



**David McLaughlin**

# **BASIC TRAINING**

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## **ABOUT VOYAGE MINISTRIES..**

It is the mission of Voyage Ministries to equip the church with resources for spiritual growth and discipleship. Our website contains many resources which can be downloaded for free or can be purchased if hard copies are preferred. Our Statement of Beliefs is also available at our website.

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David is available to speak at your church or event. He also has a special presentation called "One Hour Voyage Through The Bible" in which he takes the audience through the entire Bible, including every book, in just one hour.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS...**

I would like to thank everyone I have ever had a friendly argument with for this curriculum. It is through collegial debate and discussion that we really discover what we believe and why.

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Most importantly I thank my wife, Tina, and our children, Chase and Reagan, for giving up their claim to my time while working on this study.

I pray this study encourages you to use your mind in your pursuit of the very best God has to offer you in this life and the next.

Love & Mercy,  
David McLaughlin

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# BASIC TRAINING

## Introduction

In the military, Basic Training is where soldiers learn the basics of combat. But it's far from easy. It requires commitment and endurance. As Christians, we have to do combat against attacks on our faith. That is one reason we have developed Basic Training, a boot-camp for believers.

1 Peter 3:15 tells us “...***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.***” As this verse points out, our defense of the faith should always be done with gentleness and respect. We should not see people as our enemy. Rather, we seek to explain the *reasons* we are Christians.

The purpose of Basic Training is to equip Christians to answer the most important questions in life from a Christian worldview. This study guide will examine many of the philosophical, historical, scientific and theological arguments related to the Christian faith.

Another reason is to provide those answers for anyone who is seeking the truth about God and Christianity.

It is not the objective of each individual lesson to be a comprehensive defense of the faith. Instead, the study guide builds a cumulative case for the Christian faith throughout the entire 9 lesson study.

Of course, there are always more questions to be asked and answered, but this study guide covers the most important and common questions. It is our desire that your pursuit of the truth does not end here, but rather begins here.



## LESSON ONE

# IS THERE ABSOLUTE TRUTH?

**Mission:** The purpose of this lesson is to examine whether or not truth exists at all and how to determine what is true.

Relativism has become more and more popular over the last few decades. This is the view that truths are not absolute but are relative to the groups or individuals that hold them. If this view is accurate, then it is difficult, if not impossible, to confidently hold any belief system.

However, we will see that this view, as well as other misconceptions about truth, is self-defeating. We will also see how to determine what is true.

Does truth matter? There are almost as many belief systems as there are people. Isn't it arrogant to believe that any one belief system is the only truth? Doesn't everyone have the right to believe whatever they want?

Of course, people do have the *right* to believe whatever they want, but every belief is not wise. One could sincerely believe they are bulletproof, but that belief could have fatal consequences. So it is self-evident that truth matters. Apathy about truth is extremely dangerous. While it may not seem important to analyze claims about truth, it can literally be a life or death issue. Or an eternal life issue!

## EAST VS. WEST

When discussing the nature of truth, the claim is often made that truth is an either-or proposition. For example, the page this text is written on is either white or it is not. This is an excellent example of Western logic. Many people, however, view logic from an Eastern framework. This view would hold that it is possible for the paper to be both black and white. It would point out that the paper appears white but has elements of blackness. It is not purely white. This is put forth as an example of duality, or how two contradictory things can possibly be true.

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This is illustrated by the symbol “yin-yang.” This Eastern symbol illustrates the idea that there is nothing purely black or white, good or evil.

We could summarize the Eastern philosophy of logic this way:

The Eastern view of logic is that logic is a “both-and” proposition. This view is superior to the Western “either-or” view of logic.

But let’s examine this view. The underlying argument here is that the Eastern view should be used instead of the Western view. We could restate it this way.

Either the Eastern view of logic should be used or nothing else.

There is no reason to promote the “superior” Eastern view of logic unless it should be preferred above all others. But this means those promoting this view are using an “either-or” argument to argue against “either-or” arguments.

You have just experienced a “self-defeating” argument! You should become very familiar with these so you can recognize them in a proposition. Don’t worry about not being able to find them. They are all around!

## **THE AGONY OF DEFEAT**

A self-defeating argument is one that contradicts itself. If the statement were true, then the statement itself could not be true. It is an extension of **The Law of Noncontradiction**, which states that a claim cannot be both true and false at the same time.

In our example above, a statement is made that this paper is white. In conversational language we understand that this is not a claim that there are no black specks anywhere in the paper, but that the general color of the paper is white. It would be contradictory to say the paper is purely white and purely black. It cannot be both.

Let’s look at some popular theories about truth and see how they are affected by self-defeating arguments.

### **Skepticism**

Skepticism can be a good thing. It is beneficial to be skeptical about that shocking email you received before you forward it to 50 of your closest

friends. It can also be wise to be skeptical about that sure-fire financial investment before you invest thousands of dollars.

But we are talking about a particular form of skepticism that relates to what we can know about truth.

Skepticism is the view that truth must be empirically or definitionally verifiable.

This view was made popular by David Hume. This became known later as The Principle of Empirical Verifiability. Hume claimed that the only things which should be believed would be propositions which either:

1. Use abstract reasoning, such as math or definitions,
  - Such as  $2+2=4$ , and
  - All triangles have three sides, or
2. Can be verified empirically through the senses.

This view cannot be sustained because it is self-defeating. Hume's skepticism says that truth must be true by definition or be validated through the senses.

Since his own proposition cannot be proven true by definition or empirically verified through the senses, it cannot be true using its own test for truth. It is, therefore, self-defeating.

## **Agnosticism**

Immanuel Kant picked up where David Hume left off. While Hume claimed that only verifiable propositions can be true, Kant claims that even those propositions cannot be trusted as truth.

Agnosticism is the view that truth is unknowable.

The Greek word "gnosis" means *knowledge* or *to know*. Agnostics, in the sense we are discussing in this lesson, do not believe anything can be known with certainty.

Truth is unknowable, according to Kant, because everything you know about truth is only known through the senses or the mind. You never know the essence of something, only your perception of that thing. For example, you do not know the essence of the bus that is coming down the street. You only know the perceptions your mind forms of the bus. (It should be noted, however, that even the most ardent agnostic looks both ways before crossing the street!)

It is surprising that this view, as well as skepticism, is quite popular in academia today. It can be quite simply shown to be a self-defeating argument.

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While claiming that nothing is knowable, Kant must claim to *know* that nothing is knowable. If his statement is true, that *nothing* can be known, then his statement cannot be known to be true.

## **FEET FIRMLY PLANTED IN MID-AIR**

Let's return to the topic of relativism. It is equally as popular, if not more so, than skepticism and agnosticism.

Relativism states that truth has no absolute basis.

While you may not have heard it formally posited and argued, you have certainly heard its popular forms:

All beliefs are equally valid.

We should be tolerant of all beliefs.

What is true for you may not be true for me.

You are probably becoming an expert at defeating these arguments now. You can easily see that these statements are self-defeating. One must claim that there is at least one absolute truth: the truth that all truths are not absolute. You can almost hear them following up with, "Except this truth." But the moment you make an exception for the truth claim of relativism, it is defeated.

Enter a college campus and make a truth claim about any religious belief and you will almost instantly be confronted by relativism. The conversation will usually go something like this:

*You: Christianity is the only true religion.*

*Professor: You cannot say that because it is intolerant.*

*You: Why is that intolerant if it is true?*

*Professor: Because truth is relative. There is no such thing as absolute truth.*

*You: Is that so?*

*Professor: Yes.*

*You: How do you know your statement is true if there is no such thing as absolute truth?*

*Professor: Nice try. Your statement about Christianity is intolerant to other beliefs.*

*You: What does that mean?*

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Professor: You claim that your way is the only way. But others believe the same thing. It is more tolerant to accept all views as equally valid.

You: *But you are not accepting my view as valid. Why are you not being tolerant of my view?*

Professor: Because your view is wrong.

You: *How can it be wrong if there is no truth? For my view to be wrong there would have to be a differing view that is right. But you said that is not possible.*

Professor: But you are the one claiming to have truth. I am claiming there is no absolute truth.

You: *Which you claim to be true. But if there is no truth, then your statement cannot be true. Are you saying that all views should be accepted except mine? Isn't that intolerant?*

Professor: It is very complicated. Maybe by the end of the semester you will understand that what they taught you in Sunday School was a bunch of lies and fairy tales.

You: *How can they be lies if there is no truth? Doesn't that make all beliefs equally worthless?*

Professor: You see your view as truth because of the way you were raised. It is your culture that has shaped your version of the truth. But other people in other cultures have a different version of the truth.

You: *Right. So my truth is worthless.*

Professor: You are starting to get it. But don't be so hard on yourself. It is not your fault. It is the way you were raised.

You: *I think your view is also worthless.*

Professor: Then you probably won't get a good grade.

You: *But you cannot give me a bad grade. There is no absolute truth, so I cannot get any wrong answers.*

Professor: That's not how it works in my class.

You: *Are there any true/false questions on the test?*

Professor: Not any more.

You can see from this discussion (which happens more often than you think) that relativism doesn't make it very far in the "real" world. While it is true that our views are often shaped by our culture, this does not mean that nothing can be found to be true.

## WHAT IS TRUTH?

It is one thing to claim, as we do, that truth is knowable. But how can we determine what is true? The fact of the matter is, there is very little we can know with absolute certainty. But there are some tests we can use to get us closer to the truth.

### True or False?

What is false cannot be true. So here we have one test for truth.

**If something can be demonstrated to be false, then it cannot be true.**

We can actually go a long way with this information. Again, this is the Law of Noncontradiction. Something cannot be true and false at the same time. In our search for the truth, we can eliminate many truth claims from our belief system if we can prove them to be false. This is often used in science.

A scientist will create a hypothesis. If she tests her hypothesis (called an experiment) and it fails, she knows the hypothesis is not correct and either abandons or adjusts it.

But what if the experiment works? Unfortunately, she cannot yet claim the hypothesis as true. She must continue to test the hypothesis repeatedly and under varying circumstances to see if it is always successful.

If I have never flipped a coin and form a hypothesis that a quarter will always land on heads I can run an experiment. If the quarter lands on heads, I cannot stop there and declare that a quarter will always land on heads! But if I repeatedly flip the coin, I will begin to realize that there is a 50/50 chance it will land on heads.

Falsifiability is an extremely useful, although limited, tool in the search for truth. When we use formal logical arguments, we are using what is called **deduction**. Deduction can tell us what is false, but not what is true. Let's see why not.

Premise 1: All men have wings.

Premise 2: David is a man.

Conclusion: David has wings.

Logically, this conclusion follows from the premises. But we must first analyze the premises to see if they are true. The premise that "All men have wings," cannot be proven true by deduction (logical arguments). It must be tested by **induction**. Induction involves observation and

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experience. This brings us to the **Law of The Excluded Middle**. This states that something either *is*, or *is not*. As an example, either men have wings, or they do not. Either God exists, or He does not.

We can use induction to test many of these statements. We can observe men, and see if they have wings. In our study of men we will realize that men do not have wings. *At least, not the men we have observed.*

Unfortunately, due to the fact that we cannot view every man throughout all time, we cannot know for 100% certainty that all men do not have wings. But this should not alarm us. We can know with considerable certainty that men do not have wings. It can be *reasonably* concluded that men do not have wings. It can be concluded with certainty that not *all* men have wings.

Almost everything that we “know,” we know in this way. Inductive conclusions can be trusted to varying degrees of certainty, but they can definitely be trusted. We have not seen every person who ever lived held to the earth by gravity, but we can reasonably conclude that gravity is true because of repeatedly observing and testing the effects of gravity.

We can now propose:

**Statements can be held to be true if they are:**

- 1) **not false, and**
- 2) **reasonably affirmable.**

One might argue here that God is not affirmable. But theists can respond that the results of God (creation for example) are very affirmable. Gravity is not a “thing” in itself, but its results are affirmable.

## **THE REAL WORLD**

For those seeking a belief system that allows for the “do what feels good” lifestyle, relativism seems just the ticket. We have been talking about truth relativism. But the logical extension of that philosophy is moral relativism.

Moral relativism is the view that since there are no absolute truths, then all morals and ethics are relative to cultural and personal preferences.

But just as relative truth cannot stand scrutiny, neither can moral relativism. This view is never sustainable as a way of life. If no moral value is correct or better than any other version of morality, then anarchy ensues.

For example, if murder is not inherently and morally wrong (a moral absolute), then there is no reason not to commit murder against my neighbor or even mass genocide.

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Many people say they believe in moral relativism but very few hold to the idea consistently. If I broke into the home of a moral relativist and took their belongings and physically abused them, it is inconceivable that they would not believe they had been wronged. But by their own belief system, there is no absolute moral standard of reference by which to proclaim such acts as wrong.

In fact, virtually every aspect of our life is dependent on a mutually accepted standard of morality. The economy could not function if there was no integrity in financial dealings. There could be no relationships without the virtues of caring and forgiveness. It is the universal acceptance of morality that keeps society from disintegrating into complete barbarism.

While many decry the act of “legislating morality,” the fact is that all legislation is enacting a moral value. The question then becomes, “Whose moral value will be legislated, yours or mine”?

## **THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH**

We can clearly see that all arguments against the existence of absolute truth are self-defeating. Truth must exist. It is important then for each individual to investigate what is true.

As we continue to examine the truth about faith, it will be very useful in our next lesson to determine if miracles are possible.

## LESSON TWO



## ARE MIRACLES POSSIBLE?

**Mission:** The purpose of this lesson is to examine whether or not miracles are possible and how to recognize them if they occur.

One obstacle many people have to religion and Christianity in particular is the claim of miracles within their holy writings. Since these books often tell stories of dramatic miracles such as God parting the water, walking on water, turning water into wine, and even resurrection from the dead, and people do not experience these events in their own life, they discount them completely. Some people, such as Thomas Jefferson, could accept the Bible and the teachings of Christ if you just took out all the miracles.

But Christians do not believe the miracles recorded in the Bible were fairy tales, but rather they were actual events that God used to teach people about Himself. So it is important to the Christian faith to recognize whether miracles are possible and how to recognize them if they occur today.

How do different groups of people respond to the ideas of miracles? The most common reactions are as follows:

**Atheists-** Miracles do not occur because there is no God. Everything that happens must conform to natural law.

**Agnostics-** It seems like agnosticism would lead to the conclusion that we cannot know whether miracles occur. However, most agnostics would say that miracles only occur to the extent that we cannot currently explain them. They could be explained by natural laws if we fully understood the laws themselves.

**Deists-** Miracles do not occur because God does not interact with the world beyond its creation.

## WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

It would probably be helpful in determining whether miracles are possible if we could just define it. As you might expect, however, defining a miracle is where much of the disagreement comes in. So let's examine various definitions that have been proposed and see how they stand up to logic and Christian theology.

### Hume's Miracles

Philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) defined miracles as follows:

*A miracle is "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent."*

His reasoning is:

- P1: A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature.
- P2: Firm and unalterable experience has established these laws.
- P3: A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence.
- C: Therefore, uniform experience amounts to a proof; there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of fact, against the existence of any miracle.

A careful reading of his thoughts on miracles actually demonstrate that he never says miracles are impossible, only that they are improbable. And if something is improbable, they should not be accepted as fact.

His premises above and this entire line of reasoning can easily be seen as faulty. We will look at the premise that miracles are a violation of the laws of nature later. For now we can say that this *might* not be the case.

As for the second premise, he assumes that the experiences we have are firm and unalterable. This is quite a leap in logic. There have been many discoveries since Hume's day that would clearly demonstrate that knowledge from experience is far from unalterable.

The third premise demonstrates a bias to the evidence he prefers. While we could agree with the premise on its face, Hume, through his second premise, demonstrates that evidence to the contrary of his foregone conclusion does not get a fair hearing. For Hume, we are more wise to accept the "greater evidence." That is, evidence that is the most abundant and most common. But given this logic, no events that occur rarely could ever be considered as true. It is like saying nobody has ever won the lottery because it is far more common to not win the lottery.

To demonstrate the absurdity of this logic, Richard Whately published his pamphlet in 1819 called *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte*.

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He demonstrated that using Hume's logic, since the exploits of Napoleon were so unprecedented, no intelligent person could believe such a man ever existed. This is obviously a logical fallacy. Due to the fact that miracles, by nature, would be rare, there could never be enough evidence for Hume to believe in them.

## **Spinoza's Miracles**

Dutch philosopher Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) believed that:

*A miracle is an event which we are unable to explain by other events familiar to our experience.*

His logic is as follows:

- P1: Miracles are violations of natural laws.
- P2: Natural laws are immutable.
- P3: It is impossible for immutable laws to be violated.
- C: Therefore, miracles are not possible.

Spinoza makes some bold assertions. Premise 1 we will deal with later. The second and third premises are highly questionable and Spinoza has no real way of demonstrating they are true. If it is possible that they are not true, then the conclusion does not logically follow.

Spinoza's logic, or lack thereof on this topic, is actually a very good example of modern thinking. It is very materialistic in the sense that it presumes that all that exists is nature and there are no other explanations for anything in the universe. As we demonstrated in earlier lessons, it is very logical to question this premise. If not reject it completely.

We might add, however, that there is some validity to the idea that what we call a miracle today might not be considered a miracle with tomorrow's knowledge or technology. It is therefore very important to be careful which things we call miracles. For example, traveling to the moon in Spinoza's day could have been called miraculous, while going there today, though extraordinary, could not rightly be called miraculous.

## **Kant's Miracles**

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) of the Copernican Revolution, proposed the following definition of miracles:

*"[Miracles] are events in the world the operating laws of whose causes are, and must remain, absolutely unknown to us."*

It might take a while to absorb Kant's idea, but what he is saying is that miracles are events that subscribe to some kind of laws. In his view, there

are laws known to us, and laws unknown to us. Miracles belong in the category of events that occur according to the laws unknown to us. In fact, to truly classify an event as a miracle, those laws would have to always remain unknown to us. He would agree with Spinoza's idea that some things might be able to be explained at a later time. In that case, it never was a miracle.

The problem with Kant's logic is that it assumes that God, for example, must be bound by some set of laws. In this idea, God would be subject to these laws just as we are subject to natural laws. In this way Kant deifies these unknown laws and makes God a being who always acts according to some set of laws. It is obviously problematic for Kant to demonstrate how he knows this to be true.

The positive side of Kant's argument is that it allows the possibility that there are things we do not now that exist outside of the laws of nature. This is a major step forward in terms of recognizing the supernatural.

## **GOD'S MIRACLES**

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) provides a more balanced and reasonable view of miracles:

*"Those things are properly called miracles which are done by divine agency beyond the order more commonly observed in nature."*

This definition provides that miracles are:

1. Performed by God.
2. Beyond the ordinary course of nature.

In this definition, miracles are not mere coincidences (missing a flight on a plane that crashed) or events that might be explainable by some natural means given more knowledge or technology (flying to the moon-or Mars).

First, miracles are performed by God. This prevents us from truly calling miracles things that are done, albeit incredibly, by men or nature. A doctor or athlete may perform a remarkable feat, but it was humanly possible nonetheless.

Second, miracles are beyond the ordinary course of nature. It is important to note that this does not mean miracles *cannot* happen within nature, but they do not ordinarily occur within nature.

## Miracles and Natural Law

The most common objection to miracles is that they violate natural laws. However, we must ask ourselves if this is true? Miracles can truly be said to be beyond the ordinary observed course of nature, but it is not necessarily true that they violate the laws of nature.

We have spent so much time defining miracles that we have not discussed the laws of nature. We generally think of these laws in the wrong way.

Let's take gravity for example. We think of the "law of gravity" as stating that we will always be held to the earth by this law. But the law actually states that we will be held to this earth with such a force that is in proportion to the mass of the earth and the mass of ourselves (as well as some other factors). The point is that there are different factors that involve themselves into the *functionality* of the law (size, weight, speed, etc.).

C.S. Lewis made this point very well in his book *Miracles*. He explains:

But every prediction of what will happen in a given instance is made under the proviso "other things being held equal" or "if there are no interferences." Whether other things *are equal* in a given case and whether interferences may occur is another matter.

He illustrates this by explaining that if one billiard ball strikes another billiard ball, the amount of momentum lost by the first ball must exactly equal the momentum gained by the second ball (just enjoy the physics lesson).

But every physicist knows there are other factors: the roughness of the cloth for example, or whether the player reaches down and picks up the ball. In those cases, other factors effect the result.

In other words, the predictive value of science is limited. It can predict what will happen *if* certain events occur, but cannot predict *whether* they will occur. There is no way to predict whether two automobiles will collide although you can predict what will happen to the cars *if* they collide.

## God As Interference

The point to all this is that Christians believe in "miracles" simply because God is the "other factor" in the equation. We agree that there are laws of nature and things will most likely move along in accordance to those laws. But if God decides to step into space and time, then Augustine's "ordinary

course of nature” becomes unordinary, but does not necessarily violate any natural laws.

C.S. Lewis used the virgin birth of Christ as an example:

If God creates a miraculous spermatozoon in the body of a virgin, it does not proceed to break any laws. The laws at once take it over. Nature is ready. Pregnancy follows, according to all the normal laws, and nine months later a child is born.

It can easily be said that a supernatural God can cause supernatural activity. Given the existence of a supernatural God (as seen in Lesson Three) there is no reason not to believe it is *possible* for that God to interact with the world. But is it probable?

## **ALL I NEED IS A MIRACLE**

Let's examine why God might perform miracles in the first place. Deist's believe God created the universe and then lets it operate according to the laws of nature he established. So why would God insert himself into humanity? In the Bible we can see three facts in the miracles of Jesus (not to mention the Old Testament miracles).

### **1. Miracles validated Jesus's message.**

Jesus taught that he was teaching the truth about the Kingdom of God and that He was the Messiah. The miracles He performed validated that He brought with Him the very power of God.

*Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.*

Acts 2:22

### **2. His miracles showed people that He cared about them.**

Jesus genuinely cared for the poor, the hungry and the sick. His miracles demonstrated His compassion to those in need.

*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

Matthew 14:14

### **3. His miracles never convinced everybody.**

Many people say they would believe if only they could see a miracle. It is important to note that there were people who even saw the miracles of Jesus with their own eyes and chose not to believe.

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*But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."*  
Matthew 12:24

So God might have valid reasons to perform miracles. These are generally two-fold: **compassion** and **revelation** (the desire to reveal Himself to mankind).

## **P I C K   A   M I R A C L E**

So how can we identify a miracle? This is an important question for knowing whether miracles occur in the present or past. Many religious books claim miraculous events. If we do not preclude their possibility, how can we know which ones to accept?

### **1. Multiple validations.**

David Hume correctly questions the validity of testimony as a proof of miracles. Our senses are notoriously questionable. Many times we think we see things we do not actually see. Examples of this are numerous. It is also possible to be in an altered state of consciousness through various means such as grief, fatigue, lack of nutrition, drugs, etc.

The more witnesses and documentation of a supposed miraculous event the better. This is admittedly very difficult. There are even many examples of collective hallucination. Large groups of people can be hyped up to the point of believing almost anything.

But the miracles of the Bible cannot be explained by collective hallucination and were witnessed by many people. The writers of the New Testament often ask their readers to verify with others that the events actually occurred. This is particularly powerful with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is virtually impossible for over 500 people to be in a state of hallucination in various places and over a period of 40 days.

### **2. Identification with a purpose.**

While it may not be impossible for God to interact in the world for no reason, it does seem improbable. Although the Bible records many miracles, we should note that most people never saw a miracle and even fewer experienced one. Miracles should not be expected on a common basis. What we do see in the Bible is that God wants to accomplish a specific purpose when He performs a miracle and that miracle will always bring glory to God.

## FAITH AND MIRACLES

Before we conclude we should briefly examine how faith impacts miracles. We can certainly call on God to perform miracles on our behalf but to what extent should we expect God to meet those requests.

There are certain Biblical principles that should be observed:

### 1. We should pray for God's will.

We must always seek the will of God above our own will. Many times we ask for things, even good things, and do not realize what the consequences would be.

*"This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*  
Matthew 6:9-10

*"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*  
Luke 22:42

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him.*  
1 John 5:14-15

### 2. We should accept the Sovereignty of God.

Although we might request many good things, we should always recognize that God has reasons for the things He does or does not do. We should trust that His way is wise and He can even redeem the bad things that happen to us (see Lesson Four).

*Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.*  
Job 38:1-4

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*  
Romans 8:28



LESSON

THREE

IS THERE

A GOD?

**Mission:** The purpose of this lesson is to establish that belief in a **theistic God is reasonable.**

The existence of God has been debated for millennia. But why? Why should we care whether or not God exists? As long as there has been recorded history, people have believed in another world with a cosmic being, or beings, who control at least a portion of the events in the universe. Some have claimed they have a special revelation of God and that their truth is the only truth, only to have other groups make identical claims yet with completely different beliefs about what is true.

What we believe about God affects our worldview, how we treat each other, the planet, and how we view ourselves. It seems that there will never be universal agreement on the topic, but there is no greater question one should seek to answer for themselves than, “**Is There A God?**”

The arguments for and against God’s existence can range from the scientific to the philosophical to the theological. It should be noted that when discussing the existence of God it is acceptable to utilize all fields of study. In fact, it would make sense that we would use all of the tools at our disposal to examine such an important question.

The arguments about God have most commonly been in the realm of philosophy. This lesson will be very similar to an introductory course in philosophy (although much shorter). There are many more arguments to be made on each side of the issue, but we have tried to fairly present the most common and important arguments related to the discussion. At times we will interject answers that are exclusively Christian in nature. That is because we believe there are certain questions that can only be answered satisfactorily from a Christian worldview.

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## A Defining Moment

There are many terms used while discussing the existence of God that are important to define. Other definitions could be given for some of the terms below but we have used common definitions for each.

**Deism** is the belief that God must have existed in order to create the universe, but is not concerned with humans, the universe, justice, etc.

**(Mono)Theism** is the belief in one God, the creator of the universe, who is perfect, personal, separate from the universe and worthy of worship. This belief is distinct from polytheism (many gods), pantheism (everything is god), panentheism (god is in everything), etc.

**Atheism** is the belief that there is no God and that with enough information all questions could be explained through completely naturalistic means.

**Materialism/Naturalism** is the belief that all that exists is material in nature and essence. There is nothing supernatural that exists.

**Supernaturalism** is the belief that there are forces that exist beyond or outside of natural causes. Those forces could be God, gods, spirits, faeries, unicorns, or other conceivable entities.

**Agnosticism** is the belief that there is not enough evidence to prove or disprove the existence of God, so it is impossible to know whether God exists.

## How Do We Know?

There are many different ways of obtaining knowledge. Each method has advantages and disadvantages.

### Science

The **scientific method** of acquiring knowledge consists of four steps:

1. **Observe** some aspect of the universe.
2. Form a **hypothesis** about what you have observed.
3. Make **predictions** based on the hypothesis.
4. Use **experiments** to test the hypothesis.

This is an incredibly useful method of learning that has yielded significant results. However, it is limited in scope to things that can be observed and tested. A theistic God obviously cannot be observed and tested although some of the claims about God's activities in the universe might be observed and tested.

## Logic/Philosophy

The fields of logic and philosophy are intertwined. While scientists test experiments, philosophers pose questions about aspects of the universe and try to use reason to answer those questions.

Philosophical arguments generally take the form of a series of premises (called an argument) that support a conclusion. For example:

Premise 1: If you get a grade of 95 on the final exam you will get an A in the class.

Premise 2: You got a grade of 93 on the exam.

Conclusion: Therefore, you will not get an A in the class.

When all of the premises of an argument can be established as **true** and **complete** then the conclusion must be true as well. While the above argument appears to draw a true conclusion because both premises are true, it may not if the premises are not also complete. There was no premise that the *only* way to receive an A in the class was to get a 95 on the final exam. Maybe you had enough other course work or extra credit to receive an A even though you did not get a 95 on the final exam.

This field of study is also extremely useful and has given us significant results. While it allows for a much broader evaluation of the world around us than science, it is also limited in scope because of the limitations of the human mind and what we can know as absolute truth.

## Experience

Another way of acquiring knowledge is through our personal and collective experiences. As we go through life we experience aspects of the universe with our senses and draw conclusions based on those experiences.

While our experiences often lead to our most deeply held beliefs, they are also the most unreliable. Not only is it impossible for any person to experience all that there is to experience, the experiences we do have are often skewed in light of our other experiences as well as through the limitations of our memory, perception, etc. This is why saying, "I just know (or feel) that it is true," has never been a very convincing argument to a skeptic.

## Let's Argue

In this section we will examine the most common arguments for and against the existence of God.

# **GOD DOES NOT EXIST**

## **The Scientific Argument**

Although seldom formally posed, there is a common argument against the existence of God that we will call the Scientific Argument. It goes something like the following:

- P1: Naturalism can explain all of the causes of the universe.
- P2: There is no scientific evidence God exists.
- C: Therefore, God does not exist.

This argument fails for three reasons. The first premise cannot be proven as true. While naturalism *may* be able to explain everything in the universe, it has yet to do so. For example, since science tells us the universe had a beginning, how did something begin to exist from nothing? Or, if we accept that naturalism can explain the existence of humans, what causes consciousness?

The second premise cannot be proven to be complete. Even if one accepts the truth of the premise, the lack of evidence for something does not necessitate that it does not exist. For example, just because you have not found evidence that I have one hundred dollars does not mean that I cannot or do not have one hundred dollars. It only proves that you do not have the evidence.

Finally, the conclusion does not necessarily flow from the premises. Even if the premises are accepted as true and complete, at the most they would only prove that it is not necessary for God to exist. It does not prove the non-existence of God. So it is reasonable to believe God exists.

## **The Problem of Evil**

The most popular argument against the existence of God is often called “The Problem of Evil.” Many call it the atheist’s killer argument. This is such a popular argument that we will devote the next lesson completely to it, but we will examine it briefly here as well.

- P1: If God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent then evil would not exist.
- P2: Evil exists.
- C: Therefore, God does not exist.

Now we’re getting somewhere. This is a compelling argument which requires us to look at each of its parts. Let’s define some of the terms.

The following “omni” traits are characteristics that are traditionally given to a theistic God.

**Omniscience** is the power to know everything. If God knew evil would exist why did He create anything at all? Or does He not have omniscience and therefore is unaware of the evil His creation has caused?

**Omnipotence** is the power to do anything. If God is all powerful why does He not stop the evil? Or does He not have the power to stop evil?

**Omnibenevolence** is the power of doing only good. If God is a good God, why would He allow evil? Or is He not all good?

We should also look at the different types of evil:

**Moral evil** is used to define the evil acts that humans do. This would include war, murder, abuse, lying, etc.

**Natural evil** is used to define the evil that occurs in nature. This would include hurricanes, earthquakes, famine, etc.

Again, we will study this argument in depth in the next lesson, but let’s briefly raise some questions that might make “The Problem of Evil” slightly less powerful.

Are the accepted definitions of the “omni” traits of God accurate? Does omnipotence really mean that God can do *anything*? For example, can God make a square circle? Some would say that if God cannot make a square circle then He is not omnipotent. Others would argue that omnipotence *properly* defined would only mean that God is all powerful within the boundaries of logic and within the bounds of the rules He has established (i.e.: free will).

Does omnibenevolence really mean that God can only *allow* good things to happen? Doesn’t the existence of evil make good possible? How could one even know what good is if it were not contrasted with that which is not good? In fact, does not some good come out of evil? For example, did not the evils of Hitler’s regime bring forth the heroic good of those who stopped him? Is it possible that omnibenevolence means only that God *desires* good for all? If this is so, it would lead us back to a discussion of God’s omnipotence.

In a Christian worldview, God has the power to force everyone to do good, but out of his love he allowed us to have free will. In our own free will we choose to do evil, which accounts for moral evil. Natural evil can only be satisfactorily explained if one accepts the Biblical concept of original sin and that the universe went into a fallen state that God will correct at the end of this age (Romans, Chapters 5 and 8). So it is reasonable to believe that God exists.

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## **GOD DOES EXIST**

There have been many arguments for the existence of God. Some are certainly better than others.

### **The Ontological Argument (The nature or essence of God)**

St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, developed two versions of this argument. We will examine the more popular second argument. It states that there must exist a greatest possible being.

- P1: By definition, God is that which nothing greater can be conceived.
- P2: If God is just an idea, then something greater can be conceived—something that exists.
- C: Therefore, God exists.

St. Thomas Aquinas argued that only God could know if the first premise were true. A Christian monk, Guanilo, argued that using Anselm's argument one could define anything into existence, such as the perfect island.

Anselm responded that no matter how great an island one could conceive, a greater one could always be conceived. Therefore, according to Anselm, God is the only being for which the Ontological Argument could work.

The Ontological Argument has had many supporters (i.e.: Rene Descartes, Alvin Plantinga) but it has never been extremely convincing to the masses, if for no other reason than its difficulty to grasp. It is still, however, reasonable to believe that God exists, based on this argument.

### **The Cosmological Argument (First Cause)**

Cosmology is the study of the nature and structure of the universe. The Cosmological Argument has been made in various forms from the likes of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. It essentially states that God is the first cause of all things.

- P1: All things are contingent and must have a cause.
- P2: There is a chain of cause and effects.
- P3: This chain is either of "infinite regress" or has a first cause.
- P4: The "principle of sufficient reason" rules out infinite regress.
- C: Therefore, a first cause exists which must be God, the uncaused first cause.

Two explanations are needed:

**Infinite regress** is a term used to explain that something has always existed without a beginning. Some have said that the universe could have eternally existed (infinite regress) and, therefore, would not need a Creator.

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The **principle of sufficient reason** says that the cause must not be too feeble to explain the effect. For example, the principle of sufficient reason would require that the boulder at the foot of a mountain was not thrown there by the baby at the top of the mountain. The strength of the baby is not a sufficient reason for the placement of the boulder.

The Cosmological Argument has been very convincing for many. The argument can be seen to be a generalization of the Latin dictum *ex nihilo nihil fit*, "nothing comes from nothing". The main criticisms of the argument are as follows.

**Criticism #1:** The principle of sufficient reason may be flawed. David Hume argued that our understanding of cause and effect is based only on experience and that our experience with cause and effect may not be complete.

Hume made an interesting point but can provide no *disproof* of the law of cause and effect related to the principle of sufficient reason.

**Criticism #2:** Infinite regress may be possible.

The study of physics has provided us with scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning (called the big-bang). Therefore, the universe has not eternally existed (infinite regress fails).

**Criticism #3:** The first premise contradicts the conclusion.

True. However, the whole point of the Cosmological Argument is that God is the uncaused first cause and therefore does not need a cause Himself. In fact, without an uncaused first cause (which we call God) nothing could have ever existed. Nothing comes from nothing.

It should be noted that some scientists believe that "vacuum fluctuations" of energy can account for creation of matter from nothing. Though the discussion is too complex for this course we will say that while this *may theoretically* account for the creation of matter (which is debatable), it does not account for the creation of the energy which created the matter. So it is still reasonable to believe that God exists.

## **The Teleological Argument (Design)**

There has been a movement in recent years called the Intelligent Design movement. It essentially puts forth the idea that the universe is too complex to have happened by chance. The movement uses modern discoveries in science to demonstrate the complexity of the universe.

Certainly there are aspects of the Cosmological Argument involved, but the movement is really an evolution of the Teleological Argument. Teleology is the study of purpose, or the purpose of the universe.

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Before giving the formal argument, let's look at William Paley's analogy called "**The Cosmic Watchmaker.**" Paley stated that if you were walking on a deserted island and found a gold watch, you would assume the watch had a watchmaker. This is because the watch is sufficiently complex in design that it is inconceivable that it came together by random chance. In similar fashion, according to the Teleological Argument, the universe is sufficiently complex in design that it is inconceivable that it came together by random chance.

P1: All things in the universe appear to be highly complex.

P2: It is impossible for this complexity to have happened by chance.

C: Therefore, a conscious designer (God) must exist.

David Hume argued that this argument only leads to a *probable* rather than absolute conclusion. He also noted that if this argument stands, the conclusion could also support deism, polytheism, as well as other supernatural phenomena.

What Hume doesn't do is disprove the argument. The fact that he states the argument leads to a probable conclusion and that it does lead to some form of supernaturalism makes the belief in God reasonable.

## Let's Be Reasonable

Though there are respectable criticisms of these arguments for the existence of God, there are no convincing disproofs of them. Nor were the arguments against the existence of God convincing.

Therefore, belief in a theistic God is reasonable. The atheist or the agnostic might want to speak up here and state that it is also reasonable *not* to believe in a theistic God. And if this was all of the evidence we might agree. However, there are many other good reasons to believe in a theistic God; even the Biblical, Christian God. We will discuss many of these reasons in future lessons.

## Will to Believe

It is vitally important to carefully consider the question of whether God exists. William James noted that there are several kinds of beliefs:

**Momentous:** Very important decisions. (Who should I marry?)

**Trivial:** Decisions which are unimportant. (What should I wear?)

**Living:** Options that are a real possibility. (Where should I go to college?)

**Dead:** Options that are impossible. (Shall I travel to another solar system tonight?)

**Forced:** You must make a choice because refusal to do so is a choice. (I refuse to decide whether to marry or not.)

**Avoidable:** Refusal to choose has no effect. (I refuse to play soccer.)

**Genuine:** A choice that is momentous, living, and forced. (Is there a God?)

James points out that a person cannot be neutral on the question of the existence of God because “to not choose God is to reject Him.” He believed that if the evidence was equal on all sides it would be most logical to “choose to believe” since that decision holds the greatest possible benefits, as we will see with Pascal’s Wager.

## Wanna Bet?

Blaise Pascal put forth what is known as “Pascal’s Wager” with respect to belief in God.

P1: If we **believe** and the belief is **true**, our gain is maximal because of the earthly benefits of righteous living and the eternal benefits of salvation and heaven.

P2: If we **believe** and the belief is **false**, our loss is minimal. We have only lost temporary pleasures.

P3: If we **do not believe** and are **wrong**, the loss is maximal. We receive eternal damnation.

P4: If we **do not believe** and are **correct**, the gain is minimal. We do not get to gloat in the afterlife.

C: It is obviously better to believe.

But what real point does James and Pascal make? Can we somehow force ourselves into believing when we don’t? Of course not. But since the potential benefits of believing far outweigh the potential benefits of not believing, you would want to be absolutely sure that you have examined all of the possible evidence before concluding that God does not exist.

Since it is impossible for any person to observe and absorb all possible knowledge, it is a given that some evidence will be missed. Which is why it seems to many that it takes more faith to be an atheist than a believer.

If you are still searching for answers, continue to study the rest of the lessons in Basic Training and decide if belief in God is more than just reasonable.

## LESSON FOUR



### WHY IS THERE EVIL?

**Mission:** The purpose of this lesson is to examine whether or not the existence of evil and suffering preclude the existence of God. We will also learn why evil and suffering exist and what should be done about it.

There is no question that the world in which we exist has given us plenty of examples of evil and suffering throughout history: famine, war, terrorism, disease, abuse, the Crusades, the Holocaust, 9/11, and the list goes on. Does the existence of evil mean that God is either unknowledgeable of evil, uncaring, or unable to stop it? What is the answer the Bible gives for the existence of evil?

It's not hard to understand why this is an important topic. Everyone who has come face-to-face with evil and suffering has looked to the heavens and asked God, "Why?" It is important to have a proper understanding of the reason evil exists as well as how to deal with it when we experience it for ourselves.

Let's refresh our memories on a few definitions of words related to this lesson.

**Omniscience** is the power to know everything.

**Omnipotence** is the power to do anything.

**Omnibenevolence** is the power of doing only good.

**Moral evil** is used to define the evil acts that humans do.

**Natural evil** is used to define the evil that occurs in nature.

We should also define **evil** and **suffering**.

**Evil** is the people, powers, influences and actions that oppose God and His purposes.

**Suffering** is the personal physical, emotional, or spiritual response to evil.

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We learned in the last lesson that “The Problem of Evil” is what many call the atheist’s killer argument. Formally, the argument against the existence of God looks like this:

- P1: If God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent then evil would not exist.**
- P2: Evil exists.**
- C: Therefore, God does not exist.**

We saw previously that, although this is a powerfully emotional argument, the definitions related to Premise 1 cause the argument to fail. Those who want to deny the existence of God based on the Problem of Evil define omnipotence as “the power to do anything.” Since God does not stop evil, He must not have the power to do so.

Christianity explains omnipotence in a different way. To one extent, yes, God *can* do anything. He *could* have created a world in which no evil existed. But to do so, He would have limited one of His other attributes of being loving. Instead, He loved us so much He gave us the power of **free will**.

**Free will** is the power human beings have to make choices that are unconstrained by external forces such as fate or divine will.

God could have created a world in which there was no evil only by creating a world of human robots who did not have the power to make their own choices. If He did such a thing, not only would there be no evil, neither would there be love, courage, perseverance, or any other admirable trait.

But couldn’t God have made a world in which there was *less* evil? Again, only if He were to encroach upon free will. If our will was limited some of the time, it would not be truly free.

Because of this, we see that God does not *create* evil, He only allows for the *potential* for evil. Only a Christian worldview can satisfactorily account for the existence of evil and maintain a view of God as all-knowing (He is aware of evil), all-loving (He cares about evil and suffering), and all-powerful (He *can* stop evil but allows it for other reasons, such as free will).

Additionally, the fact that we recognize events as evil points to the existence of God. Evil can only be defined against a standard of what is good. For something to be morally good or bad there must be moral law. If there is moral law, there must be a moral lawgiver.

## ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

There are really only five options related to the possible worlds people claim God could have created. God could have:

1. Not created any world at all.
2. Created a world of non-free human robots.
3. Created a free world where we would not do evil.
4. Create a free world where we would do evil, but everyone would accept God's salvation.
5. Create a world where we have free will and do evil, some accept God's salvation and some reject it.

The first world cannot be compared to the other four because it is in a completely different category of non-existence. We cannot compare non-existence to existence. Although we do not understand *why* God chose to create, the Bible tells us all we can know. The Bible says that God *chose* to create because (a) it was His will (Revelation 4:11) and (b) to display His glory (Isaiah 43:7).

The second world would have been an amoral world, a world with no evil, but also with no good since all choices would be forced. So it would not have been better than this world, because there would be absolutely no good at all. Although this world contains evil, it also contains good. Of course, some good is better than no good at all.

Worlds three and four are contradictions and, therefore, impossible. God could not create a world of free moral agents and then force them to make certain choices.

The fifth world, our world, seems to be, if not the best of all possible worlds, *a way to* the best of all possible worlds; a world in which nobody does evil anymore and everyone has accepted God's salvation.

### The Best of All Possible Worlds

We could all agree that the best of all possible worlds is a world in which there is no evil or suffering. What if I told you that is precisely the world God intended to create. I don't mean that God set out to make the best of all possible worlds (one with no evil) and blew it; but that the best way to get to that world was through this world.

The Bible teaches that in the beginning God created a perfect universe. It was a world with no evil or suffering, an actual paradise. Because of what is called "the fall" of mankind, which occurred when Adam and Eve used their free will to commit the first sin, evil and suffering entered the world.

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Two important things happened because of the fall:

**1. Death entered the world.**

**Romans 5:12** – “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...”

**2. The universe has been corrupted ever since.**

**Romans 8:19-22** – “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”

So mankind used his free will to do evil acts and, therefore, nature was subjected to what is called The Second Law of Thermodynamics, or Entropy. This means that the universe is in a constant state of decay. This accounts for hurricanes, tornadoes, disease and other natural evils.

Christians believe that **paradise lost will be paradise restored** at the end of this age. The universe will not be destroyed in the sense of being thrown away, but will be redeemed in the same way we as humans will be redeemed (1 Corinthians 15). The Bible teaches that the universe will once again be absent of evil.

**2 Peter 3:10-13** – “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare... That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

**Revelation 21:1-4** – “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

So, according to Christian doctrine, the best of all possible worlds will be a world in the future with no evil or suffering in which people choose of their own free will to be with God forever.

**Revelation 21:27** – “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

From a philosophical standpoint, we have demonstrated that the Problem of Evil does not stand as long as it is at least theoretically possible that this is the best possible world given free will.

From a theological standpoint, we have demonstrated that not only is this the best possible world given free will, but there is a perfect world to come for those who freely choose it.

## **FEAR NO EVIL**

We should also examine another aspect of the Problem of Evil and suffering. Is it possible that some good comes from evil? Does the existence of evil actually cause some good things to happen? The Bible teaches us that just as God will redeem the fallen universe, He will redeem evil itself.

**Romans 8:28** – “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

The Bible does not say that all things “are good” but that God can use all things “for good.”

In fact, there could be no heroism without danger, no bravery without fear, no endurance without struggle and no healing without pain. The Apostles Paul and James both saw some value in suffering.

**Romans 5:3-5** – “...but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10** – “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

**James 1:2-4** – “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

Nobody desires to experience evil and suffering, but nobody is exempt from it. And though we are not exempt, neither is it useless. The most terrible evils can be used in some way for God’s glory.

On this point we must be careful to recognize that we may not always see or understand what good may come from any particular evil, but we trust that God is able to redeem every circumstance in His wisdom and in ways which are not always known to us (see the story of Job for example).

Christians also believe that Jesus Christ was God Himself who came in the flesh and suffered ridicule, torment, persecution, crucifixion and even

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death. It is important to recognize that although God allows evil and suffering, He did not exempt Himself from it.

**Hebrews 2:17-18** – " For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

## **DELIVER US FROM EVIL**

Surely we all experience evil and suffering on various levels. Of course, some experience it on far worse levels than others.

There are some in our own neighborhoods who are victims of abuse or poverty. There are certainly people around the world who are victims of poverty and repressive governments. As Christians, it is our duty to help alleviate evil and suffering in the world.

We are God's agents on earth (2 Corinthians 5:20). This should cause us to recognize two things:

### **1. We should do no evil.**

**Romans 6:11-12** – "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

**1 Peter 3:12** – "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

### **2. We should alleviate evil.**

**Deuteronomy 15:11** – "There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land."

**Isaiah 1:17** – "...learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow."

**Matthew 5:7-9** – "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

The Old Testament prophets had many very harsh words from God to those who were wealthy and blessed yet did not help and defend the poor and needy. It is a sin for Christians to be so self-centered that we surround ourselves with the best life has to offer and turn a blind-eye to the evil and suffering in the world.

The existence of evil and suffering is like a large, blinking, neon sign that there is much work for the body of Christ to do in the name of Christ. Jesus talked about this very issue.

**Matthew 25:34-46** – “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

## **ANSWERING EVIL**

God has created the only way to the best of all possible worlds. It is available to those who accept His free offer of salvation through faith in Christ.

**John 3:16** – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

**Ephesians 2:8-9** – “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast.”

We will all experience varying degrees of evil and suffering as we go through life, but God has promised that He can use that suffering for good and will help us through it.

**2 Corinthians 1:3-4** – “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

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Finally, we should do no evil ourselves and also do everything we can to alleviate evil and suffering around the world.

**James 1:27** – “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

This is the command we as believers receive from the Bible. Which, as we will see in the next two lessons, is a very unique book.



## LESSON

## FIVE

### HOW DID WE GET THE BIBLE?

**Mission:** The purpose of this lesson is to examine how the Bible was inspired by God and how mankind has handed it down from generation to generation.

Christians believe the Bible is the Word of God. It is how God has communicated to us what He wants us to know about Himself and how we should live. It is important to know if what we have in the Bible today was really inspired by God and if it is what was originally written down. We will examine the inspiration, preservation, and translation of the Bible.

God has a message for you according to Christians. That message has been recorded in a book called the Bible. Of course, the Bible is not one book, but a collection of many. It was written by more than 40 writers as diverse as kings, poets, and fishermen, over a timespan of 1500 years, on three continents and in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek).

But is it really the Word of God or just books by human authors? That is a very important question to answer. Really, it must be answered in two parts. This lesson will address how we got the Bible. The next lesson will address whether it is reliable or not.

### LET'S BE INSPIRED

What do we mean when we say that the Bible is inspired? **Inspiration** means "God-breathed." It means that the words that were written are the very words God intended to be written. This is why we call it the "Word of God." There are three elements we could include in the process called inspiration:

- the divine cause
- the prophetic agency
- the written result.

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## Divine Cause

The Bible is the result of God's desire to communicate with mankind. According to the Bible, He communicated with man in various ways such as angels, audible voices, dreams and visions, spokesmen (prophets), and an internal, still, small voice. But the Bible is the result of His desire to have a written record of how He brought redemption to mankind .

## Prophetic Agency

The Word of God comes to us through people of God. The prophets and apostles were chosen by God to be the instruments through which He would give His Word to mankind. Not only did he use them to speak verbally, but He was the divine cause of their writings.

*"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

2 Peter 1:21

## Written Result

Because the prophets and apostles were inspired by God as they wrote, the written result has divine authority. This is not to say that the prophets were robots, who were mere automatons writing the words of God like taking dictation, but God used their personalities and individual styles to create His divinely inspired written word.

## Evidence of Inspiration

So how do we know that the Bible is inspired? There are three important points to be made in this regard.

- 1) Internal Claim. The Bible makes the claim that it is inspired. A few examples are:

2 Peter 1:21 - *"For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

2 Timothy 3:16 – *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful..."*

1 Corinthians 2:13 – *"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."*

Exodus 24:4 – *"Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said."*

- 2) Internal Witness. The authoritative nature of each of the Old Testament's sections, and almost all of its books individually are

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confirmed by the New Testament. Jesus Himself confirmed many of the people, places, and events of the Old Testament:

- Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4)
- Noah's Flood (Luke 17:27)
- Call of Moses (Luke 20:37)
- Provision for Israel in the wilderness (John 3:14; 6:49)
- Miracles of Elijah (Luke 24:24-25)
- Jonah in the belly of a great fish (Matthew 12:41)

The authors of the books of the New Testament claimed for themselves, as well as for each other, to be scripture along with the Old Testament.

It is also the internal consistency between the books of the Bible which give credibility to the divine inspiration of God. It is inconceivable that these books written by so many different people in different places and at different times on so many topics could speak with absolute harmony without divine intervention. (More on this topic will be discussed in the next lesson.)

- 3) External Witness. The Jewish prophets and teachers accepted the books of the Old Testament as the divine Word of God and utilized them as such. The entire canon of the Old Testament was largely agreed upon and used before the time of Christ.

The books of the New Testament were also used by the early Christian church in their public readings and worship and attested to as divinely inspired by the early Church fathers. The books which were used by the church in various regions were largely agreed upon as inspired independently of knowing which books the other groups were using until later. There were debates over a few of the books, but the majority of the New Testament books (including all four Gospels) were easily agreed upon and recognized as part of divine scripture along with the Old Testament.

The historical and archaeological evidence supporting the facts recorded in the Bible is also a powerful external witness to the inspiration of scripture.

## **Inerrancy of the Bible**

There are many who believe that the Bible is a valuable collection of historic, or semi-historic documents but not that it is without error. Others believe it is a book of superstitious myths and legends.

It is vitally important at this point to explain the concept of “inerrancy” of scripture. This is the Christian view that the Bible is, in fact, the divine repository of God’s Divine Word, and that it is infallible in all respects. In short, this means the Bible is without any error.

However, the Christian view of inerrancy is often misunderstood. Inerrancy is only claimed on behalf of the original manuscripts (**autographa**) as written by the prophets, apostles and their associates.

We do not claim that there are no errors in the copies that were handed down, nor that the translations into different languages are free from error or difficulties. In other words, there may indeed be errors or difficulties in translating certain words or phrases in the Bible you hold in your hand.

So why should we read the Bible? Is there any reason to think that what we have today is anywhere close to what was originally written?

## **WELL PRESERVED**

The books of the Old Testament and New Testament had to be copied by hand and distributed in order to be used by believers in various locations and handed down to later generations.

The job of copying the books of the Bible was done with extraordinary care by copyists called scribes. There were emphatic rules that must be followed while copying the texts. However, we know that despite the best care possible that errors did occur.

It is not a case, however, of so many errors being made to a few existing copies that the original is unrecognizable. Quite the contrary, the manuscript evidence of the Bible stands alone among other great books of antiquity.

For example, there are approximately 24,000 known manuscripts related to the New Testament alone, some of which can be dated to within 25 years of the original. Compare this to the next best case of manuscript evidence for a book of antiquity, the writings of Homer, of which there are only 643 manuscripts that date to within 500 years of the original.

## **Reconstruction Efforts**

But if there are errors in the copies of the “Word of God” what does it matter how many manuscripts there are? Because the large number of manuscripts can give us greater confidence that what we have is a reasonable view of the original.

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This can be illustrated by an example. If we tore out page one of today's edition of the New York Times newspaper, I could ask 20 people to handwrite a copy of the entire page. No doubt, there would be a few mistakes in each copy. But not all copies would have the same errors. And the larger the number of copies we compiled, the more accurately we could examine the differences and, therefore, ascertain what was in the original! If we could reconstruct the New York Times accurately with 20 copies, how much more accurately could we construct the New Testament with 24,000 copies?

It is also important to note that the errors contained within the copies are generally errors in spelling, numbers, etc. There is no cause to doubt the passages on which all of the major doctrines of the church are founded. The manuscripts attest to the veracity of doctrinal passages. Modern authors who challenge the trustworthiness of the manuscripts have yet to provide any evidence of an error in any important doctrinal passage.

It should also be noted that the historical accuracy of the sections of our copies and translations that speak to history have been thoroughly confirmed through historical and archaeological evidence. This external confirmation of the accuracy of our copies gives validity to the other parts that are not verifiable. If those parts were copied accurately we have good reason to trust the other parts were as well.

## **NOT LOST IN TRANSLATION**

There is no question that there are difficulties in translating words and phrases from one language and culture to another. Modern corporations work very hard at making sure that everything from contracts to advertising is translated in proper fashion and yet they still have moments of embarrassing breakdowns in communication.

These problems have become less consequential concerning the Bible as we continue to learn more about the original languages and cultures of Bible times. It is extremely important to understand the cultures of those who recorded the Bible and who lived during those times in order to have a full and complete understanding of the meaning of the Bible.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. In between the times of the Old and New Testaments, the region formerly known as Israel had been taken over by the Greeks and most Jews slowly lost their ability to read and write Hebrew. A translation of the Old Testament scriptures was made into the Greek. This translation is known as the **Septuagint**. The New Testament was written in Greek and Aramaic.

Translations later began to be made into various languages:

- Syriac, second to third century, from the Greek and possibly some Hebrew.
- Latin, second century, most likely from the Greek.
- Coptic (a form of Egyptian), third or fourth century, most likely from the Greek.
- Armenian, early fifth century, likely from the Greek and Syriac.
- Georgian, mid fifth century, not sure if from Greek, Armenian, Syriac of combination.
- Ethiopic, fifth or sixth century, from the Greek, Syriac, Coptic.
- Arabic, eighth century, from Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Latin.
- Sogdian, ninth to eleventh century, from the Syriac.
- Old Church Slavonic, tenth to eleventh century, from Latin and Greek.
- Nubian, unknown date-likely ninth to tenth century, origins unsure.

1227-Chapter divisions began to be added to various Bibles.

**English Translations** (some minor translations omitted)

- Wycliffite Bible, 1382, from the Latin

1450-Gutenberg's Printing Press invented

1517-Protestant Reformation begins

- Tyndale New Testament, 1525, Greek and Hebrew
- Coverdale Bible, 1535, various
- Matthew's Bible, 1537, various
- Great Bible, 1539, largely from Matthew's Bible

1551-Verses began to be added to various Bibles.

- Geneva Bible, 1560, various, first English Bible to contain numbered verses.
- Bishops' Bible, 1568, Great Bible, Hebrew and Greek
- King James Bible, 1611, Bishops' Bible, other English translations, Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

1627 through Mid-Nineteenth century-many previously unknown ancient manuscripts found.

- Modern Speech Versions, various sources
  - Revised Version, 1881
  - American Standard Version, 1901
  - Twentieth Century New Testament, 1901
  - Weymouth's New Testament, 1903
  - Moffat's Bible, 1913
  - Smith and Goodspeed's American, 1923

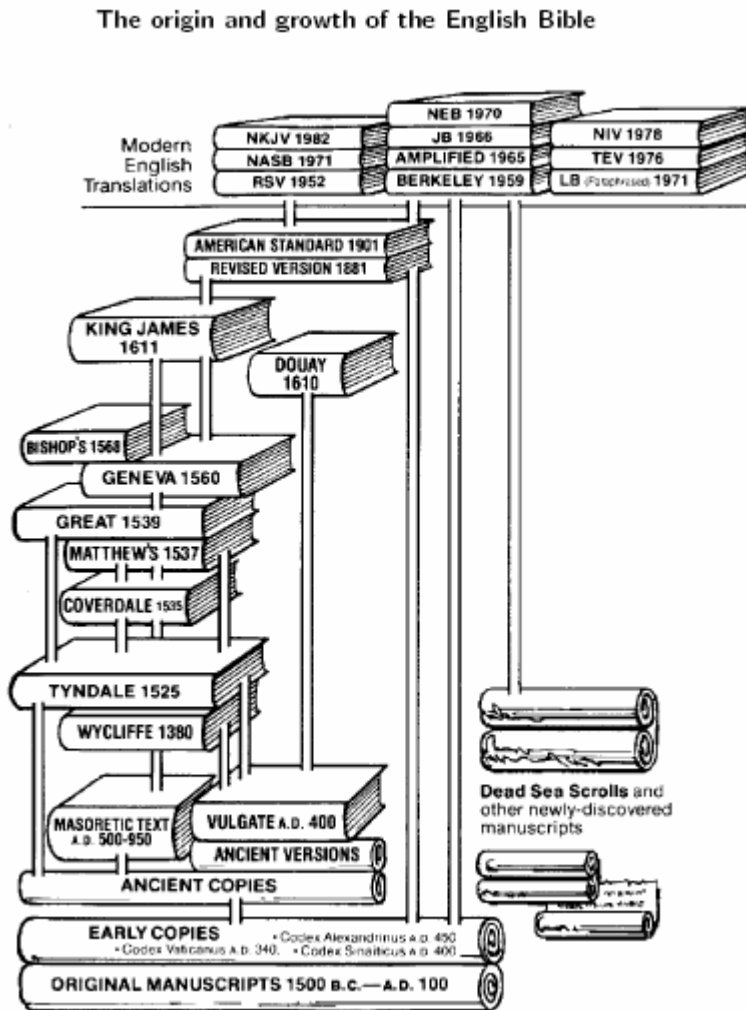
1947-1956 Dead Sea Scrolls discovered.

- Revised Standard Version, 1952
- Jerusalem Bible, 1966
- New American Bible, 1970
- New English Bible, 1970
- New International Version, 1978
- Many more...

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We should notice that as time has progressed we now have access to older, more reliable manuscripts. Below is a useful chart to visualize the sources and time frames of the evolution of the modern day Bible.



It is most important to note that what we have today in our Bible is not a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy with new errors in each copy. Instead we have a host of manuscript evidence, greater than any other book of antiquity, that allows us to trust that our modern translations are a reasonable view of the original manuscripts.

We should also be aware that some translations in history have been better than others, some have been down right terrible, but most have been done well with positive advances in translation along the way. And we not only have the translations but we do, in fact, have many manuscripts of the original Greek and Hebrew languages.

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It may also be helpful to know the difference between a "translation" of the Bible and a "paraphrase."

A **translation** is a copy of the Bible that translates directly from the original language. Some translations use a word-for-word approach while others emphasize translating the meaning (thought-for-thought) of the original into our language. The King James Bible, The New International Version, and most others are translations.

A **paraphrase** is a copy of the Bible that tries to keep the essence of the original but interjects words or phrases that may not be found in the original writings. This is done to create a more flowing, expanded, or poetic interpretation. The Living Bible and The Message Bible are examples of paraphrases.

## **FROM GOD TO US**

We can see that it is very reasonable to believe that the Bible contains the information that was actually written by the prophets, apostles and their associates. In the next lesson we will see how reliable those writings have been found to be over the course of history.

Two excellent books that can be studied for more detailed information on this topic are:

**"From God To Us"** by Norman L. Geisler & William E. Nix

**"The Bible In Translation"** by Bruce M. Metzger

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# LESSON SIX IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?

**Mission:** The purpose of this lesson is to examine whether the Bible is a reliable document. If it really is the “Word of God,” then it should be accurate in its historical information as well as internally consistent.

Many critics of the Bible through the years have claimed that the Bible is filled with errors and contradictions that demonstrate that it cannot be divine. However, with each fresh batch of criticisms, we also learn more about the ancient world that continues to prove the accuracy of the Bible.

The Bible is the greatest selling book of all time. That has not prevented many people through the centuries from attacking it. Many have claimed that the Bible is unreliable, that it is inaccurate in its historical documentation as well as full of contradictions. If these claims were true then Christianity would fall apart as a viable belief system.

As we will see, however, just the opposite is true. The Bible has been proven to be accurate in its prophecies, in its history, as well as its internal consistency. This proves the Bible is divine rather than human in origin.

## PROPHECY FULFILLED

The Bible is full of prophetic statements in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Most of the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled before the time the New Testament was ever written. There were many prophecies regarding the future of Israel and its surrounding nations that were fulfilled exactly as foretold by the Old Testament prophets. Many of these prophecies were so specific and accurately fulfilled that they have caused recent critics to suggest that they were written after the fact. This despite any evidence to support their position.

We will look at just a few examples of fulfilled prophecy in the Bible, beginning with the Old Testament.

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## **Isaiah**

Around 700 BC, the prophet Isaiah lived during a time of prosperity in Israel. Jerusalem was complete as a city and the temple was glorious. Isaiah made a strange prophecy. He claimed that a king named Cyrus would allow Jerusalem and the temple to be rebuilt (Isaiah 44:28). The Jews at the time believed that God was on their side and they were invincible.

Because they had turned away from God, He allowed Jerusalem and the temple to be destroyed in judgment by the Babylonians and the Jews were taken into captivity. Later the Persians conquered the Babylonians. The king of Persia allowed a remnant of Jews to return to their homeland to rebuild their city and temple. The name of the king, who had not even been born when Isaiah made his prophecy approximately 160 years earlier, was Cyrus.

## **Daniel**

Before Isaiah's prophecies regarding Cyrus were fulfilled, Daniel had also made many prophecies. Some of them were in regards to Israel's future and how the empires of the region would fall in succession one to the other (chapters 2,7 and 8).

Daniel's prophecies accurately predicted the rise and fall of the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires hundreds of years before they happened.

## **The Messiah**

Old Testament prophets made over 300 prophecies and references regarding the coming Messiah, each of which were fulfilled in incredible detail in the life of Jesus Christ. The statistical odds of one man fulfilling just 48 of these prophecies has been calculated at  $10^{157}$  (which is a one followed by 157 zeroes).

These are just a few of the hundreds of prophecies fulfilled in the Old Testament. The prophetic accuracy of the Old Testament is powerful!

## **New Testament Prophecies**

The book of Revelation is the most prophetic book in the New Testament. Some believe most of its prophecies have already been fulfilled in the past regarding the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, while others believe Revelation was prophesying about a time that is still in our future. Regardless which of these views one holds, the New Testament

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contains at least one incredible prophecy that has certainly already been fulfilled. It was made by Jesus Christ himself while in Jerusalem. The prophecy is recorded in Matthew 24:

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

Jesus then continues what is known as "The Olivet Discourse" describing in Old Testament apocalyptic language the catastrophic events surrounding this coming judgment. He then makes an important statement in verse 34:

I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

Jesus not only predicted the tremendous temple would be completely destroyed, but that it would happen within a generation. This prophecy was miraculously fulfilled in 70 AD when the Roman Empire destroyed Jerusalem and completely leveled the temple.

## **HISTORY REVEALED**

Throughout the centuries some have declared the Bible inaccurate in its portrayal of people, places, and events. These criticisms have generally not been because of contradictory evidence, but because of a lack of corroborating evidence.

For example, the Old Testament describes a group of people known as the Hittites. For a very long time scholars believed that this was a mythological group of people found only in the Bible. As a result of archaeological finds, with now hundreds of references to the Hittites, the Bible has been proven to have been accurate all along.

Another example is seen in Genesis 14:1-2:

At this time Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).

This battle, as well as the cities mentioned, were long thought fictitious. However, the discovery of the Ebla tablets in northern Syria not only confirm the existence of the cities, but list them in the same order as Genesis 14.

The New Testament has also been criticized and later vindicated. No author in the New Testament has been more challenged than Luke the Physician, the author of The Gospel of Luke and The Acts of the Apostles. In fact, Luke wrote more of the New Testament than any other writer (Paul's books were more numerous but Luke's more voluminous).

Luke's references to the census surrounding the birth of Jesus, Quirinius as governor of Syria, the locations of Lystra and Derbe, and the person of Lysanias were all believed to be in error. Archaeological findings have vindicated Dr. Luke on every occasion.

In fact, renowned archaeologist Sir William Ramsey has made the following statement:

“Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed among the greatest of all historians.”

The trustworthiness of the Bible in its historical accuracy could fill volumes. In fact...it has. It is as simple as going to the local library or bookstore to find hundreds of books cataloguing the accuracy of the Bible. Those who still try to say the Bible is full of historical errors are either relying on old and disproven criticisms, or have not taken the effort to discover the truth for themselves.

## **GETTING THE STORY STRAIGHT**

A favorite tactic of Bible critics is to point to alleged contradictions found within the Bible. The answers to their arguments are usually very simple if only they will take the time to listen to the answers which have been readily available for many years.

These criticisms can be categorized as **contradictions** and **difficulties**. There are some passages that at first glance seem to contradict one another, there are others which are just difficult to understand. There have been many books written on this topic but one of the best is “**When Critics Ask**” by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe.

### **Hard to Handle**

As an example of a Bible difficulty, let's examine the topic of polygamy (having more than one spouse). Many have claimed that the Bible is not a reliable book because it endorses the practice of polygamy. The facts, however, are the opposite. Critics confuse something the Bible records as an endorsement. We should look for what the Bible *reveals*, not only what it *records*. The Bible *records* the statement, “There is no God,” but it *reveals* it as the statement of a fool (Psalm 14:1).

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The Bible records that Solomon and others had many wives (1 Kings 11:3). This should not be misunderstood as endorsing the practice. In fact, the Bible almost always reveals that those who were polygamous reaped many problems as a result. To the contrary, the clear command in scripture is that marriage should be between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Proverbs 18:22; 1 Corinthians 7:2; Ephesians 5:33).

There are other passages that are difficult to understand and are debated among theologians because of our distance in time from the original events and meanings of some ancient words and phrases (Hebrews 6; 1 Corinthians 7:14; etc.). This does not mean that the Bible is incorrect. It only means our understanding is incomplete. It should also be noted that our understanding will always be limited by our incomplete knowledge as well as the result of sin in our lives.

### **Contradictions and Explanations**

There are only a few examples of actual contradictions in the Bible. A most notable example would be 2 Kings 8:26 which gives the age of king Ahaziah as twenty-two, whereas 2 Chronicles 22:2 says he was forty-two. The two verses cannot both be true at the same time and are a good example of an actual contradiction.

We know that the second reference cannot be correct because this would make Ahaziah older than his father. This is an example of a scribal error that was passed down from manuscript to manuscript. This is why the previous lesson was so important. We know where this error is because we understand that only the original manuscripts are inerrant, and we are able to detect where the errors are through internal comparisons (as seen above) and comparison with other manuscripts.

### **The Death of Judas**

Instead of actual contradictions as seen above, the Bible contains many apparent contradictions. These are examples of passages that at first glance seem contradictory. After more careful examination we see that they actually are not.

Two examples of this relate to the death of Judas Iscariot. The first is in how Judas dies. We have two accounts:

“So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.” *Matthew 27:5*

“With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out.” *Acts 1:18*

At first glance we might believe these verses contradict. Matthew says Judas hanged himself and Luke writes in Acts that he fell, apparently a long way, and his body burst open. It is possible, however, that both accounts are correct. It is likely that Judas hanged himself on a tree overhanging a large drop-off, and after beginning to decompose his body fell and burst open. The two accounts are not mutually exclusive but rather complimentary as to provide us with more information.

There are many such cases in the Bible. In fact, it is this fact that actually makes the Bible more reliable. If every account was exactly the same, critics would claim that the writers colluded to tell the same version of the story. But because various writers provide different levels of detail we are able to trust that what they say is true when they compliment each other.

As a second example related to Judas, we should note that Acts 1:18 above said Judas bought a field with the money he received from betraying Jesus. But some have pointed out that Matthew 27:6-7 says:

The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners.

This appears at first as an actual contradiction. It must be true that either Judas or the chief priests purchased the field. Actually, both can be true. It was common then, as it is now, for an action performed on behalf of someone to be spoken of as if done by that person. If I say that I am building a house, you would not assume that it is me who is hammering the nails. Others are doing it on my behalf, but I can say that I am doing it.

In the same way, we see in Matthew that the chief priests were the ones who actually took the money and bought the field, but in the book of Acts, Luke shortens the story by just referring to Judas as the one who bought the field since legally it would have been bought in his name.

## **TAKE IT TO THE BANK**

Although this lesson is too short to deal with every question related to the Bible, you can see that there are plenty of answers for the most strident critics questions. The answers are readily available if we will only take the time to look and listen. It is perfectly reasonable to recognize that the Bible is reliable.

This is extremely important for theological as well as historical reasons. Since the Bible can be demonstrated as divine rather than human in origin because of its incredible reliability, then we can also trust what it says on matters of theology. This is why the Christian faith is a reasonable faith!

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LESSON  
SEVEN  
  
IS  
JESUS  
GOD?

**Mission:** The purpose of this lesson is to examine whether Jesus Christ was God Himself in human flesh. This is the most important claim of orthodox Christianity.

Some critics of Christianity claim that Jesus was merely human. Some say He was only an immaterial spirit being. A few say He never existed at all. It is vitally important to the Christian faith to demonstrate that Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine.

It is extremely important to properly understand the human and divine nature of Jesus. If Jesus was not God, He should not be worshiped. If He was not human, He could not relate to us.

Virtually every heresy begins with a misunderstanding of the nature of Christ. **Heresy** is any doctrine or teaching that is in opposition to established, orthodox Christian doctrine. It is a departure from essential Christian doctrine.

The clear scriptural statements about Christ in this lesson are what separate true Christianity from other false religions such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarianism, Christian Science, Scientology, Unificationism, and others. Although many religions claim to talk about Jesus Christ, it is important to know what they mean when they define Jesus. If they do not adhere to the clear teachings of scripture, they are teaching heresy.

In this lesson we will look at two aspects of the nature of Jesus. First, we will see how Christ was both fully human and fully God. Second, we will seek to explain the mystery of the trinity.

## FULLY GOD AND FULLY MAN

Many people believe that Jesus was a great teacher or prophet but not that He was God in the flesh. A few others believe that He was God but that He was never actually physically human. Both of these views are incorrect according to scripture.

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was fully human. Although the conception of Jesus through the virgin Mary was a miraculous event, His birth was a physical event like any other human.

Luke 2:6-7 describes the physical birth of Christ in Bethlehem:

*While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*

According to Luke 2:40 & 52 describe Jesus developing physically, mentally and socially:

*And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.*

*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

**Jesus also had the following physical characteristics:**

- Hunger (Matthew 4:2, Luke 24:41-43)
- Thirst (John 19:28)
- Limited physical strength (John 4:6, Luke 23:26)
- Flesh and bones (Luke 24:39)
- Emotions (Matthew 8:10, Matthew 26:38, John 11:35, John 12:27)
- Suffered physical death (Luke 23:46)

One might ask, “Why did Jesus have to be human?” Although it is conceivable that God may have come up with some other way to redeem mankind, in His wisdom He chose sending His Son to the world as a human. This reality had several results.

*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Hebrews 2:14-18

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The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was God. Jesus Himself claimed to be God and also proved that He was God.

*Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. John 8:54-59*

The reason they attempted to stone Him was because they clearly understood that by using the term "I Am," He was claiming equality with God who called Himself by the same name (Exodus 3:13-14).

*But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered. Matthew 26:63-66*

Jesus again elicited a strong response because He quoted from Daniel 7:13-14 a passage they knew to be referring to God.

**Jesus also proved His divinity (divine nature) in several ways:**

- Various miracles (John 20:30-31)
- Control over nature (Matthew 8:26)
- Power over death (Mark 5:35-42, John 11:32-44)
- Power over His own life and death (John 10:17-18)

**The New Testament writers also claimed Jesus was God:**

- Matthew 1:23
- John 1:1-14
- Colossians 1:15-19; 2:9
- Hebrews 1:1-12
- Revelation 1:8-18

"Incarnation" is a word that is not in the Bible, but is a word we use to describe what we have demonstrated above. The fullness of God came and dwelt in human flesh. Jesus was not half man and half God, but He was at the same time fully human and fully God.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

“Trinity” is another word that is not found in the Bible, but is used to describe a concept that is clearly taught in scripture. We call it a mystery because, although we can *apprehend* (take or accept) the concept of the Trinity because it is taught in scripture, it is impossible to *comprehend* (fully understand) the idea because it attempts to explain the infinite nature of God. Since we are finite (limited) we cannot possibly fully grasp the nature of God.

The concept of the Trinity states that there is one God, who is revealed in three distinct persons. There are not three Gods, but one. Each distinct “person” (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is fully God, not one-third God. Yet each “person” has distinct roles. These distinctions make all analogies (such as triangles, water, etc.) inaccurate or incomplete.

The Old and New Testaments agree that there is only one God:

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Deuteronomy 6:4*

*"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. Isaiah 43:10*

*One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Mark 12:28-29*

Although there is only one God. God has revealed Himself in three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Father is called God in 1 Corinthians 8:6:

*...yet for us there is but one God, the Father...*

The Son (Jesus) is also called God (by the Father) in Hebrews 1:8:

*But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.*

The Holy Spirit is also called God in Acts 5:3-4:

*Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."*

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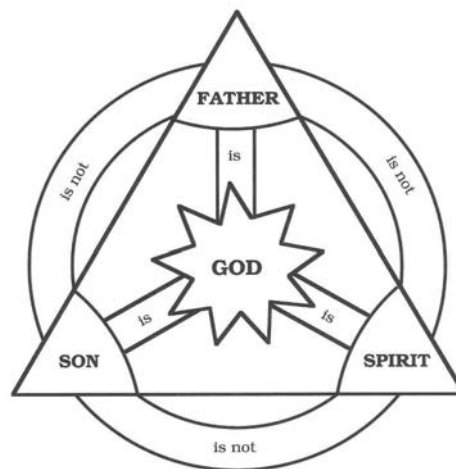
It is also important to realize that each person of the Trinity exists simultaneously. Some have viewed the Godhead in a form called **modalism**, which teaches that God is indeed revealed in these three persons, but is similar to an actor in a play who comes out on stage and reveals himself as three different characters. But this is not what the Bible teaches about God.

While they are all called God, the Bible also teaches that they are distinct and exist simultaneously.

*After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. John 17:1*

*"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. John 15:26*

The Son prays to the Father, and along with the Father, the Son sends the Spirit.



Although this is a difficult concept to understand, we should never attempt to change our understanding of the nature of God to fit our finite understanding, because God is infinite and therefore incomprehensible. What we do see, is that the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was God.

## THE FINAL WORD

If there is any doubt that Jesus is God, we should finally examine a few more passages of scripture that can put the question to rest.

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In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men...The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.  
John 1:1-14

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: 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. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1:15-20*

*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form... Colossians 2:9*

It is abundantly clear that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was not only the Son of God, but in fact, was God Himself.

The final, and possibly the most important, evidence that Jesus was God is His resurrection from the dead. We will study this fact of history in our next lesson.



## LESSON EIGHT

### DID JESUS RISE FROM THE DEAD?

**Mission:** The purpose of this lesson is to examine whether Jesus really rose from the dead after His crucifixion and death.

The resurrection is the hinge that Christianity swings on. If the resurrection did not happen, then Jesus was not God and there is no reason to worship Him. But if it did, it is the strongest evidence of the deity of Jesus Christ.

What event could possibly have caused devout Jews to change vital aspects of their religious culture? What could have caused them to claim that Jesus was God when they were fiercely monotheistic (Deuteronomy 6:4, known as the *Shema*)? What could have caused them to change their day of worship from the Sabbath (basically Saturday) to Sunday? What could have caused the disciples, who had abandoned Jesus at the crucifixion, to turn into brave witnesses and martyrs for the cause of Christianity?

Throughout history there has been only one reasonable answer to these questions. The physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Had Jesus not been raised, a short walk from downtown Jerusalem to the tomb could have proven the disciples wrong. Though some have tried to claim that His body was stolen or dumped in an unmarked grave there is no evidence to support these claims. On the contrary, there is much evidence of the resurrection of Christ.

The resurrection is the hinge that all Christianity swings on. Without the physical resurrection of Christ, it cannot be proven that Jesus was God. If Jesus was not God, as He claimed, then He was either a liar or a lunatic. We cannot say that Jesus was a great teacher if He lied about who He was. He is either the Lord over all creation or a deceitful mad-man who we should reject completely.

## LET'S GET PHYSICAL

We have already found the New Testament reliable, so let's see what the writers of those books had to say about the resurrection. Although some people claim that Jesus's resurrection was spiritual rather than physical, we will see that the scriptures tell another story.

*The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." **Matthew 28:5-10***

*But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid. **Mark 16:4-8***

*While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. **Luke 24:36-43***

*So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. **John 20:3-8***

*After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command...**Acts 1:3-4***

*For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers*

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*at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8*

It is obvious from these scriptures that it was the clear belief of the first century Jews that Jesus Christ had physically risen from the dead which is what caused them to begin an entirely new movement called Christianity. From these Jewish Christians this message of the gospel (good news) spread to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and many of them believed as well.

## C I R C U M S T A N I A L   E V I D E N C E

There is also evidence for the resurrection outside of the Bible itself. Though some of the evidence is what would be called “circumstantial evidence” in a court of law, it is compelling nonetheless.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is extremely significant to note the behavior of the followers of Jesus after His death. The only reasonable explanation for these events is the miraculous, physical resurrection of Christ:

- Devout Jews changed vital aspects of their religious culture by abandoning animal sacrifices, etc.
- Claimed that Jesus was God while maintaining monotheism.
- Changed their day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday.
- The disciples, who had abandoned Jesus at the crucifixion, turned into brave witnesses and martyrs for the cause of Christianity.

The last point is crucial. While it is conceivable that many people die for what they believe to be the truth, it is totally different for every single one of the disciples to have been willingly martyred if they knew the resurrection was a lie.

## C O R R A B O R A T I N G   E V I D E N C E

Many critics of the resurrection point to a lack of non-biblical accounts of the resurrection as evidence that it never happened. This is a weak criticism. It is like saying that because there were no biblical accounts of the moon launch, it never happened. It cannot be said that because a historical event is not told in more than one place it never occurred. However, the gospels are not one account, but four different (though complimentary) accounts of the resurrection.

Furthermore, there **are** non-biblical accounts that Christians **believed** there was a resurrection. Critics have raised objections to the validity of

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these references so we will not use them in our defense of the resurrection in this short lesson. However, these objections have been dealt with in "Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus" and "The Verdict of History" by Gary Habermas, as well as by other authors.

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

The importance of the resurrection of Christ cannot be overstated. There are three main reasons the resurrection is important for believers.

The first reason is **spiritual**. It demonstrates that Jesus Christ was God and has the power to remove our sins. Paul has troubling words if the resurrection did not happen:

*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...* 1 Corinthians 15:17-20

But the Bible tells us that He raised Himself from the dead.

*Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body.* John 2:19-21

*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." John 10:17-18*

It also tells us that God raised Jesus from the dead.

*God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.* Acts 2:32

*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* Romans 10:9

This is further evidence of the doctrine of the Trinity, that there is one God revealed in three persons. Since Jesus raised Himself from the dead, and God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus must be God.

Because He is God, He has the power to remove our sins:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...* 1 Peter 1:3

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:4-7*

*The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him (Abraham) alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:23-25*

The other two reasons the resurrection is important are **physical**. First, while in our current physical bodies, we can live an obedient life in Christ because of His resurrection power.

*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Romans 8:11*

*Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. Romans 6:13*

*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. Ephesians 1:18-21*

Second, after we die we will be resurrected with changed bodies and live forever.

*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3:10-11*

*By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. 1 Corinthians 6:14*

*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23*

*...because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. 2 Corinthians 4:14*

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*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

Both believers and unbelievers will be physically raised from the dead. Each will also face a judgment. Non-believers will be eternally condemned.

*The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:13-15*

Believers will live eternally with the resurrected Christ in resurrected bodies.

*Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 1 Corinthians 15:51-54*

## **DON'T MISS THE POINT**

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was a real event in history that has eternal ramifications. It is crucial that we understand its significance. If the resurrection demonstrates that Jesus was God, and if He alone has the power to remove our sins, then we should be sure we understand what we must do in order to receive salvation from Him.

That is the topic of our next lesson. We will study what the Bible says about how to go to heaven and live eternally with Jesus Christ.



## LESSON

## NINE

# HOW DO I GET ETERNAL LIFE?

**Mission:** The purpose of this lesson is to examine what the Bible says about how we gain eternal life and live with Jesus Christ forever.

The main story of the Bible is one of redemption. God's purpose is to redeem the universe and everything in it, especially mankind. But He will never force us to spend eternity in Heaven with Him. It is a choice that He asks us to make of our own free will.

It is important to know then, what the Bible really says about how to obtain this eternal life.

In Romans 1:16, the Apostle Paul said the gospel is "*...is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*" That sounds pretty important. Apparently we had better be sure of what "the gospel" is because he warns in one of his other letters that some people desert Christ and turn to a "different gospel" (Galatians 1:6). If the gospel message provides salvation (which is how we get to heaven and gain eternal life) then we really want to be sure we have the right gospel and not a "different" gospel.

The word *gospel* simply means "good news." It is also how we refer to the first four books of the New Testament, The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. By defining the gospel we don't mean a book in the New Testament, we mean the message, or good news those books, in fact the whole Bible, contains.

So in our effort to define the Gospel, let's see what the Bible says. And let's start at the top. What did Jesus say about the gospel? Paul mentioned it was related to salvation, so what did Jesus say about salvation?

There was a man named Nicodemus (John 3) who asked Jesus about how to inherit the kingdom of God. Jesus told him he had to be "born

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again.” This was the first time that phrase had been used and Nicodemus was understandably confused. He couldn’t quite figure out how to arrange that with his mother. So Jesus explained further.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” John 3:16-18*

In this passage of scripture, we see the outline of the definition of the gospel. Notice some key points:

1. Some are condemned for not believing.
2. God loved the world so much he sent Christ to die for our sins.
3. Believers have eternal life in the kingdom of God.

We won’t take the time in this lesson to go through each of these points thoroughly but let’s at least examine number one. Why are people condemned just for not believing? Because of two simple reasons. God is holy. We are not.

## **SO WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?**

The Bible tells us clearly that God is holy.

*“Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy.” Psalm 99:9*

*“Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?” Isaiah 6:20*

Holiness is perfection, purity, and justice. God has this trait. The verse above in Isaiah asks rhetorically who can stand in the presence of His holiness. Because God is holy, He can only have fellowship with other holy entities.

That’s bad news for us. We like to think of ourselves as good people. We are definitely better than some other people. But when it comes to entering heaven, we don’t get to compare ourselves to other people, we have to compare ourselves to God and His holiness.

You see the problem. Without having to be told, you know you are not holy. Nobody is.

*“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...” Romans 5:12*

*“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” Romans 3:23*

*“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” Isaiah 64:6*

It would be fun to blame all of this sin on Adam and Eve, but you and I have sinned on our own, apart from them. “Sin” is a word that comes from archery. It means “to miss the mark.” Sin doesn’t have to mean doing something bad; it just means not being perfect...as God is perfect.

In the Old Testament, God set up a system where people could have their sins temporarily forgiven. They would bring a sacrifice of an animal. That animal would shed its blood in an act of “atonement.” Break that word up and you see what it symbolized: at-one-ment. They could temporarily be “at one” with God. Until they missed the mark again.

Jesus was the final sacrifice (Hebrews 7:27). He came and lived a perfect, sinless life and became the ultimate sacrifice so that we no longer have to bring sacrifices.

So let’s go back to the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. And let’s state point one a little differently.

Since God is holy and we are not, we cannot go to heaven unless we are reconciled to God.

## **The Good News**

Let’s briefly look at point two.

God loved the world so much he sent Christ to die for our sins.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23*

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8*

That’s easy enough to understand. It is *because* we are not perfect Christ died in our place-taking the punishment for our sins. Now remember point three.

## The Great News

Believers have eternal life in the kingdom of God.

*“...whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16*

*“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”  
John 5:24*

*“But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.” 1 Timothy 1:16*

So there we have it...the gospel! Let's make this four points instead of three by breaking point one into two parts.

### The gospel is:

1. God is holy and we are not.
2. To enter heaven we must be reconciled to God.
3. God loved the world so much he sent Christ to die for our sins.
4. Believers have eternal life in the kingdom of God.

### Not So Fast

Now there is one more important thing to know on this topic. What is a “different gospel?” Paul warned us that some would depart the true faith and follow a different gospel. So part of defining the gospel is being able to define a “different” or “false” gospel.

A false gospel usually derives from one of two points.

1. A false gospel distorts who Jesus is.

As you saw in Lesson Seven, the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is God who came in the flesh. Anyone who denies that Christ is God is teaching a different gospel.

2. A false gospel distorts how you gain eternal life.

The verses we studied above clearly demonstrate that it is belief, or faith in Christ as our Savior, that gives us eternal life. In case it wasn't clear enough, read what Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9*

The gospel message is that we are saved through faith, not works. Anyone that teaches that we are saved by our works-any kind of works-is teaching a different gospel.

## **NEW CREATIONS**

The Bible tells us that something incredible happens when someone receives the message of the gospel and accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They become somebody else!

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17*

Of course, you are still you physically. You can tell that by looking in the mirror. Although that might have been a nice part of salvation-a brand new body! (Actually, we *do* get a brand new body when we are physically resurrected from the dead, but that's a whole other topic.) Paul is saying that we are new creations spiritually. Notice what he tells Titus:

*"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." Titus 3:3-7*

Paul is clearly saying that when we are saved, the Holy Spirit does a miraculous work and "justifies" us before God. "Justified" means that we are "considered" righteous even though we are not. When God looks at us, He no longer sees our unrighteous deeds but Christ's deeds (in a symbolic sense-of course, God can still see us). This is why Christ died in our place.

## **THE BIG PAYDAY**

So what does all this have to do with gaining eternal life? Remember the verse we saw earlier?

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*"...whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16*

This is what it means when Christians talk about "being saved." It means through faith in Jesus Christ, through believing that He is God and His death paid the price for our sins, we will have eternal life spiritually. Of course, we will have a physical death:

*"... man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment..." Hebrews 9:27*

The great news for those who believe (place their faith in Christ) is that we have nothing to fear from the final judgment.

*"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" Revelation 21:3-4*

## **IS THAT YOUR FINAL ANSWER?**

If you have decided after this study that you want to receive forgiveness for your sins and make Jesus Christ the Lord of your life, we would suggest that you simply say a prayer and tell Jesus of your decision. There is no magic formula in any particular prayer so just close your eyes and pray right now and tell God what is in your heart.

We also recognize that despite the evidence provided in this brief study, some may not still be convinced about Christianity. We would ask you to pray also. Simply ask God to help you find the truth. Then please continue looking for answers to the questions you have. There are many books available to help you find the answers for any question you have about Christianity.

To help you find those answers, please visit our website at <http://www.voyagethroughthebible.com> for lists of books as well as other websites that can help you. If you still do not find the answers you are seeking, please email us at [info@voyagethroughthebible.com](mailto:info@voyagethroughthebible.com) with your question and we will be happy to help you find the answers.

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