I Don't
Have Enough
FAITH
To Be An
ATHEIST



FRANK TUREK &
NORMAN L. GEISLER

Updated Edition

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"Given the multitude of apologetics books to choose from, Turek and Geisler have done us all a big favor. Theirs is the only work you need to read to cover all the basic and vital elements of classical Christian defense. I've recommended *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* so many times to provide a solid foundation for any Christian who is wondering if his confidence in Christ has been well placed or who is intent on engaging the multitude of lost souls who doubt him but desperately need him. Turek and Geisler's book needs to be in every Christian's library—and read thoroughly."

Gregory Koukl, President, Stand to Reason; author, *Tactics*; *Street Smarts*; and *The Story of Reality*

"This book is one of the most important I've ever read because it helped rescue me from a season of doubt during my first job as a pastor. This expanded edition is even better. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* will show you why Christianity is true so you can confidently live free and share that freedom in Christ with others."

Josh Howerton, Pastor, LakePointe Church; host, *Live Free with Josh Howerton* podcast

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Updated Edition

Frank Turek

Norman L. Geisler

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Preface to the Updated Edition

How Much Faith Do You Need to Believe This Book?

THE DAY BEFORE we went to Utah Valley University together, my friend Charlie Kirk texted me this: "*. . . for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries*" (1 Cor. 16:9).

The next day Charlie's lifeless body was stretched out before me across the back seat of a speeding SUV. His eyes weren't looking at me but past me, right into eternity. He was away from his body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

That is, if the Bible is true.

If it's not true, where is Charlie now? Gone forever? Merged with the one? In Allah's hellfire? Somewhere else?

Charlie's murder—which followed the deaths of my dad and my coauthor, Norman Geisler—thrust upon me the reality of evil and the supreme importance of eternity. In fact, as we'll see in this updated edition of *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, if there is no God or afterlife, then life has no ultimate meaning. It doesn't *ultimately* matter if you live here as a murderer or a missionary because without God, judgment, and an afterlife, the fate of each of us is the same—we will all cease to exist regardless of what we've done or what we believe.

As this updated edition intends to show, God and eternity are real, and Jesus came to provide the way to the right side of eternity. The logical progression of the arguments hasn't changed from the first edition. But much new evidence has come to light since 2004 to support those arguments, which makes the case for Christianity even stronger. I've also had the refining

experience of defending these arguments on college campuses for more than twenty years, including debates with prominent atheists such as Christopher Hitchens and Michael Shermer. Since the new atheism has come and gone, this updated edition will address the more recent challenges and objections that atheists and others have cited against our case.

Atheists, skeptics, and non-Christians may think books like this one can't be trusted for objective information because such books are written by religious people who have an agenda. In fact, that's the way skeptics view the Bible—as a biased book written by biased people. Their assessment may be true for some books about religion, but it's not true for them all. If it were, you couldn't trust anything you read concerning religion—including books written by atheists, skeptics, and people from other faiths—because every writer has a viewpoint on religion.

So what does this mean for you, the reader? Should you disbelieve what an atheist writes about Christianity just because he's an atheist? Not necessarily, because he could be telling the truth. Should you disbelieve what a Christian writes about atheism just because he's a Christian? Again, not necessarily—he too could be telling the truth.

But what about an author's agenda? Does an agenda fatally taint his objectivity? If so, no book can be trusted, including those by atheists, skeptics, and non-Christians. Why? Because *all* books are written for a reason, all authors have an agenda, and all (or at least most) authors believe what they write! However, that doesn't mean what they write is false or not objective. While authors are almost never neutral about their topics (personal interest is what drives them), they nevertheless can present their topics objectively. We will present evidence that the authors of the Bible did exactly that—they were telling the truth, not inventing fanciful stories.

In the meantime, please keep in mind that you should believe or disbelieve what we say because of the evidence we present, not because we have a certain set of religious beliefs. Norm and I both became Christians through evidence. So the fact *that* we became Christians is not the issue; *why* we became Christians is the important point. That's the focus of this book.

Should this book help you to become a Christian or a more dedicated disciple, be advised that you will have many adversaries. But as Charlie would tell you, Jesus is worth it, and the retirement plan is out of this world.

Frank Turek

Acknowledgments

MY COAUTHOR, Norman Geisler, finally got to see the Lord he had been defending for so many years when he passed from this life into the next on July 1, 2019. This Updated Edition would not have been possible without the support of the Geisler family, especially Norm's wife, Barbara, and their son David Geisler. David offered many helpful suggestions to this updated manuscript.

Casey Luskin and Jonathan McLatchie checked and improved the chapters that investigate the origin of life and new life forms. Those issues can be enormously technical, but Casey and Jonathan can make them understandable to the rest of us who do not have PhDs in the natural sciences. Many thanks also go to Greg Bailey at Crossway for his skillful editing job and David Fassett for the stunning new cover.

Since the first edition, I've learned so much more about the case for Christianity from several brilliant people whose work you may see reflected in this updated edition. They include (in no particular order) John Lennox, Stephen Meyer, Gary Habermas, J. Warner Wallace, Greg Koukl, William Lane Craig, Hugh Ross, Natasha Crain, Alisa Childers, Allie Beth Stuckey, Edward Feser, Craig Keener, Michael Licona, Richard Bauckham, Brandt Pitre, Peter J. Williams, Justin Brierley, Tim McGrew, Lydia McGrew, Michael Behe, Larry Hurtado, Tim Keller, Josh Howerton, Peter Kreeft, Lee Strobel, Josh McDowell, Sean McDowell, Neil Mammen, David Limbaugh, J. P Moreland, Jay Richards, William Dembski, Doug Axe, David Wood, Jay Smith, Paul Copan, Jeff Myers, Titus Kennedy, Joel Kramer, Eli Shukron, Rice Broocks, Richard Howe, Tom Howe, Mike Winger, Brady Blevins, Wes Huff, Cliffe and Stuart Knechtle, and several other people I'm forgetting because I have a condition known as being 64!

Finally, people tend to think that when an author thanks his wife, it's just a pleasant formality. Not in this case. Nothing I've done in ministry would exist without the great Stephanie Turek, who had enough faith in 1993 to

sacrifice comfort and stability and move to a distant city so her husband could attend seminary—all with three small children and a husband who had no job! Today she continues to be my love, my best friend, and a faithful, wise partner leading our ministry efforts as we attempt to make heaven crowded. This updated edition is dedicated to her.

Introduction

Finding the Box Top to the Puzzle of Life

> One who claims to be a skeptic of one set of beliefs is actually a true believer in another set of beliefs.
>
> PHILLIP E. JOHNSON

THE UNIVERSITY RELIGION PROFESSOR gave his wide-eyed undergraduate class a clear warning the very first day of the semester. "Please leave your religious beliefs at home!" he demanded. "As we look at the Old Testament, I may make some observations that will run contrary to what you've been taught in Sunday school. It's not my purpose to offend anyone, but it is my purpose to be as objective as possible in analyzing the text."

That sounded great to me. After all, I (Frank) enrolled in that class because I was in the midst of a spiritual search. I didn't want any religious party line. I just wanted to know if there was a God or not. What better place, I thought, to get some objectivity about God and the Bible than a secular school like the University of Rochester?

From the beginning, the professor took a very skeptical view of the Old Testament. He immediately affirmed the theories that Moses did not write the first five books of the Bible and that many of the Bible's supposed prophetic passages were written after the fact. He also suggested that the Jews originally believed in many gods (polytheism), but that one God ultimately won the day because the final editors of the Old Testament were "religious-fanatic monotheists."

The students had no trouble with his analysis, except one young man a couple of rows ahead of me. As the semester wore on, that student became visibly more agitated with the professor's skeptical theories. One day, when the professor began to criticize sections of Isaiah, the student could no longer moderate his displeasure.

"That's not right!" he blurted out. "This is the word of God!"

"That guy's too religious," I quietly whispered to the person sitting next to me.

"Look," the professor reminded everyone, "I told you all at the beginning that you must leave your religious beliefs at home. We will not be able to be objective if you can't do that."

"But you're not being objective," charged the student as he stood up. "You're being overly skeptical."

Some in the class began to heckle the student.

"Let the professor teach!"

"Sit down!"

"This isn't Sunday school!"

The professor tried to defuse the situation, but the flustered student stormed out and never returned.

While I had some sympathy for the student and could see that the professor had his own antireligious bias, I also wanted to hear more of what the professor had to say about the Old Testament, and particularly about God. When the semester ended, I was somewhat convinced that the professor was right—the Old Testament was not to be taken at face value. However, I still didn't have an answer to my most basic question: Does God exist? I felt completely unfulfilled when the last class ended. I had no closure, no answer. So I approached the professor, who was surrounded by students asking final questions.

"Professor," I said, after waiting until just about everyone else had left, "thanks for the class. I think I've learned a new perspective. But I still have one huge question."

"Sure, go ahead," he said.

"I enrolled in this class to find out if there really is a God or not. Well . . . is there?"

Without a moment's hesitation he snapped, "I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No, I have no idea."

I was stunned. I felt like scolding him by saying, “Wait a minute, you’re teaching that the Old Testament is false, and you don’t know whether there’s a God or not? The Old Testament could be true if God actually exists!” But since final grades were not in, I thought better of it. Instead, I simply walked out, frustrated with the entire semester. I could have respected a qualified “yes” or “no” with some reasons given, but not “I don’t know”—I could get that from an uninformed man on the street. I expected a lot more from a university religion professor.

I later learned that my expectations were too high for the modern university. When students attend a university, they are supposed to be guided in the quest to find unity in diversity—namely, how all the diverse fields of knowledge (the arts, philosophy, the physical sciences, mathematics, etc.) fit together to provide a unified picture of life. A tall task indeed, but one that the modern university has not only abandoned but reversed. Instead of finding unity in diversity, most schools now deem every viewpoint, no matter how ridiculous, just as valid as any other—that is, except the viewpoint that just one religion or worldview could be true. That’s the one viewpoint considered intolerant and bigoted on most college campuses.

Despite the denials streaming from our universities, we believe that there *is* a way to discover unity in diversity. And if one were to discover such unity, it would be like seeing the box top of a jigsaw puzzle. Just as the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are difficult to put together without the picture on the box top, the many diverse pieces of life make no sense without some kind of unifying big picture. The question is, Does anyone have the box top to this puzzle we call life? Many world religions claim that they do. Are any of them correct?

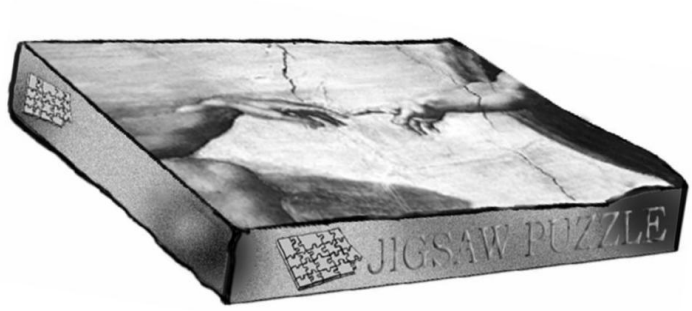


Figure 1.1 The puzzle of life

Religion and the Box Top

World religions are often attempts to provide a box top that allows you to see how the many pieces of life's puzzle make a complete, cohesive picture. This picture usually—and for good reason—begins with some sort of claim about God. What someone believes about God affects everything else that he or she believes. When Mortimer Adler was asked why the "God" section was the largest in the Great Books of the Western World series (which he edited), he insightfully observed that it's because more implications flow from the subject of God than from any other subject.[1] Indeed, the five most consequential questions in life are these:

1. Origin: Where did we come from?
2. Identity: Who are we?
3. Meaning: Why are we here?
4. Morality: How should we live?
5. Destiny: Where are we going?

The answers to each of these questions depend on the existence of God. If God exists, then there's ultimate meaning and purpose to your life. If there's a real purpose to your life, then there's a real right and wrong way to live it. Choices you make now not only affect you here but will affect you in eternity.

On the other hand, if there is no God, then your life ultimately means nothing. Since there is no enduring purpose to life, there's no right or wrong way to live it. And it doesn't matter how you live or what you believe—your destiny is dust.

So which world religion, if any, answers the God question correctly? Does any religion provide the true box top for life? The common wisdom says no, for several reasons.

First, many say it is unreasonable to believe that one religion could be exclusively true. If one religion were really true, it would mean that billions of religious people from every other religious faith are wrong today and have been wrong throughout the centuries. (And that's a big problem if Christianity is true because Christianity seems to teach that non-Christians are going to hell!) There's also the not unfounded fear that those who think they have the truth will be intolerant of those who won't accept it.

Easygoing Americans are more apt to believe that no religion is *the* truth.

This sentiment is often illustrated by the favorite parable of many university professors: the parable of the six blind men and the elephant. Each blind man feels a different part of the elephant and therefore reaches a different conclusion about the object in front of him. One grabs the tusk and says, "This is a spear!" Another feels the trunk and says, "This is a snake!" The one hugging the leg claims, "This is a tree!" The blind man holding the tail thinks, "I have a rope!" The one feeling the ear believes, "This is a fan!" And the one leaning on the elephant's side is certain, "This is a wall!" These blind men are said to represent world religions because they each come to a different conclusion about what they are sensing. Like each blind man, we are told, no one religion has *the* truth. No one religion has the complete box top. Religions are simply different paths up the same mountain. This, of course, greatly appeals to the broadly tolerant American mind.

In America, truth in religion is considered an oxymoron. There is no truth in religion, we are told. It's all a matter of taste or opinion. You like chocolate, I like vanilla. You like Christianity, I like Islam. If Buddhism works for you, then it's true for you. Besides, you ought not judge me for my beliefs!

The second major problem with truth in religion is that some pieces of life seem to defy explanation—they don't appear to fit any religious box top. These include the existence of evil and the silence of God in the face of that evil. These are especially powerful objections to anyone claiming that an all-powerful and loving God exists. Many skeptics and atheists argue that if one true, powerful, loving God actually exists, then he would intervene to clear up all the confusion. After all, if God is really out there, then why does he seem to hide himself? Why doesn't he just show up to debunk the false religions and end all the controversy? Why doesn't he intervene to stop all the evil in the world, including all the religious wars that are such a black mark on his name? And why does he allow bad things to happen to good people? These are difficult questions for anyone claiming that theistic religion is true.

Finally, many modern intellectuals imply that any box top based on religion wouldn't be legitimate anyway. Why? Because, they say, only science yields truth. Not only has evolution removed the need for God, they say, but only what is testable in a laboratory can be considered true. That is, only science deals in matters of fact, while religion stays merely in the realm of faith. So there's no sense trying to muster evidence or facts to support

religion, because that would be like mustering facts to prove that chocolate ice cream tastes better than vanilla ice cream. You can't prove preferences. Therefore, since they insist that religion is never a matter of objective fact but merely subjective taste, any box top derived from religion couldn't provide the objective picture of life we're looking for.

So where does all this leave us? Is the search for God and for life's box top hopeless? Should we assume that there's no objective meaning to life, and each invent our own subjective box top? Should we be content with the professor's "I don't know" answer?

We don't think so. We believe that there is a real answer. And despite the powerful objections we have identified (which we will address in later chapters), we believe that the answer is very reasonable. In fact, we believe this answer is more reasonable and requires less faith than any other possible answer, including that of an atheist. Let's begin to show you what we mean.

What Kind of God?

Before we go any further, let's be sure we're clear on terminology. Most of the world's major religions fall into one of these three religious worldviews: theism, pantheism, and atheism.

A *theist* is someone who believes in a personal God who created the universe but is not part of the universe. This would be roughly equivalent to a musician and his song. The musician made the song, and his attributes are expressed in the song, but he is not the song. Likewise, God made the universe, and his attributes are expressed in it, but God is not the universe. Major theistic religions are Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

By contrast, a *pantheist* is someone who believes in an impersonal God that literally *is* the universe. So, rather than *making* the song, pantheists believe God *is* the song. In fact, pantheists believe that God is everything that exists: God is the grass; God is the sky; God is the tree; God is this book; God is you; God is me; etc. Major pantheistic religions are of the Eastern variety such as Hinduism, some forms of Buddhism, and many forms of the New Age.

An *atheist*, of course, is someone who does not believe in any type of God. To follow our analogy, atheists believe that what looks like a song has either always existed or came into existence without a cause. No one wrote or performed it. Religious humanists would fall into this category.

Here's an easy way to remember these three religious worldviews: theism

—God *made* all; pantheism—God *is* all; atheism—*no* God at all. In figure 1.2 theism is depicted as the hand *holding up* the world, pantheism as the hand *in* the world, and atheism as *nothing but* the world.



Figure 1.2 The three major religious worldviews

One other term that we will use frequently is *agnostic.* That's someone who is unsure about the question of God.

So now that we've defined our terms, let's get back to this issue of faith and religion.

Faith and Religion

Despite its apparent persuasiveness, the claim that religion is simply a matter of faith is nothing more than a modern myth—it's just not true. While religion certainly requires faith, religion is not *only* about faith. *Facts* are also central to all religions because all religious worldviews—including atheism—make truth claims, and many of those truth claims can be evaluated through scientific and historical investigation.

For example, theists (e.g., Christians, Muslims, Jews) say that the universe had a beginning, while some atheists and pantheists (e.g., New Agers, Hindus) say that it did not (the universe is eternal). These are mutually exclusive claims. They can't both be right. Either the universe had a beginning or it did not. By investigating the nature and history of the universe, we can reasonably conclude that one view is right and the other wrong.

The alleged resurrection of Christ presents another example. Christians claim that Jesus rose from the dead, while Muslims say that Jesus never even died. Again, one of these views is right and the other wrong. How can we

know which one is right? By evaluating each of these conflicting truth claims against the historical evidence.

Notice that not only do different religions attempt to answer these questions, but scientists also have something to say about these matters. That is, science and religion often address the same questions: Where did the universe come from? Where did life come from? Are miracles possible? and so on. In other words, science and religion are not mutually exclusive categories as some have suggested.

Certainly not all religious claims are open to scientific or historic investigation. Some are unverifiable dogma. Nevertheless, the validity of many religious beliefs can be checked out. Some beliefs are reasonable—they can be proven with a high degree of certainty—while others are clearly unreasonable.

The Problems with Christianity

Is Christianity reasonable? We believe it is. However, unless one makes a thorough investigation of the evidence with an open mind, belief in Christianity may appear to be problematic.

First, there are many perceived *intellectual* objections, like those mentioned above (the problem of evil and the objections of many scientists).

Second, there are *emotional* obstacles that sometimes obstruct the acceptance of Christianity. Christian exclusivism, the doctrine of hell, and the hypocrisy of Christians are emotional roadblocks to just about everyone. (In fact, hypocrisy in the church probably repels people more than any other factor. Someone once said the biggest problem with Christianity is Christians!)

Finally, there are *volitional* reasons to reject Christianity, namely, Christian morality, which seems to restrict our choices in life. Since most of us don't want to answer to anyone, yielding our freedom to an unseen God is not something we naturally want to do.

Yet despite these intellectual, emotional, and volitional obstacles, we submit that it's not faith in Christianity that's difficult but faith in atheism or any other religion. *That is, once one looks at the evidence, we think it takes more faith to be a non-Christian than it does to be a Christian.* This may seem like a counterintuitive claim, but it's simply rooted in the fact that every religious worldview requires faith—even the worldview that says there is no God.

Why? Because as limited human beings, we do not possess the type of knowledge that will provide us with absolute proof of God's existence or nonexistence. Outside of the knowledge of our own existence (we know we exist because we have to exist to ponder the question), we deal in the realm of probability. Whatever we've concluded about the existence of God, it's always possible that the opposite conclusion is true.

In fact, it is possible that our conclusions in this book are wrong. We don't think they are because we have good evidence to support them. Indeed, we think our conclusions are true beyond a reasonable doubt. This type of certainty, say, 95-plus percent certain, is the best that fallible and finite human beings can attain for most questions, and it is more than sufficient for even the biggest decisions in life. Nevertheless, some faith is required to overcome the possibility that we are wrong.

The Faith of an Atheist

While some faith is required for our conclusions, it's often forgotten that faith is also required to believe any worldview, including atheism and pantheism. We were reminded of this when we met an atheist named Barry at one of our seminars. Barry was incredulous that a mutual friend, Steve, had become a Christian.

He said, "I can't figure Steve out. He claims to be intellectual, but he can't answer all the objections I pose to him about Christianity. He says he doesn't have all the answers because he's new and still learning."

I (Frank) said, "Barry, it's virtually impossible to know *everything* about a particular topic, and it's certainly impossible when that topic is an infinite God. So there has to come a point where you realize you have enough information to come to a conclusion, even if unanswered questions remain."

Barry agreed but still didn't realize that he was doing exactly what he was chiding Steve for doing. Barry had decided his view—atheism—was correct even though he did not have exhaustive information to support it. Did he know for sure there is no God? Had he investigated every argument and evidence for the existence of God? Did he possess exhaustive information on the question of God? Could he exhaustively explain reality in the absence of God or answer every objection to atheism? Of course not. Indeed, it would be impossible to do so. Since Barry, like Steve, was dealing in the realm of probability rather than absolute certainty, he had to have a certain amount of faith to believe that God does *not* exist.

Although he claimed to be an agnostic, Carl Sagan made the ultimate statement of *faith in atheistic materialism* when he claimed that "the Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be."[2] How did he *know* that for sure? He didn't. How could he? He was a limited human being with limited knowledge. Sagan was operating in the realm of probability just like Christians are when they say God exists. The question is, Who has more evidence for their conclusion? Which conclusion is more reasonable? As we'll see when we look at the evidence, the atheist has to muster a lot more faith than the Christian.

You may be thinking, "The atheist has to muster a lot more faith than the Christian! What possibly could Geisler and Turek mean by that?" We *do not* mean faith in the biblical sense of trusting *in* what you have good evidence to believe is true. In this book we are using faith the same way atheist Richard Dawkins defined it when he said, "Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."[3] Therefore, the less evidence you have for your position, the more faith you need to believe it (and vice versa).

By this definition, faith covers a gap in knowledge. And it turns out that atheists have bigger gaps in knowledge because they have far less evidence for their beliefs than Christians have for theirs. In other words, the empirical, forensic, and philosophical evidence strongly supports conclusions consistent with Christianity and inconsistent with atheism. Here are a few examples of that evidence that we'll unpack in the ensuing chapters:

1. The scientific evidence overwhelmingly confirms that the universe exploded into being out of nothing. Either someone created something out of nothing (the Christian view) or no one created something out of nothing (the atheistic view). Which view is more reasonable? The Christian view. Which view requires more faith? The atheistic view.
2. The simplest life form contains the information equivalent of 1,500 books. Christians believe only an intelligent being can create a life form containing the equivalent of 1,500 books. Atheists believe nonintelligent natural forces can do it. Christians have evidence to support their conclusion. Since atheists don't have any such evidence, their belief requires a lot more faith.
3. Hundreds of years beforehand, ancient writings foretold the coming of a man who would actually be God. This man-God, it was

> foretold, would be born in a particular city from a particular bloodline, suffer in a particular way, die at a particular time, and rise from the dead to atone for the sins of the world. Immediately after the predicted time, multiple Jewish eyewitnesses proclaimed and later recorded that those predicted events had actually occurred. Those eyewitnesses, who had no motive to invent those events, endured persecution and death when they could have saved themselves by denying the events ever happened. Thousands of people in Jerusalem were then converted after seeing or hearing of these events, and this belief swept quickly across the ancient world. Ancient historians and writers allude to or confirm these events, and archaeology corroborates them. Having seen evidence from creation that God exists (point 1 above), Christians believe these multiple lines of evidence show beyond a reasonable doubt that God had a hand in these events. Atheists must have a lot more faith to explain away the predictions, the eyewitness testimony, the willingness of the eyewitnesses to suffer and die, the origin of the Christian church, and the corroborating testimony of the other writers, archaeological finds, and other evidence that we'll investigate later.

Now perhaps these three points have raised in your mind some questions and objections. They should, because we're leaving out a lot of the detail that we'll unpack throughout the book. The main point for now is that you see what we mean when we say that every worldview—including atheism—requires some degree of faith.

Even skeptics have faith. They have faith that skepticism is true. Likewise, agnostics have faith that you can't know what is true. There are no neutral positions when it comes to beliefs. As Phillip Johnson so aptly put it, "One who claims to be a skeptic of one set of beliefs is actually a true believer in another set of beliefs."[4]

In other words, atheists, who are skeptical of Christianity, turn out to be true believers in atheistic materialism. Their beliefs may include that the universe popped into existence without a cause; that life and new life forms are the result of nonintelligent evolutionary processes; that nothing is objectively right or wrong (morality is relative); and that every thought they have is merely the result of molecules bumping into one another. Those beliefs require evidence as much as Christian beliefs. As we shall see, if they

are honest about the evidence, they need a lot more faith to maintain their atheistic beliefs than Christians need to maintain theirs.

Discovering the Box Top

We claim that there is strong evidence supporting Christianity. How will we proceed through this evidence? We will do so logically, from the question of truth all the way to the conclusion that the Bible is the word of God, via this twelve-point progression:

1. Truth about reality is knowable.
2. The opposite of true is false.
3. It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:
   a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)
   b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/Fine-Tuning)
   c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)
   d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)
4. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God (i.e., as acts of God to confirm a word from God).
6. The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:
   a. Early testimony
   b. Eyewitness testimony
   c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
   d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived
7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus's claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:
   a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself
   b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds
   c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection
9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

Before we begin presenting this line of reasoning, please note five points: First, we are not suggesting that the above points are true just because we

say so. Most of these points are premises that need to be justified by evidence. For example, point 3 claims, “It is true that the theistic God exists.” We’ll give the arguments for that claim when we get to that point in the book.

Second, notice that we are starting at the point of complete skepticism. That is, we are starting with a person who says he doesn’t even believe in truth. We need to start there because if the prevailing view of the culture is right—that there is no truth—then it can’t be *true* that a theistic God exists or that there is a *true* word from that God. However, if there is truth and that truth can be known, then we can go on to investigate the truth of God’s existence and the other points that follow (e.g., miracles are possible; the New Testament is historically reliable; and so forth).

Third, *if* this line of reasoning is sound (and that’s a big “if” that this book will attempt to show), it necessarily disproves other religions where they differ from the Bible. (This sounds incredibly arrogant and presumptuous, but we’ll address that later.) This would *not* mean that all other religions are completely false or that they have no truth. Nearly all religions have some truth. We are simply saying that *if the Bible is true*, then any specific claim that contradicts the Bible must be false.

For example, if the Bible is true, and it says that there is a God beyond the universe who created and sustains the universe (theism), then any claim that denies theism (e.g., atheism) must be false. Likewise, if the Bible is true, and it claims that Jesus rose from the dead, then the Qur’anic denial of that fact must be false. (By the way, the reverse would also be true. If the evidence showed that the Qur’an was true, then the Bible would be false wherever it contradicted the Qur’an.)

Fourth, we give evidence for Christianity because we ought to live our lives based on truth. Socrates once said that the unexamined life is not worth living.[5] We believe that the unexamined faith is not worth believing. Furthermore, contrary to popular opinion, Christians are not supposed to “just have faith” in the sense Richard Dawkins believes. Faith is not against the evidence or without evidence. As we’ve mentioned, biblical faith is trusting *in* what you have good evidence to believe *that* is true. That’s why Christians are *commanded* to know what they believe and why they believe it. They are commanded to give answers to those who ask (1 Pet. 3:15) and to demolish arguments against the Christian faith (2 Cor. 10:4–5). Since God is reasonable (Isa. 1:18) and wants us to use our reason, Christians are disobeying God if they deliberately stay ignorant. In fact, using reason is part

of the greatest commandment, which, according to Jesus, is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind*" (Matt. 22:37).

Finally, we are often asked, "If Christianity has so much evidence behind it, then why don't more people believe it?" Our answer: Although we believe the evidence we're about to present shows that the Bible is true beyond a reasonable doubt, no amount of evidence can compel anyone to believe it. Belief requires assent not only of the mind but also of the will. While many non-Christians have honest intellectual questions, we have found that many more seem to have a volitional resistance to Christianity.

When I (Frank) ask atheists who attend my college campus events, "If Christianity were true, would you become a Christian?" they often answer "No!" Why would atheists—who often claim to be beacons of reason—say they wouldn't believe something that turned out to be true?

Because they don't want it to be true. They don't want there to be a God because they want to be God over their own lives. Like all of us on occasion, they're not on a truth quest but a happiness quest. The problem isn't the *existence* of God but their *resistance* to God. There's evidence to believe, but they don't *want* to believe.

At this point a skeptic might reverse the argument by claiming that it's the Christian who simply *wants* to believe. True, many Christians believe only because they want to and cannot justify their belief with evidence. They simply have faith that the Bible is true. And merely wanting something to be true doesn't make it so. However, many non-Christians do the same thing: They take a "blind leap of faith" that their non-Christian beliefs are true simply because they *want* them to be true. In the ensuing chapters, we'll take a hard look at the evidence to see who must take the bigger leap.

The skeptic might then ask, "But why would anyone *want* Christianity to be false?" Maybe because they mistakenly think Christianity is just like other religions—a system of commands to do good works to earn your way to heaven—rather than God doing all the work so you can be offered heaven for free. Why would anyone reject that? Maybe because some people believe that accepting the truth of Christianity would require them to change their thinking, friends, priorities, lifestyle, or morals, and they are not quite willing to give up those things or their autonomy. They believe that this life would be easier and more fun without such changes. Perhaps they realize that while Christianity is all about forgiveness, it's also about denying yourself and

carrying your cross. Indeed, Christianity is free, but it can cost you your life (well, this temporal life anyway).

So please don't think that if we provide enough evidence, everyone (including yourself) will automatically become Christians. There's a difference between belief *that* and belief *in*. You might be able to show beyond a reasonable doubt *that* Jesus is God, but that doesn't mean that someone will trust *in* Jesus.

The difference between belief *that* and belief *in* is true of all relationships. When I (Frank) first met Stephanie in 1985, I got good evidence *that* she would be a great wife. But all the evidence in the world wouldn't make her my wife. I had to take a step of faith *in* her and ask her to be my wife. (And in a momentary lapse of judgment, she said yes!)

As we'll see, since there is plenty of evidence *that* Christianity is true and Jesus is God, you ought to say "I do" to him. But will you?

Can we ask you a question? If Christianity were true, would you become a Christian? Think about that question for a moment. If your *honest* answer is no, then your resistance to Christianity is emotional or volitional, not merely intellectual. No amount of evidence will convince you because evidence is not what's in your way—*you* are. In the end, only you know if you are truly open to the evidence for Christianity.

One beauty of God's creation is this: If you're not willing to accept Christianity, then you're free to reject it. This freedom to make choices—even the freedom to reject truth—is what makes us moral creatures and enables each of us to choose our ultimate destiny.

This really hits at the heart of why we exist at all, and why God might not be as overt in revealing himself to us as some would like. For if the Bible is true, then God has provided each of us with the opportunity to make an eternal choice to either accept him or reject him. And in order to ensure that our choice is truly free, he puts us in an environment that is filled with evidence of his existence, but without his *direct* presence—a presence so powerful that it could overwhelm our freedom and thus negate our ability to reject him. For if God were to be overtly present to us like a cosmic helicopter parent correcting our every choice and bringing us to justice immediately, would we really be free to go our own way?

In other words, *God has provided enough evidence in this life to convince anyone willing to believe, yet he has also left some distance so as not to compel the unwilling.* In this way, God gives us the opportunity either to love

him or to reject him without violating our freedom. In fact, the purpose of this life is to make that choice freely and without coercion. Love, by definition, must be freely given. It cannot be coerced. That's why C. S. Lewis wrote, "The Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of [God's] scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to over-ride a human will (as His felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo."[6]

We hope the evidence we present in this book will, in some small way, woo you to God. Keep in mind that it's not our evidence, it's *his.* We are simply compiling it in a logical order. By using real-world stories and illustrations as often as possible, we intend to make this book readable and its reasoning easily accessible.

Summary and Conclusion

As we have seen, many religious truth claims can be investigated and their plausibility determined. Since all conclusions about such claims are based on probability rather than absolute certainty, they all—including atheistic claims—require some amount of faith. As we look at the evidence in the ensuing chapters, we'll see conclusions such as "God exists" and "Jesus rose from the dead" are certain beyond reasonable doubt. *Therefore, it takes a lot more faith to be a non-Christian than it does to be a Christian.*

However, evidence alone cannot convince someone to become a Christian. Some atheists and other non-Christians may reject Christianity not because the evidence is inadequate but because they don't *want* to accept it. Some people choose to suppress the truth rather than live by it. *In fact, we humans have a fatal tendency to try to adjust the truth to fit our desires rather than adjusting our desires to fit the truth.*

But wait. Isn't there a third alternative? What about remaining agnostic like the Old Testament professor at the beginning of this chapter? He said he didn't know if God exists. Some may think that such a person is open-minded. Perhaps. But there's a big difference between being *open-minded* and being *empty-minded.* In light of the evidence, we think agnosticism is a decision to be empty-minded. After all, isn't the reason we should be open-minded so that we can recognize truth when we see it? Yes. So what are we to do when there's enough evidence to point us to the truth? For example, what should we do when we see evidence beyond a reasonable doubt that

George Washington was the first president of the United States? Should we remain open-minded as to who the first president was? No, that would be choosing to be *empty*-minded. Some questions are closed. As we'll see, there's enough evidence regarding Christianity to draw a reasonably certain conclusion.

As Mortimer Adler observed, our conclusion about God impacts every area of our lives.[7] It is the key to finding unity amid diversity and ultimate meaning in life. It is literally the most important question for every human being to address. Fortunately, if our reasoning is correct, we will discover the box top to life's puzzle at the end of our journey. So let's take the first step on that journey. It begins with the question of truth.

Focus of Chapters 1–2

1. **Truth about reality is knowable.**
2. **The opposite of true is false.**
3. It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:
   a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)
   b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/Fine-Tuning)
   c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)
   d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)
4. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God (i.e., as acts of God to confirm a word from God).
6. The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:
   a. Early testimony
   b. Eyewitness testimony
   c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
   d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived
7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus's claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:
   a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself
   b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds
   c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection
9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

1

Can We Handle the Truth?

> Men stumble over the truth from time to time, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened.
>
> WINSTON CHURCHILL

IN THE MOVIE *A Few Good Men*, Tom Cruise plays a Navy lawyer who questions a Marine colonel, played by Jack Nicholson, about the murder of one of Nicholson's men. The dramatic courtroom scene turns into a shouting match as Cruise accuses Nicholson of being complicit in the murder:

CRUISE: "Colonel, did you order the Code Red!"
JUDGE: "You don't have to answer that question!"
NICHOLSON: "I'll answer the question . . . you want answers?"
CRUISE: "I think I'm entitled to them."
NICHOLSON: "You want answers!"
CRUISE: "I want the truth!"
NICHOLSON: "You can't handle the truth!"[1]

Nicholson might as well have been yelling at all of America rather than Cruise because it seems that many in our country can't handle the truth. On one hand, we demand truth in virtually every area of our lives. For example, we demand the truth from:

- loved ones (no one wants lies from a spouse or a child)

- doctors (we want the right medicine prescribed and the right operations performed)
- stock brokers (we demand that they tell us the truth about companies they recommend)
- courts (we want them to convict only the truly guilty)
- employers (we want them to tell us the truth and pay us fairly)
- airlines (we demand truly safe planes and truly sober pilots)

We also expect to be told the truth when we pick up a reference book, read an article, or watch a news story; we want the truth from advertisers, teachers, and politicians; we assume road signs, medicine bottles, and food labels reveal the truth. In fact, we demand the truth in almost every facet of life that affects our money, relationships, safety, or health.

On the other hand, despite our unwavering demands for truth in those areas, many of us say we aren't interested in truth when it comes to morality or religion. In fact, many downright reject the idea that any religion can be true.

As we're sure you've noticed, there's a huge contradiction here. Why do we demand truth in everything but morality and religion? Why do we say, "That's true for you but not for me," when we're talking about morality or religion, but we never even think of such nonsense when we're talking to a stockbroker about our money or a doctor about our health?

Although few would admit it, our rejection of religious and moral truth is often on volitional rather than intellectual grounds—we just don't *want* to be held accountable to any moral standards or religious doctrine. So we blindly accept the self-defeating truth claims of politically correct intellectuals who tell us that truth does not exist; everything is relative; there are no absolutes; it's all a matter of opinion; you ought not judge; and religion is about faith, not facts! Perhaps Augustine was right when he said that we love the truth when it enlightens us, but we hate it when it convicts us.[2] Maybe we can't handle the truth.

In order to resolve our cultural schizophrenia, we need to address four questions concerning truth:

1. What is truth?
2. Can truth be known?
3. Can truths about God be known?
4. So what? Who cares about truth?

We'll cover these questions in this chapter and the next.

What Is Truth? The Truth About Truth

What is truth? Very simply, truth is "telling it like it is." When the Roman governor Pilate asked Jesus "What is truth?" before crucifying him, Pilate didn't wait for Jesus to respond. Instead, he immediately acted as if he knew at least some truth. Concerning Jesus, he declared, "I find no guilt in him" (John 18:38). By exonerating Jesus, Pilate was "telling it like it is."

Truth can also be defined as "that which corresponds to reality," "that which corresponds to its referent," or "that which describes an actual state of affairs." Pilate's judgment was true because it matched reality; referring to Jesus it described an accurate state of affairs. Jesus really was innocent.

Contrary to what is being taught in many public schools, truth is not relative but absolute. That is, truth is not invented—it's not merely my subjective opinion or preference. Truth is discovered—it corresponds to the objective world outside of myself. That means, if something is true, it's true for all people regardless of what they think about it.

All truth claims are absolute, narrow, and exclusive. Just think about the claim "everything is true." That's an absolute, narrow, and exclusive claim. It excludes its opposite (i.e., it claims that the statement "everything is *not* true" is wrong). In fact, all truths exclude their opposites. Even religious truths.

This became comically clear when I (Norm) debated religious humanist Michael Constantine Kolenda. Of the many atheists I debated, he was one of the few who actually read my book *Christian Apologetics* prior to the debate.

When it was his turn to speak, Kolenda held up my book and declared, "These Christians are very narrow-minded people. I read Dr. Geisler's book. Do you know what he believes? He believes that Christianity is true and everything opposed to it is false! These Christians are very narrow-minded people!"

Well, Kolenda had also written a book that I had read beforehand. It was titled *Religion Without God* (which is sort of like romance without a spouse!). When it was my turn to speak, I held up Kolenda's book and declared, "These humanists are very narrow-minded people. I read Dr. Kolenda's book. Do you know what he believes? He believes that humanism is true and everything opposed to it is false! These humanists are very narrow-minded people!"

The audience chuckled because they could see the point. Humanist truth

claims are just as narrow as Christian truth claims. For if H (humanism) is true, then anything opposed to H is false. Likewise, if C (Christianity) is true, then anything opposed to C is false.

There are many other truths about truth. Here are some of them:

- Truth is discovered, not invented. It exists independent of anyone's knowledge of it. (Gravity existed prior to Newton.)
- Truth is transcultural; if something is true, it is true for all people, in all places, at all times. (2+2=4 for everyone, everywhere, at every time.)
- Truth is unchanging even though our *beliefs* about truth change. (When we began to believe the earth was round instead of flat, the *truth* about the earth didn't change, only our *belief* about the earth changed.)
- Beliefs cannot change a fact, no matter how sincerely they are held. (Someone can sincerely believe the world is flat, but that only makes that person sincerely mistaken.)
- Truth is not affected by the attitude of the one professing it. (A person's arrogance does not make the truth he professes false. A person's humility does not make the error he professes true.)
- All truths are absolute truths. Even truths that appear to be relative are really absolute. (For example, "I, Frank Turek, feel warm on July 11, 2025" may appear to be a relative truth, but it is actually absolutely true for everyone, everywhere that Frank Turek had the sensation of warmth on that day.)

In short, contrary *beliefs* are possible, but contrary *truths* are not possible. We can *believe* everything is true, but we cannot *make* everything true.

This seems obvious enough. But how do we deal with the modern assertion that there is no truth? A couple of cartoon characters can help us.

The Road Runner Tactic

If someone said to you, "I have one insight for you that absolutely will revolutionize your ability to quickly and clearly identify the false statements and false philosophies that permeate our culture," would you be interested? That's what we're about to do here. In fact, if we had to pick just one thinking ability as the most valuable we've learned in our many years of education, teaching, and debating, it would be this: how to identify and refute

self-defeating statements. An incident from a talk-radio program will demonstrate what we mean by self-defeating statements.

The program's liberal host, Jerry, was taking calls about morality. After hearing numerous callers boldly claim that a certain moral position was true, one caller blurted out, "Jerry! Jerry! There's no such thing as truth!"

I (Frank) scrambled for the phone and began to dial furiously. Busy. Busy. Busy. I wanted to get on and say, "Jerry! To the guy who said, 'There is no such thing as truth'—is *that* true?"

I never did get through. And Jerry, of course, agreed with the caller, never realizing that his claim could not possibly be true because it was self-defeating.

A self-defeating statement is one that violates a fundamental law of logic known as the Law of Noncontradiction. This law states that opposite ideas cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. For example, God can't both exist and not exist at the same time and in the same sense. He either exists or he doesn't, but not both. We don't teach logic in public school anymore. Instead of teaching kids how to think, we are teaching them what to feel. And that's dangerous because when people follow feelings without reason or moral restraint, they wind up in very dark places.

If you've had a course in logic (hi, homeschooler), then you probably immediately realized that the statement "There is no truth" claims to be true and thus defeats itself. It's like saying, "I can't speak a word in English." If someone ever said that, you obviously would respond, "Wait a minute! Your statement must be false because you just uttered it in English!"

Self-defeating statements are made routinely in our postmodern culture, and once you sharpen your ability to detect them, you'll become a fearless defender of truth. No doubt you've heard people say things like "All truth is relative!" and "There are no absolutes!" Now you'll be armed to refute such silly statements by simply asking a question to show that the statements don't meet their own criteria. In other words, by turning a self-defeating statement on itself, you can expose it for the nonsense it is.

We call this process of turning a self-defeating statement on itself the "Road Runner" tactic because it reminds us of the cartoon characters Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote. As you may remember from *Looney Tunes* cartoons, the Coyote's one and only quest is to chase down the speedy Road Runner and make him his evening meal. But the Road Runner is simply too fast and too smart. Just when the Coyote is gaining ground, the Road Runner

stops short at the cliff's edge, leaving the passing Coyote momentarily suspended in midair, supported by nothing. As soon as the Coyote realizes he has no ground to stand on, he plummets to the valley floor and crashes in a heap.

Well, that's exactly what the Road Runner tactic can do to the relativists and postmodernists of our day. It helps them realize that their arguments cannot sustain their own weight. Consequently, they crash to the ground in a heap. This makes you look like a super genius! Let's take the Road Runner tactic to college to show you what we mean.

The Road Runner Takes on My Truth Versus Your Truth

The Road Runner tactic is especially needed by today's youth. Why? Because if you watch social media or you listen to many high school teachers and university professors, they will tell you that there is no truth. It amazes us that parents all over the world are literally paying thousands of dollars in college tuition so that their sons and daughters can be taught *the "truth" that there is no truth*, not to mention other self-defeating postmodern assertions, such as "All truth is relative" (Is *that* a relative truth?); "There are no absolutes" (Are you *absolutely* sure?); and "It's true for you but not for me!" (Is that statement true just for you or is it true for everyone?).

What about "You have your truth and I have my truth"? If we spell this common mantra out, it's really saying, "There isn't *the* truth, only my truth and your truth." Simply ask, "Is that just *your* truth or *the* truth?" If it's just your truth, then it's just your opinion, so why should I believe it? But if you're saying that statement is *the* truth, the first half of your statement says there are no *the* truths. In other words, that sentence claims to be *the* truth while at the same time claiming there is no *the* truth. It's just another example of a self-defeating statement.

We know this is unpopular in our culture, but we have to say it: *There's no such thing as "your" truth, and there's no such thing as "my" truth—there's just* the *truth.* If you want to say you have your own truth, you might as well say you have your own math. Do you think "I have my own math" is going to get you off the hook with the IRS if you fail to add up and report your income properly? No, that won't add up with them.

"I have my truth and you have your truth" may be the mantra of our day, but that's not how the world really works. You can't safely build a bridge, fly a plane, or diagnose and treat a disease with "your" truth. You need *the* truth!

Since we can't safely build a bridge with our own truth, why do we think we can safely build our lives with our own truth?

For those who still blindly believe the self-defeating mantras of our culture, we have a few questions: If there really is no truth, then why try to learn anything? Why should any student listen to any professor? (After all, the professor doesn't have the truth.) What's the point of going to school, much less paying for it? What's the point of obeying the professor's moral prohibitions against cheating on tests or using AI to write term papers? How can you get a wrong answer on a test if there is no truth? How can you catch someone in a lie if there is no truth? And how can you claim someone is an "oppressor" unless objective truth exists?

Ideas have consequences. Good ideas have good consequences, and bad ideas have bad consequences. Indeed, many students realize the implications of these bad postmodern ideas and behave accordingly. If we teach students that truth does not exist—and that includes truth about morality—then why are we surprised when students shoot up their classrooms or a teenage mother leaves her baby in a trash can? Why should they act "right" when we teach them that there is no such thing as "right"?

C. S. Lewis revealed the absurdity of expecting virtue from people who are taught that no virtue exists: "In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful."[3]

The truth of the matter is this: False ideas about truth lead to false ideas about life. In many cases, these false ideas give apparent justification for what is immoral behavior. If you can kill the concept of truth, then you can kill the concept of any true religion or any true morality. Many in our culture have been attempting to do this, and the past several decades of religious and moral decline trumpet their success. Unfortunately, the devastating consequences of their efforts are not just true for them—they are also true for all of us. Yes, the truth may hurt at times, but lies ultimately hurt more.

So truth exists. It cannot be denied. Those who deny truth make the self-defeating truth claim that there is no truth. In this regard, they are a lot like Rabbit in *Winnie-the-Pooh*—they answer a knock at the door by saying, "Nobody is at home!"

Now, let's see how the Road Runner tactic can help us answer the skeptical truth claim that "Truth cannot be known!"

Can Truth Be Known? Knock, Knock . . .

Evangelical Christians believe that they ought to obey Jesus's command to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). In order to help Christians carry out this "Great Commission," D. James Kennedy created a door-to-door evangelism technique called Evangelism Explosion (EE). If you're a Christian, the EE technique allows you to quickly ascertain where a person is spiritually. After introducing yourself, you are to ask questions like these to the person answering the door:

1. Can I ask you a spiritual question?
   and
2. If you were to die tonight and stand before God, and God were to ask you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" what would you say?

Most people are curious enough to say yes to question 1. (If they say, "What do you mean by 'a spiritual question'?" you go ahead and ask them the second question.) As for the second question, the EE manual predicts that the non-Christian will usually give the "good works" answer. You know, something like this: "God will accept me because I'm basically a good person. I haven't killed anybody; I go to church; I give to the poor . . ." In that case, the EE manual tells you to respond with the gospel (literally the "good news"): that all (including you) have fallen short of God's perfect standard and no good work can erase the fact that you've already sinned, but the good news is that you can be saved from punishment by trusting in Christ, who was punished in your place.

While this technique has been very successful, some non-Christians do not respond to the two questions as expected. For example, one evening I (Norm) decided to take EE to the streets along with a fellow member of my church. Here's how it went:

Knock, knock.

"Who's there?" (A man came to the door.)

I stuck out my hand and said, "Hi! My name is Norm Geisler, this is my partner, Ron, and we're from the church at the end of the street."

"I'm Don," the man replied, his eyes quickly sizing us up.

Immediately I jumped into action with question 1: "Don, do you mind if we ask you a spiritual question?"

“No, go ahead,” Don said boldly, apparently eager to have a Bible thumper for dessert.

I laid question 2 on him: “Don, if you were to die tonight and stand before God, and God were to ask you, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’ what would you say?”

Don snapped back, “I’d say to God, ‘Why *shouldn’t* you let me into your heaven?’”

Gulp . . . he wasn’t supposed to say that! I mean, that answer wasn’t in the book!

After a split second of panic, I offered up a quick prayer and replied, “Don, if we knocked on your door seeking to come into your house, and you said to us, ‘Why should I let you into my house?’ and we responded, ‘Why *shouldn’t* you let us in?’ what would you say?”

Don pointed his finger at my chest and sternly replied, “I would tell you where to go!”

I immediately shot back, “That’s exactly what God is going to say to you!”

Don looked stunned for a second, but then he narrowed his eyes and said, “To tell you the truth: I don’t believe in God. I’m an atheist.”

“You’re an atheist?”

“That’s right!”

“Well, are you absolutely sure there is no God?” I asked him.

He paused, and said, “Well, no, I’m not *absolutely* sure. I guess it’s possible there might be a God.”

“So you’re not really an atheist, then—you’re an agnostic,” I informed him, “because an atheist says, ‘I know there is no God,’ and an agnostic says, ‘I don’t know whether there is a God.’”

“Yeah . . . alright; so I guess I’m an agnostic then,” he admitted.

Now this was real progress. With just one question we had moved from atheism to agnosticism! But I still had to figure out what kind of agnostic Don was.

So I asked him, “Don, what kind of agnostic are you?”

He laughed as he asked, “What do you mean?” (He was probably thinking, “A minute ago, I was an atheist—I have no idea what kind of agnostic I am now!”)

“Well, Don, there are two kinds of agnostics,” I explained. “There’s the *ordinary* agnostic who says he *doesn’t* know anything for sure, and then

there's the *ornery* agnostic who says he *can't* know anything for sure."

Don was sure about this. He said, "I'm the ornery kind. You can't know anything for sure."

Recognizing the self-defeating nature of his claim, I unleashed the Road Runner tactic by asking him, "Don, if you say that you can't know anything for sure, then how do you know *that* for sure?"

Looking puzzled, he said, "What do you mean?"

Explaining it another way, I said, "How do you *know* for sure that you can't *know* anything for sure?"

I could see the lightbulb coming on but decided to add one more point: "Besides, Don, you can't be a skeptic about everything because that would mean you'd have to doubt skepticism; but the more you doubt skepticism the more sure you become."

He relented. "Okay, I guess I really *can* know something for sure. I must be an *ordinary* agnostic."

Now we were really getting somewhere. With just a few questions, Don had moved from atheism through *ornery* agnosticism to *ordinary* agnosticism.

I continued, "Since you admit now that you *can* know, why *don't* you know that God exists?"

Shrugging his shoulders, he said, "Because nobody has shown me any evidence, I guess."

Now I launched the million-dollar question: "Would you be willing to look at some evidence?"

"Sure," he replied.

This is the best type of person to talk to: someone who is willing to take an honest look at the evidence. Being willing is essential. Evidence cannot convince the unwilling.

Since Don was willing, we gave him a book by Frank Morison titled *Who Moved the Stone?*[4] Morison was a skeptic who set out to write a book refuting Christianity but instead became convinced by the evidence that Christianity was indeed true. (In fact, the first chapter of *Who Moved the Stone?* is called "The Book That Refused to Be Written.")

We visited Don a short time later. He described the evidence presented by Morison as "very convincing." Several weeks later, in the middle of a study of the Gospel of John, Don accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior.

Don later became a deacon in a Baptist church near St. Louis, Missouri. Every Sunday morning, for years, he would drive the church bus through the local neighborhood to pick up those kids whose parents wouldn't come to church. His ministry has special meaning to me (Norm) because two men like Don (Mr. Costie and Mr. Sweetland) picked me up with a church bus more than 400 times—every Sunday from when I was nine until I was seventeen. I was in a position to accept Christ at seventeen largely because of that bus ministry. I guess it's true what they say: "What goes around comes around" (even if it's just the church bus).

Can All Religions Be True?

The moral of the EE story is that complete agnosticism or skepticism is self-defeating. Agnostics and skeptics make the truth claim that truth claims cannot be made. They say that truth can't be known but then claim that their view is true. You can't have it both ways. Progressive Christians run into the same problem when they raise doubt to a virtue because they don't doubt their insistence that we doubt.

So we've established that truth can be known. In fact, it's undeniable. But so what? Can't all religions be true? Unfortunately, it's not just the secular world that's confused about this question; even some church pastors have trouble with it.

Seminary professor Ronald Nash heard of a good example of this. He told us of a student of his who went home to Bowling Green, Kentucky, for Christmas break one year. While on break, this Bible-believing student decided to be adventurous one Sunday and attend a church that he had never attended before. But as soon as the pastor uttered the first sentence of his sermon, the student realized he had made a mistake—the pastor was contradicting the Bible.

"The theme of my sermon this morning," the pastor began, "is that all religious beliefs are true!" The student squirmed in his seat as the pastor went on to assure each member of the congregation that every religious belief they had was true!

When the sermon was over, the student wanted to slip out unnoticed, but the heavy-set, robed pastor was waiting at the door, bear-hugging each passing congregant.

"Son," the pastor boomed upon greeting the student, "where are you from?"

“Actually, I’m from Bowling Green, sir. I’m home on break from seminary.”

“Seminary! Good. So what religious beliefs do you have, son?”

“I’d rather not say, sir.”

“Why not, son?”

“Because I don’t want to offend you, sir.”

“Oh, son, you can’t offend me. Besides, it doesn’t matter what your beliefs are—they’re true. So what do you believe?”

“Okay,” the student relented. He leaned toward the pastor, cupped his hand around his mouth, and whispered, “Sir, I believe that you are going to hell!”

The pastor’s face turned bright red as he struggled to respond. “I, ah, guess I, ah, made a mistake! All religious beliefs can*not* be true because yours certainly aren’t true!”

Indeed, as the pastor realized, religious beliefs cannot all be true, because many religious beliefs are contradictory—they teach opposites. For example, conservative Christians believe that those who haven’t accepted Christ as their Savior have chosen hell as their ultimate destination. It’s often overlooked, but many Muslims believe the same about non-Muslims—they’re headed for hell as well. And Hindus generally believe that everyone, regardless of beliefs, is caught in an indefinite cycle of reincarnation based on works. These contradictory beliefs can’t all be true.

In fact, world religions have more contradictory beliefs than complementary ones. The notion that all religions teach basically the same thing—that we ought to love one another—demonstrates a serious misunderstanding of world religions. While most religions have some kind of similar moral code because God has implanted right and wrong on our consciences (we’ll discuss that in chapter 8), they disagree on virtually every major issue, including the nature of God, the nature of man, sin, salvation, heaven, hell, and creation!

Think about it: *the nature of God, the nature of man, sin, salvation, heaven, hell, and creation.* Those are the biggies! The truth is that world religions are superficially similar but essentially different. Here are a few of those big differences:

- Jews, Christians, and Muslims believe in different versions of a theistic God, while most Hindus and New Agers believe that

everything that exists is part of an impersonal, pantheistic force they call God.
- Many Hindus believe that evil is a complete illusion, while Christians, Muslims, and Jews believe that evil is real.
- Christians believe that people are saved by grace while all other religions, if they believe in salvation at all, teach some kind of salvation by good works (the definition of "good" and what one is saved from varies greatly).

These are just a few of the many essential differences. So much for the idea that all religions teach basically the same things!

Truth Versus Tolerance

While most *religions* have some beliefs that are true, not all religious *beliefs* can be true because they are mutually exclusive—they teach opposites. In other words, some religious beliefs must be wrong.

Oops, you're not supposed to say that in America today. You're supposed to be tolerant of all religious beliefs. And in American culture today, tolerance no longer means to put up with something you believe to be false (after all, you don't tolerate things you agree with). Tolerance now means that you're supposed *to accept and even celebrate every belief as true (except some Christian beliefs)!* In a religious context, this is known as religious pluralism—the belief that all religions are true. There are several problems with this new definition of tolerance.

First, let us say that we are thankful that we have religious freedom in this country, and we don't believe in imposing a religion legislatively. While all laws legislate morality, they don't necessarily legislate religion, as I (Frank) discuss in the book *The War on Reality*.[5] We are well aware of the dangers of religious intolerance and believe that we should accept and respect people who have different religious beliefs. But that doesn't mean that we ought to embrace the impossible notion that all religious beliefs are true. Since mutually exclusive religious beliefs cannot be true, it makes no sense to pretend that they are. In fact, on an individual level it can be dangerous to do so. If Christianity is true, then it's dangerous to your eternal destiny not to be a Christian. Likewise, if Islam is true, then it's dangerous to your eternal destiny not to be a Muslim.

Second, the claim that "you ought not question someone's religious

beliefs" is itself a religious belief for pluralists. But this belief is just as exclusive and "intolerant" as any religious belief of a Christian or Muslim. In other words, pluralists think all nonpluralist beliefs are wrong. So pluralists are just as dogmatic and closed-minded as anyone else making truth claims in the public square. And they want everyone who disagrees with them to see things *their* way.

The left can be just as intolerant as any traditional religious person, as we've seen with cancel culture, "hate speech" laws, and people being fired from their jobs for not agreeing with leftist morality. In fact, I (Frank) was fired as a consultant from two Fortune 500 companies in 2011 for writing a book that disagreed with same-sex marriage. Ironically, I was fired in the name of "inclusion, tolerance, and diversity." I was not included and not tolerated for holding a diverse view! (For details on what happened, see my book *Correct, Not Politically Correct*[6]).

Third, the prohibition against questioning religious beliefs is also an absolute moral position. Why shouldn't we question religious beliefs? Would it be immoral to do so? And if so, by whose standard? Do pluralists have any good reasons supporting *their belief* that we ought not question religious beliefs, or is it just their opinion that they want to impose on the rest of us? Unless they can give us good reasons for such a moral standard, why should we allow them to impose it on us? And why are pluralists trying to impose *that* moral position on others anyway? That's not very "tolerant" of them.

Fourth, the Bible commands Christians to question religious beliefs (e.g., Deut. 13:1–5; Gal. 1:8; 2 Cor. 11:13; 1 John 4:1; etc.). Since Christians have a religious belief that they ought to question religious beliefs, then pluralists —according to their own standard—should accept this Christian belief as well. But of course they do not. Ironically, pluralists—advocates of the new tolerance—are not tolerant at all. They only "tolerate" those who already agree with them, which by anyone's definition is not tolerance.

Fifth, the pluralist's claim that we ought not question religious beliefs is a derivative of the false cultural prohibition against making judgments. The prohibition against judging is false because it fails to meet its own standard: "You ought not judge" is itself a judgment! Pluralists misinterpret Jesus's comments on judging (Matt. 7:1–5). Jesus did not prohibit judging as such, only judging hypocritically. Indeed, everyone—the pluralist, the Christian, the atheist, the agnostic—makes judgments. So the issue isn't whether or not we make judgments, but whether or not we make the *right* judgments.

Finally, are pluralists ready to accept as true the religious beliefs of Muslim terrorists—especially when those beliefs say that all non-Muslims (including pluralists) should be thrown off a building? They, of course, will say no, but then tend to blindly support Jihadists whenever there is a conflict between Hamas and Israel. How do they ignore this deadly contradiction?

While we should respect the rights of others to believe what they want, we are foolish, and maybe even unloving, to tacitly accept every religious belief as true. Why is this unloving? Because *if* Christianity is true, then it would be unloving to suggest to anyone that their opposing religious beliefs are true as well. Affirming such error might keep them on the road to damnation. Instead, if Christianity is true, we ought to kindly tell them the truth because only the truth can set them free.

Once I Was Blind but Now I See

What does the vast plurality of religious beliefs tell us about truth in religion? At first glance, it might appear that the existence of so many contradictory beliefs just reinforces the elephant parable we mentioned in the introduction—namely, that truth in religion cannot be known. But exactly the opposite is the case.

To refresh your memory, in this parable an elephant is being examined by six blind men. Each man feels a different part of the elephant and thus reaches a different conclusion about the object in front of him. One grabs the tusk and says, “This is a spear!” Another holds the trunk and says, “This is a snake!” The one hugging the leg claims, “This is a tree!” The blind man holding the tail thinks, “I have a rope!” The one feeling the ear believes, “This is a fan!” And the one leaning on the elephant’s side is certain, “This is a wall!” These blind men are said to represent world religions, because they each come to a different conclusion about what they are sensing. Like each blind man, we are told, no one religion has *the* truth. Religious truth is relative to the individual. It is subjective, not objective.

This may seem persuasive until you ask yourself one question: “What’s the perspective of the one telling the parable?” Hmm, let’s see, the one telling the parable . . . appears to have an *objective* perspective of the entire proceeding because he can see that the blind men are mistaken. Exactly, now you see the elephant in the room! The parable teller wouldn’t know that the blind men were wrong unless he had an objective perspective of what was right!

So if the person telling the parable can have an objective perspective, why can't the blind men? They could—if the blind men suddenly could see, they too would realize that they were originally mistaken. That's really an elephant in front of them and not a wall, fan, or rope.

We too can see the truth in religion. Unfortunately, many of us who deny there's truth in religion are not *actually* blind but only *willfully* blind. We may not want to admit that there's truth in religion because that truth will convict us. But if we open our eyes and stop hiding behind the self-defeating nonsense that truth cannot be known, then we'll be able to see the truth as well. And not just truth in the areas where we demand it—money, relationships, health, law, etc.—but truth in religion as well. As the blind man healed by Jesus said, "I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25 NIV 1984).

The skeptic may say, "Wait a minute! The elephant parable may be a bad parable, but that still doesn't prove that truth in religion can be known. You've proven that truth can be known, but not necessarily truth in religion. In fact, didn't David Hume and Immanuel Kant disprove the idea of truth in religion?"

Not at all, and we'll discuss why in the next chapter.

Summary

1. Despite the relativism that emanates from our culture, truth is absolute, exclusive, and knowable. To deny absolute truth and its knowability is self-defeating.
2. The Road Runner tactic turns a statement on itself and helps expose the self-defeating (and thus false) statements that are so common today. These include statements such as, "There is no truth!" (Is *that* true?); "All truth is relative!" (Is *that* a relative truth?); "You can't know truth!" (Then how do you know *that?*); and "There is no *the* truth, only my truth" (Is that *the* truth?). Basically, any statement that is unaffirmable because it violates the Law of Noncontradiction (and itself) must be false. Relativists are defeated by their own logic.
3. Truth is not dependent on our feelings or preferences. Something is true whether we like it or not. Facts don't care about your feelings.
4. Contrary to popular opinion, major world religions do not all teach the same things. They have essential differences and only superficial agreements. All religions cannot be true because they teach opposites.

5. Since, logically, all religions cannot be true, we cannot subscribe to the new definition of tolerance that demands that we accept the impossible idea that all religious beliefs are true. We are to respect the beliefs of others but lovingly tell them the truth. After all, if you truly love and respect people, you will tactfully tell them the truth about information that may have eternal consequences.

2

Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All?

> People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive.
>
> BLAISE PASCAL

THE LATE AUTHOR and speaker James Sire used to conduct an eye-opening interactive seminar for students at colleges and universities across the country. The seminar was called "Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All?"

With such an intriguing title, the event usually attracted a large audience. Sire began by asking those in attendance this question: "Why do people believe what they believe?" Despite the wide variety of answers, Sire showed that each answer he got fitted into one of these four categories: sociological, psychological, religious, and philosophical.[1]

Table 2.1 Why people believe the things they believe

Sociological Reasons	Psychological Reasons	Religious Reasons	Philosophical Reasons
Parents	Comfort	Scripture	Consistency
Friends	Peace of Mind	Pastor/Priest	Completeness (best explanation of all the evidence)
Society	Meaning	Guru	

Culture	Purpose	Rabbi	
	Hope	Imam	
	Identity	Church	

Beginning on the left, Sire went through the reasons in each category by asking students, “Is that a good reason to believe something?” When he got sharp students (like he would at Southern Evangelical Seminary!), the dialog might go something like this:

SIRE: I see that many of you cited sociological factors. For example, many people have beliefs because their parents have those same beliefs. Do you think that alone is a good enough reason to believe something?

STUDENTS: No, parents can sometimes be wrong!

SIRE: Okay, what about cultural influences? Do you think people ought to believe something just because it’s accepted culturally?

STUDENTS: No, not necessarily. The Nazis had a culture that accepted the murder of all Jews. That sure didn’t make it right!

SIRE: Good. Now, some of you mentioned psychological factors, such as comfort. Is that a good enough reason to believe something?

STUDENTS: No, we’re not “comfortable” with that! Seriously, comfort is not a test for truth. We might be comforted by the belief that there’s a God out there who cares for us, but that doesn’t necessarily mean he really exists. Likewise, a junkie might be temporarily comforted by a certain type of drug, but that drug might actually kill him.

SIRE: So you’re saying that truth is important because there can be consequences when you’re wrong?

STUDENTS: Yes, if someone is wrong about a drug, he or she might take too much and die. Likewise, if someone is wrong about the thickness of the ice, he or she might fall in and freeze to death.

SIRE: So for pragmatic reasons it makes sense that we should only believe things that are true.

STUDENTS: Of course. Over the long run, truth protects and error harms.

SIRE: Okay, so sociological and psychological reasons alone are not adequate grounds to believe something. What about religious reasons? Some mentioned the Bible; others mentioned the Qur’an; still others got their beliefs from priests or gurus. Should you believe something just because some religious source or holy book says so?

STUDENTS: No, because the question arises, "Whose scripture or whose source should we believe?" After all, they teach contradictory things.

SIRE: Can you give me an example?

STUDENTS: Well, the Bible and the Qur'an, for example, can't both be true because they contradict one another. The Bible says that Jesus died on the cross and rose three days later (1 Cor. 15:3–8), while the Qur'an says he existed but didn't die on the cross (4:157). If one's right, the other one is wrong. Then again, if Jesus never existed, both of them are wrong.

SIRE: So how could we adjudicate between, say, the Bible and the Qur'an?

STUDENTS: We need some proofs outside those so-called scriptures to help us discover which, if either, is true.

SIRE: From which category could we derive such proofs?

STUDENTS: All we have left is the philosophical category.

SIRE: But how can someone's philosophy be a proof? Isn't that just someone's opinion?

STUDENTS: No, we don't mean philosophy in *that* sense of the word, but in the classic sense of the word, where philosophy means finding truth through logic, evidence, and science.

SIRE: Excellent! So with that definition in mind, let's ask the same question of the philosophical category. Is something worth believing if it's rational, if it's supported by evidence, and if it best explains all the data?

STUDENTS: That certainly seems right to us!

By exposing inadequate justifications for beliefs, the way is cleared for the seeker of truth to find adequate justifications. This is what an apologist does. An apologist is someone who shows how good reason and evidence support or contradict a particular belief. That's what we're attempting to do in this book, and it's what Sire set up in his seminar.

Sire's Socratic approach helped students realize at least three things. First, any teaching—religious or otherwise—is worth trusting only if it points to the truth. Apathy about truth can be dangerous. In fact, believing error can have deadly consequences, both temporally and—if any one of several religious teachings are true—eternally as well.

Second, many beliefs that people hold today are not supported by evidence but only by the subjective preferences of those holding them. As

Blaise Pascal said, “People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive.”[2] But truth is not a subjective matter of taste—it’s an objective matter of fact.

Finally, to find truth, one must be ready to give up those subjective preferences in favor of objective facts. And facts are best discovered through logic, evidence, and science.

While using logic, evidence, and science seems the best way to get at truth, some still have an objection. That objection concerns logic—namely, whose logic should we use, Western or Eastern?

Western Logic Versus Eastern Logic

Some relativists assert that there is a difference between “Western logic” and “Eastern logic.” Western logic is “either-or,” but Eastern logic is “both-and” (signified by the yin-yang symbol). That’s why people in, say, India are perhaps more comfortable with contradictions than are people in the West.

For example, in the East, you can believe that salvation is only through Jesus, but you can also at the same time believe that people can be saved in other ways too. It’s not *either* one way *or* many ways, but *both* one way *and* many ways. Everyone is right, even though they contradict one another. Therefore, relativists say, when you’re in the East, you must use “both-and” logic rather than “either-or” logic.

Do you see the self-defeating problem with this assertion? You can if you unleash the Road Runner tactic. Simply ask the person who insists that you must use “both-and” logic rather than “either-or” logic to answer this question: “Are you saying that when I’m in India, I must use *either* ‘both-and’ logic *or* nothing else?”

The “either-or” does seem to emerge, doesn’t it? Indeed, the very assertion that I must use “both-and” logic in the East must use “either-or” logic to be understood at all.

Despite what relativists assert, things work in the East just like they work everywhere else. In India, just like in the United States, you look both ways before you cross the street because it’s *either* you *or* the bus, not both. Likewise, 2+2=4, the same gravity keeps everyone on the ground, and murder is wrong there just as it is in the West. Truth is truth no matter what country you come from. And truth is truth no matter what you believe about it. Just as the same gravity keeps all people on the ground whether they believe in it or not, the same logic applies to all people whether they believe

it or not.

So what's the point? The point is that there's only one type of logic that helps us discover truth. It's the one built into the nature of reality that we can't avoid using. Despite this, people will try to tell you that logic doesn't apply to reality, logic doesn't apply to God, there are different types of logic,[3] and so on. But as they say such things, they use the very logic they are denying. This is like using the laws of arithmetic to prove that arithmetic cannot be trusted.

It's important to note that we are not simply engaging in word games here. The Road Runner tactic uses the undeniable laws of logic to expose that much of what our common culture believes about truth, religion, and morality is undeniably false. That which is self-defeating cannot be true, but many Americans believe it anyway. We contradict ourselves at our own peril.

To Be Burned or Not to Be Burned, That Is the Question

The Road Runner tactic is so effective because it utilizes the Law of Noncontradiction, which we introduced in the last chapter. The Law of Noncontradiction is a self-evident first principle of thought that says contradictory claims cannot both be true at the same time in the same sense. In short, it says that the opposite of true is false. We all know this law intuitively and use it every day.

Suppose you see a married couple on the street one day—friends of yours—and you ask the wife if it's true that she's expecting a baby. If she says "yes" and her husband says "no," you don't say, "Thanks a lot, that really helps me!" You think, "Maybe she hasn't told him or maybe they misunderstood the question (or maybe something worse!)." There's one thing you know for sure: They can't both be right! The Law of Noncontradiction makes that self-evident to you.

When investigating any question of fact, including the question of God, the same Law of Noncontradiction applies. Either the theists are right—God exists—or the atheists are right—God doesn't exist. Both can't be correct. Likewise, either Jesus died and rose from the dead as the Bible claims or he did not as the Qur'an claims. One is right and the other is wrong.

In fact, a medieval Muslim philosopher by the name of Avicenna suggested a surefire way to correct someone who denies the Law of Noncontradiction. He said that anyone who denies the Law of Noncontradiction should be beaten and burned until he admits that to be

beaten is not the same as not to be beaten, and to be burned is not the same as not to be burned! (A bit extreme, but you get the point!)

While reasonable people have no problem with the Law of Noncontradiction, some very influential philosophers have denied it implicitly in their teachings. Perhaps the two most influential of them were David Hume and Immanuel Kant. Many people have never heard of Hume and Kant, but their teachings have affected the modern mind greatly. That's why it's important that we take a brief look at each of them. We'll start with Hume.

Hume's Skepticism: Should We Be Skeptical About It?

Perhaps more than any other person, David Hume is responsible for the skepticism prevalent today. As an empiricist, Hume believed that all meaningful ideas were either true by definition or must be based on sense experience. Since, according to Hume, there are no sense experiences for concepts beyond the physical, any metaphysical claims (those about concepts beyond the physical, including God) should not be believed—because they are meaningless. In fact, Hume asserted that propositions can be meaningful only if they meet one of the following two conditions:

- The truth claim is abstract reasoning, such as a mathematical equation or a definition (e.g., "2+2=4" or "All triangles have three sides").
- The truth claim can be verified empirically through one or more of the five senses.

While he claimed to be a skeptic, Hume certainly wasn't skeptical about these two conditions—he was absolutely convinced he had the truth. In fact, he concludes his *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* with this emphatic assertion:

> If we take in our hand any volume—of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance—let us ask, "Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?" No. "Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact and existence?" No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.[4]

Do you see the implications of Hume's two conditions? If he's correct,

then any book talking about God is meaningless. You might as well use all religious writings for kindling!

Nearly 200 years later, Hume's two conditions were converted into the "principle of empirical verifiability" by twentieth-century philosopher A. J. Ayer. The principle of empirical verifiability claims that a proposition can be meaningful only if it's true by definition or if it's empirically verifiable.

By the mid-1960s this view had become the rage in university philosophy departments across the country, including that of the University of Detroit, where I (Norm) was a student. In fact, I took an entire class on Logical Positivism, which was another name for the brand of philosophy espoused by Ayer. The professor of that class, a Logical Positivist, was a strange breed. Though he claimed to be a Roman Catholic, he refused to believe it was meaningful to speak about the existence of reality beyond the physical (i.e., metaphysics, God). In other words, he was an admitted atheist who told us that he wanted to convert the entire class to his brand of semantical atheism. (I once asked him, "How can you be both a Catholic and an atheist?" Ignoring two millennia of official Catholic teaching, he replied, "You don't have to believe in God to be a Catholic—you just have to keep the rules!")

On the first day of that class, this professor gave the students the task of giving presentations based on chapters in Ayer's book *Logic, Truth, and Language.* I volunteered to do the chapter titled "The Principle of Empirical Verifiability." Now keep in mind, this principle was the very foundation of Logical Positivism and thus of the entire course.

At the beginning of the next class, the professor said, "Mr. Geisler, we'll hear from you first. Keep it to no more than twenty minutes so we can have ample time for discussion."

Well, since I was using the lightning-fast Road Runner tactic, I had absolutely no trouble with the time constraints. I stood up and simply said, "The principle of empirical verifiability states that there are only two kinds of meaningful propositions: (1) those that are true by definition and (2) those that are empirically verifiable. Since the principle of empirical verifiability itself is neither true by definition nor empirically verifiable, it cannot be meaningful."

That was it. I sat down.

There was a stunned silence in the room. Most of the students could see the Coyote dangling in midair. They recognized that the principle of empirical verifiability could not be meaningful based on its own standard. It

self-destructed in midair! In just the second class period, the foundation of that entire class had been destroyed! What was the professor going to talk about for the next fourteen weeks?

I'll tell you what he talked about. Instead of admitting that his class and his entire philosophical outlook was self-defeating and thus false, the professor suppressed that truth, hemmed and hawed, and then went on to suspect that I was behind everything that went wrong for him the rest of the semester. His allegiance to the principle of empirical verifiability—despite its obvious fatal flaw—was clearly a matter of the will, not of the mind.

There's a lot more to Hume, particularly his antimiracle arguments, which we'll address when we get to chapter 9. But for now the point is this: Hume's hard empiricism, and that of his devotee A. J. Ayer, is self-defeating. The claim that something can only be meaningful if it's empirically verifiable or true by definition excludes itself because that statement is neither empirically verifiable nor true by definition. In other words, Hume and Ayer try to prove too much because their method of discovering meaningful propositions excludes too much. Certainly claims that are empirically verifiable or true by definition are meaningful. However, such claims don't comprise *all* meaningful statements as Hume and Ayer contend. So instead of committing all books about God "to the flames" as Hume suggests, you may want to consider using Hume's books to get your fire going.

Kant's Agnosticism: Should We Be Agnostic About It?

Immanuel Kant's impact has been even more devastating to the Christian worldview than Hume's, for if Kant's philosophy is right, then there is no way to know *anything* about the real world, even empirically verifiable things! Why? Because according to Kant, the structure of your senses and your mind forms all sense data, so you never really know the thing *in itself*. You only know the thing *to you* after your mind and senses form it.

To get a handle on this, look for a second out the window at a tree. Kant is saying that the tree you think you are looking at appears the way it does because your mind is forming the sense data you're getting from the tree. You really don't know the tree in itself; you only know the phenomena your mind categorizes about the tree. In short, you "kant" know the real tree in itself, only the tree as it appears to you.

Whew! Why is it that the average person on the street doesn't doubt what he sees with his own two eyes but supposedly brilliant philosophers do? The

more we study philosophy, the more we are convinced of this: If you want to make the obvious seem obscure, just let a philosopher get ahold of it!

Nevertheless, we can't avoid studying philosophy because, as C. S. Lewis said, "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered."[5] Kant's philosophy is bad philosophy, yet it has convinced many people that there is an unbridgeable gulf between them and the real world; that there's no way they can get any reliable knowledge about what the world is really like, much less what God is really like. According to Kant, we are locked in complete agnosticism about the real world.

Thankfully, there's a simple answer to all of this—the Road Runner tactic. Kant commits the same error as Hume—he violates the Law of Noncontradiction. He contradicts his own premise by saying that *no one can know* the real world while *he claims to know* something about it—namely, that the real world is unknowable! In effect, Kant says the *truth* about the real world is that there are *no truths* about the real world.

Since these self-defeating statements can stump even the sharpest minds, let's look at Kant's error another way. Kant is also making a logical fallacy called the "nothing-but" fallacy. This is a fallacy because "nothing-but" statements imply "more than" knowledge. Kant says he knows the data that gets to his brain is *nothing but* phenomena. But in order to know this, he would have to be able to see *more than* just the phenomena. In other words, to differentiate one thing from another thing, you have to be able to perceive where one ends and the other begins. For example, if you put a white piece of paper on a black desk, the only way you can tell where the paper ends is by seeing some of the desk that borders it. The contrast between the paper and the desk allows you to see the boundaries of the paper. Likewise, in order for Kant to differentiate the thing in the real world from that which his mind perceives, he would have to be able to see both. But this is exactly what he says can't be done! He says only the *phenomena* of the mind can be known, not the *noumena* (his term for the real world).

If there's no way to distinguish between the phenomena and noumena, then you can't see how they might differ. And if you can't see how they might differ, then it makes much more sense to assume that they are the same—in other words, that the idea in your mind accurately represents the thing in the real world.

What we are saying is that you really *do* know the thing in itself. You

really *do know* the tree you are seeing because it is being impressed on your mind through your senses. In other words, Kant was wrong: Your mind doesn't mold the tree, *the tree molds your mind.* (Just think about a wax seal: It's not the wax that impresses the seal; it's the seal that impresses the wax.) There's no gulf between your mind and the real world. In fact, your senses are your windows to the world. And senses, like windows, are that *through which* we look at the outside world. They are not that *at which* we are looking.

In a philosophy class I (Norm) was teaching, I pointed out the flaws in Kant's philosophy this way. I said, "First, if Kant claims that he can't know anything about the real world (the thing in itself), then how does he know the real world is there? And second, his view is self-defeating because he claims that you *can't know* anything about the real world while asserting that he *knows* that the real world is unknowable!"[6]

One student blurted out, "No! It can't be that easy, Dr. Geisler. You can't destroy the central tenet of the last hundred-plus years of philosophical thought in just a couple of simple sentences!"

Quoting my favorite source—*The Reader's Digest*—I responded, "'That's what happens when a beautiful theory meets a brutal gang of facts.' Besides, whoever said that a refutation must be complex? If someone makes a simple mistake, it only takes a simple correction to point it out." There's nothing complex about the Road Runner; he's simply fast and effective.

Hume and Kant Are Wrong. So What?

Since Hume and Kant violate the Law of Noncontradiction, their attempts to destroy all "religious" truths fail. However, just because Hume and Kant are wrong, that doesn't necessarily mean that we have positive evidence for, say, the existence of God. The Road Runner tactic can only reveal that a proposition is false. It does not provide positive evidence that any particular claim is true.

So is it true that a theistic God exists? Is there any knowable evidence that will give us reasonable certainty one way or the other? Is there such a thing as knowable evidence for an unseen God? To answer those questions, we need to investigate how truth itself can be known.

How Is Truth Known?

Let's sum up what we've seen so far: Truth exists, and it is absolute and undeniable. To say that truth cannot be known is self-defeating because that very statement claims to be a *known, absolute* truth. In fact, anytime we say anything, we are implying that we know at least some truth because *any* position on *any* subject implies some degree of knowledge. If you say that someone's position is wrong, you must *know* what is right in order to say that (you can't know what is wrong unless you know what is right). Even if you say, "I don't know," you are admitting that you know something; namely, you *know* you don't know something else about the topic in question, not that you don't know anything *at all.*

But just how does one know truth? In other words, by what process do we discover truths about the world? The process of discovering truth begins with the self-evident laws of logic called first principles. They are called first principles because there is nothing behind them. They are not proved by other principles; they are simply inherent in the nature of reality and are thus self-evident. So you don't learn these first principles; you just know them. Everyone intuitively knows these principles even if they haven't thought about them explicitly.

Two of these principles are the Law of Noncontradiction and the Law of the Excluded Middle. We've already seen the reality and value of the Law of Noncontradiction. The Law of the Excluded Middle tells us that something either *is* or is *not.* For example, either God exists or he does not. Either Jesus rose from the dead or he did not. There are no third or middle alternatives.

These first principles are the tools we use to discover all other truths. Without them you couldn't learn anything else. First principles are to learning what your eyes are to seeing. Just as your eyes must be built into your body for you to see anything, first principles must be built into your mind for you to learn anything. It is from these first principles that we can learn about reality and ultimately discover the box top to this puzzle we call life.

Although we use these first principles to help us discover truth, they alone cannot tell us whether or not a particular proposition is true. To see what we mean, consider the following logical argument:

1. All men are mortal.
2. Spencer is a man.
3. Therefore, Spencer is mortal.

The self-evident laws of logic tell us that the conclusion, Spencer is mortal, is a valid conclusion. In other words, the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises. *If* all men are mortal and *if* Spencer is a man, then Spencer is mortal. However, the laws of logic do not tell us whether those premises, and thus the conclusion, are true. Maybe all men are *not* mortal; maybe Spencer is not a man. Logic by itself can't tell us one way or the other.

This point is more easily seen by looking at a valid argument that isn't true. Consider the following:

1. All men are four-legged reptiles.
2. Zachary is a man.
3. Therefore, Zachary is a four-legged reptile.

Logically, this argument is valid, but we all know it isn't true. The argument is valid because the conclusion follows from the premises. But the conclusion is false because the first premise is false. In other words, an argument can be logically sound but still be false because the premises of the argument do not correspond to reality. So logic only gets us so far. Logic can tell us that an argument is false, but it cannot tell us by itself which premises are true. How do we know that Zachary is a man? How do we know that men are not four-legged reptiles? We need some more information to discover those truths.

We get that information from observing the world around us and then drawing general conclusions from those observations. When you observe something repeatedly, you may conclude that some general principle is true. For example, when you repeatedly drop an object off a table, you naturally observe that the object always falls to the floor. If you do that enough, you finally realize that there must be some general principle in place known as gravity.

This method of drawing general conclusions from specific observations is called induction (which is commonly equated with the scientific method). In order to be clear, we need to distinguish induction from deduction. The process of lining up premises in an argument and arriving at a valid conclusion is called deduction. That's what we did in the arguments above. But the process of discovering whether the *premises* in an argument are true usually requires induction.

Much of what you know, you know by induction. In fact, you've already

used induction intuitively to investigate the truth of the premises in the arguments above. Namely, you determined that since every man you've observed has been a two-legged mammal, the man Zachary cannot be a four-legged reptile. You did the same thing with the question of Spencer's mortality. Since all men you've heard about ultimately die, you made the general conclusion that all men are mortal, including a specific individual man named Spencer. These conclusions—two-legged men, gravity, and human mortality—are all inductive conclusions.

Most conclusions based on induction cannot be considered absolutely certain but only highly probable. For example, are you absolutely, 100 percent certain that gravity makes all objects drop? No, because you haven't observed all objects being dropped. Likewise, are you absolutely certain that all men are mortal? No, because you haven't observed all men die. Perhaps there's someone somewhere who hasn't died or will not die in the future.

So if inductive conclusions are not certain, can they be trusted? Yes, but to varying degrees of certainty. As we have said before, since no human being possesses infinite knowledge, most of our inductive conclusions can be wrong. (There is one important exception. It's called the "perfect induction," where all the particulars are known. For example, "All the letters on this page are black." This perfect induction yields certainty about the conclusion because you can observe and verify that every letter is indeed black.)

But even when we don't have complete or perfect information, we often have enough information to make reasonably certain conclusions on most questions in life. For example, since virtually everyone has been observed to die, your conclusion that all men are mortal is considered true beyond a reasonable doubt; it's 99-plus percent sure, but it's not beyond any doubt. It takes some faith—albeit a very small amount—to believe it.[7] The same can be said for concluding that gravity affects all objects, not just some. The conclusion is practically certain but not absolutely certain. In other words, we can be sure beyond a *reasonable* doubt, but not sure beyond *all* doubt.

How Are Truths About God Known?

So what do observation and induction have to do with discovering the existence of God? Everything. In fact, observation and induction help us investigate the ultimate religious question: "Does God exist?"

You say, "Wait a minute! How can we use observation to investigate an unobservable being called God? After all, if God is invisible and immaterial

as most Christians, Jews, and Muslims claim, then how can our senses help us gather information about him?"

The answer: We use induction to investigate God the same way we use it to investigate other things we can't see—by observing their effects. For example, we can't observe gravity directly; we can observe only its effects. Likewise, we can't observe the human mind directly, but only its effects. From those effects we make a rational inference to the existence of a cause.

In fact, the book you are now reading is a case in point. Why do you assume that this book is an effect of a human mind? Because all your observational experience tells you that a book is an effect that results only from some preexisting intelligence (i.e., an author). You've never seen the wind, the rain, or other natural forces produce a book; you've only seen people do so. Therefore, despite the fact that you didn't see anyone writing this book, you've concluded that it must have at least one author.

By reasoning that this book has an author, you are naturally putting observation, induction, and deduction together. If we were to write out your thoughts in logical form, they would look like this deductive argument:

1. All books have at least one author (premise based on inductive investigation).
2. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* is a book (premise based on observation).
3. Therefore, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* has at least one author (conclusion).

You know the argument is valid because of deduction, and you know the argument is true because the premises are true (which you have verified through observation and induction).

Now here's the big question: Just as a book requires preexisting human intelligence, are there any observable effects that seem to require some kind of preexisting supernatural intelligence? In other words, are there effects that we can observe that point to God? The answer is yes, and the first effect is the universe itself. An investigation of its beginning is the next step on our journey to discover the box top.

But before we look at the evidence for the beginning of the universe, we need to address one more objection to truth. And that is, "So what? Who cares about truth?"

So What? Who Cares About Truth?

We sometimes ask our students, "What's the greatest problem in America today? Is it ignorance or is it apathy?" One time a student answered, "I don't know, and I don't care!"

That sums up the problem in America today. Many of us are ignorant and apathetic about truth—but not when it comes to money, medicine, or the other tangible items we mentioned earlier. We care passionately about those things. But many people are ignorant and apathetic about truth in morality and religion (we know you're not because you're taking the time to read this book). Are the people who have adopted the "Whatever—you do you" theme of the culture correct, or does truth in morality and religion really matter?

It really matters. How do we know? First, even though people may *claim* that truth in morality doesn't matter, they don't really believe that when someone treats them immorally. For example, they might claim that lying isn't wrong, but just watch how morally outraged they get when someone lies to them (especially if that someone cheated on them sexually or financially!).

We often hear that "it's the economy, Stupid!" But just think about how much better the economy would be if everyone told the truth. There would be no need for costly security, nor would there be scandals or scams. There would be no burdensome government regulations. Of course, the economy is important, but it's directly affected by morality! Morality undergirds virtually everything we do. It not only affects us financially, but also, in certain circumstances, affects us socially, psychologically, spiritually, and even physically.

A second reason truth in morality matters is because success in life is often dependent on the moral choices a person makes. These include choices regarding sex, marriage, children, drugs, money, business dealings, and so on. Some choices bring prosperity, others result in ruin.

Third, as we pointed out in a previous book, *Legislating Morality*,[8] all laws legislate morality. The only question is "Whose morality will be legislated?" Think about it. Every law declares one behavior right and its opposite wrong—that's morality. Whose morality should be legislated on issues such as abortion or sex change hormones and surgery for children? These are issues that directly impact the lives and health of real people. If it's morally wrong to kill innocent people or mutilate and sterilize a child going through a phase, shouldn't that truth be legislated? Likewise, whose morality should be legislated on other issues of public policy that may affect your life,

health, or finances? The answers we legislate can dramatically affect every citizen's life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

There's no doubt that what we believe to be true about morality directly impacts lives. Did it matter that the United States Supreme Court (as reflected in the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision) believed that blacks were not citizens but the property of their slave owners? Did it matter that the Nazis believed the Jews were inferior to the Aryan race? Does it matter today what we think about the moral status of people in other racial or religious categories? Of course! Truth in morality matters.

What about truth in religion? That truth can impact us even more profoundly than truth in morality. A fellow naval officer helped me (Frank) realize this back in 1988 when I was a new Christian.

At that time, we were deployed with a U.S. Navy flight crew to a Persian Gulf country. It was near the end of the Iran-Iraq war, and tensions were still high. When you're in a foreign and dangerous place, you tend to ponder your life and your mortality more seriously and frequently.

One day we were doing just that—talking about God and the afterlife. During our conversation my friend made a comment that has stuck with me to this day. Referring to the Bible, he said, "I don't believe the Bible. But if it *is* true, then I'll be in big trouble."

Of course he was right. If the Bible is *true*, then my friend has *chosen* an unpleasant eternal destiny. In fact, if the Bible is true, then everyone's eternal destiny can be read from its pages. On the other hand, if the Bible is not true, then many Christians are unwittingly wasting a lot of time, money, and, in some cases, even their lives by preaching Christianity in hostile territories. Either way, truth in religion matters.

It also matters if some other religion is true. For example, if the Qur'an is true, then I'm in just as much eternal trouble as my non-Christian Navy friend. On the other hand, if the atheists are right, then we might as well lie, cheat, and steal to get what we want because this life is all there is and there are no consequences in eternity.

But forget eternity for a minute. Consider the temporal implications of religious teachings around the world. In several Muslim countries, schoolchildren are being taught that Jews are pigs and that non-Muslims (infidels) should be killed (while, thankfully, a majority of Muslims do not believe that non-Muslims should be killed, a significant minority of Muslims teach that type of jihad straight from the Qur'an[9]). Is it really true that Allah

exists and he wants Muslims to kill all non-Muslims (which probably includes you)? Does this religious "truth" matter? It does when those kids grow up to fly planes into buildings and blow themselves up in populated areas. Wouldn't it be better to teach them the religious truth that God wants them to love their neighbor?

Some jihadists may be teaching that Jews are pigs, but in America, by means of a one-sided biology curriculum, we teach kids that there's really no difference between *any* human being and a pig. After all, if we're merely the product of blind naturalistic forces—if no deity created us with any special significance—then we are nothing more than pigs with big brains. Does this religious (atheistic) "truth" matter? It does when kids carry out its implications. Instead of good citizens who see people made in the image of God, we are producing criminals who see no meaning or value in human life. Ideas have consequences.

On the positive side, in the second half of the last century, the Roman Catholic nun Mother Teresa helped improve conditions in India by challenging the religious beliefs of many in the Hindu culture. The Hindu belief in karma and reincarnation leads many Hindus to ignore the cries of the suffering. Why? Because they believe that those who suffer deserve their plight for doing something wrong in a previous life. So if you help suffering people, you are interfering with their karma. Mother Teresa taught Hindus in India the Christian principles of caring for the poor and suffering. Does that religious idea matter? Ask the millions whose lives she touched. Does the religious teaching of karma matter? Ask the millions still suffering.

The bottom line is this: regardless of what the real truth is concerning religion and morality, our lives are greatly affected by it today and perhaps even in eternity. Those who cavalierly say, "So what? Who cares about truth in morality and religion?" are ignoring reality and are blindly skating on thin ice. We owe it to ourselves and others to find the real truth, and then act on it. So let's get started with the question "Does God exist?"

Summary

1. People often get their beliefs from their parents, friends, childhood religion, or culture. Sometimes they simply formulate their beliefs on the basis of their feelings alone. While such beliefs can be true, it's also likely they may not be. The only way to be reasonably certain is to test beliefs by the evidence. And that is done by

utilizing sound philosophical principles including those found in logic and science.[10]

2. Logic tells us that opposites cannot be true at the same time in the same sense. Logic is part of reality itself, and is thus the same in America, India, and everywhere in the universe.
3. By use of the Road Runner tactic, we can see that Hume is not skeptical about skepticism and Kant is not agnostic about agnosticism. Therefore, their views defeat themselves. It is possible to know truths about God.
4. Many truths about God can be known by his effects, which we can observe. Through many observations (induction) we can draw reasonable conclusions (deductions) about the existence and nature of God (which we will do in subsequent chapters).
5. Truth in morality and religion has temporal and maybe even eternal consequences. Apathy and ignorance can be fatal. What you don't know, or don't care to know, *can* hurt you.
6. So why should anyone believe anything at all? Because they have evidence to support those beliefs and because beliefs have consequences.

Focus of Chapters 3–8

1. Truth about reality is knowable.
2. The opposite of true is false.
3. **It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:**
   - **a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)**
   - **b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/Fine-Tuning)**
   - **c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)**
   - **d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)**
4. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God (i.e., as acts of God to confirm a word from God).
6. The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:
   - a. Early testimony
   - b. Eyewitness testimony
   - c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
   - d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived
7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus's claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:
   - a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself
   - b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds
   - c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection
9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

3

In the Beginning There Was a Great SURGE

> Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.
>
> ALBERT EINSTEIN

IT WAS 1916 and Albert Einstein didn't like where his calculations were leading him. If his Theory of General Relativity was true, it meant that the universe was not eternal but had a beginning. Einstein's calculations indeed were revealing a definite beginning to all space, time, and matter. This flew in the face of his belief that the universe was static and eternal.

Einstein later called his discovery "irritating." He wanted the universe to be self-existent, not reliant on any outside cause. But the universe appeared to be one giant effect. In fact, Einstein so disliked the implications of General Relativity—a theory that is now proven accurate to five decimal places—that he introduced a cosmological constant (which some have since called a "fudge factor") into his equations in order to show that the universe is static and to avoid an absolute beginning.

But Einstein's fudge factor didn't fudge for long. In 1919, British cosmologist Arthur Eddington conducted an experiment during a solar eclipse that confirmed that General Relativity was indeed true—the universe wasn't static but had a beginning. Like Einstein, Eddington wasn't happy

with the implications. He later wrote, “Philosophically, the notion of a beginning of the present order of nature is repugnant to me. . . . I should like to find a genuine loophole.”[1]

By 1922, Russian mathematician Alexander Friedmann had officially exposed Einstein’s fudge factor as an error. Meanwhile, Dutch astronomer Willem de Sitter had found that General Relativity required the universe to be expanding. And in 1929, the expanding of the universe was actually observed by astronomer Edwin Hubble (namesake of the space telescope).

Looking through the 100-inch telescope at California’s Mount Wilson Observatory, Hubble discovered a “red shift” in the light from every observable galaxy, which meant that those galaxies were moving away from us. In other words, General Relativity was again confirmed—the universe appears to be expanding from a single point in the distant past.[2]

In 1931, Einstein made a pilgrimage to Mount Wilson to look through Hubble’s telescope for himself. What he saw was irrefutable. The *observational* evidence showed that the universe was indeed expanding as General Relativity had predicted. With his cosmological constant now completely crushed by the weight of the evidence against it, Einstein could no longer support his wish for an eternal universe. He subsequently described the cosmological constant as “the greatest blunder of my life,” and he redirected his efforts to find the box top to the puzzle of life. Einstein said that he wanted “to know how God created the world. I am not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know His thought, the rest are details.”[3]

Although Einstein said that he believed in a pantheistic god (a god that *is* the universe), his comments admitting creation and divine thought better describe a theistic god. And as “irritating” as it may be, his Theory of General Relativity stands today as one of the strongest lines of evidence for a theistic god. Indeed, General Relativity supports what is one of the most powerful formal arguments for the existence of a theistic god—the Cosmological Argument.

The Cosmological Argument—the Beginning of the End for Atheism

Don’t be put off by the technical-sounding name: *cosmological* comes from the Greek word *cosmos*, which means “world” or “universe.” That is, one form of the Cosmological Argument is the argument from the beginning of

the universe. If the universe had a beginning, then the universe had a cause. In logical form, this argument—technically called the Kalam Cosmological Argument—goes like this:

1. Everything that had a beginning had a cause.
2. The universe had a beginning.
3. Therefore, the universe had a cause.

As we saw in the last chapter, for an argument to be true it must be logically valid and its premises must be true. This is a valid argument, but are the premises true? Let's take a look at the premises.

Premise 1—Everything that had a beginning had a cause—is the Law of Causality, which is *the* fundamental principle of science. Without the Law of Causality, science is impossible. In fact, Francis Bacon (the father of modern science) said, "True knowledge is knowledge by causes."[4] In other words, science is a search for causes. That's what scientists do—they try to discover causes for the effects they observe.

If there's one thing we've observed about the universe, it's that things don't happen without a cause. When a man is driving down the street, a car never appears in front of his car out of nowhere, with no driver or no cause. We know many a police officer has heard this, but it's just not true. There's always a driver or some other cause behind that car appearing. Even the great skeptic David Hume could not deny the Law of Causality. He wrote, "I never asserted so absurd a proposition as that something could arise without a cause."[5]

But that's about effects *inside* the universe. What about the universe itself? Could it arise without a cause? Some atheists have suggested that,[6] and others have ruled God out in other ways. For example, atheist theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss says that all causes must be physical, including the cause of the universe (which would rule out God, who is not physical but Spirit).[7] Krauss has no evidence for this assertion. And if his assertion were true, it would destroy all rationality and science, including his own.

Here's why: While Krauss is obviously using his physical brain, physical causes can't explain the reasoning process completely. Immaterial realities play a part, such as the laws of logic and mathematics, the information that comes through his senses, his conscious mind, and his own free will, which allow him to follow the evidence where it leads. If we are just meat machines —just moist robots driven completely by the laws of physics—as Krauss's

ideology of materialism asserts, then why believe anything Krauss says, including what he says about science and the origin of the universe? He's a molecular machine, not a rational human being.

Yet Krauss and other atheists use their *immaterial* minds to cause *immaterial* thoughts that disbelieve in God *while denying immaterial minds and causes exist!* (Yes, following that contradiction makes our heads hurt too.) Despite claiming to be champions of reason and science, the atheists' ideology of materialism ironically would make reason and science impossible if it were true (we will address this more fully in chapter 7).[8]

Since reason requires immaterial causes, there's no way atheists can use reason or evidence to say that all causes are physical. Nor have they shown evidence that anything—much less the entire universe—can arise without a cause. If the entire universe could arise without a cause, then why doesn't everything do so?[9] Why don't Corvettes, computers, Air Jordans, and pizzas pop into existence out of nothing, without a cause?

If you're hungry for pizza right now, does it make sense to order one or should you just sit there and hope one pops into existence out of nothing? If you don't believe a pizza can pop into existence out of nothing, then why would you believe the entire universe could? It takes a lot of blind faith to believe that.

The bottom line is that given our uniform experience that all material and immaterial effects need a cause, it's certainly much more reasonable to conclude that the universe needs a cause than to blindly assert it doesn't. Since little effects need a cause, the biggest effect of all needs a cause too. Therefore, despite these atheistic attacks on the Law of Causality, rationality, and science, we can rest assured that premise 1 is true—everything that begins to exist had a cause.

But what about premise 2? Did the universe have a beginning? If not, then no cause was needed. If so, then the universe must have had a cause.

Until about the time of Einstein, scientists who were atheists could comfort themselves with the belief that the universe is eternal, and thus did not need a cause. But since then, five lines of scientific evidence have been discovered that show beyond a reasonable doubt that the universe did indeed have a beginning. And that beginning was what scientists now call "the Big Bang." This Big Bang evidence can be easily remembered by the acronym SURGE.

The Great SURGE

The fact that the universe had a beginning and will ultimately die is now widely admitted by most scientists. Why? Because modern scientists know that a beginning and an ending are demanded by one of the most validated laws in all of nature—the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

S—The Second Law of Thermodynamics

The Second Law of Thermodynamics is the S in our SURGE acronym. Thermodynamics is the study of matter and energy, and the Second Law states, among other things, that the universe is running out of usable energy. With each passing moment, the amount of usable energy in the universe grows smaller, leading scientists to the obvious conclusion that one day all the energy will be used up and the universe will die. Like a running car, the universe will ultimately run out of gas.

You say, "So what? How does that prove that the universe had a beginning?" Well, look at it this way: the *First* Law of Thermodynamics states that the universe has a finite amount of energy, and as time goes on that finite amount changes from usable to unusable energy.[10] Think of the universe as having a tank of gas. If your car has only a finite amount of gas (the First Law), and whenever it's running it continually consumes gas (the Second Law), would your car be running right now if you had started it up an infinitely long time ago? No, it would be out of gas by now. In the same way, the universe would be out of energy by now if it had been running from all eternity. But here we are—the lights are still on, so the universe must have begun sometime in the finite past. That is, the universe is not eternal—it had a beginning.

A flashlight is another way to think about the universe. If you leave a flashlight on overnight, what's the intensity of the light in the morning? It is dim because most of the energy in the batteries has been used up. Well, the universe is like a dying flashlight. It has only so much energy left to consume. But since the universe still has some battery life left (it's not quite dead yet), it can't be eternal—it must have had a beginning—for if it were eternal, the batteries would have died by now.

The Second Law is also known as the Law of Entropy, which is a fancy way of saying that nature tends to bring things to disorder. That is, with time, things naturally fall apart. Your body falls apart; your car falls apart; your house falls apart. Left to itself, nature will turn a building into a pile of bricks,

but nature will never take a pile of bricks and turn it into a building.

But if the universe is becoming less ordered, where did the original order come from? Astronomer Robert Jastrow likens the universe to a wound-up clock.[11] If a wind-up clock is running down, then someone must have wound it up.

This aspect of the Second Law also tells us that the universe had a beginning. Since we still have some order left—just like we still have some usable energy left—the universe cannot be eternal, because if it were, we would have reached complete disorder (entropy) by now. In fact, the opposite of the Big Bang is the Big Chill. That's where we're heading. Unless a force outside this universe intervenes, complete heat death is the destiny of the universe—a cold, disordered, and lifeless state.

Many years ago, a student from a Christian ministry on an Ivy League campus invited me (Norm) to speak there on a related topic. During the lecture, I basically told the students what we've written here but in more detail. After the lecture, the student who had invited me there asked me to have lunch with him and his physics professor.

As we sat down to eat, the professor made it clear that he was skeptical of my argument that the Second Law requires a beginning for the universe. In fact, he said he was a materialist who believed that only material exists and that it has existed from all eternity.

"If matter is eternal, what do you do with the Second Law?" I asked him.

He replied, "Every law has an exception. This is my exception."

I could have countered by asking him if it's good science to assume that every law has an exception. That doesn't seem very scientific and may even be self-defeating. It may be self-defeating when you ask, "Does the law that 'every law has an exception' have an exception?" If it does, maybe the Second Law is the exception to the law that every law must have an exception.

I didn't go down that road because I thought he would take exception. Instead, I backed off the Second Law for a moment and decided to question him about materialism.

"If everything is material," I asked, "then what is a scientific theory? After all, the theory about everything being material isn't material; it's not made of molecules."

Without a moment's hesitation he quipped, "A theory is magic."

"Magic?" I repeated, not really believing what I was hearing. "What's

your basis for saying that?"

"Faith," he quickly replied.

"Faith in magic?" I thought to myself. "I can't believe what I'm hearing! If faith in magic is the best the materialists have to offer, then *I don't have enough faith to be a materialist!"*

In retrospect, it seemed to me that this professor had a brief moment of complete candor. He knew he couldn't answer the overwhelming evidence in support of the Second Law, so he admitted that his position had no basis in evidence or good reason. In doing so, he provided another example of the will refusing to believe what the mind knows to be true, and how his atheistic view was based on blind faith.

The professor was right about one thing: having faith. In fact, he needed a *leap* of faith to willingly ignore the most established law in all of nature. That's how Arthur Eddington characterized the Second Law more than a century ago:

> The Law that entropy increases—the Second Law of Thermodynamics—holds, I think, the supreme position among the laws of Nature. If someone points out to you that your pet theory of the universe is in disagreement with Maxwell's equations—then so much for Maxwell's equations. If it is found to be contradicted by observation—well, these experiments do bungle things sometimes. But *if your theory is found to be against the Second Law of Thermodynamics, I can give you no hope; there is nothing for it but to collapse in deepest humiliation.*[12]

Since I could see that the professor was not really interested in accepting the truth, I didn't ask him any more potentially humiliating questions. But since we couldn't ignore the power of the Second Law on our own bodies, we both ordered dessert. Neither of us was willing to deny that we needed to replace the energy we had just used up!

U—The Universe Is Expanding

Good scientific theories are normally those that can predict phenomena that have yet to be observed. As we have seen, General Relativity predicted an expanding universe. But it wasn't until legendary astronomer Edwin Hubble looked through his telescope more than a decade later that Einstein's prediction was confirmed. Hubble saw that the universe is expanding, and

concluded that it's expanding from a single point. (Astronomer Vesto Melvin Slipher was hot on the trail of this expanding universe as early as 1913, but it was Hubble who put all the pieces together in the late 1920s.) This expanding universe is the second line of scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning.

How does the expanding universe prove a beginning? Think about it this way: if we could watch a video recording of the history of the universe in reverse, we would see all matter in the universe collapse back to a point—a point not the size of a basketball, not the size of a golf ball, not even the size of a pinhead, but mathematically and logically to a point that is actually nothing (i.e., no space, no time, and no matter). In other words, once there was nothing, and then, BANG, there was something—the entire universe exploded into being! This, of course, is what is commonly called the Big Bang.

It's important to understand that the universe is not expanding into empty space, but space itself is expanding—there was no space before the Big Bang. It's also important to understand that the universe did not emerge from existing material but from nothing—there was no matter before the Big Bang. In fact, chronologically, there was no "before" the Big Bang because there are no "befores" without time, and there was no time until the Big Bang.[13] Time, space, and matter came into existence at the Big Bang.

These facts give atheists a lot of trouble, as they did on a rainy night in Georgia way back in April 1998. That night I (Frank) attended a debate in Atlanta on the question "Does God exist?" William Lane Craig took the affirmative position and Peter Atkins took the negative position. The debate was highly spirited and even humorous at times, partially due to the moderator, the late great William F. Buckley Jr. (Buckley did not hide his favoritism for Craig: After introducing Craig, with his impressive credentials, as being on God's side, Buckley began to introduce Atkins by cracking, "On the side of the Devil is Dr. Peter Atkins!")

One of Craig's five arguments for the existence of God was the Cosmological Argument as supported by the Big Bang evidence we've been discussing here. He pointed out that the universe—all time, all matter, and all space—exploded out of nothing, a fact that Atkins had conceded in his book and reaffirmed later in the debate that night.

Since Craig spoke first, he informed the audience how Atkins had attempted to explain the universe from an atheistic perspective:

> In his book *The Creation Revisited*, Dr. Atkins struggles mightily to explain how the universe could come into existence, uncaused out of nothing. But in the end, he finds himself trapped in self-contradiction. He [writes], "Now we go back in time beyond the moment of creation to when there was no time, and to where there was no space." At this time before time, he imagines a swirling dust of mathematical points which recombine again and again and again and finally come by trial and error to form our space time universe.[14]

Craig went on to point out that Atkins's position was not a scientific theory but was self-contradictory pop-metaphysics. It was pop-metaphysics because it was a made-up explanation—there was absolutely no evidence supporting it. And it was self-contradictory because it assumed space and time before there was space and time.

Since Craig did not get a chance to dialogue with Atkins directly on this point, a colleague and I stood in the question line near the end of the debate to ask Atkins about his position. Unfortunately, time expired before either of us could ask a question, so we approached Atkins backstage afterward.

"Dr. Atkins," my colleague started, "you admit that the universe exploded out of nothing, but your explanation for the beginning equivocates on what 'nothing' is. Swirling mathematical points are not nothing. Even they are something. How do you justify this?"

Instead of addressing the issue, Atkins verbally succumbed to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. He said, "Look, gentlemen, I am very tired. I can't answer any more questions now." In other words, his decrease of energy proved the Second Law was at work. Atkins literally had nothing to say.

Well, according to the modern cosmological evidence, the universe literally had nothing physical from which to emerge. Yet when it came to giving an atheistic explanation for this, Atkins didn't really begin with nothing but with mathematical points and time. Of course, one can't imagine how mere mathematical points and time could actually cause the universe anyway. Nevertheless, we wanted to press the fact that atheists like Atkins must be able to explain how the universe began from absolutely nothing.

What is nothing? It means nonbeing, no preexisting physical state, zip, zero, nada. The nothing from which the universe emerged is not "mathematical points," as Atkins suggested, or "positive and negative energy," as atheist Isaac Asimov once wrote.[15] Nor is it a quantum vacuum

that Lawrence Krauss deceptively called “nothing” in his book *A Universe from Nothing*.[16] Nothing is literally *no thing.* Nothing is what rocks dream about.

British author Anthony Kenny honestly described his own predicament as an atheist in light of evidence for the Big Bang. He wrote, “According to the Big Bang Theory, the whole matter of the universe began to exist at a particular time in the remote past. A proponent of such a theory, at least if he is an atheist, must believe that the matter of the universe came from nothing and by nothing.”[17]

R—Radiation from the Big Bang

The third line of scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning was discovered by accident in 1965. That’s when Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson detected strange radiation on their antenna at Bell Labs in Holmdel, New Jersey. No matter where they turned their antenna, this mysterious radiation remained. They initially thought it might be the result of bird droppings deposited on the antenna by nesting Jersey Shore pigeons, so they had the birds and the droppings removed. But when they got back inside, they found that the radiation was still there, and it was still coming from all directions.

What Penzias and Wilson had detected turned out to be one of the most incredible discoveries of the last century—one that would win them Nobel Prizes. These two Bell Lab scientists had discovered the afterglow from the Big Bang fireball explosion!

Technically known as the cosmic background radiation, this afterglow is the “smoking gun” of the Big Bang. It is the light and heat left over from the initial explosion. This light is no longer visible because its wavelength has been stretched by the expanding universe to a distance slightly shorter than those produced by a microwave oven. But the heat can still be detected.

As early as 1948, scientists predicted that this radiation should be out there if the Big Bang really had occurred. But for some reason no one attempted to detect it before Penzias and Wilson stumbled on it by accident nearly twenty years later. When the discovery was confirmed, it laid to rest any lingering suggestion that the universe is in an eternal steady state. Agnostic astronomer Robert Jastrow put it this way:

> No explanation other than the Big Bang has been found for the fireball

> radiation. The clincher, which has convinced almost the last Doubting Thomas, is that the radiation discovered by Penzias and Wilson has exactly the pattern of wavelengths expected for the light and heat produced in a great explosion. Supporters of the steady state theory have tried desperately to find an alternative explanation, but they have failed. At the present time, the Big Bang theory has no competitors.[18]

In effect, the discovery of the fireball radiation burned up any hope in the Steady State Theory. But that wasn't the end of the discoveries. More Big Bang evidence would follow. In fact, if cosmology were a football game, believers in the Big Bang would have been called for "piling on" with this next discovery.

G—Great Galaxy Seeds

After finding the predicted expanding universe and radiation afterglow, scientists turned their attention to another prediction that would confirm the Big Bang. If the Big Bang actually had occurred, scientists believed that we should see slight variations (or ripples) in the temperature of the cosmic background radiation that Penzias and Wilson had discovered. Cosmologists thought that these temperature ripples would have enabled matter to congregate by gravitational attraction into galaxies. If found, they would comprise the fourth line of scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning.

In 1989, the search for these ripples was intensified when NASA launched the $200 million satellite aptly called COBE for Cosmic Background Explorer. Carrying extremely sensitive instruments, COBE was able to see whether these ripples actually existed in the background radiation and how precise they were.

When the project leader, astronomer George Smoot, announced COBE's findings in 1992, his shocking characterization was quoted in newspapers all over the world. He said, "If you're religious, it's like looking at God." University of Chicago astrophysicist Michael Turner was no less enthusiastic, claiming, "The significance of this [discovery] cannot be overstated. They have found the Holy Grail of Cosmology." Cambridge astronomer Stephen Hawking also agreed, calling the findings "the most important discovery of the century, if not of all time."[19] What did COBE find to merit such momentous descriptions?

COBE not only found the ripples, but scientists were amazed at their precision. The ripples show that the explosion and expansion of the universe was precisely tweaked to cause just enough matter to congregate to allow galaxy formation, but not enough to cause the universe to collapse back on itself. If there had been any slight variation one way or the other, none of us would be here to tell about it. In fact, the ripples are so exact (down to one part in 100,000) that Smoot called them the "machining marks from the creation of the universe" and the "fingerprints of the maker."[20]

But these temperature ripples are not just dots on a scientist's graph somewhere. COBE took infrared pictures of the ripples. Now keep in mind that space observations are observations of the past because of the long time it takes light from distant objects to reach us. So COBE's pictures are pictures of the past. That is, the infrared pictures taken by COBE point to the existence of matter from the very early universe that would ultimately form into galaxies and clusters of galaxies.[21] Smoot called this matter "seeds" of the galaxies as they exist today. These "seeds" are the largest structures ever detected, with the biggest extending across one-third of the known universe. That's 10 billion light years or 60 billion trillion (60 followed by 21 zeros) miles.[22]

Now you can see why some scientists were so grandiose in their description of the discovery. Something predicted by the Big Bang was again found, and that something was so big and so precise that it made a big bang with scientists.

E—Einstein's Theory of General Relativity

The E in SURGE is for Einstein. His Theory of General Relativity is the fifth line of scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning, and its discovery was the beginning of the end for the idea that the universe is eternal. The theory itself, which has been verified to five decimal places, demands an absolute beginning for time, space, and matter. It shows that space-time and matter are correlative. They came into existence together because they are interdependent—there's no space-time without matter, and there's no matter without space-time. (*Where* would you put matter without space-time?)

From General Relativity, scientists predicted and then found the expanding universe, the radiation afterglow, and the great galaxy seeds that were precisely fine-tuned to allow the universe to form into its present state. Add these discoveries to the Second Law of Thermodynamics and we have

five lines of powerful scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning—a beginning, we might say, that came in a great SURGE.

God and the Astronomers

So the universe had a beginning. What does that mean for the question of God's existence? The man who once sat in Edwin Hubble's chair at the Mount Wilson observatory had a few things to say about that. His name was Robert Jastrow, an astronomer we've already quoted in this chapter. In addition to serving as the director of Mount Wilson, Jastrow was the founder of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies. Obviously his credentials as a scientist were impeccable. That's why his book *God and the Astronomers* made such an impression on those investigating the implications of the Big Bang; namely, those asking, "Does the Big Bang point to God?"

Jastrow reveals in the opening line of chapter 1 that he has no religious axe to grind. He writes, "When an astronomer writes about God, his colleagues assume he is either over the hill or going bonkers. In my case it should be understood from the start that I am an agnostic in religious matters."[23]

In light of Jastrow's personal agnosticism, his theistic quotations are even more provocative. After explaining some of the Big Bang evidence we've just reviewed, Jastrow writes,

> Now we see how the astronomical evidence leads to a biblical view of the origin of the world. The details differ, but the essential elements in the astronomical and biblical accounts of Genesis are the same: the chain of events leading to man commenced suddenly and sharply at a definite moment in time, in a flash of light and energy.[24]

The overwhelming evidence for the Big Bang and its consistency with the biblical account in Genesis led Jastrow to observe in an interview,

> Astronomers now find they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation to which you can trace the seeds of every star, every planet, every living thing in this cosmos and on the earth. And they have found that all this happened as a product of forces they cannot hope to discover. . . . *That there are what I or anyone would call supernatural forces at work is now, I think, a scientifically proven*

fact.[25]

By evoking the supernatural, Jastrow echoes the conclusion of Einstein contemporary Arthur Eddington. As we mentioned earlier, although he found it "repugnant," Eddington admitted, "The beginning seems to present insuperable difficulties unless we agree to look on it as frankly supernatural."[26]

Now why would Jastrow and Eddington admit that there are "supernatural" forces at work? Why couldn't natural forces have produced the universe? Because these scientists knew as well as anyone that natural forces—indeed, all of nature—were created at the Big Bang. In other words, the Big Bang was the beginning point for the entire physical universe. Space-time and matter came into existence at that point. There was no natural world or natural laws prior to the Big Bang. Since a cause cannot come after its effect, natural forces cannot account for the Big Bang. Therefore, there must be something *outside of nature* to do the job. That's exactly what the word *supernatural* means.

The discoverers of the afterglow, Robert Wilson and Arno Penzias, were not Bible-thumpers either. Both initially believed in the Steady State Theory. But due to the mounting evidence, they changed their views and acknowledged facts that are consistent with the Bible. Penzias admits, "The Steady State theory turned out to be so ugly that people dismissed it. The easiest way to fit the observations with the least number of parameters was one in which the universe was created out of nothing, in an instant, and continues to expand."[27]

Wilson, who once took a class from Fred Hoyle (the man who popularized the Steady State Theory in 1948), said, "I philosophically liked the Steady State. And clearly I've had to give that up."[28] When science writer Fred Heeren asked him if the Big Bang evidence is indicative of a Creator, Wilson responded, "Certainly there was something that set it all off. Certainly, if you are religious, I can't think of a better theory of the origin of the universe to match with Genesis."[29] George Smoot echoed Wilson's assessment. He said, "There is no doubt that a parallel exists between the big bang as an event and the Christian notion of creation from nothing."[30]

The Empire Strikes Back (but Fizzles Out)

What do atheists have to say about this? We've already seen the

shortcomings in the explanations of Atkins, Asimov, and Krauss—they start with *something* rather than literally nothing, and the something they start with doesn't seem to have creative power. Are there any other atheistic explanations out there that may be plausible? Not that we've seen. Atheists have come up with other theories, but all of them have their fatal flaws.[31] Let's take a brief look at a few of them.

The Cosmic Rebound Theory

This theory suggests the universe has been expanding and contracting forever. This helps its proponents avoid a definite beginning. But the problems with this theory are numerous, and for those reasons it has fallen out of favor.

First, and most obviously, there's no evidence for an infinite number of bangs (after all, it's not the Big Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang, Bang Theory!). The universe appears to have exploded once from nothing, not repeatedly from existing material.

Second, there's not enough matter in the universe to pull everything back together. The universe seems poised to continue expanding indefinitely.[32] This was confirmed in 2003 by Charles Bennett of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center. After looking at readings from a NASA space probe, he said, "The universe will expand forever. It will not turn back on itself and collapse in a great crunch."[33] While some scientists think the universe might collapse back on itself in the distant future, all agree that at the present time the expansion of the universe is accelerating. As of 2024, Dark Energy is the name given to the mysterious force that is somehow causing the acceleration.[34]

Third, even if there were enough matter to cause the universe to contract and bang again, the Cosmic Rebound Theory contradicts the Second Law of Thermodynamics because the theory falsely assumes that no energy would be lost in each contraction and explosion. A universe banging repeatedly would eventually fizzle out just as a dropped ball eventually fizzles out. So if the universe had been expanding and contracting *forever*, it would have fizzled out already.

Finally, there's no way that today would have gotten here if the universe had been expanding and contracting forever. An infinite number of big bangs is an actual impossibility (we'll elaborate on this in a couple of pages). And even if there were a *finite* number of bangs, the theory cannot explain what

caused the first one. There was nothing to bang before the first bang.

Imaginary Time

Other atheistic attempts at explaining how the universe exploded into being out of nothing are just as flawed. For example, to avoid an absolute beginning of the universe, James Hartle and Stephen Hawking proposed a theory that utilizes "imaginary time." We could just as well call it an "imaginary theory" because Hawking himself admitted that this theory is "just a [metaphysical] proposal" that cannot explain what happened in real time. "In real time," he conceded, "the universe has a beginning. . . ."[35] In fact, according to Hawking, "Almost everyone now believes that the universe, and time itself, had a beginning at the Big Bang."[36] So by his own admission Hawking's imaginary theory fizzles when applied to the real world. Imaginary time is just that—purely imaginary.

Gravity

In Hawking's final book in 2010, he wrote, "Because there is a law like gravity, the universe can and will create itself out of nothing."[37]

What? Yes, we were puzzled too.

It's hard to imagine why Hawking thought this was a sufficient explanation. Gravity didn't exist prior to the creation event. It is a feature of a universe that already exists, and it doesn't create anything but acts on masses inside this already-created universe. The esteemed mathematician, author, and Oxford professor John Lennox responded to Hawking's explanation this way: "What this all goes to show is that nonsense remains nonsense, even when talked by world-famous scientists."[38]

Uncertainty

Since the evidence for the beginning of the universe is so strong, we've seen some atheists question the first premise of the Cosmological Argument—the Law of Causality. This is dangerous ground for atheists, who typically pride themselves on being champions of reason and science. As we have pointed out before, the Law of Causality is the foundation of all science. Science is a search for causes. If you destroy the Law of Causality, then you destroy science itself.

Atheists attempt to cast doubt on the Law of Causality by citing quantum

physics, specifically Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. This principle describes our inability to simultaneously predict the location and speed of subatomic particles (i.e., electrons). The atheist's contention here is this: If causality at the subatomic realm isn't necessary, then maybe causality of the entire universe isn't necessary either.

Fortunately for science, this atheistic attempt to cast doubt on the Law of Causality is questionable for at least three reasons.

First, this objection confuses *causality* and *predictability.* The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle does *not* prove that the movement of electrons is uncaused; it only describes our inability to *predict* their location and speed at any given time. The mere fact that we can't predict something doesn't mean it has no cause. In fact, quantum theorists acknowledge that we might not be able to predict the simultaneous speed and location of electrons because our very attempts at observing them are the cause of their unpredictable movements! Like a beekeeper putting his head in a beehive, we must stir them up to observe them. Hence, the disturbance may be a case of the scientist looking at his own eyelashes in the microscope.

Second, those who cite quantum uncertainty often forget to tell you that we are not exactly sure what goes on in the quantum realm. There are at least ten different interpretations—some that require causation to occur and others that don't—but we don't know which interpretation is correct. Given that we observe causation occurring everywhere else, why think it doesn't occur in the quantum realm?

Finally, regardless of what happens *in* the quantum realm, the quantum realm itself would still have needed a cause. It is not "nothing," as atheist Lawrence Krauss has stated, but physical reality at the subatomic level. So when Krauss and others theorize that the universe could arise spontaneously out of the quantum realm, they have not explained the existence of the quantum realm itself.[39] They haven't solved the First Cause problem.

In the end, no atheistic theory adequately refutes either premise of the Cosmological Argument. In fact, the story of cosmology since at least the 1960s is that the standard Big Bang model has survived every attack and alternative theory. The scientific evidence shows that the universe had a beginning and therefore it needs a cause.

The Religion of Science

So why don't all scientists just accept this conclusion instead of attempting to

avoid the facts and their implications with speculative and implausible explanations? Jastrow's comments are again insightful (remember, an agnostic). He observes,

> Theologians generally are delighted with the *proof* that the Universe had a beginning, but astronomers are curiously upset. Their reactions provide an interesting demonstration of the response of the scientific mind—supposedly a very objective mind—when evidence uncovered by science itself leads to a conflict with *the articles of faith in our profession.* It turns out that the scientist behaves the way the rest of us do when our beliefs are in conflict with the evidence. We become irritated, we pretend the conflict does not exist, or we paper it over with meaningless phrases.[40]

The phrases we have seen used by atheists such as Atkins and Asimov to explain the beginning of the universe—"mathematical points" and "positive and negative energy," respectively—certainly seem meaningless to us. Indeed, they explain nothing.

Regarding Einstein's feelings of irritation about General Relativity and the expanding universe, Jastrow writes, "This is curiously emotional language for a discussion of some mathematical formulas. I suppose that the idea of a beginning in time annoyed Einstein because of its theological implications."[41]

Everyone knows that theists have theological beliefs. But what's often overlooked is that atheistic and pantheistic scientists also have theological beliefs. As noted above, Jastrow calls some of these beliefs "the articles of faith in our profession," and he asserts that some of these beliefs comprise the "religion in science." He writes,

> There is a kind of religion in science . . . every effect must have its cause; there is no First Cause. . . . This religious faith of the scientist is violated by the discovery that the world had a beginning under conditions in which the known laws of physics are not valid, and as a product of forces or circumstances we cannot discover. When that happens, the scientist has lost control. If he really examined the implications, he would be traumatized. As usual when faced with trauma, the mind reacts by ignoring the implications—in science this is known as "refusing to speculate"—or trivializing the origin of the

world by calling it the Big Bang, as if the Universe were a firecracker.[42]

Traumatized or not, scientists must come to grips with the implications of the Big Bang evidence. They may not like the evidence or its implications, but that won't change the facts. Since the evidence shows that time, space, and matter were created at the Big Bang, the most probable scientific conclusion is that the universe was caused by something *outside* of time, space, and matter (i.e., an Eternal Cause). When scientists stop short of that conclusion by papering it over with "meaningless phrases" or by "refusing to speculate," it seems that they are simply refusing to accept the facts and the most reasonable conclusions that come from them. This is a matter of the will, not the mind. The evidence is objective; it's the disbelieving scientists who are not.

What If the Big Bang Is Wrong?

So far we've given widely acknowledged scientific evidence (SURGE) for the fact that the universe had a beginning. But suppose scientists wake up one day and find out that all of their observations and calculations have been wrong—there was no Big Bang. Given the wide scope of the evidence and the ability of the theory to correctly predict so much observable phenomena, a total abandonment of the Big Bang would be extremely unlikely.

This is admitted even by atheists. Victor Stenger, a physicist who taught at the University of Hawai'i, once wrote that "the universe exploded out of nothingness."[43] Stenger acknowledged that the Big Bang is looking more probable all the time. "We have to leave open the possibility that [the Big Bang] could be wrong," he said, "but . . . every year that goes by, and more astronomical data comes in, it's more and more consistent with at least the general Big Bang picture."[44]

Stenger's words have turned out to be prophetic. In 2003, more evidence came forth that the Big Bang is correct. NASA's WMAP satellite (Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe) confirmed the findings of its predecessor COBE and returned pictures of the background radiation ripples thirty-five times sharper than COBE's.[45]

That same year, cosmologists Arvind Borde, Alan Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin developed a theorem (now called the BGV Theorem) that concluded that any universe like ours that has, on average, been expanding throughout its history cannot have been infinite in the past but must have had a beginning

(a past space-time boundary).

Since it's always possible that new evidence can overturn existing theories, science is tentative. However, Vilenkin, who is an agnostic, sees so much evidence pointing to a beginning that he's willing to call the BGV Theorem a "proof." He writes,

> It is said that an argument is what convinces reasonable men and a proof is what it takes to convince even an unreasonable man. With the proof now in place, cosmologists can no longer hide behind the possibility of a past-eternal universe. There is no escape, they have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning.[46]

Why is the beginning a "problem" for cosmologists? Because many scientists today assume only natural causes exist, but there can be no natural cause for nature itself. As we'll see explicitly below, the cause of nature must be beyond nature—something supernatural.

Still, some atheists cast doubt on the beginning because the laws of physics break down prior to Planck time (when the universe was only 10^{-43} seconds old), and we can't reconcile how things work on a large scale (Einstein's General Relativity) with how things work on a small scale (Quantum Mechanics). But Vilenkin says that those mysteries concerning physics do not affect the conclusion that the universe had a beginning. He writes,

> A remarkable thing about [our BGV] theorem is its sweeping generality. We made no assumptions about the material content of the universe. We did not even assume that gravity is described by Einstein's equations. So, if Einstein's gravity requires some modification, our conclusion will still hold. . . . The conclusion is that past-eternal inflation without a beginning is impossible.[47]

In 2022, nearly twenty years after the BGV Theorem, scientists saw more evidence that the Big Bang occurred. Looking through the James Webb Space Telescope, they observed that the light from distant galaxies is even more redshifted than previously thought, confirming the absolute beginning as described by the standard Big Bang model. This finding is causing scientists to refine their theory of galaxy formation in the early universe, but the fact that the universe had a beginning was again confirmed.[48]

So the evidence continues to support the standard Big Bang model. In fact, space observations have become so supportive of the theistic worldview that George Will once mused, “Soon the American Civil Liberties Union, or People for the American Way, or some similar faction of litigious secularism will file suit against NASA, charging that the Hubble Space Telescope unconstitutionally gives comfort to the religiously inclined.”[49]

Nevertheless, let’s play skeptic’s advocate for a second. Let’s suppose that at some point in the future the Big Bang evidence is deemed wrong. Would that mean that the universe is eternal? No, for several reasons.

First, the Second Law of Thermodynamics (the S in SURGE) supports the Big Bang but is not dependent on it. The fact that the universe is running out of usable energy and heading toward disorder is not even up for debate. In Eddington’s words, the Second Law “holds the supreme position among the Laws of Nature.”[50] It is true even if the Big Bang is not.

Second, the same can be said for Einstein’s Theory of General Relativity (the E in SURGE). This theory, well verified by observation, requires a beginning to space, matter, and time whether or not it all began with a bang.

Third, there’s also scientific evidence from geology that the universe had a beginning. As many of us learned in high school chemistry, radioactive elements decay over time into other elements. For example, radioactive uranium eventually turns into lead. This means that if all uranium atoms were infinitely old, they would all be lead by now, but they’re not. So these elements cannot be infinitely old.

Finally, there’s a philosophical line of evidence for the beginning of the universe. This line of evidence is so rationally inescapable that some consider it the strongest evidence of all. To grasp this argument, see the timeline below, marked in segments of days (figure 3.1). The further left you go, the further back in history you go. The right end of the line represents today. Tomorrow isn’t here yet, but when it gets here, we’ll add one more segment (i.e., a day) to the right end of the line.



Figure 3.1 Illustration of the Cosmological Argument

Now consider this question: If there were an infinite number of days before today, would today have ever arrived? No, because you would always have had to live another day before you got to today. But since today has arrived, there must have been only a *finite* number of days before today. Thus, time must have had a beginning. This holds regardless of any scientific evidence for a beginning.

Some may say that infinite numbers can exist, so why can't infinite days? Because there's a difference between an abstract infinite series and a concrete one. The one is purely theoretical, the other is actual. Mathematically, we can conceive of an infinite number of days, but we could never actually count, live, or traverse an infinite number of days. You can conceive of an infinite number of mathematical points between two bookends on a shelf, but you could not fit an infinite number of books between them. That's the difference between an abstract and a concrete. Numbers are abstract. Days are concrete. (By the way, this amplifies our answer above as to why there could not have been an infinite number of bangs in the cosmological history of the universe. An infinite number of actual events is impossible.)

What we are saying here is that the universe, Big Bang or not, had a beginning. That is, the Cosmological Argument is true because both premises of the argument are true: Everything that comes to be has a cause, and the universe came to be. Since the universe had a beginning, it must have had a Beginner. But what kind of Beginner?

Who Made God?

In light of all the evidence for a beginning of the space-time universe, the Beginner must be outside the space-time universe. When God is suggested as the Beginner, atheists are quick to ask the age-old question, "Then who made God? If everything needs a cause, then God needs a cause too!"

As we have seen, the Law of Causality is the very foundation of science. Science is a search for causes, and that search is based on our consistent observation that everything that has a beginning has a cause. In fact, the question "Who made God?" points out how seriously we take the Law of Causality. It's taken for granted that virtually everything needs a cause.

So why then doesn't God need a cause? Because the atheist's contention misunderstands the Law of Causality. The Law of Causality does not say that *everything* needs a cause. It says that everything *that comes to be* needs a cause. God did not come to be. No one made God. He is unmade. As an

eternal being, God did not have a beginning, so he didn't need a cause.

"But wait," the atheist will protest, "if you can have an eternal God, then I can have an eternal universe! After all, if the universe is eternal, then it did not have a cause." Yes, it is logically possible that the universe is eternal and therefore didn't have a cause. In fact, it is one of only two possibilities: Either the universe or something outside the universe is eternal. (Since something undeniably exists today, then something must have always existed; we have only two choices: the universe or something that caused the universe.)

The problem for the atheist is that while it is *logically* possible that the universe is eternal, it does not seem to be *actually* possible. For all the scientific and philosophical evidence tells us the universe cannot be eternal. So by ruling out one of the two options, we are left with the only other option —something outside the universe is eternal.

When you get right down to it, there are only two possibilities for anything that exists: either (1) it has always existed and is therefore uncaused, or (2) it had a beginning and was caused by something else (it can't be self-caused, because it would have had to exist already to cause anything). According to the evidence, the universe had a beginning, so it must have been caused by something else—by something outside itself. Notice that this conclusion is consistent with theistic religions, but it is not based on those religions—it is based on good reason and evidence.

What Kind of God?

So what is this First Cause like? One might think you need to rely on a Bible or some other so-called religious revelation to answer that question. But we don't need anyone's scripture to figure that out. Einstein was right when he said, "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind."[51] Religion can be informed and confirmed by science, as it is by the Cosmological Argument.

We can discover some characteristics of the First Cause just from the evidence we've discussed in this chapter. From that evidence alone, we know the First Cause has *at least* these six attributes:

1. Spaceless because the First Cause created space.
2. Timeless because the First Cause created time.
3. Immaterial because the First Cause created material.
4. Powerful to create the universe out of nothing.

5. Personal because the First Cause chose to create the universe. An impersonal force, such as gravity, has no ability to make choices. Personal agents (like God) can create. Impersonal forces, which we call natural laws, merely govern what is already created, provided agents don't interfere.
6. Intelligent to be able to make a choice to create and design the universe with such incredible precision (we'll talk about the fine-tuning of the universe in the next chapter).

These six attributes of the First Cause are some of the same attributes theists ascribe to God. Now, at this point, we don't know if the cause of the universe is the God of the Bible because these attributes could just as well point to Allah or some other theistic or deistic Creator. But if we later discover that Jesus really did predict and accomplish his own resurrection from the dead, then we can reasonably conclude that the First Cause is the God of the Bible.

We'll investigate that later. For now, notice that the second attribute—God being timeless—provides another way to respond to the "Who made God?" objection. Simply ask, "Does something timeless have a beginning?" No. Therefore, since God is outside of time, he's eternal and uncreated. No one "made" God.

Also, note the inconsistency of some atheists: Until the Big Bang evidence came along, most atheistic scientists thought the universe was eternal. Why did they never ask, "Who made the unmade universe?" but they insist on asking, "Who made the unmade God?"

These six attributes we've discovered about the First Cause are not based on someone's religion or subjective experience. They are drawn from the scientific and philosophical evidence we have just reviewed, and they help us see a critically important section of the box top to this puzzle we call life.

Conclusion: If There Is No God, Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?

During the question-and-answer portion of an "I don't have enough faith to be an atheist" presentation at Oakland University in Michigan, an atheist student by the name of John took exception to the Cosmological Argument that I (Frank) had just made.

He said, "We have to give science more time! If we give science more

time, one day we will find a natural cause for the universe."

I said, "That sounds a lot like *faith*, John. You have faith that science will one day find a cause."

"We will!" he insisted.

I said, "John, we will never find a natural cause for all of nature. We can't in principle. If nature had a beginning, then the cause can't be something natural because nature didn't exist. Nature was the effect, so it can't be the cause. The cause must be something beyond nature, or supernatural."

I added, "For you to say, 'If you give us enough time, we'll find a natural cause for all of nature,' is like you saying, 'If you give me enough time, I'll find out I gave birth to my own mother!' It's impossible in principle, John."

As a committed atheist, John wasn't convinced. But regardless of what we consider ourselves—atheist, Christian, or anything in between—we all must grapple with this question: "If there is no God, why is there something rather than nothing?" In other words, if there is no God, why does *anything* exist?

In light of the evidence, we are left with only two options: Either *no one* created something out of nothing or *someone* created something out of nothing. Which view is more reasonable? Nothing created something? No. Even Julie Andrews, in the old movie *The Sound of Music*, knew the answer when she sang, "Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could!"[52] If you can't believe that nothing caused something, then you don't have enough faith to be an atheist.

The most reasonable view is that a spaceless, timeless, immaterial, powerful, intelligent, and personal Being we call God did the creating. Jastrow suggested this when he ended his book *God and the Astronomers* with this classic line: "For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."[53]

4

Divine Design

> Only a rookie who knows nothing about science would say science takes away from faith. If you really study science, it will bring you closer to God.
>
> JAMES TOUR, NANOSCIENTIST

THE ASTRONOMICAL EVIDENCE for God must be strong when atheistic physicists admit that "the universe exploded out of nothingness" and agnostic astronomers claim that "supernatural forces" were so at work in the beginning that scientists are led back to "a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries" (see chapter 3). But the scientific evidence for God does not end with the Cosmological Argument. For many, the *precision* with which the universe exploded into being provides even more persuasive evidence for the existence of God.

This evidence, technically known as the Teleological Argument, derives its name from the Greek word *telos*, which means goal or purpose. The Teleological Argument goes like this:

1. Every design had a designer.
2. The universe has highly complex and specified design.
3. Therefore, the universe had a designer.

Isaac Newton (1642–1727) implicitly confirmed the validity of the

Teleological Argument when he marveled at the design of our solar system. He wrote, “This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.”[1] Yet it was William Paley (1743–1805) who made the argument famous by his commonsense observation that every watch requires a watchmaker. Imagine you’re walking along in the woods and you find a diamond-studded Rolex on the ground. What do you conclude is the cause of that watch? The wind and the rain? Erosion? Some combination of natural forces? Of course not! There’s absolutely no question in your mind that some intelligent being made that watch, and that some unfortunate individual must have accidentally dropped it there.

Scientists are finding that the universe is like that diamond-studded Rolex, except the universe appears to be even more precisely fine-tuned than the watch. In fact, the universe is specifically fine-tuned to enable life on earth—a planet with scores of improbable and interdependent life-supporting features that make it a tiny oasis in a vast and hostile universe.

There are at least three levels of this fine-tuning[2] that scientists have discovered since the 1950s:

1. The initial conditions of the universe, such as:
    a. The initial order (low entropy state) at the beginning
    b. The expansion rate from the beginning
2. The laws of nature and/or the numerical constants within them, such as:
    a. The gravitational force
    b. The electromagnetic force
    c. The strong nuclear force
    d. The weak nuclear force
    e. The cosmological constant
3. Local features of our planet and solar system, such as:
    a. Our distance from the sun
    b. The oxygen level in the atmosphere
    c. The presence of a large planet such as Jupiter
    d. The size and distance of the moon from us

These features about our universe and solar system fall into extremely narrow ranges. If *any one* of them were slightly different, life would not be possible. In addition, minor changes of some of these features would make

the existence of the universe and basic chemistry impossible.

The above list is only partial. In total, there are hundreds of features about our universe (levels 1 and 2) and our planet and solar system (level 3) that are balanced on a knife's edge.[3]

Let's start with the initial conditions of the universe (level 1). Atheist Stephen Hawking wrote this about the beginning of the universe:

> If the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million, it would have recollapsed before it reached its present size. On the other hand, if it had been greater by a part in a million, the universe would have expanded too rapidly for stars and planets to form.[4]

We cannot claim that this extremely precise expansion rate somehow evolved to the perfect speed by chance, because it's an initial condition of the universe—it didn't evolve at all but started at the exact right speed at the creation event. It's as if the Creator of space-time and matter caused that value to be exactly where it needed to be from the very beginning.

Sir Roger Penrose, an agnostic on religious matters, is a mathematician and Nobel laureate in physics. He calculated how likely our universe was to have, by chance, the high degree of order it had at the beginning. His answer? One chance in 10^{10} raised to the 123rd power.

"That's quite a big number," write astrophysicists Geraint Lewis and Luke Barnes: "If you wrote a zero on every single particle in the known universe, you still fall a long way short of writing down all the digits in that number. In fact, you would need roughly 10^{43} universes worth of particles just to write the number down."[5]

In case you forgot what your math teacher said about how to write large numbers, 10^{43} translates to a 1 with 43 zeroes following it. In other words, according to Penrose's calculations, assuming the creation of our universe was not intelligently designed, there's one chance in the number of elementary particles in 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 *universes* that there would have been the high degree of order we had at the Big Bang. As we say in New Jersey, fuhgeddaboudit: It didn't happen by chance!

In the second level of fine-tuning, involving the laws of nature and their constants, the degree of fine-tuning is similarly incomprehensible. We don't have space to investigate all of them, but a couple will make the point:

- The strong nuclear force, which holds the nuclei of atoms together, is 10^{40} stronger than gravity. If we increased the strength of gravity by just 1 part in 10^{34} (again, that's 1 part in 1 with 34 zeroes following it) relative to the strong nuclear force, the universe would not have life-sustaining planets.[6] That kind of precision is like a blindfolded person randomly choosing one marked dime out of *one billion piles of dimes, each* as large as the entire North American continent stacked 238,000 miles to the moon!
- The cosmological constant, which is a measurement of the mysterious force that keeps the universe expanding, is fine-tuned to 10^{90} (some say 10^{120}) to nearly perfectly balance the gravitational force. To get an idea of this degree of precision, consider that there are an estimated 10^{80} elementary particles in the entire universe. That means the cosmological constant is so fined-tuned that *your chances of randomly picking one marked particle in the entire universe are 10 billion times better than the universe randomly having the cosmological constant that it has.*[7] It takes a lot of blind faith to believe there's no intelligence behind this.

For the third level of fine-tuning, involving local factors about our planet and solar system, let's imagine going on a trip into outer space. While hurtling through lifeless and hostile space, astronauts can survive only in the small confines of their spaceship, which has very specific environmental conditions. Like a spaceship, our earth is an oasis for life as it hurtles though our solar system. Any slight change in any one of several factors about our solar system or the earth itself would fatally alter the narrowly defined environmental conditions we need to survive.

Apollo 13, one of the most challenging and famed missions in the history of NASA, will help drive this point home. We're going to climb aboard Apollo 13 for the next few pages. As we relive that mission, we'll point out some of the fine-tuned features of our earth and solar system that make our lives possible.

Houston, We Have a Problem!

It's April 13, 1970, more than two days since Mission Commander Jim Lovell and two other astronauts blasted out of the earth's atmosphere on Apollo 13. They are now flying through space at more than 2,000 miles an

hour, eagerly anticipating a walk that only a few men have taken—a walk on the surface of the moon. Everything is going as planned on their magnificently designed spacecraft. In Lovell's own words, he and his crew are "fat, dumb, and happy."[8] But all of that is about to change.

At 55 hours and 54 minutes into the mission, shortly after completing a TV broadcast back to earth, Lovell is putting wires away when he hears a loud bang. He initially thinks it's just Pilot Jack Swigert playing a joke by secretly actuating a noisy valve. But when he sees the concerned expression on Swigert's face—an expression that reveals "It's not my fault!"—Lovell quickly realizes that this is no joke.

The dialogue between astronauts Lovell, Swigert, and Fred Haise on Apollo 13, and Charlie Duke on the ground in Houston, goes like this:

SWIGERT: Houston, we've had a problem here.
DUKE: This is Houston. Say again, please.
LOVELL: Houston, we've had a problem. We've had a main B bus undervolt.
DUKE: Roger. Main B undervolt.
HAISE: Okay. Right now, Houston, the voltage is . . . looking good. We had a pretty large bang associated with the caution and warning there. And as I recall, main B was the one that had an amp spike on it once before.
DUKE: Roger, Fred.
HAISE: That jolt must have rocked the sensor on oxygen quantity 2. It was oscillating down around 20 to 60 percent. Now it's full-scale high.

At this point, the astronauts are not entirely sure what is happening. Oxygen tank sensors appear to be erratic. They're showing the tanks have as little as 20 percent to the impossible quantity of over 100 percent. Meanwhile, despite Haise's initial observation that "the voltage is looking good," multiple master caution warnings on the ship's electrical systems are telling the opposite story.

Within a few minutes, the dire nature of the problem becomes apparent. Apollo 13 doesn't have just a sensor problem. It has an actual problem. Their spacecraft—now nearly 200,000 nautical miles from earth and heading away from home—is quickly losing oxygen and power. Two of the three fuel cells are dead, and the third one is depleting rapidly. Haise notifies Houston about the power situation:

HAISE: AC 2 is showing zip. . . . We got a main bus A undervolt now. . . . It's reading about 25 and a half. Main B is reading zip right now.

Lovell then reports the oxygen problem:

LOVELL: And our O_2 quantity number 2 tank is reading zero. Did you get that?
HOUSTON: O_2 quantity number 2 is zero.

Then, as Lovell looks out a hatch, he sees what appears to be a gas venting into space from the side of their spacecraft.

LOVELL: And it looks to me, looking out the hatch, that we are venting something.
HOUSTON: Roger.
LOVELL: We are . . . we are venting something out into the, into space.
HOUSTON: Roger. We copy, you're venting.
LOVELL: It's a gas of some sort.

That gas is later confirmed to be oxygen. Although the crew doesn't know this yet, oxygen tank 2 has just exploded and damaged oxygen tank 1 in the process. Lovell can't see the damage, just the venting gas.

Local Feature 1: Oxygen Level

On earth, oxygen comprises 21 percent of the atmosphere. That precise figure makes life on earth possible. If oxygen were 25 percent, fires would erupt spontaneously; if it were 15 percent, human beings would suffocate. Lovell and his crew must now find a way to maintain the right level of oxygen in their ship.

But oxygen is not their only problem. Like the atmosphere on earth, a change in one constant on the spacecraft can affect several others that are also necessary for life. The explosion creates a shortage not only of oxygen but also of electricity and water. On Apollo 13, water and electricity are produced by combining oxygen with hydrogen in the fuel cells. Without oxygen, there will be no way to manufacture air, water, or power. And since they are in the vacuum of space, there's no source of oxygen from the outside.

The situation is so unimaginable that Swigert will later say, "If somebody had thrown that at us in the simulator," meaning a quadruple failure of fuel

cells 1 and 3 and oxygen tanks 1 and 2, “we’d have said, ‘Come on, you’re not being realistic.’”

Unfortunately, this isn’t the simulator but a real emergency in a spacecraft two-thirds of the way to the moon. What can they do? Fortunately, there’s a lifeboat. The lunar module (LM, known as “the lem”) has provisions that can be used in an emergency. The LM is the craft attached to the top of the command module (CM) that two of the astronauts are scheduled to ride down to the moon while the third astronaut orbits above. Of course, the moon landing is about to be called off: saving the lives of the astronauts is now the new mission of Apollo 13.

In an effort to save power for reentry, the astronauts quickly power down the command module and climb into the LM. But even with the LM, the astronauts are by no means out of the woods. They still have to sling around the moon in order to get back to earth. This will take time—time they don’t have. The LM has provisions designed to sustain two men for about forty hours, but they need to sustain *three* men for *four days!*

As a result, every effort is made to conserve water, oxygen, and electricity. All nonessential systems are shut down—including heat—and the astronauts decrease their water consumption to one small cup per day. Haise, feeling ill, soon begins to run a fever, and all three of the astronauts slowly begin dehydrating. This makes concentration more difficult.

Unfortunately, with most automated systems shut down, concentration becomes more and more critical. Besides slinging around the moon, the crew needs to make several manual course corrections to ensure they hit the proper reentry angle and to speed up their trip home. To do so, they’ll have to manually navigate by the stars. But since debris from the explosion continues to envelop the ship in the vacuum of space, the astronauts can’t distinguish the stars from sunlight reflecting off the debris. Consequently, they are reduced to using the earth and the sun as navigational reference points by lining them up in a spacecraft window.

Using this rather crude method, they check their calculations again and again to ensure they are correct. They have little room for error. In fact, they must aim the ship for reentry at a point no less than 5.5 degrees and no more than 7.3 degrees below the earth’s horizon (from the spacecraft’s point of view). Any deviation from that range and their ship will either skip off the earth’s atmosphere or burn up in too steep a descent.

Local Feature 2: Atmospheric Transparency

The small reentry window the astronauts must hit reflects the exacting standards by which the universe has been designed. While the atmosphere presents a reentry problem for the astronauts, its present qualities are essential for life here on earth. If the atmosphere were less transparent, not enough solar radiation would reach the earth's surface. If it were more transparent, we would be bombarded with far too much solar radiation down here. (In addition to atmospheric transparency, the atmosphere's precise levels of nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide, and ozone are themselves features with narrow ranges for life.)

Local Feature 3: Moon-Earth Gravitational Interaction

As the astronauts begin to sling around the moon, they encounter another necessary feature for life. This one regards the gravitational interaction that the earth has with the moon.[9] If the interaction were greater than it currently is, tidal effects on the oceans, atmosphere, and rotational period would be too severe. If it were less, orbital changes would cause climatic instabilities. In either event, life on earth would be impossible.

Local Feature 4: Carbon Dioxide Level

Following their close encounter with the moon, the astronauts are finally heading toward home. However, still another problem arises. The delicate living conditions inside the spacecraft are becoming contaminated. As oxygen is being consumed, the astronauts are producing a new problem simply by exhaling. That is, carbon dioxide is beginning to reach dangerous levels inside the ship. If they can't find a way to change the carbon dioxide filters in the LM, the three astronauts will be poisoned by their own breaths!

Mission Control tells the astronauts to unpack extra filters designed for the command module (the part of the ship that has been evacuated and powered down) to see if they can be used in the LM. But instead of getting some much-needed good news, the astronauts soon realize that the CM filters are the wrong size and shape for the LM! Contractor A apparently had not coordinated with contractor B! Frustrated, Flight Director Gene Krantz—who famously inspired Mission Control with his assertion that "failure is not an option!"—barks, "Tell me this isn't a government project!"

Scrambling for a solution, NASA engineers on the ground begin what is

known as a “workaround”—they brainstorm a way to rig the square CM filters to fit the round hole in the LM with materials that can be scrounged up on the spacecraft. They design a fix that they think will work and then talk the crew through the rigging process. Their workaround involves the ingenious use of cardboard, space-suit hoses, stowage bags, and duct tape (yes, it also fixes anything in space too—don’t leave home without it!).

Of course such a rig is not necessary here on earth because just the right level of carbon dioxide is maintained naturally in the earth’s atmosphere. This is another feature necessary for life. If the CO_2 level were higher than it is now, a runaway greenhouse effect would develop (we’d all burn up). If the level were lower than it is now, plants would not be able to maintain efficient photosynthesis (we’d all suffocate due to lack of oxygen—the same fate the astronauts are trying to avoid).

Thankfully, the rigged filters work and buy the crew valuable time (and breathable air). Soon the time arrives to jettison the crippled service module. As the service module falls away, the crew sees for the first time the extent of the damage: The oxygen tank explosion blew a twelve-by-six-foot panel off the side of the service module, tilted the fuel cells, and damaged an antenna. Had an explosion *less than half that magnitude* occurred near the heat shield of the command module, it would have resulted in a catastrophic failure of the spacecraft and loss of the crew.

As they approach reentry, the crew climbs back into the command module in an attempt to power it up. This is their only hope of getting home (the LM doesn’t have a heat shield). But with all three fuel cells dead and only battery power available, the normal CM power-up procedure will not work. Not every system can be brought online because there simply isn’t enough juice in the batteries! As a result, they must rely on a new power-up procedure that other NASA engineers and astronauts have just finished developing on the ground.

To complicate matters, condensed water is now dripping from the CM’s control panels where the temperature is a frigid 38 degrees. Will the panels short? Will the necessary systems come online? This is a dangerous environment in which to apply power, but they have no choice.

Despite the danger, the new power-up sequence succeeds, and the astronauts strap themselves in for reentry. Back on earth, the world fixates on the fate of the three men. News bulletins and press conferences give timely updates. Congress passes a resolution for the American people to pray, and

the pope urges the world to pray as the three brave Americans, in a damaged space capsule, accelerate toward the earth's atmosphere at a tremendous speed. In a short time they will be pulled by the earth's gravity to a maximum velocity of nearly 25,000 miles per hour. That's almost 7 miles *per second!*

Local Feature 5: Earth's Surface Gravity

The gravity that is pulling the astronauts back home is still another feature necessary for life. Its strength may be terrifying, but it couldn't be much different without affecting the ability of human life to flourish here on earth. If the earth's surface gravity were different by only a few percentage points, bipedal life like ours would be much more difficult if not impossible. If it were a little weaker, we would have stability problems just standing and walking. If it were a little stronger, injuries would increase while mobility, dexterity, and lifespan would decrease.[10]

As the astronauts plummet to earth in their crippled spacecraft, no one is certain if they will survive the violent and intensely hot reentry. Too many questions remain unanswered: Is the heat shield fully intact? Is the ship really on the right reentry angle? Will the entry batteries on the CM work? Will the parachutes deploy properly? To make matters worse, there's a typhoon warning in the recovery area.

In light of all the uncertainty, the astronauts pay their respects to the ground crew just prior to the three-minute radio blackout that accompanies reentry:

SWIGERT: Hey, I want to say you guys are doing real good work.
HOUSTON: So are you guys, Jack.
SWIGERT: I know all of us here want to thank all of you guys down there for the very fine job you did.
LOVELL: That's affirm, Joe.
HOUSTON: I tell you, we all had a good time doing it.
LOVELL: You have a good bedside manner.
HOUSTON: That's the nicest thing anybody's ever said.
HOUSTON: Okay. Loss of signal in a minute . . . welcome home.
SWIGERT: Thank you.

During reentry, a C-135 aircraft is circling in the recovery area to provide the necessary communication link back to Mission Control. But after three

minutes, there is no contact with the astronauts. Tension rises:

HOUSTON: Apollo 13 should be out of blackout at this time. We are standing by for any reports of ARIA (Apollo Range Instrumentation Aircraft) acquisition.
FLIGHT: Network, no ARIA contact yet?
NETWORK: Not at this time, Flight. (long pause)

Four minutes since reentry—still no contact. No reentry blackout has ever lasted this long.

HOUSTON: Standing by for any reports of acquisition. (pause)

Finally, the aircraft receives a signal from the capsule:

HOUSTON: We got a report that ARIA 4 aircraft has acquisition of signal.

But there's no confirmation yet that anyone is alive.

HOUSTON: Odyssey, Houston. Standing by. Over.

To the relief of everyone, Swigert finally speaks up.

SWIGERT: Okay, Joe.
HOUSTON: Okay. We read you, Jack!

The astronauts are alive, but one last hurdle remains. Two stages of parachutes, first the drogue and then the main, must work or all will be lost. Without successful parachute deployment, the astronauts will be obliterated as their capsule impacts the ocean at 300 miles per hour.

HOUSTON: Less than two minutes now till time of drogue deployment.

Waiting . . .

HOUSTON: Report of two good drogues. Coming up now on main chutes. (pause) Standing by for confirmation of main chutes deploy.

The main parachutes deploy as designed, and Houston gains visual contact.

HOUSTON: Odyssey, Houston. We show you on the mains. It really looks

great!

Finally, after four days of nail-biting suspense, the astronauts, Mission Control, and the rest of the world breathe a sigh of relief:

HOUSTON: Extremely loud applause here in Mission Control! . . . Extremely loud applause as Apollo 13 on main chutes comes through loud and clear on the television display here.

Splashdown occurs at 1:07 p.m. EST on April 17, 1970.

Fine-Tuning: The Little Details Matter

When some in Mission Control began to express doubts that the astronauts would return alive, Flight Director Gene Krantz countered their pessimism with, “Gentlemen, I think this is going to be our finest hour.” Indeed, it was. Apollo 13 became known as a “successful failure.” The astronauts failed to walk on the moon, but they successfully returned to earth despite nearly lethal conditions.

Just as the crew survived against all odds through those lethal conditions, we too survive against all odds on this tiny planet called earth. The Apollo spacecrafts, like our earth, were designed to maintain human life in the very hostile environment of space. Since human beings can survive only in a very narrow envelope of environmental conditions, these ships must be designed with incredible precision and thousands of components. If one small thing goes wrong, human life is in jeopardy.

On Apollo 13, the one small thing that put the crew in jeopardy seems too minor to matter—oxygen tank number two had been accidentally dropped two inches at some point prior to its installation. That mere two-inch drop damaged the tank’s thin wall and began a cascade of events that ultimately led to its explosion.[11] Due to the interdependent nature of the components, the failure of the oxygen system led to the failure of other systems and almost to the loss of the spacecraft and crew. Think of it—that one little two-inch drop led to all the problems the astronauts had to overcome to survive. It resulted in too little oxygen, water, and power, and too much carbon dioxide and navigation error.

Like a small change in the spaceship, a small change in any of the three levels of fine-tuning would result in big problems for us as well. And like the components on Apollo 13, many of the fine-tuned features are interdependent

—a small change in one affects other features that would further destroy the conditions necessary for life.

In reliving the Apollo 13 mission, we mentioned five fine-tuned features of our earth or solar system. Here are just a few more:

- If the centrifugal force of planetary movements did not precisely balance the gravitational forces, nothing could be held in orbit around the sun.
- If water vapor levels in the atmosphere were greater than they are now, a runaway greenhouse effect would cause temperatures to rise too high for human life; if they were less, an insufficient greenhouse effect would make the earth too cold to support human life.
- If Jupiter were not in its current orbit, the earth would be bombarded with space material. Jupiter's gravitational field acts as a cosmic vacuum cleaner, attracting asteroids and comets that might otherwise strike earth.
- If the thickness of the earth's crust were greater, too much oxygen would be transferred to the crust to support life. If it were thinner, volcanic and tectonic activity would make life impossible.
- If the rotation of the earth took longer than twenty-four hours, temperature differences would be too great between night and day. If the rotation period were shorter, atmospheric wind velocities would be too great.
- The 23.5-degree axial tilt of the earth is just right. If the tilt were altered slightly, surface temperatures would be too extreme on earth.
- If the atmospheric discharge (lightning) rate were greater, there would be too much fire destruction; if it were less, there would be too little nitrogen fixing in the soil.
- If there were more seismic activity, much more life would be lost; if there were less, nutrients on the ocean floors and in river runoff would not be cycled back to the continents through tectonic uplift. (Yes, even earthquakes are necessary to sustain life as we know it!)

Astrophysicist Hugh Ross lists over 100 of these fine-tuned earth/solar system features. He calculated the probability that 122 of these features would exist today *for any planet in the universe* by chance (i.e., without design) as one in 10^{138}—that's one chance in one with 138 zeros after it![12]

Doesn't it seem that the extreme degree of the universe's fine-tuning

makes this the most powerful argument for the existence of God? It's not that there are just a few broadly defined features that may have resulted by chance. No, there are more than 100 very narrowly defined features that seem to require an intelligent designer.

Nobel laureate Arno Penzias, codiscoverer of the radiation afterglow, put it this way:

> Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing and delicately balanced to provide exactly the conditions required to support life. In the absence of an absurdly-improbable accident, the observations of modern science seem to suggest an underlying, one might say, supernatural plan.[13]

Cosmologist Ed Harrison uses the word "proof" when he considers the implications of fine-tuning on the question of God. He writes, "Here is the cosmological proof of the existence of God—the design argument of Paley—updated and refurbished. The fine-tuning of the universe provides *prima facie* evidence of deistic design."[14]

While some scientists we've quoted are Christians (such as Ross), many highly esteemed non-Christian scientists have also confirmed fine-tuning. They include Sir Martin Rees, Sir Roger Penrose, Sir Fred Hoyle, Paul Davies, Alan Guth, Alexander Vilenkin, Stephen Weinberg, Stephen Hawking, and many others.[15]

How can anyone remain an agnostic or atheist in light of fine-tuning? If not God, who or what could be the cause of fine-tuning?

Proof for God! How Do Atheists Respond?

How do atheists respond to this "proof for God"? There are three possibilities to explain fine-tuning:

1. Physical necessity. The features of the universe had to be this way. But there's no reason to think this is the case, so few take this option.
2. Chance. Despite the long odds we've seen, many atheists support this option. But they supposedly increase the odds with some sci-fi magic we'll see in a moment.
3. Design/God. There is some kind of supernatural intelligence that fine-tuned all those features of the universe for life.

Some atheists take option 3 and admit there's some kind of designer out there. Astronomer Fred Hoyle had his atheism shaken by the fine-tuning and the complexity he saw in life (which we'll cover in the next two chapters). Hoyle concluded, "A commonsense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature."[16] While Hoyle was vague about just who this "super intellect" is, he recognized that the fine-tuning of the universe requires intelligence.

Most atheists say it all happened by chance. But how can they seriously suggest chance in the face of the extreme improbabilities we've seen? They resort to wild speculation popular in sci-fi movies to give chance more of a chance. It's called the multiverse or the Multiple Universe Theory.

According to the Multiple Universe Theory, there actually are an infinite number of universes in existence, and we just happen to be lucky enough to be in the universe with the right conditions. Given an infinite number of universes, these atheists say, every set of conditions will occur, including the life-supporting conditions of our universe.

There are multiple problems with this explanation. First, and most significantly, *there's no evidence there are other universes!* The evidence shows that finite reality came into existence with the Big Bang. Finite reality is exactly what we call "the universe." If other universes exist, they're beyond our ability to detect.

The second reason the theory doesn't work is because an infinite number of finite things—whether we're talking about days, books, bangs, or universes—is an actual impossibility. There can't be an unlimited number of limited universes. And if we say there is a finite number of universes, we run into the problem of low probabilities that we've seen.

Third, even if other universes do exist, they would have needed fine-tuning to get started just as our universe did. Is there some kind of universe-generating machine out there? If so, it would need a designer too. So positing multiple universes doesn't eliminate the need for a designer—it *multiplies* the need for a designer.

Fourth, the Multiple Universe Theory is so broad that *any event or claim* can be explained by it. For example, if we ask, "Why did the planes hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9/11?" we need not blame Muslim terrorists: The theory lets us say that we just happen to be in *the* universe where those planes—though they appeared to be flown deliberately into the

buildings—actually hit the buildings by accident. With the Multiple Universe Theory we can even let Adolf Hitler off the hook. Perhaps we just happen to be in *the* universe where the Holocaust appeared to be murder, but actually the Jews secretly conspired with the Germans and sent themselves to the ovens. In fact, the Multiple Universe Theory is so broad that it can even be used as a reason for God. Perhaps we just happen to be in *the* universe where God exists!

Fifth, even if we discover there are other universes out there, the whole show—all the universes together—would still require an absolute beginning. That's according to the BGV Theorem, which we discussed in the last chapter. So even if the multiverse is real, that wouldn't solve the problem of a beginning; it would just move the problem back a step.

Some say, "Well of course the universe appears to be designed, because if it wasn't, we wouldn't be here to observe it." While that's true, it doesn't explain why the universe is designed in the first place. If you keep losing money to a poker dealer who has dealt himself five royal flushes in a row (the odds are less than 1 chance in 10^{40}), would you accept his explanation that you'd have to exist to observe losing five times in row? Or suppose he said, "We just happen to be in the universe where I get five royal flushes in a row!" Would you accept that? What's more likely: the multiverse or he's cheating (he "designed" the outcome)?

The Multiple Universe Theory is actually a backhanded compliment to the strength of the fine-tuning evidence. What scientist would be resorting to wild sci-fi speculation if there was an observable natural explanation for the unbelievable precision we've seen? The multiple universe idea seems nothing more than a metaphysical concoction—a fairy tale built on blind faith—as detached from reality as Stephen Hawking's "imaginary time."

Now, some atheists may respond: "Why is God any better? He could be a metaphysical concoction too!" True, but fine-tuning isn't the only evidence or argument we have for God. In other words, we have evidence and arguments *independent of fine-tuning* that lead us to think that God exists—such as the Cosmological Argument we've already seen and several others, including the Moral Argument, the evidence from prophecy, and the Resurrection, that we'll see later. But there's no other independent reason to posit a multiverse. Unlike the claim that God exists, there's no way to corroborate or verify the claim that other universes exist.

In the end, the Multiple Universe Theory is simply a desperate attempt to

avoid the implications of a designer. In fact, agnostic physicist Paul Davies calls it a "dodge."[17] It doesn't multiply chances, it multiplies absurdities. It's akin to the Apollo 13 astronauts denying the fact that NASA designed and built their spacecraft in favor of the unsupported theory that there are an infinite number of naturally occurring spacecraft out there and the astronauts are just lucky enough to be on one that happens to support life. Such a theory lacks any evidence, and its obvious absurdity reveals how strong the evidence for design really is. Extreme evidence calls for extreme theories to explain it away.

God? "Look to the Heavens"

On February 1, 2003, President George W. Bush solemnly peered into a TV camera to address the American people: "My fellow Americans, this day has brought terrible news and great sadness to our country. At 9:00 a.m. this morning, Mission Control in Houston lost contact with our space shuttle *Columbia*. A short time later, debris was seen falling from the skies above Texas. The *Columbia* is lost; there are no survivors."[18]

Traveling at 12,500 miles per hour, *Columbia* disintegrated as it attempted to re-enter the earth's atmosphere. The second great shuttle tragedy left the nation shaken but not deterred. "The cause in which they died will continue," the president vowed. "Mankind is led into the darkness beyond our world by the inspiration of discovery and the longing to understand. Our journey into space will go on."

Yet any human journey into space will penetrate only a tiny fraction of it. There are 100 billion stars in our galaxy, and the average distance between those stars is 30 trillion miles. (By the way, this distance is another fine-tuned aspect of our galaxy. If the stars were closer together or farther apart, planetary orbits would be affected.)

How far is 30 trillion miles? Let's put it this way: When the space shuttle was in orbit, it traveled at about 17,000 miles an hour—*almost five miles per second.* If you could get in the space shuttle and speed through space at nearly five miles per second, it would take you 201,450 *years* to travel 30 trillion miles! In other words, if you had gotten into the space shuttle at the time of Christ and begun traveling from our sun toward another star an average distance away, you would be only *one-100th* of the way there right now. Incredible.

Now keep in mind that's just between *two* of the 100 billion stars in *our*

galaxy. How many stars are there in the entire universe? *The number of stars in the universe is at least 100 times the number of sand grains on all the beaches on the entire earth.* And at five miles per second it will take you over 200,000 years to go from one grain of sand to another! The heavens are *awesome.*

The Bible tells us to look "to the heavens" if we want to get an idea of what God is like. Expressing the Teleological Argument long before Newton and Paley, David wrote in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." A couple of centuries later, the prophet Isaiah posed a question from God: "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One" (40:25). The answer is in the next verse: "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens" (v. 26 NIV 1984). Isaiah goes on to say that God knows all of heaven's stars by name!

Why does God tell us to compare him with the heavens? Because God has no limits, and from our perspective, neither do the heavens. God is the unlimited limiter—the uncreated Creator. He is the source and sustainer of all things. He's the self-existing, infinite Being who created this vast and beautiful universe out of nothing and who holds it all together today. There's only one entity in our experience that can provide an analogy to the infinity of God. An image intended to depict God won't do.[19] It merely limits his majesty. Only the heavens scream out infinity.

Infinity is what describes each of God's attributes, including his power, knowledge, justice, and love. This is why the Bible uses the heavens to help us grasp the infinite height of God's love. Psalm 103:11 says, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him." How high are the heavens above the earth? When you consider that there are 30 trillion miles between stars as numerous as the grains of sand on the beaches of a hundred earths, you might as well say, "The heavens are infinitely high." Indeed, and that's the height of God's love.

God's infinite love is perhaps what led President Bush to quote Isaiah in his tribute to *Columbia's* crew:

> In the skies today we saw destruction and tragedy. Yet farther than we can see there is comfort and hope. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them each by name.

> Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing." The same Creator who names the stars also knows the names of the seven souls we mourn today. The crew of the shuttle Columbia did not return safely to Earth; yet we can pray that all are safely home.[20]

Anything but Ordinary

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Paul wrote, near the beginning of his letter to the Romans, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20 NIV 1984). The evidence for a designer certainly is clear in creation, but we often take it for granted.

C. S. Lewis, in his classic book *The Screwtape Letters*, provides a great insight into this tendency we have to take for granted the amazing world all around us. The senior demon, Screwtape, writes some advice to his junior demon, Wormwood, on how to keep people from becoming Christians. Screwtape writes, "Keep pressing home on him the *ordinariness* of things. Above all, do not attempt to use science (I mean, the real sciences) as a defense against Christianity. They will positively encourage him to think about realities he can't touch and see. There have been sad cases among modern physicists."[21] The "sad cases" are, of course, physicists who have been honest with the evidence they've seen and have become Christians.

Lewis hit on a tendency many of us have. In our fast-paced lives, we rarely stop and observe the world around us. Therefore, we tend to consider every amazing facet of this beautiful universe as ordinary. But as we have seen, it is anything but ordinary. Now science is showing us, as in no other time in history, that this is a universe of incredible design and complexity. It's giving us a new perspective on a world that we too often take for granted.

Astronauts get a new perspective from their spaceships that helps them realize this universe is anything but ordinary. When the first astronauts passed over the surface of the moon and saw the *earth* rise—something no human being had ever seen before—they reverently read from the book of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1 KJV). What else would fit the moment? A recitation of the Multiple Universe Theory certainly wouldn't have expressed the awe the astronauts were experiencing. They witnessed design from an angle no one had ever seen

before and were overwhelmed with the realization that the amazing creation requires an amazing Creator. John Glenn echoed their convictions when, at seventy-seven years of age, he looked out of the space shuttle *Discovery* and remarked, "To look out at this kind of creation and not believe in God is, to me, impossible."[22]

The raw impact of their experiences reveals the intuitive nature of the Teleological Argument. You don't need anyone to tell you that something beautifully designed requires a designer. It's self-evident. Nevertheless, let's state the argument formally again, with emphasis on what we've discovered in this chapter:

1. Every design had a designer.
2. As verified by at least three levels of fine-tuning, we know *beyond a reasonable doubt* that the universe has highly complex and specified design.
3. Therefore, the universe had a designer.

Atheists must take extreme measures to deny the obvious. When they dream up hypothetical theories that are not supported by any evidence—and in fact are actually impossible—they have left the realm of reason and rationality and entered into the realm of blind faith. Theoretical physicist Paul Davies, who is an agnostic, writes, "One may find it easier to believe in an infinite array of universes than in an infinite Deity, but such a belief must rest on faith rather than observation."[23]

Believing without observation is exactly what atheists accuse "religious" people of doing. But, ironically, it's the atheists who are pushing a religion of blind faith. Christians have good reasons based on observation (such as the Big Bang and fine-tuning) for believing what they believe. Atheists don't. *That's why we don't have enough faith to be atheists* (again, we are using the common atheist definition of "faith" in this book as blind belief without evidence).

This blind faith of the atheist reveals that the rejection of a designer is not a *head* problem—it's not as if we lack evidence or intellectual justification for a designer. On the contrary, the evidence is impressive. What we have here is a *will* problem—some people, despite the evidence, simply don't *want* to admit there's a designer. In fact, one critic of fine-tuning admitted to the *New York Times* that his real objection was "totally emotional" because "it smells of religion and intelligent design."[24] So much for scientific objectivity.

In chapter 7, we'll address more of these motivations for denying the strong evidence for the existence of God. But before we get there, we'll explore more persuasive evidence for a designer—the evidence found in life itself.

5

The First Life: Natural Law or Divine Awe?

> God never performed a miracle to convince an atheist, because his ordinary works provide sufficient evidence.
>
> ARIEL ROTH

SINCE THE FIRST EDITION of this book in 2004, confidence in Darwinian evolutionary theory has fallen dramatically among biologists. Michael Behe, professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University, opens his 2020 book with this startling statement: "Since the turn of the millennium a raft of distinguished biologists have written books critically evaluating evolutionary theory. *None* of them think that Darwin's mechanism is the main driver of life."[1]

In the next chapter, we'll see why many of the world's most distinguished biologists are now admitting that evolutionary theory doesn't work. But since life can't evolve unless it first exists, we need to start a step earlier. Before we get to evolution of new life forms, we need to investigate the origin of the first life. For that, let's start at the breakfast table.

Take Out the Garbage—Mom

Sixteen-year-old Noah came down from his bedroom and stumbled into the kitchen to get a bowl of his favorite cereal—Alpha-Bits. When he got to the

table, he was surprised to see that the cereal box was knocked over, and the Alpha-Bit letters spelled “TAKE OUT THE GARBAGE—MOM” on the placemat.

Recalling a recent high school biology lesson, Noah didn’t attribute the message to his mom. After all, he’d just been taught that life itself is merely a product of mindless natural laws. If that’s the case, Noah thought, why couldn’t a simple message like “Take out the garbage—Mom” be the product of mindless natural laws as well? Maybe the cat knocked the box over or an earthquake shook the house. No sense jumping to conclusions. Noah didn’t want to take out the garbage anyway. He didn’t have time for house chores. This was summer vacation, and he wanted to get to the beach. Ava would be there.

Since Ava was the girl Scott liked too, Noah wanted to get to the beach early to beat Scott there. But when Noah arrived, he saw Ava and Scott walking hand in hand along the shore. As he followed them at a distance, he looked down and saw a heart drawn in the sand with the words “Ava loves Scott” scrawled inside. For a moment, Noah felt his heart sink. But thoughts of his biology class rescued him from deep despair. “Maybe this is just another case of natural laws at work!” he thought. “Perhaps sand crabs or an unusual wave pattern just happened to produce this love note naturally.” No sense accepting a conclusion he didn’t like! Noah would just have to ignore the corroborating evidence of the hand holding.

Comforted by the fact that principles learned in his biology class could help him avoid conclusions he didn’t like, Noah decided to lie down for a few minutes to get a little sun. As he put his head back on his towel, he noticed a message in the clouds: “Drink Coke,” the white puffy letters revealed on the sky-blue background. “Unusual cloud formation?” Noah thought. “Swirling winds, perhaps?”

No, Noah couldn’t play the game of denial any longer. “Drink Coke” was the real thing. A message like that was a sure sign of intelligence. It couldn’t be the result of natural forces because natural forces have never been observed to create messages. Even though he had not seen a plane, Noah knew there must have been a skywriter up there recently. Besides, he wanted to believe this message—the hot sun had left him parched, thirsting for a Coke.

Simple Life? There’s No Such Thing!

One needs to be playing with only half a deck or be willfully blind to suggest that messages like “Take out the garbage—Mom” and “Ava loves Scott” are the work of natural laws. Yet these conclusions are perfectly consistent with principles taught in most high school and college biology classes today. That’s because naturalistic biologists assume that messages far more complicated are the mindless products of natural laws. They make this claim in trying to explain the origin of life.

Naturalistic biologists assert that life arose by undirected natural processes from nonliving chemicals (abiogenesis) without any intelligent intervention. Such a theory might have seemed plausible to a nineteenth-century scientist who didn’t have the technology to investigate what’s inside the cell. But today this naturalistic theory flies in the face of everything we know about natural laws and biological systems.

Since the 1950s, advancing technology has enabled scientists to discover a tiny world of awesome design and astonishing complexity. As our telescopes are seeing farther out into space, our microscopes are seeing deeper into the components of life. While our space observations reveal the fine-tuning of the universe (which we discussed in the last chapter), our life observations are yielding an equally impressive fine-tuning of biology.

To show you what we mean, let’s consider so-called “simple” life. Naturalistic evolutionists claim that a one-celled bacteria (or something like it) came together without intelligent intervention in a warm little pond somewhere on the very early earth. According to their theory, all biological life has evolved from that first “simple” life form without any intelligent guidance at all. This, of course, is the theory of macroevolution: from the goo to you via the zoo.

Believers in this theory of origin are called by many names: naturalistic evolutionists, macroevolutionists, materialists, atheists, and Darwinists (in the remainder of this chapter and the next, we’ll refer to believers in this atheistic evolutionary theory as Darwinists or atheists. This does not include those who believe in theistic evolution—i.e., that evolution was guided by God). Regardless of what we call the true believers in this theory, the key question for us is this: “Is their theory true?” It appears not.

Forget the Darwinist assertions about men sharing a common ancestor with apes or birds evolving from reptiles. The supreme problem for Darwinists is not explaining how all life forms are related (although, as we’ll see in the next chapter, that’s still a major problem). The supreme problem

for Darwinists is explaining the origin of the *first* life.

Now, they will claim the origin of life is not part of the theory of evolution. True, but nothing evolves unless it already exists. So how did the first life arise to allow macroevolution to take over?

Many scientists who subscribe to evolutionary theory are materialists. They assume that only natural causes can explain biological systems. Therefore, although they don't know how life began, they assume it must have sprung up naturally from nonliving chemicals, without intelligent intervention.

Unfortunately for those Darwinists, the first life was by no means "simple" (no form of life is). As we're about to see, life contains characteristics that not only defy natural explanation but seem to require an intelligent cause. This began to become clear in 1953 when James Watson and Francis Crick discovered DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), the chemical that encodes instructions for building and replicating all living things.

DNA has a helical structure that looks like a twisted ladder. The sides of the ladder are formed by alternating deoxyribose and phosphate molecules, and the rungs of the ladder consist of a specific order of four nitrogen bases. These nitrogen bases are adenine, thymine, cytosine, and guanine, which commonly are represented by the letters A, T, C, and G. These letters comprise what is known as the four-letter genetic alphabet. This genetic alphabet is identical to our English alphabet in terms of its ability to communicate a message, except that the genetic alphabet has only four letters instead of twenty-six.[2]

When those letters are arranged in base pairs along the spine of DNA's twisted ladder, they comprise the unique genetic makeup of that living entity, which is called a genome. This genome is, in effect, a software program that directs cells to make proteins and perform other functions that are still being discovered.

Just as the specific order of the letters in this sentence communicates a unique message, the specific order of A, T, C, and G within a living cell also communicates a message called "specified complexity." Intelligent Design (ID) proponent Stephen Meyer, who holds a PhD in the philosophy of science from Cambridge University, calls this message the "Signature in the Cell"—the title of his award-winning book.[3]

This signature is extremely long in even the simplest life. Staunch Darwinist and atheist Richard Dawkins, former professor of zoology at

Oxford University, admits that the message found in just the cell *nucleus* of a one-celled amoeba is more than all thirty volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* combined, and the entire amoeba has as much information in its DNA as 1,000 complete sets of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*![4] In other words, if you were to spell out all of the A, T, C, and G in the "unjustly called 'primitive' amoeba" (as Dawkins describes it), the letters would fill 1,000 complete sets of an encyclopedia. This is in a one-celled creature so small that several hundred could be lined up in an inch!

If you were to spell out the DNA of one human cell—which has about 3 billion base pairs—you would fill more than 10,000 200-page books. To write out the DNA of all your cells? Multiply that number by at least 40 *trillion.*

Oddly, the size of the genome doesn't necessarily correlate with the size or complexity of the creature. For example, the one-celled amoeba *Polychaos dubium* has 200 times the DNA of a human cell, while other kinds of amoebae have much less. Onion cells have about 16 billion base pairs, more than five times bigger than a human cell. A fern on the island of New Caledonia was recently discovered to have 160 billion base pairs, over fifty times more than the DNA of a human cell (yes, a plant!).[5] The smallest genome of an independent living thing discovered so far is a kind of bacteria that has just over half a million base pairs. That would still fill over 1,500 200-page books.

Now, whether we are talking about half a million base pairs or several billion, we must emphasize that those letters are not random but in a very specific order—just like the letters in real books. In fact, atheists admit this is like computer code. Meyer summarizes this point in his 2021 book, *Return of the God Hypothesis*, where he writes,

> Richard Dawkins notes that "the machine code of the genes is uncannily computer-like." And software developer Bill Gates observes that "DNA is like a computer program." Similarly, biotechnology specialist Leroy Hood describes the information stored in DNA simply as "digital code."[6]

Where does code come from? Coders. Where do messages come from? Minds.

So here's the key question for Darwinists: If simple messages such as "Take out the garbage—Mom," "Ava loves Scott," and "Drink Coke" require

an intelligent being, then why doesn't a message 1,500 books long require one? That's what we have in bacterial life with the shortest genome.

Meyer and other ID proponents have been asking Darwinists a similar question for at least the past twenty years: What is the source of this genetic information we find in all life? What could cause a program hundreds of books long? To claim natural laws did so would be like claiming an explosion in a printing shop created the Library of Congress!

As we're about to see, Darwinists have not been able to provide evidence that natural laws could do the job. They instead charge that ID proponents are committing the "god-of-the-gaps" fallacy while insisting that scientists will discover a natural cause someday. We'll address that shortly.

But even if Darwinists could discover a natural cause for the genetic information resident in DNA, information alone is not life. This book has specified and complex information, but it is not alive. In other words, information is a necessary but not sufficient condition for life to exist. As we'll see in the next chapter, life is much more than information.

Regardless, Darwinists don't arrive at the obvious conclusion that intelligence is needed because they have defined the rules of science so narrowly that intelligence is ruled out in advance, leaving natural laws as the only game in town. This rule is often called "methodological naturalism"—meaning that, according to them, true scientists look only for natural causes when they are doing science. Is this a good rule? Let's look at the scientific principles that ought to be used in discovering how the first life began.

The Origin of Life

How do we know what happened in the past?

The following fact is obvious but often overlooked: No one *observed* the emergence of the first life on earth. It was a one-time, unrepeatable historical event. And we can't travel back in time and directly observe whether the first life was created by some kind of intelligence or arose by natural laws from nonliving materials.

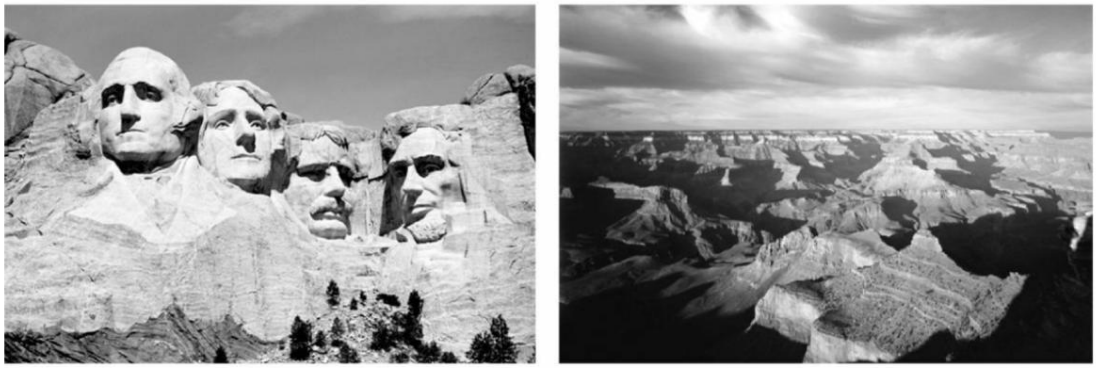
That raises an important question: If we can't directly observe the past, then what scientific principles can we use to help us discover what caused the first life? We use the same principles that are utilized every day in our criminal justice system—forensic principles. In other words, the origin of life is a forensic question that requires us to piece together evidence much like detectives piece together evidence from a murder. Detectives can't go back in

time and witness the murder again. Neither can they revive the victim and go into the laboratory to conduct some kind of experiment that will allow them to observe the crime repeatedly. Instead, they must utilize the principles of forensic science to discover what happened in the past.

The central principle in forensic science is the Principle of Uniformity, which holds that causes in the past were like the causes we observe today. In other words, by the Principle of Uniformity, we assume that the world worked in the past just like it works today, especially when it comes to causes. If "Take out the garbage—Mom" requires an intelligent cause today, then any similar message from the past must also require an intelligent cause. Conversely, if natural laws can do the job today, then the Principle of Uniformity would lead us to conclude that natural laws could have done the job in the past.

Consider the Grand Canyon. What caused it? Did anyone see it form? No, but by the Principle of Uniformity we can conclude that natural processes, particularly water erosion, were responsible for the Grand Canyon. We can conclude this confidently, even though we were not there to see it happen, because we can observe these natural processes creating canyons today. We see this in nature when we observe water's effect on a land mass. We can even go into the laboratory and repeatedly pour water in the middle of a mass of dirt, and we'll always get a canyon.

Now consider another geologic formation: Mount Rushmore. What caused it? Common sense tells us that we would never suggest that the presidential faces on Mount Rushmore were the result of natural laws. Erosion couldn't have done that. Our "common sense" is actually the Principle of Uniformity. Since we never observe natural laws chiseling a highly detailed sculpture of a president's head into stone at the present time, we rightly conclude that natural laws couldn't have done so in the past either. Today we see only intelligent beings creating detailed sculptures. As a result, we rightly conclude that, in the past, only an intelligent being (a sculptor) could have created the faces on Mount Rushmore.



Intelligent (Mount Rushmore) Natural (the Grand Canyon)

Figure 5.1 Two types of causes

But if we were to adopt the rule of methodological naturalism, no geologist could conclude the correct cause of Mount Rushmore, and no archaeologist could conclude that human beings inscribed the Rosetta Stone. So why apply the rule to biology but not geology and archaeology?

If we are honest with the data, the Principle of Uniformity should lead us to conclude that only an intelligent cause could have assembled the 1,500 books worth of information found in the simplest life. Natural laws never have been observed to create a simple message like “Drink Coke,” much less a message 1,500 books long.

This is why proponents of Intelligent Design are not committing the god-of-the-gaps fallacy when they conclude that an intelligent designer is the best explanation for the origin of life. The god-of-the-gaps fallacy is when you plug God into a gap in your knowledge to say that God must have done it. We haven’t found a natural cause, so it must be God!

ID proponents are not doing that. They don’t just *lack* a natural explanation for the genetic equivalent of 1,500 books—a software program 1,500 books long is positive, empirically verifiable evidence *for* an intelligent cause. This is the same common-sense conclusion you make when you find “Ava loves Scott” scrawled in the sand. You don’t say, “I better not suggest an intelligent being here because that would be a god-of-the-gaps fallacy!” No, you realize that you don’t merely *lack* a natural explanation—the message itself is undeniable evidence *for* an intelligent being.

If anyone is committing a fallacy it is the atheists who are committing the natural-law-of-the-gaps fallacy. They are attributing creative power to natural laws that have never been observed to have that power. And they are doing so by faith.

On what grounds other than faith would Darwinists assert that the first life must have arisen naturally from nonliving chemicals without intelligent intervention? Abiogenesis—life from nonlife—has never been observed. Ever since Louis Pasteur sterilized his flask, one of the most fundamental observations in all of science has been that life arises only from similar existing life.

Scientists have been unable to combine chemicals in a test tube and arrive at a DNA molecule, much less life.[7] In fact, all experiments *designed* to generate life from nonliving chemicals—including the now discredited Urey-Miller experiment—have not only failed but also suffered from the illegitimate application of intelligence.[8] In other words, scientists intelligently contrive experiments, yet they still cannot do what they tell us mindless natural laws have done. Why should we believe that mindless processes can do what brilliant scientists cannot do? And even if scientists eventually do create life in the laboratory, it would prove Intelligent Design. Why? Because their efforts would show that it takes a lot of intelligence to create life.

Do atheists insist on abiogenesis because they just don't see the evidence for design? Not at all. In fact, exactly the opposite is true—they see the evidence clearly! For example, Dawkins titled his book *The Blind Watchmaker* in response to William Paley's design argument that we cited in the last chapter. The appearance of design in life is admitted on the first page of *The Blind Watchmaker.*

Dawkins writes, "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose."[9] Two pages later, despite acknowledging "the intricate architecture and precision-engineering" in human life and in each of the trillions of cells within the human body, Dawkins flatly denies that human life or any other life has been designed. Apparently Dawkins refuses to allow observation to interfere with his conclusions. This is very strange for a man who believes in the supremacy of science, which is supposed to be based on observation.

Francis Crick, codiscoverer of DNA and another ardent Darwinist, agreed with Dawkins about the appearance of design. In fact, the appearance of design is so clear that he warned that "biologists must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved."[10] Crick's little memo to biologists led Phillip Johnson, author of the seminal book *Darwin on Trial*, to observe, "Darwinian biologists must keep repeating that reminder to themselves because otherwise they might become conscious of the reality

that is staring them in the face and trying to get their attention."[11]

The complexity of DNA is not the only problem for Darwinists. Its origin is also a problem. A difficult chicken-egg dilemma exists because DNA relies on proteins for its production, but proteins rely on DNA for *their* production. So which came first, proteins or DNA? One must already be in existence for the other to be made.[12]

Why do Crick, Dawkins, and others in their camp ignore the plain implications of the evidence staring them in the face? Because their preconceived ideology—naturalism—prevents them from even considering an intelligent cause. As we're about to see, this is bad science, and it leads to wrong conclusions.

Is This Religion Versus Science?

It is commonly asserted that the Intelligent Design versus evolution debate entails a war between religion and science, the Bible and science, or faith and reason. But such assertions are false. *The ID-evolution debate is not about religion versus science or the Bible versus science—it's about good science versus bad science.* Likewise, it's not about faith versus reason—it's about *reasonable* faith versus *unreasonable* faith. It may surprise you to see just who is practicing the bad science and just who has the unreasonable faith.

First, ID proponents are not getting their evidence from the Bible. They are looking at the same evidence in living things that Darwinists are seeing (more on this later). But since the ID people haven't ruled out intelligent causes in advance, they are open to following the evidence where it leads.

The evidence does not support abiogenesis. That's why ID proponents call it a "just-so" story. It's "just-so" because since life exists, atheists insist it *must* have gotten here by natural causes. Their ideology demands it.

But when you dispense with the materialistic ideology and look at the evidence, the problem for atheists is immense. Biochemist Klaus Dose admits that more than thirty years of research into the origin of life has led to "a better perception of the immensity of the problem of the origin of life on Earth rather than to its solution. At present all discussions on principal theories and experiments in the field either end in stalemate or in a confession of ignorance."[13] Francis Crick once lamented, "Every time I write a paper on the origin of life, I swear I will never write another one, because there is too much speculation running after too few facts."[14]

More recently, award-winning synthetic organic chemist James Tour of

Rice University echoed how clueless the scientific community is on discovering a natural explanation for the origin of life. He wrote:

> Those who think scientists understand the issues of prebiotic chemistry are wholly misinformed. Nobody understands them. Maybe one day we will. But that day is far from today. It would be far more helpful (and hopeful) to expose students to the massive gaps in our understanding. They may find a firmer—and possibly a radically different—scientific theory. The basis upon which we as scientists are relying is so shaky that we must openly state the situation for what it is: it is a mystery.[15]

As Tour points out in great scientific detail, the odds of merely assembling the chemicals necessary for life in one place would be freakishly improbable now or in the early earth. The quantities, order, timing, and conditions did not exist in the early earth, and even if they had, nature would quickly have broken up the reactions to prevent them from assembling in time anyway. In other words, it's a myth that given enough time anything can happen. Time is the enemy of abiogenesis. As Tour puts it, "The proposals offered thus far to explain life's origin make no scientific sense."[16]

Moreover, why think that merely having the chemicals necessary for life is sufficient for life? If scientists were to kill a one-celled bacterium in a petri dish, all the chemicals for life would be there in one place at one time. Would any of those scientists think that natural forces would "resurrect" those chemicals into a live bacterium? So why think it could happen in the early earth, where conditions would have been a lot less favorable?

The evidence is so strong for intelligence and against naturalism that prominent evolutionists have suggested aliens deposited the first life here. Fred Hoyle (the same evolutionist who popularized the Steady State Theory we mentioned in chapter 3) invented this far-out theory (called "panspermia," or "seeds everywhere") after calculating that the probability of life arising by abiogenesis was effectively zero.

Richard Dawkins later cited this theory to interviewer Ben Stein in the video documentary *Expelled*, to which Stein mused, "I can't believe it: Dr. Dawkins believes in Intelligent Design!"[17] Why did Stein say that? Because an alien is an intelligent designer. Dawkins later disavowed the theory, but his candid suggestion in the interview reveals the immensity of the problem for naturalism. When top evolutionists must resort to aliens to explain the origin of life, you know the simplest life must be unbelievably

complex and that there is no hint of a natural explanation. Of course, panspermia, even if it's true, doesn't solve the problem. It simply puts the problem back another step: Who made the intelligent aliens? They would not be eternal and uncaused like God.

Another panspermia advocate, Chandra Wickramasinghe, admits that the Darwinists are acting on blind faith when it comes to abiogenesis. He observes, "The emergence of life from a primordial soup on the Earth *is merely an article of faith* that scientists are finding difficult to shed. There is no experimental evidence to support this at the present time. Indeed, all attempts to create life from non-life, starting from Pasteur, have been unsuccessful."[18] Biochemist and medical geneticist Michael Denton writes, "The complexity of the simplest known type of cell is so great that it is impossible to accept that such an object could have been thrown together suddenly by some kind of freakish, vastly improbable event. Such an occurrence would be indistinguishable from a miracle."[19]

In light of "just-so" explanations such as abiogenesis and panspermia, who do you think is practicing the bad science: the people derisively called "religious" (the theists/ID people) or the "enlightened" ones (the atheists/Darwinists), who are really just as religious as the "religious"? Physicist and information scientist Hubert Yockey realizes it's the Darwinists. He writes, "The belief that life on earth arose spontaneously from nonliving matter, *is simply a matter of faith* in strict reductionism and is based entirely on ideology."[20]

Yockey is right. Darwinists falsely believe they can reduce life to its nonliving chemical components. That's the ideology of reductionism. For Darwinists, who believe that only the material exists, life can be nothing more than chemicals. But life is clearly more than chemicals. Life contains a message—DNA—that is *expressed* in chemicals, but those chemicals cannot cause the message any more than the chemicals in ink and paper can cause the sentences on this page. A message points to something beyond chemicals. The message in life, just like the one on this page, points to an intelligence beyond its chemical elements. (We realize that life is certainly *more* than chemicals with a message, but the key point here is that it's certainly not *less.*)

So by blind allegiance to this naturalistic, reductionist ideology—which is against observation and reason—Darwinists dogmatically assert that life arose spontaneously from its nonliving chemical components. Ironically, this

is exactly what Darwinists have long accused ID proponents of doing—allowing their ideology to overrule observation and reason. In truth, it's the Darwinists who are allowing *their faith* to overrule observation and reason. Intelligent Design proponents are simply making a rational inference from the evidence. They are following the evidence exactly where it leads—back to an intelligent cause.

Yockey was not the only one pointing out that Darwinists have a philosophical bias against intelligent causes. Phillip Johnson correctly pointed out that "Darwinism is based on an *a priori* [prior] commitment to materialism, not on a philosophically neutral assessment of the evidence. Separate the philosophy from the science, and the proud tower collapses."[21]

And it's not just the critics of evolution who see this bias. Prominent Darwinists admit it as well. In fact, Dawkins himself has acknowledged the bias in responding to an email question from Johnson. "[Our] philosophical commitment to materialism and reductionism is true," Dawkins wrote, "but I would prefer to characterize it as philosophical commitment to a real explanation as opposed to a complete lack of an explanation, which is what you espouse."[22] (Dawkins may think he has a "real explanation," but, as we have seen, his explanation is against all of the observational and forensic evidence.)

If Dawkins leaks out a half-hearted admission of bias, the late Richard Lewontin, a Darwinist at Harvard University, once gushed a complete written confession. Read how Lewontin acknowledges that Darwinists accept absurd "just-so" stories that are against common sense because of their prior commitment to materialism:

> Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because *we have a prior commitment to materialism.* It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world but, on the contrary, that *we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes* to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that

> produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover that materialism is absolute for *we cannot allow a divine foot in the door*.[23]

Now the real truth comes out. It's *not* that the evidence supports abiogenesis or Darwinism—in fact, according to Lewontin and our own common sense, materialistic explanations are "counterintuitive." The real truth is that atheists have defined science in such a way that the only possible answer is Darwinism. Any other definition would, God forbid, allow God to get his "foot in the door"!

We'll investigate the possible motivations for keeping God out later. For now, the bottom line is this: The event required to get the atheistic theory of macroevolution off the ground—the abiogenesis of first life—is believed because of false philosophical assumptions disguised as science, not because there are legitimate scientific observations that support it. False science is bad science, and it's the atheists who are practicing it. Their belief in abiogenesis results from their blind faith in naturalism. It takes tremendous blind faith to believe that the first one-celled creature came together by natural laws because that's like believing 1,500 books resulted from an explosion in a printing shop! Atheists can't even explain the origin of the printing shop, much less the 1,500 books. Therefore, we don't have enough faith to be atheists.

Give Time and Chance a Chance!

"Not so fast!" say the Darwinists. "You've overlooked the role of time and chance in the naturalistic explanation of first life."

Give Time More Time!

Evolutionists dismiss the conclusion that intelligence was necessary for the first life by suggesting that more time would allow natural laws to do their work. Give it several billion years and eventually we'll get life. Is this plausible?

Let's go back to Mount Rushmore for a minute. Darwinists assert that science is built on observation and repetition. Okay, suppose we observe and repeat an experiment in which we allow natural laws to work on rock for the next ten years. Will we ever get something like the faces on Mount Rushmore? Never.

You say, “Maybe natural laws would do it if we gave them billions of years.” No, they wouldn’t. Why? Because nature tends to disorder rather than order things (recall that this is another aspect of the Second Law of Thermodynamics). More time will make things worse for the Darwinist, not better. How so?

Let’s suppose you throw red, white, and blue confetti out of an airplane 1,000 feet above your house. What’s the chance it’s going to form the American flag on your front lawn? Very low. Why? Because natural laws will mix up or randomize the confetti. You say, “Allow more time.” Okay, let’s take the plane up to 10,000 feet to give natural laws more time to work on the confetti. Does this improve the probability that the flag will form on your lawn? No, more time actually makes the flag less likely because natural laws have longer to do what they do—disorder and randomize.

What is different about the origin of the first life? Darwinists might say that the Second Law of Thermodynamics doesn’t apply continuously to living systems. After all, living things do grow and can get more ordered. Yes, they grow and get more ordered, but they still lose energy in the process of growth. The food that goes into a living system is not processed at 100 percent efficiency. So the Second Law applies to living systems as well.

But that’s not even the point. The point is, we’re *not* talking about what something can do once it’s alive; *we’re talking about getting a living thing in the first place.* How did life arise from nonliving chemicals, without intelligent intervention, when nonliving chemicals are susceptible to the Second Law? Darwinists have no answer, only faith.

Give Chance a Chance!

Can all the incredible specified complexity in life be explained by chance? Atheists and theists alike have calculated the probability that life could arise by chance—meaning the laws of nature working on nonliving chemicals. The figures they calculate are astronomically small—virtually zero. For example, Michael Behe has said that the probability of getting *one protein molecule* (which has about a hundred amino acids) by chance would be the same as a blindfolded man finding one marked grain of sand in the Sahara Desert three times in a row. And one protein molecule is not life. To get life, you would need to get about 200 of those protein molecules together![24]

Caltech-trained molecular biologist Doug Axe confirmed a similar improbability regarding protein folds.[25] Axe calculated that the probability of

getting just one protein fold by chance is just 1 in 10^{77}. That means there's only *one* combination of chemicals that will make a functional protein fold to 10^{77} combinations that won't work.[26] Why would any atheist think those are good odds?

And as bad as those odds are, there's still a conceptual problem for atheists. When the evidence is against natural explanations, they sometimes will appeal to chance or "luck." But chance and luck are not causes. Chance is a *word* that we use to describe mathematical possibilities. It has no power of its own. Chance is *no*thing and thus causes nothing.

If someone flips a fair coin, what's the chance it will come up heads? Fifty percent, we say. Yes, but what *causes* it to come up heads? Is it chance? No, the primary cause is an intelligent being who decided to flip the coin and apply so much force in doing so. Secondary causes, such as the physical forces of wind and gravity, also impact the result of the flip. If we knew all those variables, we could calculate how the flip would turn out beforehand. But since we don't know those variables, we use the word *chance* to cover our ignorance.

We shouldn't allow atheists to cover their ignorance with the word *chance*. The evidence overwhelmingly shows that there are no natural causes for life, but there is *positive evidence* that life is the product of intelligence. We should not let atheists get away with suggesting there's some hidden hope in a powerless word that really isn't a cause at all. An appeal to chance or luck—as Richard Dawkins made in *The God Delusion* to explain the fine-tuning of the universe[27]—is just another example of the blind faith atheists have when the evidence is against their position.

Science Doesn't Say Anything—Scientists Do

Unfortunately, Darwinists have been successful in convincing much of the public that the only bad science is that which disagrees with Darwinism (and that really isn't science at all, they say—it's just religion masquerading as science). In fact, the exact opposite is true. It's the atheists who are practicing the bad science because their science is built on a false philosophy. In effect, *their* secular religion of naturalism leads them to ignore the empirically detectable scientific evidence for design.

What lessons can we learn from the bad science of the Darwinists? To answer that, let's look at more of the debate we cited in chapter 3 between Christian philosopher William Lane Craig and Darwinist Peter Atkins.[28]

Recall that the debate was over the existence of God. At one point, Atkins argued that God wasn't necessary because science could explain everything.

"There is no need for God," declared Atkins. "Everything in the world can be understood without needing to evoke a God. You have to accept that's one possible view to take about the world."

"Sure, that's possible," Craig admitted. "But . . ."

"Do you deny that science can account for everything?" Atkins interrupted.

"Yes, I *do* deny that science can account for everything," said Craig.

"So what can't it account for?" demanded Atkins.

A veteran of many debates, Craig was ready with a multifaceted answer. "I think there are a good number of things that cannot be scientifically proven but we are all rational to accept," he said. Craig then cited these five examples of rational beliefs that cannot be proven by science:

1. Mathematics and logic (Science can't prove them because science presupposes them.)
2. Metaphysical truths (These include the truth that there are minds that exist other than my own.)
3. Ethical judgments (You can't prove by science that the Nazis were evil, because morality is not subject to the scientific method.)
4. Aesthetic judgments (The beautiful, like the good, cannot be scientifically proven.)
5. Science itself (The belief that the scientific method discovers truth can't be proven by the scientific method itself; more on this below.)

(Following this barrage of examples refuting Atkins's view, moderator William F. Buckley Jr. could not hide his pleasure with Craig's answer. He peered over at Atkins and cracked, "So put that in your pipe and smoke it!")

Craig is right. The scientific method of searching for causes by observation and repetition is but *one* means of finding truth. It is not the *only* means of finding truth. We find truth through our own senses and the senses of others when they testify to what they saw and heard (testimony, not science, is how most of history is known and how most subjects are taught). And as we saw in chapter 1, nonscientific (philosophical) laws, such as the laws of logic and mathematics, help us discover truth as well. In fact, those laws are used in the scientific method!

Moreover, Atkins's claim that science can account for everything is also

false because it is self-defeating. In effect, Atkins was saying, “Science is the only objective source of truth.” If we test that statement by the Road Runner tactic from chapter 1, we see it is self-defeating and therefore false. The statement “Science is the only objective source of truth” claims to be objectively true, but it is not a statement *of* science—you can’t prove it in a laboratory—but a philosophical statement *about* science. So the statement defeats itself.

This leads us to perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn from the bad science of the Darwinists: *Science is built on philosophy. Indeed, science is a slave to philosophy.* Bad philosophy results in bad science, and good science requires good philosophy. Why? Here are three reasons:

1. *Science cannot be done without philosophy.* Philosophical assumptions are utilized in the search for causes, and, therefore, cannot be the result of them. For example, scientists assume (by faith) that reason and the scientific method allow us to accurately understand the world around us. That cannot be proven by science itself. You can’t prove the tools of science—the laws of logic, the Law of Causality, the Principle of Uniformity, or the reliability of observation—by running some kind of experiment. You must assume those things are true in order to *do* the experiment! So science is built on philosophy. Unfortunately, as Albert Einstein himself acknowledged, the man of science is a poor philosopher.[29]

2. *Philosophical assumptions can dramatically impact scientific conclusions.* If a scientist assumes beforehand that only natural causes are possible, then no amount of evidence will convince him that intelligence created the first one-celled life or any other designed entity. When atheists *presuppose* that intelligent causes are impossible, then natural laws are the only game in town. Likewise, if an ID proponent rules out natural causes beforehand (and we don’t know of any who do), then he also risks missing the right answer. But a scientist who is *open-minded* to both natural and intelligent causes can follow the evidence wherever it leads.

3. *Science doesn’t say anything—scientists do.* All data must be gathered and interpreted, and who does that? Not science but scientists. When those scientists let their personal preferences or unproven philosophical assumptions dictate their interpretation of the evidence (like ruling out intelligent causes beforehand), they do exactly what they accuse religious

people of doing—they let their ideology dictate their conclusions. When that's the case, their conclusions should be questioned because they may be nothing more than philosophical presuppositions passed off as scientific facts.[30]

While science is important and improves our quality of life, it cannot answer most of the big questions we're addressing in this book, such as identity, meaning, morality, and destiny (see the introduction). Science can't even help with what's most important to people—relationships. You don't learn you love someone through science. When you're asked, "Do you love me?" you don't say, "I don't know—let's run an experiment!"

Summary and Conclusion

Since we've covered a lot of ground in this chapter, let's sum it up with a few short points:

1. Life does not consist merely of chemicals. If that were the case, mixing the chemicals of life in a test tube would produce life. Life clearly consists of more than chemicals; it also includes specified complexity—a message, which can come only from a mind. Therefore, materialism is false.
2. There are no known natural laws that create specified complexity—we observe only intelligence creating it (e.g., "Take out the garbage —Mom," "Drink Coke," Mount Rushmore, etc.). Therefore, if we find specified complexity in life, we should conclude, using the Principle of Uniformity, that the cause must also be intelligent.
3. The simplest life consists of specified complexity (called DNA) equivalent to 1,500 books. DNA operates as a software program that directs activities essential to life. Programs come from intelligent programmers, not blind natural forces. Einstein said, "[God] does not play dice with the universe."[31] He was right. As Phillip Gold said, "God plays Scrabble!"[32]
4. Science is a search for causes that is built on philosophy. There are only two types of causes, intelligent and natural, but Darwinists philosophically rule out intelligent causes before they even look at the evidence. That's why when Darwinists look at those 1,500 books —despite observing and recognizing their obvious design—they assert that their cause must be natural. But if "Take out the garbage

—Mom" requires an intelligent cause, then so do 1,500 books.

5. Since life cannot evolve unless it first exists, Darwinism requires life to get the theory started. But abiogenesis (life from nonliving chemicals by natural laws) has never been observed. Given our knowledge of the natural world, abiogenesis seems so unlikely that scientists say it would be a "miracle" if it did happen. Yet many atheists believe it by faith.
6. Since the strong cosmological and teleological evidence shows that this is a theistic universe (and for other reasons we'll see later), the Darwinian belief in naturalism (or materialism) is also an article of faith that, if true, would make reason itself impossible. Materialistic beliefs appear little more than a secular religion masquerading as science.

The skeptic may say, "Wait a minute! You're moving much too fast. What makes you think that Intelligent Design is scientific? Isn't there still a 'god-of the-gaps' problem here? If you stop looking for a natural cause, won't that stop science? And what about the evidence for the evolution of new life forms that you have yet to mention?"

Answers to these and other Darwinist claims are coming in the next chapter. Not only will we address those claims, but we will also provide more pieces to the puzzle that confirm that the Intelligent Design people, not the Darwinists, have the right box top.

6

New Life Forms: The Survival or Arrival of the Species?

> In grammar school they taught me that a frog turning into a prince was a fairy tale. In the university they taught me that a frog turning into a prince was a fact!
>
> RON CARLSON

IN THE MOVIE CONTACT, Jodie Foster plays a scientist who is part of the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) research team.[1] SETI, which is a real organization, has scientists who scan space for unmistakable signs of intelligent life. What constitutes an unmistakable sign of intelligent life? A message. That's right, something like "Take out the garbage—Mom."

In the movie, Foster's character, Ellie, gets extremely excited when her antenna picks up radio waves that appear to have an intelligent pattern, "One, two, three, five, seven, eleven . . . those are primes!" she exclaims (meaning prime numbers). "That can't be natural phenomena!"

Indeed, random radio waves can be naturally produced, but those that contain a message always have an intelligent source. Prime numbers, from one to 101 in order, constitute a message that could come only from an intelligent being.

Ellie is so confident that ET has been found, she goes public with her discovery. Government and military officials then converge on her facility.

“If this is such an intelligent source, then why don’t they just speak English?” one official asks with a hint of derision.

“Because math is the only universal language!” Ellie fires back.

Of course she’s right. In fact, alphabets, and thus language itself, can be ultimately reduced to numbers. This is why the English alphabet is mathematically identical to the genetic alphabet of DNA and why the comparison of cell information to the long messages we find in books is a one-to-one relationship rather than just an analogy.

While Ellie and her colleagues later discover a more complicated message embedded in the radio waves, they are absolutely certain the prime numbers alone prove that the message comes from intelligent life. Why are they so certain of this? Because repeated observation tells us that only intelligent beings create messages and that natural laws never do. When we see a sequence of prime numbers, we realize that it requires an intelligent cause, just like the messages “Take out the garbage—Mom” and “Ava loves Scott” do.

Ironically, *Contact* was based on a novel by the late Carl Sagan, an ardent evolutionist who believed in abiogenesis and who was instrumental in starting the real SETI program. The irony lies in the fact that Sagan was absolutely convinced that a simple string of prime numbers proves the existence of an intelligent being, but the equivalent of 1,500 books in the simplest one-celled life does not.

Moreover, Sagan wrote this about the human brain:

> The information content of the human brain expressed in bits is probably comparable to the total number of connections among the neurons—about a hundred trillion bits. If written out in English, say, that information would fill some twenty million volumes, as many as in the world’s largest libraries. The equivalent of twenty million books is inside the heads of every one of us. The brain is a very big place in a very small space. . . . The neurochemistry of the brain is astonishingly busy. The circuitry of a machine more wonderful than any devised by humans.[2]

Actually, Sagan probably *under*estimated the brain’s information content at 20 million books. Nevertheless, the figure is still stunning. To conceptualize it, picture yourself at center court of Madison Square Garden several hours before a basketball game. You are the only one in the arena,

and you are looking at almost 20,000 empty seats all around you. How many books would you have to stack on *each seat* in order to fit 20 million books in that arena?

You would need to stack a thousand books *on each and every seat* to fit 20 million books in Madison Square Garden. Think about that. The roof is not high enough to allow that many books; you'd have to blow off the roof and keep stacking! That's how much specified and complex information is between your ears. Sagan was indeed right that the brain is a very big place in a very small space, and it's immeasurably more sophisticated than anything humans have ever created.

Now let's review the facts: Sagan realized that the human brain has the information content of 20 million books. He also realized that's drastically more specified and complex than a string of prime numbers. Then why did he think the simpler message required an intelligent being but not the one 20 million books long? We might also ask Sagan and his fellow Darwinists a question of similar weight: If *intelligent* human beings can't create anything close to the human brain, why should we expect *nonintelligent* natural laws to do so?

The Darwinist response usually involves "natural selection." Is this sufficient to account for new life forms? After all, it's a long way from one cell to the human brain.

What About New Life Forms?

Before discussing the origin of new life forms, we need to revisit the problem of the origin of first life. It certainly is a long way from one cell to the human brain, but the journey may be even longer from nonliving chemicals to the first cell. That's the most difficult problem for Darwinists. Where did the *first* life come from?

Do you see the magnitude of this problem for them? If Darwinists don't have an explanation for the first life, then what's the point of speaking about new life forms? The process of macroevolution, if it's possible at all, can't even begin unless there's preexisting life.

But as we saw in the last chapter, this doesn't stop the Darwinists. Against all empirical and forensic evidence, they make up a "just-so" story—abiogenesis or panspermia—that magically gives them the first life they need. This isn't science—this is a joke. (In fact it reminds us of a joke. Steve Martin used to say, "I know how you can be a millionaire and never pay

taxes! First, get a million dollars. Okay, now . . .")

This position is even more problematic for atheists when you consider that they don't even have an explanation for the source of the nonliving chemicals, much less an explanation for life. As we saw in chapter 3, one of the most profound questions to ask is "If there is no God, why is there something rather than nothing at all?" We saw that the atheists have no plausible answer to this question. Suggesting a possibility is not enough—they should present evidence if they are going to be scientific. It's obvious they don't know where the universe came from. A good box top (worldview) should be able to plausibly explain all the data. If it can't answer the fundamental questions of the origin of the universe or the origin of life, it's not a viable box top. It's time to look for a new one.

Even though the atheists' box top is fundamentally flawed, we need to look at a few of the claims they make regarding the origin of new life forms. Their theory is macroevolution.

What Do You Mean by Evolution: Micro or Macro?

Macroevolution is the belief that all life forms have descended from a universal common ancestor—the first one-celled creature—and all of this happened by natural processes without any intelligent intervention. God was not involved. It has been a completely blind process—from the goo to you via the zoo.

Darwinists have long said this happened by natural selection. But the term *natural selection* is a misnomer. Since the process of evolution is, by definition, without intelligence, there is no "selection" going on. It's a blind process. The term *natural selection* simply means that the fittest creatures survive. So what? That's true by definition. "The fittest survive" is a tautology that doesn't prove anything. Logically, the surviving creatures are the creatures that are best equipped genetically or structurally to deal with changing environmental conditions (that's why they survive).[3]

As an example of natural selection, consider what happens to bacteria attacked by antibiotics. When bacteria survive a bout with antibiotics and multiply, the parent bacteria possessed the genetic capacity to resist, or a rare biochemical mutation somehow helped it survive (we say "rare" because most mutations are not helpful). Since the sensitive bacteria die, the surviving bacteria multiply and now dominate.

Darwinists say that the surviving bacteria have evolved "resistance." The

mutation gave the bacteria a survival advantage, which meant nature "selected" that bacteria to survive. Having adapted to the environment, the surviving bacteria provide us with an example of evolution. Fair enough, but what kind of evolution?

The answer we're about to give is critical. In fact, outside of the philosophical presuppositions we've been exposing, defining "evolution" is perhaps the greatest point of confusion in the ID-evolution controversy. This is where Darwinian errors and false claims begin to multiply like bacteria if not checked by those who believe observation is important to science. Here's what observation tells us: *The surviving bacteria always stay bacteria.* They do not evolve into another type of organism. That would be macroevolution. Natural selection has never been observed to create new types.

But macroevolution is exactly what Darwinists claim from the data. They say that these observable *micro* changes can be extrapolated to prove that unobservable macroevolution has occurred. As we're about to see, that extrapolation appears to be false. Yet Darwinists will take any evidence of change as evidence for their grand theory that all life has evolved from the first one-celled creature by natural processes.

In other words, Darwinists are masters at defining the term *evolution* broadly enough so that evidence in one situation might be counted as evidence in another. This is why it is essential that the right distinctions be made and that all hidden assumptions be exposed when discussing the ID-evolution controversy.

So when someone asks us, "Do you believe in evolution?" we ask that person, "What do you mean by evolution?" Does that person mean change over time? If so, count us in. Does that person mean adaptation within a type (microevolution)? Again, count us in—we see that. But if the person means macroevolution—the theory of common ancestry from molecules to man without intelligent intervention—not only has that never been observed, but there's also evidence against it.

Unfortunately for Darwinists, the public is beginning to catch on to the ambiguity in their broad definitions, thanks largely to the popular works of scholars such as Stephen Meyer, Doug Axe, Michael Behe, Fuz Rana, Michael Denton, Jonathan Wells, Casey Luskin, and others. But someone outside the discipline of biology was among the first to expose the problems with Darwinism. Berkeley attorney Phillip Johnson released his groundbreaking book *Darwin on Trial* back in 1991. That's where he points

out that “none of the ‘proofs’ [for natural selection] provides any persuasive reason for believing that natural selection can produce new species, new organs, or other major changes, or even minor changes that are permanent.”[4] Biologist Jonathan Wells agreed when he wrote, “Biochemical mutations cannot explain the large-scale changes in organisms that we see in the history of life.”[5] And now many more are agreeing.

Major Evolutionists Now Admit That Mutating DNA Won’t Work

Darwinists have begun to admit what critics like Johnson and Wells have said for decades. As we pointed out at the top of the last chapter, “Since the turn of the millennium a raft of distinguished biologists have written books critically evaluating evolutionary theory. *None* of them think that Darwin’s mechanism is the main driver of life.”[6]

Why not? Here are seven discoveries that show why macroevolutionary theory doesn’t fit the evidence:

1. *Mutating DNA won’t create a new body plan.* The problems with evolutionary theory have gotten so obvious that one of the most prestigious science organizations in the world, the Royal Society, once headed by Issac Newton, convened a conference in London in 2016 to revise the standard theory of evolution.[7] Conference speakers recognized that the neo-Darwinian mechanism of natural selection working on random mutations simply does not have the power to create new life forms. But they offered little, if anything, in terms of solutions.

Stephen Meyer, who attended the conference, said that one of the newer discoveries related to evolutionary theory destroys the central tenet of Darwinism. It is the discovery that the development of organisms is not determined by DNA alone but by the form and structure of information in embryonic cells called “epigenetic information.” *This epigenetic information cannot be modified by mutations*. Moreover, experiments show that any mutations at the embryonic level are lethal to the organism.[8] Therefore, the central claim of neo-Darwinism—that mutating DNA will eventually produce a new body plan—is demonstrably false. DNA can mutate forever; it will never produce a new body plan.[9] Here’s how Meyer put it:

> Even in a best-case scenario—one that ignores the immense improbability of generating new genes by mutation and selection—mutations in DNA sequence would merely produce new genetic

> information. But building a new body plan requires more than just genetic information. It requires both genetic and epigenetic information—information by definition that is not stored in DNA and thus cannot be generated by mutations to the DNA. It follows that the mechanism of natural selection acting on random mutations in DNA cannot by itself generate novel body plans, such as those that first arose in the Cambrian explosion.[10]

The Cambrian Explosion is when most of the major body plans simply appeared in the fossil record fully formed without a chain of fossil precursors. We'll say more about that soon.

In the meantime, this epigenetic problem for Darwinists is threefold and fatal to the theory: (1) mutating DNA won't give you a new body plan; (2) much new coordinated information must be infused at the embryonic level to get a new body plan; and (3) any mutation to that level of information is always *lethal to the organism*. Obviously, death ends all evolution.

The bottom line is that the current theory of macroevolution that relies on a blind process of mutating DNA has been shown not to work. And Darwinists at the oldest and most prestigious scientific organization in the world are admitting it and are looking for a new theory.

2. *There are genetic limits to change*. Darwinists who still cling to the crumbling theory say that extrapolating microevolutionary changes will give us macroevolution. In other words, if small changes can occur over a short period of time, think what natural selection can do over a long period of time.

Unfortunately for these Darwinists, genetic limits seem to be built into the basic types. For example, dog breeders always encounter genetic limits when they intelligently attempt to create new breeds of dogs. Dogs may range in size from the Chihuahua to the Great Dane, but despite the best attempts of intelligent breeders, dogs always remain dogs.[11]

Likewise, when developmental biologists try to change embryos to create new body plans, they don't get an evolutionary result. Jonathan Wells writes,

> Remarkably, although interference may introduce deformities, the basic endpoint of development never changes. If they survive, fruit fly eggs always become fruit flies, frog eggs always become frogs, and mouse eggs always become mice. Not even the species changes. Every embryo is somehow programmed to develop into a particular species of

animal.[12]

He observes, “No matter what we do to a fruit fly embryo, there are only three possible outcomes—a normal fruit fly, a defective fruit fly, or a dead fruit fly. Not even a horsefly, much less a horse.”[13] This is especially significant because the short life of fruit flies allows scientists to test many generations of genetic variation in a short period of time.

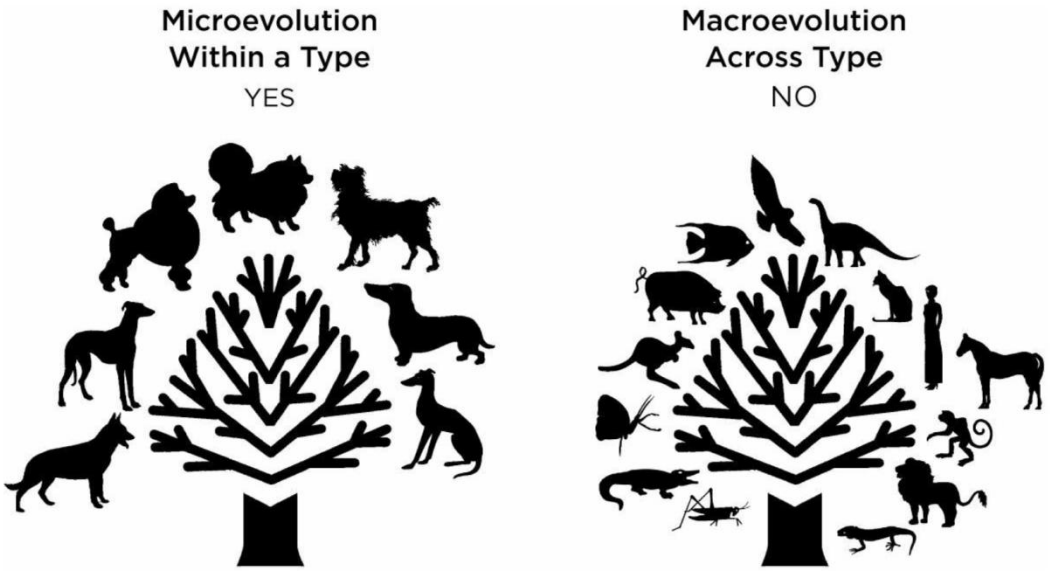


Figure 6.1 Microevolution versus macroevolution

Most importantly, the comparison between natural selection and the artificial selection that breeders do is completely invalid, as table 6.1 shows.

Table 6.1 Artificial selection versus natural selection

Crucial Differences	**Artificial Selection**	**Natural Selection**
Goal	Aim (end) in view	No aim (end) in view
Process	Intelligently guided process	Blind process
Choices	Intelligent choice of breeds	No intelligent choice of breeds
Protection	Breeds guarded from destructive processes	Breeds not guarded from destructive processes
Freaks	Preserves desired freaks	Eliminates most freaks
Interruptions	Continued interruptions to reach desired goal	No continued interruptions to reach any goal
Survival	Preserved by intelligence	Not preserved by intelligence

Confusing intelligent with nonintelligent processes is a common mistake of Darwinists. This was the case when I (Norm) debated humanist Paul Kurtz on the topic of evolution. The debate, moderated by TV host John Ankerberg, produced this exchange regarding macroevolution:

GEISLER: [Chandra] Wickramasinghe [*an atheist*] said, "Believing that life came by chance is like believing that a Boeing 747 resulted from a tornado going through a junk yard." You have to have a lot of faith to believe that!

KURTZ: Well, the Boeing 747 evolved. We can go back to the Wright brothers and see that first kind of airplane they created . . .

GEISLER: Created?

KURTZ: Yes, but . . .

ANKERBERG: By intelligence or by chance? [Laughter]

KURTZ: There was a period of time in which these forms changed . . .

ANKERBERG: But didn't they create those airplanes using intelligence?

KURTZ: I was using the analogy that Dr. Geisler was using.

GEISLER: Well, you're helping my argument! [Laughter] You ought to drop that one and find another one!

KURTZ: No, no, I think the point I make is a good one because there have been changes from the simplest to the more complex airplanes.

GEISLER: Yes, but those changes were by intelligent intervention!

Indeed, directional change in airplanes *by intelligence* proves nothing about the possibility of directional change in living things *without intelligence.* As we'll see in the next section, directional change in living things by natural selection has not been observed. And directional change in living things *with intelligence* hits genetic limits.

So even when it is intelligently guided, evolution hits walls. *In other words, even when scientists intelligently manipulate creatures with an end in mind—which is the antithesis of the blind Darwinian process—macroevolution still doesn't work!* If intelligent scientists cannot break genetic barriers or get new body plans by modifying embryos, why should we expect nonintelligent natural selection to do so?

3. *Change is cyclical, not directional.* Not only are there genetic limits to change within types, but the change within types appears to be cyclical. In other words, changes are not directional toward the development of new life

forms, as macroevolutionary theory requires, but they simply shift back and forth within a limited range.

For example, Charles Darwin's finches had varying beak sizes, which correlated with the weather.[14] Larger beaks helped crack larger, harder seeds during droughts, and smaller beaks worked fine when wetter weather brought an abundance of smaller, softer seeds. When the weather became drier, the proportion of finches with larger beaks grew relative to the smaller-beaked finches. The proportion reversed itself following a sustained period of wet weather.

Notice that no new life forms came into existence—they always remained finches; only the relative proportion of existing large-beaked to small-beaked finches changed. (This is an example of what Phillip Johnson meant when he wrote that natural selection can't even produce minor changes that are permanent. Instead, changes are cyclical within a limited range.) Notice also that natural selection cannot explain how finches came into existence in the first place. In other words, natural selection may be able to explain the *survival* of a species, but it cannot explain the *arrival* of a species.

4. *Life is irreducibly complex*. In 1859, Darwin wrote, "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down."[15] We now know that there are many organs, systems, and processes in life that fit that description.

One of those is the cell. In Darwin's day, the cell was a "black box"—a mysterious little part of life that no one could see into. But now that we can peer into the cell, we see that life at the molecular level is immeasurably more complex than Darwin ever dreamed. In fact, it is irreducibly complex. An irreducibly complex system is "composed of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to effectively cease functioning."[16]

Those are the words of Michael Behe, who unpacked the concept of irreducible complexity in his revolutionary book *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution.* Behe's research verifies that living things are literally filled with molecular machines that perform the numerous functions of life. These molecular machines are irreducibly complex, meaning that all the parts of each machine must be completely formed, in the right places, in the right sizes, in operating order, at the same time for the

machine to function.

A car engine is an example of an irreducibly complex system. If you remove a part—say, take out a piston, a connecting rod, or the camshaft—your car will go nowhere. Even a slight change in the size of the pistons would cause the engine to stop working *unless* you also had simultaneous changes in the camshaft, block, cooling system, engine compartment, and other systems. Irreducible complexity is why you can't gradually modify necessary parts of the engine in isolation and still have function.

Behe shows that living things are also irreducibly complex, just like a car engine. With painstaking detail, he shows that numerous functions in the body—such as blood clotting, vision, and molecular machines like the flagellum that propels the bacteria—require fully developed parts that are integrated in a very specific way.

The processes and elegant nanomachines whirling inside of you right now are such engineering marvels that biologists can't help but describe their parts with the same engineering names we use for cars and other machinery. There are molecular motors, switches, shuttles, sensors, tweezers, propellers, stators, bushings, rotors, driveshafts, and so on. And together they operate with unrivaled precision and efficiency.

For example, consider the bacterial flagellum, the unofficial mascot of the Intelligent Design movement. It's an irreducibly complex subsystem that propels a bacterium through liquid with a nano rotary motor so small that 35,000 of them would fit side-by-side in one millimeter. The motor normally runs at about 18,000 rpm but has been clocked at a sizzling 100,000 rpm in one direction. It can stop in only a quarter-turn to run just as fast in the opposite direction! Our machines are crude by comparison. That's why there's an entire research field called biomimetics, in which scientists are studying biological machines so we can design our own machines that mimic them. What we call "nature" does it better than we do!

These irreducibly complex systems could not have developed in the gradual Darwinian fashion. Why? Because intermediates would be nonfunctional. As with a car engine, all the right parts must be in place in the right size at the same time for there to be any function at all. You can build an engine part by part (and that takes intelligence), but you can't drive to work with only a partial engine under the hood. Nor could you drive to work if one essential part of your engine were modified but others were not. In the same way, living systems quickly would become nonfunctional if they were

modified piece by piece.

Behe's discoveries are fatal for Darwinism. Irreducible complexity means that new life cannot come into existence by the Darwinian method of slight, successive changes over a long period of time. Darwinism is akin to natural forces producing (without any intelligent help) a running car engine (i.e., a one-celled creature) and then modifying that irreducibly complex engine into successive intermediate engines until those natural forces finally produce the space shuttle (i.e., a human being). Darwinists can't explain the source of the materials to make an engine, much less how any irreducibly complex engine came to be in the first place. Nor can they demonstrate the *unintelligent* process by which any engine has evolved into the space shuttle while providing propulsion at every intermediate step. This is evident from the complete absence of explanations from Darwinists for how irreducibly complex systems could arise gradually. Behe exposes the empty claims of Darwinists when he writes,

> *The idea of Darwinian molecular evolution is not based on science.* There is no publication in the scientific literature—in journals or books—that describes how molecular evolution of any real, complex, biochemical system either did occur or even might have occurred. There are assertions that such evolution occurred, but absolutely none are supported by pertinent experiments or calculations. Since there is no authority on which to base claims of knowledge, *it can truly be said that the assertion of Darwinian molecular evolution is merely bluster*.[17]

Little has changed since Behe wrote that in 1998. While some evolutionists have speculated about ways evolutionary processes could have circumvented irreducible complexity, no one has observed or provided a step-by-step process. In 2020, after surveying the papers of those saying they've answered irreducible complexity, Behe wrote, "A grand total of zero of them concern Darwinian details of irreducibly complex systems."[18]

Yet even if a Darwinian path could be discovered for one biological system, that wouldn't solve the problem for Darwinists. *Every* irreducibly complex system and subsystem in biology would also have to be explained in a Darwinian random trial-and-error process. Insisting that an unknown Darwinian process will be found in the future is what we call faith.

But isn't it a "god-of-the-gaps" argument to conclude intelligence must be involved? No, because, again, we don't merely *lack* a natural explanation for

such systems; irreducibly complex systems, whether they be in automobiles or biological systems, are themselves positive evidence *for* intelligent design.

This is because, in all of our experience, irreducibly complex systems come from intelligence. As Stephen Meyer and microbiologist Scott Minnich explain: "In all irreducibly complex systems in which the cause of the system is known by experience or observation, intelligent design or engineering played a role [in] the origin of the system."[19]

Behe does not underestimate the implications of irreducible complexity and other discoveries regarding the complexity of life. He writes,

> The result of these cumulative efforts to investigate the cell—to investigate life at the molecular level—is a loud, clear, piercing cry of 'design!' The result is so unambiguous and so significant that it must be ranked as one of the greatest achievements in the history of science. The discovery rivals those of Newton and Einstein.[20]

5. *Transitional forms wouldn't survive.* Another problem that plagues the plausibility of natural selection creating new life forms is the fact that transitional forms could not survive. For example, consider the Darwinian assertion that birds evolved gradually from reptiles over long periods of time. This would necessitate a transition from scales to feathers.

How could a creature survive that no longer has scales but does not quite have feathers? Feathers are irreducibly complex. A creature with the structure of half a feather has no ability to fly. It would be easy prey on land, in water, and from the air. And as a halfway house between reptiles and birds, it probably wouldn't be adept at finding food for itself either.[21]

So the problem for Darwinists is twofold: First, they have no viable mechanism for getting from reptiles to birds; and second, even if a viable mechanism were discovered, the transitional forms would be unlikely to survive anyway.



Figure 6.2 The transition from reptiles to birds?

6. *Conflicts at the molecular level don't support a "tree of life."* Darwinists often say that evidence of common descent lies in the fact that nearly all living things share a common genetic code, which is a set of rules that direct living cells to make the proteins necessary to sustain life. For example, Richard Dawkins states, "The reason we know for certain we are all related, including bacteria, is the universality of the genetic code and other biochemical fundamentals."[22] Darwinists also think the DNA similarity between apes and humans, for example, which some say is over 98 percent, strongly implies an ancestral relationship.[23]

But is this evidence for common *ancestry* or for a common *designer?* It could be interpreted either way. Perhaps the Darwinists are right—it is possible that we have a common genetic code and similar DNA sequences because we've all descended from a common ancestor. But they could just as easily be wrong—*perhaps we have a common genetic code and similar DNA sequences because a common designer designed us to live in the same biosphere.*[24]

Consider figure 6.3. Does similarity and progression prove that the kettle evolved from the teaspoon? No. Similarity and progression do not automatically imply common ancestry. In this case, we know that they mean that there is a common creator or designer. This is the same situation we have for real living things.

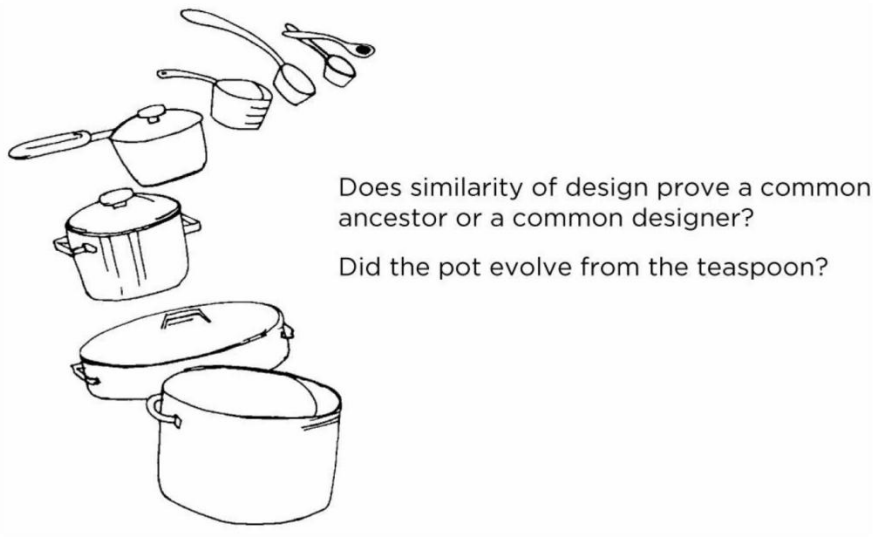


Figure 6.3 Similarity and progression

Scientists are still investigating the degree of similarity between the human genome and the genomes of other species, such as chimps or mice, and more research needs to be done in this field to nail down the exact numbers. But two things are clear right now: The percentage of similarity between humans and chimps is less than 98 percent,[25] and the degree of similarity is not an argument for common ancestry.[26] Again, the reason for the similarity could be a common creator rather than a common ancestor. We need evidence from the molecular level to help us discover whether the common genetic code is evidence of one or the other.

That other evidence *has* been found—by comparing protein sequences. Proteins are the building blocks of life. They are composed of long chains of chemical units called amino acids. Most proteins have in their structure more than a hundred amino acids, which must be in a very specific order. DNA contains the instructions for ordering the amino acids in the proteins, and the order is critical because any variation usually renders the protein dysfunctional.

Molecular biologists hoped that by comparing DNA and protein sequences of genes in different organisms that they could construct a grand "tree of life" showing how all things are related by common ancestry. However, things didn't pan out the way they'd hoped because a consistent tree of life has not emerged from the genetic data.

As Casey Luskin notes, "The basic problem is that one gene gives one version of the tree of life, while another gene gives a highly different, and conflicting, version of the tree."[27] Or, as Carl Woese, the father of molecular

systematics, stated, “Phylogenetic incongruities can be seen everywhere in the universal tree.”[28] The journal *New Scientist* similarly explained that “different genes told contradictory evolutionary stories,” and while “the holy grail was to build a tree of life . . . today the project lies in tatters, torn to pieces by an onslaught of negative evidence. . . . We’ve just annihilated the tree of life.”[29]

The bottom line is that the molecular evidence contradicts the tree of life we’re so used to seeing. And even if a tree of life did exist, evolutionists would still lack a naturalistic mechanism that could overcome the problems we’ve already identified in the five points above and the one we’re about to cover next: the fossil record.

7. *The fossil record shows instantaneous creation, not evolution*. Without the benefit of today’s technology, Charles Darwin could not recognize the problems his theory faced at the cellular level. However, he did recognize that the fossil record posed a big problem for his theory because it didn’t show gradualism. That’s why he wrote, “Why then is not every geological formation and every stratum full of such intermediate links? Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain, and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and gravest objection which can be urged against my theory.”[30]

But Darwin thought that further fossil discoveries would reveal that his theory was true. Time has proven him wrong. Contrary to what you may hear in the general media, the fossil record has turned out to be a complete embarrassment for Darwinists. If Darwinism were true, we would have found thousands, if not millions, of transitional fossils by now. Instead, according to the late Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould (an evolutionist),

> The history of most fossil species includes two features particularly inconsistent with gradualism: 1). Stasis. Most species exhibit no directional change during their tenure on earth. They appear in the fossil record looking much the same as when they disappear; Morphological change is usually limited and directionless. 2). Sudden Appearance. In any local area, a species does not arise gradually by the steady transformation of its ancestors; it appears all at once and ‘fully formed.’[31]

In other words, Gould is admitting that fossil types appear suddenly, fully

formed, and remain the same until extinction without any directional change—exactly what one would expect to find if creation were true.

But instead of adopting creation, Gould rejected the gradualism of Darwinism and formulated a theory he called "Punctuated Equilibria" (PE). PE suggests that species evolved faster over a shorter period of time, thereby explaining the huge fossil gaps. Some evolutionary biologists protested, saying this required too much genetic change too quickly. But since Gould had ruled out intelligence, he asserted PE even though he had no natural mechanism by which it could have occurred. This is a classic case of allowing your prejudices to taint your interpretations.

But we digress. The main point here is that the fossil record lines up much better with supernatural creation than with macroevolution. Indeed, there aren't missing links—there's a missing chain!

There is no chain because nearly all the major groups of animals known to exist appear in the fossil record abruptly and fully formed in strata from the Cambrian period (which many scientists estimate to have occurred between 540 and 500 million years ago). Jonathan Wells writes, "The fossil evidence is so strong, and the event so dramatic, that it has become known as 'the Cambrian explosion,' or 'biology's big bang.'"[32]

Geologist Casey Luskin explains, "The Cambrian explosion is hardly the only example of the 'explosive,' 'abrupt,' or 'sudden' appearance of new types of organisms in the history of life. In fact, this pattern of explosions and abrupt appearance tends to dominate the fossil record and the history of life."[33] He gives examples such as the origin of marine invertebrates, fish, plants, insects, dinosaurs, birds, and mammals as also showing this same pattern of sudden, explosive appearance in the fossil record.

This evidence, of course, is completely inconsistent with Darwinism. Most phyla appear separately, without fossil precursors, fully formed and at the same geological time. That's not evidence of gradual evolution but abrupt creation. So the Darwinian tree we are so used to seeing doesn't properly illustrate the real fossil record. In fact, as Wells observes, "if any botanical analogy were appropriate, it would be a *lawn* rather than a tree."[34] And that lawn would have patches of different grasses or plants separated by large areas of nothing but dirt.

At this point you may be thinking, "But what about the skull progression we're so used to seeing? Doesn't it appear that man has evolved from apes?"

I (Norm) once debated a Darwinist who lined up skulls on a table to

illustrate that evolution had occurred. “Ladies and gentlemen, right here is the evidence for evolution,” he declared.

Gee, how can you ignore the fossils? The skulls look like they’re in a progression. They look as if they could be ancestrally related. Is this good evidence for Darwinism? No, it’s not any better than the evidence that the large kettle evolved from the teaspoon.

The problem for the Darwinists is that the fossil record cannot establish ancestral relationships. Why not? Because, according to Michael Denton, “99 percent of the biology of any organism resides in its soft anatomy, which is inaccessible in a fossil.”[35] In other words, it’s extremely difficult to discover the biological makeup of a creature by looking at its fossil remains. Wells observes, “The fossil evidence is open to many interpretations because individual specimens can be reconstructed in a variety of ways, and because the fossil record cannot establish ancestor-descendant relationships.”[36]

But this doesn’t stop the Darwinists. Since Darwinism *must* be true because of their prior philosophical commitment, Darwinists *must* find evidence supporting it. So instead of admitting that fossils can’t establish ancestral relationships, Darwinists take the one percent that fossils tell them and then use the other 99 percent of leeway to depict their fossil discoveries as filling any gap they want. With such vast leeway and no facts to constrain them, Darwinists have been free to creatively build entire “missing links” from fossil remains as trivial as a single tooth. This is why many so-called missing links have later been exposed as frauds or mistakes.[37] Henry Gee, once the chief science writer for *Nature*, writes, “To take a line of fossils and claim that they represent a lineage is not a scientific hypothesis that can be tested, but an assertion that carries the same validity as a bedtime story—amusing, perhaps even instructive, but not scientific.”[38]

Not only is the fossil record inadequate to establish ancestral relationships, in light of what we now know about the irreducibly complex nature of biological systems, *the fossil record is irrelevant to the question.* The similarity of structure or anatomy between types (sometimes called homology) also tells us nothing about common ancestry. Michael Behe writes,

> Anatomy is, quite simply, irrelevant to the question of whether evolution could take place on the molecular level. So is the fossil record. It no longer matters whether there are huge gaps in the fossil

> record or whether the record is as continuous as that of U.S. presidents. And if there are gaps, it does not matter whether they can be explained plausibly. The fossil record has nothing to tell us about whether the interactions of 11-cis-retinal with rhodopsin, transducin, and phosphodiesterase [irreducibly complex systems] could have developed step-by-step.[39]

So according to Behe, biochemistry is far more important than anatomy on the question of the plausibility of macroevolution. Just as the contents of a book provide far more information than its cover, the biology and biochemistry of a creature provide far more information than its skeletal structure. Nevertheless, Darwinists have long argued that similarity of structure between, say, apes and humans is evidence of common ancestry (or common descent) rather than common design.

But while apes may have a similar structure to humans, what is often overlooked is the fact that apes and humans bear almost no resemblance to snakes, fungus, and trees. But according to Darwinism, all living things have evolved from the same ancestor. To posit Darwinism, you must be able to explain the vast *dissimilarity* between living things. You must explain how the palm tree, the peacock, the octopus, the locust, the bat, the hippopotamus, the porcupine, the sea horse, the Venus flytrap, the human, and mildew, for example, have all descended from a common ancestor without intelligent intervention. You also must explain how the first life and the fine-tuned universe came into existence. Without viable explanations, which Darwinists have failed to provide, we don't have enough faith to be Darwinists.

Is Intelligent Design an Intelligent Alternative?

Much more could be said about macroevolution, but space does not permit us to go any further. Nevertheless, a reasonable conclusion can be drawn from the data we have investigated in this chapter. In light of the fossil record, problems with the evolutionary tree, transitional difficulties, irreducible complexity, cyclical change, genetic limits, and epigenetic information, Darwinism does not fit the observable evidence. As we have seen, there's not only a lack of evidence for macroevolution, *there's positive evidence that it has not occurred.* And many experts in biology are now admitting it!

If macroevolution isn't true, then what is? Well, if there's no natural explanation for the origin of new life forms, then there must be an intelligent

explanation. It's the only other option. There's no halfway house between intelligence and nonintelligence. Either intelligence was involved or it wasn't.

But Darwinists who are still clinging to their failed theory don't like this option. So once they exhaust their ability to adequately defend their own position with unbiased scientific evidence (which is very quickly), Darwinists typically turn their guns on the Intelligent Design people—those of us who believe there's intelligence behind the universe and life. Here are their most common objections and our responses:[40]

Objection: Intelligent Design Is Not Science

As we have seen, science is a search for causes, and there are only two types of causes: intelligent and nonintelligent (natural). The Darwinists' claim that Intelligent Design is not science is based on their overly restrictive definition of science. But that's arguing in a circle! If your definition of science rules out intelligent causes beforehand, then you'll never consider Intelligent Design science.

The irony for the Darwinists is this: If Intelligent Design is not science, then neither is Darwinism. Why? Because both Darwinists and Intelligent Design scientists are using the same scientific method to discover what happened in the past. Origin questions are forensic questions and thus require the use of the forensic science principles we already have discussed. No one can go into the past and observe what happened directly. All we can do is look at the clues left behind to make an inference to the best explanation (also called abduction). Both sides of the debate are using that same method; they just infer that the evidence points to a different cause. Table 6.2 shows the difference between empirical science and forensic science.[41]

Table 6.2 Empirical science versus forensic science

Empirical (Operation) Science	**Forensic (Origin) Science**
Studies present	Studies past
Studies regularities	Studies singularities
Studies repeatable	Studies unrepeatable
Re-creation possible	Re-creation impossible
Studies how things work	Studies how things began

Tested by repeatable experiment	Tested by uniformity
Asks how something operates	Asks what its origin is
Examples:	Examples:
How does water fall?	What's the origin of a hydroelectric plant?
How does rock erode?	What's the origin of Mount Rushmore?
How does an engine work?	What's the origin of an engine?
How does ink adhere to paper?	What's the origin of this book?
How does life function?	What's the origin of life?
How does the universe operate?	What's the origin of the universe?

If intelligent design in biology is not science, then several other disciplines shouldn't be considered science. But they are. These include archaeology, cryptology, criminal and accident investigations, forensic pathology (which includes autopsies), and the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI). These are all legitimate forensic sciences that investigate the past and infer intelligent causes. Something must be wrong with the Darwinists' definition of science. In fact, the suggestion that life was created by intelligence is not a danger to science—it is a danger to atheism.

But even if ID is defined to be outside of science, that wouldn't mean ID is false or that there is no intelligent designer. The definition of science is not a question answered by science (you can't run an experiment to discover the answer). It is a question answered by philosophy. The evidence from the beginning of the universe, the fine-tuning of the universe, and the design of life shows that an intelligent designer exists. Asserting that ID isn't science doesn't defeat that fact.

Objection: Intelligent Design Commits the God-of-the-Gaps Fallacy

We've responded to this already, but there's more to say. First, as we mentioned earlier, when we conclude that intelligence created the first cell or the human brain, it's not simply because we *lack* evidence of a natural explanation; it's also because we have positive, empirically detectable evidence *for* an intelligent cause. We're arguing from what we *do* know, not what we *don't* know. So it's not an argument from ignorance, nor is it based on any "gap" in our knowledge.

Second, Intelligent Design scientists are open to *both* natural and intelligent causes. They are not opposed to continued research into a natural explanation for the first life. They're simply observing that all known natural explanations fail and all empirically detectable evidence points to an intelligent designer.

Now, one can question the wisdom of continuing to look for a natural cause of life. William Dembski, who has published extensive research on Intelligent Design, asks, "When does determination [to find a natural cause] become pigheadedness? . . . How long are we to continue a search before we have the right to give up the search and declare not only that continuing the search is vain but also that the very object of the search is nonexistent?"[42]

Consider the implications of Dembski's question. Should we keep looking for a natural cause for phenomena like Mount Rushmore or messages like "Take out the garbage—Mom"? When is the case closed?

Walter Bradley, a coauthor of the seminal work *The Mystery of Life's Origin*,[43] believes "there doesn't seem to be the potential of finding a [natural explanation]" for the origin of life. He added, "I think people who believe that life emerged naturalistically need to have a great deal more faith than people who reasonably infer that there's an Intelligent Designer."[44]

Regardless of whether you think we should keep looking for a natural explanation, the main point is that ID scientists are open to both natural and intelligent causes. It just so happens that an intelligent cause best fits the evidence.

Third, the Intelligent Design conclusion is falsifiable. In other words, Darwinists could disprove ID if they could cite natural laws that could create specified complexity. Stephen Meyer has participated in several debates in which he asked Darwinists and atheists to tell him what natural laws can do so. They couldn't.

Instead, they emoted. For example, in debates with Meyer, philosopher Michael Ruse called Meyer's conclusion that messages come from minds "religious." Chemist Peter Atkins disdainfully quipped it was "nonsense." And biologist Peter Ward called it—well, here it is:

MEYER: We're interested in evidence and arguments, okay? And we think the evidence strongly supports the reality of a prior designing intelligence. We don't go further in identifying the designer on the basis of that assumption.

WARD: But how do you test that?

MEYER: In some of the ways I mentioned previously.

WARD: Science cannot test the supernatural, and that's what you're advocating—natural science cannot deal with what you want it to go to. It is NOT science.

MEYER: If your argument was true, Peter, then we would not be able to test the conclusion that the Rosetta Stone had been made by an intelligent agent [rather] than wind and erosion.

WARD: Oh, that's crap!

MEYER: That, again, was not an argument. The point is we test our inferences about the past against our knowledge of the cause-and-effect structure of the world. We know from experience that intelligence produces information. When we find information on the Rosetta Stone, we therefore infer that there was an intelligent cause at work. That is testable against the backdrop of our knowledge of cause-and-effect experience.[45]

Well, Meyer is certainly correct that "crap" is not an argument. And the issue for biology is not whether the cause is supernatural or natural, but whether it is intelligent or materialistic.

But don't you think atheists would tell Meyer, if they could, what natural laws can produce specified and complex information? They could shut up Meyer and his colleagues forever by falsifying a central argument for ID. But they can't because Meyer and ID proponents have the evidence on their side.

While ID is open to falsification, the same *cannot* be said about the Darwinist position. Darwinists don't allow falsification of their "creation story" because, as we have described, they don't allow any other creation story to be considered. Their "science" is not tentative or open to correction; it's more closed-minded than the most dogmatic church doctrine the Darwinists are so apt to criticize.

Finally, it's the Darwinists who are committing a "natural-law-of-the-gaps" fallacy. When they are totally at a loss for how irreducibly complex, information-rich biological systems came into existence, they simply cover their gap in knowledge by claiming that natural selection, time, and chance did it.

But natural laws have never been observed to create specified complexity; to infuse massive amounts of new information into new life forms; to

transcend genetic limits; or to create and modify irreducibly complex systems. At best, natural selection may be responsible for minor cyclical changes in existing living species, but it cannot explain the origin of the first life or the basic forms of life.

Yet despite the obvious problems with their mechanism, Darwinists insist that natural laws cover any gap in their knowledge. Moreover, they ignore the positive, empirically detectable evidence for an intelligent being. This is not science but the dogma of a secular religion. Darwinists, like the opponents of Galileo, seem to be letting their religion overrule scientific observations. (You don't agree with that claim? Does it make you mad? We're not trying to make you mad, but what if it's true?)

Objection: We Don't See This Invisible Intelligent Designer

Some critics of ID admit that we've seen human beings create inscriptions, books, and crimes before, but we've never seen the mysterious designer that ID proponents posit. So how do we know this designer exists?

Well, that's the very question, isn't it? What counts as evidence for an unseen designer? Just because something is unseen doesn't mean it's not real. There are many unseen realities that scientists use every day, such as the laws of logic, the laws of mathematics, the laws of nature, their minds, and so forth. Stephen Meyer writes,

> Physicists postulate forces, fields, and quarks; biochemists infer submicroscopic structures; psychologists discuss their patients' mental states. Evolutionary biologists themselves infer unobserved past mutations and invoke the existence of extinct organisms and transitional forms for which no fossils remain. Such things, like the actions of an intelligent designer, are inferred from observable evidence in the present, because of the explanatory power they may offer.[46]

Darwinists, who still cling to the crumbling theory, also must assert that unobserved natural processes can supposedly create the long specified and complex messages we see in DNA, overcome genetic limits, modify irreducibly complex systems while maintaining function, and somehow mutate epigenetic information to get a new body plan without killing the creature. And they must insist all this has happened by causes they cannot see or duplicate in the lab.

So both sides in the ID-evolution debate are positing unseen causes. Both sides infer from the effects they can see to causes they can't see. The difference is that the ID folks have a cause adequate to produce the biological effects they see, and evidence beyond biology to corroborate that such a cause actually exists (e.g., the beginning of all physical reality; the fine-tuning of the universe, including the laws of nature; the existence of objective moral obligations; the laws of logic; our ability to reason; etc.).

Objection: Intelligent Design Is Religiously Motivated

There are two aspects to this objection. The first is that some Intelligent Design people may be religiously motivated. So what? Does that make Intelligent Design false? Does the atheistic motivation of some Darwinists make Darwinism false? No, the truth doesn't lie in the motivation of the scientists but in the quality of the evidence. A scientist's motivation or bias doesn't necessarily mean he's wrong. He could have a bias and still be right. Bias or motivation isn't the main issue—truth is. To dismiss a claim because of its source is called the "Genetic Fallacy" in logic.

Now, as we said earlier, if philosophical or religious biases prevent someone from interpreting the evidence correctly, then we would have grounds for questioning that person's conclusions. In the current debate, that problem seems to afflict Darwinists more than anyone else. Yet the main point is that even if someone is motivated by religion or philosophy, their conclusions can be corrected by an honest look at the evidence. Scientists on both sides of the fence may have a difficult time being neutral, but if they have integrity, they can be objective.

The second aspect of this objection is the charge that Intelligent Design people don't have any evidence for their view—they're simply parroting what the Bible says. This aspect of the objection doesn't work either. Intelligent Design beliefs may be *consistent* with the Bible, but they are not *based* on the Bible. As we have seen, Intelligent Design is a conclusion based on empirically detectable evidence, not sacred texts. As Michael Behe observes, "Life on earth at its most fundamental level, in its most critical components, is the product of intelligent activity. The conclusion of intelligent design flows naturally from the data itself—not from sacred books or sectarian beliefs."[47]

Intelligent Design is not "creation science" either. Intelligent Design scientists don't make claims that so-called "creation scientists" make, such as

a young earth or worldwide flood. While some may believe those positions, they acknowledge that the data for Intelligent Design is not derived from the Bible but from the scientific evidence. In fact, the evidence they see doesn't necessarily identify the designer as the Christian God. While the designer *could be* the Christian God, the Being instead could be the God of Jews, Muslims, or Deists; the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle; or someone else. That's why ID proponents are from several different religions or no religion at all.

ID scientists study the same things in nature that the Darwinists study—life and the universe itself—but they come to a more evidence-based conclusion about the cause of those things. In short, regardless of what the Bible or other religious texts may say on the topic, *Darwinism should be rejected because it doesn't fit the scientific data*, and Intelligent Design should be accepted because it does.

Objection: Intelligent Design Is False Because the So-Called Design Isn't Perfect

Darwinists have long argued that if a designer existed, he would have designed his creatures better. Stephen Jay Gould pointed this out in his book *The Panda's Thumb*, where he cited the apparent suboptimal design of a bony extrusion pandas have for a thumb.

The problem for the Darwinists is that this actually turns out to be an argument *for* a designer rather than an argument against one. First, the fact that Gould can identify something as suboptimal design implies that he knows what optimal design is. You can't know something is imperfect unless you know what perfect is. So Gould's observation of even suboptimal design implies an admission that design is detectable in the panda's thumb. (By the way, this is another reason the Darwinists are wrong when they assert that Intelligent Design is not science. When they claim something isn't designed correctly, they are implying they could tell if it *were* designed correctly. This proves what ID scientists have been saying all along—ID is science because design is empirically detectable.)

Second, suboptimal design doesn't mean there's no design. In other words, even if you grant that something is not designed optimally, that doesn't mean it's not designed at all. Your car isn't designed optimally, yet it's still designed—it certainly wasn't put together by natural laws.

Third, in order to say that something is suboptimal, you must know what

the objectives or purpose of the designer are. If Gould doesn't know what the designer intended, then he can't say the design falls short of those intentions. How does Gould know the panda's thumb isn't exactly what the designer had in mind? Gould assumes the panda should have opposable thumbs like those of humans. But maybe the designer wanted the panda's thumbs to be just like they are. After all, the panda's thumb works just fine in allowing it to strip bamboo down to its edible interior. Maybe pandas don't need opposable thumbs because they don't need to write books like Gould; they simply need to strip bamboo. Gould can't fault the designer of that thumb if it wasn't intended to do more than strip bamboo. In fact, an article in *Nature* found that the panda's thumb is so well-designed that it "enabl[es] the panda to manipulate objects with great dexterity."[48]

Finally, in a world constrained by physical reality, all design requires trade-offs. Laptop computers must strike a balance between size, weight, and performance. Larger cars may be safer and more comfortable, but they also are less maneuverable and consume more fuel. High ceilings make rooms more dramatic, but they also consume more energy. Because trade-offs cannot be avoided in this world, engineers must look for a compromise position that best achieves intended goals.

For example, you can't fault the design of a compact car because it doesn't carry fifteen passengers. The goal is to carry four passengers, not fifteen. The carmaker traded size for fuel economy and achieved the intended goal. Likewise, it could be that the design of the panda's thumb is a trade-off that still achieves intended goals. The thumb is just right for stripping bamboo. Perhaps if the thumb had been designed any other way, it would have hindered the panda in some other area. We simply don't know without knowing the goals of the designer. What we do know is that Gould's criticisms cannot succeed without knowing those goals.

Objection: Intelligent Design Is a Science Stopper

Peter Atkins, the atheist chemist we saw earlier debating William Lane Craig, claims that concluding "God did it" is "lazy" and would stop science.[49] But this is not a good objection, and it boomerangs back to hit Darwinists.

First, while scientists are tentative about most of their conclusions because new information can overturn existing theories, some questions are settled. For example, no scientist is wasting time looking for a perpetual-motion machine because we discovered the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Similarly, no one is questioning the germ theory of disease or the necessity of giving insulin to diabetics.

But the bigger problem with this objection is that evolution has proven to be a science stopper! For years Darwinists just assumed that over 90 percent of the human genome—especially the bulk of DNA that does not code for proteins—was useless junk left over from the Darwinian process of trial and error. So they didn't see any reason to investigate it. They stopped science. Meanwhile, ID theorists predicted that this DNA wasn't useless junk but directed other functions in the human body. Therefore, they continued to investigate and have been proven correct. "Junk DNA" isn't junk at all. Now their research could be helpful in the fight against disease, because by studying the noncoding region ID theorists are discovering ways to turn off cancer cells. They never would have discovered that had they bought into the science stopper known as Darwinism.

In fact, much of the debate between Darwinists and ID theorists is a result of Darwinists stopping science because they assume they already know the answer. So they dismiss the increasingly obvious evidence of design and try to shoehorn every finding into their crumbling theory, all the while claiming they are champions of science. Sadly, they are instead champions of the self-defeating ideology of materialism—an ideology in which they use their minds to deny the existence of minds and everything else immaterial. But if we don't have minds that can freely follow the evidence where it leads, the very science they claim to champion is impossible.

How Important Is the Age of the Universe?

We couldn't leave the discussion of evolution and creation without at least mentioning the age of the universe. Many Christians believe Genesis 1 is teaching a young earth, but others don't.

For example, John Lennox believes that Genesis 1 leaves the age of the earth indeterminate because the universe is created in Genesis 1:1 before the seven days ever begin.[50] This would also fit with other conservative scholars who say the Genesis creation account isn't addressing the age issue because that wasn't a question for the people to whom it was written.

Instead, Genesis 1 is addressing the big question the Hebrews had after 400 years in Egypt: "Is Yahweh the true God or are the Egyptian gods the true gods?" Therefore, these scholars say that Genesis 1 is a polemic against the Egyptian creation story.[51] Unlike Egyptian creation accounts, in which

finite preexisting gods *inside* the universe fight to bring order to chaos, Yahweh is the true God who exists *outside* the universe and just speaks to bring order to chaos. That seems to be the primary purpose of the text, not how long ago creation happened.

Contrary to popular opinion, the Bible and science do not conflict on creation. However, there are some *interpretations* of the natural world (science) and the Bible that do conflict. Since there are several views on this topic, especially within Christian circles, we do not have space to treat them all here.[52] Look them up if you're interested. But the more important point is not *when* the universe was created but *that* it was created.

As we have seen, the universe exploded into being out of nothing, and it has been precisely fine-tuned to support life on earth. Since this universe—the entire time-space continuum—had a beginning, it required a Beginner, no matter how long ago that beginning was. Likewise, since this universe is designed, it required a designer, no matter how long ago it was designed. So regardless of what view we take, we must be sure not to obscure the larger point that this creation required a Creator.[53]

Summary and Conclusion

Now let's get to the bottom line. There are really only two possibilities: Either God created us or we created God. Either God really exists or he's just a creation of our minds. As we have seen, Darwinism—not God—is a creation of the human mind. You've got to have a lot of faith to be a Darwinist. You must believe that, *without intelligent intervention*, the following is true:

1. Something arose from nothing (the origin of the universe).
2. Order arose from chaos (the design of the universe).
3. Life arose from nonlife (which means that intelligence arose from nonintelligence, and personality arose from nonpersonality).
4. New life forms arose from existing life forms without intelligence despite evidence to the contrary, such as:
    a. Epigenetic information
    b. Genetic limits
    c. Cyclical change
    d. Irreducible complexity
    e. Molecular conflicts destroying the tree of life

f. Nonviability of transitional forms
g. The fossil record

Okay, so the evidence is not good for macroevolution. But what about *theistic* macroevolution? Perhaps what can't be explained naturally makes good sense if you add God to the picture.

As we have seen, possible evidence for a common ancestor—such as homology or the common genetic code—could instead be evidence for a common designer. With that in mind, I (Frank) recently asked several theistic evolutionists at a public meeting, "What is the best evidence you have for macroevolution that could *not* equally be interpreted as evidence for a common designer?" After a long pause, one scholar at the meeting cited certain errors found at a similar place in the genome of both monkeys and humans. He said that implies a common ancestor because it would make no sense for a designer to put an error in the same place.

Stephen Meyer, who happened to be at the meeting too, revealed that such a conclusion is just another example of Darwinists stopping science by assuming Darwinism is true. Meyer spoke up and said, "ID Theorists don't think those are errors. We are discovering they have function."

At that same meeting, the ID proponents kept asking the theistic evolutionists to identify just where God got involved in the process. The only answer we got was "As little as possible," which was no answer at all. If you're not going to tell us where God intervenes, then why even suggest theistic evolution? And if God does intervene, then you're actually an advocate of Intelligent Design because God is an intelligent designer. Could it be that you're just trying to sound more credible to secular academia by calling your theory theistic *evolution*?[54]

Finally, let's look at the evidence with another question in mind: What would the evidence have to look like for creation (Intelligent Design) to be true? How about:

1. A universe that exploded into being out of nothing
2. A universe and solar system that between them have over 100 exquisitely fine-tuned attributes that make life on Earth possible
3. Life that has the following traits:

- Life has been observed to arise only from existing life (it has never been observed to arise spontaneously).

- Life consists of thousands and even millions of volumes of empirically detectable specified complexity (and is, therefore, more than just the nonliving chemicals it contains).
- Life changes cyclically and only within a limited range.
- Life cannot be built or modified gradually (i.e., is irreducibly complex).
- Life has diverse forms that cannot be arranged into a "tree."
- Life leaves a fossil record of fully formed creatures that appear suddenly, do not change, and then disappear suddenly.

An honest look at the facts suggests Intelligent Design, not macroevolution, is true. As we have seen, atheists must work really hard not to conclude the obvious. That's why they need to have a lot more faith than we do.

Finally, we have a proposal to help resolve the debate in America over what should be taught in the public schools regarding our origin. What would be wrong with teaching students what we've just covered in chapters 3 to 6? Notice that we haven't been quoting Bible verses to make our points. We've been citing scientific evidence.

So this isn't a battle of science versus religion; it's a battle of *good* science versus *bad* science. Right now, most of our children are being taught bad science because they're being taught evolution only. It doesn't have to be that way. What would be unconstitutional about teaching the SURGE evidence, showing them the complexity of the simplest life, making the distinctions between micro- and macroevolution and between forensic and empirical science, or exposing the problems with macroevolution? Nothing. So why do we continue to indoctrinate our children in a flawed and crumbling theory that is based more on philosophical presuppositions than on scientific observations?

Why don't we give our children all the scientific evidence—pro and con—and let them make up their own minds? After all, shouldn't we be teaching them how to think critically on their own? Of course we should. But Darwinists go to great lengths to ensure that that doesn't happen. Darwinists would rather suppress the evidence than allow it to be presented fairly. Why? Because this is the one area where Darwinists lack faith—*they lack the faith to believe that their theory will still be believed after our children see all the evidence.*

7

Ten Aspects of Reality That Atheists Take on Faith

> "Until science comes up with a testable theory of the laws of the universe, its claim to be free of faith is manifestly bogus."
>
> AGNOSTIC THEORETICAL PHYSICIST PAUL DAVIES

THUS FAR, WE'VE PRESENTED EVIDENCE for a supernatural being who created and fine-tuned this universe and is the best explanation for life and new life forms. Despite this, many atheists continue to insist that there's no evidence for God. We could ask them, "What kind of evidence would you need to see to believe God exists?"

But it might be better to ask more foundational questions, such as: *Why is there evidence for anything?* Why do we live in an orderly reality where we can use our three-pound brains to discover evidence that accurately describes the real world outside of our skulls? In other words, why is the universe orderly and rationally intelligible at all?

John Lennox often brings up the rational intelligibility of the universe in discussions with atheistic scientists. He asks his atheistic colleagues, "Please tell me how your brain arose." They inevitably respond with an explanation that goes something like this: "My brain evolved by a blind process that didn't have its end in mind." So Lennox asks, "Then why do you trust it?"[1]

Good question. After all, if a computer was somehow thrown together by

a tornado raging through a junkyard, would you trust anything it told you? No, but since experience shows us that we *can* trust our brains and the minds they produce—in other words, our ability to think is an effect that needs a cause—then we need a cause with the power and scope to explain why we have this ability to think.

We've already seen that a cause such as God is necessary to create and fine-tune this orderly universe and the life within it. Blind natural laws, left to themselves, wouldn't even create one protein fold in trillions of earth histories, much less life, much less a human brain.

So why do atheists insist that we got here by natural processes?

Because they've ruled out intelligence and assume naturalism/materialism is true. We've touched on a couple of the problems with materialism already, but let's expand our critique here.

Why Atheists Can Never Use Reason to Disbelieve in God

What is the evidence for materialism? Is it even possible to get evidence for materialism? The answer is no, and there's plenty of evidence against it.

First, materialism is unreasonable because many immaterial realities clearly exist. These include the laws of logic, the laws of mathematics, the laws of morality, and human minds, thoughts, and souls (this commonsense observation informs a philosophical outlook called "realism"). It's undeniable that the laws of logic, minds, and thoughts exist because to deny them is to use them. A purely materialistic view of reality can't explain those things.

While materials are certainly involved in the human thought process, they cannot explain all human thoughts. The *theory* of materialism isn't made of molecules. Likewise, someone's thoughts, whether they be of love or hate, are not chemicals. How much does love weigh? What's the chemical composition of hate? Where is the two-ton pink elephant in your brain that you're thinking about right now? These are absurd questions because thoughts, convictions, and emotions are not completely materially based. Since they are not completely materially based, materialism is false.

The same is true of the message in every one of your 40 trillion cells. DNA can be *expressed* materially but it cannot be *explained* materially. The precise order of the DNA letters cannot be explained by nonintelligent natural laws any more than the letters in this sentence can be explained by the nonintelligent laws of ink and paper.

Moreover, what combination of materials can account for consciousness?

Even Peter Atkins, in his debate with William Lane Craig, admitted that explaining consciousness is a great problem for atheists. It is such a problem that atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett thought consciousness was an illusion (one wonders if he was conscious when he thought that!).[2]

If Dennett's consciousness is an illusion, then so is his argument because it came from an illusion. Not only that, but to discover that something is an illusion, you must get outside of the illusion, just as you must get outside of a dream to discover it's just a dream (you must wake up!). Those living in the matrix have no means of knowing they are in it. So for Dennett to verify that human consciousness is an illusion, he would need to get a perspective beyond human consciousness. That means he would have to be someone like God.[3]

The truth is that rationality, free will, morality, consciousness, and science all require immaterial realities to exist. So when you think about something, make a choice, recognize that a certain behavior is wrong, have a conversation with someone, or interpret evidence from an experiment, you are literally participating in something that transcends the material. That's one aspect of what the word *supernatural* means—it entails phenomena that go beyond the natural, material, or physical. Ironically, when atheists use their reason to assert that the supernatural doesn't exist, they are using the supernatural to say so!

Second, if materialism was true, we wouldn't be able to trust our own reasoning abilities. If rationality is completely natural—our thoughts are caused by the laws of physics alone—then we have no reason to believe that claim is true because it too was caused by the laws of physics alone. You didn't freely reason to that claim by evaluating evidence; it just happened to you like a burp or a sneeze.

Atheist evolutionary biologist J. B. S. Haldane put it well when he wrote, "If my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true . . . and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms."[4] He would also have no reason to trust any of his beliefs, including atheism or evolution.[5] In other words, if materialism were true, you couldn't know it because you wouldn't have the free will to follow the evidence where it leads —you would be merely a moist robot, completely determined by the laws of physics.

C. S. Lewis also lowered the boom on the materialistic worldview. He

wrote,

> [Suppose] there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. It is merely that when the atoms inside my skull happen for physical or chemical reasons to arrange themselves in a certain way, this gives me, as a bye-product, the sensation I call thought. But if so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? . . . But if I can't trust my own thinking, of course I can't trust the arguments leading to atheism, and therefore have no reason to be an atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I can't believe in thought: so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God.[6]

Boom. You can't say it better than that!

Now, Lewis was not suggesting that design and our ability to reason necessarily prove the *Christian* God. But he was saying that our ability to reason is better explained by theism (which could be the Christian God), and that asserting materialism destroys our warrant to argue for anything—including atheism. In effect, atheists can't refute Christianity or get evidence for materialism. They can only assert their claims by blind faith.

This is supremely ironic because atheists—who claim to champion truth and reason—have made truth and reason impossible by their theory of materialism. So even when atheists are right about something, their worldview gives us no reason to believe them because reason itself is impossible in a world driven exclusively by chemical and physical forces.

Third, your self identity over time shows materialism is false. If you were only your molecules, you wouldn't have a persistent self-identity because the molecules in your body continually change over time. "About 330 billion cells are replaced daily, equivalent to about 1 percent of all our cells. In 80 to 100 days, 30 trillion will have replenished—the equivalent of a new you."[7] While different cells turn over at varying rates, estimates for a complete molecular changeover of every cell in your body range from five to seven years.

You are physically not the same person you were when you started to read this paragraph. But the essence of "you" is the same because "you" are not just your body—you also have a soul. Greg Koukl writes,

> Your soul is what you're aware of when you introspect. It is the center

> of all your first-person experiences and the source and "container" of all your mental activities—your thoughts, beliefs, sensations, intentions, and acts of will. Your soul stays the same even when your physical body changes. Indeed, even if you had no body, you would still be yourself since the essential "you" is not physical at all.[8]

One reason you have a physical body is to make the invisible visible—your body in union with your soul makes you visible. You are a soul-body unity. If you were just a physical body, you wouldn't be able to remember anything longer than seven years ago. And it would be wrong to hold you or anyone else morally accountable for anything. Being a molecular machine, you didn't have a choice in what you did, and the person who committed the offense in the past literally wasn't you!

Fourth, I (Frank) and many others now see scientific evidence for an immaterial soul. There are more than 100 documented evidential near-death experiences (NDEs) that show you are more than a just a physical body.[9] These NDEs are not merely the experiences of people who flatline on an operating table and say they saw their deceased loved ones. Such cases can't be verified. The cases I am citing are of people who have had out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and viewed remote events that can be verified.

Upon resuscitation, more than 100 people who had OBEs described events they couldn't have known about or observed while lying on the operating table. These included everything from details about their own resuscitations, as seen from above the room, to simultaneous events hundreds of miles away (in one case, the events were 1,200 miles away!).[10]

This led cardiologist Pim van Lommel, who has done extensive research into NDEs, to conclude, "Scientific research has shown that consciousness can indeed be experienced independently of the body without brain function."[11] Van Lommel is not a Christian, and NDEs do not prove Christianity or any particular view of the afterlife. However, they are consistent with Jesus's teaching that we have souls, and they provide another disproof of naturalism.

Michael Egnor, a neurosurgeon at Stony Brook School of Medicine in New York, makes an even more robust scientific case that the mind and soul exist in his book *The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul.* Drawing on thousands of hours of experiments on the brain and observations of people who are completely functional with even

much of their brains missing, Egnor shows that there is a distinction between the brain and the mind. The brain affects a person's perception, movement, memory, and emotion, but abstract reasoning, moral judgments, and the ability to make free-will decisions do not originate in the brain. They belong to the nonmaterial intellect or soul. One evidence for this is that "people in a persistent vegetative state, which is just short of clinical brain death in terms of consciousness, have been able to communicate with researchers."[12] (See his fascinating book for much more.)

Fifth, if materialism is true, then everyone in human history who has ever had any kind of spiritual experience—good or bad—has been completely mistaken. While this is possible, it does not seem likely given the vast number of spiritual experiences that people have reported. Has every great spiritual leader and thinker in the history of humanity—including some of the most rational, scientific, and critical minds ever—been completely wrong about their spiritual experiences? This includes Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Thomas Aquinas, Johannes Kepler, Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal, and Jesus Christ himself. Can every answered prayer be explained naturally? How about every demonic or occult experience? *If just one spiritual experience in the entire history of the world is true, then materialism is false.*

Not only is reason impossible in an atheistic-materialistic world, but the atheist assertion that we should rely on reason alone cannot be justified. Why not? Because reason actually requires *faith.* As J. Budziszewski points out, "The motto 'Reason Alone!' is nonsense anyway. Reason itself presupposes faith. Why? Because a defense of reason *by* reason is circular, therefore worthless. Our only guarantee that human reason works is God who made it."[13]

Let's unpack Budziszewski's point by considering the source of reason. Our ability to reason is an effect that requires an adequate cause. That is, we know reason works, but *why* does it work? What cause could produce the effect known as reason?

Our ability to reason can come only from preexisting intelligence or mindless matter (intelligence or nonintelligence are the only possibilities). The atheists/Darwinists/materialists believe, *by faith*, that our minds arose from mindless matter without intelligent intervention.

We say it is by faith because, as we saw in chapters 5 and 6, such an assertion contradicts observation. Where have the atheists observed or shown a step-by-step natural process of how nonliving matter turns into a conscious

living thing that can reason? They haven't. Instead, since they dislike the only other alternative—a preexisting intelligence—they assert that some kind of naturalistic story *must* be true.

But before they get to biology, they should recognize that we already have evidence for a preexisting intelligence from the creation and fine-tuning of the universe. Since our universe is designed, it makes sense to conclude that we are designed. And the instrument we use to discover that the universe is designed *is also* designed. In other words, our minds were created to apprehend truth and reason about reality because they were made in the image of the Great Mind for that purpose.

The Bible recognized this millennia ago. John 1 echoes the Genesis 1 account of God creating the universe by stating, "In the beginning was the Word." "Word" here is *logos* in Greek, from which we get the English word *logic*. As we've seen, the scientific and philosophical evidence supports what John said: In the beginning, God—the self-existing, timeless, spaceless, immaterial, personal, powerful, intelligent Mind (the *logos*)—created the universe and everything in it, including our minds.

Are Science and God in Competition?

We've just seen that we must have free will and the ability to reason in order to know anything. Christianity can explain free will and reason; atheists cannot, so they take them on faith. But without free will and reason, science would be impossible. So ironically, it's not science and Christianity that are in conflict; *it's science and atheism that are in conflict.*

But isn't it true that the more science and technology advance, the less we need God?

No, that's a mistake for several reasons.

First, God and science are not in competition because science is not a cause but a method we use to discover causes. Science doesn't say anything or cause anything. What atheists mean when they claim the supremacy of science is that some combination of the four natural forces—gravity, the strong nuclear force, the weak nuclear force, and the electromagnetic force—can explain all the effects we see. But we've already seen why that's not true. *The forces of nature themselves are effects—they were created and are fine-tuned along with the universe.* And no combination of the four fundamental forces can create a multibillion letter program such as DNA or the simplest life.

A second mistake is confusing how something works with how it came to be. As we saw in chapter 5, how something originated and how it works are two different questions. Christians and atheists don't disagree about how technology works. There are not atheist and Christian theories of how cell phones or airplanes operate because those involve empirical processes that can be observed and repeated.

But there are different atheist and Christian theories about three major origin questions:

1. What caused the universe?
2. What caused the first life?
3. What brought new life forms into existence?

Those are historical questions that require piecing clues together and making an inference to the best explanation, just as a detective does when investigating a murder. We often miss that distinction and get duped by assuming that advancing technology means that whatever a scientist says about origin questions must be correct. But discovering new ways to harness natural laws and make technological advances says nothing about how the universe, natural laws, and life came to be in the first place.

Someone who knows how Facebook works isn't necessarily an expert on what it took to create Facebook. *To think that our better understanding of how the natural world works disproves the existence of God is like thinking that our better understanding of how Facebook works disproves the existence of Mark Zuckerberg.*[14] That's fallacious thinking! Knowing how a process works doesn't negate the need for a creator and sustainer of that process. Both types of causes—law and agency (natural and intelligent)—are necessary for Facebook to work and for many aspects of reality to work.

A third mistake in thinking that technology dispenses with God is assuming that every inference to intelligence must be a god-of-the-gaps fallacy. We assume that because so many scientists in the past who were ignorant of natural causes thought God was directly causing natural events. But that assumption misses the point of what scientists are finding now. Advancing technology and increasing scientific knowledge are, ironically, not closing gaps but widening them. In other words, *we are not finding more effects that can be explained by natural forces but more effects that require intelligent causes.*

As we have seen, recent scientific discoveries have found that the universe

had a beginning and is extremely fine-tuned; that life contains billions of letters of software code and is irreducibly complex; and that new life forms require infusions of millions of letters of new software code and new structural information. These findings provide positive evidence for an intelligent agent.

In this chapter, we'll see more of those widening gaps. But perhaps the most important point we'll see is that even repetitive natural forces require a being like God. Aristotle knew this 2,400 years ago. So this next point is an old truth that the modern world needs to rediscover.

Why Science Needs God: The "Right Now" Cause

Paul Davies, who is an agnostic on the question of God, is a respected theoretical physicist at Arizona State University. Yet he was the target of vitriol from many atheists when he asked his fellow scientists to explain the origin of the laws of nature.

In an opinion piece in *The New York Times* titled "Taking Science on Faith," Davies observed that "all science proceeds on the assumption that nature is ordered in a rational and intelligible way. You couldn't be a scientist if you thought the universe was a meaningless jumble of odds and ends haphazardly juxtaposed."[15] He said that scientists take the orderly laws of physics on "faith" and that those laws "all are expressed as tidy mathematical relationships."

Davies then asked the questions he's not supposed to ask: "But where do these laws come from? And why do they have the form that they do?" He went on to say, "Over the years I have often asked my physicist colleagues why the laws of physics are what they are. The answers vary from 'That's not a scientific question' to 'Nobody knows.' The favorite reply is, 'There is no reason they are what they are—they just are.'"

Davies thinks it's "antirational" and makes "a mockery of science" to say that this ordered and rational universe exists as a brute fact "reasonlessly." He wrote, "Can the mighty edifice of physical order we perceive in the world about us ultimately be rooted in reasonless absurdity? If so, then nature is a fiendishly clever bit of trickery: meaninglessness and absurdity somehow masquerading as ingenious order and rationality."

Davies won't appeal to God to explain these laws. He ended his op-ed this way:

> The laws should have an explanation from within the universe and not involve appealing to an external agency. The specifics of that explanation are a matter for future research. But until science comes up with a testable theory of the laws of the universe, its claim to be free of faith is manifestly bogus.

But can we really avoid external agency for the origin of the universe and its natural laws? As we've argued thus far, the origin, order, and design of this fine-tuned universe provide *positive evidence* for a being beyond the universe who has some of the attributes of the Christian God. That order includes fine-tuned natural laws, which would seem to require an intelligent lawgiver. So even if natural laws could produce some of the items we've attributed to God, natural laws themselves would need a cause like God.

Minds as lofty as those of Aristotle and Aquinas took the need for God a step further. They argued that nature itself demonstrates teleology—that it is goal-directed. Since nature consistently goes in a direction, it requires a mind to sustain its direction.

For example, why does an acorn (if it's properly nourished) always become an oak tree? Why doesn't it become an elm tree, a birch tree, or a sea horse? Is an acorn conscious? Is an acorn sitting in the dirt asking itself, "How do I become an oak tree?" No. Since it doesn't have a mind of its own but reliably goes in a direction, there must be an external mind *right now* directing it toward its end. That's what Aristotle called the Unmoved Mover.

Aquinas came along in the thirteenth century and called this his "fifth way" to argue for God. Since natural laws remain constant and consistently sustain effects—such as acorns becoming oak trees, babies becoming adults, uranium decaying into lead—there must be an intelligent sustaining mind driving those natural laws and processes.

Modern science only strengthens that conclusion. As I (Frank) write in *Stealing from God*, what happened to all of us in the womb was undeniably directed:

> Upon fertilization, a biological construction project of astonishing intricacy and precision began without any conscious direction from you or your mother. Hundreds of biological procedures took place automatically and simultaneously involving, among other things, chromosomes, amino acids, proteins, DNA, and cell division. As if they had minds of their own, your new cells—some of them eventually

> reproducing in the womb at a rate of more than 100,000 per second—knew where to go and what to do in order to become each of your major organs. How did certain cells "know" to become heart cells, while others "knew" to become brain cells? There is no known material explanation for their goal-directedness.[16]

Similar goal-directed processes continue inside of you right now. You just made 4 million new red blood cells. You just made another 4 million. And you continue to do that without any conscious input from you!

Please note that this goal directedness argument is not a version of the Cosmological Argument showing God bringing something into existence back in time. Rather, it is a version of the Teleological Argument showing God working in the *present*. It's sometimes called "final causality," and it shows that God is *sustaining* the universe and the laws that govern it toward a goal *right now*.[17]

The fact that God is sustaining laws and processes is what makes science possible. As Davies observed, we couldn't live or find reliable cause and effect if there were no laws of nature, if they were random, or if they changed every ten minutes. So contrary to assertions by some atheists, science doesn't disprove God—our very ability to do science depends on God creating and sustaining this orderly universe, including the laws that govern it. Ironically, science hasn't disproven God; science needs God to even be possible!

Not surprisingly, the Bible affirms that God is a sustaining cause. Paul proclaims, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), and, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). The writer of Hebrews declares, "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, *sustaining* all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3 NIV 1984).

God is to the universe what a band is to music. A band creates and sustains music, but the music ends the moment the band stops playing. Likewise, God creates and sustains this fine-tuned universe and the laws that govern it, but they will end if he pulls his power away.

Philosophy professor Edward Feser has written much about Aristotle, Aquinas, and this argument from final causality. Once an atheist but now a Roman Catholic, partially due to the power of this argument, Feser writes, "If you find yourself intellectually convinced that there is a divine Uncaused Cause who sustains the world and you in being at every instant, and don't

find this conclusion extremely strange and moving, something that leads you to a kind of reverence, then I daresay you haven't understood it."[18]

Ten Aspects of Reality That Atheists Take on Faith

We've noticed that many atheists who declare that there's no evidence for God aren't open to evidence. These include people such as theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss and the late author and journalist Christopher Hitchens, who have described themselves not merely as atheists but as "antitheists." Krauss doesn't just disbelieve God; he is opposed to God and rejects him, just as Hitchens did.

I (Frank) had two debates with the brilliant Hitchens (who sounded even more brilliant than he was because he had a British accent!). We first debated "Does God exist?" but he would not interact seriously with the arguments for God. That's why, for our second debate, I insisted that we discuss this question: "What Better Explains Reality: Atheism or Theism?"[19] That way we both would have the burden of proof to explain why things are the way they are. In effect, I was asking Hitchens, "How do you explain reality in the absence of God?"

Answering that question is necessary for anyone attempting to defend their worldview. Whatever your beliefs—Christian, atheist, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, New Ager, agnostic, or anything else—you still have the burden of proof to explain why reality is the way it is. Every rational worldview must explain:

1. The creation of the universe
2. The fine-tuning of the universe, including the natural laws that govern it
3. The creation of life
4. The creation of new life forms
5. Consciousness and our ability to think (which includes our ability to do science)
6. The laws of logic and the rational intelligibility of the universe
7. The laws of mathematics and why reality can be described mathematically
8. The Moral Law, including objective moral values and obligations (see chapter 8) and the existence of evil (see appendix 1)
9. Old Testament prophecy (see chapter 14)

10. The unparalleled character and life of Jesus, including the evidence for his resurrection from the dead (see chapter 13), that make him the most influential human being in history

Some of the effects on this "reality list" are the reasons why most people throughout history have believed in a higher power. They've intuitively sensed that every effect has a cause, and atheism offers no ultimate cause. While some people have historically committed the god-of-the-gaps fallacy by falsely attributing natural effects to the gods, the effects on the reality list not only lack a natural explanation but also show positive evidence of intelligence.

To avoid having to explain the effects on the reality list, some atheists now claim that they simply "lack a belief in God." Our response has been to say, "If you just 'lack a belief in God,' you're not really saying anything about whether God exists. You're just revealing your psychological state. That doesn't prove anything. It would be like us saying, 'We lack a belief in materialism and evolution.' Our 'lack of belief' wouldn't show materialism and evolution are false."

We ask atheists who say they "lack a belief" this question: "Do you agree or disagree with the claim 'God exists'?" If they agree, they're theists; if they disagree, they're atheists; if they don't know, they're agnostics.

We then ask, "What evidence do you have for your answer?" Simply saying you "lack a belief" in the Christian explanation doesn't explain away the evidence for Christianity, nor does it provide alternative causes for the effects on the reality list.

If one detective presents evidence that suspect X is the murderer, a second detective may say he lacks a belief that X is the real killer. But has the second detective done his job if he doesn't offer reasons for his conclusion or stops searching for the real killer? No, both detectives have a responsibility to look at all the evidence and find out who did it. The same is true for anyone claiming his or her worldview is true, including atheists who think there is no god and materialism is true. Some atheists think they can just play naysayer. But smelling a rotten egg is not the same as laying a better one.

More responsible atheists have suggested quantum fluctuations, multiple universes, and evolution as causes for a few of these truths about reality. As we saw in chapters 3 to 6, those explanations don't work and are faith positions because they lack evidence. But even if they did work, they fall far

short of explaining the entire list. That is, atheist theories lack the explanatory power and scope for what we know to be true about reality and how we can know it.

This failure to explain reality adequately also affects Christians who have "deconstructed" their faith. Although they may not realize it, any deconstruction of one set of beliefs automatically demands the construction of a new set of beliefs. Merely asserting Christianity is false doesn't negate the evidence for Christianity, nor does it relieve the non-Christian of the responsibility to explain why reality is the way it is in the absence of God. If God is no longer the cause of the list above, then who or what is?

Rather than providing evidence for *their* beliefs, atheists and former Christians tend to offer complaints about the way God is running the universe. They claim that God allows too much evil, he doesn't reveal himself enough, he was immoral in the Old Testament,[20] he puts too many sexual restrictions on them, and so forth. But complaints are not evidence against God, especially when an omniscient God might have sufficient reasons unknown to us, and true charges of immorality require an objective moral standard that would not exist unless God did (see the next chapter).

Complaints also fail to provide any evidence-based explanations for how the items on the reality list could exist without God. A teenager can complain about how his dad is running his home, but complaints don't disprove the existence of his dad, nor do they provide the resources necessary to keep the home going (maybe the teen should move out and make it on his own while he still knows everything!).

In our experience, skeptics and critics of Christianity who raise the bar of evidence to accept Christian beliefs conveniently lower the bar to the ground for their own beliefs.[21] They may claim they are following the evidence where it leads. But when we ask them for evidence for *their* beliefs about who or what caused the items on the reality list, they offer little more than speculations or *faith* that naturalistic explanations will turn up in the future.

The Atheist Versus the Critical-Thinking Consultant

The very fact that atheists think they have reasons to be atheists presupposes that some kind of God exists. How so? Because *reasons* require that this universe be a *reason*able one that presupposes there is order, logic, design, and truth. But order, logic, design, and truth can exist and be known only if there is an unchangeable objective source and standard of such things.

The human mind is not that objective standard of truth or the source of the laws of logic. If no human minds existed, the proposition "No human minds exist" would still be true. Therefore, the source and standard of truth must be an unchangeable and eternal mind.[22] That's what we mean by God. (As we'll see later, Jesus claimed to be God, so it's not surprising that he also claimed to be "the truth" who existed before the world began.)

Moreover, to say something is *un*reasonable, atheists must know what *reasonable* is. To say something is *not* designed, atheists must know what *designed* is. To say something is *not* true, atheists must know what *truth* is, and so forth. As we have seen, none of these concepts have material explanations. Like all nontheistic worldviews, atheism steals from the theistic worldview to make its own view intelligible.[23]

This tendency of atheists to steal unwittingly from the theistic worldview was beautifully exposed by author Pete Bocchino[24] during a curriculum meeting for the state of Georgia's Department of Education. Pete, who was working for an internationally known Christian ministry at the time, was slated to be on a subcommittee to review and improve the sixth- to twelfth-grade public school curriculum in subjects such as U.S. government, law, ethics, and character training.

The first of a weeklong series of meetings was held in a large room, where all the subcommittee members were given an opportunity to introduce themselves. Pete, who got held up in traffic, arrived late, missed the introductions, and started heading for his seat. When the subcommittee chairman noticed Pete walking in, he told him that they had already introduced themselves and asked Pete to do the same by giving his name, background, and occupation. Pete gave his name and said that he had a degree in mechanical engineering.

Pete thought to himself, "I certainly don't want to bring Christianity into this by telling them that I work for an international Christian ministry." So he cryptically said, "I currently work for a not-for-profit organization as a critical-thinking consultant."

The chairman said, "A what?"

"A critical-thinking consultant," Pete repeated.

"What exactly does a critical-thinking consultant do?" the chairman persisted.

"Well, we're already running late, and I don't want to take up the committee's time," Pete reasoned, "but you'll find out during the week."

As the week progressed, the committee debated various topics, such as diversity, tolerance, human rights, and other controversial issues. At one point, when they were discussing psychology standards, Pete noted that the standards did not contain a definition of personhood. This was a gaping hole in the psychology curriculum, so Pete submitted the following definition based on a section of Mortimer Adler's book *Haves Without Have-Nots*:[25]

> Course: Psychology / Topic: Uniqueness
> Standard: Evaluates the uniqueness of human nature and the concept of personhood.
>
> 1. Intellect / conceptual thought
> 2. Freedom to choose / free will
> 3. Ethical responsibility (standards)
> 4. Moral accountability (obligations)
> 5. Inalienable rights of personhood

As soon as this standard was placed on the table, an educator sitting across from Pete—who had made it known that she was an atheist—was about to challenge this standard. Before she could do that, Pete stopped her and said to the group,

> If anyone were to disagree with this standard, they would be doing the following:
>
> 1. That person would be engaging me in conceptual thought (as in 1 above).
> 2. That person would be exercising his/her "freedom" to do so (as in 2 above).
> 3. That person must think that there is an ethical responsibility to teach what is right/true (as in 3 above).
> 4. That person is seeking to hold me morally accountable to teach the truth (as in 4 above).
> 5. That person has the right to disagree with my position (as in 5 above).
>
> So if anyone were to disagree with these criteria, that person would actually confirm the validity of each point of these criteria.

The group became rather quiet for a moment. Then the chairman spoke up and said, “Now we know what a critical-thinking consultant does!” With that, he told the committee secretary to include the standard in the recommendations.

With a little critical thinking, we see that the atheistic worldview collapses not only from a lack of evidence but also because atheists must unwittingly steal from the theistic worldview as they attempt to make their case. In other words, atheists tend to exempt themselves from their own theories. While they may claim that everyone is merely a molecular machine and that consciousness is an illusion, atheists don’t act as if *they* are molecular machines and *their* consciousness is an illusion.

Consciousness, free will, objective morality, and human rights as well as reason, logic, design, and truth can exist only if some kind of God exists. Yet atheists must assume some or all of these realities when they defend their worldview. They can’t have it both ways.

Atheists Have the Wrong Box Top

In the introduction we said that a worldview is like a box top that allows you to place the many pieces of life’s puzzle into a complete, cohesive picture. If you have the right box top, then the pieces make sense in light of the complete picture.

But what if you keep discovering pieces that don’t fit the box top you have? Common sense would tell you that you’ve got the wrong box top, so you need to look for the right one. Unfortunately, many atheists won’t do this. The evidence strongly indicates that they have the wrong box top, but they refuse to consider that’s even possible (much less look for the right one). Their preconceived box top shows a picture without intelligent causes. Yet, as they themselves acknowledge, they’ve discovered many pieces to the puzzle that have the clear appearance of being intelligently designed. In effect, they’re trying to fit theistic pieces into their atheistic/materialistic puzzle. How do they do this?

Instead of discarding the wrong box top and finding the right one, atheists simply insist that the pieces aren’t really what they appear to be. They try to fit every piece—from the precisely designed universe to the information-rich single cell—into a puzzle that doesn’t have those pieces in it. In doing so, they disregard observation, which is the very essence of the empirical science they claim to champion. As they themselves admit, atheists are

philosophically committed to their box top regardless of what the puzzle pieces look like.

How do you find the right box top to the puzzle of life? Arriving at the right box top is not a matter of preference (you like naturalism, I like theism). No, it's a matter of objective fact. By using the self-evident first principles of logic and the correct principles of scientific investigation, we discovered in chapters 3 and 4 that this is a theistic universe. Since this is a theistic universe, naturalism is false. Since naturalism is false, atheists are not interpreting the evidence correctly.

It's important to realize that this is not a debate about evidence. *Everyone is looking at the same evidence.* This is a debate about how to *interpret the evidence*, and your interpretation is dependent on the box top you think describes reality. If your box top causes you to philosophically rule out intelligent causes beforehand—as the atheists do—you will never interpret the evidence properly if an intelligent being actually is responsible.

Since we already know that a designer exists through creation and fine-tuning, when we see biological systems that even Darwinists like Richard Dawkins recognize "give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose,"[26] maybe we ought to conclude that *they really were designed for a purpose.*

As William Dembski points out, "If a creature looks like a dog, smells like a dog, barks like a dog, feels like a dog, and pants like a dog, the burden of evidence lies with the person insisting the creature isn't a dog."[27] Since the universe was created and designed, then we should expect to find that life was created and designed as well. (At least it's *possible* that life was created by intelligence. Ruling out that possibility beforehand is clearly illegitimate.)

So the conclusion that life is the product of an intelligent designer makes sense because it's not a lone piece of evidence. It's consistent with other scientific findings. Or to continue with our jigsaw puzzle analogy, it's a piece that fits perfectly with the other pieces of the puzzle.

So Why Are There Still Atheists?

If the evidence is so strong for God, then why are so many scientists still atheists? After all, these people are not dummies—their names are usually followed by the letters PhD!

Of course, many truly believe that the scientific evidence supports their theory. We think they get this misconception because experts today rarely

study the research of those in other fields. As a result, very few get the big picture. Many academics are so specialized that they might study the mating habits of, say, the South African natal fruit fly to the point that they know more and more about less and less until they know everything about nothing!

Theology used to be known as the queen of the sciences because it attempts to discover if God exists, and if so, how all the areas of academic study—philosophy, physics, biology, geology, psychology, anthropology, archaeology, history, and so on—fit together under one umbrella of God's truth so we can learn what reality is and how it works. Theology forces you to get the big picture so you can better interpret the details. For example, if God exists, then ruling out intelligent or supernatural causes in advance may cause scientists to interpret the evidence wrongly. Unfortunately, today's narrow specialization often leaves people without the proper context to interpret evidence properly.

According to molecular and cell biologist Jonathan Wells, this narrow specialization is especially true of biologists. Wells observes, "Most biologists are honest, hard-working scientists who insist on accurate presentation of the evidence, but who rarely venture outside their own fields."[28] So although they do honest work, they see only their own piece of the puzzle. Since they've been taught that the Darwinian box top of the puzzle is generally true (it's just those pesky details that remain unresolved), most biologists interpret their piece of the puzzle with that box top in mind, giving the benefit of the doubt to the Darwinian view and assuming that the really strong evidence for Darwinism lies in another specialized field of biology. In other words, they are allowing the Darwinian paradigm to do their thinking for them. Even if they can't see the evidence for abiogenesis or macroevolution in their piece of the puzzle, the evidence must be somewhere else in biology because the Darwinian box top requires those things to be true.

There is also the normal human reluctance to admit you've been wrong about a theory to which you've devoted your career. That's why new theories rarely take hold until the old guard has retired. And even though high-profile biologists are now admitting Darwinism doesn't work, it takes time for that conclusion to reach the rest of the biologists and the general public.

But there are even more personal reasons why people cling to atheism or Darwinism. We know because they either tell us or their behavior gives it away. For example, Richard Dawkins has famously written, "It is absolutely

safe to say that if you meet somebody who claims not to believe in evolution, that person is ignorant, stupid or insane (or wicked, but I'd rather not consider that)."[29] Dawkins's comment is false. There are brilliant PhDs who believe in Intelligent Design. But the real question is, Why the invectives? Why the emotion? Why the hostility? We thought this was science. There must be something else at stake here. There is.

Let's go back to Richard Lewontin's quote from chapter 5. Recall his assertion that Darwinists believe in the absurdities they do because "materialism is absolute for we cannot allow a divine foot in the door."[30] Now, that's the real issue for some—keeping God out. But why would Darwinists not want a "divine foot in the door"? We suggest four major reasons.

First, by admitting God, atheists would be admitting that they are not the highest authority when it comes to truth. Currently, in this technologically advanced world, scientists are viewed by the public as the revered authority figures—the new priests who make a better life possible and who comprise the sole source of objective truth. To allow the possibility of God would be to relinquish their claim of superior authority. Probably the most popular appeal to authority in Western culture is "Science says _____."

Second, by admitting God, atheists would be admitting that they don't have absolute authority when it comes to explaining causes. In other words, if God exists, they wouldn't be able to explain every event as the result of predictable natural laws. Lewontin put it this way: "To appeal to an omnipotent deity is to allow that at any moment the regularities of nature may be ruptured, that miracles may happen."[31] As Robert Jastrow noted, when that happens, "the scientist has lost control," certainly to God, and perhaps to the theologian.[32]

Third, by admitting God, atheists would be risking the loss of financial security and professional admiration. How so? Because there's tremendous pressure in the academic community to publish something that supports atheism or evolution, or at least disconfirms Christianity. Find something important and you may find yourself on the cover of *National Geographic* or the subject of a Netflix documentary. Find nothing and you may find yourself out of a job, out of grant money, or at least out of favor with your materialist colleagues. So there's a money, job security, and prestige motive to advance the Darwinian worldview.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, by admitting God, atheists would

be admitting that they don't have the authority to define right and wrong for themselves. By ruling out the supernatural, atheists can avoid the possibility that anything is morally prohibited. If there is no God, everything is lawful, as the character Ivan Karamazov observed in a Dostoevsky novel.[33]

The late Julian Huxley, once a leader among Darwinists, admitted that sexual freedom is a popular motivation behind evolutionary dogma. When he was asked, "Why do people believe in evolution?" Huxley honestly answered, "The reason we accepted Darwinism even without proof, is because we didn't want God to interfere with our sexual mores."[34] Notice he didn't cite evidence for abiogenesis or evidence from the fossil record. The motivation he observed to be prevalent among evolutionists was based on moral preferences, not scientific evidence.

Philosopher Thomas Nagel, a professor at New York University, penned a book that shocked his fellow atheists. The book is titled *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*.[35] His admission that his own worldview appeared to be wrong was even more shocking because he had previously written,

> I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that. My guess is that this cosmic authority problem is not a rare condition and that it is responsible for much of the scientism and reductionism of our time.[36]

Nagel's admission seems to have applied to Christopher Hitchens, who expressed his own cosmic authority problem. His objections to God were much more about rebellion to moral authority than evidence. He characterized God as a cosmic North Korean dictator peering into our sex lives, and rejected such an "unalterable celestial dictatorship."[37] Even his book title and punctuation screamed out contempt—*god Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.[38]

While Hitchens was verbally gifted, his book was short on evidence and long on attitude. That is why I concluded both of my debates with him this way: "You can sum up Christopher's book in one sentence: *There is no God, and I hate him.*"[39]

Former atheist Lee Strobel reveals that he had a moral motivation to

believe in Darwinism. He writes, “I was more than happy to latch onto Darwinism as an excuse to jettison the idea of God so I could unabashedly pursue my own agenda in life without moral constraints.”[40]

The late author and lecturer Ron Carlson had Darwinists admit the same to him. On one such occasion, after lecturing at a major university on the problems with Darwinism and the evidence for Intelligent Design, Carlson had dinner with a biology professor who had attended his presentation.

“So what did you think of my lecture?” Carlson asked.

“Well, Ron,” began the professor, “what you say is true and makes a lot of sense. But I’m gonna continue to teach Darwinism anyway.”

Carlson was baffled. “Why would you do that?” he asked.

“Well, to be honest with you, Ron, it’s because Darwinism is morally comfortable.”

“Morally comfortable? What do you mean?” Carlson pressed.

“I mean if Darwinism is true—if there is no God and we all evolved from slimy green algae—then I can sleep with whomever I want,” observed the professor. “In Darwinism, there’s no moral accountability.”[41] Now, that’s a moment of complete candor.

This is not to say that all Darwinists think this way or that all atheists are immoral—some undoubtedly live morally better lives than many so-called Christians. It simply reveals that some people are motivated not by the evidence but rather by a desire to remain free from the perceived moral restraints of God. This motivation may drive them to suppress the evidence for the Creator so they can continue to live the way they want to live.[42]

These motivations should not surprise us. Sex, money, and power are the motivators that underlie many of our most intense cultural debates. Too often people take positions in those debates that merely line up with what they want to be true rather than what is true.

This explains why some Darwinists suggest such absurd “counterintuitive” explanations—explanations that are “against common sense.” Despite the plain evidence for design, some atheists have signaled or explicitly admitted it’s more important to prevent God from getting his “foot in the door” of their personal lives.

There is a caution for Christians here too. Are you a Christian because you find it attractive rather than because you have evidence it’s true? Motivations don’t determine the truth, but they may determine what you believe.

Summary and Conclusion

Before we leave the evidence from science and move on to morality, let's summarize and draw some conclusions:

1. It's a mistake to think Christianity and science are at odds. It's atheism and science that are at odds. Both agency and law are needed to explain reality, and recent scientific discoveries are showing more evidence for agency (intelligent causes).
2. Although atheists claim to be champions of reason and science, their ideology of materialism can't explain our ability to reason and do science. Molecules in motion can't think or follow the evidence where it leads. Rather, materialism makes reason impossible, which means it can be believed only by faith. There are also several reasons to believe materialism is false.
3. Science requires an orderly universe that is goal directed. This is best explained by God—a self-existent mind who not only created but *sustains* the universe and the natural laws that govern it. So even if atheists could make the case that life is the product of natural forces and macroevolution is true, God would still be necessary to create and sustain the natural forces that drive such processes. Either way—macroevolution or not—a being like God is still necessary.
4. Every worldview needs to explain why reality is the way it is. That includes atheism. Its proponents need to provide causes for the ten items on the reality list in the absence of God. Merely complaining about how God is running the universe doesn't do that.
5. Some atheists admit that they harbor volitional and/or moral objections to Christianity. While motivations don't determine whether our beliefs are true, they may reveal a bias that leads us to not be honest with the evidence and, therefore, arrive at false conclusions.

At the end of the day, there really are only two possible ways to explain reality: Either matter is eternal and gave rise to mind, or mind is eternal and gave rise to matter. All the evidence shows it's the latter. The divine Mind is the source and sustainer of everything on the reality list, including the universe, ourselves, and our ability to reason and do science. Theists have evidence for that cause of reality. Atheists don't have a cause and take ten

aspects of reality, including science and reason, on faith.

8

Mother Teresa Versus Hitler

> We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.
>
> THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

MY FRIEND DAVE AND I (FRANK) were just finishing dinner at a dockside restaurant in Portland, Maine, when the conversation turned to religion. "I don't think one religion can be exclusively true," Dave said. "But it seems like you, Frank, have found a center. You have found something that's true for you, and I think that's great."

Playing along with his premise that something can be true for one person but not another, I asked, "Dave, what's true for you? What makes life meaningful for you?"

He said, "Making money and helping people!" Now, Dave is a very successful businessman, so I pressed him a little bit more.

I said, "Dave, I know CEOs who have reached the pinnacle of business success. They've planned and achieved great things in their business life but have planned nothing and achieved little in their personal lives. They're now facing retirement, and they're asking themselves, 'Now what?'"

Dave agreed and added, "Yeah, and I know that most of those CEOs have experienced nasty divorces, mostly because they ignored their families in

pursuit of a buck. But I'm not like that. I will not sacrifice my family for money, and in my business I want to help people as well."

I commended him for his commitment to his family and his desire to help people, but questions still remained. Why should we be faithful to our families? Who said we should help people? Is helping people a universal moral obligation, or is it just true for you but not for me? And how should you help them: Financially? Emotionally? Physically? Spiritually?

I said, "Dave, if there's no objective standard, then life is nothing but a glorified Monopoly game. You can acquire lots of money and lots of property, but when the game is over, it's all going back in the box. Is that what life is all about?"

Uncomfortable with the direction of the conversation, Dave quickly changed the subject. But his sense that he ought to help people was correct; he just had no way of justifying it. Why did he think he should help people? Where did he get such an idea? And why do you and I, deep down, agree with him?

Stop and ponder that point for a minute. Aren't you just like Dave? Don't you have a deep-seated sense that we all ought to help people? We all do. Why? And why do most human beings seem to have that same intuitive sense that they ought to do good and shun evil?

Behind those questions is more evidence for the theistic God. This evidence is not scientific—that's what we've seen in previous chapters—but moral in nature. Like the laws of logic and mathematics, this evidence is nonmaterial but just as real. The reason we believe we ought to do good rather than evil—the reason we, like Dave, believe we should help people—is that there's a Moral Law that has been written on our hearts. In other words, there is a "prescription" to do good that has been given to all of humanity.

Some call this moral prescription "conscience"; others call it "Natural Law"; still others (like the American Founding Fathers) refer to it as "Nature's Law." We refer to it as "the Moral Law." But whatever you call it, the fact that a moral standard has been prescribed on the minds of all human beings points to a Moral Law Prescriber. Every prescription has a prescriber. The Moral Law is no different. There must be someone we're obligated to obey who has given us this Moral Law.

This Moral Law is our third argument for the existence of a theistic God (after the Cosmological and Teleological Arguments). It goes like this:

1. Every law has a lawgiver.
2. There is a Moral Law.
3. Therefore, there is a Moral Lawgiver.

If the first and second premises are true, then the conclusion necessarily follows. Of course, every law has a lawgiver. There can be no legislation unless there's a legislature. Moreover, if there are moral obligations, there must be someone to be obligated to.

But is it really true that there is a Moral Law? Our Founding Fathers thought so. As Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence, "Nature's Law" is "self-evident." You don't reason to it; you just know it. Perhaps that's why my friend Dave hit a roadblock in his thinking. He knew that helping people was the right thing to do, but he couldn't explain why without appealing to a standard outside himself. Without an objective standard of meaning and morality, life is meaningless and there's nothing objectively right or wrong. Everything is merely a matter of opinion.

Most would agree that Mother Teresa, the Roman Catholic nun who served the poor in India much of her life, was an objectively better moral example than the murderous German dictator Adolf Hitler. But not everyone must agree on moral issues for us to conclude that objective morality exists. In fact, the word *objective* in this context means that certain behaviors are right and others are wrong *regardless of what any human being thinks about them* (in this book we're using the words *objective* and *absolute* interchangeably). This means, for example, that if the Nazis had won World War II and brainwashed everyone to believe that murdering Jews, homosexuals, and gypsies was morally correct, those murderous actions would still have been wrong. Objective morality is based on God's unchanging righteous nature, not human opinion.

Nevertheless, while human agreement isn't necessary, people who have their intellectual and moral faculties working properly are impressed with a fundamental sense of right and wrong. Everyone knows, for example, that love is superior to hate and that courage is better than cowardice.

University of Texas professor J. Budziszewski writes, "Everyone knows certain principles. There is no land where murder is virtue and gratitude vice."[1] C. S. Lewis, who wrote profoundly on this topic in his classic work *Mere Christianity*, put it this way: "Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of double-

crossing all the people who had been kindest to him. You might just as well try to imagine a country where two and two made five."[2]

In other words, everyone knows there are objective moral obligations that are binding on all people at all times and in all places. And an objective Moral Law implies an objective Moral Lawgiver.

Now this does *not* mean that every moral issue has easily recognizable answers or that some people don't deny that objective morality exists. There are difficult problems in morality, and people suppress and deny the Moral Law every day. It simply means that there are basic principles of right and wrong that everyone knows whether they admit them or not. Budziszewski calls this basic knowledge of right and wrong "what we can't *not* know" in his book by that title.[3]

We can't not know, for example, that it is wrong to kill innocent human beings for no reason. Some people may deny it and commit murder anyway, but deep in their hearts they know murder is wrong. Even serial killers *know* murder is wrong—they just may not *feel* remorse.[4] And like all absolute moral laws, murder is wrong for everyone, everywhere: in America, India, Zimbabwe, and every other country, now and forever, whether they have human laws against it or not. That's what the Moral Law tells every human heart. And that Moral Law is evidence that God exists.

How Do We Know the Moral Law Exists?

Let's highlight seven ways we know the Moral Law exists:

1. The Moral Law Is Undeniable

Relativists usually make two primary truth claims: (1) There is no absolute truth and (2) there are no absolute moral values. The Road Runner tactic can help you defuse their first claim: If there really is no absolute truth, then their absolute claim that "there is no absolute truth" can't be true. So when they say, "There is no truth," simply ask, "Is that true?" You can see that the relativist's statement is irrational because it affirms exactly what he's trying to deny.

Like absolute truth, absolute values are also undeniable. While the claim "There are no absolute values" is not self-defeating, the existence of absolute values is practically undeniable. People who deny all values certainly value their right to deny them. Further, they want everyone else to value them as people worthy of respect even while they deny that people have any objective

value.

This was illustrated clearly many years ago when I (Norm) was speaking to a group of affluent, well-educated Chicago suburbanites. After I suggested there are such things as objective moral values to which we all have an obligation, one lady stood and protested loudly, “There are no real values. It’s all a matter of taste or opinion!” I resisted the temptation to make my point by shouting, “Sit down and shut up, you egghead. Who wants to hear your opinion?” Of course, if I had been so rude, she would have rightly complained that I had violated her right to her opinion and her right to express it. Then I could have replied, “You have no such right—you just told me such rights don’t exist!”

Her complaint would have proved that she actually did believe in a real absolute value—she valued her right to say that there are no absolute values. In other words, even those who deny all *values* nevertheless *value* their right to make that denial. And therein lies the inconsistency. Moral values are practically undeniable.

2. Our Reactions Help Us Discover the Moral Law (Right from Wrong)

In the above scenario, the lady’s reaction would have reminded her that there are absolute moral values. A professor at a major university once gave a relativistic student the same experience. The professor, who was teaching a class in ethics, assigned a term paper to his students. He told the students to write on any ethical topic of their choice, requiring each student only to properly back up his or her thesis with reasons and documentation.

One student, an atheist, wrote eloquently on the topic of moral relativism. He argued, “All morals are relative; there is no absolute standard of justice or rightness; it’s all a matter of opinion; you like chocolate, I like vanilla,” and so on. His paper provided both his reasons and his documentation. It was the right length, on time, and stylishly presented in a handsome blue folder.

After the professor read the entire paper, he wrote on the front cover, “F! I don’t like blue folders!” When the student got the paper back, he was enraged. He stormed into the professor’s office and protested, “‘F! I don’t like blue folders!’ That’s not fair! That’s not right! That’s not just! You didn’t grade the paper on its merits!”

Raising his hand to quiet the bombastic student, the professor calmly retorted, “Wait a minute. Hold on. I read a lot of papers. Let me see . . . wasn’t your paper the one that said there is no such thing as fairness,

rightness, and justice?"

"Yes," the student answered.

"Then what's this you say about me not being *fair*, *right*, and *just*?" the professor asked. "Didn't your paper argue that it's all a matter of taste? 'You like chocolate, I like vanilla?'"

The student replied, "Yes, that's my view."

"Fine, then," the professor responded. "I don't like blue. You get an F!"

Suddenly the lightbulb went on in the student's head. He realized he really *did* believe in moral absolutes. He at least believed in justice. After all, he was charging his professor with *injustice* for giving him an F simply because of the color of the folder. That simple fact defeated his entire case for relativism.

The moral of the story is that there are absolute morals. And if you really want to get relativists to admit it, all you need to do is treat them unfairly. Their reactions will reveal the Moral Law written on their hearts and minds.

In this case, the student realized there is an objective standard of rightness by how he *reacted* to the professor's treatment of him. In the same way, I may not think stealing is wrong when I steal from you. But watch how morally outraged I get when you steal from me.

Our reactions also indicate that relativism is ultimately unlivable. People may claim they are relativists, but they don't want their spouses, for example, to live like sexual relativists. They don't want their spouses to be only *relatively* faithful. Nearly every male relativist expects his wife to live as if adultery were *absolutely* wrong and would *react* quite negatively if she lived out relativism by committing adultery. And even if there are a few relativists who wouldn't object to adultery, do you think they would accept the morality of murder or rape if someone wanted to kill or rape them? Of course not. Relativism contradicts our reactions and our common sense.

The Moral Law is not always apparent from our actions, as evidenced by the terrible things human beings do to one another. But it is brightly revealed in our *re*actions—what we do when we personally are treated unfairly. In other words, *the Moral Law is not always the standard by which we treat others, but it is nearly always the standard by which we expect others to treat us.* It does not describe how we *actually* behave, but rather it prescribes how we *ought* to behave.

3. Without the Moral Law, There Would Be No Human Rights

It seems as if people in the West are creating new "rights" every ten minutes, whether it's abortion rights, same-sex marriage rights, or "trans" rights. However, many of the advocates for such rights are atheists, which means they have no justification for rights of any kind. If there is no God, there's not only no right to abortion, there's no right to life; there's not only no right to same-sex "marriage," there's no right to natural marriage; there are not only no trans rights, there are no Christian rights, women's rights, children's rights, or human rights of any kind![5] Unless God exists, everything is just a matter of opinion.

The founders of the United States recognized this when they wrote in the Declaration of Independence:

> We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain *unalienable Rights*, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure *these rights*, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their *just powers* from the consent of the governed (emphasis added).

Notice the phrase "they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." In other words, the Founding Fathers believed that human rights are God-given, and, as such, they are the rights of all people in all places at all times, regardless of their nationality or religion.

They recognized that there was a higher authority—the "Creator"—to whom they could appeal to establish objective moral grounds for their independence. Had they begun with "We hold these *opinions* as our own . . ." (rather than "self-evident" "truths"), they wouldn't have expressed an objective moral justification for their Declaration of Independence. It simply would have been their opinion against that of King George III. So the Founders appealed to the "Creator" because they believed his Moral Law was the ultimate standard of right and wrong that would justify their cause. And their cause was to end the rule of King George in the American colonies. They were convinced that George's rule needed to be ended because he was violating the basic human rights of the colonists.

4. Without the Moral Law, There Would Be No Way to Measure Moral Differences

Consider the two maps of Scotland in figure 8.1. Which is the better map?

How can you tell which is better? The only way to tell is to see what the real Scotland looks like. In other words, you would have to compare both maps to a real unchanging place called Scotland. If Scotland does not exist, then the maps are meaningless. But since it does, we can see that Map A is better because it's closer to the unchanging standard—the real Scotland.

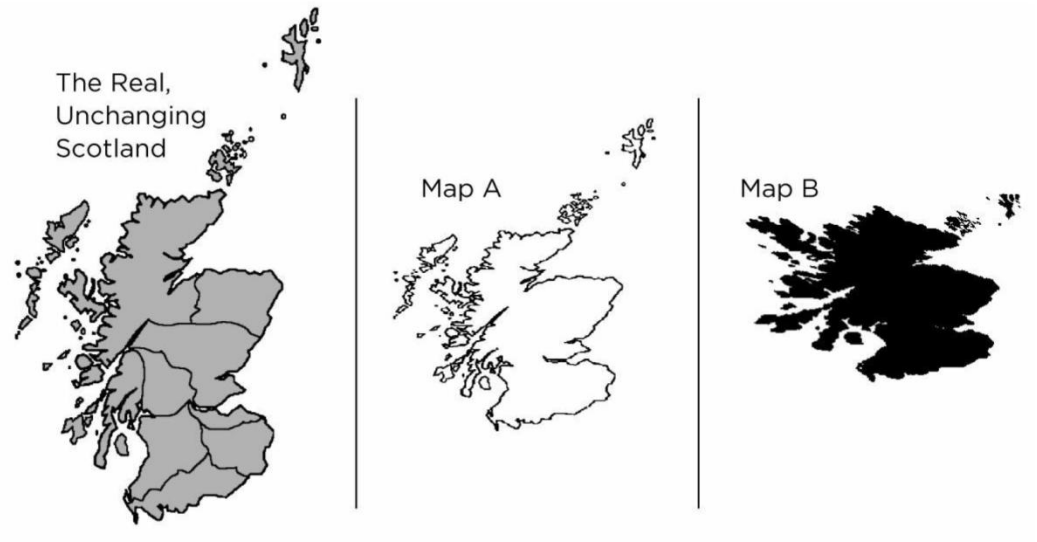


Figure 8.1 Measuring differences by comparison to a standard

This is exactly the kind of comparison prosecutors made when they put Nazi leaders on trial in Nuremburg for their war crimes. The prosecutors appealed to an absolute unchanging standard beyond human opinion and beyond any individual government. If there were no objective Moral Law that transcended German law, then the Allies would have had no grounds to condemn the Nazis. C. S. Lewis put it this way:

> The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either. You are, in fact, comparing them both with some Real Morality, admitting that there is such a thing as a real Right, independent of what people think, and that some people's ideas get nearer to that real Right than others. Or put it this way. If your moral ideas can be truer, and those of the Nazis less true, there must be something—some Real Morality—for them to be true about.[6]

If God doesn't exist, then there's no moral difference between the behavior of the Allies and the Nazis. Likewise, statements such as "Murder is evil," "Racism is wrong," and "You shouldn't abuse children or bully people different than you" have no objective meaning. They're just someone's opinion, on a par with "Chocolate tastes better than vanilla." In fact, without the Moral Law, simple value-laden terms such as *good*, *bad*, *better*, and *worse* would have no objective meaning when used in a moral sense. But we know they do have meaning. For example, when we say, "Society is getting better," or, "Society is getting worse," we are comparing society to some moral standard beyond ourselves. That standard is God's nature expressed in the Moral Law that's written on our hearts.

In short, to believe in moral relativism is to argue that there are no real moral differences between Mother Teresa and Hitler, freedom and slavery, equality and racism, care and abuse, love and hate, or life and murder. We all know that such conclusions are absurd. So moral relativism must be false. If moral relativism is false, then an objective Moral Law exists, which means God exists.

5. Without the Moral Law, We Couldn't Know Justice or Injustice

Perhaps the most popular argument against the existence of God is the presence and persistence of evil in the world. If there really is a good and powerful God, then why does he allow evil? Atheists have long asserted that it is more logical to believe that this God doesn't exist than to try to explain how evil and God can coexist.

However, evil is not an argument against God but an argument *for* God. When Lewis was an atheist, he believed that the injustice in the world confirmed his atheism—until he thought about how he *knew* the world was *unjust.* He wrote, "[As an atheist] my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?"[7] This realization led Lewis out of atheism and ultimately to Christianity.

Lewis realized that you can't know what is unjust unless you know what is just, and you can't know what is just unless there's an unchanging standard of justice outside of yourself that everyone is obligated to obey. That standard is what theologians mean by God's nature. Without God, all moral claims

would just be a matter of opinion, including those against murder, rape, theft, slavery, and racism. Since we know those behaviors are morally wrong, we know that God exists.

But why did God create evil in the first place? He didn't create evil, because evil is not a thing—it is a lack in a good thing. Evil is like cancer. If you take all the cancer out of a good body, you'll have a better body. But what happens if you try to take all the body out of the cancer? You'll have nothing. Evil also is like rust in a car. If you take all the rust out of a car, you'll have a better car. But what happens if you try to take all the car out of the rust? You'll have a Pinto (look it up—it was a car that was worse than nothing!). In other words, evil is a parasite in good, and good can exist in an objective sense only if God exists. So contrary to popular opinion, evil doesn't disprove God—it shows that God does exist.

During a debate I (Frank) had with David Silverman, who at the time was the president of the American Atheists, Silverman claimed that nothing was objectively right or wrong. Yet he also said it was wrong to deny adoption rights to same-sex couples. After I pointed out the inconsistency, he went on to make a shocking claim about the Holocaust. Here's how the conversation went:

SILVERMAN: There is no objective moral standard. We are responsible for our own actions.

TUREK: Responsible to who?

SILVERMAN: To ourselves and to our society.

TUREK: Which society? Mother Teresa's or Hitler's?

SILVERMAN: The society in which we live. Yes, this is not an easy question.

TUREK: So at Nuremburg then we really had no right to convict the Nazis for obeying their government.

SILVERMAN: We as a world society judge our criminals, and we judge them as we see fit.

TUREK: I know we judge them. So you're saying we just judge them based on our preferences. You know in some cultures they take care of their babies, in other cultures they eat their babies. Which do you prefer?

SILVERMAN: I prefer the one where they take care of their babies. I also prefer the ones where the Nazis don't do terrible things under the name of God.

TUREK: But it's just a preference.

SILVERMAN: Yes. It's an opinion.

TUREK: Well, if it's just an opinion, I don't know why you condemn a Christian couple for not wanting to put a baby with a homosexual because that's just their morality that they have every right to express, don't they?

SILVERMAN: They have every right to do it. I'm saying it's a wholly immoral position.

TUREK: According to who?

SILVERMAN: According to me.

TUREK: Well, okay, that's just David Silverman.

SILVERMAN: Of course that's all according to us. We all make our own moral decisions. The only difference between you and me is that I take responsibility for my moral decisions and you justify your moral decisions by finding a passage in the Bible that matches your moral decisions and say, "Aha! It's objective morality."

TUREK: Well, if there is no objective morality, then we have . . . it's even hard to talk this way because we say we have no right, but that implies a moral standard too . . .

SILVERMAN: No, we have a societal right.

TUREK: According to you?

SILVERMAN: According to the government that we create.

TUREK: Okay, well, then we have no real way to condemn the Nazis for what they did.

SILVERMAN: The hard answer is you're correct. The hard answer is it is a matter of opinion. The hard answer is they thought they were doing objective good. They did. So we condemn them as a society, but you know we do this all the time.

TUREK: Yeah, they thought they were doing good, but they really weren't according to a standard. But the only way you could know whether they were really . . .

SILVERMAN: According to whose standard?

TUREK: The unchanging objective moral standard that is God's nature.

SILVERMAN: They did it under the name of God.

TUREK: Well . . . you don't judge a philosophy or religion by its abuse, David. Jesus never said that we ought to go kill the Jews, quite obviously. He was a Jew himself, you should know that.

SILVERMAN: [smiling] Yeah.

TUREK: So because people have abused religion doesn't mean the religion is false.

SILVERMAN: The fact that people have abused religion shows you that morality is relative. If it was objective, you couldn't abuse it.

TUREK: No. You're confusing sociology and morality. Sociology is how people behave; morality is how they ought to behave. We all ought to behave a certain way, but we fail to. By the way, that's why we need a Savior.

When we posted that exchange online, YouTube censored it because Silverman, even though ethnically Jewish, denied the Holocaust was objectively wrong. When someone denies that to maintain his atheism, he is refusing to believe something obvious in order to believe something far less obvious. Namely, we are far more certain that murdering 6 million people is wrong than that atheism is true. So why choose to remain an atheist?

We'll discuss more about the coexistence of evil and God in appendix 1. For now, the main point is this: If there were no Moral Law, then we wouldn't be able to detect evil or injustice of any kind. Without justice there can be no injustice. Likewise, unless there's an unchanging standard of good, there is no such thing as objective evil. But since we all know that evil exists, then so does God and his Moral Law.

6. If There Were No Moral Law, We Wouldn't Make Excuses for Violating It

Did you ever notice that people make excuses for immoral behavior? If you catch someone in a lie, they don't say, "There's nothing wrong with lying!" They come up with excuses about extenuating circumstances or about how *your* behavior was really the source of the problem. Making excuses is a tacit admission that the Moral Law exists. Why make excuses if no behavior is actually immoral?

But we don't just make excuses—we're worse than that. We often try to whitewash our behavior by trying to sell evil as good. Individuals and governments do this.

Abortion is never advertised as killing; it's disguised with moral-sounding words and phrases such as *choice*, *reproductive healthcare*, and *reproductive justice*. And the victim isn't called a baby; he or she is called *the product of*

conception, a *fetus*, or a *blob of tissue*.

Transitioning a young boy is never called *castration*; instead, the procedure has been veiled with the pleasant sounding *gender affirming care*. Many unnatural and harmful behaviors are being sold under the banner of words like *inclusion*, *tolerance*,[8] *diversity*, *equity*, *rights*, and *love*, so much so that now pedophiles are demanding that they be called *minor attracted persons*.

We all know governments love propaganda. Hitler had a minister of propaganda who led people to believe they weren't murdering innocent people; they were doing *good* by offering the *final solution* to create the *super race*. Communist dictators, who silence and kill their own people, prefix the name of their land with "The People's Republic of." One recent bill in the U.S. Congress tried to change the U.S. Code to whitewash convicted criminals as "justice involved individuals."

Why can't we come right out and say that we want to do evil or advocate for it? It's because the Moral Law is pressing on us so much that we need to justify what we are doing by whitewashing it. Why would we do this if we did not know the Moral Law? You don't need to whitewash something unless you know it's dirty.

Now, some of our advocacy of evil may be well intended. We are just mistaken about what evil is because our consciences have become seared by propaganda (especially in this social media age). This happens when a good value, such as empathy, is weaponized against us by causing us to think it should be pursued at all costs without reference to other moral principles. In effect, empathy is "swollen to madness in isolation" so that we think we must agree with people and their bad behavior in order to love them. That's actually toxic empathy.[9] And upon reflection, every parent knows it's toxic. If you approve of everything your thirteen-year-old wants to do, are you loving? No, you're unloving because you're enabling your child to harm herself.

Love does not mean approval. Love means seeking what's best for the other person according to God's definition of best. The most prolific apostle of Christianity, Paul, wrote these famous words about the true nature of love: "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Cor. 13:6–7 NIV 1984).

We're not protecting people when we delight in the evil they do, no matter how natural it feels to them. That's not love; it's toxic empathy because it

enables their destruction. Too often we won't properly love people by telling them the truth because we want to protect ourselves from blowback. We would rather allow people to remain on the path of self-destruction than to see them upset with us. The brilliant Thomas Sowell put it this way: "When you want to help people, you tell them the truth. When you want to help yourself, you tell them what they want to hear."[10]

7. Without the Moral Law, There Are No Moral Grounds for Political or Social Dissent

If you ask people of nearly every political and religious perspective, "What's wrong with the world?," no one will say, "Nothing, everything is perfect!" Everyone recognizes that injustice exists, and most want moral improvements to be made.

But unless God exists, it's impossible to make moral improvements because there is no external standard that tells how the world ought to be. Morality isn't determined by majority vote or mob rule. In fact, correcting the wrong moral positions of the majority is what moral reformers are usually trying to do.

Without God's Moral Law, Abraham Lincoln wasn't objectively right to fight against slavery; Martin Luther King Jr. wasn't objectively right to fight against racism; and any critical theorist complaining about "oppressors" has no moral force behind his or her complaints.

If God didn't exist, there would be nothing wrong with oppression, racism, or slavery. Likewise, there would be nothing wrong with outlawing atheism, confiscating the property of atheists, and giving it to a church. There would be nothing wrong with gay bashing, stealing from the poor, polluting the environment, imperialistic wars, or abusing animals. In other words, without the Moral Law, atheists and everyone else would have no moral grounds to argue for their pet political causes.

Yet atheists are famous for pet political causes. We see them on every college campus we visit: abortion rights, gay rights, trans rights, climate change, critical race theory, social justice, and more. If atheists are going to be consistent, they can't claim there is no objective right or wrong but then claim their own political causes are morally right.

Moreover, they can't say things are wrong with the world unless they know how the world *ought* to be. Every negation implies an affirmation. If someone says, for example, that outlawing abortion is wrong (the negation),

they are implying people have a right to abort their children (the affirmation). But by what objective moral standard are they making such a judgment? In what world *ought* you kill your children? Unless God exists and they have evidence he agrees with them, they have no way to justify their positions as objectively correct.

By rebelling against the Moral Law, atheists have, ironically, undermined their grounds for rebelling against anything! They've made moral progress and moral reformers impossible. But since we all know that people fighting to protect life and ordered liberty aren't fighting for mere preferences—that they involve real moral rights—then God and his Moral Law exist.

Absolute Versus Relative: Why the Confusion?

If there really is an absolute Moral Law as we have argued, then why do so many believe that morality is relative? And why do so many people appear to have different values? Rationally, the reason lies with the failure to make proper distinctions. Let's make those distinctions to clear up the areas of confusion.

Confusion #1—Absolute Morals Versus Changing Behavior

A common mistake of relativists is to confuse behavior with value. That is, they confuse what *is* with what *ought* to be. What people *do* is subject to change, but what they *ought* to do is not. This is the difference between sociology and morality. Sociology is *descriptive*; morality is *prescriptive.*

In other words, relativists often confuse the changing behavioral situation with the unchanging moral duty. For example, in a discussion of a moral topic such as premarital sex or same-sex marriage, you often hear people in support of it say something like "Get with it, this is the twenty-first century!" as if current behaviors dictate what's right and wrong. To illustrate the absurdity of the relativist's reasoning, you need only to turn the discussion to a more serious moral issue, such as murder, which also occurs much more frequently in America today than it did seventy years ago. How many relativists would speak in support of murder by asking us to "get with it, this is the twenty-first century!"? That's where their reasoning takes them when they confuse what people do with what they ought to do.

Another aspect of the *is-ought* fallacy manifests itself when people suggest that there is no Moral Law because people don't obey it. Of course everyone disobeys the Moral Law to some degree—from telling white lies to

committing murder. But that doesn't mean there is no unchanging Moral Law; it simply means that we all violate it. Everyone makes mathematical mistakes too, but that doesn't mean there are no unchanging rules of mathematics.

Confusion #2—Absolute Morals Versus Changing Perceptions of the Facts

Another confusion concerns the existence of an absolute moral value itself and the understanding of the facts used in applying that value. For example, as C. S. Lewis has noted, in the late 1600s witches were sentenced as murderers, but now they are not.[11] A relativist might argue, "See! Our moral values have changed because we no longer seek to kill witches. Morality is relative to time and culture."

But the relativist's claim is incorrect. What has changed is not the moral principle that murder is wrong but the perception or factual understanding of whether "witches" can really murder people by their curses. People no longer believe they can. Hence, people no longer consider them murderers. In other words, *the perception of a moral situation is relative* (whether witches are really murderers), *but the moral values involved in the situation are not* (murder has always been and always will be wrong).

Failure to make this distinction also leads people to believe that cultural differences reflect essential differences in core moral values. For example, some believe that since Hindus revere cows and Americans eat them, there's an essential difference between the moral values of Americans and Hindus. But seeing cows as sacred is not itself a core moral value for the people of India—it has to do with their religious belief in reincarnation. Indians believe that cows may possess the souls of deceased human beings, so they won't eat them. In the United States, we do not believe that the souls of our deceased relatives might be in cows, so we freely eat cows.

In the final analysis, what appears to be a moral difference is actually an agreement—we both believe it's wrong to eat Grandma! The core moral value that it's wrong to eat Grandma is considered absolute by people in both cultures. They only disagree on whether Grandma's soul is in the cow![12] They have different *perceptions of the facts* pertaining to the moral value, but they fundamentally agree that the moral value must be upheld.

Our moral knowledge is so certain on some issues that we know moral facts better than some scientific facts. For example, philosopher J. P. Moreland points out that there have been at least four different theories of

electrons over about the past century.[13] We can imagine believing differently about electrons in the future as we discover more about them. But can we really imagine believing differently in the future on the morality of torturing babies for fun? No, that moral truth is self-evident. Most scientific truths are not.

Confusion #3—Absolute Morals Versus Applying Them to Particular Situations

As we have seen, people know right from wrong best by their reactions rather than by their actions. When people are the victims of bad behavior, they have no trouble understanding that the behavior is absolutely wrong. Yet even if two victims wind up disagreeing over the morality of a particular act, this does not mean that morality is relative. An absolute Moral Law can exist even if people fail to know the right thing to do in a particular situation.

Consider the moral dilemma often used by university professors to encourage their students to believe in relativism: There are five people trying to survive on a life raft designed for only four. If one person isn't thrown overboard, then everyone will die. Students labor over the dilemma, come to different conclusions, and then conclude that their disagreement proves that morality must be relative.

But the dilemma actually proves the opposite—that morality is objective. How? Because *there would be no dilemma if morality were relative!* If morality were relative and there were no right to life, the students would say, "It doesn't matter what happens! Throw everyone overboard! Who cares?" The very reason they struggle with the dilemma is because they know how valuable life is.

While people may get morality wrong in complicated situations, they don't get it wrong on the basics. For example, everyone knows murder is wrong. Hitler knew it. That's why he had to dehumanize the Jews to rationalize killing them. Even cannibals appear to know that it is wrong to kill innocent human beings. It may be that cannibals don't think that the people in other tribes are human. But chances are they do. Otherwise, as J. Budziszewski observes, why do cannibals "perform elaborate expiatory rituals before [they] take their lives?"[14] They wouldn't perform these rituals unless they thought there was something wrong with what they were about to do.

So the basics are clear, even if some difficult problems are not. Moreover,

the fact that there are difficult problems in morality doesn't disprove the existence of objective moral laws any more than difficult problems in science disprove the existence of objective natural laws. Scientists don't deny that an objective world exists when they encounter a difficult problem in the natural world (i.e., when they have trouble knowing the answer). And we shouldn't deny that morality exists just because we have trouble knowing the answer in a few difficult situations.

There are easy and hard problems in morality just as there are in science. Answering a simple scientific problem such as "Why do objects fall to the ground?" proves that at least one natural law or force exists (i.e., gravity). Likewise, truthfully answering a simple moral question such as "Is murder justified?" proves that at least one law of morality exists (i.e., "Don't murder"). If *just one* moral obligation exists (such as "Don't murder," "Don't rape," or "Don't torture babies"), then the Moral Law exists. If the Moral Law exists, then so does the Moral Lawgiver.

Confusion #4—An Absolute Command (What) Versus a Relative Culture (How)

Another important point of difference, often overlooked by moral relativists, is between the absolute nature of a moral command and the conventional way in which that command is followed in different cultures. For example, all cultures have some form of greeting, which is an expression of love and respect. However, cultures differ widely on just what that greeting is. In some it is a kiss; in others it is a hug; and in still others it is a handshake or a bow. *What* should be done is common to all cultures, but *how* it should be done differs. Failure to make this distinction misleads many to believe that because people have different practices they have different values. The moral value is absolute, but how it is practiced is relative.

Confusion #5—Absolute Morals Versus Moral Disagreements

Relativists often point to the controversial issue of abortion to demonstrate that morality is relative. Some think abortion is acceptable while others think it's murder. But just because there are different opinions about abortion doesn't mean morality is relative.

In fact, instead of providing an example of relative moral values, the entire abortion controversy exists because each side defends what they think is an *absolute* moral value—protecting life versus allowing liberty (i.e., allowing a

woman to “control her own body”). The controversy is over *which* value applies (or takes precedence) in the issue of abortion.[15] If the unborn are not human beings, then the proliberty value should be applied in legislation. But since the unborn *are* human beings, the prolife value should be applied in legislation because a person’s right to life supersedes another person’s right to individual liberty. (The baby is not just part of the woman’s body; it has its own body with its own unique genetic code, its own blood type, and its own gender.) Even if there were doubt as to when life begins, the benefit of the doubt should be given to protecting life—reasonable people don’t shoot unless they’re *absolutely* sure they won’t kill an innocent human being.

Recall that our *reaction* to a particular practice reveals what we really think about its morality. Ronald Reagan once quipped, “I’ve noticed all those in favor of abortion are already born.” Indeed, all proabortionists would become prolife immediately if they found themselves back in the womb. Their *reaction* to the possibility of being killed would remind them that abortion really is wrong. Of course, most people deep in their hearts know an unborn child is a human being and therefore know that abortion is wrong. Even some proabortion activists are finally admitting as much.[16] Indeed, abortion is not intellectually difficult—we know a human being lives in the womb. It is emotionally difficult because some people think that life would be easier for them if the baby were not born.

So in the end, this moral disagreement is not because morality is relative or because the Moral Law isn’t clear. This moral disagreement exists because some people are suppressing the Moral Law to justify what they want to do. In other words, support for abortion is more a matter of the will than of the mind. That’s why it may be helpful to ask, “When is killing your own child a good solution to any problem?”[17]

Confusion #6—Absolute Ends (Values) Versus Relative Means

Often moral relativists confuse the end (the value itself) with the means to attaining that end. Several political disputes are of this sort. On some issues (certainly not all), liberals and conservatives want the same things—the same *ends.* They just disagree on the best *means* to attain them.

For example, regarding the poor, liberals believe the best way to help is through government assistance. But since conservatives think such assistance creates dependency, they would rather stimulate economic opportunity so the poor can help themselves. Conservatives also give far more than liberals to

private nonprofit groups that help the poor because conservatives believe that private assistance to the needy is far more efficient and effective than government programs that just impersonally drop checks into bank accounts, with no relationships or accountability. Notice that the end is the same (assisting the poor) but the means are different.

Likewise, both militarists and pacifists desire peace (the end); they simply disagree as to whether a strong military is the best means to attain this peace. They both agree on the absolute *end*; they just disagree on the *means* to achieve it.

How Do Atheists Explain the Moral Law?

So the evidence for the Moral Law is sound, and objections to it miss the mark. Then how do atheists explain the existence of the Moral Law without God?

Some misunderstand the argument. They think Christians and other theists are saying that you must be a believer to know right from wrong or to be good. That's *not* what we're saying. Atheists *can* be good and *do know* right from wrong. They just can't justify what "good," "right," and "wrong" are.

This kind of response came up in both debates I (Frank) had with Christopher Hitchens and both debates I had with Michael Shermer, editor of *Skeptic* magazine. Hitchens and Shermer insisted that since we know right from wrong, God isn't necessary. But that claim confuses two important philosophical categories: epistemology and ontology. Epistemology tries to explain how you know something, while ontology tries to explain the nature and existence of the thing known. *How you know* a moral standard exists (epistemology) does not explain *why that standard exists* in the first place (ontology).

Imagine you're on a road trip with a friend, and you warn him to slow down because the cops just lowered the speed limit due to an accident ahead. Suppose he says, "Relax! Cops don't exist because I know the speed limit." Your friend would be mistaking epistemology with ontology. The fact that he knows what the sign says (epistemology) doesn't explain why there's a speed limit in the first place (ontology)! There would be no speed limit without some kind of traffic authority.

This is the same mistake atheists make when they insist that God isn't necessary because they know morality and are good people. The exact opposite conclusion follows from that evidence. If you know there's a law,

you should also know that there's a law giver. All people know the Moral Law, but only those who believe in God can justify its existence.

Like Hitchens and Shermer, atheist Sam Harris also believes that objective morality exists in the absence of God. But he says that objective morality is related to "the well-being of conscious creatures."[18] That may be true, but it begs a question: Why are we obligated to care about the well-being of conscious creatures?[19] If there is no God and no purpose to life, then conscious creatures are not objectively valuable, and we have no obligation to seek their well-being.

Despite the self-evident nature of moral truths, other atheists bite the bullet of their worldview and insist there is no objective morality. The nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is perhaps the most famous atheist to say this. Atheists today say it too. Richard Dawkins wrote:

> In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. . . . DNA neither cares nor knows. DNA just is. And we dance to its music.[20]

No justice, evil, or good? That's consistent with his atheism, but it's inconsistent with what Dawkins wrote twenty years later, when he penned a colorful rant about how the God of the Old Testament is "a petty unjust, unforgiving control freak" (among other, more caustic charges).[21]

Which is true: There is no justice or the God of the Bible is unjust? He can't have it both ways. Perhaps the Moral Law is so obvious that Dawkins can't help contradicting himself when he thinks someone has acted immorally (especially if that someone is God!).

Elsewhere, Dawkins said that giving birth to Down syndrome babies is "immoral." But if there is no good or evil and we're all just dancing to our DNA, how can anything or anyone be immoral?

Others are not as inconsistent. Among the most popular atheistic explanations for our moral sense is that evolution gave it to us. Let's look at that.

Can Evolution Explain Morality?

Atheists such as Alex O'Connor and Edward O. Wilson deny objective morality and try to explain our sense of morality as a product of evolution. In a radio discussion I (Frank) had with Alex in London in 2017, he asserted that all our moral sentiments come from evolution.[22] Alex was echoing Wilson, who had written earlier that the biological process of people passing their genes on to their offspring "through thousands of generations inevitably gave rise to moral sentiments."[23]

So according to this theory, we may think our moral intuitions are the result of an objective standard, but we are mistaken—moral intuitions are materially and genetically determined by the evolutionary process. They are only inherited feelings or instincts, not real moral commands that give us moral obligations.

If atheism is true, how could they be anything other than mere feelings? A mutating biological code doesn't have the moral authority to tell you what you can and can't do. Chemical reactions don't have moral qualities: They aren't moral standards, and they don't issue commands or obligate humans to follow them.

We have already seen several reasons why natural selection can't explain new life forms (chapter 6). So should we expect it to explain moral sentiments within human beings? No, for several reasons.

First, as I mentioned to Alex during our discussion, if our thoughts about morality are completely the result of a materialistic evolutionary process, then so are *all our thoughts, including Alex's own thought that evolution gives us our moral sentiments.* In other words, his theory is self-defeating because his theory makes knowing the truth about anything impossible. If our moral sentiments really are the product of a materialistic evolutionary process, then we have no way of knowing the theory is true (or anything else). We must take it on blind faith.[24]

Second, morality cannot be merely an instinct because (1) we have competing instincts and (2) something else often tells us to ignore the stronger instinct to do something more noble. For example, if you hear somebody who is being mugged calling for help, your stronger instinct may be to stay safe and not get involved. Your weaker instinct (if we may call it that) might be to help. As C. S. Lewis puts it,

> But you will find inside you, in addition to these two impulses, a third thing which tells you that you ought to follow the impulse to help, and

> suppress the impulse to run away. Now this thing that judges between two instincts, that decides which should be encouraged, cannot itself be either of them. You might as well say the sheet of music which tells you, at a given moment, to play one note on the piano and not another, is itself one of the notes on the keyboard. The Moral Law tells us the tune we have to play: our instincts are merely the keys.[25]

Third, Wilson says that social morals have evolved because those "cooperative" morals helped humans survive together. But this assumes an end—survival—for evolution, when Darwinism, by definition, has no end because it is a nonintelligent process. And even if survival is granted as the end, Darwinists cannot explain why evolution wouldn't urge us to survive by being selfish, including stealing from or raping others to survive. Nor can Darwinists explain altruistic behavior where people subvert their own survival instincts to help others, sometimes to the point of their own deaths.[26] We all know that there are nobler ends than mere survival: Soldiers sacrifice themselves for their friends in battle, parents sacrifice for their children, and, if Christianity is true, God sacrificed his Son for us. Most would agree with Jesus, who said that laying down your life for others is the greatest form of love (John 15:13). As Casey Luskin explains,

> But if human behavior evolved, why do humans exhibit selfless behavior that often prevents evolutionary success? More importantly, if human morality evolved, why do humans universally have internal moral compasses that oddly whisper that selfless love is the "right" option—often whispering the loudest in our most selfish moments? Many of the most sacred aspects of human life seem not tuned to survival and reproduction but higher purposes.[27]

Fourth, Wilson and other Darwinists assume that survival is a "good" thing, but there is no real good without God or his objective Moral Law. In fact, this is the problem with pragmatic and utilitarian ethical systems that say, "Do what works," or, "Do whatever brings the greatest good." Do what works toward whose ends—Mother Teresa's or Hitler's? Do whatever brings the greatest good by whose definition of good—Mother Teresa's or Hitler's? Such ethical systems must smuggle in the Moral Law to define what ends we *should* work toward and what really is the greatest good. Without God there is no objective end, purpose, or good.

Fifth, Darwinists confuse how one comes to *know* the Moral Law with the *existence of* the Moral Law. Even if we come to know some of our moral sentiments because of genetic and/or environmental factors, that doesn't mean there is no objective Moral Law outside ourselves.

This came up in the 1998 debate between Peter Atkins and William Lane Craig. Atkins claimed morality evolved from genetics and "our massive brains." Craig correctly responded, "At best that would show how moral values are *discovered*, but it would not show that those values are *invented*."[28] This is again a confusion of epistemology and ontology. You may inherit a capacity for math and learn the multiplication tables from your mother, but the laws of mathematics exist regardless of how you come to know them. Likewise, morality exists independently of how we come to know it.

Sixth, Darwinists cannot explain why anyone *should* obey any biologically derived moral sentiment. Why *shouldn't* people murder, rape, and steal to get what they want if there is nothing beyond this world? Why *should* the powerful cooperate with the weaker when the powerful can survive longer by exploiting the weaker? After all, history is replete with criminals and dictators who have lengthened their own survival precisely because they *disobeyed* all moral sentiments in their repression and elimination of their opponents. Joseph Stalin, for example, didn't have to cooperate with most of the people in his country to get what he wanted.

Seventh, if these moral sentiments are merely the product of an evolutionary process, couldn't the sentiments evolve further? Might we one day develop "sentiments" for rape and genocide because they will help us propagate our genes and protect our kin? (If that possibility disgusts you, it's because you're appealing to a moral standard outside the evolutionary process.)

Finally, even love is undermined by this materialistic theory. This was revealed in my (Frank's) debate with Christopher Hitchens at the College of New Jersey when a student asked Christopher about the nature of love. Although Hitchens claimed to be a materialist, he tried to suggest there was a transcendent, nonmaterial aspect to love. Seeking clarification on the contradiction, I asked Christopher directly if love was just a chemical. He said, "The likelihood that it is chemical is very strong."[29]

I don't think this kind of answer would endear a man to his wife. Imagine this conversation:

WIFE: “Honey, do you love me?”
HUSBAND: “Of course I do, Darling.”
WIFE: “Why?”
HUSBAND: “Because I have the right chemicals today!”

Really? Is there an atom for love? How much does love weigh? What’s the chemical composition of the compassion molecule? These questions are meaningless because physical particles are not responsible for morality. If materials are solely responsible for morality, then lovers and criminals have no real moral responsibility for what they do—they just have “good” or “bad” molecules.[30]

Such an explanation is nonsense, and we all know it. Moral laws and virtues are not material things any more than the laws of logic and mathematics are material things. They are immaterial entities that cannot be weighed or physically measured. As a result, they can’t be explained in material terms by natural selection or any other atheistic means.

Football and a “Dilemma”

Let’s go back to Richard Dawkins’s claim that if atheism is true, “there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good.” He’s right to admit that without objective purpose there can be no objective good.

To see this point, imagine you like a certain professional American football team. How do you know it’s “good” if your quarterback throws a touchdown and “bad” if he throws an interception? You only know that because you know the purpose of the game—to score more points than the other team. If there was no purpose of the game, you couldn’t say that the touchdown was “good” because it got you closer to the purpose and the interception was “bad” because it took you further from the purpose. You could only say the plays were different.

Now, obviously, football plays don’t have a moral quality, and the purpose and rules of the game are arbitrary. They could be different. But notice that the purpose and rules come from outside the game. The players don’t determine them—the purpose and rules are created and enforced by the NFL commissioner, the team owners, and the referees.

In life, the purpose and rules also come from “outside the game,” but they are not arbitrary because they flow from God’s perfect nature. So while plays in football are not moral, “plays” in life are. Our deepest intuitions tell us that

we ought to act in certain ways and not others. Since we know there are truly good and bad ways to live life, then God must exist.

"But God isn't a better explanation of morality," say some atheists (especially internet atheists). They cite the so-called "Euthyphro Dilemma," which asserts that either God arbitrarily makes up moral rules or he looks to a standard outside of himself. This is supposed to be a dilemma for theists because humans can do that too—we can make up moral rules or we can look to another standard outside of ourselves. So we don't need God for morality.

But this is a false dilemma because there's a third option. God doesn't take cues from a standard beyond himself—if he did, *that* standard would be the true God—nor does he arbitrarily invent moral rules: God *is* the standard. The buck must stop somewhere, and it stops with God's nature. He is the standard of righteousness, justice, and love. So God *is* necessary for objective morality after all.[31]

Does Atheism or Christianity Lead to Violence?

If the Darwinists are right that our sense of morality has a natural source, then morality is not objective. If there is no God and humans evolved from the slime, then we have no higher moral status than slime because there is nothing beyond us to instill in us objective morality, dignity, or purpose.

The implications of this have not been lost on Darwinists and their followers. In fact, Adolf Hitler used Darwin's theory as philosophical justification for the Holocaust. In his 1924 book *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"), he wrote,

> If nature does not wish that weaker individuals should mate with the stronger, she wishes even less that a superior race should intermingle with an inferior one; because in such cases all her efforts, throughout hundreds of thousands of years, to establish an evolutionary higher stage of being, may thus be rendered futile. . . .
>
> But such a preservation goes hand-in-hand with the inexorable law that it is the strongest and the best who must triumph and that they have the right to endure. He who would live must fight. He who does not wish to fight in this world, where permanent struggle is the law of life, has not the right to exist.[32]

For propaganda purposes, Hitler falsely claimed that God was with him.

But his own book reveals that his real justification was Darwinism: There are superior races and inferior races, and the Jews, being an inferior race, have no right to exist if they don't want to fight.

Atheistic Darwinism doesn't *require* this moral conclusion, but it *allows* it. In other words, racism and genocide are a permissible outworking of Darwinism. On the other hand, love and self-sacrifice are the commanded outworking of Christianity. Ideas have consequences.

The racism associated with evolution was explicit in the subtitle of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. Which is the most "favoured" race? Darwin didn't say, but his theory allowed others to fill in the blanks. The high school biology textbook that occasioned the famous Scopes Trial of 1925 spoke of five races of man and concluded that the "Caucasians" are the "highest type of all."[33] This, of course, directly contradicts biblical teaching that all people are made in the image of God and thus equally valuable (Gen. 1:27; Acts 17:26, 29; Gal. 3:28). It also contradicts what is affirmed by the Declaration of Independence ("all men are created equal").

In more recent times, Princeton professor and Darwinist Peter Singer has used Darwinism to assert that "the life of a newborn is of *less* value than the life of a pig, a dog, or a chimpanzee."[34] Yes, you read that correctly.

What are the consequences of Singer's outrageous Darwinian ideas? He believes that parents should be able to kill their newborn infants until they are twenty-eight days of age! These beliefs are not commanded by Darwinism, but they are allowed by Darwinism. If there is no God and we all came from slime, then we have no grounds to say that humans are morally any better than any other species. The only question is, Why limit infanticide at twenty-eight days or, for that matter, twenty-eight months or twenty-eight years? If there is no Moral Lawgiver, then there's nothing wrong with murder at any age! Of course, Darwinists such as Singer might reject this conclusion, but they have no objective grounds for disagreeing unless they can appeal to a standard beyond themselves—a Moral Lawgiver.

Two other Darwinists wrote a book asserting that rape is a natural consequence of evolution.[35] While they personally don't think rape is moral, authors Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer assert that rape is "a natural, biological phenomenon that is a product of the human evolutionary heritage," just like "the leopard's spots and the giraffe's elongated neck."[36]

Richard Dawkins agreed. He declared that any beliefs we have about rape are arbitrary. Radio host Justin Brierley said to Dawkins, "Ultimately, your belief that rape is wrong is as arbitrary as the fact that we've evolved five fingers rather than six." Dawkins responded: "You could say that, yeah."[37]

While Dawkins, Thornhill, and Palmer personally oppose rape, their atheistic worldview of Darwinism provides no grounds for opposing it. How could it when Darwinists insist that we exist to pass on our genes in a brutal "survival of the fittest" contest? One could conclude that's what rape accomplishes!

Shocking as they are, these Darwinian conclusions about murder and rape fit the worldview that says we're just moist robots dancing to our DNA without any ultimate purpose. In this view, *all* behaviors are genetically determined. Since only material things exist, then murder and rape are nothing more than the results of chemical reactions in a criminal's brain brought about by natural selection. Moreover, murder and rape can't be objectively wrong (i.e., against the Moral Law) because there are no laws or moral obligations if only chemicals exist. Objective moral laws require a transcendent Moral Lawgiver, but the Darwinian worldview has ruled him out in advance. So consistent Darwinists can consider murder and rape only as personal dislikes, not real moral wrongs.

Finally, some Darwinists claim that their view is amoral—the theory doesn't dictate a morality. They claim instead that religion is the motivation of most wars. That latter claim is certainly false. According to the *Encyclopedia of Wars*, only 7 percent of wars are religious in nature (and more than half of those are motivated by Islam).[38]

By contrast, while it's true that the idea of Darwinism/atheism doesn't *necessarily* lead to immorality, historically it has. We've seen how Hitler used Darwinism. And the tens of millions of innocents murdered by atheistic regimes in the last century—those led by Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong, for example—dwarf all the murders committed by Christians (who disobeyed Christ's teachings) over the previous nineteen centuries combined. Historian John Dickson writes, "There is no necessary link between atheism and immorality, but it is equally true that atheism rationally *permits* a Stalin in a way that is not true of religion. Even the strictest Inquisitor never imagined he was *allowed* to kill an innocent."[39]

Dickson's point is a good one. While all people do evil, the Christian worldview has commands against it and an Ultimate Judge who promises to

punish evildoers. Atheists have no objective moral commands and no ultimate accountability for evildoers. When a dictator believes there's no law or accountability beyond himself in this life or the next, you're not assured of getting a Stalin or a Mao, but history shows it's certainly more likely.

Summary and Conclusion

During our "I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist" presentations, the following two statements about morality immediately capture the attention of the audience:

> If there is no God, then what Hitler did was just a matter of opinion.
>
> If just one thing is morally wrong—like it's wrong to torture babies for fun or it's wrong to go into a school and shoot nine-year-olds—then God exists.

These statements help people realize that, without an objective source of morality, all so-called moral issues are nothing but personal preference. Hitler liked killing people, and Mother Teresa liked helping them. Unless there's a standard beyond Hitler and Mother Teresa, then no one is really right or wrong—it's just one person's opinion against that of another.

Fortunately, as we have seen, there *is* a real moral standard beyond human beings. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. . . . [However,] they do not in fact behave that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in."[40]

Hopefully we've done some clear thinking in this chapter. Here's a summary of what we've covered:

1. There is an objective standard of right and wrong written on the hearts of all human beings that we are all obligated to obey. People may deny it or suppress it, and their actions may contradict it, but their *reactions* reveal that they know it.
2. Relativism is false. Human beings do not *determine* right and wrong; we *discover* right and wrong. If human beings determined right and wrong, then anyone would be "right" in asserting that rape, murder, the Holocaust, or any other evil is not really wrong. But we

know those acts are wrong intuitively through our consciences, which are manifestations of the Moral Law.

3. This Moral Law must have a source higher than ourselves because it is a prescription that is on the hearts of all people. Since prescriptions always have prescribers—they don't arise from nothing—the Moral Law Prescriber (God) must exist. And because God exists, we don't have only objective moral values, but also objective moral obligations.
4. This Moral Law is God's standard of rightness, and it helps us adjudicate between the different moral opinions people may have. Without God's standard, we're left with just that—human opinions. The Moral Law is the final standard by which everything is measured.
5. In Christian theology, the Moral Law is God's very nature. In other words, morality is not arbitrary—it's not "Do this and don't do that because I'm God and I said so." No, God doesn't make up rules on a whim. The standard of rightness *is* the very nature of God himself—infinite justice and infinite love.
6. Although it is widely believed that all morality is relative, core moral values are absolute, and they transcend cultures. Confusion over this is often based on a misunderstanding or misapplication of moral absolutes, not on a real rejection of them. That is, moral values are absolute, even if our understanding of them or of the circumstances in which they should be applied is not absolute.
7. Atheists have no basis for objective right and wrong. This does not mean that atheists are not moral or don't understand right from wrong. On the contrary, atheists can and do understand right from wrong because the Moral Law is written on their hearts just as it is written on every other heart. But while they may *believe* in an objective right and wrong, they have no way to *justify* such a belief (unless they admit a Moral Lawgiver, at which point they cease being atheists).

In the end, atheism cannot justify why anything is morally right or wrong. It cannot guarantee human rights or ultimate justice in the universe. To be an atheist—a consistent atheist—you have to believe that there is nothing really wrong with murder, rape, genocide, torture, or any other heinous act. By

faith, you have to believe there is no moral difference between a murderer and a missionary, a teacher and a terrorist, or Mother Teresa and Hitler. Or, by faith, you have to believe that real moral principles arose from nothing. Since such beliefs are clearly unreasonable, *we don't have enough faith to be atheists.*

Focus of Chapter 9

1. Truth about reality is knowable.
2. The opposite of true is false.
3. It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:
   a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)
   b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/Fine-Tuning)
   c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)
   d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)
4. **If God exists, then miracles are possible.**
5. **Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God (i.e., as acts of God to confirm a word from God).**
6. The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:
   a. Early testimony
   b. Eyewitness testimony
   c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
   d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived
7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus's claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:
   a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself
   b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds
   c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection
9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

9

Miracles: Signs of God or Gullibility?

> If we admit God, must we admit Miracle? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it. That is the bargain.
>
> C. S. Lewis

We need to pause for a moment and put together the pieces of the puzzle we've discovered so far. Remember, we're looking for unity in diversity. We're trying to put together the seemingly diverse pieces of life together into a coherent picture. So far our coherent picture shows us that truth exists and can be known. Any denial of truth presupposes truth, so the existence of truth is inescapable. And while we can't know most truth absolutely due to our human limitations, we can know many truths to a high degree of certainty (i.e., beyond reasonable doubt). One of these truths is the existence and nature of God. From the evidence we have reviewed—the Cosmological, Teleological, and Moral Arguments—we are able to know beyond a reasonable doubt that a theistic God exists who has certain characteristics.

From the Cosmological Argument we know that God is:

- Self-existent, timeless, nonspatial, and immaterial (since he[1] created time, space, and matter, he must be outside of time, space, and matter). In other words, he is without limits. That is, he is infinite.
- Unimaginably powerful since he created the entire universe out of nothing.

- Personal and intelligent since he chose to convert a state of nothingness into the time-space-material universe (an impersonal, nonintelligent force has no ability to make choices).

From the Teleological Argument we know that God is:

- Supremely intelligent since he designed life and the universe with incredible complexity and precision, which he sustains to this very moment.
- Purposeful since he designed the many forms of life to live in this specific and ordered environment.

From the Moral Argument we know that God is:

- Moral because his nature is the unchangeable standard of morality by which all actions are measured. This standard includes infinite justice and infinite love.

Theism is the proper term to describe belief in such a God. Now here is the amazing truth about these findings: *The theistic God we have discovered is consistent with the God of the Bible, but we have discovered him without use of the Bible.*

We have shown that through good reason, science, and philosophy much can be known about the God of the Bible. In fact, this is what the Bible itself says (e.g., Psalm 19; Rom. 1:18–20; 2:14–15). That is, God reveals himself to us in two ways: by his works and his word.[2] Everyone, whether they have Scripture or not, knows that God exists by his works—his effects.

Notice what we've done to this point: We've discovered effects and reasoned back to a cause. The creation of the universe is an effect, so we reasoned back to a Creator. The design of the universe and the design of life are effects, so we reasoned back to a designer. The Moral Law is an effect, so we reasoned back to a Moral Lawgiver. We could do the same for the laws of physics, mathematics, and logic—they are effects that require a cause, not just at the beginning of the universe, but right now.

Arguing from effect to cause is what scientists do. And through effects that everyone can access, we've discovered that theism is true. This discovery helps us to see not only what the true box top looks like, but what it *cannot* look like. Since the opposite of true is false (chapter 2), we know that any nontheistic worldview must be false. Or to put it another way, of the major

world religions, only one of the theistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, or Islam—could be true. All other major world religions could not be true because they are nontheistic.

Table 9.1 The truth of major world religions

Could Be True (Theistic)	**Could Not Be True (Nontheistic)**
Judaism	Hinduism (pantheistic and polytheistic)
Christianity	Buddhism (pantheistic or atheistic)
Islam	New Age (pantheistic)
	Secular humanism (atheistic)
	Mormonism (polytheistic)
	Wicca (pantheistic or polytheistic)
	Taoism (pantheistic or atheistic)
	Confucianism (atheistic)
	Shinto (polytheistic)

This may seem like a grandiose claim—to deny the truth of so many world religions at this stage. But by simple logic—using the Law of Noncontradiction—mutually exclusive religions cannot all be true. Just as certain football players are rightfully cut from the roster of possible players because they lack necessary abilities, certain world religions are rightfully cut from the roster of possible true religions because they lack necessary qualifications.

So logically, if theism is true, then all nontheisms are false. Now, this does not mean that every teaching of a nontheistic religion is false or that there is nothing good in those religions—there is certainly truth and goodness in most world religions. It simply means that as a way of looking at the world (i.e., a worldview) any nontheistic religion is built on a false foundation. While some details may be true, the core of any nontheistic religious system is false. They are systems of error even though they have some truth in them.

For example, Hindus rightly teach the truth that you reap what you sow, even though the worldview of Hinduism—that “you” don’t really exist because everything is part of one indistinguishable reality called Brahman—is false. Secular humanists rightly assert the reality of evil, even though the

humanist worldview—which denies an objective standard by which we can detect evil—is false. Mormons rightly teach that there are moral standards we ought to obey, even though the Mormon worldview that there are many gods is false.[3]

This last point about Mormonism raises a question: Why does the existence of a theistic God disprove polytheism? It disproves polytheism because God is infinite, and there cannot be more than one infinite Being. If we are to distinguish one being from another, they must differ in some way. If they differ in some way, then one lacks something that the other one has. If one being lacks something that the other one has, then the lacking being is not infinite, because an infinite being, by definition, lacks nothing. So there can be only one infinite Being.

Now, one could argue that finite beings (or "gods") exist that are more powerful than human beings. In fact, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all teach the existence of angels and demons. But that's not polytheism, which denies that there is a supreme, infinite, eternal Being to whom all creatures owe their existence and are ultimately accountable. Since theism is true, polytheism is just as false as atheism, pantheism, and all other nontheistic worldviews.

But we digress. The main point is that the right box top for the universe shows a theistic God. That means that only one of the three major theistic world religions can make the cut of truth: either Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Now, logically, all of these theistic world religions cannot be true—because they make mutually exclusive claims.

Moreover, it could be that none of these world religions is completely true. Maybe they have theism right but little else. That's possible. However, since we know beyond a reasonable doubt that God exists and that he has the characteristics we've listed above—characteristics that include design, purpose, justice, and love—then we should expect him to reveal more of himself and his purpose for our lives. This would require that he communicate with us. One of the three major theistic religions is likely to contain that communication.

How Does God Communicate?

As we have seen, God has already communicated to us through creation and conscience (his works), which give us basic ideas about his existence, power, and moral requirements. But how could God reveal himself so that we could

get a more detailed understanding of what his ultimate purpose is for us?

Why couldn't he appear to each one of us? He could, but recall from the introduction that such an approach might interfere with our free will. C. S. Lewis has some great insights on this topic. In his *Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape, the senior demon, writes the following to his disciple Wormwood:

> You must have wondered why the Enemy [God] does not make more use of His power to be sensibly present to human souls in any degree He chooses and at any moment. But you now see that the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to over-ride a human will (as His felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for Him useless. He cannot. He can only woo.[4]

If God has not chosen the overpowering option of face-to-face interaction with every person on the planet, then perhaps he has chosen a more subtle method of communication. (In fact, the Bible says God is not always as overt as we would like him to be, Isa. 45:15.) Perhaps God has manifested himself in some way to a select group of people over many centuries and inspired them to write down what they witnessed and heard from him. Written language is a precise medium of communication that can easily be duplicated and passed on to succeeding generations, yet it also can be easily ignored by those who freely decide that they don't want to be bothered with God.

So a book would work as a valid but not overpowering means of communication from God. But whose book? Has God communicated through the book of the Jews, the book of the Christians, or the book of the Muslims? How are we supposed to tell whose book, if any, is really a message from God?

The King's Seal

In the days before mass communications—when all long-distance messages were sent by hand—a king would place his seal on his message. This seal would be a sign to the recipient of the message that the message was authentic—it really came from the king and not from someone just posing as the king. Of course, to make this system work, the seal needed to be unusual or unique, easily recognizable, and something only the king possessed.

God could use a similar system to authenticate his messages—specifically, he could use miracles. Miracles are unusual and unique, they are easily recognizable, and only God can do them. Even skeptics, by demanding a sign from God, are implicitly admitting that miracles would prove his existence.

What is a miracle? A miracle is a special act of God that interrupts the normal course of events. Atheist Antony Flew put it well: "A miracle is something which would never have happened had nature, as it were, been left to its own devices."[5] So we might say that natural laws describe what happens regularly, by natural causes; miracles, if they occur at all, describe what happens rarely, by supernatural causes.

Through miracles, God could tell the world which book or which person speaks for him. So if God wanted to send a message through Moses, Elijah, Jesus, Paul, Muhammad, or anyone else, he could pour out miracles through that person.

If God actually works in this way, then a miracle confirms the message and the sign confirms the sermon. Or to put it another way, a miracle is an act of God to confirm the word of God through a messenger of God.

The question is, Does God work that way? Does the King of the universe use such signs? Are miracles even possible? Our secular world says no. As we're about to see, they are seriously mistaken.

Is the Box Open or Closed?

On a trip to Russia to speak to Russian educators just after the Iron Curtain fell, seminary professor Ronald Nash had a big challenge. He wanted to talk to them about God, but he knew he wouldn't get anywhere with them unless he could overcome their long-held biases against theism. For more than seventy years, Russians had been taught a worldview that ruled out God in advance. The official state religion was atheism, and the atheistic worldview asserts that only the natural, material world exists. According to atheists, miracles are impossible because there is no supernatural realm. To believe otherwise is to believe in fairy tales.

Nash began by showing the educators two small cardboard boxes. One was opened and one was closed.

"Here is the difference between your worldview and mine," he began. Pointing to the closed box, he said, "You believe that the physical universe is closed; that the universe is all that exists, and there's nothing outside it."

Shifting to the open box, he continued, "I believe that the physical

universe exists as well; but I also believe the universe is open—that there's something outside the universe we call God." Nash paused and added, "And God created the box!"

He then reached into the open box and said, "Just like I can reach into this box to manipulate its contents, God can reach into our universe and perform what we call miracles."[6]

For some reason, this was a profound illustration for the Russians. Light bulbs began coming on in the minds of educators all over the room. These educators had assumed their naturalistic worldview was correct and had considered no other alternatives. Nash helped them think that maybe another alternative, theism, had better evidence.

As we have seen in chapters 3 through 8, theism does have better evidence. We know beyond a reasonable doubt that a theistic God exists. Since God exists, the universe represented by the closed box is false. The box is open and was created by God. So it *is* possible for God to intervene in the natural world by performing miracles.

What's the greatest miracle in the Bible? The greatest miracle in the Bible is the first verse: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). If that miracle is true, then every other miracle is believable.[7]

Now, this might be the most powerful point: *Even atheists are admitting the evidence for the Bible's greatest miracle—the creation of the universe out of nothing.* Although atheists deny God is the cause, they are admitting the data. If Genesis 1:1 is true—"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"—then miracles aren't just possible, they are actual. So when people say they don't believe in miracles, you might want to say, "Look around, you're living in one."

Since the greatest miracle in the Bible appears to be true, then other, lesser miracles in the Bible are at least possible. Can a God who created the entire universe out of nothing part the Red Sea? Bring fire down from heaven? Sustain a man in a great fish for three days?[8] Accurately predict future events? Turn water into wine? Heal diseases instantaneously? Raise the dead? Of course. All of those miraculous events are simple tasks for an infinitely powerful Being who created the universe in the first place.

Now this doesn't mean that God *has* performed those biblical miracles. That remains to be seen. It means only that he could have—that such miracles are possible.

Since we live in a theistic universe, ruling out miracles beforehand (as

many atheists do) is clearly illegitimate. As C. S. Lewis put it, “If we admit God, must we admit Miracle? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it. That is the bargain.”[9]

So why do so many people today say that miracles are not possible or should not be believed? How can skeptics disbelieve in miracles when the whole universe appears to be one amazing miracle? We need to address those questions before we begin to investigate whether God has confirmed the truth of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam through miracles.

Objections to Miracles

Since the late 1600s, there have been two major objections to miracles that we need to investigate. The first was from Benedict Spinoza and the second is from David Hume. We’ll start with Spinoza’s objection.

Natural Laws Are Immutable

The argument that natural laws are immutable was first popularized in the 1670s by Spinoza, a Jewish pantheist. Spinoza’s argument against miracles goes something like this:

1. Miracles are violations of natural laws.
2. Natural laws are immutable.
3. It is impossible to violate immutable laws.
4. Therefore, miracles are impossible.

If Spinoza is right—if there is no way natural laws can be overpowered, interrupted, or interfered with—then miracles are impossible.

The problem with this objection is that it assumes what it must prove. If you define natural laws as immutable, then of course miracles are impossible. But what evidence do you have that natural laws are immutable?

Spinoza, in accord with his pantheistic worldview, illegitimately ruled out the theistic God, and thus miracles, in advance. But if God exists, miracles are possible. And as we have seen, the greatest miracle of all, the creation of the universe out of nothing, has already occurred.

Creation itself demonstrates that natural laws are not immutable. Something doesn’t naturally come from nothing. But here we are.

We also know that natural laws are not immutable because they are only *descriptions* of what happens, not *prescriptions* for what must happen.

Natural *laws* don't really cause anything, they only describe what regularly happens in nature. They describe the effects of the four known natural *forces*—gravitation, electromagnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear forces. Once you introduce intelligent beings into the picture, natural forces can be overpowered. We know that those forces can be overpowered because we do so ourselves every day.

For example, when a baseball player catches a falling baseball, he is overpowering the force of gravity. We do the same whenever we fly planes or blast off into space. In such cases, gravity is not changed, it is simply overpowered. If finite beings like us can overpower natural forces, then certainly the infinite Being who created those forces can do so.[10]

Miracles Are Not Credible

Years ago I (Norm) was invited to speak at Harvard University's divinity school, one of the most liberal divinity schools in the country. My topic was "Harvard's Premature Farewell to Evangelicalism." Believe it or not, Harvard, like most other schools of its day, was founded by evangelical Christians to train students to know Jesus Christ. Harvard's 1646 charter states its purpose clearly (original spelling and Scripture references retained):

> Let every Student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the maine end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3) and therefore to lay Christ in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and Learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisedome, Let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seeke it of him (Prov. 2:3).[11]

How did Harvard get so far away from its charter? It happened because the school's leaders bought into one of the most powerful arguments against miracles ever formulated. It wasn't Spinoza's argument. Due to the advances in modern science and our better understanding of the natural world, not many today really believe that natural laws are immutable. The argument against miracles that was accepted at Harvard—and that some even accept today—was put forth by the great skeptic David Hume about a century after Spinoza.

You may remember Hume from chapter 2. He said that any talk about God is meaningless because such talk does not involve empirical observation

or self-evident truths. We saw that his claim is self-defeating.

But Hume's argument against miracles was a bit more sophisticated and not as easily refuted as his argument against God-talk. Perhaps that's one reason it is still believed by some today. In fact, Hume's argument against miracles is one of the pillars of the so-called Enlightenment (that era when we supposedly became enlightened enough to abandon our superstitious belief in miracles and put our faith in reason and the empirical truths discovered by the scientific method). Hume's argument helped advance the naturalistic worldview, which later metastasized with Darwin's theory of evolution.

What follows is basically the material I presented to the audience at Harvard that day. I began by spelling out Hume's antimiracle argument and then moved on to critiquing it. Here is Hume's argument in syllogistic form:

1. Natural law is by definition a description of a regular occurrence.
2. A miracle is by definition a rare occurrence.
3. The evidence for the regular is always greater than that for the rare.
4. A wise man always bases his belief on the greater evidence.
5. Therefore, a wise man should never believe in miracles.

If Hume's four premises are true, then his conclusion necessarily follows —the wise man should never believe in miracles. Unfortunately for Hume and for those over the years who have believed him, the argument has a false premise—premise 3 is not necessarily true. The evidence for the regular is *not* always greater than that for the rare.

At first glance this might not seem to be the case. In the age of instant replay, premise 3 seems to make sense. For example, a football referee sees a play from one angle at full speed while we get to see it from several angles in slow motion. We have greater evidence seeing a play several times (the regular) than does the ref who only sees it once (the rare).

But what may be true for a videotaped football game is not necessarily true for every event in life. To disprove premise 3 we need only to come up with one counterexample. We actually have several, and they are from Hume's own naturalistic worldview:

1. *The origin of the universe happened only once.* It was a rare, unrepeatable event, yet virtually every naturalist believes that the Big Bang evidence proves that the universe exploded into being.

2. *The origin of life happened only once.* It too was a rare, unrepeatable event, yet every naturalist believes that life arose spontaneously from nonlife somewhere on the earth or elsewhere in the universe.
3. *The origin of new life forms also happened only once.* Those rare, unrepeatable events are nevertheless dogmatically believed by most naturalists, who say it all happened by unobserved (i.e., rare) macroevolutionary processes.
4. *In fact, the entire history of the world is comprised of rare, unrepeatable events.* For example, Hume's own birth happened only once, but he had no trouble believing it occurred!

In every one of these counterexamples from Hume's own naturalistic worldview, his third premise must be disregarded or considered false. If Hume really had believed in that premise, he would not have believed in his own birth or his own naturalistic worldview!

So we know by some of these counterexamples that Hume's third premise, and thus his entire argument, cannot be true. But what are the specific problems with this naturalistic kind of thinking?

First, it confuses *believability* with *possibility*. Even if premise 3 were true, the argument would not disprove the *possibility* of miracles; it would only question their *believability*. So even if you personally witnessed, say, Jesus Christ rising from the dead as he predicted—if you were in the tomb, verified the body was dead, and then saw him get up and walk out of the tomb—Hume's argument says that you (a "wise" person) shouldn't believe it. There's something wrong with an argument that tells you to disbelieve what you have verified to be true.

Second, Hume confuses *probability* with *evidence.* He doesn't *weigh* the evidence for each rare event; rather, he *adds* the evidence for all regular events and suggests that this somehow makes all rare events unworthy of belief. But this is flawed reasoning as well. There are many improbable (rare) events in life that we believe when we have good evidence for them. For example, a hole-in-one golf shot is a rare event, but when we witness one we have no trouble believing it. We certainly don't say to the golfer, "Since the evidence for the regular is always greater than that for the rare, I'm not going to believe your shot unless you can tee it up and do it five times in a row!" Likewise, we certainly don't tell a lottery winner who beat 76-million-to-one

odds that he's not going to get his money until he can win it five times in a row!

No, in these cases, the evidence for the rare is greater than that for the regular. Sober, sane eyewitnesses provide evidence for a rare hole-in-one no matter how regularly that golfer had missed the hole in the past. Likewise, a winning ticket provides evidence that a certain person improbably won the lottery no matter how regularly that person had failed to win in the past.[12]

So the issue is not whether an event is regular or rare—the issue is whether we have good evidence for the event. We must *weigh* evidence for the event in question, not *add* evidence for all previous events.

Third, Hume is arguing in a circle. Instead of evaluating the veracity of the evidence for each miracle claim, Hume rules out belief in miracles in advance because he believes there is uniform experience against them. As usual, C. S. Lewis has great insight:

> Now of course we must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely "uniform experience" against miracles, if in other words they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.[13]

So Hume commits the same error as the Darwinists—he hides his conclusion in the premise of his argument by way of a false philosophical presupposition. His false presupposition is that all human experiences have been against miracles. How can he know that? He can't, so he presupposes it. As we have seen, miracles are possible because God exists. Therefore, human beings may have experienced true miracles. The only way to know for sure is to investigate the evidence for each miracle claim. Assuming that each and every miracle claim is false, as Hume does, is clearly illegitimate.

Finally, although Hume correctly defines a miracle as a rare event, he then punishes it for being a rare event! It's as if Hume is saying, "If only miracles happened more often, then we could believe them." But if miracles happened more often—say, regularly (to use Hume's terminology)—then they would cease being miracles (rare events), and we might consider them natural laws or part of unexplained natural phenomena. But as soon as we consider them natural in origin, then they no longer get our attention as special acts of God.

Rarity is one of the characteristics that distinguishes miracles from everything else! To put it another way, the reason miracles get our attention is because we know that such events could not be produced by natural laws.

So by Hume's logic, even if there is a God who performs miracles, we shouldn't believe any miracles he performs because they are not regular events. Again, there's something wrong with an argument that tells you to disbelieve what has actually occurred. And there's something wrong with an argument that requires that miracles not be miracles to be believed.

The bottom line is that Hume, without justification, simply declares that the only believable events are regular events, and since a miracle is not a regular event, it fails to meet his artificial criteria. As we've mentioned above, if we can't believe in rare events then we can't believe anything from history, because history is comprised of succeeding rare, unrepeatable events. Such a position is clearly unreasonable.

After presenting this information at Harvard University, I received no questions or challenges to my critique of Hume, just stunned silence.

During this same time period (the 1980s) I was challenged by a professor at another Ivy League school, Princeton University, to a debate on this issue. The professor asked for a copy of my presentation before the debate, which is very unusual. The element of surprise at a debate is an advantage that most debaters will not relinquish. However, I was so confident that my critique of Hume was correct that I sent it to the professor in advance. After receiving my critique of Hume, the professor contacted me to say that he would prefer that I lecture to his class rather than debate him, but that he would be there to "lead the charge" during the question-and-answer period. I agreed.

When I arrived on campus on the appointed date and time, the professor was nowhere to be found. His assistant said that he had some "personal emergency" and that the meeting was canceled. I wound up presenting my critique to a group of students that had come down from Nyack College. The professor never responded to my subsequent attempts to contact him.

I received a similar response from Antony Flew, who may have been the world's foremost philosophical atheist during the last few decades of the twentieth century. In the late 1980s, I asked him to comment on my book *Miracles and Modern Thought*,[14] which critiqued numerous antimiracle arguments, including his own (which was very similar to Hume's). Flew agreed to provide a written critique in the next edition of a major humanist journal. But in that article, instead of attempting to refute the arguments

I presented, Flew provided a backhanded compliment by suggesting that atheists need to come up with better arguments against miracles if they are going to answer contemporary theists.

However, two decades later, Flew finally admitted Hume's argument didn't work. He then shocked the academic world and became a theist, largely due to the evidence from DNA. While he never said he fully embraced Christianity, Flew wrote a book titled *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, claiming he was simply following the evidence back to an intelligent designer.[15] Several atheist scholars who did not convert have also admitted that Hume's argument is invalid.[16]

The main point is this: *Since we know that God exists, miracles are possible. Any argument against miracles that can be concocted, including that of David Hume, is destroyed by that one fact.* Since there is a God who can act, there can be acts of God (miracles).

So in the end, it's not miracles that are hard to believe—Hume's argument is hard to believe! And even prominent atheists are now admitting it.

All That Glitters Is Not *God*—What Is and Isn't a Miracle?

So the box is open—miracles are possible. But how will we know a miracle if we see one? In order to answer this, it's important to define what a miracle is and isn't so that we know what we're looking for.

As shown in table 9.2, there are at least six different kinds of unusual events, only one of which is a miracle.

Table 9.2 Types of unusual events

	Anomalies	**Magic**	**Psychosomatic Events**	**Satanic Signs**	**Providence**	**Miracles**
Description	Freaks of nature	Sleight of hand	Mind over matter	Evil power	Prearranged events	Divine act
Power	Physical	Human	Mental	Psychic	Divine	Supernatural
Traits	Natural event with pattern	Unnatural and man-controlled	Requires faith; fails for some sickness	Evil, falsehood, occult, limited	Naturally explained; spiritual context	Never fails, immediate, lasts, glory to God
Example	Bumblebee	Rabbit in a hat	Psychosomatic cures	Demonic influence	Fog at Normandy	Raising the dead

Let’s take a brief look at each of these unusual events. We’ll start with miracles because if we know what those are, we can better understand why other unusual events are not miracles.

Miracles

For an act of God to be an unmistakable sign from God, the act would have to meet certain criteria—criteria that would distinguish God’s acts from any other unusual event. Like a king’s seal, God’s sign must be unique, easily recognizable, and something only God can do. In other words, it must have characteristics that cannot be explained by natural laws, natural forces, or anything else in the physical universe. What would these criteria look like?

As we saw from the Cosmological, Teleological, and Moral Arguments, God alone has infinite power (power beyond that in the natural world), supreme design and purpose, and complete moral purity. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that his acts would display or contain elements of these attributes. So the criteria for true miracles include:

1. An instantaneous beginning of a powerful act, as evidenced by the Cosmological Argument (the beginning of the universe)
2. Intelligent design and purpose, as evidenced by the Teleological Argument (the precise design of the universe for the purpose of supporting life, and the specified and complex design of life itself)
3. The promotion of good or right behavior, as evidenced by the Moral Argument (the Moral Law pressing on us).

The power component of miracles (1) means that the sign could not be explained naturally, for if a natural cause is possible, then the sign cannot be definitely identified as a miracle. A miracle has an unmistakable supernatural cause—one that transcends nature.

The design component (2) means that any sign done without an obvious purpose—to confirm a truth or a messenger of truth or to bring glory to God—is probably not a sign from God. In other words, God is not likely to do miracles for mere entertainment purposes. Just as most earthly kings will not use their seals lightly, the King of the universe is not likely to use his seal for frivolous reasons. After all, if he were to use miracles for mere entertainment, then we would be less likely to recognize his intent when he tried to confirm a new truth or a new messenger. So as not to “cry wolf,” miracles must be

focused on promoting a truth claim and must be relatively rare if they are going to be effective.

The moral component of miracles (3) means that any sign connected with error or immorality cannot be a sign from God. Error and immorality are against God's nature because he is the unchanging standard of truth and morality. He cannot confirm error or immorality.

With these criteria—instantaneous power, intelligent design, and morality—we can identify what unusual events are true signs from God. Notice that we drew these criteria from what we've learned about God from the natural world and what we've learned about the limits of nature itself. The Bible agrees with our assessment by calling events that meet these same criteria miracles.[17] And both the Bible and the Qur'an teach that miracles have been used to confirm a word from God.[18]

So an event that had these characteristics and was connected with a divine truth claim would be a miracle—an act of God to confirm a word from God. For example, we can say a miracle has occurred if Jesus—a man who predicted he would rise from the dead—actually rose from the dead. Such an event would display instantaneous power beyond natural capabilities, intelligent forethought and design, and a moral purpose by confirming that Jesus is from God (and we, therefore, ought to listen to what he has to say!). There is no natural force or other source of power that could explain such an event.

Moreover, if the resurrection actually happened, it did not occur out of the blue but in context. In other words, the resurrection was an event in the context of a theistic universe, where a man claiming to be from God and performing miracles along the way predicted it would happen. Such a context suggests it was a miracle and not just a yet-to-be-explained natural event. In short, if the resurrection occurred (and we'll investigate that question later), it has God's "fingerprints" all over it.

Finally, notice that the miracles of Christ weren't random displays of supernatural power. Jesus displayed power over the four basic problems we have in this life: sin, nature, sickness, and death. Jesus is sinless, he has power over nature, he can heal the sick, and he can raise the dead. That is, Jesus didn't just declare he is our Savior; *he showed us he is our Savior* by performing miracles that correct our fallenness. Upon his return, he will completely tame and restore this fallen natural world and put an end to sin, sickness, and death.

Providence

Religious people, particularly Christians, throw the term *miracle* around rather loosely. Quite often they identify an event as a miracle when it could be more accurately described as divine providence.

Providential events are those caused by God indirectly, not directly. That is, God uses natural laws to accomplish them. Answered prayer and unlikely but beneficial happenings can be examples. These may be quite remarkable and may stimulate faith, but they are not supernatural. For example, the fog at Normandy was providential because it helped conceal the Allied attack against the evil Nazi regime at D-Day in World War II. It wasn't a miracle because it could be explained by natural laws, but God may have been behind it. By contrast, a miracle would have been something like bullets bouncing off the chests of our young men as they assaulted the beach.

Satanic Signs

Another possible cause of an unusual event could be other spiritual beings. Since God exists, it is possible that other spiritual beings exist. But if Satan and demons do exist, they have limited powers. Why? Because, as we mentioned earlier in this chapter, it is impossible for there to be two infinite beings. Since God is infinite, no other being can be infinite.

Moreover, pure dualism—an infinite good power vs. an infinite evil power—is impossible. There is no such thing as pure evil. Evil is a privation of or a parasite in good; it cannot exist on its own. As we mentioned earlier, evil is like rust in a car. If you take away all the rust, you have a better car. If you take away all the car, you have nothing. So Satan cannot be the evil equivalent of God. In fact, Satan has good attributes, such as power, free will, and rational thought, but he uses them for evil purposes.[19]

The bottom line is that God has no equal. He is the one infinite Being, and is therefore supreme over all of creation. As a result, created spiritual beings, if they exist at all, are limited by God and cannot perform the kinds of supernatural acts that only God can perform.

So by natural revelation alone—without revelation from any religious book—we know that if other spiritual beings exist they are limited in their power. Incidentally, this is exactly what the Bible teaches.

But just how limited are these other spiritual beings? Now we need special revelation. While we haven't gotten to the point yet of proving beyond a reasonable doubt that the Bible is true, let's assume that such beings are real

and can interact with the natural world as the Bible describes.

According to the Bible, only God can create life and raise the dead (Gen. 1:21; Deut. 32:39). Pharaoh's magicians, who had imitated the first two plagues that God brought upon Egypt when Pharaoh refused to release his Israelite slaves, couldn't imitate the third, which created life (in the form of lice). These magicians acknowledged that the third plague was the "finger of God" (Ex. 8:19).

Satan can perform tricks better than the best magicians—and there are many examples of these in the Bible[20]—but those tricks fail to meet the characteristics of a true miracle. As we have seen, true miracles cause one to think more highly of God, tell the truth, and promote moral behavior. Counterfeit signs from Satan do not do this. They tend to glorify the person ostensibly performing the sign, and they are often associated with error and immoral behavior. They also may not be immediate, instantaneous, or permanent.

In short, only God performs true miracles; Satan does counterfeit miracles. This is precisely what the Bible calls them in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 when Paul writes that, "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of *counterfeit* miracles, signs and wonders" (NIV 1984). Of course, unless one is discerning, such signs can be deceptive and may be mistaken for miracles (Matt. 24:24).

Table 9.3 summarizes the differences between a divine miracle and a satanic sign:[21]

Table 9.3 Miracles versus satanic signs

Divine Miracle	**Satanic Sign**
Actual supernatural act	Counterfeit supernatural act
Under the Creator's control	Under a creature's control
Never associated with the occult	Associated with the occult
Connected with the true God	Frequently connected with pantheistic or polytheistic gods
Associated with truth	Associated with error
Associated with good	Associated with evil
Involves true prophecies	Involves false prophecies
Glorifies the Creator	Glorifies the creature

Psychosomatic Events

Many years ago, I (Norm) developed what I thought was an allergy to blooming flowers. I began taking a strong drug in the spring of that year to help alleviate the symptoms. One spring Sunday morning I was invited to preach at a local church and arrived early to meet the elders. When I got near the pulpit I saw some flowers on a nearby table. Almost immediately, I began to sneeze, and my eyes watered up.

I said to one of the elders, "I won't be able to preach with these flowers here because my allergy is acting up. So would you please move them?"

He looked at me and said, "They're plastic!"

I said to myself, "Geisler, you just sneezed at plastic flowers. That allergy has got to be in your head!" So I threw away my prescription and never had that problem again.

Now, not all allergies are purely psychosomatic. But there are some illnesses and cures that are psychosomatic, and these are well documented. Norman Cousins, in his book *Anatomy of an Illness,* describes in detail how he literally laughed himself well from cancer.[22] Indeed, mental stress can have a negative impact on our physical health, while having a positive mental attitude, faith, or happiness can have a positive, healing effect (see Prov. 17:22).

Yet there are some medical conditions—such as severed spinal cords or amputated limbs—that cannot be cured by mind over matter because they are not psychosomatic illnesses. A true miracle would have to occur for those conditions to be cured.

The bottom line is that psychosomatic cures are psychological, not supernatural, in nature. They are evidence that the mind can have a limited but significant impact on the body. They are not to be confused with miracles.

Magic

Perhaps the most familiar kind of unusual event is magic. Magic is based on human sleight of hand or misleading of the mind. A good magician can make you think he has sliced a woman in half, pulled a rabbit out of a hat, or made an elephant disappear. But it's all an illusion, a clever trick. Once you're let in on it, you say, "Now, why didn't I think of that?" Magic, being a trick under human control, is not a miracle. Only God can perform a miracle.

Anomalies

An anomaly is an unexplained freak of nature. For example, at one time scientists couldn't understand how a bumblebee could fly. Its wings were too small for its body. Scientists considered bumblebee flight an anomaly until they discovered a kind of "power pack" that made up for the small wings. They knew it wasn't a miracle because of the observable pattern—all bumblebees flew. So they kept looking for a natural explanation and found one.

The skeptic might ask, "So why couldn't the resurrection of Jesus Christ be considered an anomaly?" Because of the context: The resurrection was predicted and it served to validate Christ's claims about himself. It had God's fingerprints all over it. Anomalies are not connected with intelligent truth claims, and they lack moral and theological dimensions. If the resurrection of Christ occurred, it was no anomaly.

Why Don't We See Biblical Miracles Today?

Many people today have a very provincial view of history and of human experience. "If I personally don't see certain events happening today," they think, "they probably never happened." The implication for miracles is obvious. People ask, "If there are no public, biblical-quality miracles happening today, then why should I think they happened in the past?" It's a fair question.

However, there's a common misconception behind this question. It's the belief that the Bible is filled with accounts of miracles that occurred continually throughout biblical history. That's only partly true. It is true that the Bible is filled with miracles, about 250 occasions of them.[23] But most of those miracles occurred in very small windows of history, during three distinct time periods—during the lifetimes of Moses, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and the apostles. Why? It was because those were the times when God was confirming new truth (revelation) and new messengers with that truth.[24]

If most of the miracles are bunched there, what was happening miraculously during the other periods the Bible covers? Nothing. In fact, there are huge gaps of time in the Bible (even hundreds of years) when there were no recorded miracles from God. This was because there was no new word from God, and most miracles confirmed some new word from God.

So why don't we see biblical miracles today? Since the Bible is true and complete, God is not confirming any new revelation and thus does not have

this main purpose for performing miracles today. There is no new word from God that needs to be confirmed by God. And Christianity could still be true even if no miracles have occurred since the time of Jesus and the apostles.

Besides, miracles must be rare if they are going to get our attention as special acts of God. Including Jesus, very few people came back from the dead in thousands of years of Bible history (and only Jesus experienced a real resurrection to an immortal body, whereas the others died again).[25] Now, imagine if resurrections occurred routinely. How would that affect the ability of Christ's resurrection to authenticate him as Savior and God?

"Hey, Jesus rose from the dead to prove he is God!"

"So what? Uncle Harold just rose from the dead two weeks ago. Now I've got to give the inheritance back!"

Resurrections can't happen all the time without destroying the uniqueness and purpose of Christ's resurrection. Moreover, it's only because natural causes are responsible for how things work most of the time that we are able to detect the rare miracle when it happens. This is why it's ridiculous for atheists (like David Hume) to insist that we shouldn't believe in miracles because natural causes are more likely. Of course they are more likely *if no one has intervened*. But what if someone has? You can discover that only by looking at the evidence, not by assuming the answer beforehand.

Now, please don't misunderstand us here. We are *not* saying that God cannot do miracles today or that he never does. In fact, Craig Keener has written two academic volumes (about 1,100 pages in all) called *Miracles* documenting instances of present-day miracles all over the world.[26] Almost 40 percent of Americans believe they have experienced a miracle, and 55 percent of U.S. doctors say they have seen results in their patients that they consider miraculous.[27]

Is it possible they are all wrong? Yes. But is it reasonable to believe they are all wrong? Is it reasonable to believe that every person *in all recorded history* who says that he or she has had some sort of miraculous or spiritual experience (either good or bad) has been completely mistaken? We don't think so. Yet that's what you need to believe to be an atheist. If just one spiritual experience or miracle claim in all of recorded history is true, then atheism is false.

As the sovereign Creator and sustainer of the universe, God can do a miracle anytime he wants. While modern-day miracles are not needed to prove Christianity, enough evidence exists that God does do miracles today

in the lives of individuals. It's just that he may not have a reason to publicly display his power the way he did during biblical times because all the truths he wanted to reveal have already been revealed and confirmed through apostles and prophets who have long since died. As with a house, the foundation needs to be laid only once. Biblical miracles were special acts of God that laid the foundation for his permanent revelation to mankind.

Miracles Atheists Believe

While atheists can rightfully question Christians for believing in certain miracles, Christians might want to ask atheists for evidence to support the miracles *they* believe. Yes, atheists believe in miracles too, namely:

- No one created everything out of nothing.
- Fine-tuning arose without a fine-tuner.
- Order and natural laws arose and are sustained without a mind.
- Life arose from nonlife without intelligence.
- DNA programs arose without a programmer.
- Rationality arose from irrationality.
- Moral laws arose without a lawgiver.
- Consciousness arose from nonconsciousness.
- The personal arose from the nonpersonal.

Atheists say they are champions of science, which is supposed to find causes for effects. Yet atheists fail to cite causes for reality's biggest effects, thus providing no evidence for *their* miracles either. Christians do. So just who takes everything on blind faith?

Summary and Conclusion

1. We know God by his effects (works), and the essential characteristics of the biblical God can be discovered without the Bible by way of these effects—as manifested in the Cosmological, Teleological, and Moral Arguments. Those arguments, which are supported by very strong evidence, show us that this is a theistic universe. Since this is a theistic universe, only the theistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have "made the cut" of truth to this point. All nontheisms, while they may have some truths, are built on a false foundation because they are wrong about the

existence and nature of God.

2. Since God exists, miracles are possible. In fact, the greatest miracle of all—the creation of the universe out of nothing—has already occurred, and even atheists are admitting the evidence for it. While they deny God is the cause, we've seen that God is the best candidate. If Genesis 1:1 is true, every other miracle in the Bible is at least possible.
3. Arguments against miracles fail because they are based on false philosophical assumptions rather than observational evidence. God can intervene in the universe he created despite what David Hume or any atheist says.
4. A true miracle would be an act only God could perform, meaning it would include Godlike characteristics such as supernatural power, intelligent design, and the promotion of moral behavior. By these characteristics, miracles can be distinguished from other types of unusual events, such as acts of providence, satanic signs, psychosomatic cures, magic, and anomalies.
5. Due to his moral nature, we would expect God to communicate his specific purpose to us in more detail (i.e., going beyond *works* to *word*). God could use miracles as his sign to confirm to us his word (special revelation). Used in this way, a miracle is an act of God to confirm a message from God.
6. Despite evidence that miracles are still happening today, they are not necessary to prove Christianity. Miracles have *already* authenticated God's word. In fact, biblical miracles must be rare to get our attention as truly divine acts of God. If they happened all the time, they wouldn't be miracles or have their intended effect. How would Christ's predicted resurrection affirm his deity if such predictions and resurrections occurred frequently today?

Our next question about miracles is this: "Has God used miracles to confirm Judaism, Christianity, or Islam?" We'll begin to answer that in the next chapter.

Focus of Chapters 10–13

1. Truth about reality is knowable.
2. The opposite of true is false.
3. It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:
   a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)
   b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/Fine-Tuning)
   c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)
   d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)
4. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God (i.e., as acts of God to confirm a word from God).
6. **The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:**
   a. Early testimony
   b. Eyewitness testimony
   c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
   d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived
7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus's claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:
   a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself
   b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds
   c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection
9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

10

Do We Have Early Testimony About Jesus?

> Historical evidence moves us a long way towards demonstrating our belief; as a result, the faith that is necessary to fill in the remaining gap is reasonable.
>
> Craig Blomberg

In AD 66, Jews in Palestine initiated a revolt against Roman rule that—to put it mildly—the Romans did not appreciate. The emperor sent troops led by General Vespasian to squash the rebellion and regain control of rebel areas. In 67, Vespasian laid siege to the rebel town of Jotapata in Galilee. In the forty-seventh day of that siege, a young Jewish revolutionary chose to surrender to the superior Roman army rather than commit suicide—a fate many of his countrymen had chosen. That young man won favor with Vespasian and was later taken to Rome by General Titus, Vespasian's son, after Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in AD 70.

That young man was Flavius Josephus (ca. 37–ca. 100), who ultimately became the greatest Jewish historian of his time. Josephus began his historical writings in Rome while serving as a historian for the Roman emperor Domitian. It was there that he authored his autobiography and two major historical works. One of those works was his now-famous *Antiquities of the Jews*, which he finished in about AD 93. In it, Josephus, who was not a

Christian, wrote these words:

> At this time [the time of Pilate] there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.[1]

That wasn't Josephus's only mention of Jesus.[2] In another passage from *Antiquities*, Josephus revealed how the new high priest of the Jews (Ananus the younger) took advantage of a gap in Roman rule to kill James, the brother of Jesus. In AD 62, the Roman governor Festus died suddenly in office. Three months elapsed before his successor, Albinus, could get to Judea, allowing ample time for Ananus to do his dirty work. Josephus describes the incident this way:

> Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he [Ananus the high priest] assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others [or some of his companions], and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.[3]

So here we have not only another first-century reference to Jesus but also confirmation that he had a brother named James, who obviously was not well liked by the Jewish authorities. Could it be that James was martyred because he was the leader of the Jerusalem church, as the New Testament implies?[4]

Just how many non-Christian sources are there that mention Jesus? Including Josephus, there are ten known non-Christian writers who mention Jesus within 150 years of his life.[5] When you add those non-Christian writings to the Christian sources over that same 150 years, there are more than forty sources who mention Jesus.

Some of the non-Christian sources—such as Celsus, Tacitus, and the Jewish Talmud—could be considered *anti-Christian* sources. While these works do not have any eyewitness testimony that contradicts events described

in the New Testament documents, they were written by writers whose tone is decidedly anti-Christian. What do we learn from them and the more neutral non-Christian sources? We learn that they admit certain facts about early Christianity that help us piece together a storyline that is surprisingly congruent with the New Testament. Piecing together all ten non-Christian references, we see that:

1. Jesus lived during the time of Tiberius Caesar.
2. He lived a virtuous life.
3. He was a wonder worker.
4. He had a brother named James.
5. He was acclaimed to be the Messiah.
6. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
7. He was crucified on the eve of the Jewish Passover.
8. Darkness and an earthquake occurred when he died.
9. His disciples believed he rose from the dead.
10. His disciples were willing to die for their belief.
11. Christianity spread rapidly as far as Rome.
12. His disciples denied the Roman gods and worshiped Jesus as God.

In light of these non-Christian references, the theory that Jesus never existed is clearly unreasonable. How could non-Christian writers collectively reveal a storyline congruent with the New Testament if Jesus never existed?

But the implications run even deeper than that. What does the agreement of these sources say about the New Testament? On the face of it, non-Christian sources affirm the basic storyline of the New Testament. While the non-Christian authors don't say they believe in the resurrection—if they did, they'd be Christian sources—they report that the disciples certainly believed Jesus had risen from the tomb.

Since, as we have shown, the existence of God and the possibility of miracles is firmly established (chapters 4–9), and the general story of Christ and the early church is affirmed through non-Christian sources, did the miracles of Christ actually occur as the disciples claim? Do the New Testament documents record actual history? Could it be that they are not biased religious writings full of myths and fables as many in our modern world assume, but instead describe actual events from the first century? If so, we'll be well on our way to discovering which theistic religion is true.

To see if the New Testament is a record of actual history, we need to

answer two questions concerning the documents that comprise the New Testament:

1. Do we have accurate copies of the original documents that were written down in the first century?
2. Do those documents speak the truth?

In order to establish the truth of the New Testament message, both of those questions must be answered in the affirmative. It's not enough just to give evidence that we have an accurate copy of the original first-century documents (question 1) because those documents could be telling lies or just be mistaken. We must have accurate copies of the documents *and* have reason to believe that those documents describe what really happened in the first century (question 2). Let's begin with question 1.

Question 1: Do We Have Accurate Copies?

We're sure you remember the child's game of "telephone." One child is given a verbal message to pass to the next child, who passes what he's heard to the next child, and so on. By the time the message gets to the last child in the chain, it barely resembles what the first kid was told. To the casual observer, it seems like that same type of distortion could have infected documents that have been transmitted from generation to generation over the centuries.

Fortunately, the New Testament was not transmitted like messages in the "telephone" game. Since the content of the New Testament was not told to one person who told it to another and so on, the problem from the telephone game does not apply. Numerous people independently witnessed New Testament events, and nine of those eyewitnesses or their contemporaries put their observations in writing.

At this point, we need to clear up a common misunderstanding about the New Testament. When we speak of the New Testament documents, we are not talking about one writing but about twenty-seven writings. The New Testament is composed of twenty-seven different documents that were written on twenty-seven different scrolls by nine different writers over a twenty to fifty-year period. These individual writings have since been collected into one book we now call the New Testament. So the New Testament is not just one source but a collection of sources.

There's only one problem: So far, none of the *original* written documents of the New Testament have been discovered. We have only *copies* of the original writings, called manuscripts. Does this prevent us from knowing what the originals said?

Not at all. In fact, *all literature from the ancient world is reconstructed* into its original form by comparing the manuscripts that survive. To reconstruct the original, it helps to have a large number of manuscripts that were written not long after the original. More manuscripts and earlier manuscripts usually provide more trustworthy testimony and enable a more accurate reconstruction.

How do the New Testament documents fare in this regard? They fare extremely well—far better than anything else from the ancient world. In fact, the New Testament documents have more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts, and more abundantly supported manuscripts than the best ten pieces of classical literature *combined.*

More Manuscripts

At last count, there are approximately 5,800 handwritten Greek manuscripts of the New Testament that have been discovered that date from the second century to the time of the printing press (ca. 1450). In addition, there are some 20,000 manuscripts in other languages (e.g., Latin, Syriac, Coptic, and Arabic). Some of these manuscripts are complete Bibles, others are books or pages, and some are just fragments. As shown in figure 10.1, there is nothing from the ancient world that even comes close in terms of manuscript support. The next closest work is the *Iliad* by Homer, with 1,800 manuscripts. Most other ancient works survive on fewer than a dozen manuscripts,[6] yet few historians question the historicity of the events those works describe.

Earlier Manuscripts

Not only does the New Testament enjoy abundant manuscript support, but it also has manuscripts that were written soon after the originals. The earliest undisputed manuscript is a segment of John 18:31–33 and 37–38 known as P52 (for Papyrus 52), and also known as the John Rylands fragment (because it's housed in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England). Scholars date it between AD 100 and 150. It was found in Egypt—across the Mediterranean from its probable place of composition in Asia Minor—showing that John's Gospel had been copied and had spread quite some

distance by the early second century.

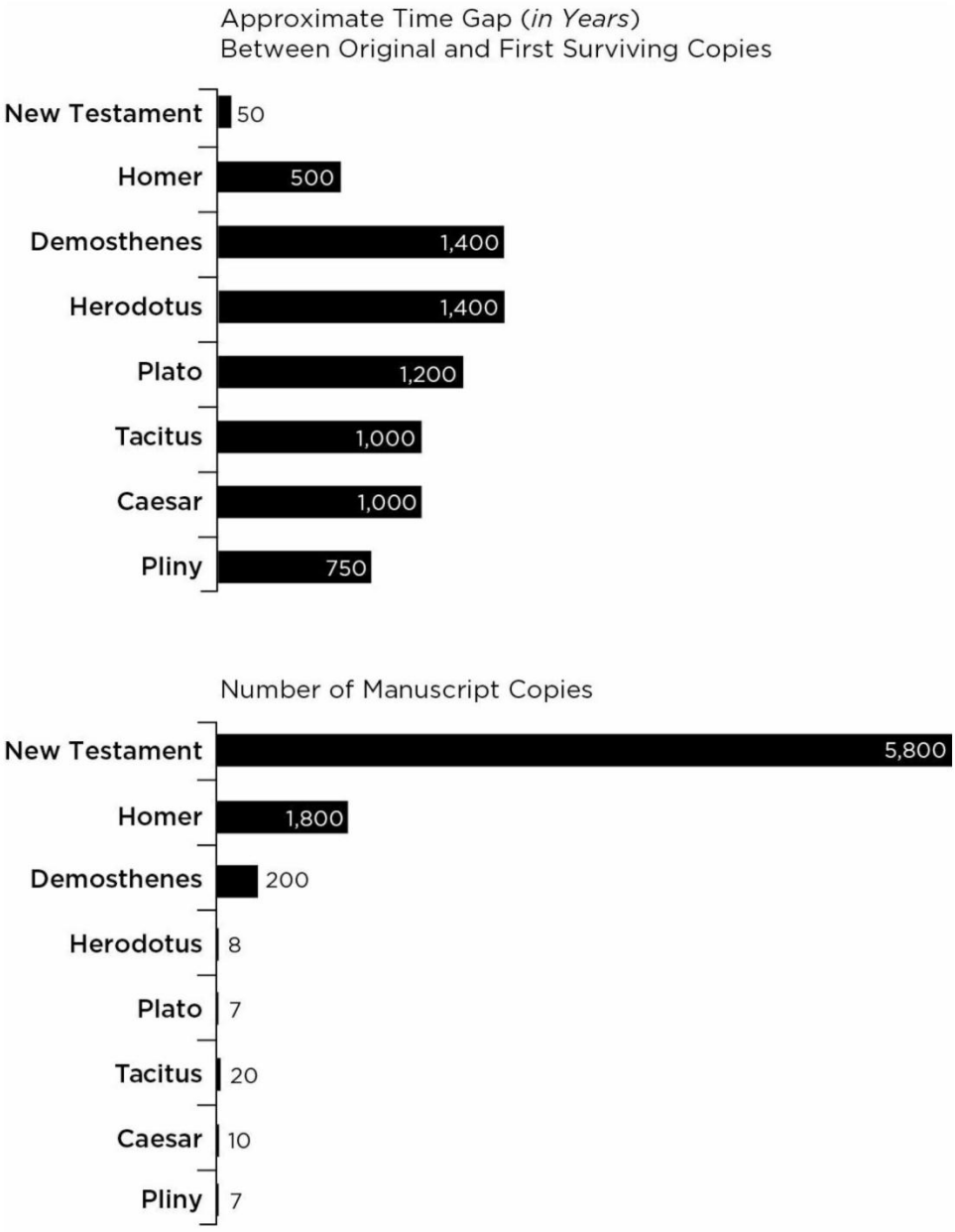


Figure 10.1 Reliability of the New Testament compared to other ancient documents

The time gap between the original and the first surviving copy is vastly shorter than anything else from the ancient world.[7] The *Iliad* has the next shortest gap at about 500 years; most other ancient works are 1,000 years or more from the original. The New Testament gap is about fifty years, give or take a couple decades. (This does *not* mean there were no other manuscripts

between the original and the first copy; there most certainly were. It simply means that those manuscripts have decayed, have been destroyed, or are still undiscovered.)

How old are the oldest surviving manuscripts of New Testament books? Some complete manuscripts of New Testament books survive from about AD 200. Most of the New Testament, including all of the Gospels, survives from 250, and a manuscript of the vast majority of the New Testament (including a Greek Old Testament) called Codex Vaticanus survives from about 325. Codex Sinaiticus is a complete manuscript that also survives from that century (ca. 340). And those manuscripts have spelling and punctuation characteristics that suggest that they are from a family of manuscripts that can be traced back to AD 100–150. All told, 43 percent of the New Testament is preserved in manuscripts prior to 225.[8]

If these numerous and early manuscripts were all scholars had, they could reconstruct the original New Testament with great accuracy. But they also have abundant supporting evidence from the ancient world that makes New Testament reconstruction even more certain.

More Abundantly Supported Manuscripts

Beginning in February of AD 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian issued three edicts of persecution on Christians because he believed that the existence of Christianity was breaking the covenant between Rome and her gods. The edicts called for the destruction of churches, manuscripts, and books, and the killing of Christians.[9]

Hundreds if not thousands of manuscripts were destroyed across the Roman Empire during this persecution, which lasted until 311. But even if Diocletian had succeeded in wiping every biblical manuscript off the face of the earth, he could not have destroyed our ability to reconstruct the New Testament. Why? Because the early church fathers—men of the second and third centuries, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and others—quoted the New Testament some 36,289 times. Indeed, counting all the Fathers, there are some 1 million citations of the New Testament.[10] In other words, you could go down to your local public library, check out the works of the early church fathers, and read nearly the entire New Testament just from their quotations of it! So we not only have thousands of manuscripts but thousands of quotations from those manuscripts. This makes reconstruction of the original text virtually certain.

But how certain? How are the originals reconstructed, and how accurate is the reconstructed New Testament?

How Are the Originals Reconstructed?

These three facts—many, early, and supported manuscripts—help scholars reconstruct the original New Testament manuscripts rather confidently. The process of comparing the many copies and quotations allows an extremely accurate reconstruction of the originals even if errors crept in while copying. How does this work?

Consider the following example. Suppose we have four different manuscripts that have four different errors in the same verse, such as John 8:58, where Jesus claims the name of God. Here are the hypothetical copies:

1. Truly, truly, I say to you, #efore Abraham was, I am.
2. Truly, truly, I say to you, b#fore Abraham was, I am.
3. Truly, truly, I say to you, be#ore Abraham was, I am.
4. Truly, truly, I say to you, bef#re Abraham was, I am.

Is there any mystery what the original said? None whatsoever. By the process of comparing and cross-checking, the original New Testament can be reconstructed with great accuracy. And the reconstruction of the New Testament is easier than this, because there are far fewer errors in the actual New Testament manuscripts than are represented by this example.

Let's assume for a minute that the New Testament really is the word of God. Skeptics may ask, "Well, if the New Testament really is the word of God, then why didn't God preserve the originals?"

We can only speculate here, but one possibility is because his word might have been better protected through copies than through original documents. How so? If the original had been in someone's possession, that person could have changed it. But since there were copies spread all over the ancient world, there was no way one scribe or priest could alter the word of God. He would have had to gather and change most of the manuscripts in existence, which would have been impossible.

Instead, as we have seen, the process of reconstruction allows variants and changes from copies to be identified and corrected rather easily. So ironically, *not* having the originals may have preserved God's word better than having them.

How Accurate Are the Reconstructions?

In order to address the issue of accuracy, we need to clear up the misunderstandings of many critics concerning "errors" in the biblical manuscripts. Some have estimated there are about 200,000 errors in the New Testament manuscripts.

First, these are not "errors" but variant readings, the vast majority of which are strictly grammatical (i.e., punctuation and spelling). Second, these readings are spread throughout 5,800 manuscripts, so that a variant spelling of *one* letter of *one* word in *one* verse in 2,000 manuscripts is counted as 2,000 "errors."

Finally, the reason there are so many variants is because there are so many manuscripts. If there were only one manuscript, we would have zero variants, but we would have no way of discovering if that manuscript had been changed either intentionally or unintentionally. Having many manuscripts yields more variants but also makes the reconstruction of the text more sure.

Nineteenth-century textual scholars Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort estimated that only *one in sixty* of these variants has significance. This would leave a text 98.33 percent pure.[11] Philip Schaff calculated that, of the 150,000 variants known in his day, only 400 changed the meaning of the passage, only fifty were of real significance, and *not even one* affected "an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching."[12]

No other ancient book is so well authenticated. The late great New Testament manuscript scholar and Princeton professor Bruce Metzger estimated that the *Mahabharata* of Hinduism was copied with only about 90 percent accuracy and Homer's *Iliad* with about 95 percent. By comparison, he estimated the New Testament is about 99.5 percent accurate.[13] Again, the 0.5 percent in question does not affect a single doctrine of the Christian faith.

But didn't Metzger's famous student, Bart Ehrman, the recently retired professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, cast doubt on the reconstruction of the New Testament documents in his popular book *Misquoting Jesus*? Yes, but only for about ten minutes.

In 2005, the same year Ehrman published *Misquoting Jesus*, he helped Metzger update and revise the classic work on the topic—Metzger's *The Text of the New Testament.*[14] What did Metzger and Ehrman conclude together in that revised work? That the New Testament documents can be reconstructed accurately! In fact, Ehrman admits this in an interview found in the appendix

of the 2007 paperback edition of *Misquoting Jesus*. After praising Metzger, Ehrman writes: "The position I argue for in *Misquoting Jesus* does not actually stand at odds with Professor Metzger's position that the essential Christian beliefs are not affected by textual variants in the manuscript tradition of the New Testament."[15]

This brings up several questions. Why did Ehrman come to opposite conclusions about the New Testament documents in two different books in the same year? (Maybe *Misquoting Jesus* should be called *Misquoting Ehrman?*) Why did he give one impression to the general public and the opposite to the academic world? Could it be because he could get away with casting doubt on the New Testament to an uninformed public but not to his academic peers?

We don't know the answers to these questions, but we find this basic inconsistency quite telling—the manuscript scholar who gets all the attention for casting doubt on the reconstruction of the New Testament text, upon further review, doesn't really doubt it himself. So why should you?

Ancient manuscript authority Fredric Kenyon summed up well the status of the New Testament when he wrote,

> It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: Especially is this the case with the New Testament. The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world.[16]

So we know we have the same New Testament that was written down in the first century. But the next question is even more important: Do we have an accurate copy of the truth or a lie? In other words, is the New Testament historically reliable?

Question 2: Is the New Testament Historically Reliable?

When we ask, "Is the New Testament historically reliable?" we are seeking to discover if the major events described in the New Testament documents really happened. Specifically, was there really a Jewish man in the first century by the name of Jesus who taught profound truths, performed

miracles, was crucified by Roman and Jewish authorities for claiming to be God, and who appeared to many witnesses after rising from the dead three days later?

It is important to keep in mind that, at this point, we are *not* seeking to discover if the New Testament is without error or is the "word of God." We are simply trying to discover if the basic storyline is fact, not fiction. To discover this, we need to ascertain what kind of records comprise the New Testament. Are they documents written soon after the events by eyewitnesses (or by those who interviewed eyewitnesses)? Or, are they documents written much later by biased followers who simply embellished details about the life of a real historical figure?

In order to find out, over the next few chapters we will test the New Testament documents by criteria historians use to determine whether to believe any historical document. We'll refer to these criteria as "historical tests." They include:

1. *Do we have early testimony?* Generally, the earlier the sources, the more accurate is the testimony.
2. *Do we have eyewitness testimony?* Eyewitness testimony is usually the best means of establishing what really happened.
3. *Do we have testimony from multiple independent eyewitness sources?* Multiple independent eyewitnesses confirm that the events really occurred (they are not fiction) and provide additional details that a single source might miss. (True independent sources normally tell the same basic story but with differing details. Historians sometimes call this "coherence with dissimilarity.")
4. *Are the eyewitnesses trustworthy?* Were they people of high character? Were they biased one way or the other? Did they have any incentive to lie, such as to get sex, money, and/or power? Conversely, did writing what they did actually cost them personally?
5. *Do we have corroborating evidence from archaeology or other writers?* This adds further confirmation.
6. *Do we have any enemy attestation?* If opponents of the eyewitnesses admit certain facts the eyewitnesses say are true, then those facts probably are true (for example, if your mother says you are brave, that might be true, but it's probably more credible if your archenemy says the same thing).

7. *Does the testimony contain events or details that are embarrassing to the authors?* Since most people will not invent negative information about themselves, any testimony that makes the authors look bad is probably true.

In most cases, documents that meet most or all of these historical tests are considered trustworthy beyond a reasonable doubt. How do the New Testament documents fare? We'll find out in the remainder of this chapter and the next three chapters. But before we start at historical test number 1 (early testimony), we need to clear away some objections that prevent many skeptics from even considering the reliability of the New Testament. Here are some of the most common objections to reliability.

History Cannot Be Known

Some skeptics won't even consider the reliability of the New Testament documents because they assert that history cannot be known. Ironically, this objection normally comes from the same people who say they *know* that the first life generated spontaneously from nonliving chemicals and that all subsequent life evolved from that first life without intelligent intervention. They are absolutely sure about *that history* despite the fact that there were no eyewitnesses and there is no corroborating data for those events. Yet they assert that the resurrection of Jesus Christ—an event for which there are eyewitnesses and corroborating data—cannot be known!

The assertion that history cannot be known is against all common sense. Are we not sure that George Washington was the first president of the United States? That Abraham Lincoln was the sixteenth? That Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941? That the New York Mets won the 1986 World Series? Of course we are. The skeptic is wrong. We can and do know history. In fact, if we can't know history, then we can never detect historical revisionism or historical propaganda, both of which must assume there's an objective history that can be known.

Why can't someone have knowledge of a past event? The skeptic may say, "Because you don't have access to all the facts!" We respond, "Then scientists can't know anything either because they don't have access to all the facts." This is obviously absurd. While we don't have access to all the facts, we may be able to gather enough of them to be reasonably certain about what happened.

Part of the confusion involves a failure to define what it means to "know." Since we can't go back in time and witness historical events again, our historical knowledge is based on probability. In other words, we use the same standard a jury uses to determine if a defendant committed a crime: beyond a reasonable doubt. If history cannot be known, then no jury could ever reach a verdict! After all, a jury makes a judgment about the guilt or innocence of someone based on *knowledge* of some *past* event. Historians must discover past events just as police and forensic scientists do—by piecing together evidence and interviewing eyewitnesses. And when they do, they often use the seven historical tests we identified above.

Finally, if we cannot know history, then skeptics cannot claim that Christianity is untrue. To say that Christianity is untrue, the skeptic must know history. Why? Because every negation implies an affirmation. To say that Jesus didn't rise from the dead (the negation), the skeptic must *know* what actually *did* happen to him (the affirmation).

In the end, skeptics are caught in a dilemma. If they say history cannot be known, then they lose the ability to say evolution is true and Christianity is false. If they admit history can be known, then they must deal with the multiple lines of historical evidence for creation and Christianity.

The New Testament Documents Contain Miracles

Skeptics usually charge, "The New Testament contains miracles; therefore, much of it *has* to be legend!" We've already answered that objection. Since God exists, miracles are possible. And as we'll see later, the events of the New Testament are in a context where miracles are not only possible but were predicted. So the inclusion of miracles does not negate the historicity of the New Testament documents but may strengthen their historicity (because they record predicted events).

The New Testament Writers Were Biased

Several years ago, a so-called documentary about Jesus on a cable TV channel led off with a bold yet foolish claim. It said that most of what we think we know about Jesus comes from the New Testament Gospels —Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—but we can't trust those books for accurate information because they were written by men who were converted.

Now, what's wrong with that logic? What's wrong is that it fails to ask the most important question: *Why were they converted?* Indeed, the first and

most important question is *not* "What were the beliefs of the New Testament writers?" The first and most important question is "Why did they convert to these new beliefs?"

Why do we say that? Because skeptics will dismiss the reliability of the Bible because they think it's a Christian source. In reply, we would say, first, that it's a genetic fallacy to dismiss something without investigation because of its source. Second, the New Testament is at least nine sources, not one.[17]

But the bigger point is this: *The New Testament writers did not start as Christian sources—they started as Jewish sources.* All of the New Testament writers started as Jews who firmly believed they already had the one true religion, which insisted that they were the chosen people of God.

Why did these Jews risk persecution, death, and perhaps eternal damnation to start something that (1) wasn't true and (2) elevated non-Jews into the exclusive relationship they claimed to have with the Creator of the universe? Why did they abandon their livelihoods and treasured religious traditions for new ones? Why did they almost immediately stop observing the Sabbath, circumcision, the Law of Moses, the centrality of the temple, the priestly system, and other Old Testament teachings? Why did they insist a man claimed to be God (which was blasphemy by their own doctrine) and then rose from the dead if neither really happened?

It was because they were converted. Why were they converted? They must have witnessed some very strong evidence. We'll see that evidence soon.

The bottom line is this: The New Testament writers had everything to *lose* by inventing the Jesus story. That's why it's foolish to assume that they can't be trusted and that non-Christian sources are to be preferred. While the non-Christian sources we mentioned above corroborate that story, they are not the most credible sources for the origins of Christianity. The New Testament writers are. They backed up their story with their own blood (more on this later).

Converted People Are Not Objective

At this point, the skeptic might protest, "But since the New Testament writers were converted, they can't be objective."

Nonsense. People can be objective even when they aren't neutral. A doctor can give an objective diagnosis even if he has strong feelings for the patient. That is, he can be objective even though he isn't neutral. In fact, his passion for the patient may cause him to be all the more diligent in

diagnosing and then treating the disease properly.

In writing this book, while we certainly aren't neutral, we are presenting objective facts. Likewise, atheists are not neutral, but they too can present objective facts if they decide to. The New Testament writers could do the same.

The truth of the matter is that all books are written for a reason, and most authors believe what they are writing! But that doesn't mean what they write is wrong or has no objective element. The survivors of the Holocaust who wrote down their experiences certainly were not neutral bystanders. They believed passionately in recording those events so that the world would never forget the Holocaust and, hopefully, never repeat it. While passion may cause some people to exaggerate, it may drive others to be more meticulous and accurate so as not to lose credibility and acceptance of the message they wish to communicate.

This distinction between the neutrality and the objectivity of the New Testament writers is an extremely important point. Too often the documents that make up the New Testament are automatically considered biased and untrustworthy. This is ironic because those who hold this view are often biased themselves. They are biased because they have not first investigated the New Testament documents or the context in which they were written to make an educated assessment of their trustworthiness.

As we're about to see, the New Testament documents are not "church propaganda" or a monolith of writings designed to promote a church-manufactured theology. What are they then? That's the question we'll address in the remainder of this chapter and the next three.

So let's get started. We know we have an accurate copy of what was written down by the New Testament writers. But are those documents trustworthy? Our first question deals with historical test #1: Are the New Testament documents early?

Are the New Testament Documents Early?

Yes. How early?

All New Testament Books Were Written Before AD 100 (About Seventy Years After the Death of Jesus)

As table 10.1 shows, in letters written between AD 95 and 110, three early church fathers—Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp—quoted passages from

twenty-five of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament.[18] Only the short books of Jude and 2 John were not referenced, but they certainly had been written. (Jude had written his short letter by this time because, being Jesus's half-brother, he was almost certainly dead by AD 100; and 2 John had been written because it came before 3 John, which was one of the twenty-five books quoted.)

Table 10.1 Early citations of New Testament books

Clement, writing from Rome (c. 95)	**Ignatius, writing from Smyrna in Asia Minor (c. 107)**	**Polycarp, writing from Smyrna in Asia Minor (c. 110)**
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew
Mark	Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke	Luke
Romans	John	John
1 Corinthians	Acts	Acts
Ephesians	Romans	Romans
1 Timothy	1 Corinthians	1 Corinthians
Titus	2 Corinthians	2 Corinthians
Hebrews	Galatians	Galatians
James	Ephesians	Ephesians
1 Peter	Philippians	Philippians
	Colossians	Colossians
	1 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians
	1 Timothy	1 Timothy
	2 Timothy	2 Timothy
	Titus	Hebrews
	Philemon	1 Peter
	Hebrews	1 John
	James	
	1 Peter	
	2 Peter	
	1 John	
	3 John	
	Revelation	

Since Clement was in Rome and Ignatius and Polycarp were hundreds of miles away in Smyrna, the original New Testament documents had to have been written significantly earlier; otherwise they could not have circulated across the ancient world by the time these church fathers referenced them. Therefore, it's safe to say that all of the New Testament was written by AD 100, and at least those in the left column several years before 95.

But that's just the *latest* they could have been written. Most were probably written much earlier. How much earlier? Most if not all before AD 70.

Most If Not All of These Books Were Written Before AD 70 (About Forty Years After the Death of Jesus)

The primary reason critical scholars date the Gospels after AD 70 is because they believe Jesus could not have predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple that year. Like many Darwinists, they have an antisupernatural bias that, as we have seen, is illegitimate because God exists. They also ignore the evidence for an earlier date, which ironically includes the catastrophic events of AD 70.

To see how, imagine you're a devout Jew in the first century. The center of your national, economic, and religious life is Jerusalem, and especially the temple. It has been that way in your nation, your family, and almost every Jew's family for a thousand years—ever since Solomon built the first temple. Most of the newest temple, constructed by King Herod, was completed when you were a child, but portions of it are still under construction and have been since 19 BC. For your entire life you have attended services and brought sacrifices there to atone for the sins you've committed against God. Why? Because you and your countrymen consider this temple the earthly dwelling place of the God of the universe, the Maker of heaven and earth, the very deity whose name is so holy you dare not utter it.

As a young person, you begin following a Jew named Jesus who claims to be the long-awaited Messiah predicted in your Scriptures. He performs miracles, teaches profound truths, and scolds and befuddles the priests in charge of the temple. Incredibly, he predicts his own death and resurrection. He also predicts that the temple itself will be destroyed before your generation passes away (Mark 13:2, 30).

This is scandalous! Jesus is convicted of blasphemy by your temple priests and is crucified on the eve of the Passover, one of your holiest holidays. He's buried in a Jewish tomb, but three days later you and his other followers see

Jesus alive just as he predicted. You touch him and eat with him, and he continues to perform miracles, the last being his ascension into heaven. Forty years later, your temple is destroyed just as Jesus predicted, along with the entire city and thousands of your countrymen.

Question: If you and your fellow followers write accounts of Jesus *after* the temple and city are destroyed in AD 70, aren't you going to at least mention that unprecedented national, human, economic, and religious tragedy somewhere in your writings, especially since this risen Jesus predicted it? Of course. In fact, you probably can't resist emphasizing that the tragedy is more proof that Jesus was God or at least a prophet!

Well, here's the problem for those who say the New Testament was written after 70—there's absolutely no mention of the fulfillment of this predicted tragedy anywhere in the New Testament documents. This strongly suggests that most, if not all, of the documents must have been written prior to 70.

Some may object, "That's an argument from silence, and that doesn't prove anything." But even if this were an argument from silence, that doesn't mean it's wrong. Some events are so big in scope that they are unlikely to be left out of an account after the fact.

Consider these modern parallels. If a former sailor aboard the USS *Arizona* wrote a book related to the history of that ship, and the book ends with no mention of the ship being sunk and 1,177 of its sailors being killed at Pearl Harbor, do you have *any* doubt that the book must have been written prior to December 7, 1941? Or if a former tenant of the World Trade Center wrote a book related to the history of those buildings, and the book ends with the towers still standing—with absolutely no mention of the towers being destroyed and nearly 3,000 people being murdered by Muslim terrorists—do you have *any* doubt that the book must have been written prior to September 11, 2001? Of course not.

Well, the disaster in AD 70, in terms of lives, property, and national scope, was many magnitudes greater than Pearl Harbor and 9/11. It marked the end of such a terrible war that Josephus—who himself surrendered to the Romans in 67—called it the "greatest" war of all time.[19] The Jews didn't lose just one ship or a couple of prominent buildings—they lost their entire country, their capital city, and their temple, which had been the center of their religious, political, and economic life for the last thousand years. In addition, *tens of thousands* of their countrymen were killed and hundreds of their

villages were burned to the ground.

So if we would expect national tragedies such as Pearl Harbor and 9/11 to be mentioned in the relevant writings of today, we certainly should expect the events of AD 70 to be cited somewhere in the New Testament (especially since the events were predicted by Jesus).

There are also positive reasons to believe that even later books, such as John, Hebrews, and Revelation, were written prior to AD 70. Perhaps the most persuasive is that those books speak of Jerusalem and the temple, or activities associated with them, as if they were still intact at the time of the writings! For example, John 5:2 says, "There *is* in Jerusalem . . . a pool . . . called Bethesda." That would have been false after AD 70. Revelation also implies the temple is still standing.[20]

Manuscript scholar Daniel Wallace makes the John 5:2 argument and adds six *more* reasons to believe in the earlier dating.[21] One of those reasons is P52—the earliest manuscript fragment of the New Testament, which is from John 18. Wallace says it's "almost inconceivable" that P52, and another early papyrus that referred to John, would exist if John was written in the 90s. As we've seen, P52 is from as early as AD 100, and was discovered in Egypt, across the Mediterranean from its place of composition. It must have been in circulation for more than just a few years for that to happen. Wallace thinks John was written in AD 65. While still a minority view, several other prominent scholars are beginning to agree with Wallace that John was written pre-70.[22]

In the next chapter, we'll see fifty-eight more details from John's Gospel that lend support to this earlier dating. These details show that John was an eyewitness of the events, customs, and surroundings of pre-AD 70 Israel.

The bottom line is that there are several reasons for believing that even the later New Testament documents were written prior to 70. Others were written even earlier. How much earlier?

Many New Testament Books Were Composed Before AD 62 (About Thirty Years After the Death of Jesus)

Imagine this: You are a first-century medical doctor who has embarked on a research project to record the events of the early church. This research will require you to interview eyewitnesses of the early church and to travel with the apostle Paul as he visits new churches across the ancient world. You record prominent events in the life of the church, such as the early work of

John and Peter, as well as the martyrdoms of Stephen and James (the brother of John). In Paul's life, you record everything from sermons, beatings, and trials to shipwrecks and imprisonments. You also record his theological summit with Peter and James, who is Jesus's brother and the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15).

As you describe many of these events, your narrative is so filled with details that every informed reader will know that either you must have access to eyewitness testimony or you are an eyewitness yourself. For example, as you follow Paul on his travels, you shift from using the pronoun "they" to "we," and you correctly record the names of local politicians, use local slang, and write about local weather patterns, local topography, and local business practices; you even record the right depth of the water about a quarter mile off Malta as your ship is about to run aground in a storm! In fact, you record at least eighty-four such details in the last half of your narrative.

Question: Since you obviously find it important to record these minor details, if your main subject—the apostle Paul—is executed at the hands of the Roman emperor Nero, do you think you will record it? Or if Jesus's brother, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, is killed at the hands of the Sanhedrin, the same Jewish body that sentenced Jesus to die, do you think you will record it? Of course! And if you fail to record such momentous events, we will rightly assume that you wrote your narrative *before* their deaths.

This is the situation we find in the New Testament. Luke, the medical doctor, meticulously records all kinds of details in Acts, which chronicles the early church (a listing of eighty-four historically confirmed details is in the next chapter). Luke records the deaths of two Christian martyrs (Stephen and James the brother of John), but his account ends with three of its primary leaders (Peter, Paul, and James the brother of Jesus) still living. Acts ends abruptly with Paul under house arrest in Rome, and there's no mention of James having died. We know from Clement of Rome, writing in the late first century, and from other early church fathers that Paul was executed sometime during the reign of Nero, which ended in AD 68.[23] And we know from Josephus that James was killed in 62. So we can conclude, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the book of Acts was written before 62.

If you're still not convinced, consider this modern parallel: Suppose someone wrote a book recording the events surrounding the main figures of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. The book begins with the

assassination of President John F. Kennedy and includes the Civil Rights legislation of 1964, the marches and protests of Martin Luther King Jr., his arrest and imprisonment, and his iconic "I have a dream" speech on the Mall in Washington, DC. Question: If the book ends with King—the very leader of the movement—still alive, when would you conclude that the book was written? Obviously you would think it was written before his assassination in April 1968. This is the same situation we have with Luke's narrative. His book ends with the main leaders still alive, which means it was written no later than 62. (Classical scholar and historian Colin Hemer gives thirteen additional reasons why Acts was written by 62.[24])

If Acts was written by 62, then the Gospel of Luke was written before that. How do we know? Because Luke reminds the original recipient of Acts, Theophilus—who was probably the high priest[25] who served from AD 37–41—that he had written to him earlier. The first verse of Acts says, "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach . . ." (NIV 1984). The "former book" must be the Gospel of Luke, because Luke addresses that to Theophilus as well (Luke 1:1–4, see citation below).

How much earlier is Luke? It would seem reasonable to place Luke at or before 60. Why? Because 62 is the *latest* Acts was written, and there had to have been time between Luke's first writing to Theophilus and his second. If Acts is no later than 62 (and quite possibly earlier), then Luke is realistically 60 or before.

This date also makes sense in light of Paul's quotation of Luke's Gospel. Writing sometime between AD 62 and 65, Paul quotes from Luke 10:7 and calls it "Scripture" (1 Tim. 5:18). Therefore, Luke's Gospel must have been in circulation long enough before that time for both Paul and Timothy to know its contents and regard it as Scripture. (By the way, this was no minor claim for Paul to make. In effect, he was making the bold assertion that Luke's Gospel was just as inspired as the Holy Jewish Bible—the Old Testament he treasured so much!)

If Luke was written by 60, then Mark must have been written in the mid-to-late 50s, if not earlier. Why? Because Luke says that he got his facts by checking with eyewitness sources:

> Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those

> who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1–4 NIV 1984)

Most scholars believe Mark's Gospel was one of those eyewitness sources. But even if Mark is not before Luke, the very fact that we know beyond a reasonable doubt that Luke is before 62 and probably before 60 means that we have meticulously recorded eyewitness testimony written within twenty-five or thirty years of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection. This is far too early for the content to be legendary. It also means that the eyewitness sources go back even earlier. How much earlier?

Some New Testament Books Were Penned in the 40s and 50s, with Sources from the 30s (Very Near the Death of Jesus)

As certain as we are about the date of Luke's records, there is no doubt from anyone—including the most liberal of scholars—that Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth (which is in modern-day Greece) sometime between 55 and 56. In this letter, Paul speaks about moral problems in the church, and then proceeds to discuss controversies over tongues, prophecies, and the Lord's Supper. This demonstrates that the church in Corinth was experiencing some kind of miraculous activity and was already observing the Lord's Supper within twenty-five years of the resurrection.

But the most significant aspect of this letter is that it contains the earliest and most authenticated testimony of the resurrection itself. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes down the testimony he received from others and the testimony that was authenticated when Christ appeared to him:

> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Cor. 15:3–8)

Where did Paul get what he "received"? He probably received it from Peter and James when he visited them in Jerusalem three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18). Why is this important? Because, as Gary Habermas points out, even liberal scholars believe that this testimony was part of an early creed that was composed within one to three years after the resurrection.[26] This creed is so widely accepted as early that New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham writes, "*All scholars* recognize here an early tradition that was formulated even before Paul's own call to be an apostle (to which he refers in v. 8)."[27]

Habermas cites about forty additional creeds in the New Testament, which are short, repeatable summaries of historical events and/or theological doctrines that even illiterate people could remember easily. These include: Romans 1:3–4; 4:25; 10:9; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 11:23–26; Philippians 2:6–11; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 4:14; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18–22; and several in Acts.[28] Since these creeds predate the writings, when you're reading the New Testament documents, you're reading testimony far closer to the events than the dates of the documents themselves.

The creed from 1 Corinthians 15 goes right back to the time and place of the resurrection. Therefore, it's unlikely to be describing a legend.[29] If there was ever a place that a legendary resurrection could *not* occur it was Jerusalem, because the Jews and the Romans were all too eager to squash Christianity and could have easily done so by parading Jesus's body around the city.

Moreover, notice that Paul cites fourteen eyewitnesses whose names are known: the twelve apostles, James, and Paul himself ("Cephas" is the Aramaic for Peter), and then references an appearance to more than 500 others at one time. Included in those groups was one skeptic, James, and one outright enemy, Paul himself. By naming so many people who could verify what Paul was saying, Paul was, in effect, challenging his Corinthian readers to check him out. Bible scholar William Lillie puts it this way:

> What gives a special authority to the list as historical evidence is the reference to most of the five hundred brethren being still alive. St. Paul says in effect: "if you do not believe me, you can ask them." Such a statement in an admittedly genuine letter written within thirty years of the event is almost as strong evidence as one could hope to get for something that happened nearly two thousand years ago.[30]

If the resurrection had not occurred, why did Paul give such a list of supposed eyewitnesses? He would have immediately lost all credibility with his Corinthian readers by lying so blatantly.

In addition to 1 Corinthians, there are numerous other New Testament documents that were written in the 50s or earlier. Galatians (AD 48), 1 Thessalonians (50–54), and Romans (57–58) are all in this category. In fact (and we know we may be going out on a limb here), all of Paul's works had to have been written before he died, which was sometime in the mid-60s.

But it's not just conservative scholars who believe these early dates. Even some radical critics, such as atheist John A. T. Robinson, admitted that the New Testament documents were written early. Known for his role in launching the "Death of God" movement, Robinson wrote a revolutionary book titled *Redating the New Testament*[31] in which he posited that most New Testament books, including all four Gospels, were written sometime between 40 and 65.

The great and once-liberal archaeologist William F. Albright, after seeing how well the New Testament fit with the archaeological and historical data, wrote, "We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about AD 80."[32] Elsewhere Albright said, "In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the 40s and the 80s of the first century (very probably sometime between about A.D. 50 and 75)."[33]

Jonathan Bernier authored the most recent complete book on New Testament dating. He concludes that every gospel is prior to AD 70, with Mark the earliest at AD 42–45—that's only about ten years after Jesus's ascension. He writes that every other New Testament book was also prior to AD 70, with only a few shorter books having an estimated range where the *upper limit* passed beyond AD 70.[34]

The bottom line is that the evidence shows the New Testament documents were written early by eyewitnesses or those that knew them, and their sources go back to near the events themselves. But skeptics still have objections.

Skeptic's Advocate

The Documents Are Not Early Enough

Some skeptics may think that a ten-to-forty-year gap between the life of Christ and the writings about him is too wide for the testimony to be reliable. But they are mistaken.

Think about events that occurred ten to forty years ago. When historians write about those events, we don't say, "Oh, that's impossible! No one can remember events from that long ago!" Such skepticism is clearly unwarranted. Historians today write accurately about events in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s by consulting their own memories, those of other eyewitnesses, and any written sources from the time.

This process is the same one the New Testament writers used to record their documents. Like a good reporter, Luke interviewed eyewitnesses.[35] And as we'll see in the next chapter, some New Testament writers were eyewitnesses themselves. They could remember ten-to-forty-year-old events quite easily, just as you can. Why can you remember certain events vividly from ten to forty years ago and (if you're old enough) even further back? You may be able to remember certain events because they made a great emotional impact on you. (In fact, those of us who are "over the hill" can remember some events from thirty years ago better than those from thirty minutes ago!)

We can remember what some call "impact events" from more than sixty years ago. If you're old enough, where were you and what were you doing when President Kennedy was assassinated? When the *Challenger* exploded? When the second plane hit the tower? When Donald Trump was shot? When my friend Charlie Kirk was shot?

I was with Charlie. Do you think I'm ever going to forget the sound of the shot, seeing Charlie hit, and then trying to stop the bleeding in the back of that SUV while his lifeless eyes were staring past me into eternity? Do you think I'm going to forget the antiseptic voice of the surgeon who later marched into the hall at the hospital and coldly announced, "He's dead"—not, "I'm sorry, we tried everything" or "We did everything we could"; just, "He's dead"?

Not only won't I forget any of it—I *can't* forget any of it. That's the nature of impact events. They make a deep emotional impact on you.

Do you think the resurrection of Jesus would have been an impact event?

Of course. That's why the New Testament writers—and the other eyewitnesses they may have consulted—could easily recall the history of Jesus years later. They were also in a culture of highly developed memories that relied on oral testimony (more on this below).

Furthermore, if the major works of the New Testament are eyewitness accounts written within two generations of the events, then they are not likely to be legend. Why? Because historical research indicates that a myth cannot

begin to crowd out historical facts while the eyewitnesses are still alive.

For this reason, Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White calls the mythological view of the New Testament "unbelievable."[36] William Lane Craig writes, "The tests show that even two generations is too short to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical fact."[37] Inside of those two generations, eyewitnesses are still around to correct the errors of historical revisionists.

We've seen this tendency recently with regard to the Holocaust. In the early twenty-first century, some people began to claim that the Holocaust never happened. Why? Because most of the eyewitnesses were dead by then. Fortunately, since we have written eyewitness testimony from the Holocaust, the revisionists are not successful in passing off their lies as the truth. The same holds true for the New Testament. If the New Testament was written within sixty years of the events it records, it is highly unlikely those events could be legendary. And as we have seen, all of the New Testament documents were written within sixty years of the events, and many much earlier.

Why Not Earlier?

At this point the skeptic might say, "Okay, fine. The New Testament is early, but it's not as early as I would expect. Why didn't they write down their testimony earlier? If I saw what they said they saw, I wouldn't wait ten or twenty years to write it down."

There are several possible reasons for the wait.

First, since the New Testament writers were living in a culture where most people were illiterate, there was no initial need or utility for writing it down. First-century people in Israel, by necessity, developed strong memories in order to remember and pass on information. Craig writes,

> In an oral culture like that of first-century Palestine the ability to memorize and retain large tracts of oral tradition was a highly prized and highly developed skill. From the earliest age children in the home, elementary school, and the synagogue were taught to memorize faithfully sacred tradition. The disciples would have exercised similar care with the teachings of Jesus.[38]

In such an oral culture, facts about Jesus were put into a memorable form

—creeds, as we saw earlier. These were passed along orally before they were put into writing (like 1 Cor. 15:3–8).[39]

Second, unlike today, writing was a special skill and extremely expensive. The estimated cost of producing just one copy of the shortest Gospel, Mark, would have been $1,860 (in 2026 dollars), and more for the others. Of course, more than one copy would have been made, which would have further increased the costs.[40]

Third, since some of the New Testament writers may have had high hopes that Jesus was going to come back in their lifetime, they saw no immediate need to write it down. But as they aged, perhaps they thought it wise to put their observations down on papyrus.

As Christianity spread all over the ancient world, writing became the most efficient means to communicate with the rapidly expanding church. In other words, time and distance forced the New Testament writers to write it down.

Moreover, many scholars believe there actually were written sources that predate the Gospels. In fact, Luke, in the first four verses of his Gospel, says that he checked with other sources, though some of these may have been earlier Gospels (e.g., Matthew and Mark).[41] It certainly seems as if Luke is speaking of *several* other *written* sources, because he says, "*Many* have undertaken to *draw up* an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us . . ." (Luke 1:1 NIV 1984). Luke may have referenced Mark's Gospel and other written testimonies, including public court records from Jesus's trial.

In the end, it doesn't really matter whether there were written sources that predated the New Testament. Why? Because the documents we do know about are early enough and contain earlier source material. As we've seen, many if not all of the New Testament documents were written by eyewitnesses or their contemporaries within ten to forty years of Jesus, and some contain oral or other written testimony that goes back to the resurrection itself.

In other words, *the real issue isn't so much the dates of the writings but the dates of the sources used in the writings.* For example, if you write a book about the events of 9/11 right now (twenty-five years later as of this writing), the fact that you are interviewing eyewitnesses from that time is more important than when you're writing it down. The same is true of the New Testament events. When you read the New Testament, you're reading sources that are earlier than the original documents. Those sources go back to

the events themselves.

Why Not More?

Skeptics may ask, “If Jesus actually did rise from the dead, shouldn’t there be more written about him than there is?” In response, we would note that we actually have *more* testimony than we might expect, and certainly more than enough to establish what happened beyond a reasonable doubt. Jesus is mentioned by forty-three written sources within 150 years of his life, nearly as much as the Roman Emperor Tiberius. Nine of those forty-three authors were eyewitnesses or contemporaries of the events, and they wrote twenty-seven documents, the majority of which mention or imply the resurrection. That’s more than enough to establish historicity.

For those who still think there should have been even more written about Jesus, New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg offers four reasons why that’s not a reasonable expectation: (1) the humble beginnings of Christianity; (2) the remote location of Palestine on the eastern frontiers of the Roman Empire; (3) the small percentage of the works of ancient Graeco-Roman historians that have survived (this could be due to loss, decay, destruction, or all of the above); and (4) the lack of attention paid by surviving historical documents to Jewish figures in general.[42]

Nevertheless, some skeptics still think there should be testimony from some of the 500 people who allegedly saw the risen Christ. Skeptic Farrell Till is one of them. During a debate on the resurrection that I (Norm) had with him, Till demanded, “Trot out one of those 500 witnesses or give us something that they wrote, and we will accept that as reliable proof or evidence.”[43]

This is an unreasonable expectation for several reasons. First, as we have already pointed out, first-century Israel was an oral culture. Most people were illiterate, so they remembered information and passed it on orally.

Second, how many of those predominantly illiterate eyewitnesses would have written something even if they could write? How many had the money to write? Even today, with a much higher literacy rate, inexpensive means, and all the conveniences of modern writing and research tools, how many people do you know who have written a book or even an article on any subject? Outside of blogs, how many do you know who have written a book or article on a contemporary historical event, even a significant event like 9/11? Probably not many, and certainly fewer than one out of 500. (Has

Farrell Till ever written an article on a major historical event he witnessed?)

Third, even if some of those 500 average people did write down what they saw, why would skeptics expect their testimony to survive for 2,000 years? The New Testament survives intact because of the thousands of manuscripts copied by scribes for a growing church over the centuries. Historical works from the major ancient historians such as Josephus, Tacitus, and Pliny survive on just a handful of copies, and those copies are hundreds of years from the originals. Why do the skeptics think anything would have been written, much less survived, from an ancient group of nonapostolic Galilean peasants?[44]

Finally, we do know the names of many of the 500, and their testimony is written down in the New Testament. They include Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, and James—plus nine who are named elsewhere as apostles (Matt. 10; Acts 1).

So we shouldn't expect more testimony than what we have about Jesus. And what we do have is more than enough to establish historicity.

Summary and Conclusion

We have much more to investigate regarding the historicity of the New Testament. But we can draw two major conclusions at this point:

1. We have an accurate copy of the original New Testament documents.
    a. While the original New Testament documents do not survive or have not yet been found, we have abundant and accurate copies of them—many more than that for the ten best pieces of ancient literature combined. Moreover, nearly perfect reconstruction of the originals can be accomplished by comparing the thousands of manuscript copies that do survive. We have discovered manuscript fragments from the early second century. There are *no* works from the ancient world that even come close to the New Testament in terms of manuscript support.
    b. Reconstruction is further authenticated by the thousands of quotations from the early church fathers.
2. The New Testament documents are early and contain even earlier source material.
    a. Since the New Testament documents are referenced by other

writers by about AD 100, they had to have been composed before then.

b. Since the New Testament documents speak as if the temple and the city were still standing at the time of their writing—and there is no mention of the onset of the Jewish war or the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem—most or all the New Testament documents are probably earlier than AD 70.

c. We have very strong evidence that Acts was written by 62, which means Luke's Gospel is even earlier.

d. We have source material that goes back into the 30s. All scholars agree that the death, burial, and resurrection testimony found in 1 Corinthians 15 comes from the time of those events or within a few years of them. Furthermore, there are at least forty other creeds in the New Testament that appear to be of very early origin.

So the documents are early and the sources are even earlier. But that's not enough to prove historicity beyond a reasonable doubt. For that we need to be sure that these documents really contain *eyewitness* testimony. Do they? That's the question we'll investigate next.

11

Do We Have Eyewitness Testimony About Jesus?

> We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.
>
> SIMON PETER

WE HAVE SEEN good evidence that the New Testament documents are early, so they meet historical test #1. But what about historical test #2? Do the New Testament documents contain eyewitness testimony? Let's begin by looking at the eyewitness claims of the New Testament writers.

If you accept the plain reading of the text, the New Testament certainly contains eyewitness testimony. Notice how many times various apostles claim to be eyewitnesses:

> This Jesus God raised up, and of that *we all are witnesses*. (Acts 2:32)
>
> You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this *we are witnesses*. (Acts 3:15)
>
> So they [the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law] called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to

listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of *what we have seen and heard*." (Acts 4:18–20)

The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. *And we are witnesses* to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. (Acts 5:30–32)

And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear. (Acts 10:39–40)

. . . Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he *appeared* to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he *appeared* to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he *appeared* to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he *appeared* also to me. (1 Cor. 15:3–8)

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. (1 Pet. 5:1)

We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but *we were eyewitnesses* of his majesty. (2 Pet. 1:16)

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He *who saw it* has borne witness—his testimony is true. (John 19:33–35)

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "*We have seen the Lord.*" But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand

into his side, I will never believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, *"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side.* Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "*Have you believed because you have seen me?* Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book. (John 20:24–30)

That which was from the beginning, *which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands,* concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and *we have seen it,* and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and *was made manifest to us.* (1 John 1:1–2)

You get the impression that these folks wanted everyone to know they actually saw something, don't you?

Furthermore, Luke and the writer of Hebrews claim to be informed by eyewitnesses:

Many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning *were eyewitnesses* and ministers of the word have delivered them to us. (Luke 1:1–2)

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, *was confirmed to us by those who heard him.* God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. (Heb. 2:3–4 NIV 1984)

In short, Peter, Paul, and John all claim to be eyewitnesses, and Luke and the writer of Hebrews claim to be informed by eyewitnesses. In addition, the New Testament writers name others who saw the resurrection. Paul specifically lists fourteen people whose names are known as eyewitnesses of the resurrection (the twelve apostles, James, and himself) and claims that

there were more than 500 others. Matthew and Luke confirm the appearances to the apostles. All four Gospels mention the women as witnesses, with Mark identifying them as Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. Luke adds Joanna. That's four more. Acts 1:23 also reveals that Joseph called Barsabbas was an eyewitness. That's at least nineteen people by name.

Not only do the apostles claim to be eyewitnesses, on several occasions they tell their audiences that everyone knows that what they're saying is true. These are not offhanded comments but bold proclamations to powerful people.

Perhaps the boldest eyewitness claim comes from Paul as he stands trial before King Agrippa and Governor Festus. Paul has just begun to tell Agrippa and Festus why he has converted to Christianity and how Christ rose from the dead as predicted by the Old Testament, when suddenly Festus interrupts and calls Paul insane! The dramatic exchange is recorded by Luke in Acts 26:24–28:

> At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."
>
> "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."
>
> Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" (NIV 1984)

Do you see how brave, almost brash, Paul is? He not only boldly witnesses to the king and the governor, but he has the audacity to tell the king that he already knows Paul is telling the truth! Why is Paul so confident of this? Because the events of Christianity were "not done in a corner." They were common knowledge and surely had not "escaped [the king's] notice." Imagine a defendant challenging a ruler or judge in that way! Such a witness must know that the events he describes are well known.

This provocative approach is taken by several New Testament characters, who are not shy about challenging their hearers to test the truth of their testimony. For example, the other apostles, led by Peter, are just as brash and confident when they are questioned by angry Jewish authorities. Luke records

the incident in Acts 5:27–32:

> And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

The account goes on to say that the Jewish authorities “were enraged and wanted to kill them [the apostles],” but a well-respected Pharisee named Gamaliel talked them out of it (vv. 33–39).

The risk Paul, Peter, and the other apostles took to claim that they were providing eyewitness testimony certainly suggests that they were telling the truth. If these accounts are true, the apostles’ unwavering testimony and provocative challenges demonstrate that they were eyewitnesses who really believed Jesus rose from the dead.

But are these accounts true? After all, why should we trust that Luke is telling us the truth about these events? It’s one thing to claim that you’re an eyewitness or have eyewitness testimony, and it’s another thing to prove it. What evidence do we have that the New Testament writers were really eyewitnesses or had access to eyewitness testimony? Much more than you might think.

Were They Really Eyewitnesses?

Eyewitness Evidence: Luke

Suppose someone wrote a book in 2006 describing your hometown as it was that year. In the book, the author correctly described your town’s politicians, its unique laws and penal codes, the local industry, local weather patterns, local slang, the town’s roads and geography, its unusual topography, local houses of worship, area hotels, town statues and sculptures, the depth of the water in the town harbor, and numerous other unique details from that year. If the author claimed he had visited your town that year—or said he had gotten

good information from people who had been there—would you think he was telling the truth? Of course you would, because he provided details that only an eyewitness could provide. That's the type of testimony we have throughout much of the New Testament.

Luke includes the most eyewitness details. (While Luke may not have been an eyewitness to the resurrection itself, he certainly was an eyewitness to many New Testament events.) In the second half of Acts, for example, Luke displays an incredible array of knowledge of local places, names, environmental conditions, customs, and circumstances that befit only an eyewitness contemporary of the time and events.

Classical scholar and historian Colin Hemer chronicles Luke's accuracy in the book of Acts verse by verse. With painstaking detail, Hemer identifies eighty-four facts in the last sixteen chapters of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research.[1] As you read the following list, keep in mind that Luke did not have access to modern-day maps, nautical charts, Google Earth, or the internet, yet he accurately records the following:

1. The natural crossing between correctly named ports (Acts 13:4–5)
2. The proper port (Perga) along the direct destination of a ship crossing from Cyprus (13:13)
3. The proper location of Lycaonia (14:6)
4. The unusual but correct declension of the name Lystra (14:6)
5. The correct language spoken in Lystra—Lycaonian (14:11)
6. Two gods known to be associated—Zeus and Hermes (14:12)
7. The proper port, Attalia, that returning travelers would have used (14:25)
8. The correct order of approach to Derbe and then Lystra from the Cilician Gates (16:1; cf. 15:41)
9. The proper form of the name Troas (16:8)
10. The place of a conspicuous sailors' landmark, Samothrace (16:11)
11. The proper description of Philippi as a Roman colony (16:12)
12. The right location for the river (Gangites) near Philippi (16:13)
13. The proper association of Thyatira as a center of dyeing (16:14)
14. Correct designations for the magistrates of Philippi (16:22)
15. The proper locations (Amphipolis and Apollonia) where travelers would spend successive nights on a journey to Thessalonica (17:1)
16. The presence of a synagogue in Thessalonica (17:1)

17. The proper term (“politarchs”) used of the magistrates there (17:6)
18. The correct implication that sea travel is the most convenient way of reaching Athens, with the favoring east winds of summer sailing (17:14–15)
19. The abundant presence of images in Athens (17:16)
20. The reference to a synagogue in Athens (17:17)
21. The depiction of the Athenian life of philosophical debate in the Agora (17:17)
22. The use of the correct Athenian slang word for Paul (*spermologos*, 17:18) as well as for the court (*Areios pagos*, 17:19)
23. The proper characterization of the Athenian character (17:21)
24. An altar to an “unknown god” (17:23)
25. The proper reaction of Greek philosophers, who denied the bodily resurrection (17:32)
26. *Areopagite* as the correct title for a member of the court (17:34)
27. A Corinthian synagogue (18:4)
28. The correct designation of Gallio as proconsul, resident in Corinth (18:12)
29. The *bema* (judgment seat), which overlooks Corinth’s *forum* (18:16ff.)
30. The name Tyrannus, as attested from Ephesus in first-century inscriptions (19:9)
31. Well-known shrines and images of Artemis (19:24)
32. The well-attested “great goddess Artemis” (19:27)
33. That the Ephesian theater was the meeting place of the city (19:29)
34. *Grammateus* as the correct title for the chief executive magistrate in Ephesus (19:35)
35. *Neokoros* as the proper title of honor authorized by the Romans (19:35)
36. The correct name to designate the goddess (19:37)
37. The proper term for those holding court (19:38)
38. Use of plural *anthupatoi*, perhaps a remarkable reference to the fact that *two* men were conjointly exercising the functions of proconsul at this time (19:38)
39. The phrase for the “regular” assembly, which is attested elsewhere (19:39)
40. Use of a precise ethnic designation, *beroiaios* (20:4)

41. Employment of the ethnic term *Asianos* (20:4)
42. The implied recognition of the strategic importance assigned to this city of Troas (20:7ff.)
43. The danger of the coastal trip in this location (20:13)
44. The correct sequence of places (20:14–15)
45. The correct name of the city as a neuter plural (*Patara*) (21:1)
46. The appropriate route for crossing the open sea south of Cyprus, favored by persistent northwest winds (21:3)
47. The suitable distance between these cities (21:8)
48. A characteristically Jewish act of piety (21:24)
49. The Jewish law regarding Gentile use of the temple area (21:28). (Archaeological discoveries and quotations from Josephus confirm that Gentiles could be executed for entering the temple area. One inscription reads, "Let no Gentile enter within the balustrade and enclosure surrounding the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will be personally responsible for his consequent death."[2])
50. The permanent stationing of a Roman cohort (*chiliarch*) at Antonia to suppress any disturbance at festival times (21:31)
51. The flight of steps used by the guards (21:31, 35)
52. The common way to obtain Roman citizenship at this time (22:28)
53. The tribune being impressed with Roman rather than Tarsian citizenship (22:29)
54. Ananias being high priest at this time (23:2)
55. Felix being governor at this time (23:24)
56. The natural stopping point on the way to Caesarea (23:31)
57. Whose jurisdiction Cilicia was in at the time (23:34)
58. The provincial penal procedure of the time (24:1–9)
59. The name Porcius Festus, which agrees precisely with that given by Josephus (24:27)
60. The right of appeal for Roman citizens (25:11)
61. The correct legal formula (25:18)
62. The characteristic form of reference to the emperor at the time (25:26)
63. The best shipping lanes at the time (27:5)
64. The common bonding of Cilicia and Pamphylia (27:5)
65. The principal port to find a ship sailing to Italy (27:5–6)
66. The slow passage to Cnidus in the face of the typical northwest

wind (27:7)
67. The right route to sail in view of the winds (27:7)
68. The locations of Fair Havens and the neighboring site of Lasea (27:8)
69. Fair Havens as a poorly sheltered roadstead (27:12)
70. A noted tendency of a south wind in these climes to back suddenly to a violent northeaster, the well-known *gregale* (27:14)
71. The nature of a square-rigged ancient ship having no option but to be driven before a gale (27:15)
72. The precise place and name of this island (27:16)
73. The appropriate maneuvers for the safety of the ship in its particular plight (27:16)
74. The fourteenth night—a remarkable calculation, based inevitably on a compounding of estimates and probabilities, confirmed in the judgment of experienced Mediterranean navigators (27:27)
75. The proper term of the time for the Adriatic (27:27)
76. The precise term (*bolisantes*) for taking soundings, and the correct depth of the water near Malta (27:28)
77. A position that suits the probable line of approach of a ship released to run before an easterly wind (27:39)
78. The severe liability on guards who permitted a prisoner to escape (27:42)
79. The local people and superstitions of the day (28:4–6)
80. The proper title *protos tēs nēsou* (28:7)
81. Rhegium as a refuge to await a southerly wind to carry a ship through the strait (28:13)
82. Appii Forum and Tres Tabernae as correctly placed stopping places on the Appian Way (28:15)
83. Appropriate means of custody with Roman soldiers (28:16)
84. The conditions of imprisonment, living “at his own expense” (28:30–31)

Is there any doubt that Luke was an eyewitness to these events or at least had access to reliable eyewitness testimony? What more could he have done to prove his authenticity as a historian?

Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White says, “For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity

must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted."[3] Classical scholar and archaeologist William M. Ramsay began his investigation into Acts with great skepticism, but his discoveries helped change his mind. He writes:

> I began with a mind unfavorable to it [Acts]. . . . It did not lie then in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself often brought into contact with the book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities, and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth.[4]

Indeed, Luke's accuracy in Acts is truly amazing.

Now, here's where skeptics get very uncomfortable. Luke reports a total of thirty-five miracles in the same book in which he records these eighty-four historically confirmed details.[5] Several miracles of Paul are recorded in the second half of Acts.

For example, Luke records that Paul: temporarily blinded a sorcerer (13:11); cured a man who was crippled from birth (14:8–10); exorcised an evil spirit from a possessed girl (16:18); performed many miracles that convinced many in the city of Ephesus to turn from sorcery to Jesus (19:11–20); raised a man from the dead who had died after falling out of a window during Paul's long-winded lecture (20:9–10); healed Publius's father of dysentery, and healed numerous others who were sick on Malta (28:8–9). All of these miracles are included in the same historical narrative that has been confirmed as authentic on eighty-four points. And the miracle accounts show no signs of embellishment or extravagance—they are told with the same level-headed efficiency as the rest of the historical narrative.

Now, why would Luke be so accurate with trivial details like wind directions, water depths, and peculiar town names but not be accurate when it comes to important events like miracles? Since Luke has proven accurate with so many trivial details, it seems like antisupernatural bias to say he's not telling the truth about the miracles he records. As we have seen, such a bias is illegitimate. This is a theistic world where miracles are possible. So it makes much more sense to believe Luke's miracle accounts than to discount them. In other words, Luke's credentials as a historian have been proven on so many other points that it takes more faith *not* to believe his miracle accounts than to believe them.

Is Luke's Gospel "Gospel"?

What about the Gospel of Luke? First, we need to recognize that Acts and the Gospel of Luke are closely related books. How do we know? First, both documents contain the same Greek vocabulary and literary style. But more important, Luke addresses both documents to "Theophilus" (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1).

Who was Theophilus? A fascinating case is now being made that Luke wrote his gospel to provide the facts about Jesus to the former high priest Theophilus (who served AD 37–41, whose granddaughter, Joanna (mentioned only in Luke), is highlighted by Luke as a key witness.[6] Archaeologists have confirmed the authenticity of Joanna's burial box (an ossuary), which has the inscription "Johanna, daughter of Yehohanan, son of Theophilus the High Priest."[7] It makes sense that Luke would highlight the testimony of the granddaughter of the person to whom he was writing. However, scholars are not in agreement that this is the Theophilus of Luke and Acts.

Regardless of the true identity of Theophilus, the main point is that Luke reveals that Acts is a continuation of his Gospel. His opening says, "In my *former book*, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven . . ." (Acts 1:1–2 NIV 1984). Luke uses the remainder of Acts to tell Theophilus what happened after Christ's ascension. And as we have seen, he does so with amazing precision.

Should we expect the same degree of accuracy from Luke's Gospel? Why not? In fact, Luke says as much when he writes, "It seemed good to me also, having followed all things *closely* for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus" (Luke 1:3). Judging from his meticulous work in Acts, Luke certainly is a careful historian who should be trusted. As New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg observes, "A historian who has been found trustworthy where he or she can be tested should be given the benefit of the doubt in cases where no tests are available."[8] Since Luke has been tested on eighty-four points and has earned a perfect score, there's every reason to believe his Gospel is "gospel" as well.

But we don't need to rely solely on his work in Acts to confirm Luke's Gospel. There are several details in Luke's Gospel that have been verified independently. For example, Luke names eleven historically confirmed leaders in the first three chapters of his Gospel alone (twelve if you include Jesus). These include Herod the Great (1:5), Caesar Augustus (2:1), and

Quirinius (2:2). He then writes:

> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (3:1–3)

Does it sound as if Luke is making up a story? Of course not. If he were, there would be no way he would put historical crosshairs on the events he's describing by naming these prominent leaders and their dates. As Bible scholar F. F. Bruce observes, "A writer who thus relates his story to the wider context of world history is courting trouble if he is not careful; he affords his critical readers so many opportunities for testing his accuracy. Luke takes this risk, and stands the test admirably."[9] Indeed, all eleven of the historical figures Luke names in the first three chapters of his Gospel—including John the Baptist (son of Zechariah)—have been confirmed by non-Christian writers and/or archaeology. For example, John the Baptist is mentioned by Josephus (*Antiquities* 18:5.2), and an inscription dating from AD 14 to 29 bears the name of Lysanias.

Another historically accurate detail can be found in Luke 22:44. That's where Luke records that Jesus was in agony and sweat drops of blood the night before his crucifixion. Apparently, Jesus was experiencing a rare stress-induced condition we know today as hematidrosis. That's when tiny blood vessels rupture due to extreme stress, thus allowing blood to mix with sweat. Since Luke probably didn't know of this medical condition 2,000 years ago, he could not have recorded it unless he had access to someone who saw it.

Details like this led archaeologist William Ramsay to say, "Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness," and, "Luke is an historian of the first rank. . . . [He] should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."[10] The bottom line is that Luke can be trusted. Since he has been confirmed independently on so many testable points, there's every reason to believe he's telling the truth elsewhere.

Now, here's the crucial point: *Since Luke is telling the truth, then so are Mark and Matthew because their Gospels tell the same basic story.* This is devastating to skeptics, but the logic is inescapable. *You need a lot of faith to*

ignore it.

Eyewitness Evidence: John

Luke has proven reliable—and by implication, Matthew and Mark—but what about John? The critics claim that John is a much later work that expresses an invented deity-of-Christ theology, so it cannot be trusted for accurate historical information. But if the critics are wrong and John is accurate, then we have another independent witness to conclude that the basic New Testament story is true. So how accurate is John? What does the evidence say?

On the face of it, John appears to be an eyewitness because he includes intimate details about numerous private conversations of Jesus (see John 3, 4, 8–10, and 13–17). But there's actually much more powerful evidence for John being an eyewitness—evidence of nearly the same character as what we have seen for Acts.

Just as Colin Hemer did for Acts, Craig Blomberg did for the Gospel of John. Blomberg's *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* examines John's Gospel verse by verse and identifies numerous historical details.[11]

Since John describes events confined to the Holy Land, his Gospel doesn't contain quite as many geographical, topographical, and political items as does Acts. Nevertheless, as we're about to see, quite an impressive number of historically confirmed or historically probable details are contained in John's Gospel. Many of these details have been confirmed to be historical by archaeology and/or non-Christian writings, and some of them are historically probable because they would be unlikely inventions of a Christian writer. These details begin in John's second chapter and comprise the following list:

1. Archaeology confirms the use of stone water jars in New Testament times (John 2:6).
2. Given the early Christian tendency toward asceticism, the wine miracle is an unlikely invention (2:8).
3. Archaeology confirms the proper place of Jacob's Well (4:5–6).
4. Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, 2.232) confirms there was significant hostility between Jews and Samaritans during Jesus's time (4:9).
5. "Come down" accurately describes the topography of western Galilee. (There's a significant elevation drop from Cana to Capernaum.) (4:49, 51; cf. v. 46).[12]

6. “Went up” accurately describes the ascent to Jerusalem (5:1).
7. Archaeology confirms the proper location and description of the five colonnades at the pool of Bethesda (5:2). (Excavations between 1914 and 1938 uncovered that pool and found it to be just as John describes it. Since that structure did not exist after the Romans destroyed the city in AD 70, it’s unlikely any later noneyewitness could have described it in such vivid detail. Moreover, John says that this structure “*is* in Jerusalem,” implying that he’s writing before 70.)
8. Jesus’s own testimony being invalid without the Father’s is an unlikely Christian invention (5:31, 36–37); a later redactor would have been eager to highlight Jesus’s divinity and probably would have made his witness self-authenticating.
9. The crowds’ desire to make Jesus king reflects the well-known nationalist fervor of early first-century Israel (6:15).
10. Sudden and severe squalls are common on the Sea of Galilee (6:18).
11. Christ’s command to eat his flesh and drink his blood would not have been made up (6:53).
12. The rejection of Jesus by many of his disciples is also an unlikely invention (6:66).
13. The two predominant opinions of Jesus, one that Jesus was a “good man” and the other that he was “leading the people astray,” would not have been choices John would have made up (7:12); a later Christian writer probably would have inserted the opinion that Jesus was God.
14. The charge of Jesus being demon-possessed is an unlikely invention (7:20).
15. The use of “Samaritan” to slander Jesus befits the hostility between Jews and Samaritans (8:48).
16. Jewish *believers* wanting to stone Jesus is an unlikely invention (8:31, 59).
17. Archaeology confirms the existence and location of the pool of Siloam (9:7).
18. Expulsion from the synagogue by the Pharisees was a legitimate fear of the Jews; notice that the healed man professes his faith in Jesus only *after* he is expelled from the synagogue (9:13–39), at

which point he has nothing to lose. This rings of authenticity.

19. The healed man calling Jesus a "prophet" rather than anything more lofty suggests the incident is unembellished history (9:17).
20. During a winter feast, Jesus walked in Solomon's Colonnade, which was the only side of the temple area shielded from the cold winter east wind (10:22–23); this area is mentioned several times by Josephus.
21. Fifteen stadia (less than two miles) is precisely the distance from Bethany to Jerusalem (11:18).
22. Given the later animosity between Christians and Jews, the positive depiction of Jews comforting Martha and Mary is an unlikely invention (11:19).
23. The burial wrappings of Lazarus were common for first-century Jewish burials (11:44); it is unlikely that a fiction writer would have included this theologically irrelevant detail.
24. The precise description of the composition of the Sanhedrin (11:47) is accurate: It was composed primarily of chief priests (largely Sadducees) and Pharisees during Jesus's ministry.
25. Caiaphas was indeed the high priest that year (11:49); we learn from Josephus that Caiaphas held the office from AD 18 to 37.
26. The obscure and tiny village of Ephraim (11:54) near Jerusalem is mentioned by Josephus.
27. Ceremonial cleansing was common in preparation for the Passover (11:55).
28. Anointing of a person's feet with perfume or oil was sometimes performed for special guests in the Jewish culture (12:3); Mary's wiping of Jesus's feet with her hair is an unlikely invention (it easily could have been perceived as a sexual advance).
29. Waving of palm branches was a common Jewish practice for celebrating military victories and welcoming national rulers (12:13).
30. Foot washing in first-century Palestine was necessary because of dust and open footwear; Jesus performing this menial task is an unlikely invention (it was a task not even Jewish *slaves* were required to do) (13:4); Peter's insistence that he should get a complete bath also fits with his impulsive personality (there's certainly no purpose for inventing this request).
31. Peter asks John to ask Jesus a question (13:24); there's no reason

to insert this detail if this is fiction; Peter could have asked Jesus himself.

32. "The Father is greater than I" is an unlikely invention (14:28), especially if John wanted to make up the deity of Christ (as the critics claim he did).
33. Use of the vine as a metaphor makes good sense in Jerusalem (15:1); vineyards were in the vicinity of the temple, and, according to Josephus, the temple gates had a golden vine carved on them.
34. Use of the childbirth metaphor (16:21) is thoroughly Jewish; it has been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QH 11:9–10).
35. The standard Jewish posture for prayers was looking "toward heaven" (17:1 NIV 1984).
36. Jesus's admission that he had gotten his words from the Father (17:7–8) would not have been included if John were inventing the idea that Christ was God.
37. No specific reference to fulfilled Scripture is given regarding the predicted betrayal by Judas; a fiction writer or later Christian redactor probably would have identified the Old Testament passage to which Jesus was referring (17:12).
38. The name of the high priest's servant (Malchus), who had his ear cut off, is an unlikely invention (18:10).
39. John gives the proper identification of Caiaphas's father-in-law, Annas, who was the high priest from AD 6 to 15 (18:13); the appearance before Annas is believable because of the family connection and the fact that former high priests maintained great influence.
40. John's claim that the high priest knew him (18:15) seems historical; invention of this claim serves no purpose and would have exposed John to being discredited by the Jewish authorities.
41. Annas's questions regarding Jesus's teachings and disciples make good historical sense; Annas would have been concerned about potential civil unrest and the undermining of Jewish religious authority (18:19).
42. Identification of a relative of Malchus (the high priest's servant who had his ear cut off) is a detail that John would not have made up (18:26); it has no theological significance and could only have hurt John's credibility if he were trying to pass off fiction as the

truth.

43. There are good historical reasons to believe Pilate's reluctance to deal with Jesus (18:28ff.). Pilate had to walk a fine line between keeping the Jews happy and keeping Rome happy; any civil unrest could have meant his job (the Jews knew of his competing concerns when they taunted him by saying, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar," 19:12). The Jewish philosopher Philo records the Jews successfully pressuring Pilate in a similar way to get their demands met (*To Gaius* 38.301–2).
44. A surface similar to the Stone Pavement has been identified near the Antonia Fortress (19:13) with markings that may indicate soldiers played games there (as in their gambling for Jesus's clothes, 19:24). (Another location has recently been identified as a potential location of the pavement just south of the modern Jaffa gate.[13])
45. The Jews exclaiming, "We have no king but Caesar" (19:15), would not have been invented given the Jewish hatred for the Romans, especially if John was writing after AD 70. (This would have been like New Yorkers after 9/11 proclaiming, "We have no king but Osama Bin Laden!")
46. The crucifixion of Jesus (19:17–30) is attested to by non-Christian sources such as Josephus, Tacitus, Lucian, and the Jewish Talmud.
47. Crucifixion victims normally carried their own crossbeams (19:17).
48. Josephus confirms that crucifixion was an execution technique employed by the Romans (*Wars of the Jews*, 1.97; 2.305; 7.203); moreover, a nail-spiked anklebone of a crucified man was found in Jerusalem in 1968 (more on this in chapter 12).
49. The execution site was likely outside ancient Jerusalem, as John says (19:17); this would have ensured that the sacred Jewish city would not have been profaned by the presence of a dead body (Deut. 21:23).
50. After the spear was thrust into Jesus's side, out came what appeared to be blood and water (19:34). Today we know that a crucified person might have a watery fluid gather in the sac around the heart called the pericardium.[14] John would not have known of this medical condition and could not have recorded this

phenomenon unless he was an eyewitness or had access to eyewitness testimony.[15]

51. Joseph of Arimathea (19:38), a member of the Sanhedrin, who buries Jesus, is an unlikely invention (more on this in the next chapter).
52. Josephus (*Antiquities*, 17.199) confirms that spices (19:39) were used for royal burials; this detail shows that Nicodemus was not expecting Jesus to rise from the dead, and it also demonstrates that John was not inserting later Christian faith into the text.
53. Mary Magdalene (20:1), a formerly *demon-possessed* woman (Luke 8:2), would not have been invented as the empty tomb's first witness; in fact, women in general would not have been presented as witnesses in a made-up story (more on this later as well).
54. Mary mistaking Jesus for the gardener (20:15) is not a detail that a later writer would have made up (especially a writer seeking to exalt Jesus).
55. "Rabboni" (20:16), the Aramaic for "teacher," seems an authentic detail because it's another unlikely invention for a writer trying to exalt the risen Jesus.
56. Jesus stating that he is returning to "my God and your God" (20:17) does not fit with a later writer bent on creating the idea that Jesus was God.
57. One hundred fifty-three fish (21:11) is a theologically irrelevant detail, but perfectly consistent with the tendency of fishermen to want to record and then brag about large catches.
58. The fear of the disciples to ask Jesus who he was (21:12) is an unlikely concoction; it demonstrates natural human amazement at the risen Jesus and perhaps the fact that there was something different about the resurrection body.
59. The cryptic statement from Jesus about the fate of Peter is not clear enough to draw certain theological conclusions (21:18); so why would John make it up? It's another unlikely invention.

When we couple John's knowledge of Jesus's personal conversations with these nearly sixty historically confirmed/historically probable details, is there any doubt that John was an eyewitness or at least had access to eyewitness testimony? It certainly seems to us that it takes a lot more faith *not* to believe

John's Gospel than to believe it.

Historical Crosshairs

Let's review what we've found so far. By looking at just a few New Testament documents (John, Luke, and half of Acts), we have found more than 140 details that appear to be authentic, most of which have been historically confirmed and some of which are historically probable. If we investigated the other New Testament documents, we would probably find many more historical facts. Time and space do not permit us to embark on such an investigation. But what we have found just from John, Luke, and Acts is certainly enough to establish the historicity of the basic New Testament story (the life of Jesus and the early history of the church).

But there's even more evidence of historicity. The New Testament writers put historical crosshairs into their accounts by referencing real historical figures and their doings. *There are at least thirty-seven characters in the New Testament who have been confirmed as historical by archaeology or non-Christian sources*[16] (see table 11.1 on the next page).

For example, Matthew mentions independently confirmed historical figures, including Herod the Great (2:3) and his three sons: Herod Archelaus (2:22), Herod Philip (14:3), and Herod Antipas (14:1–11). Matthew also describes the man Herod Antipas killed, John the Baptist (chapter 14, introduced in chapter 3), along with the two women who instigated the killing, Herodias and her daughter. Mark tells the same story about Herod Antipas and John the Baptist (6:14ff.). And Luke extends the biblical citations of the Herodian bloodline by mentioning Herod the Great's grandson (Agrippa I, the king who killed James, John's brother, Acts 12) and his great-grandson (Agrippa II, the king before whom Paul testified, Acts 25:13–26:32).

Pilate is a prominent figure in all four Gospels and is cited by Paul.[17] This same Pilate appears on several occasions in two of Josephus's works (*Antiquities* and *The Wars of the Jews*) and is identified in an ancient inscription as the prefect (governor) of Judea. This archaeological discovery was made in the Israeli coastal town of Caesarea in 1961.

In addition to Pilate, Matthew, Luke, and John specifically name another leader who figured prominently in Jesus's death—the high priest Caiaphas, who sentenced Jesus to die.[18] Caiaphas is not only mentioned by Josephus, but his actual bones were discovered in a fantastic archaeological discovery

in 1990. This discovery was made possible by an ancient burial practice of the Jews.

Table 11.1 New Testament figures cited by non-Christian writers and/or confirmed through archaeology

Person	**New Testament Citation**	**Non-Christian Source(s)***
Jesus	Many citations	Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Phlegon, Thallus, Suetonius, Lucian, Celsus, Mara Bar-Serapion, the Jewish Talmud, James's ossuary
Agrippa I	Acts 12:1–24	Philo, Josephus
Agrippa II	Acts 25:13–26:32	coins, Josephus
Ananias	Acts 23:2; 24:1	Josephus
Annas	Luke 3:2; John 18:13, 24; Acts 4:6	Josephus
Aretas	2 Cor. 11:32	Josephus
Augustus Caesar	Luke 2:1	Josephus and others
Bernice (wife of Agrippa II)	Acts 25:13	Josephus
Candace	Acts 8:27	inscriptions
Caiaphas	several citations	ossuary, Josephus
Claudius	Acts 11:28; 18:2	Josephus
Demetrius	Acts 19:24–38	inscription
Drusilla (wife of Felix)	Acts 24:24	Josephus
Egyptian false prophet	Acts 21:38	Josephus
Erastus	Acts 19:22	inscription
Felix	Acts 23:24–25:14	Tacitus, Josephus
Gallio	Acts 18:12–17	inscription
Gamaliel	Acts 5:34; 22:3	Josephus
Herod Antipas	Matt. 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29; Luke 3:1; 23:7–12	Josephus

Herod Archelaus	Matt. 2:22	Josephus
Herod the Great	Matt. 2:1–19; Luke 1:5	Tacitus, Josephus
Herod Philip I	Matt. 14:3; Mark 6:17	Josephus
Herod Philip II	Luke 3:1	Josephus
Herodias	Matt. 14:3; Mark 6:17	Josephus
Herod's daughter (Salome)	Matt. 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29	Josephus
James	several citations	Josephus, James's ossuary
John the Baptist	several citations	Josephus
Judas the Galilean	Acts 5:37	Josephus
Lysanias	Luke 3:1	inscription, Josephus
Peter	several citations	inscriptions in Capernaum and Bethsaida
Pilate	several citations	inscription, coins, ring seal, Josephus, Philo, Tacitus
Quirinius	Luke 2:2	Josephus
Porcius Festus	Acts 24:27–26:32	Josephus
Sergius Paulus	Acts 13:6–12	inscription
Simon of Cyrene	Mark 15:21	inscription on his son Alexander's ossuary
Tiberius Caesar	Luke 3:1	inscriptions, coins, Tacitus, Suetonius, Paterculus, Dio Cassius, Josephus
Tyrannus	Acts 19:9	inscriptions

* This is not an exhaustive compilation of non-Christian references. There may be additional citations of these New Testament figures in these and/or other non-Christian sources.

From about 20 BC to AD 70, the Jews had a custom of exhuming the body of an important person about a year after his death and placing the remains in a small limestone box called an ossuary. In a tomb located to the south of Jerusalem, several of these ossuaries were discovered, one of which bore the Aramaic inscription "Yehosef bar Kayafa" ("Joseph son of Caiaphas"). Inside were bones of an entire family: four young people, an adult woman,

and a sixty-year-old man. The man is very likely the former high priest Joseph Caiaphas—the same man whom Josephus identified as the high priest[19] and the same man the New Testament says sentenced Jesus to die.[20] So now we not only have non-Christian written references to the high priest at Jesus's trial, we also have his bones!

That's not all: At least six historical figures associated with the crucifixion of Jesus, including Caiaphas, have been confirmed through archaeology. They include Jesus (inscription on the ossuary of his brother James), Peter (inscriptions in Capernaum and Bethsaida), Caiaphas (ossuary), Herod Antipas (coins), Pilate (inscription, coins, and ring seal), and Simon of Cyrene (inscription on the ossuary of his son).[21] We know of a seventh figure, Annas, whose tomb was discovered south of the Temple Mount exactly where Josephus said it was. However, his name was not found in the tomb.[22]

As table 11.1 illustrates, several other New Testament figures are confirmed outside the New Testament. These include Quirinius, Sergius Paulus, Gallio, Felix, Festus, Augustus Caesar, Tiberius Caesar, and Claudius.[23] What else could the New Testament writers have done to prove that they were eyewitnesses who were not making up a story?

Are We Committing the Spiderman Fallacy?

In spite of these 140-plus eyewitness details and thirty-seven references to real people, a hardened skeptic might say, "But that doesn't necessarily mean that the New Testament is true. This could be a historical novel. It's like saying that since Spiderman is set in a real New York City, Spiderman must be true. That's the Spiderman Fallacy!"

There are many problems with this objection. First, it can't explain why independent non-Christian writers collectively reveal a storyline congruent with the New Testament. If the New Testament events are fictional, then why do the non-Christian writers record some of them as though they actually occurred?

Second, it can't explain why the New Testament writers and other Jewish followers of Jesus gave up their sacred religious beliefs and then endured persecution, torture, and death. Why would they have done so for a fictional story? (More on this in the next chapter.)

Third, historical novelists usually do not use the names of real people for the main characters in their stories. If they did, those real people—especially

powerful government and religious officials—would deny the stories, destroy the credibility of the authors, and maybe even take punitive action against them for writing the stories. As we have seen, the New Testament includes more than thirty actual historical figures who have been confirmed by non-Christian sources, and many of these were prominent and powerful leaders.

Fourth, the objection is anachronistic because the genre of historical novel did not originate until the 1800s. C. S. Lewis makes that point while emphatically arguing that the Gospels are not made-up stories meant to entertain like the ones we see today:

> Now, as a literary historian, I am perfectly convinced that whatever else the Gospels are they are not legends. I have read a great deal of legend and I am quite clear that they are not the same sort of thing. They are not artistic enough to be legends. From an imaginative point of view they are clumsy, they don't work up to things properly. Most of the life of Jesus is totally unknown to us, as is the life of anyone else who lived at that time, and no people building up a legend would allow that to be so. Apart from bits of the Platonic dialogues, there are no conversations that I know of in ancient literature like the Fourth Gospel. There is nothing, even in modern literature, until about a hundred years ago when the realistic novel came into existence.[24]

Finally, since the New Testament contains multiple independent accounts of these events by nine different authors, the anachronistic historical novel theory would also require a grand conspiracy over a twenty-to-fifty-year period between those nine authors, who were spread all over the ancient world. This is not plausible either. In fact, the assertion that the New Testament events are part of a grand conspiracy exists only in novels. In the real world, such assertions are crushed by the weight of the evidence. Hence, when it comes to the Gospels, the Spiderman Fallacy is a fallacy itself.

The New Testament: One Source or Many?

"Wait!" the skeptic might protest. "You might have eyewitness testimony, but you can't believe the New Testament because it's just from one source." We covered this briefly in the last chapter but need to say more here.

When considering the historicity of the New Testament, we constantly must remind ourselves that the New Testament we see in the Bible is a

collection of largely independent writings from the pens of nine different authors. In fact, the Bible is not one book—it is a library of books in one binding. It was not written or edited by one person or by the church. While the New Testament writers describe many of the same events and may even draw material from the same earlier sources, the evidence indicates that the New Testament documents contain several lines of independent eyewitness testimony.

How do we know we have independent eyewitness testimony? We know this because (1) each major author includes early and unique material that only eyewitnesses would know and (2) their accounts describe the same basic events but include divergent details. Why are divergent details important? Because if the accounts were all from one source or a single editor, there would be harmonization, not divergence of details. When early accounts tell the same basic story but include divergent details, historians rightly conclude they have independent eyewitness accounts of actual historical events (historical test #3 that we mentioned in chapter 10). The story certainly cannot be made up because independent sources could never invent the same fictional story.

By these criteria, we know that John and Mark are independent, and we know that Luke and Matthew differ enough from Mark and from one another to be the products of independent attestation as well. So there are at least four independent sources for the basic New Testament story, and, adding Paul (1 Cor. 15:8) and Peter (1 Pet. 1:21) to the mix, there are at least six independent sources for the resurrection.

Six sane, sober eyewitnesses, who refused to recant their testimony even under the threat of death, would convict anyone of anything in a court of law (even without the additional lines of corroborating evidence that support the New Testament story). Such eyewitness testimony yields a verdict that is certain beyond a reasonable doubt. Unless you saw the event yourself, you can't be any more certain that those historical events actually occurred.

Summary and Conclusion

1. We saw from chapter 10 that:
   a. The New Testament documents are early and contain even earlier source material.
   b. At least ten ancient non-Christian writers within 150 years of Jesus's life give information about him, and their collective

references provide a storyline consistent with the New Testament.

2. From this chapter we conclude:
   a. The New Testament contains at least six lines of *early, independent eyewitness* written testimony.We conclude this because:
      i. The major New Testament writers record the same basic events with diverging details and some unique material.
      ii. They cite at least thirty-seven real historical figures who have been confirmed by ancient non-Christian writers and various archaeological discoveries.
      iii. Luke peppers the second half of Acts with at least eighty-four historically confirmed eyewitness details and includes several others in his Gospel.
      iv. Luke's proven trustworthiness affirms that of Matthew and Mark because they record the same basic story.
      v. John includes at least fifty-nine historically confirmed or historically probable eyewitness details in his Gospel.
      vi. Paul and Peter provide the fifth and sixth written testimonies to the resurrection.
   b. Since this early, independent eyewitness testimony is within one generation of the events, the New Testament events cannot be considered legendary.

So there's no question that real historical events are at the core of the New Testament. *The bottom line is that a skeptic must have a lot of faith to believe that the New Testament is fictional.*

However, there are more issues to investigate before we can conclude that the New Testament is historically reliable. For example, how do we know that the eyewitness testimony is not exaggerated or embellished? That's the question we'll address in the next chapter.

12

The Top Ten Reasons We Know the New Testament Writers Told the Truth

> Why would the apostles lie? . . . If they lied, what was their motive, what did they get out of it? What they got out of it was misunderstanding, rejection, persecution, torture, and martyrdom. Hardly a list of perks!
>
> PETER KREEFT

WE HAVE SEEN very powerful evidence that the major New Testament documents were written by eyewitnesses and their contemporaries within ten to forty years of the death of Jesus. Add to that the confirmation from non-Christian sources and archaeology, and we know beyond a reasonable doubt that the New Testament is based on historical fact. But how do we know the authors did not exaggerate or embellish what they say they saw? There are at least ten reasons we can be confident that the New Testament writers did not play fast and loose with the facts.

1. The New Testament Writers Include Embarrassing Details About Themselves and Jesus

Have you ever lied to make yourself look good? (If you answered "No," you're lying to make yourself look good!) Of course. We all have. But have you ever lied to make yourself look *bad*? No. People don't normally do that.

We will lie to make ourselves look good, but we won't lie to embarrass ourselves.

This leads us to one of the most intuitive ways historians can tell whether an author is telling the truth. It's called "the principle of embarrassment" (historical test #7 from chapter 10). This principle assumes that any details that are embarrassing to the author are probably true. Why? Because who is going to lie to embarrass himself or herself? In fact, the tendency of most authors is to leave out anything that makes them look bad.

How does the New Testament measure up to the principle of embarrassment? Let's put it this way: If you and your friends were concocting a story that you wanted to pass off as the truth, would you make yourselves look like dim-witted, uncaring, rebuked, and doubting cowards? Of course not. But that's exactly what we find in the New Testament. The people who wrote down much of the New Testament are characters (or friends of characters) in the story, and they often depict themselves in embarrassing ways. As apologist Wes Huff put it, they are not the disciples but the *duh*-ciples. Here are a few examples (quotations in this section are from the NIV 1984):

- *They are dim-witted*. Numerous times they fail to understand what Jesus is saying (Mark 9:32; Luke 18:34; John 12:16).
- *They are uncaring*. They fall asleep on Jesus twice when he asks them to pray (Mark 14:32–41). The New Testament writers later believe Jesus is the God-man, yet they admit they twice fell asleep on him in his hour of greatest need! Moreover, they make no effort to give their friend a proper burial, but record that Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin—the very court that sentenced Jesus to die (vv. 42–46).
- *They are rebuked*. Jesus calls Peter "Satan" (Mark 8:33), and Paul rebukes Peter for being hypocritical and wrong. Paul writes, "When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong" (Gal. 2:11). Keep in mind that Peter was one of the pillars of the early church, and here's Paul saying in Scripture that he was wrong!
- *They are cowards*. All the disciples but one hide when Jesus goes to the cross. Peter even denies him three times (Matt. 26:69–75) after explicitly promising, "I will never disown you" (v. 35). Meanwhile, as

the cowardly men run away and hide for fear of the Jews, the women stand by Jesus and are the first to discover the empty tomb (28:1–10; more on this below).
- *They are doubters*. Despite being taught several times that Jesus would rise from the dead (John 2:18–22; 3:14–18; Matt. 12:39–41; 17:9, 22–23), the disciples are doubtful when they hear of his resurrection. Some are doubtful even *after* they see him risen (Matt. 28:17)!

Now, if you were the New Testament writers, would you invent these embarrassing details if you were making up a story? Would you write that one of your primary leaders was called "Satan" by Jesus, denied the Lord three times, hid during the crucifixion, and was later corrected for being a hypocrite? Would you depict yourselves as uncaring, bumbling cowards, and the women as the brave ones who stood by Jesus and later discovered the empty tomb? Would you admit that some of you (the eleven remaining disciples) doubted the very Son of God *after* he had proven himself risen to all of you? Of course not.

What do you think the New Testament writers would have done if they were making up a story? They would have left out their ineptness, their cowardice, the rebuke they received, their three denials, and their hypocritical behavior. Instead, they would have depicted themselves as bold believers who stood by Jesus through it all and confidently marched down to the tomb on Sunday morning, right past the elite Roman guards, to find the risen Jesus waiting to congratulate them on their great faith! The men who wrote the New Testament also would have said that *they* declared the risen Jesus to the *women*, who were the ones hiding and trembling in fear of the Jews. If the story was a concoction, no disciple, at any time, would have been portrayed as doubting, especially after Jesus had risen.

The New Testament writers not only record self-incriminating details about themselves, but also record details about Jesus that seem to place him in a bad light. They write:

- Jesus is considered "out of his mind" by his mother and brothers, who come to seize him to take him home (Mark 3:21, 31). His own family thinks he's crazy!
- Jesus is not believed by his own brothers (John 7:5).
- Jesus is thought to be a deceiver (John 7:12).
- Jesus is deserted by many of his followers (John 6:66).

- Jesus annoys “Jews who had believed in him” (John 8:30–31) to the point that they want to stone him (v. 59).
- Jesus is called a “drunkard” (Matt. 11:19).
- Jesus is called “demon-possessed” (Mark 3:22; John 7:20; 8:48). Do you really think they would make that up?
- Jesus is called “insane” (John 10:20).
- Jesus has his feet wiped with the hair of a prostitute, an event that had the potential to be seen as a sexual advance (Luke 7:36–39).
- Jesus has two prostitutes in his bloodline (Tamar and Rahab, Matt. 1:3, 5). Who would invent and insert prostitutes into the Messiah’s genealogy? (Can you imagine an Egyptian historian writing that his Pharoah was the product of prostitutes? “Off with his head!”)
- Jesus, who they think is the Messiah, is crucified as a criminal, which is doubly embarrassing because Jews believed that “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (Deut. 21:23; cf. Gal. 3:13).
- Jesus cries out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46).

This is certainly not a list of events and qualities the New Testament writers would have invented if they had been trying to depict Jesus as the perfect, sinless God-man. Nor are these qualities congruent with the Jewish expectation that the Messiah would come to free them from political oppression. In fact, according to their own Bible at the time (the Old Testament), Jesus was cursed by God for being hanged on a tree! The best explanation for these embarrassing details is that they actually occurred, and the New Testament writers were telling the truth.

In short, *we don’t have enough faith to believe that the New Testament writers included all of those embarrassing details in a made-up story.* The best explanation is that they were really telling the truth—warts and all.

2. The New Testament Writers Leave in Difficult and Demanding Sayings of Jesus

In addition to embarrassing details, there are several difficult sayings attributed to Jesus that the New Testament writers would not have included if they had been making up a story about Jesus being God. For example, according to the New Testament, Jesus does the following:

- He declares, “The Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).
- He seems to predict incorrectly that he’s coming back to earth within a generation (Matt. 24:34).
- He says that no one knows the time of his second coming, “not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son” (Matt. 24:36).
- He seems to deny his deity by asking the rich young ruler, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Luke 18:19).
- He is seen cursing a fig tree for not having figs when it isn’t even the season for figs (Matt. 21:18ff.).
- He seems unable to do miracles in his hometown, except to heal a few sick people (Mark 6:5).

If the New Testament writers wanted to prove to everyone that Jesus was God, then why did they leave in these difficult sayings that seem to argue against his deity?

Moreover, Jesus makes what seems to be a completely morbid claim: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). After this hard saying, John says, “From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (6:66 NIV 1984). Since the New Testament writers certainly would not have invented this strange saying and unfavorable reaction, it must be authentic.

While there are reasonable explanations for these difficult sayings,[1] it doesn’t make sense that the New Testament writers would have left them in if they were trying to pass off a lie as the truth. (In fact, it doesn’t make sense that they would have made up a character anything like Jesus. A weak and dying Messiah—a sacrificial lamb—crucified as a criminal is the very antithesis of a man-made hero.) Again, the best explanation is that the New Testament writers were not playing fast and loose with the facts but were extremely accurate in recording exactly what Jesus said and did.

In addition to difficult sayings, the New Testament writers say that Jesus put demanding standards on them, which are also unlikely to have been invented. The Sermon on the Mount, for instance, does not appear to be a human invention:

- “I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).
- “I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the

ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matt. 5:32).

- "I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you" (Matt. 5:39–42).
- "I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44–45).
- "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).
- "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19–21).
- "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:1–2).

These commands are difficult or impossible for human beings to keep, and they seem to go against the natural best interests of the men who wrote them down. They certainly are contrary to the desires of many today who want a religion of spirituality that has no moral demands. Consider the extremity and undesirable implications of these commands:

- If thinking about a sin is sinful, then everyone—including the New Testament writers—is guilty.
- Such stringent standards for divorce and remarriage do not appear to be in the earthly best interests of the men who recorded this saying.
- To not resist the insults of an evil person is to resist our basic human instincts. This saying also set up an inconvenient standard of behavior for the apostles, who were undergoing persecution when it was written down.
- To pray for our enemies goes well beyond any ethic ever uttered and commands kindness where enmity is natural.
- To not accumulate financial wealth contradicts our deepest desires for

temporal security.
- To be perfect is an unattainable demand on fallible human beings.
- To not judge unless we are prepared to be judged by the same standard contradicts our natural tendency to point out faults in others while ignoring our own.

These clearly are not the type of commands that people would invent or impose on themselves. Who can live up to such standards? Only a perfect person. Perhaps that's exactly the point.

3. The New Testament Writers Carefully Distinguish Jesus's Words from Their Own

Even though quotation marks did not exist in first-century Greek, the New Testament writers distinguish Jesus's words very clearly. Most red-letter editions of the Bible are identical, illustrating how easy the New Testament writers make it to see what Jesus said and what he didn't say.

Why do we cite this as evidence of their trustworthiness? Because it would have been very easy for the New Testament writers to solve first-century theological disputes by putting words into Jesus's mouth. After all, if you were making up the "Christianity story" and trying to pass it off as the truth, wouldn't you simply make up more quotes from Jesus to convince stubborn people to see things your way? Think how convenient it would have been for them to end all debate on controversial issues such as circumcision, obeying the law of Moses, speaking in tongues, women in the church, and so forth by merely making up quotes from Jesus!

Despite controversies among some early believers, the New Testament writers never do that. Instead of pulling rank in this way, the New Testament writers seem to stay true to what Jesus said and didn't say. Paul, the man who wrote nearly half of the New Testament books (at least thirteen of the twenty-seven) and dealt with most of those controversial problems in the church, never pulls rank. He quotes Jesus just a few times. And on one of those occasions, he goes out of his way to explicitly distinguish his own words from those of Jesus (1 Cor. 7:10–12).

Why would Paul have been so careful if he were not telling the truth? Again, the best explanation for the accuracy of the New Testament writers is that they really were telling the truth.

4. The New Testament Writers Include Events Related to the Resurrection That They Would Not Have Invented

In addition to the inclusion of embarrassing details regarding themselves and Jesus, the New Testament writers record events related to the resurrection that they would not have included if they had invented the story. These include:

The Burial of Jesus

The New Testament writers record that Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, which was the Jewish ruling council that sentenced Jesus to die for blasphemy. This is not an event they would have made up. Considering the bitterness some Christians harbored against the Jewish authorities, why would they have put a member of the Sanhedrin in such a favorable light? And why would they have put Jesus in the tomb of a Jewish authority figure? If Joseph didn't really bury Jesus, the story would have been easily exposed as fraudulent by the Jewish enemies of Christianity. But the Jews never denied the story, and no alternative burial story has ever been found.

The First Witnesses

All four Gospels say women were the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the first to learn of the resurrection. One of those women was Mary Magdalene, who Luke admits had been demon-possessed (Luke 8:2). This detail would never have been inserted in a made-up story. Not only would a once-demon-possessed person make a questionable witness, but *women* in general were not considered reliable witnesses in first-century culture. So if you were making up a resurrection story in the first century, you would have avoided women witnesses and made yourselves—the brave men—the first ones to discover the empty tomb and the risen Jesus. Citing the testimony of women—especially a formerly demon-possessed woman—would only hurt your attempt to pass off a lie as the truth.[2] (While they wouldn't have made this up, a woman at one of our presentations thought she knew why Jesus appeared to the women first. She said it was because "he wanted to get the story out!")

The Conversion of Priests

“Why didn’t the risen Jesus appear to the Pharisees?” is a popular question asked by skeptics. The answer might be that it wasn’t necessary. This is often overlooked, but many priests in Jerusalem became believers. Luke writes, “The number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and *a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith*” (Acts 6:7). These priests eventually initiated a controversy that took place later in the Jerusalem church. During a council meeting between Peter, Paul, James, and other elders, “some of the believers who belonged to the party of the *Pharisees* stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses’” (Acts 15:5 NIV 1984).

The council resolved the issue, but our main point here is that Luke would not have included these details if they were fiction. Why not? Because everyone would have known Luke was a fraud if there were not significant converts from the ranks of the Pharisees. Theophilus and other first-century readers would have known—or could have easily found out—if such converts existed. Obviously the Pharisees would have known too. Why would Luke give them an easy way of exposing his lies? After all, if you’re trying to pass off a lie as the truth, you don’t make it easy for your enemies to expose your story. Pharisee conversions and Jesus’s burial by Joseph of Arimathea were two unnecessary details that—if untrue—would have completely blown Luke’s cover. And the Joseph story would have blown not only Luke’s cover but that of every other Gospel writer as well because they all include the same burial story.

The Explanation of the Jews

The Jewish explanation for the empty tomb is recorded in the last chapter of Matthew:

> While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day. (Matt. 28:11–15)

Notice that Matthew makes it very clear that his readers already know about this Jewish explanation for the empty tomb because "this story has been spread among the Jews to this day." That means Matthew's intended readers—who were Jews (Matthew being the Gospel written to convince Jews that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah)—know whether he is telling the truth. If Matthew were making up the empty tomb story, why would he give his Jewish audience such an easy way to expose his lies? The only plausible explanation is that the tomb must really have been empty, and the Jewish enemies of Christianity must really have been circulating that specific explanation for the empty tomb. (In fact, Justin Martyr and Tertullian, writing in AD 150 and 200 respectively, claim that the Jewish authorities continued to offer this theft story throughout the second century. We'll discuss the problems with this theory in the next chapter.[3])

5. The New Testament Writers Get the Names of People in First-Century Israel Correct

This is a critical point that bears repeating. The New Testament documents cannot have been invented because they contain too many historically confirmed characters (see table 11.1 in chapter 11). The New Testament writers would have blown their credibility with their contemporary audiences by implicating real people in a fictional story, especially people of great notoriety and power. There is no way the New Testament writers could have gotten away with writing outright lies about Pilate, Caiaphas, Festus, Felix, and the entire Herodian bloodline. Somebody would have exposed them for falsely implicating these people in events that never occurred. The New Testament writers knew this and would not have included so many prominent real people in a fictional story that was intended to deceive. Again, the best explanation is that the New Testament writers accurately recorded what they saw.

But it isn't just prominent first-century people who are named and identified correctly. The New Testament writers record the right prevalence of male and female names used in Israel in the first century as compared to other writings of that time and region. New Testament Scholar Richard Bauckham presents this amazing congruity in his seminal book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*. Some of his findings are summarized in table 12.1.[4]

Table 12.1 Popularity of names in Palestinian literature and inscriptions and in the Gospels and Acts

Popularity of Names Cited in Palestinian Literature and Inscriptions of the Time	Popularity of Names Cited by the Gospels and Acts
15.6 percent of the men had the name Simon or Joseph	18.2 percent of the men had the name Simon or Joseph
41.5 percent of the men had one of the nine most popular names	40.3 percent of the men had one of the nine most popular names
7.9 percent of the men had a name no one else had	3.9 percent of the men had a name no one else had
28.6 percent of the women had the name Mary or Salome	38.9 percent of the women had the name Mary or Salome
49.7 percent of the women had one of the nine most popular names	61.1 percent of the women had one of the nine most popular names
9.6 percent of the women had a name no one else had	2.5 percent of the women had a name no one else had

Bauckham also found that the popularity of Jewish names at the same time in Egypt was vastly different from those used in Israel. So the New Testament writers had to have testimony from first-century *Israel* to get the names right. If they were living in, say, Egypt, with no access to testimony from Israel, they wouldn't have been able to do that.

Name popularity changes in our time as well. In the 1920s, Robert and Mary were the #1 names in the United States. A century later, they are #89 and #135, respectively. In the 1920s, Frank was the #12 most popular male name. Now it's 468th! (Who names their kid Frank anymore?) Mildred was #9 in the 1920s. Know any babies today named Mildred?[5]

If the authors of the Gospels and Acts did not base their writings on eyewitness testimony from Israel in the first century, it's highly unlikely they would have gotten the names right for that time and place. It would be like one of us trying to write a novel set at a different time in a foreign land without any means of investigating the names used at the time. Do you think we would get the names right? The New Testament writers couldn't have faked the names!

6. The New Testament Writers Include Divergent Details

Critics are quick to cite the apparently contradictory Gospel accounts as evidence that the Gospels can't be trusted for accurate information. For

example, Matthew says there was one angel at the tomb of Jesus while John mentions two (Matt. 28:2; John 20:12). Isn't this a contradiction that blows the credibility of these accounts? No, exactly the opposite is true: Divergent details actually strengthen the case that these are eyewitness accounts. How so?

First, let's point out that the angel accounts are not contradictory. Matthew does not say there was *only* one angel at the tomb. The critic has to add a word to Matthew's account to make it contradict John's.[6]

But why did Matthew mention only one if two angels were really there? For the same reason two different newspaper reporters covering the same event choose to include different details in their stories. Read any two stories online about the same event. They will agree on what generally took place, but they will mention different details. If they are stories about a baseball game, and one account mentions that the winning team hit three home runs while another says the winners also hit two doubles, are those accounts contradictory or complementary? They are complementary.

Two independent eyewitnesses rarely see all the same details and never describe an event in the same words. They record the same major event (i.e., Jesus rose from the dead) but may differ on the details (i.e., how many angels were at his tomb). In fact, when a judge hears two witnesses giving the same word-for-word testimony, what does that judge rightly suspect? Collusion—the witnesses got together beforehand to make their stories agree.

Homicide Detective J. Warner Wallace, who has interviewed hundreds of eyewitnesses and solved numerous murder cases, writes, "Each eyewitness will describe the event in his or her own language, using his or her own expressions and terms. As a result, the same event may be described with varying degrees of passion or with divergent details resulting from the individual tastes and interests of the witness."[7]

When it comes to eyewitnesses such as Matthew and John, we should expect them to differ about the details of the same event even if we don't know why. Regarding the number of angels, maybe Matthew mentioned only the angel that spoke (Matt. 28:5) while John described how many angels Mary saw (John 20:12). Or maybe one angel was more prominent than the other, or one left. We don't know for sure. We just know that such differences are common among eyewitnesses.

These differences are true in the reporting of any historical event. For example, some survivors of the *Titanic* said that the ship went down whole

while others said it broke in two before it sank. They disagreed over that detail, but they all agreed on the central fact—that the *Titanic* sank. Likewise, the New Testament writers include divergent details about the resurrection account (who went to the tomb, in what order, how many angels were there, etc.), but they all agree on the central fact that there was a resurrection. Just as you don't need all the witnesses to agree on *how* the *Titanic* sank to be sure that it sank, you don't need all the witnesses of the resurrection to agree on every detail to know that Jesus rose from the dead!

This is why it's ridiculous for critics to cite differences about minor details between the gospel accounts as a reason to declare those accounts unreliable and reject the resurrection. Differences in minor details are what we should expect from authentic eyewitness testimony. And most of the time we can explain the differences. Why did eyewitnesses of the *Titanic* disagree how it sank? Here are some possibilities: They were in shock, it was dark, or they saw it from different angles (those abeam could see it break in two, while those on the bow or stern could not). But the main point is that they all agreed it sank.

The same is true with the Gospel writers—they all agree that Jesus rose from the dead! And even if one could find some minor details between the Gospels that are contradictory, that wouldn't prove the resurrection is fiction. It might present a problem for the doctrine that the Bible is without any errors —which we will address in chapter 15—but it wouldn't mean the major event didn't happen.

Considering numerous divergent details, it's clear that the New Testament writers didn't get together to smooth out their testimonies. This means they certainly were not trying to pass off a lie as the truth. If they were making up the New Testament story, they would have gotten together to make sure they were consistent in every detail. Such harmonization clearly didn't happen, and this confirms the genuine eyewitness nature of the New Testament and the independence of each writer.

Ironically, it's not the New Testament that is contradictory, it's the critics. On one hand, some critics claim that the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are too uniform to be independent sources. On the other hand, they claim that they are too divergent to be telling the truth. So which are they? Are they too uniform or too divergent?

We think they are a perfect blend of both. Namely, they are both sufficiently uniform and sufficiently divergent (but not too much so)

precisely *because* they are independent eyewitness accounts of the same events.[8]

Simon Greenleaf, the Harvard law professor who wrote the standard study on what constitutes legal evidence, credited his own conversion to Christianity as having come from his careful examination of the Gospel witnesses. If anyone knew the characteristics of genuine eyewitness testimony, it was Greenleaf. He concluded that the four Gospels "would have been received in evidence in any court of justice, without the slightest hesitation."[9]

The bottom line is this: Agreement on the major points and divergence on the minor details is the nature of eyewitness testimony, and this is the very nature of the New Testament documents.

7. The New Testament Accounts Inadvertently Confirm They Contain Independent Eyewitness Testimony

There are several places in the Bible where details in one writer's account inadvertently fill in the gaps of another writer's account, revealing that they saw the same event. We say "inadvertently" because these details are too insignificant and widespread to have been planned or contrived, especially among authors writing in different times and places. That's why these details are called "undesigned coincidences."[10]

We think the number and nature of undesigned coincidences show beyond any doubt that the Bible contains independent eyewitness testimony of actual historical events. About fifty undesigned coincidences have been discovered in the New Testament (and about sixty-five in the Old Testament), some of which confirm accounts between Bible authors, and others between Bible authors and secular sources. We obviously can't cover them all here—entire books have been written on them[11]—but a few brief examples from the New Testament will demonstrate what they are.

The Feeding of the 5,000

John records Jesus asking Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" (John 6:5). Why is Jesus asking Philip, and not one of the leaders, where to get money and food?

You get the solution from two Gospels. Luke, and only Luke, writes that Bethsaida was the location of the feeding of the 5,000 (see Luke 9:10), while

John mentions in other places in his Gospel that Philip was from Bethsaida in Galilee (see John 1:44; 12:21). When you put these passing references together, you realize that Jesus is asking Philip because Philip is from Bethsaida. He would know where to get money and food because he's in his hometown!

We wouldn't know that from any one spot in the New Testament. We must piece together details from different, unrelated places in two Gospels to figure it out. Thus, these accounts are inadvertently complementary—they show that both Luke and John contain eyewitness testimony of the same event.

Pilate and Jesus

Luke records the Jews bringing accusations against Jesus to Pilate: "'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.' And Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' And he answered him, 'You have said so.' Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, 'I find no guilt in this man'" (Luke 23:2–4).

Jesus seems to admit that he's guilty as charged. So why does Pilate say he's not guilty? You need to read John's account to find out: "Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' . . . Jesus answered, '*My kingdom is not of this world*. . . . Pilate . . . went back outside to the Jews and told them, 'I find no guilt in him'" (John 18:33–38, emphasis added).

Notice that John offers information not provided by Luke. Since Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world, he was not challenging Caesar's rule as accused. Therefore, Pilate found no guilt in him. This shows that both writers independently knew about the same event, but John gave more information that inadvertently answers a question someone reading Luke's account might have.

Joseph and Archelaus

Matthew records that Joseph had a dream in Egypt to return to Israel with Mary and the child Jesus. He then adds, "But when [Joseph] heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth" (Matt. 2:22–23).

Why did Joseph fear Archelaus? Matthew gives no explanation, but the Jewish historian Josephus does. In putting down a disturbance at the temple in 4 BC, Archelaus sent in troops and slaughtered 3,000 Jews.[12] The event was so horrific that Passover was canceled!

Now we know why Joseph didn't want to live under Archelaus. And we know because an insignificant detail mentioned by Matthew is validated by a non-Christian who wrote decades after Matthew. Obviously Matthew had no control over what Josephus would write later, yet Josephus corroborates the truth of Matthew's claim.

If we had space, we could give you a hundred more examples. The bottom line is that these undesigned coincidences show that many of the Bible writers independently saw the same events or knew people who did. The fact that there are so many of these across both testaments refutes the suggestion that the Bible is the product of hearsay or was pieced together many years later by people who had little or no access to eyewitness testimony.[13] We don't have enough faith to believe that these could have been contrived by several authors—both believers and nonbelievers—writing in different times and different places from different perspectives.

8. The New Testament Writers Challenge Their Readers to Check Out Verifiable Facts, Even Facts About Miracles

We've already seen some of the claims of accuracy the New Testament writers made to the recipients of their documents. These include Luke's overt assertion of accuracy to Theophilus (Luke 1:1–4); Peter's claim that the apostles did not follow cleverly devised tales but were eyewitnesses to Christ's majesty (2 Pet. 1:16); Paul's bold declaration to Festus and King Agrippa about the resurrected Christ (Acts 26); and Paul's restatement of an early creed that declared there were more than 500 eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (1 Cor. 15:6).

In addition, Paul makes another claim that he wouldn't have made unless he was telling the truth. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul declares that he previously performed miracles for them. Speaking of his own qualifications as an apostle—one sent by God—Paul reminds the Corinthians, "I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles" (2 Cor. 12:12 NIV).

Now, why would Paul write this to the Corinthians unless he really had done miracles for them? He would have destroyed his credibility completely

by asking them to remember miracles that he never did for them! The only plausible conclusion is that (1) Paul really was an apostle of God, (2) he therefore really had the ability to confirm his apostleship by performing miracles, and (3) he had displayed this ability openly to the Corinthians.

9. The New Testament Writers Describe Miracles Like Other Historical Events: with Simple, Unembellished Accounts

Embellished and extravagant details are strong signs that a historical account has legendary elements. For example, there's a legendary account of Christ's resurrection that was written more than 100 years after the actual event. It is from the second century forgery known as the *Gospel of Peter*, and it goes like this:

> Early in the morning, as the Sabbath dawned, there came a large crowd from Jerusalem and the surrounding areas to see the sealed tomb. But during the night before the Lord's day dawned, as the soldiers were keeping guard two by two in every watch, there came a great sound in the sky, and they saw the heavens opened and two men descend shining with a great light, and they drew near to the tomb. The stone which had been set on the door rolled away by itself and moved to one side, and the tomb was opened and both of the young men went in.
>
> Now when these soldiers saw that, they woke up the centurion and the elders (for they also were there keeping watch). While they were yet telling them the things which they had seen, they saw three men come out of the tomb, two of them sustaining the other one, and a cross following after them. The heads of the two they saw had heads that reached up to heaven, but the head of him that was led by them went beyond heaven. And they heard a voice out of the heavens saying, "Have you preached unto them that sleep?" The answer that was heard from the cross was, "Yes!"[14]

Wow! Now that's how we would have written it if we were making up or embellishing the resurrection story! We see large crowds, moving stones, heads of men stretching to heaven and beyond. And we even see a walking and talking cross. How exciting! How embellished.

The New Testament resurrection accounts contain nothing like this. The Gospels give matter-of-fact, almost bland descriptions of the resurrection.

Mark describes what the women saw this way:

And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:4–8)

Luke’s description is almost as stark:

> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” And they remembered his words. (Luke 24:2–8)

John’s Gospel briefly mentions Mary Magdalene discovering the empty tomb, adds the experience of Peter and John, and then returns to Mary outside the tomb. Again, nothing appears embellished or extravagant in this account:

> Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.” So Peter went out with the other disciple, and they were going toward the tomb. Both of them were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. And stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying there, and the face cloth, which had been on Jesus’ head, not lying with the linen cloths but folded up in a place by itself. Then

> the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.
>
> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. (John 20:1–12)

John's account then describes Jesus's appearance to Mary.

Matthew's account of the women's experience is more dramatic, but contains nothing as bizarre as the long heads or the walking and talking cross found in the legendary account of the *Gospel of Peter*:[15]

> And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." (Matt. 28:2–7)

The resurrection is the central event in Christianity. As Paul wrote, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17 NIV). If the resurrection were a made-up story designed to convince skeptics, then the New Testament writers certainly would have made their accounts longer with more detail. Moreover, they probably would have said that they witnessed Jesus physically rising from the dead. Instead, they write of the disciples getting to the tomb after he has risen and make no attempt to dress up their discovery with verbose descriptions or cartoonish talking crosses. Matthew, Mark, and Luke don't even say anything about the dramatic theological implications of the resurrection, and John reports those implications in just one sentence (John 20:31).

This point about the theological restraint of the Gospel writers deserves amplification. It indicates that the Gospel writers were concerned about getting the history correct, not inventing a new kind of theology. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright makes the astute observation that

> neither “going to heaven when you die,” “life after death,” “eternal life,” nor even “the resurrection of all Christ’s people,” is so much as mentioned in the four canonical resurrection stories. If Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wanted to tell stories whose import was “Jesus is risen, therefore you will be too,” they have done a remarkably bad job of it.[16]

This is almost shocking when you think about it. If you go to most evangelical church services today, the constant emphasis is “Come to Jesus to get saved.” That is certainly taught in the whole of the New Testament, but it’s hardly mentioned in the Gospels. Why? Because the Gospel writers’ main goal was to record what Jesus said and did. Their work was more about history than theology. Of course, New Testament history has dramatic implications for theology, but those implications are drawn out in other New Testament writings, namely the Epistles (letters). It would have been easy for the Gospel writers to interject the theological implications of every historical event, but they didn’t. They were eyewitnesses who were writing history, not fiction writers or proselytizing theologians.

Their levelheadedness is also on display with the other miracles they record. The thirty-five other miracles attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are described as if from reporters, not wild-eyed preachers. The Gospel writers don’t offer flamboyant descriptions or fire-and-brimstone commentary—just the facts.

10. The New Testament Writers Abandoned Their Long-Held Sacred Beliefs and Practices, Adopted New Ones, and Did Not Deny Their Testimony Under Persecution or Threat of Death

The New Testament writers don’t just say that Jesus performed miracles and rose from the dead—they backed up that testimony with dramatic action.

First, it’s critical to understand that all of the New Testament writers and apostles were originally Jewish believers in Yahweh.[17] They thought they were God’s chosen people and had no motive to make up a new religion.

As Jews, they didn’t think a man could claim to be God—that would be blasphemy—and they didn’t think one man would resurrect from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of time. Yet that’s exactly what they say happened. Then, virtually overnight, they abandoned many of their long-held sacred beliefs and practices. Among the 1,500-year-old-plus institutions they gave up are the following:

- *The animal sacrifice system*. They replaced it forever with the one perfect sacrifice of Christ.
- *The binding supremacy of the law of Moses*. They said it was powerless because of the sinless life of Christ.
- *Strict monotheism*. They now worshiped Jesus, the God-man, despite the fact that (1) their most cherished belief has been, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4); and (2) man worship had always been considered blasphemy and punishable by death.
- *The Sabbath*. They no longer observed it even though they had always believed that breaking the Sabbath was punishable by death (Ex. 31:14).
- *Belief in a conquering Messiah*. Jesus is the opposite of a conquering Messiah. He's a sacrificial lamb (at least he was on his first visit!).

And it wasn't just the New Testament writers who did this—thousands of Jerusalem Jews, including Pharisee priests, converted to Christianity and joined the New Testament writers in abandoning these treasured beliefs and practices. J. P. Moreland helps us understand the magnitude of these devout Jews giving up their established institutions virtually overnight:

> [The Jewish people] believed that these institutions were entrusted to them by God. They believed that to abandon these institutions would be to risk their souls being damned to hell after death.
>
> Now a rabbi named Jesus appears from a lower-class region. He teaches for three years, gathers a following of lower-and-middle-class people, gets in trouble with the authorities, and gets crucified along with thirty thousand other Jewish men who are executed during this time period.
>
> But five weeks after he's crucified, over ten thousand Jews are following him and claiming that he is the initiator of a new religion. And get this: they're willing to give up or alter all five of the social institutions that they have been taught since childhood have such importance both sociologically and theologically. . . . Something *very* big was going on.[18]

How do you explain these monumental shifts if the New Testament writers were making up a story? How do you explain them if the resurrection did *not* occur?

Second, not only did these new believers abandon their long-held beliefs and practices, they also adopted some new radical ones. These included:

- Making Sunday, a workday, the new day of worship because Jesus rose that day
- Baptism as a new sign that one was a partaker of the new covenant (as circumcision was a sign of the old covenant)
- Communion as an act of remembrance of Christ's sacrifice for their sins[19]

Communion is especially inexplicable unless the resurrection is true. Why would Jews make up a practice in which they symbolically eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus?

Table 12.2 sums up the dramatic changes brought about by the resurrection:

Table 12.2 Changes caused by the resurrection

Pre-Resurrection Belief	**Post-Resurrection Belief**
Animal sacrifice	Unnecessary because of Christ's sacrifice
Binding law of Moses	Nonbinding because it was fulfilled by Christ's life
Strict monotheism	Trinity (three persons in one divine essence)
The Sabbath	The Lord's Day (Sunday worship)
Conquering Messiah	Sacrificial Messiah (he'll conquer when he returns)
Circumcision	Replaced by baptism and Communion

Finally, in addition to abandoning long-held sacred institutions and adopting new ones, the New Testament writers suffered persecution and death when they could have saved themselves by recanting. If they had made up the resurrection story, they certainly would have said so when they were about to be crucified (Peter), stoned (James), or beheaded (Paul).

But were they really martyred? It has been said that eleven out of the twelve apostles were martyred for their faith (the only nonmartyr was John, who was exiled to the Greek island of Patmos).

Sean McDowell took an in-depth look at the evidence for that claim and devoted his doctrinal dissertation to it. He studied the history of the twelve

plus that of Paul and James, the half-brother of Jesus. Based on the evidence, McDowell concluded different levels of probability for the martyrdom of those fourteen, with the "highest possible probability" being Peter and James, the half-brother of Jesus. He said the martyrdoms of Paul and James, the son of Zebedee, were "very probably true." Those of Thomas and Andrew were "more plausible than not," and the rest had lesser degrees of certainty. He concluded that three died naturally.

McDowell sums up the evidence this way:

> The critical point is not that we might establish the martyrdom of all the apostles; rather, their willingness to suffer and die for their firsthand witness of the risen Jesus—this is of foremost importance. Yet, the evidence shows that some really died as martyrs, and while a few likely died natural deaths, there is no evidence to indicate that any wavered or recanted in their faith.[20]

No one recanted? Why would they have died for a known lie? If they did die for a known lie, what was their motive?

Detective J. Warner Wallace points out that whenever he finds a victim of murder, he doesn't need to track down a thousand possible motivations for the murder. He knows that there are only three possible reasons why the victim was murdered: There was either a sex/relationship issue, a money issue, or a power issue (or some combination of those three).

Wallace writes, "Sex, money, and power are the motives for all the crimes detectives investigate. In fact, these three motives are also behind lesser sins as well. Think about the last time you did something you shouldn't have. If you examine the motivation carefully, you'll probably find it fits broadly into one of these three categories."[21]

Let's apply Wallace's observation about motives to the New Testament writers and apostles. Did they suddenly get real popular with the ladies for saying that Jesus rose from the dead? No, they didn't get sex.

Did they get money? No, they weren't peddling the false prosperity gospel message some preachers spout today. To the contrary, the biblical writers talk about denying oneself and serving others, while they promise that faithful believers will experience persecution and suffering.

Did they get power? No, they got the opposite of power—they got persecution! Paul had power when he was persecuting the church, and the other apostles could avoid persecution by simply staying Jews. Instead, they

became Christians and were persecuted for it.

People often ask us, “Are there any non-Christian sources that talk about the events of the New Testament?” Yes, we already mentioned them in chapter 10. However, this question is often motivated by the absurd assumption that the New Testament writers were biased in favor of the resurrection and only the non-Christian writers can be trusted as reliable sources.

The exact opposite is true. *The New Testament writers had no motive to invent the resurrection and every earthly motive to deny it!* They didn’t get sex, money, or power, and they brought nothing but trouble on themselves for declaring the resurrection. If the resurrection story was false, the apostles surely would have cracked to save themselves. Peter had already denied Jesus three times before the resurrection to save himself!

The late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia pointed out the absurdity of those who doubt the historicity of the New Testament. In a remark biting with sarcasm against modern-day intellectuals who are just too sophisticated to believe in a miracle, Scalia declared, “It is not irrational to accept the testimony of eyewitnesses who had nothing to gain. . . . The [worldly] wise do not believe in the resurrection of the dead. So everything from Easter morning to the Ascension had to be made up by the groveling enthusiasts as part of their plan to get themselves martyred.”[22]

Exactly. While some people will die for a lie that they think is truth, no sane person will die for what he or she *knows* is a lie. The New Testament writers and the other apostles verified with their own senses that Jesus had resurrected, and they were willing to die for that conviction. Some of them did die for it, and none recanted. What more could eyewitnesses do to prove that they are telling the truth?

What About Muslim Martyrs?

“Hold on!” the skeptic may object. “Have you forgotten about 9/11 already? The hijackers were doing it for Allah! What does martyrdom prove? Does it prove Islam is true too?”

Not at all. While there are some superficial similarities, there are several critical differences between the New Testament martyrs and those of today. One similarity shared by all martyrs is sincerity. Whether you’re talking about Christians, Muslims, kamikaze pilots, or suicidal cult followers, everyone agrees that martyrs sincerely believe in their cause.

But the most critical difference is that the New Testament Christian martyrs had more than sincerity—they had evidence that the resurrection was true. Why? Because *the New Testament martyrs were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ.* They knew the resurrection was true and not a lie because they had verified it with their own senses. They had seen, touched, and eaten with the risen Jesus on several occasions. And they had seen him do more than thirty miracles earlier. In light of such strong empirical evidence, they needed very little faith to believe in the resurrection. By commonsense observation standards, they had *proof* of it. So they willingly submitted themselves to persecution and death for what they had verified themselves.

This is unlike anything from Islam (or any other martyr-producing belief system). While the current martyrs for Islam are certainly sincere about Islam, they don't have miraculous eyewitness proof that Islam is true. They are not eyewitnesses to anything miraculous.

In fact, *the contemporaries of Muhammad weren't eyewitnesses to anything miraculous either.* When Muhammad was challenged to perform miracles to confirm that he was from God, he never took the challenge (Qur'an, 3:181–84; 4:153; 6:8–9; 17:88–96). Instead, he said he was just a man (17:93).

The Qur'an admits Muhammad was being asked about miracles and records what he was allegedly told to say: "Why are not signs sent down upon him from his Lord? Say: The signs are only with Allah, and I am only a plain warner" (29:50). So instead of doing miracles, Muhammad simply warned people about Allah.

There are no clearly defined miracles recorded in the Qur'an.[23] Miracles were only attributed to Muhammad by Muslims who lived 200 years after his death because Christians kept asking them for proof that Muhammad was a prophet. These miracle claims are not based on eyewitness testimony and give every indication of being legendary. Several speak of trees moving or saluting Muhammad as he passed by. Mountains and wolves allegedly saluted Muhammad as well. And other miracle stories seem to be variations of the miracles Jesus performed (e.g., turning water into milk, feeding a thousand by multiplying a small meal, etc.). These miracle stories are found in the *Hadith*, a later collection of Muhammad's sayings and doings.

Al Bukhari is deemed the most reliable author of the *Hadith*, yet he and a majority of today's *Muslim* scholars admit that most of Muhammad's alleged miracles are not authentic.[24] Since Muhammad himself never claimed to do

miracles, and since these miracle stories arise from sources well after contemporaries of Muhammad had died, we see no reason to believe *any* of the miracles attributed to Muhammad. Believability is also a problem because of the contradiction between Islam's own writings: The Qur'an claims Muhammad did *not* do miracles while the later *Hadith* claims he did.

Meanwhile, in recent years, the foundations of Islam—including Muhammad, Mecca, and the Qur'an—have been exposed by Jay Smith as having weak historical support.[25] Drawing on the work of other scholars, Smith thinks the evidence does not support that Mecca was inhabited when Muhammad supposedly took it in AD 630.[26] And the manuscripts for the Qur'an and the life of Muhammad (the *Hadith*) are too few, significantly divergent, and hundreds of years too late to establish historicity.[27] In fact, the manuscripts are so divergent that the Egyptian government had to choose an "official" Qur'an in 1924 from the thirty versions in existence at that time! It wasn't until 1985 that the Saudi Arabian government made that version the official Qur'an for the world.[28]

So we have good reason to doubt what we've been told about the origins of Islam. But even if we assume the standard Islamic narrative is mostly true, why think God was behind it? Muhammad got followers not from miracles but from conquest.

According to the standard Islamic narrative, Muhammad and his few followers were kicked out of Mecca in AD 622, twelve years after he apparently got his first revelation. (Since Mecca was a polytheistic city filled with tributes to other gods, Muhammad's message of monotheism was not well received by the local merchants who made their living from the commerce associated with polytheism.) It wasn't until Muhammad led several successful military conquests between 622 and 630 that he began to attract a large following. His popularity was greatly increased when he led raids on Meccan caravans and divided the booty from those raids with followers. He also took numerous wives, which helped solidify his base of support. In other words, Muhammad's popularity resulted from his lucrative military victories that he shared with his followers, his astute political dealings, and his personal charisma rather than from any miraculous confirmation.

The military aspect of Islam highlights another major difference between the origin of Christianity and the origin of Islam. Christianity began as a peaceful faith and was considered illegal for about the first 280 years of its

existence (during which time it experienced its greatest growth). If you became a Christian in the Roman Empire before about 311, you might have been killed for it.

By contrast, after a brief and unfruitful attempt to propagate his faith peacefully, Muhammad turned to military force to spread Islam. By 630, he had seized Mecca by force and had control of much of what is now the Saudi Arabian Peninsula. Although Muhammad died in 632, his followers continued military campaigns in the name of Islam. By 638—only six years after Muhammad's death—the Muslims had seized the Holy Land by force. In the first 100 years of Islam, in addition to taking Jerusalem, the Muslims twice attempted to take over Constantinople (present-day Istanbul, Turkey), and they successfully swept across northern Africa, across the Strait of Gibraltar, and into Europe. Had it not been for Charles Martel, mayor of the city of Tours, France, all of Europe would probably be speaking Arabic today. Martel (which means "hammer") drove the Muslims south out of Tours in 732, exactly 100 years after Muhammad's death. The Muslims eventually retreated back over the strait, but northern Africa remains predominantly Muslim to this day.

So here's the contrast: In the early days of Christianity, you might have been killed for becoming Christian; in the early days of Islam's growth, you might have been killed for *not* becoming a Muslim! In other words, the spread of these two great monotheistic faiths couldn't have been more different. Islam spread by use of the sword on others; Christianity spread when others used the sword on it. While Muhammad was a warlord, Jesus certainly wasn't.

"What about the Crusades?" the skeptic will interject. Take a history course—the Crusades did not begin until 1095, more than a thousand years after the origin of Christianity. They weren't commanded by Christ. Instead, the initial rationale for the Crusades was to take back the land the Muslims previously had seized by military conquest from the Christians. So it was Islam, not Christianity, that initially spread by military crusade.

Now, one can understand why a religion spreads when it takes over militarily. But why does a religion spread when its adherents are persecuted, tortured, and killed during its first 280 years? (Those are *not* good selling points.) Perhaps there's some very reliable testimony about miraculous events that proves the religion is true. How else can you explain why scared, scattered, skeptical cowards would give up their treasured religious beliefs

for new ones—braving excommunication, torture, and death—to become the most dedicated, determined, self-sacrificing, and peaceful missionary force the world has ever known?

Summary and Conclusion

In chapters 10 and 11, we saw that we have an accurate copy of the early and eyewitness testimony found in the New Testament documents. Our central question in this chapter has involved invention, embellishment, and exaggeration. Namely, did the New Testament writers make up, embellish, or exaggerate elements of the story? Did they play fast and loose with the facts?

No. As we have seen, there are at least ten good reasons to believe that they were honest men who meticulously and faithfully recorded what they saw. The New Testament writers did the following:

1. Included numerous embarrassing details about themselves and Jesus
2. Included the demanding sayings of Jesus
3. Carefully distinguished Jesus's words from their own
4. Included events about the resurrection that they would not have invented
5. Got the names of people in first-century Israel correct
6. Included divergent details and made no effort to harmonize accounts
7. Inadvertently confirmed that their accounts contain independent eyewitness testimony
8. Challenged their readers to check out verifiable facts, even facts about miracles
9. Described miracles like other historical events: with simple, unembellished accounts
10. Abandoned their long-held sacred beliefs and practices, adopted new ones, and did not deny their testimony under persecution or threat of death

So we have all these reasons to support the idea that the New Testament writers relentlessly stuck to the truth. And why wouldn't they have done so? What would have motivated them to lie, embellish, or exaggerate? They didn't get sex, money, or power. Instead, they got persecution and death for testifying as they did. In other words, the New Testament writers had every motive to *deny* New Testament events, not to invent, embellish, or exaggerate

them.

Something dramatic must have happened to jolt them out of their sacred traditions and into a new belief system that promised them nothing but earthly trouble. As we pointed out earlier, a resurrection would have surely been a dramatic “impact event” that would explain these changes and fuel these former Jews to evangelize the world even under the threat of death. That best explains all of the evidence.

Yet despite these ten lines of evidence against them, the skeptics still have faith there is some other explanation. Since the evidence makes it virtually impossible to conclude that Jesus was a legend or that the New Testament writers were liars, some skeptics cling to their only remaining possibility: The New Testament writers were deceived. They sincerely thought Jesus had risen from the dead, but they were wrong. That’s the possibility we’ll address in the next chapter.

13

Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

> Skeptics must provide more than alternative theories to the resurrection; they must provide first-century evidence for those theories.
>
> GARY HABERMAS

GIVEN WHAT WE'VE SEEN to this point, what conclusions can we draw about the New Testament?

- *The New Testament story is not a legend*. The New Testament documents were written well within two generations of the events by eyewitnesses or their contemporaries, with some source material going back to the events themselves. The New Testament storyline is not only corroborated by non-Christian writers, but it gets name usage right in first-century Israel and cites more than thirty historical figures who have been confirmed by sources outside the New Testament. Therefore, the New Testament story cannot be a legend.
- *The New Testament story is not a lie*. The New Testament writers included divergent and embarrassing details, as well as difficult and demanding sayings, and they carefully distinguished Jesus's words from their own. They also referenced facts and eyewitnesses that their readers either already knew or could verify. In fact, the New Testament writers provoked their readers and prominent first-century

enemies to check out what they said. If that's not enough to confirm their truthfulness, then their martyrdoms should remove any doubt. These Jewish eyewitnesses gave up their treasured religious beliefs and then endured persecution and death for the empirical claim that they had seen, heard, and touched the risen Jesus, yet they could have saved themselves by simply denying their testimony.

- *The New Testament story is not an embellishment.* The New Testament writers were meticulously accurate, as evidenced by well over 140 historically confirmed or probable details. They recorded miracles in those same historically confirmed narratives, and they did so without apparent embellishment or significant theological comment.

So is the New Testament true?

If we conclude that the New Testament story is not a legend, a lie, or an embellishment, then we know beyond a reasonable doubt that the New Testament writers accurately recorded what they saw. Does this mean that all of the events of the New Testament are true? Not necessarily. The skeptic still has one last out.

The last possible out for the skeptic is that the New Testament writers were deceived. In other words, perhaps the New Testament writers simply were wrong about what they thought they saw.

Given the characteristics of the New Testament that we have already reviewed, it does not seem plausible that the New Testament writers were deceived about routine, non-miraculous events. They have been proven right about so many historical details. Why doubt their observations about routine events?

But were they deceived about miraculous events like the resurrection? Perhaps they really believed that Jesus had risen from the dead—and that's why they paid with their lives—but they were mistaken or fooled. Perhaps there are natural explanations for all the miracles they thought they saw. Critical scholars leave themselves this out.

Gary Habermas, who has investigated the beliefs of about 3,400 New Testament scholars, both Christians and non-Christians, found that more than 90 percent of them believe that "the disciples had experiences *that they believed* were actual appearances of the risen Jesus."[1] The famous atheist and New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman calls the disciples' *belief* in the resurrection "a historical fact." He writes,

> Historians, of course, have no difficulty speaking about the belief in Jesus's resurrection, since this is a matter of public record. It is a historical fact that some of Jesus's followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution. We know some of these believers by name; one of them, the apostle Paul, claims quite plainly to have seen Jesus alive after his death.[2]

In other words, scholars are *not* necessarily saying that Jesus rose from the dead (although some think he did). Due to the evidence from "the public record," the minimal consensus of nearly all scholars is that the disciples *believed* that Jesus rose from the dead.

Why did they believe it? Were they deceived? For the eyewitnesses and contemporaries of the events to have been deceived, there must be some other explanation for the resurrection and the other miracles recorded in the New Testament. Since the resurrection is the central event in Christianity, let's begin there. How could the disciples plausibly have been deceived?

Skeptical About Skeptical Theories

Here are the explanations for the resurrection most frequently offered by skeptics:

The Disciples Experienced Hallucinations

Perhaps the disciples sincerely thought they had seen the risen Christ but instead really experienced hallucinations. This theory has several fatal flaws. We'll address two of them.

First, hallucinations are not experienced by groups but only by individuals. In that regard, they are a lot like dreams. That's why if a friend says to you one morning, "Wow! That was a great dream *we* had last night, eh?" you don't say, "Yeah, it was fabulous! Should we continue it tonight?" No, you think your friend has gone mad or is joking. You don't take him seriously because dreams are not collective experiences. Individuals have dreams—groups do not. Hallucinations work the same way. If *rare* psychological conditions exist, an individual may have a hallucination, but his friends will not. And even if they do, they will not have the same hallucination.

The hallucination theory doesn't work because Jesus did not appear once to just one person—he appeared on a dozen separate occasions in a variety of

settings to different people over a *forty-day* period. He was seen by men and women. He was seen walking, talking, and eating. He was seen inside and outside. He was seen by many and by a few. A total of more than 500 people saw this risen Jesus. And they were not seeing a hallucination or a ghost because on six of the twelve appearances Jesus was physically touched and/or ate real food (see table 13.1).

The existence of the empty tomb is the second fatal flaw with the hallucination theory. If various eyewitnesses did have the unprecedented experience of seeing the same hallucination at twelve different times, then why didn't the Jewish or Roman authorities simply parade Jesus's body around the city? That would have ended Christianity once and forever. They would have loved to do so, but they couldn't because the tomb really was empty. They even admitted it was empty, which they wouldn't have done if the hallucination theory was true.

The Witnesses Went to the Wrong Tomb

Maybe the disciples went to the wrong tomb and then assumed that Jesus had risen. This theory also has two fatal flaws.

First, if the disciples had gone to the wrong tomb, the Jewish or Roman authorities would have gone to the right one, removed Jesus's body, and paraded it around the city. The tomb was known by the Jews because it was *their* tomb (it belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin). And the tomb was known by the Romans because they placed guards there. As William Lane Craig notes, the wrong tomb theory assumes that all of the Jews (and the Romans) had a permanent kind of "collective amnesia" about what they had done with the body of Jesus.[3]

Table 13.1 The twelve postresurrection appearances of Christ

Persons to Whom Jesus Appeared	Saw	Heard	Touched	Other Evidence
Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–18)	X	X	X	Empty tomb
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Matt. 28:1–10)	X	X	X	Empty tomb (empty tomb and grave clothes also in Luke 24:1–12)
Peter (1 Cor. 15:5)	X	X		Empty tomb
Two disciples (Luke 24:13–35)	X	X		Ate with him
Ten apostles (Luke 24:36–49; John 20:19–23)	X	X	X**	Saw wounds, saw him eat food
Eleven apostles (John 20:24–31)	X	X	X**	Saw wounds

Seven apostles (John 21)	X	X		Ate with him
All apostles (Matt. 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–18)	X	X		
500 brethren (1 Cor. 15:6)	X	X*		
James (1 Cor. 15:7)	X	X*		
All apostles (Acts 1:4–8)	X	X		Ate with him
Paul (Acts 9:1–9; 1 Cor. 15:8)	X	X		

* Implied ** Offered himself to be touched

Second, even if the disciples did go to the wrong tomb, the theory does not explain how the risen Jesus appeared twelve different times. In other words, the appearances must be explained, not just the empty tomb.

Notice that the empty tomb did not convince most of the disciples (with the possible exception of John) that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was the *appearances* of Jesus that turned them from scared, scattered, and skeptical cowards into the greatest peaceful missionary force in history. This is especially true of the devout enemy of Christianity, Saul (Paul). He was not only unconvinced by the empty tomb, he was persecuting Christians very soon after the resurrection. It took an appearance of Jesus himself to turn Paul around. It seems that James, the skeptical brother of Jesus, also was converted after an appearance of Jesus. As we have seen, James's conversion was so dramatic that he became the leader of the Jerusalem church and was martyred in AD 62 at the hands of the high priest as recorded by Josephus.

The bottom line is this: Even if one could explain the empty tomb naturally, this would not be enough to disprove the resurrection. Any alternative theory of the resurrection must explain the empty tomb *and* the appearances of Jesus. The wrong tomb theory explains neither.

Jesus Swooned or Only Appeared to Die

Is it possible that Jesus didn't really die on the cross? Perhaps Jesus merely swooned. In other words, he was still alive when he was placed in the tomb, but he somehow escaped and convinced his disciples that he had risen from the dead. There are numerous fatal flaws with this theory as well.

First, enemies and friends alike believed Jesus was dead. The Romans, who were professional executioners, whipped and beat Jesus brutally to the point of his collapse. They then drove heavy, wrought-iron nails through his wrists and feet, and plunged a spear into his side. They didn't break his legs

to speed death because they knew he was already dead. (Crucifixion victims often died by asphyxiation because they couldn't push themselves up to breathe. Breaking the legs would, therefore, speed death.) Moreover, Pilate checked to make sure Jesus was dead, and Jesus's death was the reason the disciples lost all hope.

The brutal Roman crucifixion techniques have been verified through archaeology and non-Christian written sources (see chapter 16 for a vivid description of Jesus's crucifixion experience). In 1968, the remains of a first-century crucifixion victim were found in a Jerusalem cave; the heel bone of this man had a seven-inch nail driven through it, and his lower arms showed evidence of nails as well.[4] The spear in the heart has also been verified as a Roman crucifixion technique through the writing of the Roman author Quintilian (AD 35–95). Given such treatment of Jesus, it's no wonder the eyewitnesses thought he was dead.

Not only did those in the first century believe Jesus was dead, modern medical doctors also believe Jesus died. In the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, three medical doctors, including a pathologist from the Mayo Clinic, concluded,

> Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to his side was inflicted and supports the traditional view that the spear, thrust between his right ribs, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart and thereby ensured his death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.[5]

As we indicated in the last chapter, the blood and water from the spear wound appears to be another genuine eyewitness detail from the pen of John. That fact alone should end all doubt about the death of Jesus.

The second major flaw in the swoon theory is that Jesus was embalmed in seventy-five pounds of bandages and spices. It is highly unlikely that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (John 19:39–40) would have mistakenly embalmed a living Jesus.

Third, even if everyone was wrong about Jesus being dead when he went into the tomb, how could a badly injured and bleeding man still be alive thirty-six hours later? He would have bled to death in that cold, damp, dark tomb.

Fourth, even if he did survive the cold, damp, dark tomb, how could he have unwrapped himself, moved the two-ton rock up and away from the inside of the tomb, gotten by the elite Roman guards (who knew they would be killed for allowing such a breach of security), and then convinced the scared, scattered, skeptical cowards that he had triumphed over death? Even if he could have gotten out of the tomb and past the Roman guards, Jesus would have been a battered, bleeding pulp of a man whom the disciples would have pitied, not worshiped. They'd have said, "You may be alive, but you're certainly not risen. Let's get you to a doctor!"

Fifth, the swoon theory cannot explain Jesus's bright-light appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus. What turned around this avowed enemy of Christianity shortly after the crucifixion? It certainly wasn't a normal human being who had healed from his crucifixion experience.

Paul's description of his conversion is recorded twice in the historically authenticated book of Acts. In the second of these, Paul tells a hostile Jewish crowd about Christ's appearance to him:

> "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'" (Acts 22:6–8)

Paul was then blinded for three days and experienced a 180-degree attitude change. He went from Christianity's most eager enemy to its most ardent advocate.

Paul's conversion experience cannot be explained by a swooned Jesus wielding a torch and using his "God voice" from the bushes. This was a dramatic display of divine power in broad daylight that dramatically changed a man, and the world, forever.[6]

Sixth, several non-Christian writers affirmed that Jesus had died by crucifixion. These include Josephus, Tacitus, Thallus, and the Jewish Talmud. The Jewish Talmud, for example, says that Yeshua (Jesus) was hung on a tree on the eve of the Passover.[7] This is not a source considered friendly to Christianity, so there's no reason to doubt its authenticity.

For these reasons and others, very few scholars believe the swoon theory anymore. There's simply too much evidence against it.

The Disciples Stole the Body

The theory that the disciples stole Jesus's body cannot support the skeptic's last option—that the New Testament writers were all deceived. Why? Because the theory makes the New Testament writers the deceivers, not the deceived ones!

This, of course, flies in the face of all the evidence we've seen so far. The theory takes the untenable position that the New Testament writers were all liars. For some inexplicable reason, they stole the body to get themselves beaten, tortured, and martyred! Adherents of this theory cannot explain why anyone would do this. Why would the disciples have embarked on such a self-defeating conspiracy? And why did they continue to say that Jesus had risen from the dead when they could have saved themselves by recanting that testimony?

In addition to the disciples' severe conflict of interest, adherents of this theory cannot explain other absurdities that it requires. For example, how did the disciples get past the elite Roman guards who were trained to guard the tomb with their lives? If Jesus never rose from the dead, then who appeared to Paul, James, and the other eyewitnesses? Did the New Testament writers lie about their conversions too? Did Paul simply make up the evidence found in 1 Corinthians? And what about the non-Christian writers? Did Josephus lie about James being martyred by the Sanhedrin? Did the Roman writer Phlegon (born ca. AD 80) lie as well when he wrote in his *Chronicles*, "Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that he arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails"?[8] It would have taken more of a "miracle" for all this to happen than for Jesus to rise from the dead. *We don't have enough faith to believe all that!*

As we have seen, the notion that the disciples stole the body is exactly the explanation the Jews offered to explain the empty tomb. Beyond the fact that the disciples had no motive or ability to steal the body, this ancient Jewish explanation was not a good lie for two other reasons. First, how would the sleeping guards have known that the disciples stole the body? Second, no Roman guard would have admitted to the capital crime of sleeping on the job. (Perhaps that's why, as Matthew records, the Jewish authorities had to pay off the guards and promise to keep them out of trouble with the governor.)

In 1878, a fascinating archaeological discovery was made that may corroborate Matthew's claim that the Jews were circulating the theft

explanation. A marble slab measuring 15 by 24 inches was discovered in Nazareth with this inscription:

> Ordinance of Caesar: It is my pleasure that graves and tombs remain perpetually undisturbed for those who have made them for the cult of their ancestors or children or members of their house. If, however, anyone charges that another has either demolished them, or has in any other way extracted the buried, or has maliciously transferred them to other places in order to wrong them, or has displaced the sealing on other stones, against such a one I order that a trial be instituted, as in respect of the gods, so in regard to the cult of mortals. For it shall be much more obligatory to honor the buried. Let it be absolutely forbidden for anyone to disturb them. In case of violation I desire that the offender be sentenced to capital punishment on charge of violation of sepulchre.[9]

Scholars believe this edict was issued by Emperor Tiberius, who reigned from AD 14 to 37 (during most of Christ's life), or Emperor Claudius, who reigned from 41 to 54. The striking nature of this edict is that it raises the penalty for grave robbing from a mere fine to death!

Why would the Roman emperor have bothered to make such a severe edict at this time in such a remote area of his empire? While no one knows for sure the reason for the edict, there are a couple of likely possibilities, both of which point back to Jesus.

If the inscription is from Tiberius, then it's likely that Tiberius learned of Jesus through one of Pilate's annual reports to him. Justin Martyr claims that this was the case.[10] Included in that report may have been the Jewish explanation for the empty tomb (the disciples stole the body), prompting Tiberius to prevent any future "resurrections" with the edict.

If the inscription is from Claudius, then the edict may have been part of his response to the riots in Rome in AD 49. In Acts 18:2, Luke mentions that Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. This is confirmed by the Roman historian Seutonius, who tells us that "because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from the city."[11] (Chrestus is a variant spelling of Christ.)

What did Christ have to do with Jewish riots in Rome? Perhaps Rome experienced the same course of events that took place in Thessalonica at roughly the same time. In Acts, Luke records that Thessalonica was thrown

into “turmoil” when the Jews became “jealous” of Paul preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead. These Jews complained to the city officials, “These men [Paul and Luke] who have turned the world upside down have come here also . . . and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:6–7).

If this is what happened in Rome, then Claudius would not have been pleased with a group that was defying his decrees and following another king. Once he had learned that this new seditious sect originated with Jews who believed their leader had resurrected, he may have exiled all the Jews from Rome and made grave robbing a capital offense.

Either of these two possibilities would explain the timing, location, and severity of the edict. But even if the edict was *not* connected with Christ’s empty tomb, we already have good evidence that the Jews put forth the theft theory (see last chapter). The main point is that the theft theory was a tacit admission that the tomb was really empty. *After all, why would the Jews have concocted an explanation for the empty tomb if Jesus’s body was still in there?*

A Substitute Took Jesus’s Place on the Cross

This happens to be the explanation offered by many Muslims today—Jesus was not crucified, but someone like Judas was killed in his place.[12] The Qur’an claims of Jesus,

> They killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not: Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise. (4:157–58)

So according to the Qur’an, it only appeared that Jesus was crucified, and Allah took him directly to heaven.

There are several problems with this theory, not the least being that there’s absolutely no evidence to back it up. That’s why every other group of scholars—be they atheists, Jews, Christians, or adherents of any other belief—disagree with this Muslim assertion. It comes from the Qur’an more than 600 years after the lifetime of Jesus. How can this be considered a more authoritative source for the life of Jesus than the accounts of the

eyewitnesses? This theory contradicts all the eyewitness testimony, as well as the testimony of the non-Christian sources.

Even the famous Muslim apologist Ahmed Deedat admitted that the Christians are right that the Qur'an is too late. He wrote, "The Christian objects, 'how can a man (Muhummed pbuh) a thousand miles away from the scene of a happening, and 600 years after the event, pronounce as to what transpired?'" Deedat's surprisingly honest answer is, "The Christian plea is valid. Their logic is good."[13]

Moreover, the Muslim claim that a substitute died in the place of Jesus raises more questions than it answers. Are we to believe that the scores of people who witnessed some aspect of Jesus's death—the disciples, the Roman guards, Pilate, the Jews, Jesus's family members and friends—were *all* mistaken about who was killed? How could so many people have been wrong about a simple identification? This is like saying that Abraham Lincoln wasn't the one killed next to his wife on that April evening in 1865 at Ford's Theater. Was Mary Lincoln mistaken about the man sitting next to her? Was Lincoln's bodyguard wrong about whom he was guarding? Was everyone else mistaken about the identity of the president as well? This is not believable.

This theory raises many other questions. If Jesus wasn't killed, then why was the tomb of the man who really *was* killed found empty? Are we to believe the *substitute* rose from the dead? If so, how did he do it? Are we to believe that all the non-Christian historians are wrong about the death of Jesus? And what are we to make of the Jewish admission of Jesus's death? Was the Talmud mistaken for saying that Jesus was hanged on a tree on the eve of the Passover? In short, are we to believe that everyone from the first century was wrong about everything?

One must question a theory that comes more than 600 years after the events and asks you to believe that all the first-century evidence is wrong. Like other alternative theories, this one is built on mere speculation without a shred of evidence to support it. *Therefore, we don't have enough faith to believe it.*

The Qur'an has a related problem called the Islamic (or Qur'anic) dilemma. On one hand, the Qur'an says that Jesus never died, which contradicts the Bible. Yet on the other hand, it says that the Bible came from Allah, is true, and that Christians and Jews should obey it (Qur'an, 3:3–4; 5:47, 68). This is a dilemma for Muslims because if the Bible is true, then the

Qur'an is not the word of God because it falsely claims Jesus didn't die (along with contradicting the resurrection and other essential doctrines of the Bible). But if the Bible is false, then the Qur'an is still not the word of God because it is telling people to obey a false book (the Bible).[14]

The standard Muslim response is that the Bible has been corrupted since the time of the Qur'an. However, the Qur'an teaches the opposite: that any word of Allah cannot be changed (6:115; 18:27).[15] And, as we have seen, the evidence agrees with the Qur'an that the Bible hasn't been corrupted. By the time of Muhammad and the compiling of the Qur'an (in the 600s), the entire Bible had been established for centuries. So the Qur'an is telling us to believe the Bible of Muhammad's time—which is the same Bible we have today—yet it is also contradicting that same Bible. For this and other reasons, we don't have enough faith to believe the Qur'an either.

The Disciples' Faith Led to Their Belief in the Resurrection

John Dominic Crossan is the cofounder of the now defunct far-left group of scholars and critics who called themselves "The Jesus Seminar." They decided that only 18 percent of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are authentic. They didn't give any real evidence for this skepticism, just speculative theories about how the faith of the disciples led to their belief in the resurrection and just about everything else in the New Testament.

This theory was brought out well during a debate Crossan had with William Lane Craig over the resurrection. Crossan offered the theory that the disciples made up the resurrection story because they "searched the Scriptures" after his death and found that "persecution, if not execution, was almost like a job description of being God's elect."[16]

The entire two-hour debate turned on Craig's response. He said, "Right. And that came *after* they experienced the resurrection appearances. . . . *The faith of the disciples did not lead to the [resurrection] appearances, but it was the appearances which led to their faith*; they then searched the scriptures."[17]

Indeed, the scared, scattered, skeptical disciples were not of a mind to invent a resurrection story and then go out and die for it. They were of a mind to go and hide for fear of the Jews! It was the resurrection appearances that gave them bold faith, not the other way around. Crossan has it backwards.

In addition to the fact that there's no evidence for his theory, Crossan cannot account for the resurrection appearances to more than 500 people. Nor

can he account for the empty tomb or the Jewish attempt to explain it. The Jews knew the disciples were claiming that the resurrection was a real historical event, not a mere product of their faith. If, as Crossan says, the resurrection didn't really occur, then why did the Jewish authorities right through the second century continue to insist that the disciples had stolen the body? Crossan has no answer because his theory is false. You have to have a lot of faith—and overlook a lot of evidence—to believe it.

The New Testament Writers Copied Pagan Resurrection Myths

This theory asserts that the New Testament is not historical because the New Testament writers merely copied pagan resurrection myths. Skeptics are quick to cite supposed resurrections of mythical characters like Marduk, Adonis, and Osiris. Is the New Testament just another myth? Could this theory be true? That's not likely for several reasons.

First, as we have seen, the New Testament is anything but mythological. Unlike pagan myths, the New Testament is loaded with eyewitness evidence and real historical figures, and it is corroborated by several outside sources. C. S. Lewis, a writer of myths himself, has commented that the New Testament stories do not show signs of being mythological:

> All I am in private life is a literary critic and historian, that's my job. And I'm prepared to say on that basis if anyone thinks the Gospels are either legends or novels, then that person is simply showing his incompetence as a literary critic. I've read a great many novels and I know a fair amount about the legends that grew up among early people, and I know perfectly well the Gospels are not that kind of stuff.[18]

Second, the pagan-myth theory can't explain the empty tomb, the martyrdoms of the eyewitnesses, or the testimony of the non-Christian writings. Nor can it explain the evidence of the disciples' conversions, leading nearly all scholars to conclude the disciples really believed they saw the resurrected Jesus.

Third, ancient non-Christian sources knew that the New Testament writers were not offering mythical accounts. As Craig Blomberg observes, "The earliest Jewish and pagan critics of the resurrection understood the Gospel writers to be making historical claims, not writing myth or legend. They

merely disputed the plausibility of those claims."[19]

Fourth, no Greek or Roman myth spoke of the literal incarnation of a monotheistic God into human form (cf. John 1:1–3, 14) by way of a literal virgin birth (Matt. 1:18–25), followed by his death and physical resurrection. The Greeks were polytheists, not monotheists as New Testament Christians were. Moreover, the Greeks believed in reincarnation into a different mortal body; New Testament Christians believed in *resurrection* into the same physical body made immortal (cf. Luke 24:37; Heb. 9:27).

Fifth, after reviewing the latest scholarship on this issue, from conservative Christian to liberal atheist, Gary Habermas concludes that it's unclear if there were any dying-and-rising gods before Jesus. But even if they did exist, "it is clear for a large number of reasons that these ancient tales did not create or even significantly influence the New Testament teachings of Jesus's death and resurrection." For this conclusion there is "almost unanimous scholarly agreement."[20]

What about the Egyptian cult god Osiris? In this myth, Osiris is cut into fourteen pieces, scattered around Egypt, then reassembled and brought back to life by the goddess Isis. That predates Christ. Yes, but Osiris did not actually come back to physical life but became a member of a shadowy underworld. And there was no eyewitness or corroborating evidence for the historicity of Osiris's resurrection because Osiris was not a true historical figure. As Habermas and Michael Licona observe about the myth of Osiris, "This is far different than Jesus' resurrection account where he was the gloriously risen Prince of life who was seen by others on earth before his ascension into heaven."[21]

Finally, even if there are myths about dying and rising gods prior to Christianity, that doesn't mean the New Testament writers copied from them. The fictional TV show *Star Trek* preceded the U.S. space shuttle program, but that doesn't mean that newspaper reports of space shuttle missions are influenced by *Star Trek* episodes! We must evaluate the evidence of each account to see whether it is historical or mythical. Even atheists such as Bart Ehrman admit that the New Testament writers based their beliefs on what they said they saw. If the apostles had any preexisting beliefs about resurrection, they came from the Old Testament, not from pagan ideas that they were commanded to reject from as early as the Ten Commandments.

Do You Have Any Evidence for That?

Christians are used to "counterpunching" alternative theories about the resurrection. In fact, we've just done that by pointing out the numerous deficiencies in the alternative theories ourselves. But that's not enough. While skeptics rightfully put the burden of proof for the resurrection on Christians (and, as we have seen, Christians can meet that burden with good evidence), *Christians need to put the burden of proof on skeptics for their alternative theories.* In light of all the positive evidence for the resurrection, skeptics must offer positive, first-century evidence for their alternative views.

It's one thing to concoct an alternative theory to the resurrection, but it's another thing to find first-century evidence for it. A theory is not evidence. Reasonable people demand evidence, not just theories. Anyone can concoct a theory to explain any historical event.

For example, if someone were to claim that all of the video footage from the Holocaust concentration camps was staged and manufactured by Jews to garner sympathy and support for a Jewish state, would you believe that theory? Of course not, because it flies in the face of all the known evidence. To be taken seriously, those who offer such a theory must present credible, independent eyewitness reports and other corroborating evidence to counter the numerous reports that say the Holocaust was real and was carried out by the Nazis. But no such counterevidence exists.

This is the case with the resurrection. While skeptics have formulated numerous alternative theories to explain away the resurrection, there is no evidence from any first-century source supporting any of them.[22] The only alternative theory that's even mentioned in a first-century source (the disciples stole the body) is from Matthew, and it is clearly identified as a lie. No one from the ancient world—not even the enemies of Christianity—ever offered a *plausible* alternative explanation for the resurrection. Many alternative theories formulated over the past few centuries are rooted in antisupernaturalism. Since modern scholars philosophically rule out miracles in advance, they concoct ad hoc explanations to explain away the resurrection. As we have seen, their ad hoc explanations contain multiple absurdities or improbabilities.

Those who have alternative theories for the resurrection should be asked, "What evidence do you have for your theory? Can you please name three or four first-century sources that support your theory?" When honest skeptics are presented with this question, they typically answer with silence or a stuttering admission that they have no such evidence because none exists.[23]

And it's not just the resurrection that the skeptics must explain. They also must explain the other thirty-five miracles that eyewitnesses have associated with Jesus. Are we to believe that the four Gospel writers were all deceived about all of those miracles as well as the resurrection?

This mass deception theory needs evidence. Do we have any first-century sources that offer a different explanation for the works of Jesus? The only one that has been discovered (and it's probably from the second century) is the Jewish Talmud, which admits that Jesus performed unusual acts by saying that he "practiced sorcery."[24] But this explanation is just as weak as the Jewish explanation for the resurrection (the disciples stole the body). Perhaps sorcery could explain *some* of Jesus's "miracles," but all thirty-five? Sorcerers and magicians cannot perform the kinds of acts that Jesus is said to have performed—raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, walking on water, and so forth.

So if there's no ancient evidence for deception, are we to take the New Testament miracles at face value? Why not? We live in a theistic universe where miracles are possible. And while it's true that we don't have independent attestation for all of the miracles in the New Testament (because some are mentioned by only one writer), we certainly have multiple attestations for many of them (including the resurrection). The sheer number of Jesus's miracles cited by independent sources is too great to be explained away as a great deception. One person may be deceived once, but not numerous observers repeatedly.

German scholar Wolfgang Trilling writes, "We are convinced and hold it for historically certain that Jesus did in fact perform miracles. . . . The miracle reports occupy so much space in the Gospels that it is impossible that all could have been subsequently invented or transferred to Jesus."[25] William Lane Craig concludes, "The fact that miracle working belongs to the historical Jesus is no longer disputed."[26] That is, miracles are not disputed on historical grounds, only on philosophical grounds (more on this below).

The bottom line is that there are too many miracles and too much testimony to believe that all of the eyewitnesses got it wrong every time. With regard to the resurrection, all alternative theories have fatal flaws, and we have strong eyewitness and circumstantial evidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead. In other words, not only do we lack a natural explanation for the empty tomb, we have positive evidence *for* the resurrection. The explanation that requires the *least* amount of faith is that Jesus really did

perform miracles and really did rise from the dead as he predicted. So we don't have enough faith to believe that the New Testament writers were all deceived.

Why Don't All Scholars Believe?

If we have accurate copies of early testimony (chapter 10); if that testimony is not only early but from eyewitnesses (chapter 11); if those eyewitnesses recorded what they saw accurately (chapter 12); and if those eyewitnesses were not deceived about what they recorded (this chapter), then why don't all scholars take the New Testament at face value? Some may honestly think the evidence isn't enough, and others may have a philosophical bias against miracles.

John Dominic Crossan admitted this bias during the debate with William Lane Craig. Craig believes, as we do, that the evidence for the historicity of the literal resurrection is strong. Crossan, on the other hand, does not believe that Jesus literally rose from the dead. Here is a very telling exchange between the two men:

> CRAIG: Would there be anything, Dr. Crossan, that could convince you that Jesus was risen from the dead as a historical fact?
>
> CROSSAN: I need to make certain of what we're talking about. Let's say we have a situation outside the empty tomb on Easter Sunday morning. If somebody had a videocam, would we have recorded something coming out of the tomb? Is that the type of question?
>
> CRAIG: I guess what I'm asking, and what I think Mr. Buckley [the moderator] is pushing for, is this: what evidence would it take to convince you? Or are your preconceived ideas about the impossibility of the miraculous and so forth so strong that, in fact, they skew your historical judgment so that such an event could never even be admitted into court?
>
> CROSSAN: No. . . . A doctor at Lourdes might admit, "I have absolutely no medical way of explaining what has happened." That is a right statement. Then one has the right to say, "I by faith therefore believe that God has intervened here." *But it's a theological presupposition of mine that God does not operate that way.* . . . What would it take to prove to me what you ask? I don't know, unless God changes the universe. I could imagine discovering tomorrow morning that every

> tree outside my house has moved five feet. That needs some explanation. I don't know the explanation, but I won't immediately presume a miracle.[27]

Crossan's explicit statement of his theological presupposition against miracles is a candid admission on his part. Of course, Crossan doesn't speak for all skeptical scholars. But a majority of them deny the plain reading of the New Testament because they share his philosophical bias against miracles. It is not that the historical evidence for the New Testament is weak (it's very strong indeed). It's that they've ruled out miracles in advance. They arrive at the wrong conclusion because their bias makes it impossible for them to arrive at the right conclusion.

Context! Context! Context!

Let's take a look at Crossan's final comment about the trees in his yard moving five feet overnight. He says he wouldn't "immediately presume a miracle." Well, neither would we, because most events actually *do* have a natural explanation (which, incidentally, helps miracles stand out when they do occur). So it makes perfect sense to seek a natural explanation first.

But does that mean we should *never* conclude that any event (such as the trees moving) was a miracle? Crossan would say yes because of his theological presupposition that God does not "operate that way." But since that presupposition is unjustified—because God exists—what would be the right conclusion? It depends on the context of the event.

Let's suppose that Crossan's tree-moving event occurred in the following context: Two hundred years in advance, someone claiming to be a prophet of God writes down a prediction that all of the trees in one area of Jerusalem will move five feet one night during a particular year. Two hundred years later, a man arrives to tell the townspeople that the tree-moving miracle will occur shortly. This man claims to be God, teaches profound truths, and performs many other unusual acts that appear to be miracles.

Then one morning numerous eyewitnesses claim that the trees in Crossan's Jerusalem yard—including several deep-rooted, 100-foot oaks—actually moved five feet during the night, just as the God-man predicted. These eyewitnesses also say this is just one of more than thirty miracles performed by this God-man. They then suffer persecution and martyrdom for proclaiming these miracles and for refusing to recant their testimony.

Opponents of the God-man don't deny the evidence about the trees or the other miracles, but they offer natural explanations that have numerous fatal flaws. Many years later, after all the eyewitnesses are dead, skeptics offer additional natural explanations that prove to be fatally flawed as well. In fact, for the next 2,000 years, skeptics try to explain the event naturally, but no one can.

Question: Given that context, wouldn't it be reasonable to assume that the movement of the trees was supernatural rather than natural in origin? Of course. The context makes all the difference.

This is the case we have with the resurrection. It's not just that we lack a natural explanation for the empty tomb. It's that we have positive eyewitness and corroborating circumstantial evidence *for* the resurrection miracle. Here's the context in which we must evaluate the evidence:

First, the theistic nature of this universe makes miracles *possible*. We live in a theistic universe where miracles are possible. (Indeed, the greatest miracle of all—creation of the universe out of nothing—has already occurred.) So God can use prophets to announce his messages and miracles to confirm them. That is, a miracle can be used to confirm the word of God through a man of God to the people of God.

Second, the ancient documents say miracles are to be *expected.* We have Old Testament documents, written hundreds of years in advance, that predicted that the Messiah—a man who would actually be God—would come, be killed at a specific time as a sacrifice for sinful humanity, and rise from the dead (more on this in the next chapter).

Third, historically confirmed eyewitness documents say miracles are *actual*. There are twenty-seven documents written by nine eyewitnesses or their contemporaries that describe numerous miraculous events. Many of these documents contain historically confirmed eyewitness testimony that goes back to the time of the events, and the evidence demonstrates that the narrative is not invented, embellished, or the product of deception. We know this because the New Testament documents meet all seven tests of historicity identified in chapter 10. The New Testament documents:

1. Are early (most, if not all, were written within ten to forty years of the events, well within two generations, and contain earlier source material)
2. Contain eyewitness testimony

3. Contain independent eyewitness testimony from multiple sources
4. Were written by trustworthy people who taught and lived by the highest standard of ethics, and who died for their testimony
5. Describe events, locations, and individuals corroborated by archaeology and other writers
6. Describe some events that enemies tacitly admit are true (enemy attestation)
7. Describe events and details that are embarrassing to the authors and even to Jesus himself

These historically confirmed eyewitness documents tell the following story:

1. At the time and place, and in the manner, predicted by the Old Testament, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem and claims to be the Messiah. He teaches profound truths and, according to numerous independent eyewitnesses, performs thirty-five miracles (some on groups of people) and rises from the dead.
2. Once cowardly and unbelieving eyewitnesses suddenly begin to boldly proclaim Jesus's resurrection in the face of persecution and death. (Misguided people may die for a lie they think is true, but they will not die for a lie they know is a lie. The New Testament writers were in a position to know the truth about the resurrection.)
3. In the very city of Jesus's death and tomb, a new movement (the church) is born and quickly spreads by peaceful means on the belief that Jesus has risen from the dead. (This is difficult to explain if there was no resurrection. How could Christianity begin in a hostile city like Jerusalem if Jesus's body was still in the tomb? The hostile religious and government authorities would have exposed Christianity as fraudulent by displaying the body.)
4. Thousands of Jerusalem Jews, including Pharisee priests, abandon several of their most treasured beliefs and practices and adopt strange new ones after converting to Christianity.
5. Saul, the most ardent enemy of the new church, is suddenly converted and becomes its most prolific proponent. He travels the ancient world to proclaim the resurrection, suffering persecution and martyrdom. If there was no resurrection, then why did the greatest enemy of Christianity suddenly become its greatest leader? Why did

he willingly suffer persecution and death?

6. James, the skeptical brother of Jesus, suddenly becomes convinced that his brother is the Son of God and then becomes the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He later suffers martyrdom at the hands of the high priest. We all know that family members can be the most difficult people to convince to our religious viewpoint. James began as the unconvinced brother of Jesus (John 7:5). If there was no resurrection, then why did James—who was called "the Just" by second-century historians Clement and Hegesippus[28]—suddenly come to believe that his brother really was the Messiah? Unless he saw the resurrected Christ, why would James become the leader of the church in Jerusalem and suffer a martyr's death?
7. The Jewish enemies of Christianity don't deny the evidence but offer faulty naturalistic explanations to account for it.

Finally, the collective references of other ancient historians and writers confirm this basic storyline of the New Testament documents, and several archaeological discoveries affirm the details those documents describe.

When you put the evidence in proper context, you can see why *we don't have enough faith to be skeptical about it.* It's a lot more reasonable to be skeptical about skepticism!

Skeptics who look at the points above may conclude that Jesus did not rise from the dead. But if they do, they've got to provide evidence for an alternative theory that can account for *all* of these points. As we have seen, they have failed to do so. The resurrection best explains *all* of the evidence.

Since there is a God who can act, there can be acts of God. When God's intention is announced in advance, and we then have good eyewitness testimony and corroborating evidence that such events have actually occurred, it takes a lot more faith to deny those events than to believe them.

Extraordinary Claims and Self-Canceling Evidence

There are two more objections that skeptics often bring up against the resurrection and miracles. The first is a demand for extraordinary evidence.

Extraordinary Evidence

Some skeptics might admit that the resurrection is possible, but they say it would require extraordinary evidence to believe it. That is, since the New

Testament makes extraordinary claims—such as miracles—we must have extraordinary evidence to believe those claims. This objection seems reasonable until you ask, "What does 'extraordinary' mean?"

If it means *beyond the natural*, then the skeptic is asking the resurrection to be confirmed by another miracle. How could that work? In order to believe in the first miracle (the resurrection), the skeptic says he needs a second miracle to support it. He would then demand a third miracle to support the second, and this would go on to infinity. So by these criteria, the skeptic would never believe in the resurrection even if it really happened. There's something wrong with a standard of proof that makes it impossible for you to believe what actually has occurred.

If "extraordinary" means *repeatable*, as in a laboratory, then no event from history can be believed because historical events cannot be repeated. The believability of historical events can only be confirmed by looking at the quality of the eyewitness evidence and the nature of the forensic evidence in the light of the principles of uniformity and causality (we covered those principles in chapter 5). Besides, atheists who demand repeatability for biblical miracles are inconsistent because they do not demand repeatability of the historical "miracles" in which they believe—the Big Bang, the first life coming from nonliving chemicals, and macroevolution of subsequent life forms.

If "extraordinary" means *more than usual*, then that's exactly what we have for the resurrection. We have *more* eyewitness documents and *earlier* eyewitness documents for the resurrection than for anything else from the ancient world. Moreover, these documents include *more* historical details and figures that have been corroborated by *more* independent and external sources than anything else from the ancient world. And as we've just reviewed, we also have *more* than usual circumstantial evidence supporting the resurrection.

Finally, the skeptic's presupposition can be challenged. We don't need extraordinary evidence to believe something. Atheists believe in the Big Bang not because they have extraordinary evidence for it but because there is good evidence that the universe exploded into being out of nothing. Good evidence is all you need to believe something. However, atheists don't have even good evidence for some of their precious beliefs.

For example, some atheists believe that the universe came into existence out of nothing without a cause. That's an extraordinary claim, yet atheists

believe it on absolutely *no* evidence. In fact, it's worse than that: Such a belief is *against* the evidence because our experience tells us that every effect has a cause, which is the foundation of science and the very reason it is done—to find causes for effects. Atheists also believe in abiogenesis and macroevolution. But as we saw in chapters 5 and 6, there's not only little or no evidence for those beliefs, but there's also strong evidence *against* them.

Bob and Gretchen Passantino put this point well:

> It is an extraordinary claim to say this vast and complex universe came from nothing and was caused by nothing. It's an extraordinary claim to tell us the incredible order we see throughout the universe was caused by blind chance. It's an extraordinary claim to argue that the innate sense of right and wrong that all of us share—even when it condemns our own actions—came about by non-moral mindlessness or mere human consensus. It's certainly an extraordinary claim to say that a man who has all of the character and credentials to back up his claim to be the Son of God—and who rises from the dead to prove it—is really a self-deluded fool or, worse yet, a deceiver. In conclusion, no, the evidence is far too weak to believe the extraordinary claim of atheism that there is no God behind these things.[29]

Furthermore, skeptics don't demand extraordinary evidence for other extraordinary events from history. For example, few events from ancient history are more "extraordinary" than the accomplishments of Alexander the Great (356–323 BC). Despite living only thirty-three years, Alexander achieved unparalleled success. He conquered much of the civilized world at the time, from Greece to India to Egypt. Yet how do we know this about Alexander? We have no sources from his lifetime or soon after his death. And we have only fragments of two works from about 100 years after his death. The truth is, *we base virtually everything we know about the extraordinary life of Alexander the Great on the work of historians who wrote 300 to 500 years after his death!* In light of the robust evidence for the life of Christ, anyone who doubts Christ's historicity should also doubt the historicity of Alexander the Great. In fact, to be consistent, such a skeptic would have to doubt *all* of ancient history.[30]

Why do skeptics demand extraordinary evidence for the life of Christ but not the life of Alexander the Great? Again, it's because they're hung up on miracles. Despite the fact that miracles are possible because God exists—and

despite the fact that miracles were predicted and then witnessed—skeptics can't bear to admit that miracles have actually occurred. So they set the bar for believability too high. It's as if some skeptics are saying, "I won't believe in miracles because I haven't seen one. If the resurrected Jesus were to appear to me, then I would believe in him." Now that would be extraordinary evidence.

But is it really necessary? Does Jesus have to appear to every person in the world to make his claims credible? Why would he? We don't have to witness every event firsthand to believe the event occurred. In fact, it would be physically impossible to do so. We believe the testimony of others if they are trustworthy individuals, and especially if their testimony is corroborated by other data. This is exactly the case with the testimony of the New Testament writers.

Accepting the testimony of others is also true of science. No scientist can verify every experiment or scientific conclusion himself. He takes what he believes on good authority from others who have done the work or have the expertise he may not have.

Finally, recall from the introduction and chapter 9 that if God were too overt because of frequent miraculous displays, then he might, in some cases, infringe on our free will. If the purpose of this life is to allow us to freely make choices that will prepare us for eternity, then God will give us convincing evidence but not compelling evidence of his existence and purposes. Therefore, those who want to follow God can do so with confidence, and those who do not can suppress or ignore the evidence and live as if he didn't exist.

Self-Canceling Miracles

The great skeptic David Hume argued that miracles cannot affirm any one religion because miracles are based on poor testimony and all religions have them. In other words, miracle claims are self-canceling. Unfortunately for Hume, his objection does not describe the actual state of affairs.

First, Hume makes a hasty generalization by saying that alleged miracles from all religions are alike. As we've seen since chapter 10, the miracles associated with Christianity are not based on poor testimony. They are based on early, eyewitness, multiple-source testimony that is unrivaled in any other world religion. That is, no other world religion has verified miracles like those in the New Testament.

Second, Hume raised his objection prior to the discoveries of modern science that confirm that this is a theistic universe (chapters 3–7). Since this is a theistic universe, Judaism and Islam are the only other major world religions that possibly could be true. Miracles confirming the Old Testament of Judaism also confirm Christianity. So we are left with Islam as the only possible alternative to cancel the miracles of Christianity. But as we saw in chapter 12, there are no verifiable miracles confirming Islam. All alleged miracles of Muhammad were reported long after his death and were not based on eyewitness testimony.

Finally, the uniqueness, number, and quality of New Testament miracles cannot be explained by anything other than a supernatural cause. Jesus performed more than thirty miracles that were instantaneous, always successful, and unique. Some were even predicted. So-called miracle workers who claim partial success effect only psychosomatic cures, engage in trickery, perform satanic signs, or rely on naturally explainable events. In fact, no contemporary healer claims to be able to heal all diseases (including incurable ones) instantaneously, with 100 percent success. But Jesus and his apostles did. This demonstrates the unique, God-authenticating nature of the New Testament miracles against all other supernatural claims of any other religion. In short, nothing cancels the miracles of the New Testament.

Conclusion: The New Testament Is the Result, Not the Cause, of Christianity

At the beginning of chapter 10, we said there are two questions we needed to answer to see if the New Testament is truly historical:

1. Do we have accurate copies of the original documents that were written down in the first century?
2. Do those documents speak the truth?

As we've seen in the last four chapters, the evidence is strong that the answer to both of those questions is yes. In other words, we can be sure beyond a reasonable doubt that the New Testament is historically reliable.

At this point, we are *not* saying that the New Testament is without error. The supposed inerrancy or inspiration of the New Testament isn't part of the case to show that basic Christianity is true. We'll investigate that question later.

Right now, we can only conclude that the major events of the New Testament really occurred in the first century. Jesus really lived, taught, performed miracles, died by crucifixion, and then rose from the dead. Therefore, if you dismiss Christianity because you don't like or understand something in the Bible, you risk missing the more important fact that the essential story of Christianity is true.

In fact, *Christianity would be true even if the Bible had never been written*.

What? How so?

Because *Christianity did not originate with a book; Christianity originated with an event—the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.* There were thousands of Christians before a line of the New Testament was written. Why? Because they didn't read about it in a book—they witnessed the resurrected Jesus or knew trustworthy people who had.

Contrary to what some may believe, the New Testament documents are not the *cause* of the resurrection—they are the *result* of the resurrection. In other words, *the New Testament writers did not create the resurrection; the resurrection created the New Testament writers.*

We say that because too many people think that the basic facts about Christianity depend on some invented theology or an inerrant Bible. No, they depend on events that actually occurred in history. That's why we've spent so much time investigating the historical evidence for those events.

Thankfully, the New Testament authors wrote down in very fine detail what they saw themselves or verified through other eyewitnesses. Had they not done that, we would have only what non-Christian writers and archaeology tell us. The main point is that Christianity is grounded in real historical events that happened before the New Testament was written. Those historical events are to Christianity what you are to your birth certificate. No you, no birth certificate. No resurrection, no New Testament.

In the next chapter we'll see more evidence for Christianity, but from an unlikely source: the Old Testament. We'll also investigate whether Jesus claimed to be God.

Focus of Chapters 14–15

1. Truth about reality is knowable.
2. The opposite of true is false.
3. It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:
   a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)
   b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/Fine-Tuning)
   c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)
   d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)
4. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God (i.e., as acts of God to confirm a word from God).
6. The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:
   a. Early testimony
   b. Eyewitness testimony
   c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
   d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived
7. **The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.**
8. **Jesus's claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:**
   a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself
   b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds
   c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection
9. **Therefore, Jesus is God.**
10. **Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.**
11. **Jesus taught that the Bible is the word of God.**
12. **Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).**

14

Who Is Jesus: God or Just a Great Moral Teacher?

There are none who are as deaf as those who do not want to hear.
BARRY LEVENTHAL

WE'VE ESTABLISHED that the New Testament documents are historically reliable. That is, we can be reasonably certain that Jesus said and did what those documents say he said and did, including his resurrection from the dead. So who is this Jesus? What did he say about himself? Is he really God as Christians claim?

Before we investigate the claims of Christ, we need to take a look at the messianic predictions we've been alluding to in recent chapters. This will help us discover Jesus's true identity, and it also will provide further evidence relating to the authenticity of the New Testament. We start on the campus of UCLA in the mid-1960s.

The Messiah and the "Trick" Bible

In early 1966, Barry Leventhal was a young Jewish man on top of the world. As offensive captain of the UCLA football team, Barry had just led the team —predicted to finish last that year—to its first ever Rose Bowl championship.

"My life was great!" he remembers. "I was a hero. People loved me. My

Jewish fraternity chose me as the national athlete of the year. And I basked in the glory of it all."[1]

Soon after the Rose Bowl victory, Barry's best friend, Kent, said that he had come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way.

"I had no idea what Kent was talking about," Barry said. "I thought he had always been a Christian. After all, he had been born into a Christian home, just as I had been born into a Jewish home. Isn't that how a person got his particular religion? You inherited it from your parents."

But Barry was intrigued by the change in Kent's life, especially when Kent said to him, "Barry, I want you to know that I thank God every day for the Jews."

"Why in the world would you do that?" Barry asked.

Kent's answer utterly surprised him. "I thank God every day for the Jews for two reasons," Kent began. "First, God used them to give me my Bible. And second, and most important, God used the Jews to bring his Messiah into the world, the One who died for the sins of the whole world and especially for all of my sins."

"To this day I remember the impact of those few simple but true statements," Barry recalls. "*Genuine* Christians don't hate the Jews after all. In fact, they truly love us and are grateful and honored that God has included them by faith into his forever family."

A few weeks later, Kent introduced Barry to Hal Lindsey, the Campus Crusade for Christ leader on the UCLA campus. One day, when Barry and Hal were sitting in the crowded student lounge, things got very tense. As Hal was showing Barry that predictions of the Messiah from the Old Testament were fulfilled by Jesus, Barry blurted out loudly, "How could you do this?"

"Do what?" Hal asked.

"Use a trick Bible!" Barry charged. "You've got a trick Bible to fool the Jews!"

"What do you mean by a 'trick Bible'?" Hal asked.

Barry responded, "You Christians took those so-called messianic predictions from your own New Testament and then rewrote them into your edition of the Old Testament in order to fool the Jews. But I guarantee you, those messianic prophecies are not in our Jewish Bible!"

"No, Barry. That's not it at all," said Hal.

"No, that's a trick Bible!" Barry shouted as he jumped up.

"No, it isn't!" Hal said again, amazed at the charge. "I've never had

anyone say this before. Please sit down."

People began to stare.

"No, Hal. This relationship is over!"

"Barry, Barry, wait a minute. Do you have your own Tanach [a Jewish Bible]?"

"Yes, I've got one from my Bar Mitzvah. So what?"

"Why don't you write down these verses and go read them in your own Tanach?"

"Because that'll be a waste of time!" Barry blasted. "Those verses aren't in the Tanach!"

"Please," Hal persisted, "just write them down and check them out for yourself."

The two men volleyed back and forth until Barry—wanting to get Hal off his back—agreed to check them out. "Alright," he said as he scribbled the references down, "I'll check them out. But don't call me, I'll call you!"

Barry left, never expecting to see Hal again. He didn't check the verses for several days, but then guilt began to gnaw at him. "I told Hal I'd check them out," Barry recalled, "so I should at least do that and put this Christianity thing to rest once and for all!"

That night Barry dusted off his old Tanach—the one he hadn't even opened since he was thirteen—and was shocked at what he found. Every prediction Hal had referenced was indeed in the Tanach!

Barry's initial reaction was, "I'm in deep trouble! Jesus really is the Messiah!"

But at this point, Barry's acceptance was only intellectual. He immediately began to worry about the implications if he made his discovery public. "If I accept Jesus as the Messiah, what will my parents think? What will my Jewish fraternity friends do? What will my rabbi say?"

Barry needed to do more study before he'd be ready to go public, especially on one passage that Hal had referenced several times: Isaiah 53. Before we reveal the conclusion of Barry's search, let's look at Isaiah 53 and some of the other messianic prophecies he was investigating.

The Suffering Servant

In March of 1947 a young Arab shepherd boy (Muhammad adh-Dhib) was watching his sheep seven and a half miles south of Jericho and one mile west of the Dead Sea. After tossing a rock at a stray goat, he heard breaking

pottery. What ensued was one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of all time—the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In excavations of area caves as recently as 2021, numerous scrolls and thousands of manuscript fragments have been found in pottery vessels that had been placed there about 2,000 years ago by a Jewish religious sect known as the Essenes. The Essenes existed as a group from 167 BC to AD 68. They had broken away from the temple authorities and established their own monastic community in the Judean desert near Qumran.

One of their scrolls found in Qumran is now known as the Great Isaiah Scroll. Dated from about 125 BC, this twenty-four-foot scroll is the complete book of Isaiah (all sixty-six chapters) and is the oldest biblical scroll in existence.[2] It is currently protected in a vault somewhere in Jerusalem, but a copy of it is on display at the Shrine of the Book Museum in Jerusalem.

The importance of this discovery is not just that the scroll predates Christ and is in good condition, but that it contains perhaps the clearest and most complete prophecy about the coming Messiah. Isaiah calls the Messiah the "servant of the Lord," and he begins to refer to the servant in chapter 42 in what is known as the first "Servant Song." However, the servant is most often referred to as the "suffering servant" because of the vivid description of his sacrificial death found in Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

As you read the passage, ask yourself, "To whom is this referring?"

52:13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted.
14 As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—
15 so shall he sprinkle many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,
for that which has not been told them they see,
and that which they have not heard they understand.

53:1 Who has believed what he has heard from us?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,

and no beauty that we should desire him.
3 He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
9 And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

[11] Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
[12] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

To whom do you think this is referring? Barry had a good idea who. Reading out of his own Tanach, he was startled to see the parallels to Jesus, but he was still a bit confused. He wanted to give his rabbi a chance to explain it.

"I vividly remember the first time I seriously confronted Isaiah 53, or better still, the first time it seriously confronted me," Barry explains. "Being rather confused over the identity of the Servant in Isaiah 53, I went to my local rabbi and said to him, 'Rabbi, I have met some people at school who claim that the so-called Servant in Isaiah 53 is none other than Jesus of Nazareth. But I would like to know from you, who is this Servant in Isaiah 53?'"

Barry was astonished at his response. The rabbi said, "Barry, I must admit that as I read Isaiah 53 it does seem to be talking about Jesus, but since we Jews do not believe in Jesus, it can't be speaking about Jesus."

Barry didn't know a lot about formal logic at that point, but he knew enough to say to himself, "That just doesn't sound kosher to me! Not only does the rabbi's so-called reasoning sound circular; it also sounds evasive and even fearful." He later said, "There are none who are as deaf as those who do not want to hear."

For those who do want to hear, Larry Helyer does a fine job of summarizing the characteristics and accomplishments of Isaiah's servant. Beginning with the first Servant Song in chapter 42, Helyer makes the following observations of the servant:

1. He is elected by the Lord, anointed by the Spirit, and promised success in his endeavor (42:1, 4).
2. Justice is a prime concern of his ministry (42:1, 4).

3. His ministry has an international scope (42:1, 6).
4. God predestined him to his calling (49:1).
5. He is a gifted teacher (49:2).
6. He experiences discouragement in his ministry (49:4).
7. His ministry extends to the Gentiles (49:6).
8. The servant encounters strong opposition and resistance to his teaching, even of a physically violent nature (50:4–6).
9. He is determined to finish what God called him to do (50:7).
10. The servant has humble origins with little outward prospects for success (53:1–2).
11. He experiences suffering and affliction (53:3).
12. The servant accepts vicarious and substitutionary suffering on behalf of his people (53:4–6, 12).
13. He is put to death after being condemned (53:7–9).
14. Incredibly, he comes back to life and is exalted above all rulers (53:10–12; 52:13–15).[3]

In addition to Helyer's observations, we note that the servant is also sinless (53:9).

Just a casual reading of the passage should leave little doubt that the suffering servant is Jesus. In fact, the traditional *Jewish* interpretation of the servant passages was that they predicted the coming Messiah.[4] That is, until Jews began having more contact with Christian apologists about a thousand years ago, at which point they reinterpreted the suffering servant to be the nation of Israel. The first Jew to claim that the suffering servant was Israel rather than the Messiah was Shlomo Yitzchaki, better known as Rashi (ca. 1040–1105). Today Rashi's view dominates Jewish and rabbinical theology.

Unfortunately for Rashi and many present-day Jewish theologians, there are at least three fatal flaws with the assertion that Israel is the suffering servant. First, unlike Israel, the servant is sinless (53:9). To say that Israel is sinless is to contradict and negate virtually the entire Old Testament. The recurrent theme of the Old Testament is that Israel sinned by breaking God's commandments and by chasing after other gods instead of the one true God. If Israel is sinless, then why did God give the Jews a sacrificial system? Why did they have a Day of Atonement? Why did they constantly need prophets to warn them to stop sinning and to come back to God?

Second, unlike Israel, the suffering servant is a lamb who submits without any resistance whatsoever (53:7). History shows us that Israel certainly is not a lamb—she lies down for no one.

Third, unlike Israel, the suffering servant dies as a substitutionary atonement for the sins of others (53:4–6, 8, 10–12). But Israel has not died and is not paying for the sins of others. No one is redeemed on account of what the nation of Israel does. Nations, and the individuals that comprise them, are punished for their own sins.

This Johnny-come-lately interpretation of Isaiah 53 appears to have been motivated by the desire to avoid the conclusion that Jesus is indeed the Messiah who was predicted hundreds of years beforehand. But there's no legitimate way to avoid the obvious. Remember, the Great Isaiah Scroll was written some 125 years before Christ, and we know that the material it contains is even older. The Septuagint, which is the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (including all of Isaiah) into Greek, is dated about 250 BC. So the Hebrew original must be even older. Furthermore, manuscripts or manuscript fragments of all the Old Testament books except Esther were found with the Dead Sea Scrolls. So there's no doubt that the Old Testament, including the suffering servant passage, predates Christ by several hundred years.

Hitting the Bull's-Eye

If Isaiah 53 were the only prophetic passage in the Old Testament, it would be enough to demonstrate the divine nature of at least the book of Isaiah. But there are several other passages in the Old Testament that predict the coming of Jesus Christ or are ultimately fulfilled by him. Table 14.1 (next page) lists these passages and shows what they predicted or how Jesus fulfilled them.

Question: Who, in all the history of the world meets the following criteria?

1. From the seed of a woman
2. From the seed of Abraham
3. From the tribe of Judah
4. From the line of David
5. Both God and man
6. Born in Bethlehem

7. Preceded by a messenger and visited the Jerusalem temple before it was destroyed in AD 70
8. Died in AD 33
9. Rose from the dead (Isa. 53:11)

Table 14.1 Old Testament messianic prophecies

Messianic Passage	Messianic Prediction
Genesis 3:15 (God speaking to Satan): "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."	**Seed of a Woman:** The offspring of Eve (literally the "seed" of Eve) will ultimately crush Satan. But this human being, unlike other human beings, will be from the seed of a woman rather than from the seed of a man (cf. Matt. 1:23).
Genesis 12:3, 7 (God speaking to Abraham): "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." . . . "To your offspring I will give this land."	**Seed of Abraham:** The offspring of Abraham spoken of here literally means "seed" (not "seeds"). It refers to only one person—a Messiah—who will ultimately bless all peoples on the earth and rule over the land (cf. Gal. 3:16).
Genesis 49:10: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."	**Tribe of Judah:** The scepter (the king's ceremonial staff) will not depart from the tribe of Judah until the ultimate king, the Messiah, comes. In other words, the Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah (one of Israel's twelve tribes).
Jeremiah 23:5–6: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'" (See also Jer. 33:15–16; Isa. 11:1)	**Son of David:** The Messiah will be a son of David, and he will be called God.
Isaiah 9:6–7: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from this time forth and forevermore."	**He will be God:** The Messiah will be born as a child, but he will also be God. He will rule from the throne of David.
Micah 5:2: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too	**Born in Bethlehem:** The Messiah,

little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."	who is eternal, will be born in Bethlehem.
Malachi 3:1: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts."	**He will come to the temple:** The Messiah, who will be preceded by a messenger, will suddenly come to the temple (which would have to be prior to AD 70).
Daniel 9:25–26: "Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one [Messiah], a prince, there shall be seven weeks. And for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary."	**He will die in AD 33:** An anointed one (also translated **"**the Messiah," NASB) will die (be "cut off") 483 years (69 x 7) after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (that works out to AD 33).* The city and the temple will then be destroyed. (This occurred in AD 70.)

* For a detailed explanation of this prophecy, see Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Zondervan, 1978), 115–38.

Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the only possible candidate. Only he hits the bull's-eye. Of course, the case is strengthened further when you consider the other aspects of Isaiah 53. Jesus meets all of those criteria as well.

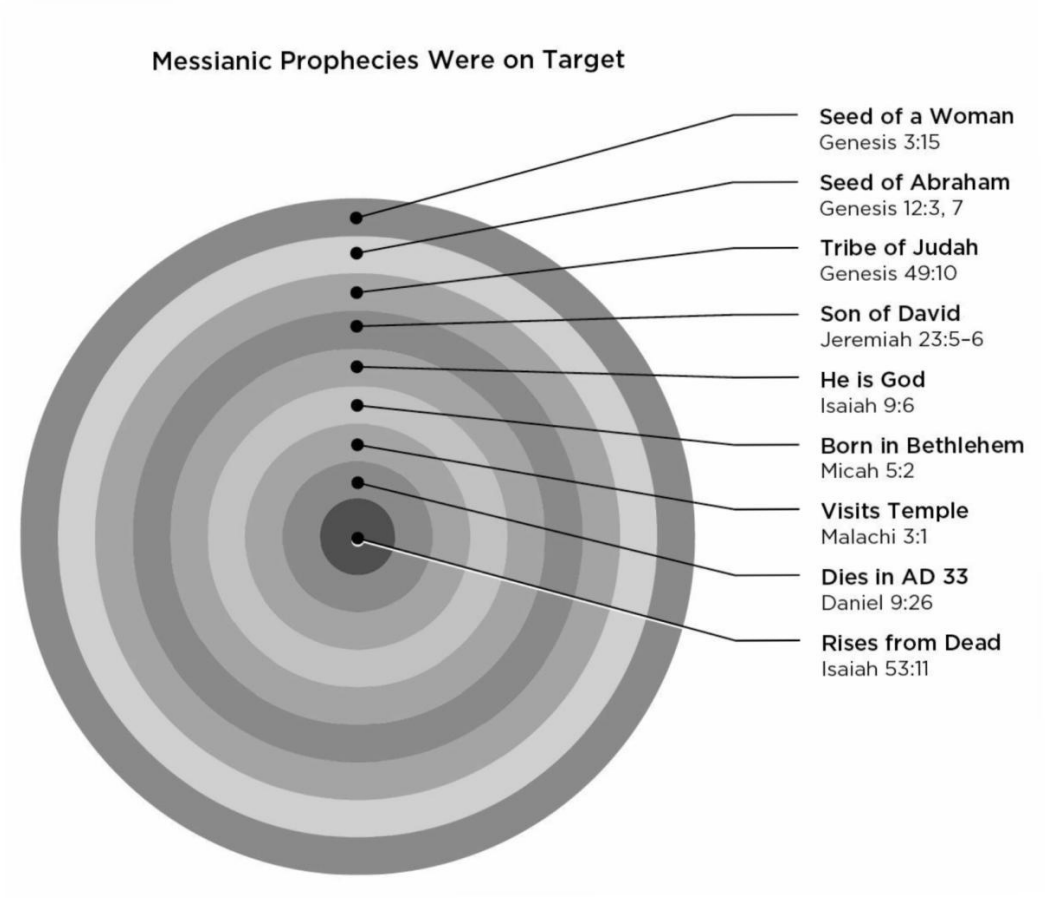


Figure 14.1 Prophecies fulfilled by Jesus

The prophetic case for Christ is strengthened even further when you realize that the Old Testament predicted that God himself would be pierced. As recorded by the Old Testament prophet Zechariah (who also wrote well before Christ), *God says*, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on *me, on him whom they have pierced,* they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps for a firstborn" (Zech. 12:10). This also affirms the deity of Christ because how could God the Father be pierced?

Later, Zechariah predicted that the Lord's "feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east" (14:4). These predictions refer to Christ's second coming, but the reference to *God having been "pierced"* (i.e., crucified) by the "house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" obviously refers to his first coming. In fact, the apostle John quotes Zechariah 12:10 as prophetic of the crucifixion (John 19:37).

You can see why Barry realized he was "in trouble." These messianic

prophecies are beyond coincidental. These are far beyond predictions any psychic could make.[5] Something truly supernatural is going on here, but many of his fellow Jews didn't see it. Barry realized that while the Jews had been waiting for a political messiah, they had failed to recognize that the Messiah would first have to come as a lamb to be slaughtered for the sins of the world (Isa. 53:7, 11–12; John 1:29).

With a sense of intrigue, Barry contacted Hal once more. They reviewed the messianic prophecies again, particularly Isaiah 53. Hal then offered Barry a small booklet.

"This is an account of Jesus's life by a young man who knew him and followed him," Hal said. "Why don't you read it and tell me what you think?"

Once Barry picked it up, he couldn't put it down. The story had many Jewish elements, from priests to Passover. And this Jesus was an amazing figure—a miracle worker who had great insights and spoke with authority but with kindness as well.

Barry didn't know it at the time, but he was reading the Gospel of John. He was particularly struck by the free gift of eternal salvation that Jesus offers to anyone who will receive him. "Everything I ever wanted out of life I had to earn myself," Barry remembers. "And yet, here was Jesus offering himself and all his best gifts for time and eternity as a free gift of his love. Who wouldn't want to embrace such an offer?"

It was April now, more than three months after that glorious Rose Bowl victory. "I suddenly realized that I had nothing that withstood the test of time, let alone the test of eternity," Barry recalls. "This was most graphically demonstrated to me by the Rose Bowl victory itself. Just a few months after the most significant event in my life, and perhaps in my *entire* life, all the glory, everything involved, was now slowly fading away into a distant memory."

"Is that all there is to life?" Barry thought. Then he remembered that Jesus the Messiah was offering *eternal* life! Barry had known *intellectually* that Jesus was the Messiah weeks earlier when he found those messianic prophecies in his own Tanach. But believing *that* Jesus was the Messiah wasn't enough (after all, even the demons know *that* Jesus is the Messiah; James 2:19). Barry needed to believe *in* Jesus as the Messiah. To accept the free gift of eternal salvation from the punishment he deserved, Barry needed to take a step of the will, not just of the mind. After all, it would be unloving

of God to force Barry into heaven against his will.

On the afternoon of April 24, 1966, Barry was ready to act on what the evidence told him was true. He knelt by his bed and prayed, “Jesus, I believe that you are the promised Messiah for the Jewish people and for the whole world, and so, for me as well, and that you died for my sins and that you are alive from the dead forevermore. So I now receive you into my life as my own personal Lord and Savior. Thank you for dying in my place.” Barry says, “There was no lightning or thunder—only his personal presence and peace as he promised, which has not left me to this very day.”

After that remarkable discovery, Barry devoted his life to reaching Jewish people with the truth that the Messiah has come. The evidence for this truth is in their own Scriptures! And the examination and presentation of the evidence for Christianity is the focus of Southern Evangelical Seminary near Charlotte, North Carolina, where Barry taught for many years until December 13, 2022. That’s when he became absent from his body but present with his Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

Vague Predictions and the Box Top to Prophecy

We have seen several Old Testament passages that are clear predictions of the Messiah. These have been fulfilled only by Jesus Christ. However, skeptics are quick to point out that some other prophecies quoted as messianic are taken out of context or do not really predict the future.

For example, Psalm 22:16 says, “they have pierced my hands and feet.” Many Christians claim that this verse is a reference to Christ’s crucifixion, which was not even a method of punishment in the days of David (the author of the psalm).[6] But the skeptic may say, “You’re only interpreting Psalm 22 that way because you now know what happened to Christ. It probably wouldn’t have been apparent to someone living in Old Testament times that Psalm 22 was about Christ.”

We respond, “You’re right. In fact, the Bible teaches exactly that.”

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, Paul writes, “But we impart a *secret and hidden* wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:7–8). In other words, had God revealed too many details of the plan of salvation in advance, the opponents of Christ never would have fulfilled God’s plan by killing Jesus. The life of Jesus and the events of the New Testament serve as the box top

for many pieces of the prophetic puzzle scattered throughout the Old Testament. That's why it was only after Jesus had come, died, risen from the dead, and ascended to heaven that the disciples understood what the plan was!

Even God's clear prophecies were incomplete; others were vague; and all of them were scattered throughout the Old Testament so no one could put all the prophecy pieces together and foil the plan. But even vague messianic prophecies require divine input. How so? Because if you can't make sense of the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle without the box top, does that mean that no one made the puzzle? No. Does it mean there's no design to the puzzle? No. In fact, once you see the box top, you suddenly realize not only how the pieces fit together but how much forethought it took to design the pieces that way.

Some have summarized it this way: In the Old Testament, Christ is *concealed*; in the New Testament, Christ is *revealed*. One Bible scholar has identified seventy-one Old Testament messianic prophecies fulfilled by Christ.[7] While some prophecies are clear beforehand, none of them were designed to give the complete picture, and some of them can be seen only in the light of Christ's life. Those that become clear *after* Christ are no less a product of supernatural design than those that were clear *before* Christ.

Is Jesus God?

As we have seen, the Old Testament predicts the coming of a Messiah who would be born a man but somehow be God as well (Isa. 9:6). Jesus is the only known person who meets the predicted qualifications of the Messiah. But did he claim to be God?

Certainly the New Testament writers claimed on several occasions that Jesus was God. For example, in the opening chapter of his Gospel, John says "the Word was God" and "the Word became flesh" (John 1:1, 14). Paul says that Christ is "God over all" (Rom. 9:5), "in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9), and Christ is "in the form of God" (Phil. 2:6), the one to whom "every knee should bow" (Phil. 2:10).

Peter declares that believers receive righteousness from "our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1). Matthew applies deity to Jesus when he quotes Isaiah 7:14: "'The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matt. 1:23). The writer of Hebrews says, "He [the Son] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power"

(Heb. 1:3). He also quotes Psalm 45:6 in claiming that God says of the Son, "*Your* throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Heb. 1:8). Virtually all of the New Testament writings refer to Jesus with the divine title "Lord." Even the demons acknowledged that Jesus was God (Matt. 8:29; Luke 4:34, 41)!

The belief that Jesus is God (called "high Christology") was held by the earliest Christians. It did not evolve over time, as some have suggested, but was proclaimed immediately after the resurrection appearances (resulting in a "Christological Big Bang"). Those appearances were "impact events" that woke up the disciples to the truth of Christ's divine claims and deeds.

"The earliest Christology was already the highest Christology," explains Richard Bauckham.[8] And that's not just the conclusion of Christian scholars. As Brant Pitre observes, "The existence of early high Christology is agreed upon by Jewish, Christian, and nonreligious scholars alike."[9]

Some of the evidence for early high Christology is from the creeds we mentioned in chapter 10—which included early hymns used in worship[10]—and the first epistles of Paul, who refers to Jesus as preexisting, sharing God's nature, seated at God's right hand, receiving prayer, being worshiped, and forgiving sins. Gary Habermas writes, "That Paul uses these lofty expressions so easily in his initial epistles without introductions, definitions, or further explanations of his meanings most likely indicates that they were already well-known and well received in these communities."[11]

The Gospel of Mark also shows Jesus is God very early. We saw in chapter 10 that Mark was likely written between AD 42 and 45, yet virtually every chapter displays high Christology. In the first nine chapters of Mark, Jesus is depicted as God and/or does only what God can do:

1. When John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus, Mark quotes an Old Testament passage (Isa. 40:3) that says he is preparing the way for Yahweh (Mark 1:2–3).
2. Jesus forgives sins, and his opponents rightfully think, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (2:7). He also claims to be the divine "Son of Man" (v. 10) and "Lord of the Sabbath" (v. 28).
3. Jesus heals diseases and drives out demons (1:21–34).
4. Jesus calms the storm and brings the boat to safety (4:35–41), which Yahweh does in Psalm 107.
5. Jesus raises the dead, not by praying to God as other prophets had done, but by his own power (Mark 5:35–43).

6. Jesus produces bread from heaven and feeds thousands like Yahweh did with manna (6:30–44). He then walks on water (vv. 45–52) as Yahweh is said to do in Job 9:8.
7. Jesus heals the deaf and mute (Mark 7:31–37), which, according to Exodus 4:11, is a power of Yahweh.
8. Peter declares Jesus is the Christ, after which Jesus claims he will later come in his Father's glory with the holy angels (Mark 8:27–30, 38).
9. Jesus is transfigured on a mountain with the only two men in the Old Testament to ascend a mountain to meet God: Moses and Elijah (9:2–13).

We could go on, but you get the point.[12] *In Mark, Jesus proves to be God by demonstrating authority over sin, disease, demons, nature, and death.* He is also declared the Christ and can transfigure himself. Then, at his trial, he directly claims to be God.

Direct Claims to Be God

Perhaps no claim is more direct than Jesus's response to Caiaphas's point-blank interrogation, as recorded in Mark:

> Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. (Mark 14:61–64)

Notice that Jesus responded to the direct question with a direct answer: "I am." Referring to himself as the "Son of Man," Jesus then added that he would be coming back on the clouds of heaven. Caiaphas and his onlookers knew the implication. This was a reference to the vision the Old Testament prophet Daniel had of the end times: The Messiah—the Son of Man—would come to earth to judge the world on the authority given to him by God the Father ("the Ancient of Days"), and all the world's people would worship him (Dan. 7:13–14 NIV). Of course, no one is to be worshiped but God himself. Yet here was Christ claiming that he would be the one to judge the

world and receive worship from its people. He was claiming to be God, and everyone knew it.

Bart Ehrman maintains that Jesus claims to be God only in the Gospel of John, not the other Gospels. When challenged by Brant Pitre during a question-and-answer session with this very claim of Jesus recorded in Mark 14—an event also recorded by Matthew and Luke—Ehrman said that while it is a divine claim by Jesus, Mark invented the claim.[13]

How does Ehrman know Mark invented it? Did Matthew and Luke invent the claim too? Ehrman revealed no evidence, but he did reveal his bias. It's easy to assert that Jesus didn't declare himself to be God in the Synoptic Gospels if you dismiss where he actually does!

As mentioned above, Ehrman does admit Jesus directly claims to be God in the Gospel of John. This occurs during a tense exchange with some Jews. After several volleys back and forth about the identity of Jesus, the conversation culminates with Jesus declaring,

> "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple. (John 8:56–59)

Skeptics may say, "'Before Abraham was, I am' is not even good English! It's the wrong tense." Exactly. Jesus wasn't worried about grammar because he was quoting the very name God gave to Moses at the burning bush:

> Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Ex. 3:13–14)

"I AM" is the self-existent one. He has no past or future because he is eternal. He's not in time. Jesus was claiming to be that eternal, self-existent one. And the Jews knew it. That's why they picked up stones to stone him.

Notice that Jesus didn't correct the Jews by denying he was God. Instead, he pointed to his works as evidence for his deity (see John 10:34–39).

For those who continue to say, “No, Jesus never claimed to be God,” we have a question: If Jesus didn’t claim to be God, then why was he killed? Jesus’s crucifixion, which is probably the most well-attested fact from ancient history, is difficult to explain unless he claimed to be God. He certainly wasn’t killed for urging people to love their neighbor!

The unbelieving Jews certainly knew he claimed to be God. Otherwise, why did they on several occasions seek to punish him for blasphemy and then urge Pilate to kill him? Why was it obvious to first-century people that Jesus claimed to be God, but it’s not obvious to some present-day skeptics?[14]

Indirect Claims to Be God

In addition to these direct claims to be God, Jesus made several other statements that clearly implied he was God:

- Jesus prayed, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:5). But the Old Testament says there is only one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:5ff.), and God says, “My glory I give to no other” (Isa. 42:8).
- He declared, “I am the first and the last” (Rev. 1:17)—the words used by God of himself in Isaiah 44:6.
- He said, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11). But the Old Testament says, “The LORD is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1). Moreover, God says, “As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep” (Ezek. 34:12).
- Jesus claimed to be the judge of all people (Matt. 25:31ff.; John 5:27). But Joel quotes God as saying, “I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations” (Joel 3:12).
- Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). But the psalmist declares, “The LORD is my light” (Ps. 27:1).
- Jesus declared, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will” (John 5:21). But the Old Testament clearly teaches that only God is the giver of life (Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6), the one to raise the dead (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2; Job 19:25–27), and the only judge (Deut. 32:35; Joel 3:12).
- Jesus insisted, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John

14:6).

Table 14.2 Jesus's statements about himself

God in the Old Testament	Claim	Jesus in the New Testament
Psalm 23:1	Shepherd	John 10:11
Isaiah 44:6	First and last	Revelation 1:17
Joel 3:12	Judge	Matthew 25:31ff.
Isaiah 62:5	Bridegroom	Matthew 25:1
Psalm 27:1	Light	John 8:12
Isaiah 43:11	Savior	Luke 19:10
Isaiah 42:8	God's glory	John 17:5
1 Samuel 2:6	Giver of life	John 5:21

Jesus also declared his deity implicitly through parables. In several of his parables, Jesus depicts himself in the role of God. For example:

- In responding to the Pharisees' complaint that Jesus is receiving and dining with sinners (Luke 15:2), Jesus tells three parables—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son (Luke 15:4–32). The implication is that Jesus is doing what the Old Testament says God does: He is a shepherd who goes and finds what is lost and a forgiving father who welcomes home repentant sinners (Ezek. 34:11; Ps. 103:8–13). (Incidentally, the Pharisees are represented by the complaining older son in the parable of the prodigal son. The Pharisees, like the older son, mistakenly think they *deserve* the father's gifts because of their good works. So this parable not only affirms the deity of Christ but also teaches that salvation is a free gift that cannot be earned, only accepted.)[15]
- In Matthew 19:28–30, Jesus declares that he—the "Son of Man"—will rule on the glorious throne of Israel at the renewal of all things, and that his followers will rule with him. He then immediately teaches the parable of the workers and the vineyard (Matt. 20:1–16). In this parable, the kingdom of God is represented by a vineyard owned by an

employer. The employer pays all workers equally, regardless of time worked, thereby communicating that God's grace is not based on any kind of merit such as length of service (Jesus says, "Many who are first will be last, and the last first," 19:30). Jesus is represented by the employer who owns the vineyard and dispenses grace freely. This equates him with God because, in the Old Testament, God owns the vineyard (Isa. 5:1–7). And as we have seen, his use of "Son of Man" is also a claim to deity.

- Jesus refers to himself as the "bridegroom" on several occasions (Matt. 9:15; 25:1; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34), including in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1–13). Since the Old Testament identifies God as the bridegroom (Isa. 62:5; Hos. 2:16), Jesus is equating himself with God.

There are several other instances of Jesus implicitly claiming deity through parables. While we don't have space to treat them all here, Philip Payne concludes, "Out of Jesus' fifty-two recorded narrative parables, twenty depict him in imagery which in the [Old Testament] typically refers to God."[16]

Divine Actions

In addition to making statements that affirmed his deity (and in addition to performing miracles), Jesus *acted* as if he was God. We've seen how he acted as God in nearly every chapter in Mark. Here are other divine actions:

- Jesus declared, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" and then immediately gave a new commandment: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . ." (Matt. 28:18–19).
- God had given the Ten Commandments to Moses, but Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another" (John 13:34).
- He requested prayer in his name: "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do. . . . If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13–14); "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7).
- Despite the fact that both the Old and New Testaments forbid worshiping anyone other than God (Ex. 20:1–5; Deut. 5:6–9; Acts 14:15; Rev. 22:8–9), Jesus accepted worship on at least nine occasions. These included worship from: (1) a leper (Matt. 8:2); (2) a ruler whose

> daughter Jesus healed (Matt. 9:18); (3) the disciples after a storm (Matt. 14:33); (4) a Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:25); (5) the mother of James and John (Matt. 20:20); (6) a Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:6); (7) a healed blind man (John 9:38); (8) all the disciples (Matt. 28:17); and (9) Thomas, who said, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

All of these people worshiped Jesus without one word of rebuke from him. Not only did Jesus accept this worship, he even commended those who acknowledged his deity (Matt. 16:17; John 20:29). This could be done only by a person who seriously considered himself to be God.

Now let's put all of this into perspective. No one did that better than C. S. Lewis, who wrote,

> Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time. Now let us get this clear. Among Pantheists, like the Indians, anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world Who had made it and was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips.[17]

Imagine your neighbor making these kinds of claims:

> I am the first and the last—the self-existing one. Do you need your sins forgiven? I can do it. Do you want to know how to live? I am the light of the world—whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. Do you want to know whom you can trust? All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Do you have any worries or requests? Pray in my name. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. Do you need access to God the Father? No one comes to the Father except through me. The Father and I are one.

What would you think about your neighbor if he seriously said those things? You certainly wouldn't say, "Gee, I think he's a great moral teacher!"

No, you'd say this guy is nuts because he is definitely claiming to be God. Again, no one has articulated this point better than Lewis, who wrote:

> I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish things that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would rather be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.[18]

Lewis is right. Since Jesus clearly claimed to be God, he couldn't be just a great moral teacher. Great moral teachers don't deceive people by falsely claiming to be God. Since Jesus claimed to be God, one of only three possibilities can be true: he was either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord.

Liar doesn't fit the facts. Jesus lived and taught the highest standard of ethics. And it's unlikely he would have laid down his life unless he really thought he was telling the truth.

If Jesus thought he was God but really wasn't, then he would have been a *lunatic*. But *lunatic* doesn't fit either. Jesus uttered some of the most profound sayings ever recorded. And everyone—even his enemies—claimed that Jesus was a man of integrity who taught the truth (Mark 12:14).

That leaves us with *Lord.* Peter Kreeft puts the argument very simply:

> There are only two possible interpretations: Jesus is God, or Jesus is not God. The argument in its simplest form looks like this: Jesus was either (1) God, if his claim about himself was true, or (2) a bad man, if what he said was not true, for good men do not claim to be God. But he was not a bad man. (If anyone in history was not a bad man, Jesus was not a bad man.) Therefore, he was (and is) God.[19]

This seems logical. But is *Lord* really the right conclusion? After all, it's

one thing to claim to be God—anyone can do that—but it's another thing to prove it.

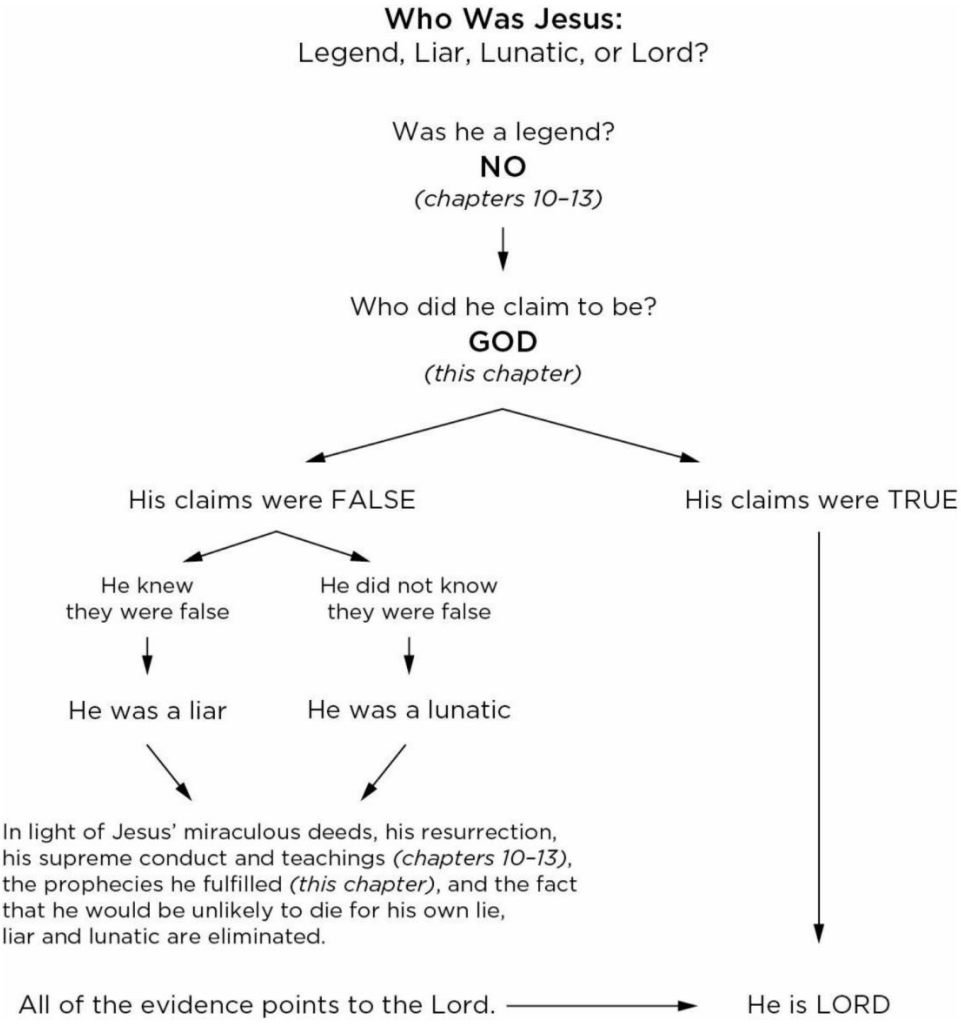


Figure 14.2 Determining who Jesus was

Proofs That Jesus Is God

As we have seen, Jesus clearly claimed to be God and often acted the part. But he didn't just claim it or act it, he proved it! He did so with three unparalleled proofs:

1. He fulfilled numerous messianic prophecies written hundreds of years before his incarnation.
2. He lived a sinless life and performed miraculous deeds.
3. He predicted and then accomplished his own resurrection from the dead.

We've already given evidence regarding the messianic prophecies, Jesus's miracles, and his resurrection. But what about this idea of Jesus being sinless? Jesus himself said, "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" (John 8:46).

Moreover, his disciples, who spent *three years* with him day and night, claimed that Jesus was sinless. Peter characterized Jesus as a lamb "without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:19) who "committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth" (2:22). And John said of Christ, "In him there is no sin" (1 John 3:5).

Furthermore, Paul wrote that Jesus "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). And the writer of Hebrews made the same point by claiming that Jesus was "without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Now, try spending three *days* with any human being—much less three *years*—and you definitely will find faults. The New Testament writers said Jesus had none.

But it wasn't just his friends who affirmed his supreme character. Christ's enemies couldn't find fault with him either. The Pharisees, who were actively searching for dirt on Jesus, could find none (Mark 14:55). They even admitted, "We know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion" (Mark 12:14). Even after all the efforts of the Pharisees to pin some charge on Jesus, Pilate found him innocent of any wrongdoing (Luke 23:22).

Still, the proof of Christ's deity does not depend on his sinlessness. The fulfilled prophecies, his miracles, and his resurrection are more than enough to prove that Jesus was God. Yet there are a few objections we need to address before concluding beyond a reasonable doubt that Jesus was (and is) the one true God.

Objections to the Deity of Christ

Why Wasn't Jesus More Overt?

In his detailed book on the divinity of Jesus, Brant Pitre writes, "*The historical Jesus claimed to be divine, but he did so in a very Jewish way*—using riddles, questions, and allusions to Jewish Scripture to both reveal and conceal the apocalyptic secret of his divinity."[20] Even when Jesus says, "I am," in the Gospels (John 8:58), he's affirming his deity in a very Jewish way. Why not be more overt than that? Here are several possible reasons.

First, Jesus didn't want interference from the Jews, who had the misconception that the Messiah would first come to free them from Roman

oppression. He often told his disciples to not reveal his identity. Despite Jesus's careful approach, he still had to escape from Jews who wanted to make him king (John 6:15)!

Second, Jesus could not be our supreme human example if he pulled rank every time he got into any earthly trouble. His conduct provides us with a perfect example of humility, servitude, and how we ought to glorify the Father rather than ourselves.

Third, Jesus had to be very careful about when and where he revealed his deity so that he could accomplish his mission of sacrificial atonement. His mission was to "give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45), not just show that he was God. If he had been too overt with his claims and miraculous proof, they might not have killed him. But if he had been too reserved, there would have been little proof that he really was God, and he might not have attracted a large enough following to spread his message.

Finally, we must understand the religious context in which Jesus lived and taught. He introduced the idea that he personally fulfilled the entire Old Testament law (Matt. 5:17)—the law that had been revered and followed for centuries and was the foundation of every political and religious practice of the Jews. As N. T. Wright says, "[This] would be like announcing in a Muslim country that one was fulfilling the will of Allah while apparently vilifying Muhammad and burning a copy of the Qur'an!"[21] It's no wonder Jesus used parables to teach and made more indirect than direct references to his deity. He gave enough evidence to convince the open-minded, but not enough to overwhelm the free will of those wishing to cling to their own traditions.

So there are good reasons why Jesus didn't proclaim his deity more overtly or often. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that he did so often enough. Before the Jews (John 8:58) and while under oath before the high priest when he knew his mission of sacrificial atonement was going to be completed (Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:70), Jesus claimed to be Yahweh.

Indirect Denials of Deity

Critics often cite three specific occasions in the New Testament when the deity of Christ can be called into question. The first is recorded in Matthew 19:17, where the rich young ruler calls Jesus "good." Jesus appears to deny his deity by responding, "There is only one who is good."

But the critics are mistaken. Jesus is not denying his deity here. He is *affirming* his deity by prompting the man to consider the implications of his statement. In effect, Jesus is asking, "Do you realize what you are saying when you call me good? Are you saying I am God?" This is apparent from the context, because just a few verses later Jesus refers to himself as the "Son of Man" who "will sit on his glorious throne" and enable the disciples to rule with him (Matt. 19:28).

The second and third objections to Christ's deity have to do with Jesus being subordinate to the Father and limited in knowledge. In John 14:28, Jesus clearly subordinates himself to God by admitting, "The Father is greater than I." And in Matthew 24:36, Jesus claims he doesn't know the date of his own return when he declares, "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." How can Jesus be God if he is subordinate to the Father and is limited in knowledge?

The answer to both objections lies in a proper understanding of the Trinity. First, let's state clearly what the Trinity is *not:* The Trinity is not three Gods, three modes of one God, or three divine essences. *The Trinity is three persons in one divine essence.* In other words, there are three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who share one divine nature. The Trinity is like a triangle: a triangle has three corners, but it is still one triangle (figs. 14.3 and 14.4).

Jesus shares in the one divine nature, but he also has a distinct human nature. Jesus is one "who" with two "what's" (a divine "what" and a human "what"); God is three "whos" (Father "who," Son "who," and Holy Spirit "who") in one "what"—that is, three persons in one divine nature. Athanasius, one of the early church fathers, said the Incarnation was not the subtraction of deity; it was the addition of humanity.[22] Indeed, when Jesus was conceived, he did not cease being God. He simply added a human nature.

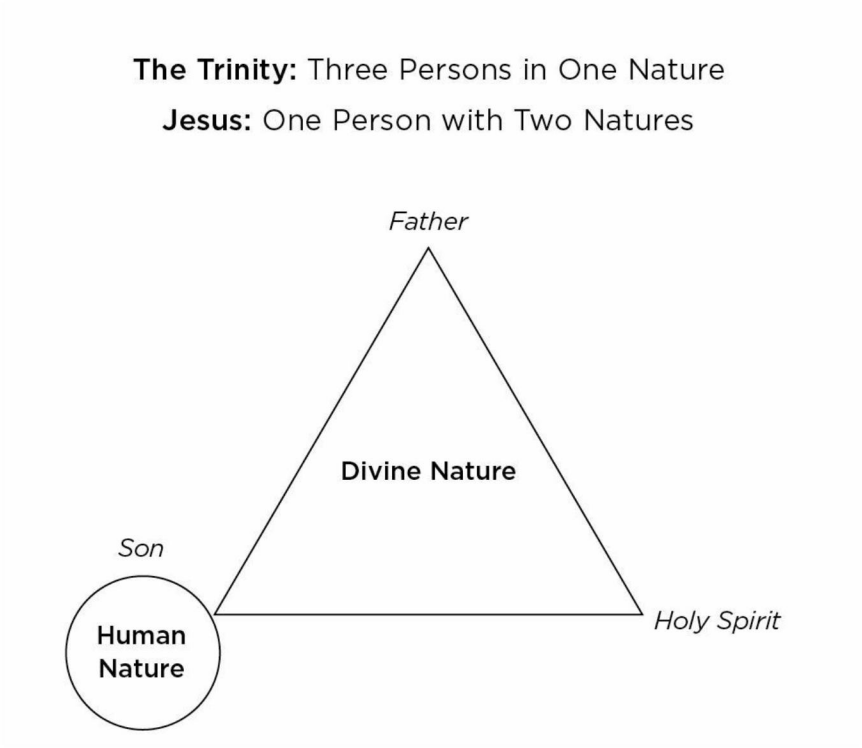


Figure 14.3 The Trinity

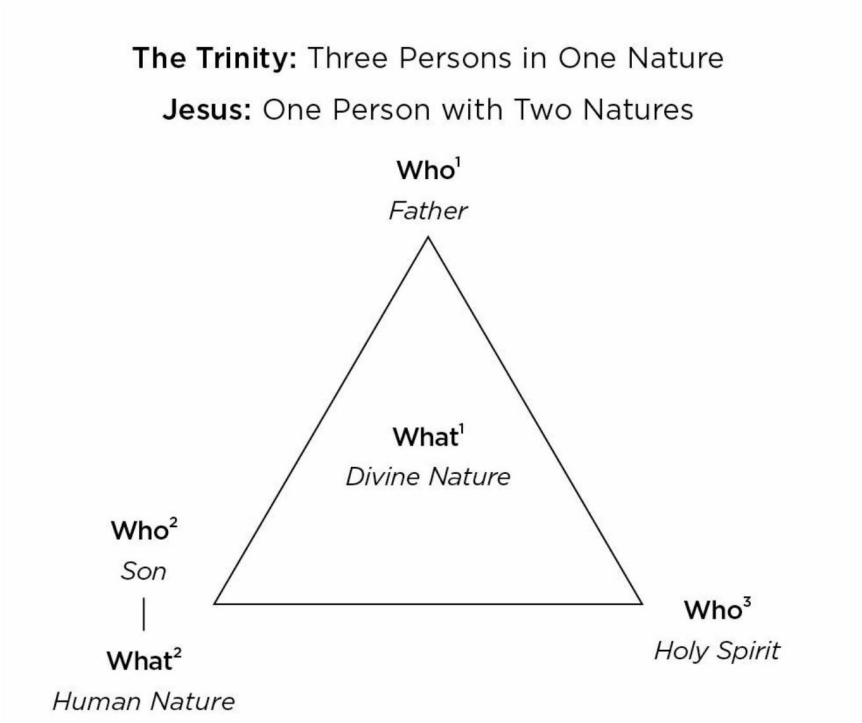


Figure 14.4 The persons of the Trinity

How does this help us deal with the second and third objections? Since

Jesus has two natures, whenever you ask a question about him you really must ask two questions. For example, did Jesus know the time of his second coming? As God, yes; as man, no. Did Jesus know all things? As God, yes; as man, no. (In fact, Luke 2:52 admits that Jesus increased in wisdom.) Did Jesus get hungry? As God, no; as man, yes. Did Jesus get tired? As God, no; as man, yes.

The Trinity also helps us understand the sense in which Jesus declared, "The Father is greater than I." The Father and Son are equal *in essence* but different *in function.* This is analogous to human relationships. For example, an earthly father is equally human with his son, but the father holds a higher office. Likewise, Jesus and the Father have different offices but are both equally God (John 1:1; 8:58; 10:30). When Jesus added humanity, he voluntarily subordinated himself to the Father and accepted the limitations inherent with humanity (this is exactly what Paul explains in Phil. 2:5–11). But Jesus never lost his divine nature or ceased being God. Table 14.3 summarizes the differences between Jesus and the Father:

Table 14.3 Jesus and the Father

Jesus Is Equal to the Father	**Jesus Is Subordinate to the Father**
In his divine nature	In his human nature
In his divine essence	In his human function
In his divine attributes	In his human office
In his divine character	In his human position

Objections to the Trinity

Despite what some skeptics may say, the Trinity is not illogical or against reason. Saying that there is one God and three Gods would be illogical. But saying that there is one God who has three persons is not illogical. It may be *beyond* reason, but it's not *against* reason.

That doesn't mean the Trinity can be completely understood. After all, no finite being can completely comprehend an infinite God. But we can *apprehend* the Trinity, just like we apprehend but do not completely *comprehend* the ocean. When we're standing on the beach, we can apprehend that there's an ocean in front of us, even though we can't completely comprehend its vast magnitude.

Some Muslims charge that the Trinity is too complex. But who said that truth must always be simple? It would be strange if an infinite God wasn't strange to us. As C. S. Lewis aptly puts it, "If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it is not. We cannot compete, in simplicity, with people who are inventing religions. How could we? We are dealing with fact. Of course anyone can be simple if he has no facts to bother about."[23]

Some critics and cult leaders have suggested that the Trinity is a later invention of the church. But this simply isn't true. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit[24] are all referred to as God in the Scriptures. Besides, even if the Trinity was not accepted by all the early church fathers, that doesn't mean it's false. Truth is not determined by majority vote. The doctrine of the Trinity is sound scripturally as well as philosophically.

In fact, instead of creating theological problems, the Trinity actually solves them. For example, the Trinity helps us understand how love has existed from all eternity. The New Testament says God is love (1 John 4:16). But how can love exist in a rigid monotheistic being? There would have been no one else to love before creation! Tri-unity in the Godhead solves the problem. After all, to have love, there must be a lover (the Father), a loved one (the Son), and a spirit of love (the Holy Spirit). Because of this triune nature, God has existed eternally in a perfect fellowship of love. He is the perfect being who lacks nothing, not even love.

Since he lacks nothing, God didn't *need* to create human beings for any reason (he wasn't lonely, as some preachers have been known to say). He simply *chose* to create us and loves us in accordance with his loving nature. In fact, his love is why he sent his Son—the second person of the Trinity—to take the punishment for our sins. His infinite justice condemns us, but his infinite love saves those who want to be saved.

Summary and Conclusion

Jesus Christ of Nazareth claimed and proved to be God and the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. His claims come in many forms: from direct "I am" statements to those that strongly imply his deity. His actions—including forgiving sins, assuming the authority of God to issue commands, and accepting worship due only to God—also reveal that Jesus really believed he was God. He then proved he was God by doing the following:

1. Fulfilling numerous specific messianic prophecies written hundreds of years in advance (Jesus is the only person in history who fulfills all of these prophecies)
2. Living a sinless life and performing miraculous deeds
3. Predicting and then accomplishing his own resurrection from the dead

We believe these facts have been established beyond a reasonable doubt. Therefore, we conclude that Jesus is God.

Since we have already established that God is a morally perfect being (from the Moral Argument in chapter 8), then anything Jesus (who is God) teaches is true. What did Jesus teach? More specifically, what did he teach about the Bible? That's the subject of the next chapter.

15

What Did Jesus Teach About the Bible?

> "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."
>
> JESUS CHRIST

THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS was in a rare joint session. All 435 representatives and 100 senators were in attendance, and the C-SPAN TV cameras were rolling. The members were gathered to hear a speech by a descendant of George Washington. But what they thought would be a polite speech of patriotic historical reflections quickly turned into a televised tongue-lashing. With a wagging finger and stern looks, Washington's seventh-generation grandson declared,

> Woe to you, egotistical hypocrites! You are full of greed and self-indulgence. Everything you do is done for appearances: You make pompous speeches and grandstand before these TV cameras. You demand the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats wherever you go. You love to be greeted in your districts and have everyone call you "Senator" or "Congressman." On the outside you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness! You say you want to clean up Washington, but as soon as you get here you become twice as much a son of hell as the one you replaced!

> Woe to you, makers of the law, you hypocrites! You do not practice what you preach. You put heavy burdens on the citizens, but then opt out of your own laws!
>
> Woe to you, federal fools! You take an oath to support and defend the Constitution, but then you nullify the Constitution by allowing judges to make up their own laws.
>
> Woe to you, blind hypocrites! You say that if you had lived in the days of the Founding Fathers, you never would have taken part with them in slavery. You say you never would have agreed that slaves were the property of their masters but would have insisted that they were human beings with unalienable rights. But you testify against yourselves because today you say that unborn children are the property of their mothers and have no rights at all! Upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed in this country. You snakes! You brood of vipers! You have left this great chamber desolate! How will you escape being condemned to hell!

Of course, such an address never really took place (if it had, you certainly would have heard about it!). Who would be so blunt and rude to address the nation's leaders that way? Certainly no one claiming to be a Christian! Are you sure?

Jesus made similar comments to the religious and political leaders of his day. What? Sweet and gentle Jesus? Absolutely. If you read Matthew 23, you'll see that much of our fictitious speech above is adapted from the real speech Jesus made to the crowds and the Pharisees. Some of the Pharisees were on the Sanhedrin, which had political and judicial responsibilities in Jesus's day. In fact, they interpreted and applied Jewish law to convict Jesus of blasphemy.

Those who say Jesus never got involved in politics apparently never noticed that the folks Jesus went after the most were politicians! He scolded the politicians and judges of his day because they "neglected the more important matters of the law" (Matt. 23:23 NIV)—a problem we still have today. Some U.S. politicians want to ban plastic straws while they encourage abortion and child mutilation. They are neglecting the more important matters of the law!

Jesus's stern rebuke of such people shows that you love God and your neighbor by opposing evil, not tolerating or encouraging it. Contrary to

popular opinion, Jesus wasn't a social worker with the personality of Mister Rogers.[1] By one pastor's count, Jesus insulted people seventy-eight times![2] The real Jesus taught with authority and did not tolerate error. When politicians and religious leaders were wrong, he made righteous judgments and let everyone know what those judgments were. And who could be better at correcting error than God himself? Since Jesus is God, whatever he teaches is true.

The historically reliable Gospels record Jesus's teachings on many subjects. But no teaching of Jesus has more far-reaching impact than what he taught about the Bible. If Jesus taught that the Bible is the word of God, then the Bible is our primary source of divine truth. So what did Jesus teach about the Bible?

What Did Jesus Teach About the Old Testament?

Jesus taught that the Old Testament (which was the Bible of his day, before the New Testament was compiled) was the word of God in seven ways. He said:

1. *The Old Testament is divinely authoritative*. When tempted by Satan, Jesus corrected him by quoting from the Old Testament. He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' . . . Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' . . . Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'"(Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Why would Jesus have quoted so confidently from the Old Testament if the Old Testament was not authoritative? He must have considered the Old Testament to be a source of truth to dismiss his most powerful enemy with it.

In fact, on ninety-two occasions Jesus and his apostles supported their position by saying, "It is written" (or the equivalent), and then quoting the Old Testament. Why? Because Jesus and his apostles considered the Old Testament Scriptures to be the written word of God, and thus the ultimate authority for life.

2. *The Old Testament is imperishable*. In the Sermon on the Mount, a passage loved by conservatives and liberals alike, Jesus claimed that not even the smallest mark in the Scriptures—the equivalent of a dot on an "i" or a cross on a "t"—will ever perish: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the

Law or the Prophets," he declared. "I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt. 5:17–18). Jesus could not have expressed the imperishability of the Scriptures more forcefully.

3. *The Old Testament is infallible*. In John 10, Jesus was about to be stoned for blasphemy. To get himself out of this jam, Jesus cited the Old Testament and declared, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). In other words, when his life was on the line, Jesus referred to an infallible authority that cannot be broken—the Scriptures. Furthermore, he later affirmed the truth of the Scriptures when he prayed for the disciples, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17).

4. *The Old Testament is inerrant*. When the Sadducees tried to trap Jesus with a question, Jesus said to them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). The implication, of course, is that the Scriptures are inerrant. It wouldn't have made any sense for Jesus to say, "You are in error because you don't know the Scriptures, which also err!"

5. *The Old Testament is historically reliable*. In addition to declaring that the Old Testament is divinely authoritative, imperishable, infallible, and inerrant, Jesus affirmed two of the most historically disputed stories in the Old Testament: Noah (Matt. 24:37–39) and Jonah (Matt. 12:40). Jesus spoke of those stories as being historically true. And why wouldn't they be true? The miracles associated with Noah and Jonah are child's play for the all-powerful God who created the universe.

Jesus also affirmed other aspects of the Old Testament that critics deny. Jesus taught that Daniel was a prophet (Matt. 24:15) while many critics say Daniel was merely a historian. (Many critics claim a later date for Daniel because they believe he couldn't have made all of his accurate predictions. Their antisupernatural bias is revealed again.) Furthermore, Jesus specifically quoted different sections of the book of Isaiah (e.g., Matt. 7:7; 13:14–15; Luke 4:17–19), never once suggesting that there were two or three Isaiahs, as many critics claim.

6. *The Old Testament is scientifically accurate*. Jesus made other claims

that contradict those of today's critics. When asked if divorce was acceptable, Jesus cited a scientific fact out of Genesis. He said, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:4–6). In other words, the nature of marriage is bound up in the scientific fact that Adam and Eve were created for a purpose.

Moreover, Jesus did not accept the false idea that the Bible could tell you how to "go to heaven" but not "how the heavens go." He told Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12). In other words, Jesus taught that if the Bible does not speak truthfully about the physical world that you can see, then it cannot be trusted when it speaks about the spiritual world that you cannot see. Indeed, Christianity is built on historical events—such as Creation and the resurrection—that can be tested through scientific and historical investigation.

While adherents of other religions may accept a complete separation from science, Christians do not. In fact, Detective J. Warner Wallace discovered that all branches of modern science—228 in all—were founded by Christians who expected to find order in a universe created and sustained by God.[3]

Although the Bible doesn't include detailed descriptions as if it were a scientific textbook, its basic truths about the origin and design of the universe align with modern scientific evidence. Since all truth is God's truth, true religious beliefs must agree with scientific facts. If they do not, then either there is an error in our scientific understanding, or our religious beliefs are wrong. As we have seen, many of the claims of Christianity are affirmed by scientific investigation. Christ knew it would be this way.

7. *The Old Testament has ultimate supremacy*. Since Jesus taught that the Old Testament is divinely authoritative, imperishable, infallible, inerrant, historically reliable, and scientifically accurate, you would expect him to assert that it has ultimate supremacy over any teaching of man. This is exactly what Jesus said. He corrected the Pharisees and the teachers of the law by claiming that they should be obeying the Old Testament Scriptures instead of their own man-made traditions. He said, "Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? . . . For the sake of your

tradition you have made void the word of God" (Matt. 15:3, 6). He then blasted them for failing to live up to the Scriptures by quoting from the Old Testament: "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men'" (Matt. 15:7–9 NIV 1984). Why would Jesus have corrected the religious leaders of Israel with the Old Testament unless the Old Testament had ultimate supremacy over their own ideas?

In light of Jesus's teaching, there's no question he considered the entire Old Testament to be the inerrant, written word of God. He said he came to fulfill the entire Jewish Old Testament (Matt. 5:17), which he referred to as "the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:40). And he told the Jews, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39–40).

So Jesus came to fulfill the Scriptures that testify of him. But what did that Old Testament comprise? To what books was Jesus referring when he spoke of "the Scriptures"? In his rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 23, Jesus covered every book in the Jewish Old Testament, first to last, when he declared, "On you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar" (v. 35). Abel was killed in the first book of the Jewish Old Testament (Genesis), and Zechariah was killed in the last (Chronicles).

In fact, Jesus and the New Testament writers cited every section of the Old Testament as authoritative, referencing events in eighteen of the twenty-two books of the Jewish Old Testament.[4] The historicity of many of the events listed in table 15.1[5] has been disputed by critics. But Jesus and the apostles reference them as if they are historically true. In addition to affirming the historicity of Noah and Jonah, Jesus himself affirms the historicity of Creation (Mark 13:19), Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4–5), Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 10:12), and Moses and the burning bush (Luke 20:37). This shows that Jesus linked the historical reality of the Old Testament with the truth of his own spiritual message.

Table 15.1 New Testament affirmations of Old Testament events

Old Testament Event	New Testament

	Affirmation(s)
Creation of the universe (Gen. 1)	John 1:3; Col. 1:16
Creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1–2)	1 Tim. 2:13–14
Marriage of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1–2)	Matt. 19:4–5
Temptation of the woman (Gen. 3)	1 Tim. 2:14
Disobedience and sin of Adam (Gen. 3)	Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22
Sacrifices of Abel and Cain (Gen. 4)	Heb. 11:4
Murder of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4)	1 John 3:12
Birth of Seth (Gen. 4)	Luke 3:38
Translation of Enoch (Gen. 5)	Heb. 11:5
Marriage before the flood (Gen. 6)	Luke 17:27
The flood and destruction of man (Gen. 7)	Matt. 24:39
Preservation of Noah and his family (Gen. 8–9)	2 Pet. 2:5
Genealogy of Shem (Gen. 10)	Luke 3:35–36
Birth of Abraham (Gen. 11)	Luke 3:34
Call of Abraham (Gen. 12–13)	Heb. 11:8
Tithes to Melchizedek (Gen. 14)	Heb. 7:1–3
Justification of Abraham (Gen. 15)	Rom. 4:3
Ishmael (Gen. 16)	Gal. 4:21–24
Promise of Isaac (Gen. 17)	Heb. 11:18
Lot and Sodom (Gen. 18–19)	Luke 17:29
Birth of Isaac (Gen. 21)	Acts 7:8
Offering of Isaac (Gen. 22)	Heb. 11:17
The burning bush (Ex. 3)	Luke 20:37
Exodus through the Red Sea (Ex. 14)	1 Cor. 10:1–2
Provision of water and manna (Ex. 16, 17)	1 Cor. 10:3–5
Lifting up of serpent in wilderness (Num. 21)	John 3:14
Fall of Jericho (Josh. 6)	Heb. 11:30
Miracles of Elijah (1 Kings 17–18)	James 5:17
Jonah and the great fish (Jonah 2)	Matt. 12:40
Three Hebrew youths in furnace (Dan. 3)	Heb. 11:34
Daniel in lions’ den (Dan. 6)	Heb. 11:33
Slaying of Zechariah (2 Chron. 24)	Matt. 23:35

But Could Jesus Have Been Wrong About the Old Testament?

So Jesus declared that the entire Old Testament is the inerrant word of God, and he and his apostles affirmed Old Testament events that many critics deny. But could Jesus have been wrong? Perhaps he wasn't saying that those events in the Old Testament really happened, but just that the Jews believed they did. In other words, maybe he was just being accommodating to the beliefs of the Jews, saying, in effect, "Just as you believe in Jonah, you ought to believe in my resurrection."

This accommodation theory doesn't work. As we have seen, Jesus did not tolerate error. He wasn't being accommodating to the beliefs of the Jews, as some skeptics have suggested. He rebuked and corrected them repeatedly, from issuing scathing public tongue-lashings (as in Matt. 23) to correcting their false interpretations of the Old Testament (Matt. 5:21–47) to overturning tables in the temple (Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; John 2:14–16). Jesus didn't back down on anything, and he certainly didn't back down on the truth of the Old Testament.

The skeptic may say, "But couldn't Jesus have erred because of his human limitations? After all, if he didn't know when he was coming back, maybe he didn't know about errors in the Old Testament." No, this limitation theory doesn't work either. Limits on understanding are different from misunderstandings. As a man, there were some things Jesus didn't know. But that doesn't mean he was wrong on what he *did* know. What Jesus *did know* was true because he taught only what the Father told him to teach (John 8:28; 17:8, 14). So to charge Jesus with an error is to charge God the Father with an error. But God can't err because he is the unchangeable standard and source of truth.[6] Furthermore, Jesus affirmed the truth of his teaching when he declared, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35), and, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18).

So where does that leave us? We need to ask only one question: Who knows more about the Old Testament, Christ or the critics? If Jesus is God, then whatever he teaches is true. If he teaches that the Old Testament is divinely authoritative, imperishable, infallible, inerrant, historically reliable, and scientifically accurate, and has ultimate supremacy, then those things are true. His credentials trump those of any fallible critic (especially those whose criticisms are not grounded in evidence but in an illegitimate antisupernatural bias).

Other Evidence Supporting the Old Testament

In addition to the claims of Jesus, there are many other reasons to accept the truthfulness of the Old Testament documents. For example, the Old Testament has many of the same characteristics that make the New Testament believable: strong manuscript support, confirmation by archaeology, and a storyline that its authors would not invent.

Let's consider that last point for just a minute. Who would invent the Old Testament storyline? A story invented by Hebrews probably would depict them as noble, upright, and triumphant people. But the Old Testament writers don't say this. Instead, they depict their own people as sinful and fickle slaves who, time after time, are miraculously rescued by God but abandon him every chance they get. The history they record is filled with bone-headed disobedience, distrust, selfishness, and judgment from other nations. Their leaders are all Olympic-quality sinners, including Moses (a murderer), Saul (a paranoid egomaniac), David (an adulterer, liar, and murderer), and Solomon (a serial polygamist).

These are the people who led the nation through which God chose to bring the Savior of the world. Yet the Old Testament writers admit that the ancestors of this Messiah included sinful characters such as David, Solomon, and even a prostitute named Rahab. None of the nineteen kings of Israel are good, and only three of twenty kings of Judah fully follow Yahweh. What people group would invent such an embarrassing history for themselves? And who inventing a religion would choose circumcision as the price of entry?

"You want me to do *what?*"

This is clearly not an invented religion or history!

While the Old Testament tells of one embarrassing gaffe after another, historians from other countries avoid even mentioning unflattering historical events. For example, you'll rarely find anything embarrassing written by Egyptian sources. Their temples are monuments of propaganda designed to inflate the reputations of the Pharaohs. They would never admit an embarrassing event like the Exodus. Writer Peter Fineman imagines what a press release from Pharaoh might say:

> A spokesman for Rameses the great, Pharaoh of Pharaohs, supreme ruler of Egypt, son of Ra, before whom all tremble in awe blinded by his brilliance, today announced that the man Moses had kicked his royal [rear end] for all the world to see, thus proving that God is

> Yahweh and the 2,000-year-old-culture of Egypt is a lie. Film at 11:00.[7]

Of course, no press secretary for Pharaoh would admit such an event! But when the Egyptians scored a military victory, they went to press and exaggerated greatly. This is apparent from the oldest known reference to Israel outside the Bible. It comes from a granite monument found in the funerary temple of Pharaoh Merneptah in Thebes. The monument boasts about the military victory of the Pharaoh in the highlands of Canaan, claiming that "Israel is laid waste, his seed is not."[8] Historians date the battle to 1207 BC, which confirms that Israel was in the land of Canaan by that time.

Contrary to what critics say, there is archaeological evidence for the events of the Exodus—some of which are artifacts found in Egypt—and scores of other archaeological findings corroborate the Old Testament.[9] Also, recall from chapters 3 and 4 that there's evidence from cosmology (the Big Bang and fine-tuning) that supports Old Testament claims that the universe had a beginning and was designed by God.

But in the end, the strongest argument for the Old Testament comes from Jesus himself. As God, he holds the trump card. If the New Testament documents are reliable, then the Old Testament is without error because Jesus said it is.

So what do you do if some biologist tells you that much of Genesis is false? Did that biologist prove he is God by predicting and accomplishing his own resurrection from the dead? No? Then it would be far wiser to believe Jesus.

What Did Jesus Teach About the New Testament?

Jesus taught that the Old Testament is inerrant, but what could he say about the New Testament? After all, it was not written until after the end of Christ's earthly life.

While Jesus *confirmed* the Old Testament, he *promised* the New Testament. He said the New Testament would come through his apostles because the Holy Spirit would remind them of what he had said and would lead them into "all truth." This is recorded in two passages of John's Gospel. Jesus declared:

> These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* (John 14:25–26)

And,

> I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, *he will guide you into all the truth,* for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:12–13)

In other words, Jesus was promising his apostles that the Holy Spirit would lead them to author what we now know as the New Testament. Paul would later echo this teaching of Jesus by asserting that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20). The early church recognized this as well because they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42).

But did the apostles really get the message from the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised? They certainly claim as much. John writes that the apostles "*are from God*" (1 John 4:6), and begins the book of Revelation with "The revelation of Jesus Christ, *which God gave him*" (Rev. 1:1). Paul claims that his words are "*taught by the Spirit*" (1 Cor. 2:13), and that his writings are "*a command of the Lord*" (14:37). In the opening of his letter to the Galatians, Paul declares, "I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ*" (Gal. 1:11–12). In fact, in his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul affirms that he is providing them with the word of God: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that *when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God,* which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess. 2:13). In addition to affirming the inspired nature of his own works, Paul quotes the Gospels of Luke and Matthew as "Scripture," putting them on the same level as Deuteronomy (1 Tim. 5:18; Luke 10:7; Matt. 10:10).

Referring to Paul's letters (there are thirteen of them), Peter agrees they are inspired when he writes, "His letters contain some things that are hard to

understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do *the other Scriptures*, to their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16; cf. 2 Tim. 3:15–16). Peter also affirms the divine source of his own words and those of the other apostles when he declares,

> *We* did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. . . . *We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed*, to which you will do well to pay attention. . . . No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:16–21)

But the apostles didn't just *claim* to be getting messages from God. Anyone can do that. They gave evidence that their words were inspired by performing miraculous signs. In fact, one of the two qualifications of an apostle was the ability to perform such signs; the other qualification was being an eyewitness to the resurrection (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1). Paul affirmed that he was an apostle when he declared to his Corinthian readers, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience" (2 Cor. 12:12). Paul must have been telling the truth about having done miracles in their presence or he would have lost all credibility with his readers.

In addition to Paul claiming to do miracles, Luke records thirty-five miracles in the book of Acts alone—the well-authenticated book we've already investigated that chronicles the propagation of the church from the resurrection to about AD 60. Most of these miracles were performed by the apostles (a few were performed by angels or by God).[10] Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews, speaking of the salvation announced by the Lord, declares, "*God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles* and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will" (Heb. 2:4).

Recall from chapter 9 that this is the way God authenticates his prophets—through miracles. The miracle confirms the message. The sign confirms the sermon. Acts of God confirm the word of God to the people of God (Ex. 4; 1 Kings 18; John 3:2; Acts 2:22). It's God's way of telling us that a message really comes from him. The New Testament apostles confirmed that their message came from God by performing miracles.

The skeptic may say, "Oh, they were just making up the miracle stories." Nonsense. We've already seen in chapters 10, 11, and 12 that the Gospel

writers were incredibly accurate historians and had no motive to make up miracle stories. In fact, they had every motive *not* to make up such stories because they were tortured, beaten, and killed for affirming them.

Moreover, the ability to perform miracles was not ultimately in their control but resided with God himself. How do we know? For two reasons. First, the apostles appear to have lost the ability to perform miracles sometime in the mid-60s AD. The writer of Hebrews, writing in the late 60s, referred to these special sign gifts of an apostle in the past tense (Heb. 2:3–4). And later in his ministry, Paul apparently could not heal some of his own trusted helpers (Phil. 2:26; 2 Tim. 4:20). If he still possessed the power to perform miracles, then why was he asking for prayer and recommending that his helpers take medicine (1 Tim. 5:23)?

Second, even *while Paul was doing miracles* he was unable to heal his own physical infirmity (Gal. 4:13). In fact, there's no instance in Scripture of anyone performing a miracle for his own benefit or for entertainment. This demonstrates that the ability to perform miracles was limited by the will of God (cf. Heb. 2:4). Miracles were done for a specific purpose, which was usually to confirm some new messenger or new revelation.

This is probably why there is no record of apostolic miracles in Paul's letters after about AD 62—the latest date Acts could have been composed.[11] By this time, Paul and the other apostles had been proven as true messengers of God. There was no need for further confirmation.

There is one additional line of evidence regarding the fact that Jesus and the Holy Spirit promised to provide the New Testament. The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would come and "preach good news." Jesus declared that he fulfilled that prediction. As recorded in Luke 4, Jesus went into the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth and made that amazing claim. Luke says,

> [Jesus] stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:
>
> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me
> to proclaim good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
> and recovering of sight to the blind,
> to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16–21)

What was fulfilled that day? The first coming of the Messiah. After reading from Isaiah 61:1–2, Jesus stopped midverse to indicate that he was the Messiah who had come to "proclaim good news to the poor," "proclaim liberty to the captives," offer "recovering of sight to the blind," and so forth. He stopped halfway through verse 2 because the second half of the verse declares the "day of vengeance of our God," which refers to Christ's second coming. The Jews in his hometown, who knew Jesus was the son of Joseph, also knew that he was claiming to be the Messiah. In fact, after Jesus implied he was a prophet who wouldn't be welcome in his hometown, the crowd in the synagogue became "filled with wrath" and drove him out of town to push him off a cliff. But Jesus escaped by walking right through the crowd (Luke 4:22–30).

Isaiah 61 predicted that the Messiah would perform healing miracles and preach "good news . . . to bind up the brokenhearted" by the "Spirit of the Lord" (v. 1). In other words, the Messiah would do exactly what Jesus did—provide new revelation and back it up with miracles. Of course, since the Messiah was to provide new revelation, someone had to write it down. That's why Jesus promised his apostles that the Holy Spirit would remind them of what he had said to them and guide them into "all the truth" (John 16:13; see also 14:26).

Discovering the Canon

What does all of this mean for the New Testament? It means that, according to Jesus, the only books that should be in the New Testament are those that are authored and/or confirmed by his apostles. Which books specifically are those?

First, we need to clear up a common misunderstanding about what we call "the canon." It is this: It's wrong to say that "the church" or the early church fathers *determined* what would be in the New Testament. They didn't *determine* what would be in the New Testament—they *discovered* what *God*

intended to be in the New Testament.

Bruce Metzger of Princeton University put it well: "The canon is a list of authoritative books more than it is an authoritative list of books. These documents didn't derive their authority from being selected; each one was authoritative before anyone gathered them together."[12] In other words, the only books that should be part of the New Testament are those that God has inspired. Since Jesus said that his apostles would produce those books, our only questions are historical: (1) Who were the apostles? and (2) What did they write?

The early church fathers can help us answer those questions because they were much closer to the events than we are. The fact is that they had no trouble *discovering* the divine nature of the major New Testament books. While there was some initial controversy over some of the minor books (such as Philemon, 3 John, and James), the early church fathers immediately recognized the Gospels and the major Epistles as divinely inspired. Why? Because they knew the books were written by apostles (or by those confirmed by apostles), and those apostles had been confirmed by miracles.

John, who obviously knew all of the apostles, had a disciple named Polycarp (AD 69–155), and Polycarp had a disciple named Irenaeus (130–202). Polycarp and Irenaeus collectively quote twenty-three of the twenty-seven New Testament books as if they are authentic—and in some cases they specifically say they are authentic.[13] Irenaeus explicitly affirms the authorship of all four Gospels.[14] Furthermore, through the historian Eusebius, we know that Papias (60–120) affirmed the authorship of Matthew and Mark. And no one doubts the authorship of the major works of Paul.

While the major works of the New Testament were immediately seen as authentic by these early church fathers, most of the New Testament was accepted before 200, and all of it was officially and finally recognized as authentic by the Council of Hippo in 393. See table 15.2[15] for a list of New Testament books cited by pre-Nicene church writers and other sources.[16]

Table 15.2 Early citations of New Testament books (all dates are AD)

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Acts	Romans	1 Corinthians	2 Corinthians	Galatians	Ephesians	Philippians	Colossians	1 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians	1 Timothy	2 Timothy	Titus	Philemon	Hebrews	James	1 Peter	2 Peter	1 John	2 John	3 John	Jude	Revelation
Epistle of Barnabas (70–130)	✓	✓	✓																✓								
Clement of Rome (ca. 96)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓						✓
Ignatius (ca. 110)	✓						✓	✓		✓			✓		✓								✓				
Polycarp (110–150)	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓				
Didache (120–150)																											
Papias / Presbyters (95–100)	✓	✓		✓			✓																				?
2 Clement (ca. 150)	✓		✓				✓		✓												✓						
Shepherd of Hermas (ca. 115–155)	✓		✓		✓														✓	✓	✓						
Justin Martyr (ca. 138–165)	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓																	✓
Tatian's *Diatessaron* (ca. 172)	✓	✓	✓	✓																							
Melito of Sardis (170–180)		✓	✓				✓						✓						✓								
Theophilus of Antioch (168–188)	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓					✓												
Irenaeus of Lyons (182–220)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Caius and the Muratorian Canon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓		✓	✓
Clement of Alexandria (193–220)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Tertullian (198–220)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓
Hippolytus (222–236)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓					✓
Origen (225–254)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	m	m	✓	✓
Novatian (250–257)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓						✓				
Against Novatian (254–256)	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓								✓	✓			✓			✓	✓
Treatise on Rebaptism (ca. 250–258)	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓				✓												✓				
Cyprian of Carthage (ca. 254–258)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Firmilian of Caesaria (256)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										✓		✓				
Seventh Council of Carthage (258)	✓			✓		✓																	✓	✓			
Gregory Thaumaturgus (240–265)	✓						✓			✓																	✓
Dionysius of Alexandria (246–265)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										✓			✓				✓			✓
Adamantius (ca. 300)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓								
Victorinus of Petau (304)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓						✓						✓
Peter of Alexandria (285–311)	✓			✓	✓	✓				✓	✓				✓								✓				
Methodius (270–312)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓												
Athanasius before Nicea (318)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓							✓		✓						
Lactantius (ca. 303–325)			✓	✓						✓													✓				✓
Alexander of Alexandria (313–326)	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓			✓					✓			
Eusebius of Caesarea before Nicea (318–325)				✓		✓				✓		✓	✓						✓	✓							

✓ = cited ? = uncertain m = inconsistent x = rejected

“Why did the recognition of these books take so long?” the skeptic may ask. Perhaps because Christianity was generally illegal in the Roman Empire until 313. It wasn’t as if the early church fathers could go down to the local Hilton and convene a Bible conference to examine the evidence together and come to a conclusion. They often feared for their lives in their own homes! The important point is that once all the evidence was on the table, all twenty-seven New Testament books, and only those twenty-seven books, were recognized as authentic.

Those twenty-seven books comprise the only authentic record of apostolic teaching we have. As we have seen, all of those books were written in the first century by eyewitnesses or by those who interviewed eyewitnesses. In other words, they meet the criteria of Jesus—they are books that are either written by the apostles or confirmed by the apostles.[17] Since no other authentic apostolic works are known to exist—and since it’s unlikely that God would allow an authentic work to go undiscovered for so long—we can rest assured that the New Testament canon is complete.

But wasn’t the message changed from the time of writing to the third-century canonization? No. We know this because of the manuscript evidence we’ve already seen, and because the early church fathers were quoting the New Testament so much and affirming the same basic facts about Jesus in their writings over those three centuries. Detective J. Warner Wallace calls this the “chain of custody.” He shows that Paul, John, and Peter all had followers who passed down the same storyline across those centuries. Since this was being done from different locations around the ancient world, the unbroken chain shows the same message being accurately passed down.[18]

How Can the Bible Be Inerrant?

If Jesus confirmed that the Old Testament was the inerrant word of God, then his promised New Testament must be part of the inerrant word of God too. Of course. But how can this be? Aren’t there scores if not hundreds of errors in the Bible?

No. The Bible does not have errors, but it certainly has *alleged* errors or difficulties. In fact, I (Norm) and another professor at Southern Evangelical Seminary, Thomas Howe, have written a book titled *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties*,[19] which addresses more than 800 difficulties critics have identified in the Bible. While we certainly can’t include the content of that

book in this one, here are a few points worth mentioning.

First, let's spell out logically why the Bible can't have errors:

1. God cannot err.
2. The Bible is the word of God.
3. Therefore, the Bible cannot err.

Since this is a valid argument, if the premises are true, then the conclusion is true. The Bible clearly declares itself to be the word of God, and we've seen the strong evidence that it is. The Bible also informs us several times that God cannot err, and we know this from general revelation as well. So the conclusion is inevitable. The Bible cannot err. If the Bible erred in anything it affirms, then God would be mistaken. But God cannot make mistakes.

So what happens when we think we've found an error in the Bible? Augustine had the answer. "If we are perplexed by any apparent contradiction in Scripture," he wisely noted, "it is not allowable to say, 'The author of this book is mistaken'; but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood."[20] In other words, inerrancy applies to the original scrolls, not the thousands of copies, and it's more likely that *we've* made an error than the Bible.

In *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties*, we identify seventeen errors typically made by critics. Here is a summary of just four of them:

- *Assuming that divergent accounts are contradictory*. As we have seen, it's not a contradiction if one Gospel writer says he saw one angel at the tomb and another says he saw two. Matthew doesn't say there was *only* one. And if there were two, there certainly was (at least) one! So divergence doesn't always mean contradiction. Instead, it often suggests genuine eyewitness testimony.
- *Failing to understand the context of a passage*. Sometimes we may think we've found a contradiction in the Bible, but instead we've simply taken a passage out of context. An obvious example would be Psalm 14:1b, which says, "There is no God." However, the proper context is revealed when the full verse is read: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"
- *Presuming that the Bible approves of all that it records*. Critics may cite the polygamy of Solomon (1 Kings 11:3) as an example of a contradiction. Doesn't the Bible teach monogamy, not polygamy? Of

course. But God certainly does not approve of every act recorded in the Bible. It records Satan's lies as well, but God doesn't approve of them either. *Not every description is a prescription.* God's standards are found in what the Bible reveals, not in everything it records. As we have seen, instead of this being an argument that proves the Bible has errors, it's actually an argument for the Bible's historicity. The fact that the Bible records the sins and faults of its people suggests that it is true—no one would make up such an embarrassing, self-condemning story.

- *Forgetting that the Bible is a human book with human characteristics*. Critics have been known to falsely impugn the integrity of the Bible by expecting a level of expression higher than that which is customary for a human document. However, this is illegitimate because most of the Bible was not verbally dictated but written by human authors (an exception is the Ten Commandments, which were "written with the finger of God," Ex. 31:18). The writers were human composers who employed their own literary styles and idiosyncrasies. They wrote historical narratives (e.g., Acts), poetry (e.g., Song of Solomon), prayers (e.g., many psalms), prophecy (e.g., Isaiah), personal letters (e.g., 1 Timothy), theological treatises (e.g., Romans), and other types of literature. These writers speak from a human standpoint when they write of the sun rising or setting (Josh. 1:15). They also reveal human thought patterns, including memory lapses (1 Cor. 1:14–16), as well as human emotions (Gal. 4:14). In short, since God used the styles of about forty authors over nearly 1,500 years to get his message across, it's wrong to expect the level of expression to be greater than that of other human documents. However, as with Christ's human nature, the Bible's distinct human nature is without error.

Objections to Inerrancy

Critics may say, "Humans err, so the Bible must err." But it's the critic who is in error. True, humans err, but humans don't *always* err. If they did, we couldn't trust anything anyone said, including what the critic is saying! The truth is that fallible people write inerrant books all the time. So fallible people who are guided by the Holy Spirit certainly can write books without any errors.

"But aren't you just arguing in a circle," the critic might ask, "by using the

Bible to prove the Bible?" No, because we're not starting with the assumption that the Bible is an inspired book. We're starting with several separate documents that, through various historical tests introduced in chapter 10, have proven beyond a reasonable doubt to be historically reliable. Since those documents reveal that Jesus is God, then we know his teaching on the Old Testament must be true.

Using those same historical tests, we know that Jesus in several ways said that the Old Testament is the inerrant word of God. He also promised that the rest of God's truth ("all truth") would come to the apostles from the Holy Spirit. The apostles then wrote the New Testament and proved their authority through miracles. Therefore, on the authority of Jesus, who is God, the New Testament is inerrant as well. That's not arguing in a circle; it is arguing inductively, collecting evidence and following that evidence where it leads.

But there are several distinctions we need to make about inerrancy. First, inerrancy is not assumed before coming to the text but is a conclusion reached after investigating the text. We've used evidence to show the documents that comprise the Bible are historically accurate. We've seen that Jesus claimed to be God and then proved it. Therefore, since Jesus is God—and God cannot lie because he is the source of all truth—then we should believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God on his authority.

Second, someone can deny inerrancy and still assent to the essential beliefs of Christianity. However, that person would be disagreeing with Jesus (which is never a good idea) and undermining trust in the Bible. How so? Because if the fundamental of all the fundamentals is not fundamental, what then is fundamental? As Josh McDowell said in the movie *Norm Geisler: Not Qualified*, "If you let inerrancy slip, then you've let every single doctrine in the scriptures slip, intellectually."[21]

Third, since Jesus's authority is well established by the evidence, we reasonably give the benefit of the doubt to the Bible when we come across a difficulty or question in the text. In other words, when we run across something inexplicable, we assume that we, not the infinite God, are making an error. It's more likely that Geisler and Turek are ignorant than that the Bible is wrong.

However, that doesn't mean we believe there's absolutely no possibility for Bible errors. After all, there's always a chance that our conclusions about inerrancy are wrong—for *we* are certainly not inerrant. In fact, our conclusion on inerrancy would be falsified if someone could trace a real error back to an

original scroll.[22] But to this day, after nearly 2,000 years of looking, no one has found such an irreconcilable problem. (This is truly amazing when you consider that the Bible is really a collection of documents written by about forty authors over a 1,500-year period. Where could you find such agreement on a variety of issues from forty authors who all live today, much less over fifteen centuries?)

Fourth, even if inerrancy is falsified someday, that wouldn't falsify the central historical truths of Christianity. The essential events and teachings of Christianity could still be true even if the Scriptures are found to contain a false detail or two, just as the essential events and teachings of any historical figure could be true even if historians got some details wrong. As we have seen, the historical evidence that Jesus taught profound truths, performed miracles, and died and rose from the dead for sinful humanity is very strong indeed.

In other words, the Bible, like many other historical records, is not a house of cards. If you find differences in the details of the accounts, that doesn't mean the main story is false. Yet critics, such as Bart Ehrman, do this when they cite differences in the resurrection accounts as evidence the documents are unreliable.[23] They should come to the exact opposite conclusion and affirm the historical reliability of the New Testament documents because: (1) differences in details are exactly what true eyewitnesses provide; (2) differences are not necessarily contradictions; (3) differences show they have independent sources that didn't merely copy from one another; and (4) all the accounts agree on the central reason the documents exist in the first place: Jesus rose from the dead! Why would these documents—written by Jews in the first century—exist at all if Jesus had not claimed to be God and risen from the dead?

Finally, after many years of continual and careful study of the Bible, we can only conclude that those who have "discovered a mistake" in the Bible do not know too much about the Bible—they know too little. This doesn't mean that we understand how to resolve all the difficulties in the Scriptures, but it means we keep doing research. We are no different than scientists who can't resolve all the difficulties or mysteries of the natural world. They don't deny the integrity of the natural world just because they can't explain something. Like a scientist of the natural world, a scientist of theology keeps looking for answers. As we do, the list of difficulties keeps getting shorter.[24] Meanwhile, for those of you who can't get past Bible difficulties, it's good to keep in

mind this thought, which has often been attributed to Mark Twain: “Most people are bothered by those Scripture passages which they cannot understand. But for me, the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand!”

Skeptics may now say, “But your position on inerrancy is not falsifiable. You will not accept an error in the Bible because you’ve decided in advance that there can’t be any!” Actually, our position *is* falsifiable, but the critics’ position may not be. Let us explain.

There is a discovery that would falsify inerrancy *and* Christianity. If someone could find the body of Jesus, Christianity would be proven false, and we’d give it up. In effect, we agree with Paul, who said that our Christian faith is in vain if Jesus did not actually rise from the dead (1 Cor. 15:14–18). This is unique about Christianity. Unlike most other religious worldviews, Christianity is built on historical events and can therefore be either affirmed or falsified by historical investigation.

The problem for skeptics and critics is that all the historical evidence points to the resurrection. The people who lived in Jerusalem at the time—some of whom would have loved to have found Jesus’s body and paraded it around the city—couldn’t find his body and admitted that his tomb was empty. And nothing has been found since. If, after 2,000 years no one can find the remains of Jesus or a plausible natural explanation for the resurrection, isn’t it quite possible that neither exist? When can a question be confidently closed? If not after 2,000 years, when?

Are the beliefs of the critics unfalsifiable? What would convince critics that Jesus rose from the dead and Christianity is true? For many of them the answer is nothing. We know because we’ve asked them, and they’ve told us. Some of them will not allow an authority beyond themselves to interfere with their desire to maintain control over their own lives.

Conclusion and Summary

Jesus taught that the Jewish Old Testament is the inerrant word of God, and he promised that the rest of God’s word would come through his apostles. The apostles, who were authenticated by miracles, wrote or confirmed twenty-seven books. All major books were immediately recognized as part of God’s word by those connected with the apostles themselves. And those twenty-seven books were later recognized as authentic by the early church councils. In other words, the Bible we have today is the true, inerrant word

of God.

Since the Bible is our established standard for truth, anything that contradicts a teaching in the Bible is false. This *does not* mean there is no truth in other religions. It simply means that any specific teaching that contradicts a teaching of the Bible is false.

Now, let's review the conclusions we've drawn since chapter 1:

1. Truth about reality is knowable.
2. The opposite of true is false.
3. It is true that the theistic God exists. This is evidenced by the:
   a. Beginning of the universe (Cosmological Argument)
   b. Design of the universe (Teleological Argument/Fine-Tuning)
   c. Design of life (Teleological Argument)
   d. Moral Law (Moral Argument)
4. If God exists, then miracles are possible.
5. Miracles can be used to confirm a message from God (i.e., as acts of God to confirm a word from God).
6. The New Testament is historically reliable. This is evidenced by:
   a. Early testimony
   b. Eyewitness testimony
   c. Uninvented (authentic) testimony
   d. Eyewitnesses who were not deceived
7. The New Testament says Jesus claimed to be God.
8. Jesus's claim to be God was miraculously confirmed by:
   a. His fulfillment of many prophecies about himself
   b. His sinless life and miraculous deeds
   c. His prediction and accomplishment of his resurrection
9. Therefore, Jesus is God.
10. Whatever Jesus (who is God) teaches is true.
11. Jesus taught that the Bible is the word of God.
12. Therefore, it is true that the Bible is the word of God (and anything opposed to it is false).

Let's go back to chapter 9 to unpack the implications of this. The evidence we had gathered up to chapter 9 (points 1–3 above) helped us conclude that all nontheistic worldviews and religions are false. This left us to consider the three major theistic world religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Which one of them is true? The evidence presented in chapters 9 through 14 (points

4–12 above) now yields a verdict:

- The revelation of Judaism is true, but it is incomplete. It lacks the New Testament.
- The revelation of Islam has some truth, but it errs on some fundamental teachings, including its denial of the deity and resurrection of Christ (Qur'an, 5:75; 4:157–59).
- Only the revelation of Christianity is the complete, inerrant word of God.

Could we be wrong about all this? It's possible. But in light of the evidence, critics, skeptics, and those of other faiths need to have a lot more faith than we do.

16

Your Destiny: Will You Choose Justice or Grace?

> There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done."
>
> C. S. LEWIS

THE CASE FOR CHRISTIANITY is actually stronger than how we've put it so far. To see what we mean, we need to look at the evidence from the opposite perspective. Instead of asking ourselves if the evidence is good enough to conclude Christianity is true, let's ask ourselves, "Would we have the evidence we've seen if Christianity was *false?"*

Why do this? Because detectives and probability theorists know that the probability an event occurred isn't just based on the evidence you have for the event, but on the likelihood the evidence would exist *if the event had not occurred.*

Homicide Detective J. Warner Wallace will tell you that in a murder case there are nearly always unanswered questions that may create some doubt about the guilt of the suspect.[1] But a good detective and prosecutor will not just present the evidence that the suspect is guilty but also will ask the jury if the evidence would exist if the suspect *did not* commit the crime. If he's innocent, would his fingerprints be on the murder weapon? Would those

three eyewitnesses have testified they saw him leaving the crime scene? Would we have those texts from the suspect threatening the victim? Would he have tried to flee the country? And so forth.

Now, let's put Christianity on trial. If Christianity is false, would we have the evidence we've seen in this book? If God does *not* exist, would we have the following effects:

- A universe created from nothing, consistent with Genesis 1:1?
- Extreme fine-tuning of its initial conditions, natural laws, and our solar system?
- Sustained natural laws and orderly cause and effect that allow us to do science?
- Thousands of books worth of software code (DNA) in every living thing?
- Irreducibly complex life filled with microscopic machines that make man-made machines seem crude?
- Explosions of major body plans without fossil ancestors?
- Immaterial laws of logic and mathematics?
- A physical universe describable by mathematics?
- Minds that can reason?
- The ability to make free will choices?
- Objective moral values and obligations?
- Evidence for a soul from out-of-body experiences?

If Jesus did *not* resurrect, would we have *Jewish* authors who:

- Assert to be eyewitnesses of events that were against their Jewish expectations (the Messiah claiming to be God and then rising from the dead)?
- Provide descriptions full of verified eyewitness testimony?
- Cite sources that go back to the events themselves, including creeds that recognize the divinity and resurrection of Jesus from the beginning?
- Reference at least thirty-seven people who have since been found in archaeology or other sources, including six people associated with Christ's crucifixion?
- Include embarrassing details about themselves and Jesus?
- Claim their Messiah was crucified as a criminal?

- Claim he did not overthrow the Romans as expected?
- Abandoned their long-held sacred beliefs and practices that they long thought they could be stoned for disobeying?
- Converted to a new series of beliefs because of a resurrection that they verified with their own senses?
- Suffered excommunication, torture, and death for their claims about Jesus when they could have saved themselves by denying them?
- Included in their writings the most demanding and inconvenient teachings of Jesus and then followed them?
- Became convinced they must no longer separate from non-Jews but risk their lives to convert them to their new beliefs that transcended Judaism?

If Christianity is *not* true, would we have:

- Accurate predictions of this Messiah in the Old Testament hundreds of years in advance?
- Christianity exploding from Jerusalem, even though it could have been refuted by enemies showing the body of Jesus?
- A tomb that even enemies admitted was empty?
- Ten ancient non-Christian sources that collectively cite a story congruent with the New Testament?
- A crucified preacher becoming the most influential human being in history?

How could all these things be true if Christianity is false? And how could the following piece, called “One Solitary Life,” be true if Christianity is false?

> He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30. Then, for three years, he was an itinerant preacher.
>
> He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn’t go to college. He never lived in a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.
>
> He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him.

> His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave, through the pity of a friend.
>
> [Twenty] centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. I am well within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned—put together—have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one, solitary life.[2]

We don't have enough faith to believe that this one solitary life from a remote, ancient village 2,000 years ago could be the most influential life of all time—*unless the resurrection is true.* If the resurrection is true, then Christianity is true.

For those who conclude that the entire story of Jesus is fiction, is it reasonable to conclude that a legendary figure could become the center of the human race? Would such skeptics think it's probable that 2,000 years from now a fictional character, such as Sam in *The Lord of the Rings*, will have become the most influential human being in history? We don't have enough faith to believe that.

Instead, only a real person could become history's most influential figure. In fact, as I (Frank) show in the book *Hollywood Heroes: How Your Favorite Movies Reveal God*, the fictional heroes in the top movie franchises of the last fifty years—including Sam in *The Lord of the Rings*—are all modeled after the ultimate hero, Jesus of Nazareth.[3]

The Box Top

We began this book by seeking the "box top" to this puzzle we call life. We said that if we could find the box top, we'd be able to answer the five most consequential questions that confront every human being. Since we now know beyond a reasonable doubt that the box top is the Bible, let's revisit those five questions to see what the answers are.

1. *Origin: Where did we come from?* We are created beings, wonderfully made by God in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:27; Ps. 139:14).

2. *Identity: Who are we?* Since we are made in the image and likeness of God, we are creatures of supreme worth to whom God offers an eternal identity. Christianity is the only worldview in which you don't *achieve* your identity; you *receive* your identity. You become a child of God and are welcomed into his kingdom by repenting and accepting Christ's gift of forgiveness and righteousness (John 1:12; 3:16–18; 2 Cor. 5:21). That's an eternal identity that you cannot lose!

3. *Meaning: Why are we here?* Adam and Eve were created in a state of innocence, but their choice to disobey condemned the human race to punishment in accordance with the infinite justice of God (Gen. 3:6–19). Since that time, each of us has confirmed the choice of Adam and Eve through our own disobedience (Rom. 3:10–12; 5:12). We remain in this fallen state so that we can make free choices that will have implications in eternity. This temporal life is the choosing ground for the eternal one. Choices we can make that will bring glory to God (Isa. 43:7; John 15:8), and may bring us eternal rewards, include:

- *Accepting* the ransom Jesus paid in order to free us from eternal punishment and welcome us into his eternal presence (Mark 10:45; Luke 16:9; John 14:2; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 9:15)
- *Serving* as ambassadors for Christ to help others make that same choice (2 Cor. 5:17–21; Matt. 28:19–20)
- *Learning* from our own sufferings to comfort others who suffer (2 Cor. 1:3–4), and realizing that our sufferings enhance our own capacity to become more like Jesus and to enjoy God now and in eternity (Rom. 8:28–29; 2 Cor. 4:15–5:1; 2 Pet. 1:5–11)

4. *Morality: How should we live?* Since God first loved us, we should love him and others (Rom. 5:8; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 John 4:19–21). In fact, the "whole duty of man" is to "fear God and keep his commandments" (Eccl. 12:13). This includes making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19) and enjoying the good things God gives us (1 Tim. 6:17).

5. *Destiny: Where are we going?* God's infinite justice demands that he punish us for our sins, but because of his infinite love he has taken the punishment on himself (Isa. 53:4, 10, 12; Rom. 3:26; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24). This is the *only* way he could remain just and still justify sinners (John 14:6; Rom. 3:26). His gift of salvation from eternal punishment is free to all the world (John 3:16; Eph. 2:8–9; Rev. 22:17). It cannot be earned through

good works or any kind of merit. And God wants everyone to be saved from the eternal punishment we all deserve (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). But since he cannot force us to love him (forced love is a contradiction), each one of us must choose for ourselves whom we will serve (Josh. 24:15; John 3:18).

You say, "Ok, maybe so. But I'm still not sure I can accept that Jesus is the only way or that God would send people to hell." The rest of this chapter will address objections like those. We'll start with a judge and his son.

Do Good Works Cancel Bad Works?

A young man is brought before a judge for drunken driving. When his name is announced by the bailiff, there's a gasp in the courtroom—the defendant is the judge's son! The judge hopes his son is innocent, but the evidence that is presented is irrefutable. He's guilty.

What can the judge do? He's caught in a dilemma between justice and love. Since his son is guilty, he deserves punishment. But the judge doesn't want to punish his son because of his great love for him.

He reluctantly announces the sentence: "Son, you can either pay a $10,000 fine or go to jail."

The son looks up at the judge and says, "But, Dad, I promise to be good from now on! I'll volunteer at soup kitchens. I'll visit the elderly. I'll even open a home to care for abused children. And I'll never do anything wrong again! Please let me go!"

At this point, the judge asks, "Are you still drunk? You can't do all of that. But even if you could, your future good deeds can't change the fact that you're already guilty of drunken driving." Indeed, the judge realizes that *good works cannot cancel bad works*! Perfect justice demands that his son be punished for what he has done.

So the judge repeats, "I'm sorry, Son. As much as I'd like to allow you to go, I'm bound by the law. The punishment for this crime is $10,000 or you go to jail."

The son pleads with his father, "But, Dad, you know I don't have $10,000. There has to be another way to avoid jail!"

The judge stands up and takes off his robe. He walks down from his raised bench and gets down to his son's level. Standing eye to eye next to his son, he reaches into his pocket, pulls out a check, writes one for $10,000 to his son, and holds it out. The son is startled, but he understands there's only one thing he can do to be free—take the money. Good works or promises of good

works cannot set him free. Only the acceptance of his father's gift of grace can save the son from certain punishment.

God is in a situation like that of the judge—he's caught in a dilemma between his justice and his love. Since we've all sinned many times in our lives, God's infinite justice demands that he punish us. But because of his infinite love, God wants to find a way to avoid punishing us.

What's the *only way* God can remain just but not punish us for our sins? He must punish a sinless substitute who voluntarily takes our punishment for us. The substitute must be sinless because he must pay for our sins, not his own. And the substitute must take our place voluntarily because it would be unjust to punish the substitute against his will. Where can God find a sinless substitute? Not from sinful humanity, but only from himself. Indeed, God *himself* is the substitute. Just as the judge came down from his bench to save his child, God came down from heaven to save you and me from punishment. And we all deserve punishment. We do. You do.

"But I'm a good person!" you say. Perhaps you are "good" compared to Adolf Hitler or even the man next door. But God's standard isn't Hitler or the man next door. His standard is moral perfection because his unchanging nature is moral perfection.

Besides, you're not all that good and neither are we. Anyone who says that human beings are inherently good has never had a two-year-old or a teenager! When we *honestly* reflect on our own behavior and tendencies, we are forced to admit that it's much easier to be bad than good; much easier to be selfish than selfless. If you sin just once per day, by age 70 you'll have a rap sheet over 25,000 crimes long. Does that sound like a "good" person? No, at best you might be *less evil* than other bad people—but you're still bad.

Yet the greatest myth believed today when it comes to religion is that "being good" will get you to heaven. According to this view, it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're a "good person" and your good deeds outweigh your bad. But this is false, because a perfectly just God must punish bad deeds regardless of how many good ones someone has performed.

Even our justice system recognizes that fact. No just judge would say that you deserve no punishment for a murder because you've done a lot of other good deeds: "Sure I murdered the victim, your honor, but look how many times I volunteered at the soup kitchen. And look at how many people I *haven't* murdered!" That's not going to fly with a human judge, and certainly not with an infinitely just judge. Once we've sinned against an

infinitely just eternal Being—and we all have—we deserve eternal punishment, and no good deed can change that fact.

Jesus came to offer us a way out of that punishment and to offer us eternal life. Paradise lost in Genesis becomes paradise regained in Revelation. So when Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” and “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6), he was not making an arbitrary claim but a statement that reflected the reality of the universe. Jesus is the only way because there is only one way God can reconcile his infinite justice and his infinite love (Rom. 3:26). If there were any other way, then God allowed Christ to die for nothing (Gal. 2:21).

John Lennox tells of the time he asked a young lady, Sally, to marry him. He gave her a cookbook and told her, “If you obey this cookbook and perform well for about forty years, then I’ll see about accepting you. And if you don’t like that, you can go back to your mother.”

Lennox says, “Audiences roar when I tell them that,” but he then quickly adds with a laugh, “Of course I didn’t do that! If I had, she would have rightly thrown that book in my face and stormed off!”[4]

He then asks, “But why do we think God works that way? Why do we think we have to obey a book before God will love us?” Do your kids have to perform for you before you love them?

No, God has loved us from the beginning, and he saves us by grace. Paul writes in his theological masterpiece known as the letter to the Romans, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). And Jesus declared that his mission was to perform the greatest act of love by laying down his life for his friends: “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45 NIV; see also John 15:13).[5]

Like the judge did for his guilty son, God satisfies his justice by punishing Jesus for our sins and offering that payment for each one of us. All we need to do to be set free is to accept the gift. There’s only one problem: *Just as the judge couldn’t force his son to accept the gift, God can’t force you to accept his gift either.* His love means that he even respects your decision to reject him.

The Servant King

You can reject Christ because he has left your free will truly free.[6] Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard helps us understand how God seeks to save

us while respecting our freedom. He tells a parable about a king who loves a humble maiden, summarized as follows:

> The king was like no other king. Every statesman trembled before his power. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents.
>
> And yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden who lived in a poor village in his kingdom. How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her body in royal robes, she would surely not resist—no one dared resist him. But would she love him?
>
> She would say she loved him, of course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind? Would she be happy at his side? How could he know for sure?
>
> If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover, an equal. He wanted her to forget that he was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross the gulf between them. For it is only in love that the unequal can be made equal.

This is exactly the problem God has in his pursuit of you and me—if he overwhelms us with his power, we may not be free to love him (love and power are often inversely related). And even if we retain our freedom, we may not love *him* but merely love what he gives us. What can God do? Here's what the king did:

> The king, convinced he could not elevate the maiden without crushing her freedom, resolved to *descend* to her. Clothed as a beggar, he approached her cottage with a worn cloak fluttering loose about him. This was not just a disguise—the king took on a totally new identity—he had renounced his throne to declare his love and to win hers.[7]

This is exactly what God did to win you and me! He descended to the human level. In fact, he descended to one of the lowest social levels possible—to that of a servant. Paul describes Christ's sacrifice this way in his letter to

the Philippians (2:5–8 NIV 1984):

> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
>
> Who, being in very nature God,
> did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
> but made himself nothing,
> taking the very nature of a servant,
> being made in human likeness.
> And being found in appearance as a man,
> he humbled himself
> and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Imagine, the Creator of the universe humbling himself by coming to serve, suffer, and die at the hands of the very creatures he created! Why would he do this? Because his infinite love compels him to offer salvation to those made in his image. And taking the form of a human servant was the only way he could offer us that salvation without negating our ability to accept it.

It's one thing to acknowledge that Christ took "the very nature of a servant" to save us from our sins. It's quite another to fathom the magnitude of his suffering. Most of us take it for granted. C. Truman Davis wrote a vivid description of Christ's suffering and crucifixion, which we have adapted into the following account.[8]

The Suffering of the Servant King

The whip the Roman soldiers use on Jesus has small iron balls and sharp pieces of sheep bones tied to it. Jesus is stripped of his clothing, and his hands are tied to an upright post. His back, buttocks, and legs are whipped either by one soldier or by two who alternate positions. The soldiers taunt their victim. As they repeatedly strike Jesus's back with full force, the iron balls cause deep contusions, and the sheep bones cut into the skin and tissues. As the whipping continues, the lacerations tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh. Pain and blood loss set the stage for circulatory shock.

When it is determined by the centurion in charge that Jesus is near death, the beating is finally stopped. The half-fainting Jesus is then untied and allowed to slump to the stone pavement, wet with his own blood. The Roman soldiers see a great joke in this provincial Jew claiming to be a king. They

throw a robe across his shoulders and place a stick in his hand for a scepter. They still need a crown to make their travesty complete. A small bundle of flexible branches covered with long thorns are plaited into the shape of a crown, and this is pressed into his scalp. Again there is copious bleeding (the scalp being one of the most vascular areas of the body). After mocking him and striking him across the face, the soldiers take the stick from his hand and strike him across the head, driving the thorns deeper into his scalp.

Finally, when they tire of their sadistic sport, the robe is torn from his back. The robe had already become adherent to the clots of blood and serum in the wounds, and its removal—just as in the careless removal of a surgical bandage—causes excruciating pain, almost as though he were being whipped again. The wounds again begin to bleed. In deference to Jewish custom, the Romans return his garments. The heavy horizontal beam of the cross is tied across his shoulders, and the procession of the condemned Christ, two thieves, and the execution party walk along the Via Dolorosa. In spite of his efforts to walk erect, the weight of the heavy wooden beam, together with the shock produced by copious blood loss, is too much. He stumbles and falls. The rough wood of the beam gouges into the lacerated skin and muscles of the shoulders. He tries to rise, but human muscles have been pushed beyond their endurance. The centurion, anxious to get on with the crucifixion, selects a stalwart North African onlooker, Simon of Cyrene, to carry the crossbeam. Jesus follows, still bleeding and sweating the cold, clammy sweat of shock.

The 650-yard journey from the Fortress Antonia to Golgotha is finally completed. Jesus is again stripped of his clothes except for a loincloth, which is allowed the Jews. The crucifixion begins. Jesus is offered wine mixed with myrrh, a mild pain-killing mixture. He refuses to drink. Simon is ordered to place the crossbeam on the ground, and Jesus is quickly thrown backward with his shoulders against the wood. The legionnaire feels for the depression at the front of the wrist. He drives a heavy, square, wrought-iron nail through the wrist and deep into the wood. Quickly, he moves to the other side and repeats the action, being careful not to pull the arms too tight, but to allow some flexibility and movement. The beam is then lifted, and the inscription, reading “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” is nailed in place.

The victim Jesus is now crucified. As he slowly sags down with more weight on the nails in the wrists, excruciating, fiery pain shoots along the fingers and up the arms to explode in the brain—the nails in the wrists are putting pressure on the median nerves. As he pushes himself upward to avoid

this stretching torment, he places his full weight on the nail through his feet. Again, there is the searing agony of the nail tearing through the nerves between the metatarsal bones of the feet. At this point, another phenomenon occurs. As the arms fatigue, great waves of cramps sweep over the muscles, knotting them in deep, relentless, throbbing pain. With these cramps comes the inability to push himself upward. Hanging by his arms, the pectoral muscles are paralyzed, and the intercostal muscles are unable to act. Air can be drawn into the lungs but it cannot be exhaled. Jesus fights to raise himself in order to get even one short breath. Finally, carbon dioxide builds up in the lungs and in the bloodstream, and the cramps partially subside. Spasmodically, he is able to push himself upward to exhale and bring in the life-giving oxygen. It is undoubtedly during these periods that he utters the seven short sentences that are recorded.

Now begin hours of this limitless pain, cycles of cramping and twisting, partial asphyxiation, searing pain as tissue is torn from his lacerated back as he moves up and down against the rough timber. Then another agony begins. A deep, crushing pain in the chest as the pericardium slowly fills with serum and begins to compress the heart. It is now almost over—the loss of tissue fluids has reached a critical level; the compressed heart is struggling to pump heavy, thick, sluggish blood into the tissues; the tortured lungs are making a frantic effort to gasp in small gulps of air. The markedly dehydrated tissues send their flood of stimuli to the brain. His mission of atonement has been completed. Finally he can allow his body to die. With one last surge of strength, he once again presses his torn feet against the nail, straightens his legs, takes a deeper breath, and utters his seventh and last cry: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”

Jesus went through all of that so you and I could be reconciled to him, so you and I could be saved from our sins by affirming, *Father, into your hands I commit my life.*

Objections to Hell and the Afterlife

“Is My Mom in Hell?”

During a debate at the University of Michigan, atheist Eddie Tabash said to me (Frank), “My mom suffered greatly in her life. Before she died, a Christian shared the gospel with her, but she rejected it. Is she in hell right now?”

I said, “Eddie, I don’t know if you mother had a death-bed conversion, but

if she didn't accept Christ before she died, then God was too loving to force her into *heaven* against her will."

See, the assumption is that everyone *wants* to go to heaven. That is not true. Who is in heaven? Jesus. People have been running from Jesus their entire lives. What's he going to do in the afterlife—force them into his presence? How would that be loving?

Okay, but how is hell loving?

To explain, I asked the ladies in the audience at the University of Michigan that night, "Have you ever had a man pursue you whom you did not want to date?" One lady in the back yelled at the top of her lungs, "Yes!" (The guy was probably sitting right next to her!)

Ladies, if that has ever happened to you, what do you say to that guy if he keeps asking you out?

"Look, I like you, but only as a *friend*."

But suppose this doesn't deter him. He keeps asking you out, and he finally declares, "Look, I love you so much I am going to force you to love me!"

Can he do that? No, love must be freely given. It cannot be forced. So if he truly did love you, what would he do?

He would leave you alone.

That's what God does for us. He sends us cards, letters, and flowers. He sends us creation, conscience, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, pastors, churches, missionaries, Christian media, apologists, friends, and so on. He may even send you a dream or a vision, as some in Muslim countries are experiencing today.[9]

But if he does all that and you keep resisting God, then he will give you up to your own desire. He will leave you alone, quarantined in a place called hell. Paul describes hell as a place where those "who do not know God and . . . do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus . . . will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:8–9).

Imagine being shut out from the source of all goodness in a place where there are no relationships, no love, and no hope for a future. In hell, there is just stone-cold, narcissistic self-absorption. It's where "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12) against God goes on forever.

The late Tim Keller described it well:

A common image of hell in the Bible is that of fire. Fire disintegrates.

> Even in this life we can see the kind of soul disintegration that self-centeredness creates. We know how selfishness and self-absorption leads to piercing bitterness, nauseating envy, paralyzing anxiety, paranoid thoughts, and the mental denials and distortions that accompany them. Now ask the question: "What if when we die we don't end, but spiritually our life extends on into eternity?" Hell, then, is the trajectory of the soul, living a self-absorbed, self-centered life, going on and on forever.[10]

What is God supposed to do with people who have put themselves in this state by their own choice?

"God Will Just Annihilate Those Who Don't Believe"

No, he won't. Hell is real. In fact, Jesus spoke more of hell than he did of heaven. God will not annihilate unbelievers because he will not destroy creatures made in his own image. That would be an attack on himself. (What would you think of an earthly father who killed his son just because his son chose not to do what his father wanted him to do?) God is too loving to destroy those who don't want to be in his presence. His only choice is to quarantine those who reject him. That's what hell does—it quarantines evil, which is contagious.

"I Can't Believe in a God Who Would Torture People in Hell"

Hell is not described as torture but as *torment*, which is the anguish that people experience over their crimes, unrepentant state, and being separated from God. They are like the addict who regrets his condition but does not repent of it and continues to commit a kind of slow suicide by pursuing the addiction.

In the Bible, those in hell do not ask to get out (Luke 16:23, 28). They may not want hell, but they *will* it. In other words, hell's doors are locked on the *inside*.

Hell is an awful place, yet it's also a place of perfect justice. The punishment is not the same for everyone in hell, just as the reward is not the same for everyone in heaven. Jesus talked about greater commandments, greater judgments, and the fact that to whom much is given, much will be required (Mark 12:24–31, 38–40; Luke 12:48). The opposite is true as well. Those who have less light will not be judged as severely as those who have

more light (more on this below).[11]

"God Is Unjust for Sending People to Hell Just Because They Don't Believe in Jesus"

First, that charge assumes an objective moral standard that requires God to exist. If God doesn't exist, no moral objection can be true. But second, the charge isn't true. The reason people go to hell is because they've sinned, and they've committed many sins other than rejecting Jesus.

To see the error in this objection, just consider this question: "Do people die just because they don't go to the doctor?" No, they die because they have a disease. Perhaps you could avoid dying (at least temporarily) by going to the doctor to get the cure, but the reason you're dying is because you have a disease.

Likewise, you don't go to hell merely because you don't go to the great physician (Jesus); you go to hell because you've contracted a disease by your sin. Since God is perfectly just, he cannot allow sin to go unpunished. Jesus paid for everyone's sins, but not everyone wants the cure. Hence, hell is necessary for those who refuse to go to the great physician to get the cure. Those who go to the great physician are forgiven and given his righteousness.

"It's Wrong to Punish Someone Eternally for Temporal Sins"

This also is a moral objection that requires God to exist, and it doesn't work either. Just like in the American justice system, the severity of the crime dictates the length of the punishment, not the time it took to commit the crime. A murder might take a few seconds to commit, but the punishment should certainly be longer than a few seconds! Moreover, crimes against the infinite, eternal Being are the most severe and demand eternal punishment. And since people continue to sin and rebel in hell, the punishment continues.

"God Will Save Everybody"

How? Against their will? Some people would rather be ruined than changed. They'd rather continue their rebellion than be reformed. So God says, "Have it your way. You may continue your rebellion, but you'll be separated from others so you can't pollute the rest of my creation." Besides, it would be unloving of God to send people who can't bear to spend an hour on Sunday praising him to a place where they will be praising him for eternity. That

would be “hell” to them!

“I Can’t Believe There Is Only One Way to God”

Why not? Do you need more than one way to get into a building? Do you bring this charge against Muslims for saying that Islam is the only way? How about Hindus? They say reincarnation is the only way to salvation. We have shown philosophically and biblically that Jesus is the only way to reconcile infinite justice and infinite love. If that’s not true, then God sent Jesus to die a brutal death for nothing.

“But What About Those Who Have Never Heard?”

This objection also assumes a moral standard by suggesting God is unjust for not getting his gospel to everyone. Besides that, there are several responses to it.

First, there is no one who has never heard about God. Everyone knows of a Creator God who is moral because of God’s works that everyone has access to: creation and conscience (the Bible teaches as much in Rom. 1:18–20; 2:14–15).

Second, those who seek God through his works will be rewarded (Heb. 11:6) with knowledge about the gospel. Since God wants everyone to be saved (even more than we do, 2 Pet. 3:9), he will ensure that seekers get the information they need. Jesus also said that the Holy Spirit will “convict the *world* concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). While some respond, others can resist that conviction and continue to go their own way.

But there are still people who never hear about Jesus! True, and that leads to our next response.

Third, we all know people who hear the gospel and reject it. It could be that people who never hear the gospel wouldn’t have accepted it even if they heard it. That’s one possible implication of Paul telling the unbelieving Athenians how God has put people in certain places and times so that they would find him. He said, “[God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26–27). In other words, since God is all knowing, he puts people who want him where they will find him, and may

not provide more light to some he knows will reject him. After all, those who hear the gospel and reject it are more culpable than those who never hear (see Luke 12:47–48; John 15:22).

Fourth, since God is infinitely just (Gen. 18:25; Ps. 9:8; Rom. 3:26), no one will go to hell who should go to heaven, and vice versa. Those in hell will get perfect justice—nothing more, nothing less. And justice is a good thing (people are screaming for it everywhere we go). Those in heaven will get unmerited grace. And grace is a better thing!

Finally, while this question of the unevangelized is a good one, it shouldn't affect your decision—*you have heard!* While you investigate the question, C. S. Lewis has this wise advice:

> In the meantime, if you are worried about people on the outside, the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself. Christians are Christ's body, the organism through which he works. Every addition to that body enables Him to do more. If you want to help those outside, you must add your own little cell to the body of Christ who alone can help them. Cutting off a man's fingers would be an odd way of getting him to do more work.[12]

"You Christians Just Want to Scare People with Hell!"

No, we just want people to know the truth. If that scares them, maybe it should. We certainly don't like what the Bible says about hell. Emotionally we wish it weren't true. But Jesus, who is God, taught it, and for good reason. It seems to be necessary. Without a hell, the injustices in this world would never be righted: people have gotten away with murder, slavery, rape, the sex trafficking of children, and so much more. If you object to hell, you're objecting to people getting justice. Why scream for better justice here on earth—as so many young people rightfully do—but oppose perfect justice in eternity, which is a place called hell?

Without hell, the free choices of people would not be respected, and the greater good of a redemption could never be accomplished. If there is no heaven to seek and no hell to shun, then nothing in this universe has any ultimate meaning—your choices, your pleasures, your sufferings, and your life and the lives of your loved ones ultimately mean nothing. We struggle through this life for no ultimate reason, and Christ died for nothing. Without heaven and hell, this incredibly designed universe is a stairway to nowhere.

“So what?” says the atheist. “Maybe this universe *is* a stairway to nowhere. Just because you want life to have meaning doesn’t mean it does.” True. But we don’t just *want* life to have meaning—we have *evidence* that it has meaning.[13]

Your Destiny: Justice or Grace?

Everyone you love will die.

Everything you build will crumble.

Everything you say will be forgotten.

Everything you do will come to nothing.

You and your identity will die and vanish.

Unless the resurrection is true.

If Jesus did not die and rise, then we are still in our sins (1 Cor. 15:17). We will all be judged for what we’ve done.

Thankfully, the evidence shows the resurrection is true. The only question is, “To where are you going to be resurrected?” That’s up to you. There are only two things you can get in the afterlife: justice or grace. As you look back on everything you’ve done in your life—good and bad—do you really want justice? We don’t.

So what’s the way forward? In order to respect your free choice, God has made the evidence for Christianity sufficient but not compelling. If you want to suppress or ignore the evidence all around you (Rom. 1:18–20)—including that which is presented in this book—then you are free to do so. But that would be a volitional act, not a rational one. You can reject Christ, but can you honestly say there’s not enough evidence to believe in him?

You say, “I believe that Jesus rose from the dead.” Good. But merely believing *that* Jesus rose from the dead is not enough. Even the demons believe *that* God exists, but they “shudder” (James 2:19). You need to put your trust *in* him.

Why? Because you can believe *that* a certain person would make a great spouse, but that’s not enough to make that person your husband or wife. You must go beyond the intellectual to the volitional—you must put your trust *in* that person by saying, “I do.” The same is true concerning your relationship with God. Trusting him is not just a decision of the head but one of the heart as well. If you truly trust and love him, you will deny yourself and follow his commands.

Now, we need to say this again because this is the most unique aspect of

Christianity—the aspect that makes Christianity different from every other world religion—yet people still miss it: *You are not saved from punishment by doing good works, following God's commands, or having your good deeds outweigh your bad. You are saved by grace through faith in the work of Jesus, not your own work* (Eph. 2:8). Following his commands is evidence that you are truly saved (James 2:18), but it doesn't save you.

The word *grace* is found 185 times in the Bible, yet people still miss it! In fact, the story of the Bible can be summed up in three short sentences:

1. God created it.
2. We broke it.
3. Jesus fixed it.

We can't completely fix our problem by doing good works. Jesus fixed our problem by doing good works, living the perfect life in our place, and taking our punishment on himself. His record is substituted for ours by grace. The choice each of us needs to make is whether we will accept the work he did as our own.

If you don't, God will respect your free choice—he's not going to force you into his presence against your will. C. S. Lewis said it best when he wrote,

> There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "*Thy* will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there would be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.[14]

The door is being held open by Jesus Christ. How can you walk through it? Paul wrote, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved" (Rom. 10:9).

If you trust in Christ, your deepest longings for transcendence—for love, forgiveness, and significance—will one day be completely fulfilled. As Lewis put it, "The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last."[15]

What happens if you freely choose *not* to walk through the door Jesus is

holding open? Jesus said you will remain in your condemned state: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, *but whoever does not believe is condemned already*, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:17–18). In other words, you’ll get justice—you’ll remain condemned and separated from God forever. God will respect your choice by saying to you, “*Thy* will be done.”

But that doesn’t have to be your destiny. We end with the greatest news anyone could ever hear. Your choices do matter. Your life does have ultimate meaning. And thanks to Christ, no one must experience hell. Every human being can accept grace. It takes no effort at all. Does it take some faith? Yes, but every choice—even the choice to reject Christ—requires faith. Since the evidence shows beyond a reasonable doubt that the Bible is true, accepting Christ is the choice that requires the *least* amount of faith. The choice is up to you. Do you have enough faith to believe anything else?

You say, “I still have doubts and questions.” So what? We do too. So do atheists and people of other religions. Everyone has doubts and questions about ultimate reality. And why shouldn’t we? As finite creatures, we shouldn’t expect to understand everything about an infinite God and how he does things. Paul certainly didn’t (Rom. 11:33–36), and many of the Old Testament writers expressed doubts and even questioned God.[16] Should we expect otherwise? It would be strange if an infinite God wasn’t strange to us.

Since we are finite creatures who must make our decisions based on probability, there must be a point where we realize that the weight of the evidence comes down on one side or the other. We’ll never have *all* the answers. But as we have seen throughout this book, there are more than enough answers to give God the benefit of our doubts.

Finally, have you ever thought about doubting your doubts? Just ask yourself, “Is it reasonable to doubt that Christianity is true in light of all the evidence?” Probably not. In fact, *in light of the evidence, you ought to have many more doubts about atheism and every other non-Christian belief system.* They cannot explain what we do know about reality. And don’t let what you don’t know cause you to doubt what you do know. So start doubting your doubts and trust Christ. It takes too much faith to believe anything else!

Appendix 1

If God, Why Evil?

ATHEIST: If there really is an all-good, all-powerful, theistic God, then why does he allow evil?

CHRISTIAN: How do you know what evil is unless you know what good is? And how do you know what good is unless there is an objective standard of good beyond yourself?

ATHEIST: Don't try to avoid the question.

CHRISTIAN: I'm not trying to avoid the question. I'm simply showing you that your complaint presupposes that God exists. In fact, the existence of evil doesn't disprove God. It may prove that there is a devil, but it doesn't prove that there's no God.

ATHEIST: Interesting move, but I'm not convinced.

CHRISTIAN: You may not be convinced, but your complaint still presupposes God.

ATHEIST: For the sake of argument, suppose I grant you that God exists. Will you then answer the question?

CHRISTIAN: Sure. It's good to see you're making progress.

ATHEIST: Remember, it's just for the sake of argument. So why doesn't your so-called "all-powerful" God stop evil?

CHRISTIAN: Do you really want him to?

ATHEIST: Of course!

CHRISTIAN: Suppose he starts with you?

ATHEIST: Be serious.

CHRISTIAN: No, really. We always talk about God stopping evil, but we forget that if he did, he would have to stop us too. We all do evil. In fact, if God were to stop evil at midnight tonight, would you still be

alive at 12:01?

ATHEIST: Oh, come on! We're not talking about the minor sins of you and me—we're talking about real evil, like what Adolf Hitler did!

CHRISTIAN: My point is not the degree of evil but the source of evil. The source of evil is our ability to make free choices in our fallen state. If God were to do away with evil, then he would have to do away with free choice. And if he did away with our free choice, we would no longer have the ability to love or do good. This would no longer be a moral world.

ATHEIST: But not all evil is due to free choice. Why do babies die? Why do natural disasters occur?

CHRISTIAN: The Bible traces it all back to the fall of man. No one is innocent because we all sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12) and we inevitably sin ourselves. None of us are righteous (Rom. 3:10). Consequently, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). Natural disasters and premature deaths are a direct result of the curse on creation because of the fall of humankind (Gen. 3; Rom. 8:20–23). This fallen world will not be righted until Christ returns (Rev. 21–22). So no one is guaranteed a trouble-free life or a full life of eighty years.

ATHEIST: Oh, isn't that convenient—dust off the Bible and tell us that God will make it right in the end! I'm not interested in the future. I want pain and suffering to end now! Why won't God end it?

CHRISTIAN: He will end it, but just not on your timetable. Just because God hasn't ended evil *yet* doesn't mean that he never will end it.

ATHEIST: But why doesn't Christ return right now to end all this pain? The sum of human pain is enormous!

CHRISTIAN: First, no one is experiencing the sum of human pain. If it's 80 degrees in Manhattan, 85 degrees in Brooklyn, and 80 degrees in Queens, does any New Yorker experience a heat of 245 degrees?

ATHEIST: No.

CHRISTIAN: That's right. Each person experiences his own pain.

ATHEIST: But that still doesn't tell me why God doesn't end it all now. Why is he waiting?

CHRISTIAN: If God wanted to end evil now, he could. But have you thought that maybe God has other goals that he would like to accomplish while evil exists?

ATHEIST: Like what?

CHRISTIAN: For starters, he would like to have more people choose heaven before he closes the curtain on this world. Paul seems to indicate that Jesus will come back after "the full number" of people become believers (Rom. 11:25 NIV 1984).

ATHEIST: Well, while God is waiting for the "full number" of people to be saved, other people are hurting!

CHRISTIAN: Yes, they are. And that means Christians have a job to do. We have the privilege of helping those who are hurting. We are ambassadors for Christ here on earth.

ATHEIST: That's nice, but if I were suffering, I'd rather have *God* help me than you!

CHRISTIAN: If God prevented pain every time we got into trouble, then we would become the most reckless, self-centered creatures in the universe. And we would never learn from suffering.

ATHEIST: Learn from suffering! What are you talking about?

CHRISTIAN: Ah, you've just hit on another reason why God doesn't end evil right now. Can you name me one enduring lesson that you ever learned from pleasure?

ATHEIST: Give me a minute.

CHRISTIAN: I could give you an hour; I doubt that you would come up with much. If you think about it, you'll find that virtually every valuable lesson you've ever learned resulted from some hardship in your life. In most cases, bad fortune teaches while good fortune deceives. That's why prosperity can sometimes result in a bigger problem than poverty. We all know people who have been ruined by too much success.

ATHEIST: Yeah, my uncle won the lottery and five years later he was broke. Didn't know how to handle it.

CHRISTIAN: Prosperity may hurt people who haven't developed enough virtue, whereas suffering can build virtue. Although none of us want to go through it, suffering is practically the only way you can learn lessons and develop virtues.

ATHEIST: Why do you say that?

CHRISTIAN: Because you can't develop courage unless there is danger. You can't develop perseverance unless you have obstacles in your way. You won't learn how to be a servant unless there's someone to serve. And compassion would never be summoned if there were never anyone

in pain or in need. It's the old adage: "No pain, no gain." That's one reason why the Bible doesn't promise us a pain-free life here—it promises the opposite. For example, Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33 NIV 1984), and Paul said, "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus *will be* persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

ATHEIST: But I know people who have gone through pain and suffering, and it made them worse. They are mad at God!

CHRISTIAN: And in other people it brings them closer to God. Sometimes you only look up when you're on your back.

ATHEIST: So God is unfair!

CHRISTIAN: No, each person decides how he or she responds. We all have a choice on how we respond to suffering: We can become *better* or *bitter*. The same sun that softens wax hardens clay. Suffering can make you better if you allow it to develop virtues in you.

ATHEIST: But I wouldn't need all those virtues if God would just end evil right now!

CHRISTIAN: But since God has reasons for *not* ending evil right now, you need to develop virtues for this life and the life hereafter. Sometimes you have to go through the wilderness to get to the promised land. As Peter Kreeft put it, "The point of our lives in this world is not comfort, security, or even happiness; but training. Not fulfillment but preparation. It's a lousy home, but it's a fine gymnasium."[1]

ATHEIST: You Christians always punt to the hereafter. You're so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good!

CHRISTIAN: We may be heavenly minded, but we know that what we do on earth matters in eternity. Virtues that believers develop through suffering will enhance their capacity to enjoy eternity. Paul says that "this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17; cf. Rom. 8:18).

ATHEIST: How is hardship here going to help me feel better in a place where there's not going to be any pain anyway?

CHRISTIAN: You like football, don't you?

ATHEIST: I've watched a few games.

CHRISTIAN: How does every player on the Super Bowl-winning team feel after the game?

ATHEIST: Great, of course!

CHRISTIAN: Does the quarterback of the winning team—who also won the MVP trophy—enjoy the victory more than the third-string quarterback, who didn't play a down all year?

ATHEIST: I suppose so.

CHRISTIAN: Of course he does. While the third-string quarterback is happy to be on the winning team, the victory is much sweeter for the QB who won the MVP trophy because he contributed to the win and persevered through the entire year to get there. By persisting through all the hardships and pains of playing, he enhanced his capacity to enjoy the victory. And it's made even sweeter by the MVP trophy.

ATHEIST: What does football have to do with heaven?

CHRISTIAN: Heaven will be like the winning locker room (but without the smell!). We'll all be happy to be there, but some will have a greater ability to enjoy it and have more rewards than others. After all, God's justice demands that there will be degrees of rewards in heaven just like there will be degrees of punishment in hell.

ATHEIST: So you're saying life is like a Super Bowl?

CHRISTIAN: To a certain extent, yes. Like a Super Bowl, life has rules, a referee, and rewards. But in life there are no spectators—everyone is in the game—and we already know who will win. Christ will win, and anyone, regardless of ability, can be a winner simply by joining the team. While everyone on the team will enjoy the victory parade, some will appreciate it even more because of the hardships they experienced during the game and the rewards they receive for playing it well. In other words, the feeling of victory is greater the more intense the battle is.

ATHEIST: So you're saying that evil has a purpose that has implications in eternity.

CHRISTIAN. Yes.

ATHEIST: Why do you insist on putting everything in light of eternity?

CHRISTIAN: Because we're all going to be dead a lot longer than we're going to be alive! Furthermore, the Bible teaches us to look to the eternal, and life makes sense only in light of eternity. If there is no eternity, then there is no ultimate purpose for anything, pleasures or pains.

ATHEIST: Suppose there is no eternity. Suppose we live, we die, and that's it.

CHRISTIAN: It's possible, but *I don't have enough faith to believe it.*

ATHEIST: Why not?

CHRISTIAN: Haven't you read this book?

ATHEIST: No, I jumped right to this appendix.

CHRISTIAN: That's just like you, isn't it? You don't want to play the game; you just want to see the final score.

ATHEIST: I suppose I suffer from the American disease of instant gratification.

CHRISTIAN: That's probably why you're having trouble realizing the value of suffering and "No pain, no gain!"

ATHEIST: You're right, reading this book is too painful. It's too long.

CHRISTIAN: It could be shorter if we didn't have to address all those crazy objections you atheists bring up. Besides, you've got time to read. Sunday mornings are free for you.

ATHEIST: There are many less painful things I could do on Sunday mornings.

CHRISTIAN: Look, I know this book may be painful to read, but it's more painful to reject its conclusion. You've got to read this book from beginning to end if you want to see the whole argument for Christianity. The case is laid out in logical order. Each chapter builds on the previous one.

ATHEIST: All right, I'll read the book. But in the meantime, let's get back to the question of evil. If there is an eternity, then some evils in this world may have an eternal purpose. But there are certainly some evil acts in this world that have absolutely no purpose.

CHRISTIAN: How could you know that?

ATHEIST: It's obvious! What good purpose could there be in, say, a baby dying? My friend, who is a Christian, had her baby die even after the entire church prayed for healing. Some loving God!

CHRISTIAN: I'm sorry. When something terrible like this happens, people don't need answers, they need comfort. They don't need a philosopher like me. They need a pastor.

ATHEIST: So you're admitting there is no answer?

CHRISTIAN: No, I'm just saying it's not the time to speculate about answers right after someone's child dies.

ATHEIST: That was twenty years ago. What would you say to her now if she asked?

CHRISTIAN: I would first ask her if there was anything unexpected that came out of that terrible tragedy—anything that, looking back over twenty years, affected her or her family for good. Perhaps something life-changing was learned or people became Christians as a result. Sometimes you only look up when you're on your back. As C. S. Lewis said, pain is God's "megaphone to rouse a deaf world."[2]

ATHEIST: Isn't it heartless to ask a woman who lost her baby to find some good in it?

CHRISTIAN: You said she's the one asking for answers. If it's twenty years later, she might now realize at the very least it helped her or others in some way.

ATHEIST: Well, I'm sure you can find a silver lining in just about anything, but there's no way your "silver lining" outweighs the pain and suffering.

CHRISTIAN: How could you know that?

ATHEIST: Know what?

CHRISTIAN: That there's nothing positive coming from a tragedy. It's impossible to know because of the ripple effect, which is the fact that every event in this world ripples forward to affect trillions of other events. Unless you are all-knowing and have an eternal perspective, how do you know tragedies will not work together for good in the end? Perhaps there are many good things that will come out of that tragedy in the individual lives we will never hear about. In fact, good results may even come generations from now unbeknownst to those who will experience them.

ATHEIST: Come on! That's a cop-out!

CHRISTIAN: No, it's simply recognizing our limits and acknowledging the limitless knowledge and unseen purposes of God (Rom. 11:33–36). We can't see the future on earth, much less what eternity in heaven will be like. So how can we say that the ultimate eternal outcome of a death won't work out for good? We already know some good things that have resulted from it. Just because we can't think of an ultimate good reason or purpose for it, that doesn't mean an infinite God doesn't have one.

ATHEIST: If God would tell me his reasons, then maybe I could believe you.

CHRISTIAN: Job already tried that tactic. After he questioned God about why he suffered, God baffled Job with questions about the wonders of

creation (Job 38–41). It's as if God were saying to him, "Job, you can't even understand how I run the physical world that you *can* see, so how are you going to understand the vastly more complex moral world that you *cannot* see—a world where the results of billions of free choices made by human beings every day interact with one another?" Indeed, it would be impossible for us to comprehend such complexity. By the way, have you ever seen the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*?

ATHEIST: Do you mean the one with Jimmy Stewart that's shown every Christm . . . I mean, winter holiday?

CHRISTIAN: Yeah, that's the one. Jimmy Stewart plays George Bailey, a character who is despondent because his business dealings have gone bad and his life seems to be falling apart. He is averted from suicide at the last minute by an angel who shows him what life would have been like for others if George had never been born. It turns out that life would have been terrible for many people throughout his hometown. But George never knew this. He never realized the amazing impact his life had had on others. Hence the title, *It's a Wonderful Life.*

ATHEIST: It would have been more wonderful if he hadn't gone through that!

CHRISTIAN: Come on. You get the point, don't you?

ATHEIST: Yeah, I get the point: We don't know what impact any person or event might have in the long run, especially since there are so many interacting choices being made.

CHRISTIAN: Yes, and even choices meant for evil can turn out for good (Gen. 50:20). Perhaps many people now or generations from now will come to Christ because of the direct or indirect effects of evil events.

ATHEIST: But it seems like that's an argument from ignorance.

CHRISTIAN: No. It's not like we have *no* information about why bad things happen. We know that we live in a fallen world, and we know that good things can come from bad. So we know it's possible that God can have a good reason for bad things even if we don't know what those reasons are. And we know that he can bring good from bad. So it's not an argument from ignorance but a reasonable conclusion from what we do know. And while we don't know the reason for every *specific* bad thing that happens, we know why we don't know: We don't know because of our human limitations.

ATHEIST: What do you think of Rabbi Kushner's answer to the question?

You know, he wrote the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People.*

CHRISTIAN: I think his answer is wrong.

ATHEIST: Wrong? Why?

CHRISTIAN: Because his answer is that God isn't powerful enough to defeat evil on earth. So we need to forgive God for allowing evil.

ATHEIST: What's wrong with that?

CHRISTIAN: Because there's strong evidence that God is infinitely powerful. Fifty-six times in the Bible God is referred to as "almighty," and in several other ways he is described as all-powerful. We also know from scientific evidence that he created this universe out of nothing (take a look at chapter 3 of this book). So Rabbi Kushner's finite god doesn't square with the facts.

ATHEIST: If God is infinitely powerful as you say, then why does he allow bad things to happen to good people?

CHRISTIAN: We've already pointed out that there are good outcomes for pain and suffering. But we also need to point out that the question makes an assumption that isn't true.

ATHEIST: What's that?

CHRISTIAN: There are no *good* people!

ATHEIST: Oh, come on!

CHRISTIAN: No, really. Some people are less evil than others, but no one is really good. We all have a natural bent toward selfishness. And we all commit sins routinely.

ATHEIST: I do more good things than bad.

CHRISTIAN: By whose standard?

ATHEIST: By society's standard. I'm a law-abiding citizen. I'm not a murderer or a thief.

CHRISTIAN: That's the problem. We consider ourselves good people only by the standards of bad people. We judge ourselves against others rather than against an absolute standard of good. By the way, have you ever stolen anything?

ATHEIST: Well, yes.

CHRISTIAN: Have you ever lied about anything?

ATHEIST: No.

CHRISTIAN: You're lying.

ATHEIST: I can't fool you.

CHRISTIAN: So you're a lying thief, then!

ATHEIST: That doesn't mean I'm all bad.

CHRISTIAN: No, but it means you're not all good either. Think about it: It's much easier to be bad than good; it's much more natural to you to be selfish rather than generous. We all have that depraved human nature. As Augustine said, "We're all born with a propensity to sin and a necessity to die."[3] That propensity is inborn. That's why young children naturally grab things and yell, "Mine!" It's also why James Madison said, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary."[4]

ATHEIST: So Kushner makes incorrect assumptions about the nature of man and the nature of God.

CHRISTIAN: Exactly. The question is not "Why do bad things happen to good people?" but "Why do good things happen to bad people?"

ATHEIST: If God really is all-powerful as you say, I still don't understand why he didn't stop a baby from dying or stop the murder of Charlie Kirk. If you knew it was going to happen and had the power to stop it, wouldn't you have stopped it?

CHRISTIAN: Of course.

ATHEIST: So you are better than God!

CHRISTIAN: No, by stopping a baby's death or the murder of my friend, I would be preventing evil. But God, who has an unlimited, eternal perspective, allows evil events and choices knowing that he can redeem them in the end. The largest evangelism event in human history was Charlie's memorial service. More than 1.2 billion people saw it worldwide within three months of the event, and probably millions have come to faith in Christ because of it. So we haven't seen just a ripple but a tsunami of good coming from that evil choice to murder Charlie. God can redeem evil choices. We can't, so we try to stop every one.

ATHEIST: But by your own Christian doctrine, God doesn't redeem all evil choices in the end. After all, some people go to hell!

CHRISTIAN: Yes, but that's because God can bring eternal good only to those who will accept it. Some people ignore the facts or simply choose to play the game in a way that brings them defeat. Since God cannot force them to *freely choose* to play the game the right way, ultimate good only comes to those who choose it. That's why Paul says, "And

we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Notice he doesn't say, "All things are good." He says all things work together *for* the good *of those who love him.*

ATHEIST: So how did "all things work together for good" for those who died on 9/11?

CHRISTIAN: Those who loved God and accepted the free gift of salvation are with God in eternity. They received grace. Those who did not are having their free choice of eternal separation respected as well. They received justice (which is a good thing that everyone says they want).

ATHEIST: What about the rest of us?

CHRISTIAN: Those of us who remain here still have time to make our decision. And those who already were Christians at the time may have had their character strengthened through 9/11.

ATHEIST: But if God is all-good and all-knowing, why would he create creatures who he knew would go to hell?

CHRISTIAN: Good question. There are only five options God had. He could have: (1) not created at all; (2) created a nonfree world of robots; (3) created a free world where we would not sin; (4) created a free world where we would sin but everyone would accept God's salvation; or (5) created the world we have now—a world where we would sin and some would be saved but the rest would be lost.

ATHEIST: Yes, and it seems like God picked the worst of those five options! So God is not all-good!

CHRISTIAN: Not so fast. The first option can't even be compared to the other four because something and nothing have nothing in common. Comparing a real world and a nonworld is not even like comparing apples and oranges, since they both are fruit. It is like comparing apples and nonapples, insisting that nonapples taste better. In logic, this is called a category mistake. It's like asking, "What color is math?" Math is not a color, so the question is meaningless.

ATHEIST: If comparing existence to nonexistence is a category mistake, then Jesus made a category mistake when he said it would have been better if Judas had never been born (Matt. 26:24).

CHRISTIAN: No, Jesus was not talking about the supremacy of nonbeing over being. He was simply making a forceful point about the severity of Judas's sin.

ATHEIST: Okay, so why didn't God make his second option—a robot world?

CHRISTIAN: He could have, but that wouldn't have been a moral world. It would have been a world with no evil, but with no love either.

ATHEIST: So why didn't he make worlds three or four? Those worlds would allow love, and they certainly would be better worlds than this one.

CHRISTIAN: Yes, but not everything *conceivable* is actually *achievable* with free creatures. It's not achievable for God to force *free* creatures not to sin and to love him. Love requires freedom, and forced freedom is a contradiction.

ATHEIST: But this world could be better if there were one less murder or one less rape. So God failed because he didn't create the best possible world.

CHRISTIAN: Hold on. While I will admit that this world is not the best possible world, it may be *the best way to get to* the best possible world.

ATHEIST: What kind of theistic psychobabble is that?

CHRISTIAN: God may have permitted evil in order to defeat it. As I've already said, if evil is not allowed, then the higher virtues cannot be attained. People who are redeemed have stronger character than people who have not been tested. Soul-building requires some pain. The Job of chapter 42 is a deeper and more joyful man than the Job of chapter 1. So evil in this world actually serves a good purpose in the end. It creates an eternal world that's the best possible world.

ATHEIST: But why would God create people knowing that they would choose hell?

CHRISTIAN: Do you have children?

ATHEIST: Yes. In fact, I'm a former child myself!

CHRISTIAN: Why did you have them, knowing that someday they would disobey you?

ATHEIST: My wife asks me that question a lot!

CHRISTIAN: I know why I did. Because love takes risks. I was willing to take the risk of loss in order to experience the joy of love. The same is true of every Super Bowl. Both teams know that one will lose, yet both are willing to play the game despite that risk.

ATHEIST: I'd rather have no risk.

CHRISTIAN: Too late. After we chose to sin, negative consequences came

into the world because God is infinitely just. Now his plan is to redeem evil for good. In fact, *Christianity is the answer to the problem of evil.* If we had never sinned, then Jesus would have had no reason to come to earth and take the punishment we deserve on himself. And after he redeems us, we experience a deeper relationship with him than if we had remained innocent.

ATHEIST: Redemption is better than innocence? How so?

CHRISTIAN: Because when someone saves you from disaster you appreciate and love that person more. The bond is stronger.

ATHEIST: I must admit that your intellectual answers make some sense, but evil still bothers me.[5]

CHRISTIAN: It bothers me too, and it should. But remember, any God big enough to be mad at is also a God big enough to have reasons you don't know about.

ATHEIST: Why doesn't he tell us the reasons?

CHRISTIAN: He does generally but not specifically. Generally, free will produces bad events that can build virtue (Rom. 5:3–4; James 1:2–3) to achieve God's promise to believers to make all things "work together for good" so they will "be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom. 8:28–29).

ATHEIST: But why doesn't he explain all the specific reasons he allowed my friend's baby to die?

CHRISTIAN: There are few things worse than losing a baby, and I don't want to minimize the pain by speculating or giving philosophical answers. Job's friends tried that, and it made matters worse.

ATHEIST: I know that. But I am asking a philosophical question, so a philosophical answer is fine. So why doesn't God explain all the specific reasons he allowed my friend's baby to die?

CHRISTIAN: Okay. Remember the ripple effect? Do we think we could comprehend all the trillions of interacting events that were or will be influenced by that baby dying? Maybe that baby dying is leading to trillions of ripples that eventually lead to a great evangelist saving millions of people 500 years from now. We can't trace all of them, but God can. We just have to trust him.

ATHEIST: Perhaps, but I don't think your intellectual answers will sustain a person through evil.

CHRISTIAN: Will yours? Atheists need to answer the problem of evil too.

What's your answer to your friend? "There's no meaning to anything? Your baby was just a bag of chemicals dancing to her DNA, and she doesn't really matter ultimately because we're all going to just wind up in the same place, fertilizer in the ground? You'll never see your baby again and no good can come of her death?"

ATHEIST: I wouldn't put it that way.

CHRISTIAN: But that's the way it is if atheism is true.

ATHEIST: Maybe so, but wishing there's an afterlife doesn't make it true.

CHRISTIAN: I agree, but we've given evidence that Christianity is true. Look, we all know that this world isn't right, and we all long for heaven. Perhaps our longing for heaven is *another* clue that it's really there. And you don't have to withstand evil with just answers. You can have access to the Divine Comforter—the Holy Spirit—to help you through this soul-building life of pain and suffering.

ATHEIST: I'd rather not suffer at all than to have a comforter.

CHRISTIAN: Maybe that's why God doesn't put pain and suffering in our control. If he did, who would choose to go through it?

ATHEIST: No one.

CHRISTIAN: Well, that's not exactly true. One man certainly chose to suffer. Jesus Christ volunteered to suffer so that you and I could be reconciled to God. It has been the only real case of a bad thing happening to a truly good person. Do we deserve better than Jesus?

ATHEIST: Probably not.

CHRISTIAN: And don't forget that Jesus's death created the greatest ripple in history: The death of one innocent man brought salvation to billions. So we can be mad at God about pain and suffering, but we have to admit that he did not exempt himself from it. As for you and me, sometimes God saves us *from* evil, but sometimes he comforts us *through* evil. In either event, whether we know his reasons or not, believers can trust God that all things will work together for good according to his eternal plan.

Appendix 2

Isn't That Just Your Interpretation?

ATHEIST: Okay, I went back and read this entire book just like you asked, but I don't think you've made the case that Christianity is true.

CHRISTIAN: Why not?

ATHEIST: Because it's just *your* interpretation.

CHRISTIAN: Of course it's *my* interpretation, but that doesn't mean my interpretation is wrong.

ATHEIST: I say it *is* wrong!

CHRISTIAN: Is that just *your* interpretation?

ATHEIST: So you're turning the tables on me?

CHRISTIAN: Yes. All conclusions involve making an interpretation, including yours. And in order for you to know that my interpretation (Christianity) is objectively wrong, you would have to know what is objectively right. So what is that right interpretation?

ATHEIST: There are no objective interpretations.

CHRISTIAN: Forgive me for doing this again, but is *that* an objective interpretation?

ATHEIST: Stop that!

CHRISTIAN: Stop what, being logical? I'm just using the Road Runner tactic from chapter 1. When you say something that's self-defeating, I feel compelled to point it out. So how can you make the objective interpretation that there are no objective interpretations?

ATHEIST: Okay, so maybe there are objective interpretations.

CHRISTIAN: Yes, there are. While you may interpret the evidence and conclude that Christianity is false, I may do the same and conclude it's true. But since opposites cannot both be true, one of us must be right

and the other one must be wrong. So who is right?

ATHEIST: I am.

CHRISTIAN: Why?

ATHEIST: I just think I'm right.

CHRISTIAN: But that's just an assertion. You must give evidence rather than just make assertions. In this book, we didn't make assertions that Christianity is true—we gave evidence every step of the way, from the question of truth all the way to the inspiration of the Bible. What evidence do you have that atheism is true?

ATHEIST: Evil and science.

CHRISTIAN: That's not positive evidence for atheism but merely *perceived* obstacles to belief in Christianity. As we have seen, the existence of evil doesn't disprove God (appendix 1), and scientific discoveries actually support the Christian worldview (chapters 3–7).

ATHEIST: But if Christianity is true, it excludes too many people. After all, millions of people are not Christians.

CHRISTIAN: That doesn't determine whether Christianity is true or not. After all, truth is not determined by how many people believe it. Truth is *discovered* by looking at the evidence. Is your interpretation (that Christianity is false) necessarily wrong because it excludes millions of Christians?

ATHEIST: No.

CHRISTIAN: Neither is mine, then. Besides, as we saw when we talked about evil, Christianity doesn't exclude people—people exclude themselves from Christianity. Everyone knows that God exists. But because we all have free will, some people choose to suppress that knowledge so that they can follow their own desires. Paul talks about that in Romans 1.

ATHEIST: Maybe so, but I find your conclusion extremely judgmental. And you know, you ought not judge!

CHRISTIAN: Forgive me again, but if we ought not judge, then why are you judging me for judging?

ATHEIST: What's the matter, Mister Holy—you'd rather play logic games than believe what Jesus said?

CHRISTIAN: It's not a game but an observation about the way things really are. It's self-defeating to tell me, "You ought not judge," when that's a judgment itself. Furthermore, you are making a judgment when you say

Christianity is *not* true!

ATHEIST: Okay, but what about my second point. Don't you believe what Jesus said?

CHRISTIAN: Why are you quoting the Bible? Do you believe it's true now?

ATHEIST: No, but you do. So why don't you believe what Jesus said?

CHRISTIAN: I do. The problem is *you don't know what he said.* Jesus did *not* tell us not to judge. He simply told us not to judge hypocritically. He said, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:1–2). He then went on to say, "Take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (v. 5), which involves making a judgment! In other words, when you judge, don't judge hypocritically. The Bible also *commands us to make judgments* when it tells us to "test everything" (1 Thess. 5:21) and not to "believe every spirit" (1 John 4:1) but to believe in Jesus Christ for eternal life (John 3:16).

ATHEIST: Are you done?

CHRISTIAN: No. There's one more point: It would be impossible to live very long if you didn't judge good from evil. You make hundreds of vital decisions every day that can either hurt you or help you. When you make those decisions you are making judgments!

ATHEIST: All right, I see that everyone makes judgments. And you are making judgments by interpreting the Bible the way you do. Who's to say that your interpretation is right?

CHRISTIAN: You need to look at the context of the passage to discover the objective meaning.

ATHEIST: If objective interpretations are possible, then why are there so many different interpretations of the Bible?

CHRISTIAN: Why do so many people get their math sums wrong? Is there no right answer to arithmetic problems?

ATHEIST: Language is different. I think that there are many interpretations of a sentence or a Bible verse that are true. That's why you get so many denominations.

CHRISTIAN: So you are saying that sentences can be interpreted in only *one* way.

ATHEIST: No! Didn't you hear what I just said? I said exactly the opposite

is true. There are *many* valid interpretations.

CHRISTIAN: If there are many valid interpretations, then why did you just correct me for misinterpreting what you said?

ATHEIST: I did?

CHRISTIAN: Yes, you just told me that I misunderstood you. In effect, you said that my interpretation was wrong! Why did you do that if there are many valid interpretations?

ATHEIST: Because I knew what I meant, and it should have been obvious to you.

CHRISTIAN: You're right. So let me ask you this: Why is it that when you make a statement, you expect others to know what *you* mean, but when God makes a statement in the Bible, you give yourself the option of pouring any meaning you want into it?

ATHEIST: Okay, so maybe there are objective interpretations. But if there are, then why are there so many denominations?

CHRISTIAN: For the same reason there are a lot of non-Christians. It's not because the truth is not *perceived*, it's because the truth is not *received.* In other words, we believe our own traditions and desires over the word of God. Jesus spoke forcefully against doing this (Matt. 15; 23).

ATHEIST: All right. I'm going to come clean with you.

CHRISTIAN: It's about time!

ATHEIST: The real problem I have with Christianity is that it leads to intolerance. You Christians think you have the truth!

CHRISTIAN: Haven't you noticed that *everyone* thinks they have the truth? Those who say Christianity is false think they have *that* truth. Even those who say every religion is true think that's the truth!

ATHEIST: Okay, okay, you're right. I think atheism is true. But I'm not intolerant like most Christians!

CHRISTIAN: Even if Christians are intolerant, that wouldn't mean Christianity is false.

ATHEIST: I realize that, but it's still a practical problem.

CHRISTIAN: How so?

ATHEIST: Because people who think they have the truth want to impose that truth on others.

CHRISTIAN: Do you mean politically?

ATHEIST: Yes.

CHRISTIAN: I've got news for you: Everyone involved in politics—

including every non-Christian—is trying to impose what he or she thinks is the truth. So what's your point?

ATHEIST: My point is that Christians want to take away the rights of people!

CHRISTIAN: Actually, Christianity is one of the few worldviews that can justify objective human rights because it affirms that those rights are given to us by God. As the American founders recognized, governments aren't meant to give or take away rights: governments are meant to secure rights that the people already possess. That's what we affirmed in our Declaration of Independence.

ATHEIST: But what about tolerance?

CHRISTIAN: Christianity is one of the few worldviews that not only offers but champions religious tolerance. Since God doesn't force anyone to believe (in fact, the purpose of this life is to make a *free choice*), most Christians recognize that government shouldn't try to force belief either.

ATHEIST: But during the Crusades, some Christians obviously thought differently!

CHRISTIAN: They may have called themselves Christians, but those that committed atrocities certainly were not following the teachings of Christ. Jesus never condoned such conduct.

ATHEIST: I think a completely secular government is the most tolerant of all. After all, there is religious freedom in secular countries in Europe.

CHRISTIAN: Those countries do exist, but most of them are living off the remnants of the Christian worldview from previous generations. And as they experience uncontrolled immigration of Muslims, they are at risk of losing freedom of religion and speech. Even atheist Richard Dawkins is so worried about it that he now calls himself a cultural Christian.

ATHEIST: That's Islamophobia!

CHRISTIAN: What do you mean by Islamophobia?

ATHEIST: It's a bias against Muslims, like racism.

CHRISTIAN: Islam is not a race. There are Muslims from every racial and ethnic group. And race or ethnicity is not a behavior. Islam is an ideology that advocates for and against certain behaviors as evidenced by most Muslim countries where you find very little religious freedom. Last I checked, churches are not allowed in Saudi Arabia, and most

other Muslim countries treat Christians as second-class citizens. Since its founding 1,400 years ago, Islam has restricted these freedoms. How is it a "phobia" to be against an ideology that wants to take away your freedom of religion and speech rights? Sounds like wisdom to me.

ATHEIST: It's wrong to demonize Muslims.

CHRISTIAN: Then why are you demonizing me?

ATHEIST: I'm not demonizing you by telling you you're wrong.

CHRISTIAN: Exactly. So how am I demonizing Muslims by telling them that some of their beliefs and practices are wrong? Disagreement isn't hate, otherwise you'd be hating me by disagreeing with me.

ATHEIST: Forget it. But you are intolerant!

CHRISTIAN: Do you think tolerance is an objective moral obligation?

ATHEIST: You're trying to connect moral obligations with God again, aren't you?

CHRISTIAN: There is no other connection. As we saw in chapter 8, there are no moral obligations or moral rights if there is no God. So why should anyone be tolerant if there is no moral obligation to be tolerant?

ATHEIST: Because it's the right thing to do.

CHRISTIAN: That's just another assertion. As an atheist, you have no way to justify why anyone should be tolerant.

ATHEIST: Maybe not. But as a Christian, you do. So why don't you believe that we ought to be tolerant?

CHRISTIAN: Actually, the supreme moral obligation is love—not tolerance. Tolerance says, "Hold your nose and put up with others." Love says, "Reach out and help others."

ATHEIST: Why can't you be tolerant *and* loving?

CHRISTIAN: You can, but sometimes love requires you to be intolerant. For example, wouldn't it be unloving to tolerate murder, rape, theft, or racism?

ATHEIST: I suppose so.

CHRISTIAN: Good, because love doesn't mean approval. Every parent knows this but often forgets it. We don't tolerate everything our kids want to do precisely *because* we love them. We have to stand in the way of evil to love them. Otherwise, we're enabling them.

ATHEIST: I think it's unloving to be against abortion and LGBTQ rights.

CHRISTIAN: By whose standard? There are no rights unless God exists. And we don't invent rights, we discover them. Since God is the

standard, we should follow what he says, not what we want. But we're getting a little off the subject. Christians certainly have social obligations to love their neighbors by putting laws in place that enshrine *real* God-given rights, punish wrongdoers (Rom. 13:3–4), and protect innocent people from evil. But that is an implication of Christianity, not the main purpose of Christianity.

ATHEIST: You wouldn't know that by the behavior of some Christians today.

CHRISTIAN: You mean you don't like their biblical views on moral issues like abortion and LGBTQ issues?

ATHEIST: Yes, because they are trying to legislate morality.

CHRISTIAN: So?

ATHEIST: What do you mean, so? Those issues are important to me!

CHRISTIAN: Are those issues so important to you that you're willing to give up truth itself in order to keep them?

ATHEIST: What are you talking about?

CHRISTIAN: The issue is truth, not what you find politically or personally attractive. Do you think you ought to believe what's true?

ATHEIST: Of course. Every reasonable person would say yes to that!

CHRISTIAN: So if Christianity is true, you ought to believe it regardless of the impact you think it might have on politics, moral issues, or any other facet of your life.

ATHEIST: That's hard to do. And I don't want Christians legislating morality.

CHRISTIAN: Everyone is trying to legislate morality, including non-Christians. The only question is, "Whose morality should we legislate?" But I don't want to legislate my morality or your morality. I want to legislate *the* morality: the one Thomas Jefferson said was self-evident and Paul said was written on our hearts by God (Rom. 2:14–15). That's God's nature. In fact, the entire concept of moral rights that we enjoy in the West came from Christian theology. So if you're arguing for rights, you're actually stealing the justification for them from Christianity.

ATHEIST: But I don't know if I can agree with all of Christian morality.

CHRISTIAN: None of us have been completely consistent by our own standards, much less God's. We're all fallen and we all need a Savior. We must give up our preferences and follow him. Christ said, "If

anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?" (Matt. 16:24–26). Do you really want to exchange your eternal soul for temporal political positions or personal preferences?

ATHEIST: If Christianity is true, that's the choice I have to make.

CHRISTIAN: Yes. And God wants you to choose him. But he loves you so much that he'll respect either choice you make. Just remember that either choice you make will have consequences here and in eternity. And that's not just my interpretation.

Notes

Introduction: "Finding the Box Top to the Puzzle of Life"

1 Mortimer Adler, *The Synopticon: An Index to the Great Ideas*, vol. 1 of *The Great Books of the Western World* (Britannica, 2005), 433.

2 Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (Random House, 1980), 4.

3 Richard Dawkins, speech at the Edinburgh International Science Festival (April 15, 1992), quoted in "EDITORIAL: A Scientist's Case Against God," *The Independent* (London), April 20, 1992, 17.

4 Phillip Johnson, "Exposing Naturalistic Presuppositions of Evolution," a talk given at Southern Evangelical Seminary's 1998 Apologetics Conference. An mp3 can be purchased at www.impactapologetics.com.

5 Quoted in Plato, *Apology*, sect. 38.

6 C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Barbour, 1961), 46.

7 Mortimer Adler, *Great Books of the Western World* (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1955), 2:561.

Chapter 1: "Can We Handle the Truth?"

1 *A Few Good Men*, directed by Rob Reiner (Columbia Pictures, 1992).

2 Augustine, *Confessions* (Penguin, 1961), 10:23.

3 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Macmillan, 1947), 35.

4 Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?* (Zondervan, 1977).

5 Frank Turek and Phoenix Hayes, *The War on Reality: Recovering the Truth in a World That Celebrates Lies* (Harvest House, 2026).

6 Frank Turek, *Correct, Not Politically Correct: About Same-Sex Marriage and Transgenderism* (CrossExamined.org, 2023). See especially the section titled "Sex at Work," 132–36.

Chapter 2: "Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All?"

1 See James Sire, "Why Should Anyone Believe Anything At All?," in D. A. Carson, ed., *Telling the Truth* (Zondervan, 2000), 93–101. See also James Sire, *Why Should Anyone Believe Anything at All* (InterVarsity Press, 1994).

2 Blaise Pascal, *The Art of Persuasion* (1658).

3 There are, of course, inductive logic, deductive logic, and symbolic logic, but all of these are based in the same fundamental laws of thought.

4 David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1894; repr., Clarendon Press, 2011), 12.3.

5 C. S. Lewis, "Learning in War-Time," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Eerdmans, 1965), 50.

6 Of course, according to Kant, we can know things about this phenomenal world of our senses, such as scientific propositions. Also, Kant held that while we cannot know anything about the real world (e.g., God), nevertheless we can posit that there is a God and live as if he exists, even though we can't know anything about the way he really is. This Kant called "practical" reason.

7 In fact, we arrive at most decisions in life—from what we eat to whom we choose for friends—

through observation and induction. For example, we don't have perfect information about the liquid in a Campbell's Soup can—we think it's edible and won't poison us—but we're not 100 percent certain. We are relying on our prior experience that Campbell's Soup is trustworthy, and we are concluding that there's actually Campbell's Soup and not poison in the can. Likewise, we don't have perfect information about the character of people we may meet. But after spending some time with them, we may conclude that they are trustworthy people. Are we 100 percent certain? No, because we are generalizing from our limited number of experiences. Our conclusion may be highly probable, but it is not certain. This is the case with many decisions we make in life.

8 Frank Turek and Norman Geisler, *Legislating Morality: Is It Wise? Is It Legal? Is It Possible?* (Wipf & Stock, 2003). Previously published by Bethany, 1998.

9 In addition to the Qur'an (read chaps. 8 and 9 for yourself), see Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 2nd ed. (Baker, 2002). Appendix 5 lists twenty citations from the Qur'an that either command or condone violence against "infidels."

10 Those who disagree with the necessity of logic in finding truth are defeating themselves and proving our point. Why? Because they attempt to use logic to deny logic. This is like trying to use language to communicate that language cannot be used to communicate!

Chapter 3: "In the Beginning There Was a Great SURGE"

1 Quoted in Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* (NavPress, 1995), 57.

2 Red-shifted galaxies are moving away from us, but that does not mean that we are at the center of the universe. To visualize how this can be, picture a balloon with black dots on it. When you blow up the balloon, all of the dots separate from one another whether they are near the center or not. The dots on opposite sides of the balloon (those farthest away from one another) separate more quickly than those next to one another. In fact, Hubble discovered a linear relationship between distance and speed, which showed that a galaxy twice as far from us moves away at twice the speed. This became known as Hubble's Law.

3 Quoted in Fred Heeren, *Show Me God* (Daystar, 2000), 135.

4 Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (1620; reprint, Bobbs Merrill, 1960), 121.

5 David Hume, quoted in J. Y. T. Greig, ed., *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols. (Garland, 1983), 1:187.

6 Alexander Vilenkin, an agnostic cosmologist, thinks he has proved that the universe had a beginning, as we'll see later in this chapter. However, Vilenkin claims that the universe doesn't need a cause. He cites what appear to be random happenings at the quantum level for this conclusion. See Alexander Vilenkin, "The Beginning of the Universe," *Inference*, October 2015, https://inference-review.com/article/the-beginning-of-the-universe. But there are problems with Vilenkin's view. One is that the quantum level itself would need to be created. So he hasn't solved the creation problem; he's just put it off a step. Another is his assumption about how the quantum level works. William Lane Craig responded to Vilenkin's claim this way: "Notice that Vilenkin just assumes here the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum mechanics according to which quantum indeterminacy is ontic rather than merely epistemic. There is no justification for this. There are, moreover, at least ten different physical interpretations of quantum mechanics which are empirically equivalent and some of which are fully deterministic. So this is not a proven counterexample to the metaphysical principle that whatever begins to exist has a cause." See Craig, "#773 Physicists & Philosophers Reply to the Kalam Cosmological Argument (Pt IV)," Reasonable Faith, March 6, 2022, https://www.reasonablefaith.org/question-answer/P20/physicists-philosophers-reply-to-the-kalam-cosmological-argument-pt-iv. See also Craig, "Creation *ex Nihilo*: Theology and Science, Reasonable Faith," https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/creation-ex-nihilo-theology-and-science.

7 See point 5 of Lawrence Krauss's comments about his debate with William Lane Craig, "#215 Laurence Krauss' Response and Perspective," Reasonable Faith, May 30, 2011,

https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/lawrence-krauss-response-and-perspective.

8 If anyone ever tells you that all causes must be physical things, simply ask that person, "What physical things *caused* you to come to that conclusion? And if your thoughts are caused completely by physical things—your immaterial mind, consciousness, and free will had no part—then why should I believe what you're saying is true?" (For a more complete response to Krauss's claims, see chap. 1 of Frank Turek, *Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* [NavPress, 2015].)

9 This question is often asked by William Lane Craig. Craig revived the Kalam Cosmological Argument in modern times and discusses it frequently in his published work and on his podcast. See Reasonablefaith.org for much on this topic and others related to philosophy, theology, and Christian apologetics.

10 You may have heard the First Law of Thermodynamics stated like this: "Energy can neither be created nor destroyed." That is a conclusion based on how energy works in a closed system. But how do we know the universe is a closed system? How do we know that energy was not created and infused from outside the universe? Given the evidence for creation, it looks as though energy was created at the beginning. A more accurate definition of the First Law is that "the total amount of energy (i.e., usable and unusable energy) in a closed system remains constant." That is, as usable energy is consumed, it is converted into *un*usable energy, but the sum of the two remains the same. Only the proportion of usable to unusable changes. The bottom line is that the First Law doesn't rule out the possibility that God created energy and infused it into the universe at the beginning.

11 Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (Norton, 1978), 48.

12 Quoted in Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint* (Simon & Shuster, 1988), 20, emphasis added.

13 Words such as *precede* and *before* usually imply time. We don't mean it that way because there was no time "before" the Big Bang. Indeed, there could not have been time before time began. What then could exist before time? The answer is, very simply, the eternal! That is, the eternal cause that brought time, space, and matter into existence.

14 The debate is available on video at the Reasonable Faith YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEoznzPSguI.

15 Isaac Asimov, *Beginning and End* (Doubleday, 1977), 148.

16 Lawrence Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing* (Atria, 2012). See chap. 1 of Turek, *Stealing from God*, for a response to Krauss's claims.

17 Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways: St. Thomas Aquinas' Proofs of God's Existence* (Schocken, 1969), 66.

18 Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 15–16.

19 See Fred Heeren, *Show Me God* (Daystar, 2000), 163–68; and Hugh Ross, *Creator and the Cosmos* (NavPress, 1995), 19.

20 Quoted in Heeren, *Show Me God*, 168.

21 These pictures can be seen at COBE's website, http://Lambda.gsfc.nasa.gov.

22 See Michael D. Lemonick, "Echoes of the Big Bang," *Time*, May 4, 1992, 62.

23 Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 11.

24 Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 14.

25 "A Scientist Caught Between Two Faiths: Interview with Robert Jastrow," *Christianity Today*, August 6, 1982, emphasis added.

26 Arthur Eddington, *The Expanding Universe* (Macmillan, 1933), 178.

27 Quoted in Heeren, *Show Me God*, 156.

28 Quoted in Heeren, *Show Me God*, 157.

29 Quoted in Heeren, *Show Me God*, 157.

30 Quoted in Heeren, *Show Me God*, 139.

31 For a detailed explanation and refutation of atheistic explanations for the beginning of the universe, see William Lane Craig, "The Ultimate Question of Origins: God and the Beginning of the Universe," http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/ultimatequestion.html; see also Norman

Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999), 102–6.

32 See Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 125.

33 See "'Baby Pic' Shows Cosmos 13 Billion Years Ago," CNN.com, February 11, 2003, http://www.cnn.com/2003/TECH/space/02/11/cosmic.portrait/.

34 See Sarah Scoles, "Will the Universe Ever Stop Expanding?," *Scientific American*, August 29, 2023, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/will-the-universe-ever-stop-expanding1/. See also Hugh Ross, "Big Bang Model Is Not Dead," Reasons to Believe, January 1, 2024, https://reasons.org/explore/blogs/todays-new-reason-to-believe/big-bang-model-is-not-dead.

35 Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (Bantam, 1988), 136–39; see also Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations* (Bethany, 2001), 107–10.

36 Quoted in Norman Geisler and Paul Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian: Leading Thinkers Explain Why They Believe* (Baker, 2001), 66.

37 Stephen Hawking and Lenard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (Bantam, 2010), 180. The complete quote says, "Because there is a law like gravity, the universe can and will create itself out of nothing as described in Chapter 6. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue-touch paper and set the universe going." But chap. 6 doesn't solve the problem. It describes some of the SURGE evidence that the universe had a beginning but then punts to the multiverse. As we'll see in the next chapter, even if multiple universes exist, they all had beginnings that would have needed a cause.

38 John C. Lennox, *God and Stephen Hawking* (Lion Hudson, 2011), 32.

39 See chap. 1 of Turek, *Stealing From God*, for more on the problems with Krauss's views. See also David Albert's scathing review of Krauss's book in *The New York Times*, titled "On the Origin of Everything," March 23, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/books/review/a-universe-from-nothing-by-lawrence-m-krauss.html. Albert is an atheist and a professor at Columbia University who authored a book on Quantum Mechanics.

40 Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 16, emphasis added.

41 Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 28.

42 Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 113–14.

43 V. J. Stenger, "The Face of Chaos," *Free Inquiry* 13 (1993): 13.

44 See Cliff Walker, "An Interview with Particle Physicist Victor J. Stenger," November 6, 1999, formerly available at http://www.positiveatheism.com/crt/stenger1.htm.

45 See "'Baby Pic' Shows Cosmos 13 Billion Years Ago."

46 Alexander Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One* (Hill and Wang, 2006), 176.

47 Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One*, 175. Some atheists have claimed the BGV Theorem does not require a beginning to our universe. William Lane Craig, following correspondence with Vilenkin himself, counters those claims with this post: "Misrepresenting the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin Theorem," Reasonable Faith, May 23, 2021, https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/misrepresenting-the-borde-guth-vilenkin-theorem.

48 Stephen C. Meyer, "Here's Why James Webb Telescope Discoveries are Causing Scientists to Rethink Galaxy Formation (But Not the Big Bang)," September 27, 2022, https://stephencmeyer.org/2022/09/27/heres-why-james-webb-telescope-discoveries-are-causing-scientists-to-rethink-galaxy-formation-but-not-the-big-bang/.

49 George Will, "The Gospel from Science," *Newsweek*, November 8, 1998.

50 Arthur Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (Cambridge University Press, 1928).

51 Albert Einstein, in *Science, Philosophy, and Religion: A Symposium* (The Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, 1941), http://www.sacred-texts.com/aor/einstein/einsci.htm.

52 *The Sound of Music*, directed by Robert Wise, music by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II (1965, 20th Century Fox).

53 Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 116.

Chapter 4: "Divine Design"

1 Isaac Newton, "General Scholium," in *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687), in Great Books of the Western World, ed. Robert M. Hutchins (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.), 369.

2 This phenomenon, called fine-tuning, has also been called the "Anthropic Principle," as it was in the first edition of this book. The word *anthropic* comes from a Greek word that means "human" or "man." The Anthropic Principle is another way of saying the universe is fine-tuned to support human life, at least here on earth. But since people use the term *anthropic principle* to mean different things, we are choosing now to use the less ambiguous term *fine-tuning*.

3 Astrophysicist Hugh Ross provides four lists of hundreds of fine-tuning parameters that need to be just right for life to exist anywhere in our universe. These lists are an online addition to his book *Why the Universe Is the Way It Is* (Baker, 2008), and can be accessed at https://reasons.org/explore/publications/articles/rtb-design-compendium-2009. Ross's most recent work on fine-tuning is *Designed to the Core* (RTB Press, 2022). You can get updates at Reasons.org. There is also a compendium of listings, quotes, and answers to objections from Ross and many other sources at https://reasonandscience.catsboard.com/t1277-fine-tuning-of-the-universe.

4 Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (Bantam, 1988), 122.

5 Geraint F. Lewis and Luke A. Barnes, *A Fortunate Universe: Life in a Finely Tuned Cosmos* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 126, Kindle edition.

6 Jay Richards, "List of Fine-Tuning Parameters," Intelligent Design, https://intelligentdesign.org/articles/list-of-fine-tuning-parameters/.

7 Stephen C. Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe* (HarperOne, 2021), 152.

8 This quotation and all other Apollo 13 communications recorded below are part of official NASA transcripts, available at http://www.capcomespace.net/dossiers/espace_US/apollo/apollo13/transcript.htm#tv2.

9 As is the case with most constants, this constant is dependent on others. For example, the gravitational interaction is also a function of the size of the moon, which is larger relative to its planet than most other moons.

10 Hugh Ross, "Have You Thanked God for Earth's Gravity Today?," Reasons to Believe, October 12, 2016, https://reasons.org/explore/blogs/todays-new-reason-to-believe/have-you-thanked-god-for-earth-s-gravity-today.

11 For more information on the accident, see the report of the Apollo 13 Review Board: https://permanent.fdlp.gov/lps70313/lps70313/history.nasa.gov/ap13rb/ap13index.htm.

12 Hugh Ross, "Why I Believe in Divine Creation," in Norman Geisler and Paul Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian: Leading Thinkers Explain Why They Believe* (Baker, 2001), 138–41.

13 Quoted in Walter Bradley, "The 'Just-so' Universe: The Fine-Tuning of Constants and Conditions in the Cosmos," in William Dembski and James Kushiner, eds., *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design* (Baker, 2001), 168.

14 Quoted in Geisler and Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian*, 142.

15 For more on this, see the excellent book on fine-tuning written by two scientists, one Christian (Barnes) and the other an atheist (Lewis): *A Fortunate Universe.*

16 Fred Hoyle, "The Universe: Past and Present Reflections," *Engineering and Science* (November 1981): 12.

17 Paul Davies, "Taking Science on Faith," *New York Times*, November 24, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/24/opinion/24davies.html.

18 For the president's complete remarks, see http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030201-2.html.

19 The second commandment prohibits "graven images" for perhaps this very reason. Images limit the majesty of God. Idols are idols whether they are metal or mental.

20 See http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030201-2.html.

21 C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Barbour, 1961), 14.

22 Quoted in Mike Clary, "Adrift in the Heavens, Glenn Reasserts Faith in God," Los Angeles Times, November 2, 1998, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1998-nov-02-mn-38562-story.html.

23 Quoted in Fred Heeren, *Show Me God* (Daystar, 2000), 239.

24 Dennis Overbye, "Zillions of Universes? Or Did Ours Get Lucky?," *The New York Times*, October 28, 2003, F1.

Chapter 5: "The First Life: Natural Law or Divine Awe?"

1 Michael J. Behe, *A Mousetrap for Darwin: Michael J. Behe Answers His Critics* (Discovery Institute, 2020), 11, Kindle.

2 Information scientist Hubert Yockey, from the University of California at Berkeley, makes it clear that this comparison between the English alphabet and the genetic alphabet is no analogy but one of mathematical identity. He writes, "It is important to understand that we are not reasoning by analogy. The sequence hypothesis applies directly to the protein and the genetic text as well as to written language and therefore the treatment is mathematically identical." "Self Organization, Origin-of-Life Scenarios and Information Theory," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 91 (1981): 16.

3 Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (HarperOne, 2009). The book was named one of the top books of 2009 in the prestigious *Times Literary Supplement's* annual "Books of the Year" issue.

4 Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (Norton, 1987), 17–18, 116.

5 Jake Buelher, "The Largest Known Genome Belongs to a Tiny Fern," *Science News*, May 31, 2024, https://www.sciencenews.org/article/largest-genome-tiny-fern.

6 Stephen C. Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries That Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe* (HarperOne, 2021), 270, Kindle.

7 For a discussion from evolutionists of the numerous difficulties in suggesting that life is a product of natural law, see Peter Ward and Donald Brownlee, *Rare Earth: Why Complex Life Is Uncommon in the Universe* (Copernicus, 2000), chap. 4.

8 For problems with the Urey-Miller experiment and many other claims about evolution, see Casey Luskin, "Welcome to the Top Ten Scientific Problems with Biological and Chemical Evolution," *Science & Culture Today*, January 2, 2015, https://scienceandculture.com/2015/01/the_top_ten_sci/.

9 Dawkins, *Blind Watchmaker*, 1.

10 Quoted in Phillip E. Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 153.

11 Johnson, *Wedge of Truth*, 153. See also Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), 27.

12 Some Darwinists have claimed this problem might be solved by what is called the RNA World Hypothesis. That hypothesis, however, has several problems, including the fact that it must presuppose the existence of genetic information, which is one of the components of life that it is trying to explain. For that and several other deficiencies with this hypothesis, see Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis*, 280, Kindle.

13 Klaus Dose, "The Origin of Life: More Questions Than Answers," *Interdisciplinary Science Review* 13 (1998): 348, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Zondervan, 2000), 107.

14 Quoted in Strobel, *Case for Faith*, 107.

15 James Tour, "Animadversions of a Synthetic Chemist," *Inference*, May 2016, https://inference-review.com/article/animadversions-of-a-synthetic-chemist. See also James Tour, "Evolution/Creation," James Tour Group, August 2019, https://www.jmtour.com/personal-topics/evolution-creation/.

16 James Tour, “An Open Letter to My Colleagues,” *Inference*, August 2017, https://inference-review.com/article/an-open-letter-to-my-colleagues.

17 *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, directed by Nathan Frankowski, narrated by Ben Stein (Premise, 2008).

18 Quoted in Robert Roy Britt, “Panspermia Q and A: Leading Proponent Chandra Wickramasinghe,” Space.com, October 27, 2000, available at http://www.ufoevidence.org/documents/doc1963.htm (emphasis added).

19 Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Adler & Adler, 1985), 264.

20 Hubert P. Yockey, *Information Theory and Molecular Biology* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 284, emphasis added.

21 Phillip E. Johnson, “The Unraveling of Scientific Materialism,” *First Things* (November 1997): 22–25.

22 Email sent on July 10, 2001. The entire exchange that week can be read at http://www.arn.org/docs/pjweekly/pj_weekly_010813.htm.

23 Richard Lewontin, “Billions and Billions of Demons,” *The New York Review of Books*, January 9, 1997, 31.

24 See Strobel, *Case for Faith*, 99–101.

25 Douglas Axe, *Undeniable: How Biology Confirms Our Intuition That Life Is Designed* (HarperCollins, 2016).

26 A protein fold is a distinctive, stable, complex, three-dimensional structure that enables proteins to perform specific biological functions. Since proteins are crucial to almost all biological functions and structures, they represent the smallest unit of structural innovation in living systems. See Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis*, 316, Kindle.

27 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 158.

28 The debate is available on video at the Reasonable Faith YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEoznzPSguI.

29 See Don A. Howard, “Albert Einstein as a Philosopher of Science,” Physics Today, December 1, 2005, https://physicstoday.aip.org/features/albert-einstein-as-a-philosopher-of-science.

30 For much more on this, see the chapter titled “Science Doesn’t Say Anything, Scientists Do,” in Frank Turek, *Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* (NavPress, 2015).

31 Albert Einstein, in a letter to Max Born, December 4, 1926, quoted in Elizabeth Knowles, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 290.

32 Quoted in William Dembski and James Kushiner, eds., *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design* (Baker, 2001), 102.

Chapter 6: “New Life Forms: The Survival or Arrival of the Species?”

1 *Contact*, directed by Robert Zemeckis (Warner Brothers, 1997).

2 Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (Random House, 1980), 278.

3 Natural selection is not always efficient at preserving the “fittest.” See Casey Luskin, “Problem 4: Natural Selection Struggles to Fix Advantageous Traits in Populations,” *Science & Culture Today*, January 16, 2015, https://evolutionnews.org/2015/01/problem_4_natur/.

4 Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), 27.

5 Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth? Why Much of What We Teach About Evolution Is Wrong* (Regnery, 2000), 178.

6 Michael J. Behe, *A Mousetrap for Darwin: Michael J. Behe Answers His Critics* (Discovery Institute, 2020), 11, Kindle.

7 The conference website says, “Developments in evolutionary biology and adjacent fields have produced calls for revision of the standard theory of evolution, although the issues involved remain hotly contested.” “New Trends in Evolutionary Biology: Biological, Philosophical and Social Science Perspectives,” The Royal Society, https://royalsociety.org/pastevent/?requestedPath=%2fscience-

events-and-lectures%2f2016%2f11%2fevolutionary-biology%2f.

8 This is not to say that the DNA is unimportant. DNA codes complex networks of gene interactions early in development called "developmental Gene Regulatory Networks" or "dGRNs." These dGRNs are vital for growing the body plan of an organism as it develops. Some evolutionary biologists propose that by mutating these early-acting genes, new body plans can magically be produced. Yet experiments on these dGRNs show that mutating them is always destructive to the organism—it produces a dead embryo, but never a new type of body plan.

9 Yet this negative result is not surprising. If something were to randomly modify the code of your architecture program on your computer, would that mutation produce the building materials you need to build your house? Of course not. You'd probably have a less functional, maybe even crashed program, and you'd still have to get those physical building materials by some other means. Mutating software alone won't build a new house, and mutating DNA alone won't build a new organism. For more on dGRNs, see Stephen C. Meyer, *Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design* (HarperCollins, 2013), chap. 13.

10 Meyer, *Darwin's Doubt*, Kindle, loc. 4846.

11 See Norman L. Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations: Contemporary Answers to Crucial Questions About the Christian Faith* (Bethany, 2001), 149–50; Wells, *Icons of Evolution*, 211; and Lane P. Lester and Raymond G. Bohlin, *The Natural Limits of Biological Change* (Zondervan, 1984), 88–89.

12 Jonathan Wells and William Dembski, *The Design of Life* (Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 2008), 49–50.

13 Jonathan Wells, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design* (Regnery, 2006), 36. See also Geisler and Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations*, 149–50; see also Wells, *Icons of Evolution*, chap. 9, 211; and Lester and Bohlin, *The Natural Limits of Biological Change*, 88–89.

14 For more on Darwin's finches, see Wells, *Icons of Evolution*, 159–75.

15 Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (1859; repr. Penguin, 1958), 171.

16 Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (Touchstone, 1996), 39.

17 Michael J. Behe, "Intelligent Design Theory as a Tool for Analyzing Biochemical Systems," in William Dembski, ed., *Mere Creation: Science, Faith, and Intelligent Design* (InterVarsity Press, 1998), 183, emphasis added.

18 Behe, *Mousetrap for Darwin*, 126. I (Frank) ran into continued frustration reading the claims of Behe's critics because they continually assume that any similarity of DNA or homology must be the result of a common ancestor, even though they could provide no step-by-step evolutionary process by which those irreducibly complex systems and structures evolved. They say it happened without showing how. If so, how do they know it happened? Not because they have evidence for a natural process, but because they've ruled out the only other possibility—intelligence.

19 Scott A. Minnich and Stephen C. Meyer, "Genetic Analysis of Coordinate Flagellar and Type III Regulatory Circuits in Pathogenic Bacteria," in *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Design & Nature* (WIT Press, 2004).

20 Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, 232–33.

21 Some evolutionists claim feathers first evolved for insulation. But this story presents a new set of problems: Why use a complex structure for insulation that just happens to be extremely well-suited for flight? It's far too serendipitous and goal directed—exactly what Darwinism is supposed to avoid!

22 Email sent to Phillip Johnson on July 10, 2001. The entire exchange that week can be read at http://www.arn.org/docs/pjweekly/pj_weekly_010813.htm.

23 Bill Nye, *Undeniable: Evolution and the Science of Creation* (St. Martin's, 2014), 248.

24 There are good functional reasons for reusing the same genetic code; it seems optimized to minimize the negative effects of mutations. See Elad Firnberg and Marc Ostermeier, "The Genetic Code Constrains yet Facilitates Darwinian Evolution," *Nucleic Acids Research*, 2013, 41 (15): 7420–

28.

25 See Josiah Seaman and Richard J. A. Buggs, "FluentDNA: Nucleotide Visualization of Whole Genomes, Annotations, and Alignments," *Frontiers in Genetics*, April 29, 2020, https://doi.org/10.3389/fgene.2020.00292.

26 See Casey Luskin, "Evolutionary Models of Palaeoanthropology, Genetics and Psychology Fail to Account for Human Origins: A Review," in *Science and Faith in Dialogue*, ed. Frikkie Van Niekerk and Nico Vorster (Aosis, 2022).

27 See Casey Luskin, "The Top Ten Scientific Problems with Biological and Chemical Evolution," in *More Than Myth? Seeking the Full Truth About Genesis, Creation, and Evolution*, ed. Paul D. Brown and Robert Stackpole (Chartwell Press, 2014).

28 Carl Woese, "The Universal Ancestor," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA* 95, no. 12 (1998), 6854–59, emphasis added.

29 Graham Lawton, "Why Darwin Was Wrong About the Tree of Life," *New Scientist*, January 21, 2009.

30 Darwin, *Origin of Species*, 280.

31 Stephen J. Gould, "Evolution's Erratic Pace," *Natural History* 86 (1977): 13–14. More recently, Robert B. Carroll, curator of vertebrate paleontology at the Redpath Museum at McGill University, affirmed Gould's assessment when he wrote, "What is missing are the many intermediate forms hypothesized by Darwin." "Towards a New Evolutionary Synthesis," *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 15 (2000): 27–32.

32 Wells, *Icons of Evolution*, 37.

33 Casey Luskin, *Top Five Evidences for Intelligent Design* (ReThink, Discovery Institute, 2023), 55–58.

34 Wells, *Icons of Evolution*, 42.

35 Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Adler & Adler, 1985), 286.

36 Wells, *Icons of Evolution*, 219.

37 See Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999), 489; and Wells, *Icons of Evolution*, 209–28.

38 Quoted in Wells, *Icons of Evolution*, 221.

39 Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, 22.

40 For a thorough defense of Intelligent Design, see William Dembski, *The Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions About Intelligent Design* (InterVarsity Press, 2004).

41 I (Norm) first wrote about this with Kerby Anderson in a 1987 book we coauthored called *Origin Science: A Proposal for the Creation-Evolution Controversy* (Baker, 1987). See that book for more on the distinctions between empirical and forensic science.

42 William Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 1999), 244.

43 Walter Bradley et al., *The Mystery of Life's Origin: The Continuing Controversy* (Discovery Institute, 2020).

44 Walter Bradley, interview by Lee Strobel, in *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Zondervan, 2000), 108.

45 For these and other debates and dialogues of Stephen C. Meyer, visit http://www.stephencmeyer.org/debates.php. See also Frank Turek, *Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* (NavPress, 2015), chap. 3.

46 Stephen C. Meyer, *Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design* (HarperCollins, 2013), 389.

47 Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, 193.

48 Hideki Endo et al., "Role of the Giant Panda's Pseudo-Thumb," *Nature* 397 (Jan. 1999), 309–10.

49 The 2011 debate between Craig and Atkins at the University of Manchester is available at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ssq-S5M8wsY.

50 John Lennox, *Seven Days That Divide the World* (Zondervan, 2011), 53.

51 See Tony L. Shetter, "Genesis 1–2 in Light of Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths," Bible.org, https://bible.org/article/genesis-1-2-light-ancient-egyptian-creation-myths#P107_27442.

52 For more on the various views, see Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999); *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Bethany, 2003); and Lennox, *Seven Days*.

53 Some Christians fear that granting long time periods improves the plausibility of macroevolution. But as we saw in chap. 5, this is not so.

54 For a very robust treatment of theistic evolution, see *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical and Theological Critique*, ed. J. P. Moreland, Stephen C. Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann K. Gauger, and Wayne Grudem (Crossway, 2017).

Chapter 7: "Ten Aspects of Reality That Atheists Take on Faith"

1 See Frank Turek's interview with Lennox on the "I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist" podcast, May 2, 2025, available at CrossExamined.org. See also John Lennox, *Can Science Explain Everything?* (The Good Book Company, 2019).

2 See Daniel Dennett, "The Illusion of Consciousness," TED talk, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjbWr3ODbAo.

3 For more on this and many other problems with atheist arguments, see Frank Turek, *Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* (NavPress, 2015). Chap. 2 deals more with Dennett's claim.

4 J. B. S. Haldane, "When I Am Dead," in *Possible Worlds and Other Essays* (1927), available at https://jbshaldane.org/books/1927-Possible-Worlds/haldane-1927-possible-worlds.html.

5 For much more on why reason can't be explained by materialism, see Turek, *Stealing from God*, chap. 2.

6 C. S. Lewis, *The Case for Christianity* (MacMillan, 1944), 32. This book was originally published in Britain as *Broadcast Talks* (Geoffrey Bles, 1942). Lewis read these talks on the BBC during World War II. They eventually served as the basis for his classic book *Mere Christianity* (Geoffrey Bles, 1952).

7 Mark Fischetti and Jen Christiansen, "Our Bodies Replace Billions of Cells Every Day," in *Scientific American* 324, no. 4 (2021), 76, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/our-bodies-replace-billions-of-cells-every-day/.

8 Greg Koukl, "The Invisible Man," Stand to Reason, March/April 2025, https://www.str.org/w/the-invisible-man.

9 See Titus Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die: Verified Paranormal Phenomena from Near-Death Experience*s, 2nd ed. (International Association for Near-Death Studies, 2023). For the credentials of Pim van Lommel, see https://sciwizlive.com/speakers/pim-van-lommel/. For a succinct summary of NDE findings, including answers to objections, see Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences* (B&H, 2024), 963–1008.

10 Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, 975.

11 Quoted in Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, xxvii.

12 Michael Egnor and Denyse O'Leary, *The Immortal Mind: A Neurosurgeon's Case for the Existence of the Soul* (Worthy Books, 2025), 83.

13 J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (InterVarsity Press, 1997), 54.

14 Neuroscientist Sharon Dirckx makes this point in an interview with Lee Strobel in his book *Seeing the Supernatural: Investigating Angels, Demons, Mystical Dreams, Near-Death Encounters, and Other Mysteries of the Unseen World* (Zondervan, 2025), 9.

15 Paul Davies, "Taking Science on Faith," *New York Times*, November 24, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/24/opinion/24davies.html.

16 Turek, *Stealing from God*, 79.

17 Aristotle mistakenly thought the universe was eternal, and Aquinas didn't think a beginning could be proven outside of Scripture. So this argument is not for a historical *creating* cause but for a present *sustaining* cause. Atheist Richard Dawkins dismisses this argument from Aristotle and Aquinas because he doesn't appear to recognize this distinction.

18 Edward Feser, "The Road from Atheism," July 12, 2012, http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2012/07/road-from-atheism.html#more.

19 Video of both of these debates can be found at the Cross Examined YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7WBEJJlYWU&t=4538s and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDCDTaKfzXU&t=6037s.

20 Paul Copan has two helpful books answering charges that God was immoral in the Old Testament: *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Baker, 2011) and *Is God a Vindictive Bully? Reconciling Portrayals of God in the Old and New Testaments* (Baker Academic, 2022).

21 We are grateful to Cliffe Knechtle, who for nearly fifty years has engaged students and professors on college campuses, for affirming that this has been his experience as well. See the fine work of Cliffe and his son Stuart at givemeananswer.org and their YouTube channel by the same name. They have also been guests on Turek's "I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist" podcast. These podcasts are available through the Cross Examined app and YouTube channel.

22 To see this and several other metaphysical arguments for God developed much more fully, see Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (Ignatius, 2017).

23 Frank's book *Stealing from God* shows the six ways that atheists unwittingly steal from God in an attempt to support their atheism.

24 See Norman L. Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations: Contemporary Answers to Crucial Questions About the Christian Faith* (Bethany, 2001). This anecdote is from a personal conversation with Peter Bocchino, April 3, 2003.

25 Mortimer Adler, *Haves Without Have-Nots: Essays for the 21st Century on Democracy and Socialism* (Macmillan, 1991).

26 Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (Norton, 1987), 1.

27 William Dembski, *The Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions About Intelligent Design* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), 222.

28 Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth? Why Much of What We Teach About Evolution Is Wrong* (Regnery, 2000), 230.

29 This quotation is originally from a 1989 *New York Times* book review. It is available at https://www.wired.com/2007/06/dawkins-and-kra/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

30 Richard Lewontin, "Billions and Billions of Demons," *The New York Review of Books*, January 9, 1997, 31.

31 Lewontin, "Billions and Billions of Demons," 31.

32 Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (Norton, 1978), 114.

33 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880; repr. Norton, 1976), 72.

34 Quoted in D. James Kennedy, *Skeptics Answered* (Multnomah, 1997), 154.

35 Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

36 Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 130.

37 "Christopher Hitchens v Tony Blair: 'Is Religion a Force for God in the Word?'—Munk Debate, 2010," Speakola, November 26, 2010, https://speakola.com/ideas/christopher-hitchens-munk-debate-2010.

38 Christopher Hitchens, *god Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (Twelve, 2007).

39 Douglas Wilson first used a similar line in his debate with Hitchens. I think it sums up the

attitude of Hitchens and many other atheists well. You can see both of my debates with Hitchens on our Cross Examined YouTube channel.

40 Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity* (Zondervan, 2000), 91.

41 From "Reaching Evolutionists for Christ," recorded at Southern Evangelical Seminary's 2001 Apologetics Conference. An mp3 can be purchased at www.impactapologetics.com.

42 In this sense, atheism is no different from many other world religions in that it provides a way to deal with the guilt that results from immoral behavior. The difference is that some atheists, instead of acknowledging guilt and offering ways to atone for it or rules to avoid it, attempt to avoid any implication of guilt by asserting that there's no such thing as immoral behavior to be guilty about!

Chapter 8: "Mother Teresa Versus Hitler"

1 J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (InterVarsity Press, 1997), 208–9.

2 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1952), 19.

3 See J. Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know: A Guide* (Spence, 2003), 39.

4 Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know*, 39.

5 For more on the issues of transgenderism and same-sex marriage, and the natural law reasons why those are not true rights, see Frank Turek, *Correct, Not Politically Correct: About Same-Sex Marriage and Transgenderism* (CrossExamined.org, 2023).

6 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 25.

7 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 45.

8 The plea to be tolerant is a tacit admission that the behavior to be tolerated is wrong. Why? Because you don't need to plead with people to tolerate good behavior, only bad. No one needs to be talked into tolerating the behavior of Mother Teresa, only the behavior of some relativists. Likewise, no one makes excuses for acting like Mother Teresa. We make excuses only when we act against the Moral Law. We wouldn't do so if it didn't exist.

9 "Swollen to madness in isolation" is a phrase C. S. Lewis used in his book *The Abolition of Man* (1943; repr. HarperCollins, 2015) to describe how a single moral principle can lead to harm if taken out of context, isolated, and pursued without regard to other moral principles. For more on toxic empathy, see Allie Beth Stuckey, *Toxic Empathy: How Progressives Exploit Christian Compassion* (Sentinel, 2024).

10 This popular quote comes from Sowell's book *Barbarians Inside the Gates and Other Controversial Essays* (Hoover Institution Press, 1999).

11 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 26.

12 Thanks to our friend Francis Beckwith for this example. See his book *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air*, coauthored with Greg Koukl (Baker, 1998), for an outstanding critique of relativism.

13 See J. P. Moreland, *Scientism and Secularism: Learning to Respond to a Dangerous Ideology* (Crossway, 2018).

14 Budziszewski, *What We Can't Not Know*, 114.

15 For a complete discussion of how to resolve conflicting moral absolutes, see Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Baker, 1989), particularly chap. 7.

16 Feminist Naomi Wolf is a notable example. She admits that everyone knows an unborn child is a human being and that abortion is a real sin that requires atonement. But instead of ending abortion, Wolf suggests that women who get abortions hold candlelight vigils at abortion facilities to show their sorrow! This sounds like an expiatory ritual similar to—forgive the comparison—that of the cannibals.

17 For a more detailed discussion of this and other moral topics, see our book *Legislating Morality: Is It Wise? Is It Legal? Is It Possible?* (Wipf & Stock, 2003). See also the one-minute video on the homepage of caseforlife.com for visual proof of the immorality of elective abortion; it is also

posted here: https://vimeo.com/37025422?fl=pl&fe=vl.

18 Quoted in Frank Turek, *Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case* (NavPress, 2015). This book also shows more of the problems with Harris's view.

19 See Turek, *Stealing from God*.

20 Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* (Basic Books, 1996), 133.

21 Dawkins's colorful charges against the Old Testament depiction of God are in his 2006 book *The God Delusion* (Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 31. I (Frank) respond at length to Dawkins's charges in *Stealing from God*, chaps. 4 and 5.

22 For the entire discussion, see the video on Alex's YouTube channel, Daily Dose of Wisdom, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5a3MxIqZOs&t=3119s.

23 Edward O. Wilson, "The Biological Basis of Morality," *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1998, http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/98apr/biomoral.htm.

24 For a clip of this point only, see this video from the Daily Dose of Wisdom YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AGZm-2g9os.

25 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 22.

26 Jeffrey Schloss, who holds a PhD in ecology and evolutionary biology, argues that even though certain altruistic and self-sacrificial behaviors can perhaps be explained in Darwinian terms, there are others that cannot be so explained. Schloss focuses especially on those who aided and hid potential Holocaust victims. See Jeffrey Schloss, "Evolutionary Account of Altruism and the Problem of Goodness by Design," in William Dembski, ed., *Mere Creation: Science, Faith, and Intelligent Design* (InterVarsity Press, 1998), 236–61.

27 See Casey Luskin, "Evolutionary Models of Palaeoanthropology, Genetics and Psychology Fail to Account for Human Origins: A Review," in *Science and Faith in Dialogue*, ed. Frikkie Van Niekerk and Nico Vorster (Aosis, 2022).

28 The debate is available on video at the Reasonable Faith YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEoznzPSguI.

29 The entire debate can be viewed on the Cross Examined YouTube channel here: https://youtube/uDCDTaKfzXU?si=b2qRnEf2hX00AWW6&t=6025. This question starts at about 1 hour and 34 minutes.

30 We are not claiming that a person's material makeup can never affect a person's moral choices, only that a moral claim, such as "You should love your wife," is not made of molecules, and that moral choices and behavior are not completely controlled by molecules.

31 See Frank's *Stealing from God*, chap. 4, for much more on this.

32 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 4th printing (Hurst & Blackett, 1939), 239–40, 242.

33 Here is the entire quote: "The Races of Man.—At the present time there exist upon the earth five races or varieties of man, each very different from the other in instincts, social customs, and, to an extent, in structure. There are the Ethiopian or negro type, originating in Africa; the Malay or brown race, from the islands of the Pacific; the American Indian; the Mongolian or yellow race, including the natives of China, Japan, and the Eskimos; and, finally, *the highest type of all, the Caucasians*, represented by the civilized white inhabitants of Europe and America." George William Hunter, *Essentials of Biology: Presented in Problems* (American Book, 1911), 320, emphasis added.

34 Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 122–23, quoted in Scott Klusendorf, "Death with a Happy Face: Peter Singer's Bold Defense of Infanticide," *Christian Research Journal* 23, no. 1 (2001): 25. See also Helga Kuhse and Peter Singer, *Should the Baby Live? The Problem of Handicapped Infants* (Ashgate, 1994), 194–97.

35 Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion* (MIT Press, 2001).

36 Quoted in Nancy Pearcey, "Darwin's Dirty Secret," *World* magazine, March 25, 2000.

37 For more on this interview and the problems with atheistic explanations of morality, see Turek, *Stealing from God*, chap. 4.

38 Andrew Holt, "Counting 'Religious Wars' in the Encyclopedia of Wars," https://apholt.com/2018/12/26/counting-religious-wars-in-the-encyclopedia-of-wars/.

39 John Dickson, *Bullies and Saints: An Honest Look at the Good and Evil of Christian History* (Zondervan, 2021), 280, Kindle.

40 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 21.

Chapter 9: "Miracles: Signs of God or Gullibility?"

1 This Being is a he, not an it; a person, not a thing. We know this Being has personality because he has done something only persons can do—he has made a choice—namely, the choice to create.

2 God's works are also called natural or general revelation, and his word (Scripture) is also called special revelation.

3 See Francis Beckwith, Norman Geisler, et al., *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism: The Great Divide Between Mormonism and Christianity* (Harvest, 1998), chap. 2.

4 C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Barbour, 1961), 46.

5 Antony Flew, "Miracles," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (Macmillan and the Free Press, 1967), 5:346.

6 Recounted in "Worldviews in Conflict," a talk given at Southern Evangelical Seminary's 2002 Apologetics Conference. An mp3 can be purchased at www.impactapologetics.com.

7 Some may quibble over semantics here to say that miracles are acts of God inside the universe rather than the creation of the universe itself. Even if you grant that distinction, the point made here still stands: If God can act to create the universe, he can certainly act inside the universe.

8 We often hear Christians trying to explain the miraculous story of Jonah by appealing to supposed true accounts of fishermen surviving inside whales for some time. Even if those events are true, they are completely irrelevant. The story of Jonah is meant to be miraculous—namely, something only God could do. Certainly a man would not survive in a great fish for three days and be vomited up on a particular land mass unless it was an act of God. If that appears unbelievable because the world doesn't regularly work that way, it's *meant* to appear that way! A miracle might not be a miracle if it can be explained by natural means. The bottom line is that the God who conducted the greatest miracle of all—the creation of the universe, including great fish and human beings—would have had no trouble orchestrating the Jonah miracle.

9 C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (Macmillan, 1947), 106.

10 Unlike moral laws, natural laws are not based on God's nature and thus are changeable. While God cannot violate moral laws—because he is the unchanging standard of morality—he can change or interrupt natural laws at will. There's nothing about God's nature that requires the gravitational force to be what it is. But his nature does require his command about not murdering to be what it is.

11 Available at http://hcs.harvard.edu/~gsascf/shield.html.

12 Most people falsely believe that the more they've played the lottery in the past, the greater chance they have to win the next time they play. But it doesn't matter how many times a person has played the lottery in the past; each lottery is a unique event unaffected by previous plays. It's 76 million to one (or whatever the improbable odds are) every time. David Hume would suggest that the repeated past experience of losing should cause you to disbelieve it if you actually did win. But if one day you win, then you've really won, despite the fact that you may have lost thousands of times before. Likewise, a miracle can occur regardless of how many times it hasn't occurred in the past.

13 Lewis, *Miracles*, 105.

14 Norman L. Geisler, revised under the new title *Miracles and the Modern Mind: A Defense of Biblical Miracles* (Baker, 1992).

15 Antony Flew, *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (HarperOne, 2008).

16 Atheists such as John Earman, Michael Martin, Michael Levine, Graham Oppy, and J. L. Mackie have all written about flaws in Hume's argument.

17 For a detailed discussion, see Norman Geisler, *Signs and Wonders: Healings, Miracles, and Unusual Events: Which Are Real? Which Are Supernormal? Which Are Counterfeit?* (Tyndale, 1988), chap. 8. See also Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999).

18 The Bible: Ex. 4:1–5; Num. 16:5ff; 1 Kings 18:21–22; Matt. 12:38–39; Luke 7:20–22; John 3:1–2; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3–4; 2 Cor. 12:12. The Qur'an: 3:184; 17:102; cf. 23:45. Interestingly, while the Qur'an attributes miracles to Moses and Jesus, it says that Muhammad didn't do miracles. He just warned people about God (see 13:7; 6:37; and 17:59). According to the Qur'an, the Qur'an itself is the ultimate miracle (29:50–51).

19 C. S. Lewis made a similar point about Satan: "To be bad, he must exist and have intelligence and will. But existence, intelligence and will are in themselves good. Therefore he must be getting them from the Good Power: even to be bad he must borrow or steal from his opponent. And do you now begin to see why Christianity has always said that the devil is a fallen angel? That is not a mere story for the children. It is a real recognition of the fact that evil is a parasite, not an original thing. The powers which enable evil to carry on are powers given it by goodness. All the things which enable a bad man to be effectively bad are in themselves good things—resolution, cleverness, good looks, existence itself. That is why Dualism, in a strict sense, will not work." *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1943), 50.

20 For a detailed discussion, see Geisler, *Signs and Wonders*, chaps. 7 and 8. See the list on pages 107–8.

21 For much more on this topic, see the article from which this chart is taken: "Miracles, False," in Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 471–75.

22 Norman Cousins, *Anatomy of an Illness: As Perceived by the Patient*, 20th Anniversary ed. (Norton, 2005).

23 On some of these occasions, multiple miracles were performed. For example, Jesus is said to have healed "many" several times, usually as people from town gathered around (e.g., Mark 1:34; 3:10; 6:56). The apostles performed several miracles on single occasions as well (Acts 5:16; 8:7; 19:11–12).

24 Theologically, the three great periods of miracles have certain things in common. Moses needed miracles to deliver Israel and sustain the great number of people in the wilderness (Ex. 4:8). Elijah and Elisha performed miracles to deliver Israel from idolatry (see 1 Kings 18). Jesus and the apostles showed miracles to confirm the establishment of the new covenant and its offer of deliverance from sin (Heb. 2:3–4).

25 The ten biblical returns from the dead: (1) the widow's son in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17–22); (2) the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:18–37); (3) a man thrown into Elisha's grave (2 Kings 13:20–21); (4) Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:41); (5) the young man at Nain (Luke 7:14–15); (6) Lazarus (John 11:38–44); (7) unknown saints during Jesus's crucifixion (Matt. 27:52–53); (8) Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:1–6); (9) Tabitha/Dorcas (Acts 9:36–42); and (10) Eutychus (Acts 20:7–12).

26 Craig Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Baker Academic, 2011).

27 Lee Strobel, *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural* (Zondervan, 2018), 23.

Chapter 10: "Do We Have Early Testimony About Jesus?"

1 Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:3.3. There is a version of this quotation in which Josephus affirms that Jesus was the Messiah, but most scholars believe that Christians changed the quotation to read that way. According to Origen, a church father who was born in the late second century, Josephus was not a Christian. So it is unlikely he would have claimed that Jesus was the Messiah. The version we have quoted here is from an Arabic text that is believed to be uncorrupted.

2 Why didn't Josephus refer to Jesus more? We can surmise that as a historian for the emperor, Josephus had to choose his topics and words carefully. Domitian was particularly suspicious of anything that might be associated with sedition. The new sect called Christianity could have been

considered seditious because Christians had a strange new belief system and refused to worship Caesar and the Roman gods. As a result, Josephus certainly didn't want to alarm or upset his boss by writing too many favorable comments about Christianity. Nevertheless, these two references affirm the existence of Jesus and James and corroborate the New Testament accounts.

3 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:9.1.

4 See Acts 21:17–18; cf. 15:13.

5 The ten non-Christian sources are: Josephus; Tacitus, the Roman historian; Pliny the Younger, a Roman politician; Phlegon, a freed slave who wrote histories; Thallus, a first-century historian; Seutonius, a Roman historian; Lucian, a Greek satirist; Celsus, a Roman philosopher; Mara Bar-Serapion, a private citizen who wrote to his son; and the Jewish Talmud. For a complete listing of mentions of Christ from these sources, see Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999), 381–85; see also Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (College Press, 1996), chap. 9. For much more detail on these and other non-Christian sources for Jesus, see Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, vol. 1: *Evidences* (B&H Academic, 2024), chap. 6.

6 Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 531–37.

7 Keep in mind that this is *not* the gap between the events and the original writings. That gap is even shorter, as we'll see later in this chapter.

8 From personal correspondence with Daniel Wallace, who also mentioned this fact in a debate with Bart Ehrman on February 1, 2012.

9 See Williston Walker et al., *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (Scribner, 1985), 123–24.

10 For a breakdown of these quotations, see Norman Geisler and William Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible* (Moody, 1986), 431.

11 For more details and for sources, see Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 532.

12 Philip Schaff, *A Companion to the Greek Testament and the English Version*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1883), 177.

13 For more details and for sources, see Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 532.

14 Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2005).

15 Bart Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (HarperOne, 2007).

16 Fredric Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, 4th ed., rev. A. W. Adams (Harper, 1958), 23.

17 The Bible is not one source but a library of sources. The nine primary New Testament sources are Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and the writer of Hebrews, who collectively wrote twenty-seven books. Those writings contain testimony from additional eyewitness sources that may include written documents and people the authors, such as Luke, interviewed. The nine authors also include early creeds that predate their writings.

18 Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (InterVarsity Press, 1986), 38–40.

19 See Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* 65.

20 See John 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:4; Heb. 5:1–3; 7:23, 27; 8:3–5; 9:25; 10:1, 3–4, 11; 13:10–11; Rev. 11:1–2.

21 Daniel Wallace, "The Gospel of John: Introduction, Argument, Outline," Bible.org, https://bible.org/seriespage/4-gospel-john-introduction-argument-outline#_ftnref24.

22 For several arguments Wallace makes for the pre-AD 70 dating, see "The Gospel of John: Introduction, Argument, Outline." To see how several contemporary scholars are moving toward the pre-AD 70 dating of John, see Shane Rosenthal, "The Date of John's Gospel: Are We Witnessing a Paradigm Shift?," The Humble Skeptic, November 25, 2024, https://www.humbleskeptic.com/p/the-date-of-johns-gospel-are-we-witnessing. For a more complete list of scholars and their statements on

this, including scholars from the past, see Shane Rosenthal, "John 5:2: There Is in Jerusalem . . . ," The Humble Skeptic, May 23, 2024, https://www.humbleskeptic.com/p/john-52-there-is-in-jerusalem.

23 See Paul Barnett, *Jesus and the Rise of Early Christianity* (InterVarsity Press, 1999), 343.

24 Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Eisenbrauns, 1990), 376–82. For a summary of Hemer's reasons, see Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 528.

25 We'll provide evidence that Theophilus is the high priest in the next chapter.

26 See the first of four massive volumes on the resurrection in Habermas, *On the Resurrection*. See especially chap. 10 for a very thorough analysis of the creed in 1 Cor. 15. For a more popular treatment of this creed, see Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, College Press, 152–57.

27 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 2017), 578, emphasis added.

28 See Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 151.

29 In addition, by writing "I delivered to you," Paul was reminding them that he had already given them that testimony earlier. So while he wrote them around AD 56, he must have verbalized it to them during an earlier visit to Corinth, probably in AD 51. This also means Paul must have received it prior to AD 51, which means this information was in existence prior to then.

30 William Lillie, "The Empty Tomb and the Resurrection," in D. E. Nineham et al., *Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament* (SPCK, 1965), 125.

31 John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Wipf & Stock, 2000).

32 William F. Albright, *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands* (Funk & Wagnalls, 1956), 136.

33 William F. Albright, "William Albright: Toward a More Conservative View," *Christianity Today*, January 18, 1963, 3.

34 Jonathan Bernier, *Rethinking the Dates of the New Testament: The Evidence for Early Composition* (Baker Academic, 2022), 277.

35 As we'll see, Luke has been confirmed as a careful historian who must have known eyewitnesses of Jesus, and he was an eyewitness during some of Paul's missionary journeys. His writings then should be considered just as reliable as if Luke had seen events himself. Eyewitness testimony is primary source material even if it is recorded later by someone else.

36 A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Clarendon, 1963), 189.

37 William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises* (Wipf & Stock, 2001), 101.

38 William Lane Craig, "The Evidence for Jesus," Truth According to Scripture, https://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/documents/apologetics/evidence-jesus.php?utm.

39 Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (College Press, 1996), chap. 7.

40 Jimmy Akin, "The Cost of the Gospels and the Synoptic Problem," January 30, 2016, https://jimmyakin.com/2016/01/the-cost-of-the-gospels-and-the-synoptic-problem.html?t. I adjusted Akin's estimate to 2026 dollars.

41 Some scholars believe the New Testament writers used written records that predate the Gospels. Luke 1:1 seems to confirm this. However, many liberal scholars suggest that the Gospels are not eyewitness accounts but were derived from one yet undiscovered source known as "Q." In the next chapter, we'll show why the New Testament writers *were* eyewitnesses. For an outstanding critique of biblical criticism and the idea that there was a "Q" source from which the New Testament writers drew, see former "Q" proponent Eta Linnemann, *Biblical Criticism on Trial* (Kregel, 2001); see also Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 618–21.

42 Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (InterVarsity Press, 1987), 197.

43 Audio of the Geisler-Till debate, "Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?," is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lGW0jq96-ZM.

44 Incidentally, while we may not have documents from the 500, their inclusion with fourteen eyewitnesses identified by name makes their seeing the risen Christ an unlikely invention of Paul.

We'll discuss this further in chap. 11.

Chapter 11: "Do We Have Eyewitness Testimony About Jesus?"

1 See Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Eisenbrauns, 1990).

2 The threat of death even extended to Romans. See Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time* (Kregel, 1991), 305.

3 A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Clarendon, 1963), 189.

4 William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Putnam, 1896), 8.

5 See a complete listing of the miracles in Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999), 485.

6 Author Shane Rosenthal notes that Joanna, a woman follower of Jesus, was married to Chuza, the right-hand man of Herod Antipas (Luke 8:3). He then makes the fascinating case that Joanna was the granddaughter of the high priest Theophilus, as evidenced by this inscription found on a first-century ossuary (burial box): "Johanna, daughter of Yehohanan, son of Theophilus the High Priest." Luke highlights the testimony of Joanna by putting her in the center of a literary device known as a chiasm (Luke 24:10). Thus, Luke's Gospel (and his next book, Acts) could be something like an affidavit to the former high priest about the truth of Jesus, using Theophilus's own granddaughter as an eyewitness. Joanna's marriage to Chuza also provides a natural way of explaining how Luke knows what Herod is thinking (Luke 9:7–9): pillow talk. See Shane Rosenthal's ebook "Luke's Key Witness," which can be downloaded at The Humble Skeptic, www.humbleskeptic.com. For an intro, see https://www.humbleskeptic.com/p/joanna-an-obscure-disciple-or-lukes#footnote-1-145145765. See his video "An Archaeological Discovery Sheds Light on Luke," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0pjddWhjEk&t=688s.

7 Dan Barag and David Flusser, "The Ossuary of Yehohanah Granddaughter of the High Priest Theophilus," *Israel Exploration Journal* 36, no. 1/2 (1986), 39–44.

8 Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (InterVarsity Press, 2001), 63.

9 F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (InterVarsity Press, 1981), 82.

10 Quoted in Bruce, *New Testament Documents*, 90–91.

11 See Blomberg, *Historical Reliability of John's Gospel*, 69–281. For other good discussions of John's historicity, see Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?* (InterVarsity Press, 1986), 56–80; and Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 388–95.

12 Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable?*, 62.

13 See Titus Kennedy, *Excavating the Evidence for Jesus* (Harvest House, 2022), 219–22. See also the video by archaeologist Joel Kramer, "Is This Where Jesus Was Tried by Pilate?," Expedition Bible, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKJ6GPvNUgc.

14 See William D. Edwards et al., "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255, no. 11 (March 21, 1986): 1455–63.

15 Skeptics might say, "Well, maybe he saw some other crucified person whose heart was punctured with a spear." That might explain it if this were the only eyewitness detail John gives us. But as we have seen, he gives us several other details that strongly suggest he really was an eyewitness to the crucifixion of Jesus.

16 Archaeologist Titus Kennedy lists thirty-seven New Testament names in his *Archaeology and the People of the Bible* (Harvest House, 2026). There may actually be more because we did not conduct an exhaustive search on every name that appears in the New Testament, and some are more tentative than others. For example, if the Joanna in Luke's Gospel is the Joanna who is granddaughter of Theophilus, she would be another discovered by archaeology.

17 Pilate appears often in the New Testament: He is the Roman governor of Judea (Matt. 27:2; Luke 3:1); causes the slaughter of certain Galileans (Luke 13:1); tries Jesus and orders his crucifixion (Matt. 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 18:28–40; 19; Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28; 1 Tim. 6:13); and allows

Joseph of Arimathea to take Jesus's body (Matt. 27:57–58; Mark 15:43–45; Luke 23:52; John 19:38).

18 Mark refers to the high priest but does not name him (14:53). Again, this leads some scholars to believe that Mark's account was written before AD 37 because that's when Caiaphas's reign ended. The theory here is that Mark was writing to a contemporary audience who already knew who the high priest was.

19 Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:2.2.

20 See Matt. 26:3, 57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49; 18:13–14, 24, 28; Acts 4:6.

21 Kennedy, *Excavating the Evidence for Jesus*, chap. 7.

22 See Kennedy, *Archaeology and the People of the Bible.* See also the video series by Frank Turek, "Digging Up the Bible," 2024, lesson 20, available from ImpactApologetics.com.

23 See "The Short List," 34–37.

24 C. S. Lewis, "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?," in *God in the Dock* (Eerdmans, 1998), 159–60.

Chapter 12: "The Top Ten Reasons We Know the New Testament Writers Told the Truth"

1 For an explanation of these and more than 800 other verses critics have questioned, see Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Baker, 1992).

2 It's interesting to note that the creed recorded in 1 Corinthians 15 does not include the women as eyewitnesses. Perhaps that's because the apostles recognized that a mention of women would add no credibility to that of the fourteen male eyewitnesses specifically named there.

3 See Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (College Press, 1996), 205.

4 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 2017), chap. 4.

5 The Social Security Administration keeps this data. See https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/decades/names1920s.html.

6 See Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, 21.

7 J. Warner Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels*, updated and expanded ed. (David C. Cook, 2023), 87.

8 This is not to deny that the Synoptic Gospels may have used the same sources or one another for some events (most scholars think Mark was written first, and that Matthew and/or Luke may have used Mark as one of their sources). Some of the language in certain passages is close or nearly identical between the Synoptics. However, there is unique material in all the Gospels and varying details between certain accounts of the same events, such as the resurrection. So the Gospels are not one source. They contain independent eyewitness testimony.

9 Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists* (1874; repr., Baker, 1984), 9–10.

10 From J. C. Thorpe, "Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels," April 2013, 5, https://www.biblethink.org.uk/pdfdocs/Long/UDCf.pdf, which describes fifty in the Gospels. The term "undesigned coincidence" was coined by J. J. Blunt, whose 1847 book was titled *Undesigned Scriptural Coincidences*. This book attempted to build on the earlier work of William Paley (originator of the Watchmaker argument about creation), who published a work by the name of *Horae Paulinae* in 1790.

11 For a more modern treatment than Blunt's *Undesigned Scriptural Coincidences*, see Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts* (Deward, 2017). Blunt cited sixty-five examples from the Old Testament and thirty-four from the New Testament. McGrew found over forty just between the Gospels and Acts. See also Frank Turek, *Stealing from God* (NavPress, 2015), 195–98.

12 Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.9.3.

13 This does not deny that certain sections of the Old Testament were written and edited long after the events they describe. For example, Moses wrote the events of Genesis hundreds of years later.

However, Moses must have had some access to testimony about those earlier events, as evidenced by undesigned coincidences and other details in his writings that show he knew the times and places of which he wrote. For those other details, see Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries That Bring the Bible to Life* (Harvest House, 2020), chap. 1.

14 Quoted in Ron Cameron, ed., *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* (Westminster, 1982), 80–81.

15 Even if one argues that Matthew's angel is an embellishment, that wouldn't disprove the historicity of the resurrection. In fact, even the embellished *Gospel of Peter* is built on the historical fact of the resurrection.

16 N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress, 2003), 603.

17 All of the apostles were Jewish, and Luke is the only writer who is thought to have been a Gentile. However, a growing number of scholars are agreeing that Luke was Jewish as well. See "Was Luke Jewish?," appendix 2 in Shane Rosenthal's ebook, "Luke's Key Witness," available for download at The Humble Skeptic, www.humbleskeptic.com. For an intro, see https://www.humbleskeptic.com/p/joanna-an-obscure-disciple-or-lukes#footnote-1-145145765.

18 J. P. Moreland, interview by Lee Strobel, in *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Zondervan, 1998), 250.

19 Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which was written in the mid-50s AD, deals with the issue of Communion as if it has been in practice there for quite some time. Paul says he passed on to the Corinthians previously what the Lord had passed on to him (1 Cor. 11:23). Paul's first visit to Corinth was about AD 51, which is probably when he passed the practice of Communion on to them. This, of course, means Paul had to have received it even earlier.

20 Sean McDowell, *Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus* (Routledge, 2024), 286.

21 Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity*, 267.

22 From a speech delivered at the Mississippi College School of Law, quoted in Clay Chandler, "Scalia's Religion Remarks: Just a Matter of Free Speech?," *Washington Post*, April 15, 1996, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1996/04/15/scalias-religion-remarks-just-a-matter-of-free-speech/4b081d94-c6dc-47db-93f0-7a1fd57c5c3d/?utm.

23 The Qur'an implies that the Qur'an itself is a miracle that authenticates Muhammad as a prophet (17:88). For why this doesn't work and a discussion of the few Qur'anic passages that some Muslims believe speak of miracles, see Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (Baker, 2002), 163–68.

24 See Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 163–74.

25 Jay Smith has been an Islamic scholar and missionary to Muslims for decades. As of this writing, he is nearing publication of a book that reveals the weak historical evidence for what he calls the three-legged stool of Islam: Muhammad, Mecca, and the Qur'an. To see his shocking findings visually, watch the two presentations that he gave at Calvary Chapel Chino Hills, which now have millions of views. Links to those presentations are in the show notes of my (Frank's) two July 2025 interviews with Smith titled "Why the Foundations of Islam Are Now Crumbling." They can be found at the Cross Examined YouTube page. The first can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS5fiBg5FOI&list=PLU-nJq1k5wmjepv8FZv6MdFP02DgokgCt&index=53 and the second at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5b8_dUoj9Y&t=593s.

26 See Dan Gibson, *Let the Stones Speak: Archaeology Challenges Islam* (Independent Scholars Press, 2023).

27 See Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Creating the Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Study* (University of California Press, 2022).

28 In my (Frank's) interview with Jay Smith, he reveals that as late as 1924 there were thirty different versions of the Qur'an—not translations but significantly different versions of the book that Muslims claim is the one perfect, unchangeable, complete, and eternal book from God. Smith even

cites respected Muslim scholar Yasir Qadhi, who admits as much. See "Why the Foundations of Islam Are Now Crumbling" at the Cross Examined YouTube page.

Chapter 13: "Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?"

1 Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 9–10.

2 Gary Habermas is releasing a four-volume set on the resurrection that will total about 4,000 pages. This quotation of Ehrman is found in the first volume, titled *On the Resurrection*, vol. 1, *Evidences* (B&H Academic, 2024), 143.

3 William Lane Craig, in Paul Copan and Ronald Tacelli, eds., *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment? A Debate Between William Lane Craig and Gerd Lüdemann* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), 56.

4 This crucifixion victim's remains were part of the discovery of an ancient burial site in Jerusalem containing about thirty-five bodies. It was determined that most of these had suffered violent deaths in the Jewish uprising against Rome in AD 70. The crucifixion victim was a man named Yohanan Ben Ha'galgol. He was about twenty-four to twenty-eight years old and had a cleft palate. A seven-inch nail was still driven through both of his feet. The feet had been turned outward so that the square nail could be hammered through at the heel, just inside the Achilles tendon. This would have bowed the legs outward so that they could not have been used for support on the cross. The nail had gone through a wedge of acacia wood, then through the heels, then into an olive wood beam. There was also evidence that similar spikes had been put between the two bones of each lower arm. These had caused the upper bones to be worn smooth as the victim repeatedly raised and lowered himself to breathe (breathing is restricted with the arms raised). Crucifixion victims had to lift themselves to free the chest muscles, and when they grew too weak to do so, they died by suffocation. See Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999), 48.

5 William D. Edwards et al., "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255, no. 11 (March 21, 1986): 1463.

6 Some skeptics claim that this was merely a subjective appearance in the mind of Paul because his companions did not see anyone (Acts 9:7) or understand what the voice said (Acts 9:7; 22:9). But this conclusion is incorrect because Paul's companions did experience objective phenomena: (1) they saw a real light (though they didn't see a person) and (2) they heard a real voice (though they didn't understand what it said).

7 See Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (College Press, 1996), 202–5.

8 Referenced by Origen (ca. AD 185–ca. 254). See Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 218. Phlegon's writings do not survive but are referenced by Origen and Julius Africanus. Skeptics might object to the use of quotations referenced by Christians such as Origen, but this objection is unreasonable. While we can't check to see if Origen quoted Phlegon accurately, we can assume he did because Origen's audience at the time would have probably had access to Phlegon's original. It doesn't make sense that Origen would have made up or altered Phlegon's quote if it could have been easily checked out at the time.

9 Quoted in Paul Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church* (Kregel, 1991), 202; see also Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 176.

10 See Maier, *Fullness of Time*, 202.

11 Seutonius, *Claudius*, 25; quoted in Habermas, *Historical Jesus*, 191.

12 Muslims sometimes appeal to the *Gospel of Barnabas* as evidence, but this has proven to be a fraud. See Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (Baker, 2002), appendix 3.

13 Quoted in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, vol. 2, *Refutations* (B&H Academic, 2024), 853. (Pbuh is an abbreviation for "Peace be upon him.")

14 David Wood has several interactions with Muslims on this dilemma on YouTube. See his succinct explanation in a video titled "The Quran, the Bible, and the Islamic Dilemma (David Wood)," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNAS0aaViM4&t=11s.

15 See Laura Z. Powell, "The Islamic Dilemma: A Game-Changer for Conversations with Muslims," GCD (Gospel-Centered Discipleship), https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/the-islamic-dilemma-a-game-changer-for-conversations-with-muslims.

16 Quoted in Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate Between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Baker, 1998), 65.

17 Quoted in Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*

18 C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Eerdmans, 1967), 209.

19 Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (InterVarsity Press, 2001), 259.

20 Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, vol. 2, 557.

21 Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*.

22 For a comprehensive treatment of alternative theories for the resurrection, see Habermas and Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection*.

23 Thanks to Gary Habermas for this point (personal conversation, July 29, 2003).

24 Talmud Sanhedrin 43a.

25 Quoted in Copan and Tacelli, eds., *Jesus' Resurrection*, 181.

26 Quoted in Copan and Tacelli, eds., *Jesus' Resurrection*, 181.

27 Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*, 61–62, emphasis added.

28 See Paul Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (Kregel, 1999), 57, 81.

29 Bob and Gretchen Passantino, "The 2002 Great Debate: Atheism vs. Christianity—Testing the Case: Which View Prevailed?," Answers.org, http://www.answers.org/atheism/debate.html.

30 A similar argument was made from the unusual exploits of Napoleon in the satire by Richard Whately, *Historical Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte* (1819), in H. Morley, ed., *Famous Pamphlets* (Routledge, 1886).

Chapter 14: "Who Is Jesus: God or Just a Great Moral Teacher?"

1 Barry's testimony is taken from his chapter in Norman Geisler and Paul Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian: Leading Thinkers Explain Why They Believe* (Baker, 2001), 205–21; and from our personal conversations with him.

2 When compared with the next oldest existing manuscript of Isaiah—the Masoretic text from AD 1000—the text is 95 percent identical, and the 5 percent variation consists mostly of slips of the pen and spelling differences (none of these variances affect any matter of doctrine). This is an example of the meticulous care Jewish scribes took in copying the Scriptures over the centuries. For more on Old Testament manuscripts, see Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Moody, 1986), 357–82.

3 Larry R. Helyer, *Yesterday, Today and Forever: The Continuing Relevance of the Old Testament* (Sheffield, 1996), 318.

4 Many Jewish rabbis down through the centuries, even before the time of Christ, took Isaiah 53 as a reference to the coming Messiah. See S. R. Driver and A. D. Neubauer, *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah According to Jewish Interpreters* (Oxford and London, 1877). For example, this work quotes rabbinic opinions saying that the following verses refer to the Messiah: "young plant" from verse 2 (p. 22); "man of sorrows" from verse 3 (p. 11); "carried our sorrows" from verse 4 (p. 23); and "was pierced for our transgressions" from verse 5 (p. 24).

5 So-called psychic predictions cannot compare to those of the Bible. For example, the People's Almanac (1976) did a study of the predictions of twenty-five top psychics. They found that sixty-six of the seventy-two predictions (or 92 percent) were dead wrong. Those that were correct to some degree were vague or could be explained by chance or by a general knowledge of world circumstances. One prediction, for example, was that the United States and Russia would remain leading powers and there would be no world wars. Isn't that incredible? By contrast, some of the Bible's predictions were made hundreds of years in advance, when future circumstances could not be foreseen without divine help, and all of the Bible's predictions have proven to be 100 percent accurate. See Norman L. Geisler, *Baker*

Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics (Baker, 1999), 475–78. See pages 544–46 for problems with the alleged Nostradamus predictions.

6 Skeptics charge that David is speaking only about himself, not Christ, so any messianic application is illegitimate. There are three possibilities here.

First, some Christian scholars agree with the skeptics on verses like this. They say that Psalm 22 is not intended to be predictive. (Of course, even if they are correct, there are plenty of verses that clearly are predictive, as we have already seen.)

Second, other Christian scholars point out that some biblical prophecies may apply to two different people at two different times. Both David and Jesus certainly had enemies and difficulties in their lives, as expressed in Psalm 22. So why couldn't the psalm be true of David and Jesus?

The third option—which is the one that seems most plausible to us—is that Psalm 22 is solely predictive of Jesus. After all, the psalm contains several direct references to Christ's crucifixion experience. It begins with his cry from the cross—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1, cf. Matt. 27:46)—and then describes other events associated with the crucifixion, including the scorn, mocking, and insults of his accusers (vv. 6–7); his thirst (v. 15); his pierced hands and feet (v. 16); his unbroken bones (v. 17); his divided garments (v. 18); the fact that his enemies cast lots for his garments (v. 18); his ultimate rescue by the Lord (v. 19); and even his public praise of God to his fellow Israelites after his rescue (v. 22). This goes beyond coincidence and leads us to believe that Christ is actually the one speaking in the entire psalm. In other words, while David wrote the psalm, Christ is the one speaking. This is not unprecedented. In Psalm 110, God the Father is having a conversation with God the Son.

7 J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (Baker, 1973), 665–70. Payne also identified ninety-five messianic prophecies for Christ's second coming (forty-two in the Old Testament and fifty-three in the New Testament).

8 Quoted in Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, vol. 1: *Evidences* (B&H Academic, 2024), 498.

9 Brant Pitre, *Jesus and Divine Christology* (Eerdmans, 2024), 15.

10 Larry Hurtado, who has written extensively about early Christian worship practices, writes, "It is relevant . . . to note that the New Testament texts often identified as possibly derived from early hymns (e.g., Phil 2:6–11; Col 1:15–20; John 1:1–18; Eph 5:14; 1 Tim 3:16) and other early texts that are explicitly labeled as worship songs (e.g., Rev. 4:11; 5:9–10, 12–13; 7:12; 11:17–18; 15:3–4) are all heavily concerned with celebrating Jesus and his redemptive work. But, whether sung to the risen Jesus or sung to God about Jesus, these references to, and examples of, early Christian hymns/odes reflect the prominent place of Jesus in the gathered worship of early Christian circles, and constitute another devotional practice that, again, has no parallel in the Jewish tradition." *Honoring the Son: Jesus in Earliest Christian Devotional Practice.* (Lexham, 2018), Kindle loc. 799.

11 Habermas, *On the Resurrection*, vol. 1, 499.

12 For a short video on this, see "Gospel of Mark Calls Jesus God in Every Chapter," Wes Huff, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwQF-SS-O_g&t=309s. See also Michael Jones interviewing Michael Licona in "Is Jesus God in the Gospel of Mark?," Inspiring Philosophy, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDjh47C6TiI.

13 See "Bart Ehrman Stumbles on the Deity of Christ," Seasoned Apologist, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EeO8zRtFus.

14 For a very robust defense of the deity of Christ, see Robert M. Bowman Jr. and Ed Komoszweski, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense* (Kregel Academic, 2024).

15 For an outstanding analysis of this parable, including the central message of grace, see Tim Keller, *Prodigal God* (Penguin, 2008). See also Peter J. Williams, *The Surprising Genius of Jesus* (Crossway, 2023).

16 Philip B. Payne, "Jesus' Implicit Claim to Deity in His Parables," *Trinity Journal*, 2 NS (1981), 17.

17 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1952), 54–55.

18 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 55–56.

19 Peter Kreeft, "Why I Believe Jesus Is the Son of God," in Geisler and Hoffman, eds., *Why I Am a Christian*, 228–29.

20 Pitre, *Jesus and Divine Christology*, 18–19, emphasis original.

21 Quoted in Jeffrey L. Sheler, *Is the Bible True? How Modern Debates and Discoveries Affirm the Essence of the Scriptures* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 208.

22 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996).

23 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 145.

24 See Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*. The following comes from page 730: "The Holy Spirit is called 'God' (Acts 5:3–4). He possesses the attributes of deity, such as omnipresence (cf. Ps. 139:7–12) and omniscience (1 Cor. 2:10–11). He is associated with God the Father in creation (Gen. 1:2). He is involved with other members of the Godhead in the work of redemption (John 3:5–6; Rom. 8:9–17, 23–27; Titus 3:5–7). He is associated with other members of the Trinity under the 'name' of God (Matt. 28:18–20). Finally, the Holy Spirit appears, along with the Father and Son, in New Testament benedictions (e.g., 2 Cor. 13:14). Not only does the Holy Spirit possess deity but he also has a differentiated personality. That he is a distinct person is clear in that Scripture refers to him with personal pronouns (John 14:26; 16:13). . . . He does things only persons can do, such as teach (John 14:26; 1 John 2:27), convict of sin (John 16:7–8), and be grieved by sin (Eph. 4:30). Finally, the Holy Spirit has intellect (1 Cor. 2:10–11), will (1 Cor. 12:11), and feeling (Eph. 4:30)."

Chapter 15: "What Did Jesus Teach About the Bible?"

1 Edward Feser, who is a Roman Catholic, made a similar point when talking about what the culture would like to see in a pope. Unlike the culture, Jesus and the Bible writers stress the primary importance of defending doctrine, not being "nice" and agreeable. See "The Pope's First Duty," April 22, 2025, https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2025/04/the-popes-first-duty.html.

2 Levi Secord, "When Jesus Insulted People: A Comprehensive List," https://www.christbible.net/escape-from-reason/when-jesus-insulted-people-a-comprehensive-list.

3 J. Warner Wallace, *Person of Interest: Why Jesus Still Matters in a World That Rejects the Bible* (Zondervan, 2021), 223.

4 The Jewish Old Testament contains the same material as the Protestant Old Testament, but the book divisions are different. The Protestant Old Testament splits Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah into two books each, and the twelve minor prophets into twelve separate books. So while they are numbered as twenty-four books in the Jewish Old Testament, these same books are split into thirty-nine books in the Protestant Old Testament. The Roman Catholic Old Testament contains eleven additional books (seven listed separately and four inserted as pieces of other books) that are called the Apocrypha. These books were officially added by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent in 1546, largely in response to the Reformation initiated by Martin Luther. For more on this, and much about Protestant agreements and differences with Roman Catholics, see Norman Geisler and Ralph McKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Baker: 1995).

5 This table is reproduced from Norman Geisler and William Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible* (Moody, 1986), 85.

6 The Bible affirms what we know by general revelation—that there must be an unchanging standard of truth. The Bible claims that God is truth (Ps. 31:5; 33:4; John 14:6; 1 John 4:6); that God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2); and that God cannot change (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29 NIV; Ps. 102:26–27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; James 1:17). For more on the attributes of God, see Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Bethany, 2003), part 1.

7 Quoted in Jeffrey L. Sheler, *Is the Bible True? How Modern Debates and Discoveries Affirm the Essence of the Scriptures* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 78.

8 Sheler, *Is the Bible True?*, 80.

9 There are even archaeological discoveries made in Egypt that provide evidence the Hebrews were there prior to 1446 BC (the biblical date for the Exodus). For that, and much more, see Titus Kennedy, *Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries That Bring the Bible to Life* (Harvest House, 2020). See also the video series of twenty-two one-hour sessions by Frank Turek titled *Digging Up the Bible: Every Major Archaeological Discovery from Genesis to Revelation*, 2024, available at CrossExamined.org.

10 For a listing of biblical miracles, see "Miracles in the Bible," in Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999).

11 This is not an argument from silence because the Bible is not silent on the nature, purpose, and function of these special apostolic miracles (see, for example, 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3–4). This function of confirming apostolic revelation fits with their cessation, since they were not needed after the revelation was confirmed.

12 Bruce Metzger, interview in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus* (Zondervan, 1998), 69.

13 Only Philemon, James, 2 Peter, and 3 John are not cited. Yet Clement of Rome (writing AD 95–97) and/or Ignatius (AD 110) confirm Philemon, James, and 2 Peter even before Polycarp and Irenaeus. So the only book not cited as authentic by anyone in the first two centuries is the tiny letter called 3 John. See Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, 294.

14 Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, 3.3.4.

15 This table is reproduced from Norman Geisler and William Nix, *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible*, rev. and expanded ed. (Moody, 2012), 142.

16 From Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, 294.

17 Luke, while technically not an apostle, possibly was one of the 500 who witnessed the resurrected Christ. But even if he was not, Luke had his writings confirmed by his traveling companion, the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7). Therefore, Luke's work is considered apostolic teaching. Mark is also confirmed by an apostle because Peter's recollections are thought to be the basis of Mark's Gospel.

18 See J. Warner Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels*, updated and expanded ed. (David C. Cook, 2023), chap. 13.

19 Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *The Big Book of Bible Difficulties: Clear and Concise Answers from Genesis to Revelation* (Baker, 2008).

20 Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, in P. Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (1st series, 1886–1894; repr., Eerdmans, 1952), 11.5.

21 Quoted in *Norm Geisler: Not Qualified*, directed by Rachel M. Payne (Norm Geisler International Ministries, 2021). The title of this documentary, which traces the life of Norman Geisler, is not an attack on Geisler's qualifications as a Bible teacher and apologist but refers to his humble beginnings.

22 Copyist errors have been found in manuscripts, but they are easily identified and known not to be in the original by comparing the many manuscripts in existence (see chap. 10). While no original Bible manuscripts have yet been found, earlier manuscripts of other works have survived. So it is possible that a Bible original may someday be discovered.

23 Ehrman argues this way in many of his public debates. One that I (Frank) attended was in 2009 at Southern Evangelical Seminary with Michael Licona. To see a clip from that debate and a response to Ehrman's line of argumentation from author Robert Martin, see "Bart Ehrman and the Case Against the Resurrection," Atheist Forum, April 4, 2014, https://atheistforum.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/bart-ehrman-and-the-case-against-the-resurrection/. Go back to chap. 12, point 6, for more on why this line of argumentation doesn't work.

24 For example, at one time critics thought the Bible was wrong about a people known as the Hittites. There was no evidence of their existence outside of the Bible—until their entire library was

uncovered in Turkey. Likewise, critics thought that writing did not exist in Moses's time, so there was no way he could have written any of the Old Testament—until they found the Ebla tablets in Syria, which predate Moses by a thousand years. As research continues, the Bible continues to be affirmed.

Chapter 16: "Your Destiny: Will You Choose Justice or Grace?"

1 See J. Warner Wallace, *Cold Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels*, updated and expanded ed. (David C. Cook, 2023). See also ColdCaseChristianity.com.

2 Adapted from "Arise, Sir Knight," a sermon by James Allen Francis, in *The Real Jesus and Other Sermons* (Judson, 1926), 123–24.

3 Frank Turek and Zach Turek, *Hollywood Heroes: How Your Favorite Movies Reveal God* (NavPress, 2022).

4 See Frank Turek's interview with Lennox on the "I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist" podcast, May 2, 2025. See JohnLennox.org for much more from the brilliant and affable Lennox.

5 Since God is love, he needs no prompting or performance by us to love us. We, however, as fallen creatures, sometimes need motivation to love God. The Bible says that we love Jesus and do good works because he loved us first and because of what he's done for us (1 John 4:19; 2 Cor. 5:14). Good works are the result of salvation, not the cause of it.

6 For a discussion of how God can be sovereign and humans remain free, see Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will*, 2nd ed. (Bethany, 2001).

7 This paraphrase of Kierkegaard's parable can be found at Reading Theology, https://readingtheology.com/the-king-and-the-maiden-by-s%C3%B8ren-kierkegaard. Its original source is Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (1844).

8 C. Truman Davis, M.D., "A Physician Analyzes the Crucifixion: A Medical Explanation of What Jesus Endured on the Day He Died," http://www.thecross-photo.com/Dr_C._Truman_Davis_Analyzes_the_Crucifixion.htm. Originally published in *Arizona Medicine*, March 1965, Arizona Medical Association. For additional information on the death of Christ, see William D. Edwards et al., "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 255, no. 11 (March 21, 1986): 1463.

9 For an overview of this evidence, see Lee Strobel's interview of Tom Doyle in *Seeing the Supernatural: Investigating Angels, Demons, Mystical Dreams, Near-Death Encounters, and Other Mysteries of the Unseen* (Zondervan, 2025), chap. 4. See also Tom Doyle, *Dreams and Visions: Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?* (Thomas Nelson, 2012).

10 Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Penguin, 2008), 76–77.

11 See Luke 12:46–48. For an example of a greater judgment, see Matthew 10:15. For an example of a greater commandment, see Matthew 22:37–38.

12 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1943), 65.

13 For more on hell and objections to hell, see Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999), 308–13.

14 C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Macmillan, 1946), 72.

15 C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Touchstone, 1949), 36.

16 For examples of Bible books where doubt and questions about God are expressed, see Job, many of the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations.

Appendix 1: "If God, Why Evil?"

1 Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering* (Servant, 1986), 142.

2 C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (Macmillan, 1959), 81.

3 Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh et al. (Image, 1958), 295 (14.1).

4 James Madison, in *The Federalist*, Benjamin F. Wright, ed. (Harvard University Press, 1961), 356.

5 For a more complete treatment of the problem of evil, see Clay Jones, *Why Does God Allow Evil? Compelling Answers for Life's Toughest Questions* (Harvest House, 2017); Frank Turek, *Stealing*

from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make Their Case (NavPress, 2015); Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999); and Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering*.

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