

Evidence for Christianity

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Atheism and Agnosticism

Dr. Gary Phillips

ATHEISTS AND AGNOSTICS: PEOPLE OF FAITH

1. ATHEISM:

- a) Meaning: There is no God.
Literally, “a” (‘alpha-privative’ which negates what follows) + theos (‘God’).
- b) Assumption: Knowledge of three things as fact.
 - (1) All believers everywhere throughout centuries were all wrong (weak, but evidence of ‘chronological snobbery’).
 - (2) Must assume that we know what God would be like if He/She/It DID exist...
 - (3) Must assume no evidence for God exists in the vastness of the (almost unknown) universe—i.e., proving inductively a universal negative.
- c) Critique: The Bible puts a rather blunt epitaph to this kind of epistemology: Psalm 14:1
The best that an atheist can say is this: “the evidence for God is not conclusive.”

2. AGNOSTICISM

- a) Meaning
A term coined by Thomas H. Huxley in an article, *Agnosticism and Christianity* (1889).
Literally, a + gnosis (‘knowledge’).
- b) Philosophical Foundation
David Hume (1711-1776) in, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1784).
Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), *Critique of Pure Reason*.
- c) Current Forms of Agnosticism¹
 - (1) *Soft Agnosticism*: not knowing or having knowledge about god(s). It is a statement about personal knowledge. The weak (soft) agnostic may not know for sure whether god(s) exist but does not preclude that such knowledge can be obtained.
 - (2) *Hard Agnosticism*: believing that knowledge about god(s) is not possible. This is a statement about the possibility of knowledge for anyone, not just the person in question.
- d) Evaluation of Agnosticism
 - (1) It is self-defeating logically (how do you know?).
 - (2) It fails to fulfill its own criteria for knowledge.
 - (3) It fails to distinguish between comprehensive knowledge and meaningful knowledge.
 - (4) Practically, the crucial (ultimate) questions of life are not optional.

In Sum: Atheists and Agnostics have bitten off more than they can eschew, and cannot defend their "religion."

¹ Definitions taken from “*Strong vs. Weak Agnosticism*” by Austin Cline. About, Inc. (About.com). Available online at: http://atheism.about.com/od/aboutagnosticism/a/strong_weak.htm .

The "Classical" Arguments for God's Existence

Dr. Gary Phillips

1. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Psalm 14:1

Focus: *the very idea of God*

Anselm (1033-1109)

Descartes (1596-1650)

The very idea of God suggests that God exists. From what source did finite beings get the idea of an infinite God?
More formally . . .

1. God is, by definition, the Being Who possesses all positive attributes.
2. Existence is a positive attribute.
3. Therefore, God exists.

2. THE DESIGN (TELEOLOGICAL) ARGUMENT

Acts 14:15-18; Psalm 19:2

Focus: *cosmic order*

William Paley (1743-1805)

1. Evidence of design and purpose can be explained only by an intelligent designer (Cause).
2. The universe demonstrates design and purpose.
3. Therefore there is an intelligent Designer, Whom we call God.

Paley's "Watchmaker" illustration--if you came upon a watch in a field, you would assume a watchmaker existed. While the Grand Canyon may have come about by natural processes, Mount Rushmore did not! There are good objections to this argument in its older forms. However, currently very sophisticated forms of the design argument are emerging by considering (positively) the 'Anthropic' Principle, and (negatively) by considering how unique life on planet earth actually is (see *Rare Earth: Why Complex Life Is Uncommon In The Universe*, by Peter Ward and Donald Brownlee [Copernicus Books, 2000]).

3. THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Psalm 19:1-6; Rom 1:18-32

Focus: *causality*

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Richard Swineburne (current)

Similar to "Design" argument, but stresses causality.

1. While not everything has a cause, all beginnings have a cause (since God had no beginning, He does not necessarily have a cause).
2. Every new existence or change in anything previously existing must have a prior cause adequate to the effect.
3. The universe is a system of changes.
4. Therefore, the universe must have a prior cause adequate to produce it, which is called God.²

"It is very unlikely that a universe would exist uncaused, but rather more likely that God would exist uncaused."

-- Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford, 1979), p. 132.

4. THE MORAL (ANTHROPOLOGICAL) ARGUMENT

Romans 1:19-20; 2:15

Focus: *moral personality*

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

1. All men have a sense of moral obligation.
2. This sense does not originate with man.

²The alternative is to argue that matter is eternal, and generates itself; most atheists are unprepared to argue this.

3. Therefore, it implies a moral Lawgiver.

One writer put it, *Your conscience suggests Conscience.*

Your will suggests Will.

Your person suggests Person.

We have an intuitive sense that all injustices will someday be put right, that a moral balance in the world will be restored. Or that this 'ought' to occur. From where did this sense of 'oughtness' come?

I believe that one strong form of moral argument would say, "Examine the alternatives!":

1. If God does not exist, my moral sense is simply another evolved appendage and there are no moral absolutes (an absolute is by definition a standard outside of man to which all men are accountable). All moral rules be come relative. As Dostoevsky said, "if God does not exist, anything is possible." But few atheists believe this or can live it. At some point they say "this is wrong!" or "that is unfair!"
2. If God does not exist and material reality is all there is ("Naturalism" or "Scientism"), then self-consciousness is really self-delusion. My thinking is simply the result of cranial chemical reactions--I have no free will, I have no moral responsibility for my actions, I simply think that I think (huh?), and nothing is intrinsically good or evil. In other words, to deny the existence of God is deny the nature of man. Again, few atheists want to admit this, nor (I would argue) can they live consistently this way.

5. The Oh-By-The-Way Department

What about arguments from experience? "You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart!" These are valid and true, but are not logically compelling because contradictory viewpoints can also have experiences. Everyone--from Muslims to Mormons--has religious experiences!

6. Value of the arguments for God's existence:

1. What they DO NOT demonstrate:
"God *MUST* exist..."
2. What they DO demonstrate:
Belief in God is a very reasonable option for any thinking person.

"You see, God has put enough into this world to make faith in Him a most reasonable thing, but he has left enough out to make it impossible to live by sheer reason alone. Does that mean that we violate reason? Absolutely not. But it does mean that there are times when reason is transcended."

- from Ravi Zacharias, "Sufficient and Comprehensive Knowledge," *A Slice of Infinity* (June 12, 2002).
(To subscribe, e-mail: slice-subscribe@lists.gospelcom.net)

Apologetics and Jesus: Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?

Dr. Gary Phillips

Unlike other "religions," Christianity is founded uniquely and completely on a Person. Christianity is only properly understood (or, effectively attacked) in the Person of Jesus Christ. My thesis: A double standard is at work when individuals consider the person and claims of Jesus of Nazareth. The person and work of no other historical figure is treated with as much skepticism. I believe that because the stakes are eternally high, other factors are invoked to render any evidence concerning Jesus "guilty until proven innocent." WHO IS JESUS?

PERSPECTIVE ONE: JESUS WHO? THE VIEW OF ABSOLUTE SKEPTICISM

In this view, the historical Jesus of Nazareth was a creation based upon current 'god-myths' (or ideas regarding

Qumran's 'Teacher of Righteousness') and foisted upon a gullible and superstitious people in order to exercise control and power.

"There was no such person in the history of the world as Jesus Christ. There was no historical, living, breathing, sentient human being by that name. Ever. The Bible is a fictional, nonhistorical narrative. The myth is good for business."

--Jon Murray, President, American Atheists, cited in *Life* (December, 1994, p. 68)

DID JESUS EXIST?

For Christians, the first century revolves around NT events--but for secular historians and writers of that time, not so. We know this and expect it. (there was no reporter from the *Jerusalem Post* eagerly awaiting Joseph and Mary at the Bethlehem manger). Similarly, none of us are necessarily the focus of *today's* writers of history. But if one of your number becomes prominent--say President--then your background will come under scrutiny, and the questions of your history will arise (as President Clinton and others have found out). Granted that secular writers would not be expected to be eyewitness observers of the NT events, is it possible that these events were *invented*? Could it be that, for instance, Jesus of Nazareth--along with the Great Pumpkin--**never existed in history**? This foundational objection to Christianity is fairly new in the history of skepticism,³ nor is it taken seriously by most scholars--but nevertheless the objection needs to be addressed.⁴

THE CHARGE: Jesus of Nazareth never existed. This idea appealed to Karl Marx, who incorporated it into his writings, with the result that it became the official position of the Communist Party. G. A. Wells, professor at Birkbeck College, London, states the case this way: "The earliest references to the historical Jesus are so vague that it is not necessary to hold that he ever existed; the rise of Christianity can, from the undoubtedly historical antecedents, be explained quite well without him...."⁵

WHAT DOES HISTORY SAY? We will examine Jewish and Roman extra-biblical sources.

a. Jewish Sources for Jesus

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Josephus

"Josephus knew that Jesus was the brother of James, the martyred leader of the church in Jerusalem, and that he was a wise teacher who had established a wide and lasting following, despite the fact that he had been crucified under Pilate at the instigation of some of the Jewish leaders." (Yamauchi, 213-214)

The Talmud

b. Roman Sources for Jesus

Suetonius (c. A.D. 70-160)

"Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome." (*Vita Claudius*, 25.4) This expulsion occurred in A.D. 49, and many scholars agree that the name is probably a misspelling of "Christus." (Note: Paul came to Corinth in A.D. 50; see Acts 18:2 for the historical event to which Suetonius refers).⁶ Suetonius also states that "punishment was inflicted upon the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition." (*Vita Nero*, 16:11-13)

Tacitus (c. A.D. 55-117)

The following passage was written in A.D. 115 describing the aftermath of the burning of Rome:

"But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration [the

³Similarly, some Neo-nazi groups are questioning the historicity of the Holocaust.

⁴The following material is adapted from widely recognized ancient historian Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?", in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Zondervan, 1995): 207-229.

⁵G. A. Wells, *The Historical Evidence For Jesus* (Prometheus Books, 1988), p. ix.

⁶One obstacle to identifying "Chrestus" with "Christus" is that years later in Rome, Jewish leaders seem to have little knowledge of Christianity (Acts 28:21-22).

burning of Rome] was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fasted the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind." (*Annals*, 15:44)

Actually, the "immense multitude" was willing to die rather than to recant the person of Christ.

Pliny the Younger (c. A.D. 61-113)

Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, wrote to emperor Trajan in A.D. 111:

"I have never been present at an examination of Christians. Consequently, I do not know the nature of the extent of the punishments usually meted out to them, nor the grounds for starting an investigation and how far it should be pressed.... I have asked them if they are Christians, and if they admit it, I repeat the question a second and third time, with a warning of the punishment awaiting them. If they persist, I order them to be led away for execution; for, whatever the nature of their admission, I am convinced that their stubbornness and unshakeable obstinacy ought not to go unpunished.... They also declared that the sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this: they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honour of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery.... This made me decide it was all the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from two slave-women, whom they call deaconesses. I found nothing but a degenerate sort of cult carried to extravagant lengths." (*Letters*, 10.96)

Yamauchi concludes: "Even if we did not have the NT or Christian writings, we would be able to conclude from such non-Christian writings as Josephus, the *Talmud*, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger that...

- (1) Jesus was a Jewish teacher;
- (2) many people believed that he performed healings and exorcisms;
- (3) he was rejected by the Jewish leaders;
- (4) he was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius;
- (5) despite this shameful death, his followers, who believed that he was still alive, spread beyond Palestine so that there were multitudes of them in Rome by A.D. 64;
- (6) all kinds of people from the cities and countryside--men and women, slave and free--worshipped him as God by the beginning of the second century." (pp. 221-222)

One must keep in mind that all of the above references are--by definition--from those who chose never to become Christians, and thus may be considered **hostile testimonials** (possibly excluding Josephus). To all of these references we may add hundreds of allusions by Christian writers! And, don't forget our primary historical source for Jesus: the New Testament.

PERSPECTIVE TWO: JESUS, THE NEW AGE GURU

Many want to claim, understandably, that Jesus is on their metaphysical team. In modern forms of **pantheism**, we are all God/god. There have been many "Christs" who are enlightened gurus, and there will be more. Jesus was not unique. (This is New Age religion trying to work Jesus into its teachings; see *The Celestine Prophecy*, p. 236). Some say Jesus gained his spiritual wisdom from travel in the East, particularly India and Tibet. He taught reincarnation and Karma (the church censored much of his teaching, but glimmers remain). His death was not an atoning sacrifice, but rather a martyrdom. Various mediums claim to have had revelations about Jesus' lost years, e.g., *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ* by Levi Downing. "Jesus also had part of God in himself--he was divine as everyone is divine--except in that he lived a more exemplary and transcendental life than anyone else, and made the best use of that Power which is within each one." -- "Chapter 4: American Transcendentalism: An Introduction", PAL: Perspectives on American Literature--A Research and Reference Guide. URL: <http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/home.html>

Occasionally appeal is made to the Gnostic Gospels found near Nag Hammadi in South Egypt in 1945. Gnosticism bears great resemblance to modern New Age teaching in that it held that through higher (mystical?) knowledge comes "salvation." Also, Gnosticism absorbed the notion from Greek philosophy that the body is intrinsically evil, and therefore God could never have become incarnated.

One rather strange but persistent claim is knowledge that Jesus' 'lost years' (between ages 12 and 30) were spent in Tibet, India and China. Russian journalist N. Notovich wrote *The Unknown Life of Jesus* in 1894, which he said was based on a book he saw in the Hiris monastery in Tibet.

Some claim NT support: *Luke 17:21*, "*The Kingdom of God is within you*" = *clear statement of Pantheism*

John 3:3, "You must be born again" = clear statement of Reincarnation
John 9:1-3, the man born blind "sinned" in previous life (reincarnation again)
Matthew 17:12-13, John the Baptist is Elijah (reincarnated)

HOW DOES ONE RESPOND?

1. The Gnostic literature was mostly written in the second century or later, over 100 years after the NT was written, and long after the death of the eyewitnesses to Jesus. Gnostic teaching differs drastically from the NT teaching about Jesus, which does rest on the testimony of eyewitnesses. The historical Jesus doesn't fit the claim – see John 14:6; Acts 4:12; and Phil 2:10-11 (where Jesus is Sovereign God).

2. "Jesus claimed to be completely at one with the Father and yet distinct from him (John 5:17ff). He recognized the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God and yet as an entity distinct from himself (Matthew 12:28; John 14:15-17; 15:26ff)" (Lucas, 8).

3. What about claims such as the one made in Notovich's *The Unknown Life of Jesus*? "All attempts to trace this book have failed. The chief Lama, who remembered Notovich, denied any knowledge of the book. It is not recorded in the catalogues of books kept in the monasteries of Tibet and China. [And furthermore,] the account of Eastern religions given in the book is incorrect at several points" (Lucas, 7). That is, this claim lacks verifiability and credibility.

4. But how do you answer revelation claims such as those made by mediums? The burden of proof would rest with all such claims, so you should simply ask for the evidence they offer. However, be aware that you may be told their views are 'beyond proof' (huh?). Further, these a) contain significant errors relating to the secular history of the time, and, b) they disagree with each other about what Jesus supposedly did.

5. How does one answer the scriptures cited in support of the New Age Jesus? By studying them!

- *Luke 17:21, "The Kingdom of God is within you"* [this is not the exact wording from the Bible, which says, "nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."]
- *John 3:3, "You must be born again" = Reincarnation* [but not in light of the following verses]
- *John 9:1-3, the man born blind* [but not according to rabbis, who debated pre-natal sin based on Gen 25:22]
- *Matthew 17:12-13, John the Baptist is Elijah (reincarnated)* [but not according to Luke 1:17 and John 1:21]

PERSPECTIVE THREE: THE JESUS SEMINAR

A. PURPOSE OF THE JESUS SEMINAR:

"We are about to embark on a momentous enterprise. We are going to inquire simply, rigorously after the voice of Jesus, after what he really said." –Robert Funk, founder of Jesus Seminar

"The goal of the Seminar was to review each of the fifteen hundred items and determine which of them could be ascribed with a high degree of probability to Jesus. The items passing the test would be included in a database for determining who Jesus was. But the interpretation of the data was to be excluded from the agenda of the Seminar and left to individual scholars working from their own perspectives." –from *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*

B. METHODS OF THE JESUS SEMINAR

"Voting was adopted, after extended debate, as the most efficient way of ascertaining whether a scholarly consensus existed on a given point. Committees creating a critical text of the Greek New Testament under the auspices of the United Bible Societies vote on whether to print this or that text and what variants to consign to notes... Voting does not, of course, determine the truth; voting only indicates what the best judgment is of a significant number of scholars sitting around the table. It was deemed entirely consonant with the mission of the Jesus Seminar to decide whether, after careful review of the evidence, a particular saying or parable did or did not fairly represent the voice of the historical Jesus."

“The Seminar adopted four categories as a compromise with those who wanted more. In addition to red, we permitted a pink vote for those who wanted to hedge: a pink vote represented reservations either about the degree of certainty or about modifications the saying or parable had suffered in the course of its transmission and recording. And for those who wanted to avoid a flat negative vote, we allowed a gray vote (gray being a weak form of black). The Seminar employed colored beads dropped into voting boxes in order to permit all members to vote in secret. Beads and boxes turned out to be a fortunate choice for both Fellows and an interested public.”

- from *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*

C. ASSUMPTIONS OF THE JESUS SEMINAR:

1. Philosophical naturalism -- the miraculous does not occur, therefore the miraculous in the life of Jesus did not occur

The implications of this philosophical assumption are enormous!

First, without examining any evidence, the concept of 'inspiration' of scripture (which includes revelation, preservation, and authority of scripture) is excluded. Second, the miraculous birth, the miraculous life, and the miraculous death/burial/resurrection of Jesus are all denied. Third, this assumption also excludes all of Jesus' prophecies of the future. Fourth, because the prophecies *did* come true (e.g., the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, the Gentile mission, the worldwide missionary outreach, the persecution of apostles, etc.), then the texts which contain them as prophetic *must* have been written *after* the events occurred, and therefore the NT could not have been written by eyewitness testimony, as it claims. Fifth, the first and second century testimony by all the Christian church fathers which asserts apostolic authorship is all wrong. In other words, it is not much of an overstatement to say that by default--not by evidence--the credibility of the first two centuries of Christianity is jettisoned.

2. Criterion of dissimilarity – any saying or act of Jesus that appears consistent with traditional orthodoxy must be considered suspicious, as a possible interpretive innovation of the early church.

D. RESOURCES FROM CONSERVATIVE JESUS SEMINAR MEMBERS AS THEY DEFEND A BIBLICAL HISTORICAL JESUS: (These volumes are careful scholarly products and can be recommended to academics.)

Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*

Volume 1: The Roots of the Problem and the Person (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

Volume 2: Mentor, Message, and Miracles (New York: Doubleday, 1994).

Volume 3: Companions and Competitors (New York: Doubleday, 2001).

Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

Wright, N. T. *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

PERSPECTIVE FOUR: THE (ORTHODOX) JEWISH VIEW

Jesus was, at best, a well-meaning but confused teacher struggling to understand the Jewish-Roman political dilemma; at worst, he was a heretic that falsely claimed to be the Messiah.

PERSPECTIVE FIVE: THE BIBLICAL VIEW⁷

1. THE CLAIMS OF JESUS (in 'red letters'⁸)

⁷ For a helpful comprehensive overview of Jesus Christ as presented in Scripture and supported in history, see Lee Strobel, *The Case For Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

⁸ One should note that the divinity of Jesus is anchored within Scripture outside of the "red letters": the Biblical writers call him God (John 1:1, Rom. 9:5, Titus 2:13), ascribe to him the attributes of God (e.g. Heb. 13:8 [immutability]; Phil 2:10-11 [sovereignty]; etc.), ascribe to him the works of God (e.g. John 1:3, Col 1:16 [creator]; Heb 1:2, Col 1:17 [sustainer of providence]; Phil 2:5-7; Col 2:9; etc.), ascribe to him worship as God (from men [Matt 14:33; 16], from angels [Heb 1:6], for all creation [Phil 2:10]). For an excellent discussion, see Don N. Howell, Jr., "God-Christ Interchange in Paul: Impressive Testimony to the Deity of Jesus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36/4 (December, 1993): 467-479.

HIS POWERS

Forgive sin (Mark 2:5; Luke 7:48)
Auto-resurrection (John 2:19)
Miracles (Mark 2:8-9; John 2:11; 10:37-38)

HIS PRONOUNCEMENTS

Identity with the Father (John 10:30)
See Him = see Father (John 14:7-9)
Pre-existence (John 17:5; 8:58)
Sinlessness (John 8:29, 46)
His trial (Matt 26:64-66)
[note reactions: John 5:18; 19:7; 10:33]

HIS POSSESSIVES

'His' Father (John 20:17)
'His' Angels (Matt 13:41)
'His' Kingdom (Matt 13:41)

HIS PRESUMPTIONS

I have been sending the prophets (Matt 23:34,37)
I will judge the world (Matt 25:31-46; 26:63-65 John 5:27)
I am Lord over the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28)
My very presence suspends normal rules (Mk 2:19)
My word is as normative as Scripture (Matt 5)
I receive worship as My due (Matt 16:16-17; John 11:27,32; 20:28)
I have power over life/death (John 5:21; 11:25)
Your eternal destiny rests on your response to my claims (Mk 8:38; Lu 12:8-10)
OT metaphors which refer to Yahweh are speaking of Me (e.g. Lord of harvest, shepherd, sower, vineyard owner, bridegroom, rock)

Missing premise: Only God has the right and authority to do these things!

"On the lips of anyone else the claims of Jesus would appear to be evidence of gross egomania, for Jesus clearly implies that the entire world revolves around himself and that the fate of all men is dependent on their acceptance or rejection of Him. There seem to be only two possible ways of interpreting the totalitarian nature of the claims of Jesus. Either we must assume that Jesus was deluded and unstable with unusual delusions of grandeur, or we are faced with the realization that Jesus is truly One who speaks with divine authority, who actually divided all of history into BC--AD, and whose rejection or acceptance determines the fate of men."

--Robert Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching* (Westminster, 1979), pp. 118-119.

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He'd either be a lunatic--on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg--or else he'd 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."

--C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1952), 40-41.

2. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS⁹

Prior to considering whether or not Jesus rose from the dead, the watershed issue is this: "will one's explanations be limited exclusively to naturalistic explanations?" Thus a presupposition of naturalism (which holds that every effect in the world is brought about by causes within the world) will predetermine one's evaluation of the evidence. The logic is inexorable:¹⁰

Premise A: Dead men do not rise.

Premise B: Jesus was a dead man.

Conclusion: Jesus did not rise.

If one is open to both naturalism and supernaturalism, however, a supernatural explanation is certainly not necessarily guaranteed (I do not believe, for example, that Apollonius of Tyana rose from the dead); but the presupposition of supernaturalism allows me to be more open and does not force me to decide the issue without at least considering the evidence.

⁹Much of this material is adapted from William Lane Craig, "Did Jesus Rise From the Dead?", in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Zondervan, 1995): 141-176; cf. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

¹⁰This is a valid E-form categorical syllogism ('total exclusion'). Its soundness (truth-value), however, is entirely dependent upon the truth of Premises A and B, which are decided *prior to* considering this syllogism. And that's my point.

HOW MIGHT ONE DECIDE THAT JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD?

1. *The presupposition of the possibility of supernaturalism* (see discussion above).

2. *The plausibility that the tomb of Jesus (Joseph of Arimathea) was empty.*

Almost no liberal critic denies the historicity of the burial stories regarding Jesus' body. Indeed, no alternative burial stories circulated, even in Jewish polemic. If so, then "the conclusion that the tomb was empty lies close at hand." The Roman and Jewish authorities knew where the tomb was. So did Peter, James, John, etc., and all the early disciples (Paul, who spoke with Peter and the other apostles shortly after his conversion, died for believing in the empty tomb – I Corinthians 15).

Further, if the story had been a fabrication...

- a) The empty tomb would not have been discovered by *named women*¹¹ whose identities and stories could be checked, and who were not permitted by Jewish and Roman law to serve as legal witnesses (!), while
- b) The disciples were portrayed as cowering in hiding.
- c) The body would have been reproduced as soon as the disciples began to proclaim Jesus' resurrection (remember: these claims were made in the city where Jesus was buried).
- d) The earliest opposition did not deny that the tomb was empty, but engaged in a conspiracy of disinformation (Matthew 28:1-5b).
- e) It was customary to venerate the graves of holy men as shrines, for the bones were said to impart spiritual value to those who draw near. But if there were no body, the grave site has no significance as a shrine. The grave of Jesus never served as a shrine because it was empty.¹²

3. *The expectation of the disciples.*

The Jewish doctrine of bodily resurrection is true and was believed by Jesus, the disciples, the common Jews of the day, the Pharisees, etc. (e.g. Matthew 22:23-33). However, it was resurrection at the end of time, not in the middle of history—invading and disrupting the flow of events! (Mark 9:9-13; John 11:24) Second, this end-times resurrection was not of individuals, much less the Messiah—it was the general resurrection of all the dead. Third, the disciples would have been far more likely, in keeping with rabbinic theology and contemporary religious claims, to proclaim Jesus as *translated* to heaven (as Enoch or Elijah), *not resurrected*. Fourth, technically there had been no resurrections in glorious victory per se—only revivifications, all of whom eventually died again. All of this helps explain why the disciples of Jesus were not expecting bodily resurrection. Indeed, they were the first resurrection skeptics.¹⁵ For them to proclaim Jesus' resurrection was contrary to the contemporary Jewish mode of thinking, and was not a proclamation contrived to make sense to their contemporaries!

4. *The testimony of postmortem appearances.*

Many people said they saw the resurrected Christ. Those who claimed to be eyewitnesses either:

- a. Truly did see him alive.
- b. Did not see him alive, but *thought* they did.
- c. Did not see him alive, but *said* they did.

Option "c" is unlikely, 1) because of coherence with Christian ethics: Paul, Peter, James, John—all of whom proclaim truth as a way of life—would then be enormous liars. This is possible, but difficult even for radical critics to assert. 2) Because of personal sacrifice—these individuals suffered intense persecution for proclaiming the resurrection and were willing to die for that unshakeable conviction.

¹¹ It is also important to remember that at this time in history, women did not hold a prominent place in society. If the disciples were indeed making up the story, they most likely would not have had the first discovery of the empty tomb be by women.

¹² Of course, the next question is: How did the tomb come to be empty? Are all explanations equally plausible in light of all the evidence?

Option "b" is often put forth: the early Christians hallucinated the appearances of Jesus. But 1) this self-deception would have to be coupled with the fact of the empty tomb (or else, again, the body would have been produced by the Jews and Romans). 2) Hallucinations are projections of what is already within the subject's mind, and bodily resurrection was *not* in the disciples' minds. Subjective visions would have led at most to the disciples' belief in Jesus' translation and exaltation.

5. *The inherent credibility of the resurrection accounts.*

The Gospels are quite factual, portraying the leaders of the Christian church 'warts and all,' and lack the theological embellishments of 'legend-stories' (contrast, for example, *The Gospel of Peter*).

6. *The implausibility of the explanatory value of alternative interpretations.*

Something happened to get the church going. *Something* happened, so that the writers of the NT and thousands of followers were willing to die for Jesus as their God. *Something* happened at Easter. What was it? What alternative constructions exist which give reasonable answers to the questions of the empty tomb, the changed lives of the apostles, the continuation of the Christian church amidst attempted extermination, etc.? C.F.D. Moule of Cambridge University argues, "The birth and rapid rise of the Christian Church remains an unsolved enigma for any historian who refuses to take seriously the only explanation offered by the church itself."¹³

Consider the broader picture of history: If you make the requirements for validating Jesus and His claims SO stringent that you are in effect requiring Him to appear in person (which, incidentally, He did), then what would that do to other historical people? To all historical events? One scholar pointed out that validating Jesus was less of a problem than validating Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great.

7. *But couldn't all of this be a conspiracy?* Analogy: Watergate, Filegate, Whitewatergate, etc.

Who would have been in on the "resurrection conspiracy?" Matthew and John would have written about this conspiracy. Add: Mark and Luke, who were not apostles (the circle of conspiracy enlarges!). Add: Paul the Apostle. Add: all the writing church fathers whose lives overlapped with the apostles (Clement of Rome, AD 95; Ignatius, AD 70; Polycarp, AD 70; Barnabas, AD 70; Hermas, AD 95, etc.).

C. S. Lewis' Lunatic, Liar, or Lord: The Trilemma

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(<http://www.columbiaseminary.edu/coffetalk/033.html>)

[...]

C. S. Lewis had grown weary of people saying that Jesus Christ was just a good man. Using undeniable logic, Lewis introduced what is often referred to as the Trilemma.

Simply put, he argued that people cannot logically say that Jesus was "just a good man."

Of the choices one has in regard to who Jesus was, "a good man" is not one of them. Jesus Christ logically had to be one of three possible choices: lunatic, liar, or Lord.

You see, Jesus Christ claimed to be God in the flesh. Good men do not claim to be God.

- (1) Jesus could have been--as we might consider anyone making claims of divinity--a raving lunatic.
- (2) He could have been the world's greatest con-man, a liar.
- (3) He could have been who he claimed to be, Lord.

Let's Briefly Consider Our Three Choices:

¹³ Cited in Craig, p. 160.

Choice # 1: Lunatic

Lunatics rave and say things that are often incoherent. Consider the lunatic Charles Manson. When he speaks, he sometimes goes off into a world where no one else can reasonably follow. This is not so with Jesus.

For just one example, consider Christ's sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7). This sermon is considered by many--Christians and non-Christians alike--to be some of the finest precepts of life and wisdom ever uttered. The golden rule "Do unto others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12) is not the ravings of a madman. It is clear, Christ was no lunatic.

Choice # 2: Liar

Jesus claimed to be God. If he wasn't a lunatic and if he wasn't God, then he had to be one of the most wicked men who ever lived. This man convinced others that he was divine. Belief in him very often led to a martyr's death. Jesus divided the religious world with his claims of deity. If he wasn't God in the flesh, then he has led multitudes of people away from the true God.

Recap of Choices # 1 and # 2

Lunatic--lunatics are not "good" men: they are delusional. As we have seen, however, it is logically unlikely that Jesus was a lunatic, so we can safely throw that one out.

Liar--liars are not "good" men: they are deceptional. But might Jesus have been a liar? If he were a liar, then he was not a good man. Good men do not lie (well, not to the extent of calling themselves God in the flesh).

The disciples believed him, and they believed in his promise to rise from the dead. Now, if Christ were a liar, then he never kept his promise and rose from the dead.

Therefore, when that first "Easter Sunday" came and went without Jesus coming out of the tomb, the disciples would have known that he was a liar.

And, since they told others that he did rise from the dead, they would have been co-conspirators and co-liars with Jesus. This scenario is not completely unlikely except for one important point . . . who dies for a lie? [...] If Jesus didn't rise from the dead and the disciples knew this, then how would they find the strength to die for a lie? How many people in their right minds will die for a lie?

Actually, it seems to be evidenced from the history of humankind that the inherent drive of self-preservation is so strong, that most people will not even die for the truth, or love. [...] To be sure, there have been some people who have been willing to die for what they believed in, but would they have died for what they knew to be false?

And, even if one or two of the disciples were willing to die for a lie, would all twelve of them have done so? The disciples died martyrs' deaths, and this is evidence that neither Christ nor the disciples were liars.

Obviously, perpetuating the lie would have been unprofitable for them. For their belief in Christ and their proclamation of him and his resurrection, many were persecuted, beaten, killed, and the disciple John was boiled in hot oil! Would all of them have endured all of this, even death, for what they knew to be a lie? To put it in an understatement, this is seriously unlikely.

Choice # 3: Lord

The final choice, and the one that best fits the evidence of logic and human self-preservation is that this carpenter from Galilee might have actually been whom he claimed to be.

He might have been the Lord . . . God in the flesh.

Of course, there is so much more to "hang your hat on" than just this little exercise in logic concerning your belief in who Jesus Christ is and was, but Lewis' Trilemma is powerful indeed.

I believe . . . Jesus Christ was and is Lord.

However, theoretically, you do not have to believe Jesus was (and is) the Lord, but logic demands that you not say, "He was just a good man." You have three, and only three, choices: Lunatic, Liar, or Lord.

Apologetics and the Bible: Its Truthfulness (Integrity)

Key #1: AUTHORITY, WORLD VIEWS, AND THE BIBLE

ALL World Views have a source of authority in which they anchor their beliefs--by faith!

1. What is authoritative for a *Naturalist*?
YES--scientific method and its results
NO--anything outside nature
2. What is authoritative for a *Transcendentalist*?
YES--personal feelings, mysticism, channelers, etc.
NO--anything individualistic (or which tends toward diversity)
3. What is authoritative for a *Theist*?
YES--God's will known by revelation
NO--anything which conflicts with God's truth
CRUCIAL: Authority of the Bible. Authoritative over: what I believe and how I behave

Key #2: THE PLAUSIBILITY OF THE IDEA OF REVELATION

If God exists, and He is indeed a personal being, it is very reasonable to assume that He would reveal Himself to His creation in a way that could be understood.

1. THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLE

- a. Time: over 1600 years in composition
- b. Languages: composed in 3 different languages, translated in more languages than any other book!
- c. Cultures: taken to and applied in more cultures than any other book
- d. Authors: over 40!
- e. Contents: 66 books=1 book with a consistent message/story!

2. THE INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY OF THE BIBLE

- a. Biblical: 2 Timothy 3:16-17
Content -- *God-breathed-out* (Matt 4:4)
Extent -- *All Scripture* ('plenary' = extending to all parts alike)
Intent -- to equip for living (the issue of Authority)
- b. Theological: The Holy Spirit's influence upon the Scripture writers so that using their own personalities they composed and recorded God's Word without error in the original manuscripts.
- c. Some inductive arguments for Inerrancy:
Explicit Statements
Jesus' Position (the norm for Christians)--Matt 4:4; 5:17-20; John 10:35; 17:17
Other statements (these are unlimited)--Psalm 12:6; 18:30; 119:160; Prov 30:5-6, etc.
Implicit Statements (Jesus' only = too much info! See sources.)
Uncontested arguments based on...
A word (John 10:34-36; 'God')
A tense (Matt 22:32; present tense, 'I am')
A suffix (Matt 22:43-45; 'my Lord')

Point: Jesus' arguments assume that even parts of the word of Scripture are reliable enough to bear the

arguments they support. This degree of reliability is what we mean by 'inerrancy.'

3. THE TEXT OF THE BIBLE (OT AND NT MANUSCRIPTS)¹⁴

The bibliographic tests for all ancient texts include three components:

1. How many copies do we have (quantity)?
2. What shape are they in (quality)?
3. How much elapsed time between the originals and copies (time gap)?

a. The OT documents

1. Quantity: relatively few
2. Quality: superb (diligence of the Masoretes + confirming 'versions' + Dead Sea Scrolls)
3. Time gap: good

b. The NT documents

1. Quantity: over 5,000 manuscripts & fragments + over 9,000 'versions' + Church Fathers
2. Quality: good (textual restoration)
3. Time gap: shorter than any other ancient manuscripts

4. THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE (& APOCRYPHA)

a. Meaning of Canon — “The standard of faith” or accepted books which are considered authoritative in the sense of 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

b. Basis for Canon — 2 Timothy 3:16. If all 'scripture' is inspired, then what fits into the category 'scripture'? The answer is: the list of inspired books.

c. Tests for 'canonicity'

1. The authority of Christ: the canon Jesus *affirmed* (Luke 24:44; 11:51) and the canon that Jesus *anticipated* (John 14:26; 16:12-15).
2. The subjective test: the Bible 'reads me' (my sheep hear my voice—rooted in the dynamic character of scripture as 'the word of God' — Heb 4:12).
3. The test of authoritative spokesmen:
OT: Prophetic circle (Deut 13:1-5; 18:20-22; Isaiah 41:21-24; Ezek 33:33).
Confirmation: Dead Sea Scrolls, Josephus, Philo, Talmud, NT (Mt 26:56).
NT: Apostolic circle (Authority--Matt 10:1-2,40; Luke 11:49; John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:12-15; 17:20); miracles through the apostles (Acts 2:1-14,37,43; 3:1-4:30; 4:37; 5:10-16; 6:8; 8:6,13-16; 10:44; 14:3; 19:6); "signs of an apostle" (2 Cor 12:12; Eph 2:20; Heb 2:3-4; 2 Pet 3:2).
Confirmation: Ignatius, Church Fathers, etc.
4. The (negative) tests of *coherence* (Deut 13:1-5) and *convergence* (Gal 1:8-9).
5. The test of primary testimony—limited chronologically, but historically important (2 Thes 2:2; 3:17; 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18).
6. Historical (providential) confirmation:
OT: Jesus, Jamnia and Josephus.
NT: Carthage (A.D. 397).

5. CHALLENGES -- RESOLVING 'CONTRADICTIONS' IN THE BIBLE

Step One: Take perspectives into account.

a. Perspective of the Author

- o The authors were humans whom the Spirit of God 'moved' according to His will. They had personalities and literary styles that were expressed in their writings. Also they wrote with different

¹⁴ For a concise summary of this argument see, William E. Brown and W. Gary Phillips, *Making Sense of Your World: A Biblical Worldview* (Salem, WI: Sheffield Press, 1996), chapter 4.

- purposes, and their writings reflect their purposes. (See Luke 1:1-4)
- The Gospel writers were eyewitnesses and at times got information from other eyewitnesses. Thus, individual accounts of a particular event may differ slightly due to different perspectives of different eyewitnesses.
- Different authors may have chosen to partially quote while other writers may have chosen to fully quote, depending on their purposes for writing. This is an issue of perspective, not contradiction.
- b. Perspective of the Time Period
 - It is important to remember the time period in which a particular work was written and not expect anachronistic elements from it (for example, digital watches on the *Titanic*...).
 - We should not expect scientific language from a pre-scientific age. (We still say, “The sun has risen today,” when we know that in reality the earth rotated. So, when Scripture tells us that the sun stood still in Joshua 10:12-14, we should not consider it inaccurate from the perspective of the writer and the reader of that time period.)
 - All writing and copying was, of course, done by hand instead of by machine. Thus, there was not as high a priority placed on exact quotations as there is today. Also, if there were 4,765 soldiers with horses and the Scripture reports it at 4,700 soldiers with horses, there is no reason to ultimately doubt the historicity of the account.
- c. Perspective of Human vs. Divine
 - It is also very important to remember that in cases of interpretive problems, human interpretation is prone to mistakes. Thus, we should be very careful of accusing the Bible of error when it may very well be our interpretation that is at fault.

Step Two: Distinguish between External vs. Internal Errors.

- a. An external error occurs when Scripture seems to disagree with a claim or account *outside* of the Bible (i.e. a scientific or archeological discovery).
 - The Bible should be considered innocent until proven guilty, not vice-versa.
 - The Bible has been vindicated throughout time by historical, scientific, and archeological discoveries.
 - Scientific, archeological, and historical conclusions that seemed to discredit Scripture have themselves been discredited.
 - We have *precedence* to wait for further information.
- b. An internal error occurs when one part of Scripture seems to contradict another part of Scripture.

Step Three: Study internal problems in context to make sure a real problem exists.

- a. Be sure the two passages in question are talking about the same thing (i.e. James and Romans and the word “justified”).
- b. Ask if there is any information available in other passages (E.g. John 6:9-13, Mark 8:5-9; cf. Mark 8:18-21).
- c. Distinguish between the reporting of an event and the approving of an event.
 - We have a report of David’s polygamy, but not an approval. It is important to note that David’s many wives caused him nothing but problems (Michal and Bathsheba). In fact, every time polygamy is reported in Scripture it is pictured as causing those involved many problems.
 - We have a report of the Egyptian midwives lying to protect the innocent Hebrew newborns, not an approval. Also Rahab lies to protect the spies and is saved during the destruction of Jericho. She is commended for her faith in Hebrews 11, not her lying.

Step Four: If a problem remains...

- a. Distinguish between *contrary* and *contradictory*.
 - Is there at least an option for a possible solution?
 - Is it a real contradiction or only contrary to something I would rather not believe?
 - Consider the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing truth.
- b. For help with particular Bible difficulties see: Norman Geisler, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook of Bible Difficulties* (Victor Books, 1992).

6. JESUS AND SCRIPTURE

Consider ‘the Word become flesh’ as He considers ‘the Word written!’

- a. Jesus constantly refers to the OT (in both quotations and allusions) as the truth of God.
- b. He always assumes Scripture is final in authority, and all parts are of equal authority. In fact, he bases arguments on words and forms of words which occur in relatively "obscure" OT passages, assuming that *even the forms of words* are trustworthy enough on which to base crucial arguments for His deity (Mt. 22).

- c. He always assumes OT prophecy must be fulfilled.
- d. He always assumes the miraculous events of the OT occurred exactly as they are recorded (even the "embarrassing" ones!). [Adam & Eve; Noah & flood; judgment of Sodom; burning bush; manna in wilderness; bronze serpent; Jonah & whale; etc.]
- e. He leans on the OT in His personal spiritual conflicts (e.g. Mt 4).
- f. His very silence regarding problems in Scripture reveals His estimate of the OT. He never hesitated to confront error, but apparently He found none to confront within the Scriptures.

7. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND THE OLD TESTAMENT (compiled by Dr. Dennis Ingolfsland)

NOTE: This work is also found in the "Archaeology" section of the disk

a. Archaeology thru the 11th century BC

- According to Joshua 2:15, Rahab "dwelt in the wall." From the ruins of ancient cities the fact that people sometimes built their homes into the city walls has been verified (*Archaeological*).
- Most of the cities mentioned in the Hexateuch have been discovered: Ur, Erech (Gen 10:10), Shechem (Gen 12:6); Gerar (Gen 20:1); Pithom and Raamsees (Ex 1:11); Arad, Jericho, Lachish, Bethel, Gezer, Ashdod, Bethshan, Megiddo, Hazor, Eglon (Josh 10:34-35), Shiloah, Joppa, Hammath (Josh 19:35).
- [King] Merneptah stela found at Thebes in 1896 dates back to 1229 BC and refers specifically to Israel. This destroys Noth and Vonrod's theory which denied the existence of Israel at all prior to 1300 BC (*Old Testament*, 137-138; *Introduction*, 323).
- Amarna texts contain correspondence from Palestinian chieftains to the Egyptian Pharaoh pleading for help because the Habiru (or Apiru) are attacking. Some once identified these linguistically with Hebrews but the contexts prove that the two are not the same. Habiru seems to be a general term for wandering mercenaries or marauders. While the term Habiru does not mean Hebrew...it is certainly possible that the Hebrews were viewed by the Canaanites as marauders or Habiru.
- The fortress of Ramoth-negeb (Josh 19:8; 1 Sam 30:27) is mentioned in the Arad Ostraca (*Old Testament*, 137-138).

b. Archaeology: 10th century BC

- Some of the building projects of Solomon have been unearthed at Megiddo and Gezer. At 10th century Megiddo levels there was a palace fortified by massive wall and defensive towers, as well as stables (*Introduction*, 125).
- Stone found with the inscription of King David in the gate to the city of Dan, now housed in the Jerusalem Archeological Museum.
- The nature of Hebrew poetry often didn't make sense to the literary critics so they frequently postulated glosses and dislocations of the text. They would then engage in wholesale rearrangement of the text. The discovery of Ugaritic texts showed that the text of Psalms was by no means as faulty or corrupt as critics had thought (*Introduction*, 974).
- A jasper seal was found at Megiddo dating from the time of Jeroboam of Israel, belonging to "Shema, servant of Jeroboam." (Jeroboam I or II???)

c. Archaeology: 9th century BC

- The Monolith Inscription of Shalmaneser mentions "Ahab the Israelite" as having the most powerful military elements in the Israelite and Syrian coalition (*Introduction*, 127).
- The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser records the subjugation of Jehu, son of Omri and tells the amount of tribute he had to pay (*Introduction*, 127; *Old Testament*, 137-138).
- Between 840-820 BC, Mesha, King of Moab commissioned a memorial celebrating the accomplishments of his reign. It mentions Omri, king of Israel and his son Ahab (*Old Testament*, 137-138).

d. Archaeology: 8th century BC

- The Assyrian annals of Tiglath pileser III restored the nature of the tribute Menahem of Israel (1 Kings 15:19ff) had to pay.
- The Khorsabad Annals give the account of Sargon II captivity of Samaria in 722: "I besieges and captured Samaria, carrying off 27,290 of the people who dwelt therein..." (*Introduction*, 128; *Old Testament*, 137-138).

e. Archaeology: 7th century BC

- In the Khorsabad annals, Esarhaddon of Babylon mentions Manasseh, king of Judah by name (*Introduction*, 338).
- The tunnel Hezekiah built to bring water into Jerusalem has been found (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chr. 32:30). It even had an inscription written in 8th century script. See 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chr. 32:30. (*Introduction*, 128; *Old Testament*, 137-138).
- The Annals of Sennacherib refer to Hezekiah of Judah and speak of the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian forces of Sennacherib (2 Kings 18-19) (*Old Testament*, 137-138).

f. Archaeology: 6th century BC

- The Annals of Nebuchadnezzar II mention the taking of "the city of Judah" (Jerusalem) by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:10). It says that he appointed a new king (2 Kings 24:17) and that he carried great amounts of booty from Jerusalem to Babylon (2 Kings 24:13-16) (*Old Testament*, 141-143).
- The Babylonian Chronicle confirms the biblical tradition that Jerusalem fell under Babylonian attacks of 597 and 587 BC (*Introduction*, 130).
- Several tablets discovered near the Ishtar gate of Ancient Babylon listed rations of grain and oil allotted to captives in Babylon between 595 and 570 BC. They even mentioned Jehoiakim (2 Kings 25:27), (Yaukin, King of the land of Yahud) (*Introduction*, 130).
- A seal was discovered in Lachish which probably belonged to Gedaliah, the governor of Judah appointed by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:23) (*Introduction*, 131).
- The Cylinder of Cyrus says that "Marduk" allowed Cyrus to enter Babylon without a battle and to deliver Nabonidus into Cyrus's hands (see Daniel). It also tells how he allowed foreign peoples to return to their homes and to repair the dwelling places of their gods (see Isaiah 45:1; Ezra 1:1-4, 6:1-15) (*Old Testament*, 147-150).

g. Archaeology: 500 to 400 BC

- Critics once denied many aspects of the book of Ezra on the basis that the Aramaic was late. They dated it to the third century BC, after the time of Alexander the Great. The discovery of the Elephantine papyri (legal contracts, deeds, official documents, agreements, diplomatic texts, private letters) show that Aramaic was the language of trade and diplomacy in the time of Ezra and that the Aramaic used in the book of Ezra was characteristic of the 5th century BC.
- An undated cuneiform text has been discovered in which there is a reference to a certain Mordecai who had lived during the Persian period and was apparently a high official in the royal court at Susa during the reign of Xerxes I (*Introduction*, 1097).
- Archaeological excavations show that the author of Esther showed an intimate acquaintance with the royal palace at Susa (Shushan)...even down to the game area for casting lots (*Introduction*, 1097).
- The palace mentioned in Esther has been uncovered. It covered 123 acres and consisted of a throne room, the house of the king, and the house of women along with numerous courts, stairways, arches and terraces. They also discovered a place with numbers on it for casting lots (cf Haman) (*Introduction*, 133).
- Critics once argued that there was no evidence that Cyrus ever made the kind of decree mentioned in Ezra (1:2ff; 6:3). The discovery of the Nabonidus Chronicle and Cyrus Cylinder shows that one method Cyrus used for personal advancement was restoring national deities and proclaiming amnesty for political prisoners in Babylon (*Introduction*, 1140).
- The Elephantine papyri mention Sanballat as governor of Samaria in 407 BC (*Introduction*, 222).

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The Problem of Evil

I. The Logical Side of the Problem: “The Problem of Evil” by Dennis McCallum¹⁵

The presence of evil, pain and suffering in our world is the most persistent argument raised against theism. The following are several of the main responses to the presence of evil in the world and its impact on the existence of the God of the Bible.

A. The Problem of Evil stated:

Traditional Statement --Atheists and others usually state the problem of evil in the form of a dilemma:

1. If God is perfectly loving, He must *wish* to abolish evil.
2. If He is all powerful, He must be *able* to abolish evil.
3. But evil exists.
4. Therefore, an all powerful, loving God does not exist.

Second Formulation

1. God is the author of everything.
2. Evil is something.
3. Therefore God is the author of evil.

Third Formulation

1. God made everything perfect.
2. Imperfection cannot come from perfection.
3. Therefore perfectly created beings cannot be the origin of evil.
4. Therefore God must be the origin.

Attack Based on the Persistence of Evil

1. If God is all good, He would destroy evil.
2. If God is all-powerful, He could destroy evil.
3. But evil is not destroyed.
4. Hence, there is no such God.

B. Christian Responses¹⁶

Christians should learn to state the free-will defense against the problem of evil quickly and clearly.

1. Free will is of moral value. That is, a world with free will is better than one without it.
2. It is a contradiction to say that God brings it about that humans freely will only the good {vs. J.S. Findlay who claims that this is possible}.
3. God must bring about the best possible world in his capacity.
4. Therefore, God must create a world with free will. [We believe the word "must" is objectionable here, but the point still stands. Instead read "God is correct to create..."]
5. But then God is not responsible for evil (choices), since it is not in his power to bring it about that men freely choose only the good. [Note: this assumes that God cannot, and need not, do the logically contradictory... Where there is no logic, there are not any contradictions . . . and anything could be the case!]

Other Statements of the Biblical Position:

1. God created the *fact* of freedom—man performs the *acts* of freedom.
2. God made evil *possible*; but free will creatures make evil *actual*.
3. The ability to do something does not necessitate doing it. God is able to control everything, yet he allows free will. The Atheistic position reduces to a moral judgment that absence of all evil is more desirable than freedom.¹⁷

Eschatological Formulation (focuses on how the future, or end state, of the world will ultimately be the true standard by which the present will be judged).

1. If God is all powerful, He can defeat evil.
2. If God is all loving and good, He will defeat evil.

¹⁵ See Dennis McCallum’s website for other apologetic resources: www.xenos.org

¹⁶ Alvin Plantinga’s Free Will Defense (Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds- A Study of Rational Justification of Belief in God*. (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967)

¹⁷ Atheistic thinkers are usually contradictory at this point. Secular Humanists prefer freedom in society even if it sometimes results in evil. Most Atheists resist the idea of governmental attempts to eliminate evil by the use of control.

3. Therefore, evil *will be* defeated.¹⁸

C. Communication Guidelines

In his arguments against God's existence, the atheist presupposes an ultimate standard of justice and good when he refers to evil.

1. Ask, "What basis does the atheist have for saying there is evil in the world?" "Is this not an appeal to his own relative moral feelings and opinions?" "Why should his feelings be authoritative?"
2. Ask, "What's your explanation?" Never accept the burden of being the only one who has to hold to a cohesive and consistent world view.

II. The Personal Side of the Problem: “Beyond Blasphemy, Beyond Prayer” by William E. Brown

Albert Camus' classic novel, *The Plague*, is a metaphor for our world of suffering. Published just after the Second World War, Camus' story describes the tragic city of Oran, quarantined from the rest of the world because of the bubonic plague. Once a city of excess and indulgence, Oran becomes defined by death and the residents struggle to respond to their suffering. The narrator, Dr. Bernard Riuex, takes a scientific and detached view of the horrors surrounding him. He acknowledges, however, that the reality of suffering draws people together. Regardless of religious beliefs or personal convictions, suffering is “beyond blasphemy, beyond prayer” in the way it unites people to weep, to work and to fight against terror.

Every worldview and religion is forced to deal with the issue of suffering. It cuts to the heart of our fragile existence. When we see news reports of a destructive hurricane in India and a famine in Kenya, we all weep. The agonized faces of children grip the heart of every parent. The helplessness of the injured and grieving motivate us to give, pray and work. We don't ask questions about political beliefs, religious affiliation or ethnic background. We are bound together by a bond stronger than social agendas. It is the bond of humanity and the suffering that marks us as a fallen people.

Suffering unites us all. It is the one experience that pulls at the soul of every person and dynamites the walls that divide us. We all meet and cry together at the smoldering ruins, the hospital, the funeral home. Since September 11, the unity we as a nation experience defies analysis. For some it is the result of facing a single enemy, for others it is the force of a common goal. But for most, it is the grief of suffering that has no name.

We can ask why God did not keep it from occurring. We can ask the same question about the millions slaughtered in the name of atheism by Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, Idi Amin. We can ask why He allowed Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris to rampage through Columbine High School. But the answers are not apparent.

Many nonbelievers arrogantly point to the existence of suffering in the world as the once-and-for-all proof that a good God cannot exist. And if a good God cannot exist then there is, in fact, no God at all. The existence of evil, writes philosopher Ed Miller, “is the most notorious evidence against God.”

But I do not want to discuss the existence of God in light of evil in our world. We have written about this elsewhere (see *Making Sense of Your World*). C. S. Lewis devotes some of his sharpest reasoning in his classic work, *The Problem of Pain*, where he reminds us that our response to suffering reveals our understanding of God. “The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of God who loves,” he writes, “is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word ‘love,’ and limit His wisdom by what seems to us to be wise.” We may not know the reasons God allows suffering in particular instances. God's ways are sometimes beyond knowing on this side of the resurrection. But one day we will know. Until then, suffering is a foil—a means to saltiness in an unsavory world:

Suffering provides a level playing field for ideas.

The unity we enjoyed in the months after the terrorist attacks provided us with the opportunity to look each other in the eye—even ideological adversaries—and relate at the most basic levels of humanity. While discussions about ultimate questions, political issues or social policies usually generate more heat than light, the attacks changed that. We want substance, not sound bites.

¹⁸ The question of why God allows the persistence of evil is distinct from the question of why He permitted it in the first place. The biblical answer to the issue of persistence of evil probably has to do with God's strategy for insuring the on-going and safe existence of freedom in the universe.

Studies and polls showed that people became less interested in frivolous activities and more serious about family and relationships. People went to church and prayed more. Incidents of bigotry and racism dropped dramatically. People were actually nicer to each other! Why? Because we recognize that what unites us is stronger than what divides us. Suffering makes us aware of a truth that we all try to suppress: we are not in control of our lives.

Suffering shows that there is something wrong with the world.

When we feel a pain in our body, it is a symptom that something is wrong. We never go the doctor and say, “Hey, Doc, I’ve been feeling really great lately. Can you run some tests and find out why?” The pain and suffering in the world is a constant reminder that something is horribly wrong with creation. To know that something is wrong is to imply that we know what it means to be right.

The opportunity to communicate to a suffering world how God can make it right is the Christian’s privilege. We give an answer for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15).

Suffering is only engaged and conquered by the One who suffered with us and for us.

The suffering of Christ is not merely intended to show God’s empathy for a fallen world. He took upon Himself the very consequences of the sin that spoiled His creation. Christ suffered “once for all” (Hebrews 9:12) and because of His sufferings all pain takes on a new meaning as temporary irritant, not ultimate victor. Even death itself will be the last enemy destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). We are never victims and we will never allow suffering, no matter how evil and destructive, to drive us to despair.

Suffering is the means God uses to communicate to us in His most passionate way.

Many claim that suffering drives people away from God. It is an odd quirk of human nature that most often the opposite occurs. We as a nation turned to God in prayer after the attacks. Not out of fear or weakness but out of knowledge and strength. Pain is, as C. S. Lewis reminds us, “God’s megaphone.”

For many people, suffering is the road traveled to find God and meaning. Viktor Frankl, thrust into the ugly hopelessness and horror of the Nazi death camps, not only survived but grew through his experience. He described working in a trench outside of Auschwitz, “struggling to find a reason for my sufferings, my slow dying. In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed in my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious ‘Yes’ in answer to my question of the existence of an ultimate purpose. At that moment a light was lit in a distant farmhouse, which stood on the horizon as if painted there, in the midst of the miserable gray of a dawning morning in Bavaria. *Et lux in tenebris lucet* – and the light shineth in the darkness.”

A meaningful and happy life is not always free from suffering. In fact, suffering is often the means to a life of joy and significance.

But this does not take away the real horror of suffering. We cannot give a definitive answer to those who ask why God allowed the horrible acts to occur. The answer is not found in a pronouncement or a philosophy.

It is found in a Person.

“Is God trying to tell us something?” writes Philip Yancey. “From the view of all history, yes, God is speaking to us through pain—or, perhaps, in spite of pain. The symphony He is working out includes minor chords, dissonance and tiring fugue passages. But those of us who follow His conducting through these early movements will, with renewed strength, someday burst into song.”

Resources:

Articles:

- Evidence for the Resurrection* by Josh McDowell
www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/josh2.html
- Fulfilled Prophecy as an Apologetic* by Hank Hanegraaff.
www.equip.org/free/DA151.htm
- Sixty Second Theodicy: How to respond to the Problem of Evil* by Gregory Koukl
www.str.org/free/commentaries/apologetics/evil/sixtysec.htm
- The Impossible Faith: Or, How Not to Start an Ancient Religion* by James Patrick Holding
www.tektonics.org/lp/nowayjose.html
- The Jesus Seminar* by Jimmy Williams, Probe Ministries
www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/jesussem.html
- The Task of the Christian Apologist* by Gannon Murphy
www.equip.org/free/DT253.htm
- Why is Apologetics Necessary?* by Hank Hanegraaff.
www.equip.org/free/CP0114.htm

Books:

- 20 Compelling Evidences that God Exists* by Ken Boa and Robert Bowman (RiverOak Publishing, 2002).
- Apologetics to the Glory of God* by John Frame (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1994).
- Faith Has Its Reasons: An Integrative Approach to Defending Christianity* by Ken Boa and Robert Bowman (NavPress, 2001).
- Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* by John Stackhouse (Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment? A Debate* by William Lane Craig (IVP, 2000).
- Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis (reprinted by Broadman and Holmann Publishers, 2000).
- Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* by William Lane Craig (Crossway, 1994).
- The Case for a Creator* by Lee Strobel (Zondervan, 2004).
- The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel (Zondervan, 1998).
- The Case for Easter* by Lee Strobel (Zondervan, 2004).
- The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel (Zondervan, 2000).
- The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell (Nelson, 1999).
- Why I Am a Christian: Leading Thinkers Tell Why They Believe* ed. by Norman L. Geisler (Baker, 2001).
- Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate* by William Lane Craig (Baker, 1999).

Websites:

- www.apologetics.com—"Challenging Believers to Think and Thinkers to Believe."
- www.carm.org—Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry seeks to equip Christians with helpful information on cults, world religions, evolution, New Age philosophy, doctrine, and much more.
- www.christiananswers.net—Answers to everything, ever.
- www.christiananswers.net/archaeology/home.html—Contains the newest information and discoveries concerning archaeology and the Bible.
- www.equip.org—The online ministry of the Christian Research Institute provides well-researched answers to common questions.
- www.josh.org—Josh McDowell's official website.
- www.leaderu.com—One of the best Christian resource sites available with articles on a variety of topics including apologetics and leadership.
- www.mckenziestudycenter.org—An institute of Gutenberg College.
- www.probe.org—Probe Ministries, "A Christian Worldview and Apologetics Ministry."
- www.rzim.org—The official website of apologist Ravi Zacharias.

www.str.org—Stand to Reason trains Christians to think more clearly about their faith and to make an even-handed, insightful, and gracious defense for classical Christianity in the public square.

www.xenos.org—A website devoted to apologetics to postmoderns.