peter 1:1-2, 3:8.
3. 1 Peter 1:3-4.
4. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19
5. Gary Habermas, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: An Exclusive Interview with Former British Atheist Professor Antony Flew." Available from the Web site of Biola University at www.biola.edu/antonyflew/.
6. Matt 28:11.
7. Luke 24:13-32
8. 1 Peter 1:21.
9. 1 Peter 1:18-21.
10. 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
11. 1 Cor. 15:32.
12. John 2:22.
13. Rom 5:8-11.
14. John 18:37-38.
15. Rom 1:4-5.
16. John 14:7.
17. James 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
18. Rom 10:9-10.

19. 1 Peter 1:18-20.
20. John 3:16.
21. John 2:22.

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Jesus Is God: 5 Powerful Indicators That Reveal His

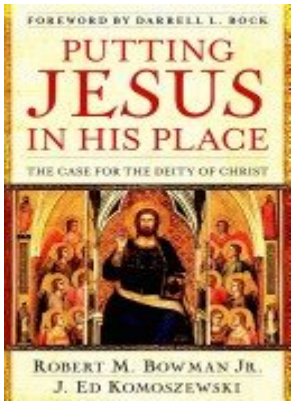
Divine H.A.N.D.S

Don Closson explains the five lines of evidence that Jesus is God from the book Putting Jesus in His Place.

Jesus Shares the *Honor* Given to God



Defending the deity of Christ can be a source of anxiety for some believers. Perhaps it is because our defense often consists only of a couple of proof texts, which are quickly challenged by Jehovah's Witnesses and others. Even worse, some Christians themselves are troubled by passages that seem to teach that Jesus is something less than God, that He is inferior to the Father in some significant way. They are fine with Jesus being the suffering servant, the Messiah who died for our sins, but less sure of His role in creation or as a member of the triune everlasting "I Am" of the Old Testament.



A recent book by Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski titled *Putting Jesus in His Place* is a great confidence builder for those wrestling with this key doctrine. The book offers five lines of evidence with deep roots in the biblical material. The book is organized around the acronym H.A.N.D.S. It argues that the New Testament teaches that Jesus deserves the *honors* only due to God, He shares the *attributes* that only God possesses, He is given *names* that can only be given to God, He performs *deeds* that only God can perform, and finally, He possesses a *seat* on the throne of God.

Let's look at the first line of evidence for the deity of Christ: Jesus deserves the honor that should only be given to God. To honor someone is to acknowledge "their place in the scheme of things—to speak about them and to behave toward them in a manner appropriate to their status and position."{1} As

creator of the universe, God deserves the highest level of honor and glory, since nothing can claim a higher degree of status or position. As a result, the Old Testament teaches that only God deserves the honor and glory that is part of human worship, and He will not share this honor with anything else. In Isaiah 42, God declares that "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols" (Isaiah 42:8).

So how does Jesus fit into this picture? In John 5, Jesus declares that the Father has entrusted judgment to the Son so that "all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father." He adds that "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father" (John 5:22, 23). Referring to his pre-existence with the Father before creation, Jesus says, "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5). In these passages, Jesus is claiming the right to receive the same honor and glory due to the Father; in effect, He is claiming to be God in the same way that the Father is God.

Jesus Shares the *Attributes* of God

If Jesus is honored in the New Testament in a manner reserved only for God, it follows that one who is given the honor and glory reserved for God is also worthy of worship. So it's not surprising that the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is to be worshipped by the angels or that in Matthew's Gospel the apostles worshipped him when he came to them walking on water (Hebrews 1:6; Matthew 14:33). Perhaps the most stirring image of Jesus being worshipped is in Revelation where every creature in heaven and on earth sing praises to the Father and to the Lamb, giving them both honor and glory and reporting that the four living creatures and the elders fell down and worshipped Him (Revelation 5:13-14).

The New Testament also teaches that Jesus shares divine attributes that only God possesses. When this claim is made,

Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others protest by pointing out that Jesus exhibited the very human attributes of hunger, fatigue, and pain. This valid observation does not conflict with the traditional Christian teaching that Jesus possessed two essential natures—one divine and one human. There is no reason to assume that one set of attributes cancels out the other. It should be added that although Jesus shares a divine nature with the Father, He does not share the same properties within the Godhead or trinity. The Father sent Jesus into the world; Jesus died on the cross and assumed the role of our permanent high priest.

Jesus clearly states in John 14 that to see him is to see the Father; both are equally God (John 14:10). In Colossians, Paul goes to great lengths to argue that all of God's divine attributes are present in Christ. He writes that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" and that ". . .God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Colossians 1:15, 19). He summarizes the same idea by adding that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9). The writer of Hebrews concurs in the opening paragraph of that book, saying that "the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus shares the Father's attribute of pre-existing the created universe and His own physical incarnation. John's Gospel tells us that Jesus was with the Father in the beginning when the universe was created, and Paul adds that Jesus is before all things (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-18). In other words, Jesus has always existed and is unchanging. He has been given all authority on heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). He deserves the honor, praise, glory, and worship of all creation.

Jesus Shares the *Names* Given to God

Those who question the deity of Christ complain that the New Testament just doesn't teach it, that it doesn't come right

out and say that Jesus is God. Is this really the case?

The New Testament uses two key words for God: *theos*, the general Greek word for deity, and *kurios,* usually translated as "lord." *Theos* is the word most often used to designate God the Father and is also used a number of times in direct reference to Jesus, especially in the Gospel of John. John begins his book with the familiar proclamation that Jesus, the Word, was with God (*theos*) in the beginning, and that the Word (Jesus) was God (*theos*). Later in the chapter, John adds that "No one has ever seen God, but God (*theos*) the One and Only, who at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). Jesus, the Word, is described by John as being with God in verse one, and at the Father's side in verse eighteen, and in both cases is given the title *theos* or God.

The Gospel John also contains the confession by Thomas that Jesus is his Lord (*kurios*), and God (*theos*). John makes sure that we understand that Thomas was talking about Jesus by writing "Thomas said to Him," that is, to Jesus, "'My Lord and my God.'"

Paul uses *theos* in reference to Jesus a number of times. In Romans 9:5 he describes Jesus as "Christ, who is God (*theos*) over all." And in Titus he writes that we are waiting for our "blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God (*theos*) and Savior, Jesus Christ (2:13)." Peter portrays himself as a servant of Christ who is writing to those through whom "the righteousness of our God (*theos*) and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours (2 Peter1:1)."

All four gospels begin with John the Baptist's ministry of "preparing the way of the Lord" as fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 40:3. The prophet wrote, "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God." The Hebrew word translated LORD in this verse is the unspoken special word for God used by the Jews consisting of four consonants called the *tetragrammaton*.

The New Testament Gospels are applying the word Lord to Jesus in the same way that the Old Testament referred to Yahweh as LORD.

Jesus Does the *Deeds* that Only God Can Do

It was universally recognized by the Jews of Jesus' day that "God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1; cf. Isaiah 37:16)." So it might be surprising to some that the New Testament also gives Jesus credit for creation. Paul teaches in Colossians that Jesus created "all things." To make sure that no one misunderstands his point, he adds that "all things" includes "things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). Paul wanted to be clear: Jesus is the creator God of the universe.

While Jesus' role in creation is enough to establish his divine nature, He also exhibited supernatural divine power during His ministry on earth. Unlike the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, Jesus did not have to petition a higher power to heal or cast out demons. He had inherent divine power to accomplish his will. Other than giving thanks, Jesus did not pray before performing miracles. In fact, the apostles reported that some demons obeyed them only when they invoked Jesus' name. There were a number of occasions when Jesus realized that power had gone out from Him even without His intention to heal (Luke 6:19; Mark 5:30; Luke 8:46).

Jesus not only healed and cast out demons, but also had direct power over nature. When the disciples were frightened on a boat, He "rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm" (Matthew 8:26). When thousands were following him without food, He fed them miraculously (Matthew 14:20-21).

The New Testament teaching that salvation is possible through Jesus Christ alone would also have serious implications for Jewish readers. The Old Testament teaches that God is the only source of salvation. For instance, Psalm 62 teaches that "My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation." How then does one explain the numerous references claiming Jesus to be the source of salvation? Matthew points out that Mary will call her son Jesus because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Jesus declares of himself that "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him (Jn. 3:17)." There are also instances where Jesus directly forgives the sins of individuals, thus attracting hostile attention from the Jews (Luke 7:47-49; Mark 2:5-7).

The Psalmist writes that it is the Lord God "who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities" and that "Salvation belongs to the Lord." John summarizes nicely when he writes, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Jesus Has a *Seat* on God's Throne

Our last line of argument for the deity of Jesus Christ refers to his claim to have a place on the very throne of God. From this throne, Jesus rules over creation and will judge all of humanity. He literally possesses all authority to rule.

Jesus made this claim clear during His questioning by the high priest Caiaphas the night of his capture. Caiaphas asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" (Mark 14:61). If Jesus wasn't God, this would have been a great opportunity for Him to clear up any misconceptions. But instead of denying His divinity, Jesus says "I am," admitting to being God's unique Son, and goes on to say, "you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:62). The high priest's response was dramatic; he tore his clothes and

declared that those present had heard blasphemy from the lips of Jesus. They understood that Jesus was making a direct claim to being God, for only God could sit on the throne of the mighty one.

In His response to the high priest, Jesus draws from a number of Old Testament passages. The book of Daniel describes this "Son of Man" as having an everlasting dominion that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14). The passage adds that the Son of Man has been given authority to rule over all people and nations, and that men of every language will worship him. He is also described as coming with the clouds of heaven, imagery that is used a number of times in the Old Testament to indicate divine presence. Exodus describes a pillar of cloud that designated God's proximity to the Jews, while the book of Psalms and the prophet Isaiah both picture God riding on clouds in the heavens (Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 19:1). The point here is that Jesus is connecting Himself to this "Son of Man" who will sit at the right hand of the Father, have everlasting dominion and authority, and will be worshipped by all men. This kind of language can only be used to describe God.

The New Testament makes it clear that there is nothing not under the authority and power of Jesus. John writes that the Father put all things under His power (John 13:3). Paul adds that the Father seated Jesus at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named (Ephesians 1:20-21). Jesus sits on the judgment seat, He sent the Holy Spirit, He forgives sinners, and is our perfect eternal high priest (2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 2:33; 7:59-60; Hebrews 7-10).

The New Testament provides multiple lines of evidence to make the case that Jesus is God. The only question remaining is whether or not we will worship him as a full member of the triune Godhead, the only eternal, self-existing, creator God of the universe.

Note

1. Robert M. Bowman and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus In His Place* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 31.

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The Iran and Israel Conflict Crisis: 4 Insights Relating to the U.S., Israel, and the Middle East

Iran and Israel Conflict Crisis and Regional Security

Iran nuclear threat: Does it pose a threat to the U.S., Israel, and the Middle East? What can we learn about the Iran and Israel conflict?

Many Americans might wonder why the president has focused so much attention on Iran. After all, it is a country 6,000 miles away in the Middle East. Some may also conclude that military action against Iranian leadership might not be warranted since the previous administration did not deploy troops or significant military hardware to the region.

Two years ago, however, the Biden administration considered

action after more than 160 attacks on U.S. troops took place in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan. There were also about 40 clashes with the Houthis in the Red Sea. Iran funded many of these attacks, either directly or indirectly. They were part of a mounting proxy battle between the U.S. and Iran.

At the time, reporters asked what President Biden would do. Some argued that the U.S. and Iran have essentially been at war for decades. Even the Pentagon press secretary acknowledged that this was true if one considers the larger conflict. To understand why reporters were asking this question, we need to review some history.

Modern History of Iran

The conflict between Iran and the United States can be traced back to 1953, when the U.S. cooperated in overthrowing Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Afterward, the Shah of Iran (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi) was placed in power.

The U.S. viewed the Shah as a key ally and a pillar of security in the Middle East. His pro-Western government advanced Western interests and served as a Cold War counterbalance to Soviet influence. The United States supported Iran through significant arms sales and strong economic ties, despite concerns about the Shah’s authoritarian rule.

The turning point came in 1979 when the Shah was overthrown by radical Islamic clerics led by Ayatollah Khomeini. The Iranian Revolution transformed the U.S. from an ally into “The Great Satan” in the eyes of the new regime.

This hostility became clear when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard seized the U.S. Embassy and took 52 American diplomats hostage. They were not released until President Reagan was sworn in on January 20, 1981. This crisis marked the beginning

of what many view as a half-century-long undeclared conflict between Iran and the United States.

The U.S. strategy had been to promote stability in the Middle East. That effort became increasingly difficult because of Iran’s growing influence. Complicating matters further, Saudi Arabia supported anti-Western Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, while Turkey—though a NATO member—began positioning itself as a leader of a renewed Islamic political vision in the region.

Iran has engaged in a proxy war against the U.S. for decades. In April 1983, Iranian-backed Hezbollah forces bombed the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people. Later that year, Hezbollah bombed the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 service members.

Despite these attacks, decisive retaliation never fully materialized. Iranian influence continued to expand through proxy groups across the region.

During the Iraq War following 9/11, evidence showed that Iran was supplying weapons and support that contributed to American casualties. While the U.S. was focused on Iraq as the primary enemy, Iranian operatives and Iranian-manufactured munitions were also responsible for attacks on U.S. troops.

Iran is often described as the chief sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East. It funds groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, which regularly target Israel and U.S. interests. Israeli and American responses to these groups are now reshaping the balance of power in the region.

Missiles and Nuclear Weapons

Iran possesses the largest stockpile of ballistic missiles in the Middle East. Many of these missiles have a range of up to 2,000 kilometers, allowing them to strike Israel and other

countries throughout the region.

Iran has also demonstrated its long-term intentions toward Western nations. Earlier this century, it launched ballistic missiles from ships in the Caspian Sea. Although the test missile did not carry a nuclear warhead, it demonstrated how such a weapon could be deployed.

A missile detonated high in the atmosphere could create an electromagnetic pulse (EMP), potentially destroying the U.S. electrical grid and causing catastrophic damage.

If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, it would destabilize the Middle East and surrounding regions. However, the latest assessment from Tulsi Gabbard suggests that Iran is not currently building a nuclear weapon and that its supreme leader has not authorized such a program since it was suspended in 2003. Some officials, however, dispute this assessment.

The Donald Trump administration resumed talks with Iran after withdrawing from the nuclear accord several years earlier. Initial negotiations produced few concrete results. Meanwhile, a United Nations nuclear watchdog reported that Iran violated nuclear nonproliferation agreements.

Iran maintains that its nuclear development is intended for civilian energy. However, the discovery of secret nuclear sites has raised concerns that the program may have military ambitions.

Tensions escalated when Iran launched a massive ballistic missile attack on Israel following Israeli strikes on Iranian targets.

In June 2025, Israel launched **Operation Rising Lion**, targeting key nuclear and military facilities, including an enrichment site. The strike lacked the bunker-busting capability needed to fully destroy the facility.

Soon afterward, the United States launched **Operation Midnight Hammer**, striking several Iranian nuclear locations. The administration announced that the sites had been "obliterated." Yet satellite imagery later suggested Iran had begun rebuilding portions of its nuclear infrastructure.

Diplomatic talks between the United States and Iran have produced few breakthroughs. Negotiations aim to limit uranium enrichment, restrict missile development, and address human rights concerns within Iran.

Since diplomacy failed, the Trump administration began military endeavors. However, many Americans remain wary of another prolonged conflict in the Middle East. Limited strikes might damage nuclear facilities, but meaningful regime change would likely require a large-scale ground invasion.

Religious Component

Another reason Iran's nuclear ambitions raise concern is the religious worldview of its leadership.

Most Iranians are Shia Muslims, and a significant branch follows the tradition known as the **"Twelvers."** This sect recognizes twelve divinely appointed leaders known as Imams.

According to their belief system, the twelfth Imam—often called the Mahdi or messianic figure—is currently in hiding and will return during a time of global conflict.

Just as Christianity has an eschatology, or doctrine of the end times, Shia Islam also holds an apocalyptic worldview. However, its narrative is essentially the reverse of what Christians read in the book of Revelation.

Twelver theology teaches that global conflict may precede the arrival of the Mahdi. Some analysts fear that extremist interpretations of this belief could view large-scale

conflict—including potential attacks on Israel or the United States—as a way to usher in that messianic era.

During the Cold War, the United States relied on the doctrine of **Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)** to deter nuclear war. The Soviet Union would not launch nuclear weapons because retaliation would guarantee its destruction.

Critics argue that radical religious interpretations might weaken this deterrence model. Some Twelver believers might assume divine intervention would protect them from destruction.

Author Joel C. Rosenberg explored this scenario in his political thriller *The Twelfth Imam*.

Yet there is another side to this story. Reports indicate that Christianity is growing rapidly in Iran, with some describing the Iranian church as the fastest-growing Christian movement in the world.

Christians should continue praying for Iranian believers who often face persecution. We should also pray for U.S. leaders and their allies as they navigate these complex challenges.

The Persian people are an ancient civilization that deserves peace and freedom. Unfortunately, many Iranians suffer under economic sanctions and harsh authoritarian leadership.

They deserve both our prayers and our compassion.

[For more articles by Kerby Anderson follow here: https://probe.org/author/kerbyanderson/]

The Value of Christian Doctrine and Apologetics

Dr. Michael Gleghorn makes a case for why Christian doctrine and apologetics are important for spiritual growth and maturity.



Just prior to beginning college, I committed my life to Christ. Naturally, as a new believer wanting to grow in my faith, I embarked upon a program of daily Bible reading. When I came to Paul's letter to Titus in the New Testament, I was both struck and inspired by a particular command, which I found nestled among others, there in the first chapter.

Paul reminded Titus, whom he had left on the island of Crete, that he wanted him to "straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders" in the local churches which had been established (Titus 1:5). After listing various spiritual and moral qualifications that an elder was to have, Paul went on to insist that he must also "hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). When I first read those words, it was as if a light went on inside my head and I thought, "That's exactly what I would like to do! I want to be able to 'encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it'" (Titus 1:9). Paul's words thus encouraged me to take up, in a serious way, the study of Christian doctrine and apologetics.

But what exactly do I mean by "Christian doctrine" and "apologetics"? At its most basic level, Christian doctrine is essentially the same thing as Christian teaching. Such teaching aims at providing a logically consistent and "coherent explication of what the Christian believes."{1} Apologetics is a bit more complicated. It comes from the Greek

term, *apologia*, and means "defense." It was often used in law courts in the ancient world.{2} Indeed, the book of Acts records several instances in which the Apostle Paul was called upon to "make a defense" of himself before various governing authorities, like Felix, Festus, and Agrippa (e.g., Acts 24:10; 25:8; 26:1-2).

Of course, when we're talking about *Christian* apologetics, we're concerned with "making a defense" of the truth-claims of Christianity. The Apostle Peter tells us, "Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15). Christian doctrine and apologetics play an important role in the life and health of the church. So please keep reading as we delve more deeply into these issues.

The Value of Christian Doctrine

Why is Christian doctrine important for the life and health of the church? The Apostle Paul told Titus that he wanted him to appoint elders in the local church who would be able to "encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9). The teaching of sound Christian doctrine is important for several reasons, but for now let me simply mention two. First, sound Christian doctrine helps us to learn what is true about both God and ourselves. Second, it reminds us of the right way to live in light of such truths. And both of these are essential for the life and health of the church.

First, it's important to know what is true about God and ourselves. Indeed, our eternal destiny depends on it! Not only must we know that God is holy and righteous and will punish all sin, we must also realize that we are sinners (Numbers 14:18; Romans 3:23). But this, in itself, would lead to despair. Hence, we must also understand that God loves us and sent his Son to be the Savior of the world (John 3:16; 1 John

4:14). We need to grasp that
forgiveness and reconciliation with God are freely available to those who turn to Christ in repentance and faith (Acts 3:19; 16:31). Sound Christian doctrine is thus essential for salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:9-13; 2 John 1:9). Without it, true spiritual life and health is impossible.

But this does not exhaust the importance of Christian doctrine. For once we are saved through faith in Christ, God then calls us to grow up and become like his Son—and this would be exceedingly difficult apart from instruction in sound Christian doctrine. As Christian philosopher Bill Craig observes, "If we want to live correctly for Christ . . . we need to first think correctly about Christ. If your thinking is skewed and off-base, it is going to affect your life and your Christian discipleship."{3} Indeed, the Apostle Paul contrasts Christian *maturity*, characterized by genuine "knowledge of the Son of God," with spiritual *immaturity*, characterized by a lack of such knowledge and a proneness to being deceived (Ephesians 4:13-14).

God calls us to Christian maturity—and instruction in Christian doctrine plays an important role in our spiritual growth. But there is also a role for Christian apologetics—and we must now turn to consider that.

A Defense of Christian Apologetics

Many people question the value of Christian apologetics for the life and health of the church.{4} They contend that it's impossible to "argue" anyone into becoming a Christian. Instead of making a defense for the truth of Christianity, we ought rather to invest our limited resources in preaching the gospel of Christ, trusting that God will open people's hearts and draw them to himself.

Now while I certainly agree that we should be preaching the

gospel, and trusting that God will use it to draw men and women to himself, this negative view of apologetics is frankly unbiblical, untrue, and shortsighted.

In the first place, such a view is unbiblical. Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul used arguments and evidence to convince their listeners of particular theological truths (Matthew 22:15-46; Acts 17:16-34). Moreover, the
Apostle Peter tells us to always be ready to "make a defense" (or offer an apologetic) to those who ask about our hope in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). A negative view of Christian apologetics thus runs counter to the teaching of Scripture.

Second, it's simply untrue that no one ever comes to Christ through apologetic arguments and evidence.{5} Indeed, sometimes the Holy Spirit actually uses arguments and evidence to draw people to Christ!{6} And while such people may admittedly be in the minority, they can be extremely influential in commending the faith to others, for they are often prepared to offer good reasons for believing that Christianity is really true!

Finally, a negative view of Christian apologetics is shortsighted. The great theologian J. Gresham Machen argued that we should aim to create "favorable conditions for the reception of the gospel." Along these lines, he noted the difficulty of attempting to do evangelism once we've given up offering an intellectually credible case for the truth of Christianity. "We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer," he said, "and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation . . . to be controlled by ideas which . . . prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion."{7} Machen understood that neglecting apologetics is shortsighted. For unless we offer arguments and evidence, we make it that much easier for people to simply shrug their shoulders and continue ignoring

Christianity's truth-claims.

Having now dismantled the arguments *against* apologetics, we'll next consider its *benefits* for the life and health of the church.

The Value of Christian Apologetics

Christian apologetics is concerned to offer a robust defense for the truth of Christianity. Hence, training in Christian apologetics can be of great value for the life and health of the church. This is because such training helps to instill within believers a deep confidence that Christianity is really true. And when one becomes convinced that Christianity is really true, one is typically more likely to share one's faith with others—and less likely to abandon the faith when confronted with various social, cultural, and intellectual pressures.

Let's consider that first point, that when one becomes convinced of Christianity's truth, one is more likely to share this truth with others. Many Christians admit to being hesitant about sharing their faith because they're afraid someone will ask them a question that they are ill-prepared to answer.{8} Training in apologetics can help counteract this fear. Granted, one may still be asked a question that is difficult to answer. But apologetics training can help alleviate the fear associated with such situations by helping believers understand that good answers are available—even if they can't remember what those answers are! To give an illustration, if I learn that there is excellent evidence that a particular drug can cure some disease, then I will be far more confident about sharing this fact with others—even if I can't answer all their questions about *how* the medicine works. I may not remember exactly *how* it works, but I do know that there is very good evidence *that* it works. And knowing this, I will naturally be more confident telling others about it, even

if I can't answer all their questions about how or why.

Moreover, training in apologetics can help insulate believers from abandoning the faith, for they now know that there are good reasons to believe that Christianity is really true. Of course, most people who abandon the faith do so for *non*-intellectual reasons. Still, as Paul Chamberlain observes, "A number of vocal critics who have moved from Christianity to atheism cite intellectual difficulties with Christianity" as a prime reason for quitting the faith.{9} While apologetics training can't completely prevent such outcomes, it can make them less likely. After all, it's far more difficult to abandon a view once you've become sincerely convinced of its truth.

Our Witness to the World

Over a hundred years ago, the theologian J. Gresham Machen forcefully argued that, for the faithful Christian, all of life—including the arts and sciences and every sphere of intellectual endeavor—must be humbly consecrated to the service of God.{10} Indeed, this should be true not only for every individual Christian in particular, but for the entire church in general. Our witness to the world depends on it.

Machen wrote:

> Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but . . . all of human thought. The Christian, therefore, cannot be indifferent to any branch of earnest human endeavor. It must all be brought into some relation to the gospel. It must be studied either in order to be demonstrated as false, or else in order to be made useful in advancing the Kingdom of God. . . . The Church must seek to conquer not merely every man for Christ, but also the whole of man.{11}

In this article, we've been considering the importance of Christian doctrine and apologetics for the life and health of

the church. And clearly, Machen's proposal cannot be effectively implemented apart from a healthy understanding of these issues on the part of the church. After all, how can "all of human thought" be brought "into some relation to the gospel" unless we first understand what the gospel is? How can views "be demonstrated as false" unless we first have some idea of what's true—and how to reason correctly about it? How can views "be made useful in advancing the Kingdom of God" unless we first understand such views, along with how and why they can be useful in advancing God's kingdom? If we are ever to have a hope of carrying out a project like this, in a manner that is both practically effective and faithful to our God, then sound Christian doctrine and apologetics must occupy a central role in our endeavors.

Christian doctrine and apologetics are not antithetical to the life and health of the church. They are rather of fundamental importance. Only by knowing what we believe, and why it's really true, can we fulfill Peter's injunction to always be ready "to make a defense" to anyone who asks about our hope in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). And only thus can we progress to true spiritual maturity, avoiding the "craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:13-14). So if we care about the life and health of the church—along with its witness to the world—we must encourage a healthy dose of respect for sound Christian doctrine and apologetics.

Notes

1. Molly Marshall-Green, "Doctrine," in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 374.
2. Steven B. Cowan, "Introduction," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 8, Kindle.
3. William Lane Craig, "Foundations of Christian Doctrine (Part 1)," *Reasonable Faith*, October 22, 2014, accessed August 22, 2018,

www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-foundations-of-christian-doctrine/foundations-of-christian-doctrine-part-1/.

4. Many of the points made in this section are indebted to the discussion in William Lane Craig, "Foundations of Christian Doctrine (Part 2)," Reasonable Faith, October 29, 2014, accessed August 29, 2018, www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-foundations-of-christian-doctrine/foundations-of-christian-doctrine-part-2/.

5. See, for example, the "Testimonials" section of the Reasonable Faith website, accessed August 29, 2018, www.reasonablefaith.org/testimonials.

6. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 192.

7. J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Culture," *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913): 7.

8. Indeed, entire books have been written to help believers feel better prepared for such conversations. See, for example, Mark Mittelberg, *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask: (With Answers)* (Tyndale, 2010).

9. Paul Chamberlain, "Why People Stop Believing," *Christian Research Journal* 41, no. 4:11.

10. Machen, "Christianity and Culture," 5.

11. Ibid., 6.

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Wes Huff – Billy Carson

Debate

A significant corner of the internet recently (October 28, 2024) blew up with a debate between Christian apologist Wes Huff and popular skeptic Billy Carson when their online debate went viral. Kyle Skaggs provides context and understanding.

In recent years, social media platforms that allow monetized live streaming services like Twitch and YouTube have gained significant importance. While live streaming first became popular for gaming content on Twitch, it quickly expanded its scope to more diverse mediums of engagement, the latest of which is the academic world.

The interactive format allows experts and enthusiasts to engage with diverse audiences in real-time, creating a more accessible form of dialogue. Live streaming services are slowly evolving into a hub for philosophical, religious, and ethical debates.

This year started with a debate over the reliability of the Scriptures, and the uniqueness and goodness of the Christian worldview went viral. So, why did it resonate with so many people, what happened during the debate, and what can it teach us about apologetics?

First, the popularity of streaming services on Twitch and YouTube among Millennials and Gen Z cannot be understated. For people my age and younger, these platforms are the most common way to learn different philosophies and worldviews rather than the classroom.

The Billy Carson–Wes Huff debate was initially to be between Carson, a popular Bible conspiracy theorist, and his friend Mark. Mark, believing he was not knowledgeable enough to do the subject matter justice, asked Director of Apologetics Canada, Wes Huff, if he would debate Carson while Mark moderated.

Huff thoroughly dismantled each of Carson's arguments with historical and literary evidence. Shortly afterwards, Carson demanded Mark not to post the debate, a request that was ignored. Carson is now trying to sue Huff. The debate was already popular due to Carson and Mark's substantial audiences, and it further went viral after Huff was invited to speak about it on Joe Rogan's podcast.

Much of the debate's three-hour runtime is padded out by the host, who tends to lead the conversation on tangents, and his statements largely add little to the debate. This, paired with his habit of over-explaining and repeating his questions, causes the debate to drag in places. However, this is offset by the quality content produced between Carson and Huff.

The topics covered are the inspiration and reliability of the scriptures, and the Christian worldview. The first point of the debate was the crucifixion of Jesus. Carson explained that the Gospel of Barnabas, which predates the KJV, does not mention the crucifixion. Furthermore, the Gospel of Jesus's Wife, while controversial, is believed to be an accurate record that Jesus may have been married. This places the crucifixion in doubt.

Huff counters that the Gospel of Barnabas is a known forgery. We know it is a forgery because it is clear the author has no knowledge of the region, customs, and time of the first century. The author also paraphrased Dante's *Inferno*. Internal evidence heavily suggests a medieval date, not to mention the only two copies of it are in late medieval Spanish and Italian.

Carson claims parts of the Genesis story are copied verbatim from the Enuma Eilish (an ancient Babylonian creation myth), Sumerian cylinder scrolls, and other ancient texts. When Huff asks him to summarize the Enuma Eilish Carson does so, but frames the story in his own interpretation to the point where it is borderline unrecognizable. It would have fit perfectly

on a late 2000's history channel at 3:00 am. Wes does not focus on this. Instead, he asks which part of Genesis 1 and 2 is copied.

Huff asks this because having read both the Bible and Enuma Eilish, he does not find any parallels beyond the surface level. He points out that most Ancient Near East scholars see the Genesis account as an apologetic against documents like the Enuma Eilish.

Carson claims that there are certain words that let him know they were copied. As an example, the idea of separating the earth from the water, and the earth being void and formless tells us that somebody looked at the Enuma Eilish and copied them. Carson attempts to change the subject, saying there was so much more he wanted to cover.

Huff explains the purpose of the Enuma Eilish was to show that the deities come from the created order, which is a fluke. The common man does not matter. Only the kings were made in the image of the divine. On the other hand, the Bible says there is only one God who creates, what He created was good, and man is made in the image of God. Huff argues that rather than plagiarism, the Genesis account is a polemic against works like the Enuma Eilish.

Carson closed his argument by claiming the scriptures are clearly 100% man-made because there are statements in the text that encourage genocide, slavery, and all sorts of horrible things. Wes counters with the ethic found in Judaism and Christianity that is found nowhere else, that we are created in the image of God. People are always going to abuse scripture and religion. The earliest criticism of Christianity is that it's a religion of slaves and women. The Christian worldview gives agency to the marginalized.

Before going into the debate, Huff looked into the content Carson produces to get a feel for what kind of arguments he'd

be facing. So he knew that all he needed to do was let Carson ramble. If Carson had not acted the way he did, and just took the loss, this would not have exploded in popularity.

Huff constantly asks Carson what is his methodology for determining what is an accurate source of information. Carson says his methodology was gathering up as many texts as he could, alongside traveling to learn from their various cultures and the stories they tell. This gave Huff an idea of how much research Carson was doing, but did not answer his question.

Why is methodology so important for Wes? He explains in his interview with Joe Rogan, “What I was trying to get Billy to get to the bottom of was partly a question of methodology.” Professionals in Wes’s field of study make sure they can explain the criteria they use when looking at one source versus another source to develop a conclusion. They must rely on non-deductive reasoning, which deals in probability. This means we look at the data we have, and make inferences to the best possible conclusion. Historians rarely disagree with the data, but the conclusion can be vastly different.

Carson’s claims disagree with the data. Everything that Billy cited against the crucifixion was either false in the case of the Sinai Bible, or verified forgeries. The evidence against the crucifixion in terms of documentary evidence presented by Billy is not convincing. When Huff points this out, Carson tries to move on to a new subject, showing his inexperience with this kind of conversation. It would have been better if he clarified his criteria for determining the value of a source, or admitted his methodology was flawed. This way, he could keep his credibility as a scholar. By deflecting and changing the subject in the face of defeat he comes across as amateur.

Throughout the debate, we see Huff exemplify what Jesus told His disciples before sending them out among the people of

Israel: “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” (Matthew 10:16) We can see from the comment section that Huff’s kind conduct resonated with people. Subscribers to Carson’s channel switched to following Huff! One wrote that their worldview was shattered, and they were picking up the Bible again! Huff later said he did not expect the debate to go viral in the way it did. It is amazing to see the Holy Spirit work through seemingly little things.

“…[I]n your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.” (1 Peter 3:15)

When we answer with gentleness and respect we show the other person we don’t want to dominate them. If they don’t become less combative, they at least become more willing to listen. From there, it’s all the Holy Spirit’s work. This is why I say we need more debates like this, because no matter how we argue, the people we speak to directly may never accept the Gospel, but what about those listening in?

The Professor: Why Are You a

Christian? – When Challenged, Can You Defend Your Faith in Christ

Are our adults ready to give a defense of the gospel? When challenged, can they give a reasonable explanation of their faith? Dr. Bohlin presents a sobering view of this question based upon years of experience questioning high school and college-age students on the basis for their belief in Christ. By exposing their lack of cogent answers to questions they may be asked, he challenges them to spend time exploring the questions and developing biblical worldview-based answers.

The Professor

Over the last ten years, I have used a very effective technique to help teens realize their unpreparedness for the step toward college. It seems our young people are heading into public and even Christian colleges thinking they are ready for the challenge to their faith that higher learning can be.

Probe Ministries has sponsored a college prep conference since 1991 that was designed to help young people gain some insights and even some knowledge on how to address the intellectual challenges that college will provide.

If you remember the thousands of college radicals who protested and picketed in the ‘60s and ‘70s, they found their push for change was not very effective. Instead, many of them stayed in college, obtained Masters Degrees and PhDs. After all, it was easier than getting a real job! As a result, they are now your children’s professors!

The college campus was an anti-Christian breeding ground

several decades ago and now it is even worse. Christianity is not so much openly mocked as it is marginalized and deemed a false and mischievous mythology.

If you haven't already heard some of these statistics, you need to hold onto your hat.

In 2007, LifeWay surveyed 23- to 30-year-olds and found that seventy percent had taken at least a one year break from church during their college years.{1} Now, almost two-thirds of these return to some level of church attendance, but mainly to please family or friends who encouraged them to return. That means that most of our churched youth are making many of their life decisions, including marriage and career, apart from a church context. Even many who return carry numerous scars from bad choices during those years.{2}

With this statistical background, it's plain our young people need some preparation before going on to college or the military. But as most parents of teens know, just telling them they need this is less than likely to be convincing.

Enter the Professor. The technique I mentioned at the beginning is to impersonate an atheistic college professor doing research on the religious beliefs of young people. Sometimes the students know I am playing a role with them, but occasionally I play the professor and the students are none the wiser.

A Simple Question

When I step to the front of the room, I introduce myself as Professor Hymie Schwartz (a name borrowed from my late colleague Jerry Solomon who played this role far better than I do). I tell the group that, since I am conducting research on the religious beliefs of young people, their youth pastor, counselor, principal, teacher—whatever, has allowed me to visit with them.

I begin the conversation something like this: “Since this is a church or Christian school I presume you are all Christians. Is anyone not a Christian?” Of course no one raises their hand. But I am always aware that some may indeed not be believers and may not appreciate my questioning so I am always paying attention.

At this point I simply call on someone, usually someone who isn’t really paying attention or is engrossed in conversation with a neighbor. “You! Are you a Christian?” No one has ever answered no. Upon receiving an affirmative answer, with hands casually stuck in my pockets, I demand, “Why?”

Students are paying attention now. This is for real. Now consider my question for yourself. If Peter warns us to always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks to give a defense for the hope that we have, this is a pretty basic question. In our highly secular culture, if someone finds out you’re a Christian, they may indeed ask you why. Peter says you ought to have an answer.

But this simple question why is usually something our young people, and even their parents, have never really considered. Their Christian faith is certainly something they would claim is central to their lives, but the dumbfounded looks on their faces tells me repeatedly that this question is a new one.

It’s usually about this time that any parents sitting in the back are suddenly quite relieved I’m not talking to them!

By asking such questions, I can get them pretty riled up and confused. The point is not to have fun but to help them see that they need to be prepared and think a little about why Christianity is important to them and why they think it’s true.

“I Asked Jesus into My Heart!”

Having their Christianity questioned usually comes as a surprise and even shock. Rather than directly answering the question, they try to tell me *how* they became a Christian. It usually takes the form of confidently saying they asked Jesus into their heart.

The professor quickly fires back, “You asked Jesus into your heart?! That sounds pretty gross, really. What’s he doing in there with all that blood? Yuck!” That always gets a surprised reaction and a little befuddlement. The student typically tries to recover by saying something like, “No, I mean it’s like I trusted Jesus as my Savior.”

Again the professor will fire back quickly with a question like, “Why did you do that?” or “Savior? What did you need saving from?” I think you can see where this is going. It really is not difficult to pick something from what he or she said and challenge it. I either pretend I don’t understand what they said, forcing them to better explain themselves (which is rare), or I deliberately ask them why they think that way, or how they know that.

In answer to “How do you know that?” I am often told that “It says so in the Bible!” They usually can’t tell me where the Bible says that. I also ask if the Bible is true, and they say it is. But when I ask, “How do you know it’s true?” the blank stare reemerges.

Sometimes a student will say, “Because it’s the word of God!” Now I can really dig a little deeper. In response to further questioning, they usually can’t tell me where the Bible says it’s the Word of God nor can they tell me why the Bible is different from The Book of Mormon or the Qur’an. If there is a youth pastor or chaplain present there is usually an embarrassed look on their face or a head buried in their hands.

By this time the class is very tense and full of nervous laughter. When I reach a dead end with a student—for instance when they say, “I don’t know” with a very resigned and defeated voice—I look for one of the laughing students and ask, “What about you?” Of course that gets everybody’s attention again and off we go.

While I admit I have a little fun playing this role, it never ceases to break my heart at how ill-prepared our young people are to follow Peter’s advice to always be prepared with an answer. I have yet to find a student in ten years who is willing and able to go toe-to-toe with the professor.

“You’re a Narrow-Minded, Self-Righteous Bigot!”

Here are three other directions our conversations have frequently taken.

When I have challenged students to tell me why they think or believe Christianity is true, some will turn to their own subjective experience. Technically, there is nothing wrong with this, specifically when speaking to a Christian audience. But someone who doesn’t even believe in God will frequently find ways to truly make fun of this element.

A student may describe that Jesus speaks to them in their prayer time, to which I quickly ask what His voice sounds like or how they know it was Jesus and not indigestion. The blank stares usually resume at this point. We have become so comfortable in our Christian bubble sometimes that we frequently don’t see how unintelligible our language is to those outside the community of faith. It’s tough to share the gospel that way.

Sometimes a student will interject that they believe in Jesus because that’s what their family has taught them or it’s what

they learned in church. I usually pounce on that pretty quickly and repeat that this student believes Christianity is true because their parents told them so. The student usually agrees. After commending them for honoring their parents I tell them that's really pretty stupid. Pausing a second for the shock to register, I go on about the boy raised in India whose parents are Hindu and he respects his parents and believes Hinduism is true, so the boy in India and this student are both headed to heaven because they trusted their parents!

One time a student stammered around and eventually agreed with my statement as his youth pastor put his head in his hands.

Finally in talking about salvation I ask what happens to those who don't believe in Jesus. Most will hesitatingly say they go to hell. The professor predictably rants, "Just because I don't believe the same fairy tale as you, I'm going to hell?" When they predictably shake their head yes, I get down eye to eye and spit out, "You're a narrow minded, self-righteous bigot!"

Always Be Ready to Give an Answer, with Gentleness and Respect

Students enjoy the interactive nature of this routine even though they are routinely embarrassed by their inability to handle the challenge. When Peter admonished all of us to always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that we have, yet with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15), they fail miserably. Perhaps as a parent, you may be glad that I don't do this with adult groups.

Often students will try to turn the conversation in their favor by asking the professor a question. I quickly dismiss that idea by simply answering that *I'm* asking the questions.

But when we're done, if time allows I attempt to leave them with hope by quickly summarizing how I, Dr. Ray Bohlin, Vice-President of Probe Ministries, would answer the same question.

Here's the outline of my response. In a calm voice I quickly assert that I know there is a God. As a scientist I look principally at how marvelously our universe, galaxy, solar system, and planet are designed for complex life here on earth. The number of highly improbable coincidences rules out chance and strongly implies design. This is reinforced by the evidence from biology of the incredible complexity of life, particularly the coded information in DNA. This remarkable molecule with its accompanying system of transcription and translation screams for intelligence.

The fact that all people have some sense of right and wrong, even though we may disagree sometimes, tells us we are comparing our morality to some invisible standard outside ourselves that must come from a supreme Law Giver. I am convinced there is a supernatural God.

If this God exists, then has He spoken to man? I quickly tell about the uniqueness of Scripture, written by forty authors from eight countries over fifteen hundred years in three languages and all with a consistent and unique message of a God of love who ransomed us from our sins. Where we have archaeological evidence it consistently confirms the accuracy of biblical events. I am convinced the Bible is the true and unique Word of God.

The Bible throughout is about Jesus, who repeatedly claimed to be the unique divine Son of God and offered his death and resurrection on behalf of mankind as proof. That Jesus bodily rose from the dead is the only rational conclusion of the evidence of the empty tomb. On top of that, my personal experience of the last thirty-seven years has shown me again and again the unique love and power of God.

So what about you? Why are *you* a Christian?

Notes

1. “LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church,” 2007, www.lifeway.com/article/165949/, accessed May 15, 2010.
2. Youth Transition Network has researched this problem over the last ten years and has excellent resources, videos, research, and books and DVDs for purchase. Take a look at www.ytn.org.

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Laredo Apologetics Conference Videos



Videos from our Apologetics Conference in Laredo, Texas are now online here.

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3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth

Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth: Jesus' birth

in Bethlehem, Jesus being taken to Egypt, and genocide surrounding His birth.

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

These experiences during the holidays warm my heart.



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

Let me share it with you. It's rather simple. It's easy to remember because it comes entirely out of Matthew's second chapter. It's not long and involved either—just three points.

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

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

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

In Matthew 10:39 Jesus said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Or

Luke 14:27, “Whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.”

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

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

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

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

Jesus Born in Bethlehem

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus' Flight to Egypt

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

"So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until

the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: “OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON.”

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus, Genocide Survivor

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

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

"Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.'"

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

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

What are the chances Jesus would fulfill this prophecy this specifically? And as we discussed before, if Jesus were no more than a charlatan attempting to self-fulfill these prophecies, how could a man orchestrate something as large-scale as the death of all the baby boys in a village? Plus the

Bible records that was Herod's idea. And remember, Herod didn't want Jesus around. Herod was attempting to eliminate potential competition for his throne.

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

from anywhere in the state. The chances of picking up the marked silver dollar on the first try are the same as Jesus fulfilling just eight Old Testament prophecies. Not happening!

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

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

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

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