



The
Foundations
of Faith

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Chapter One – Why Religion?

Many go through life without ever pondering the deeper issues of life, like where did the universe come from? Why is earth so perfectly adapted for life when other planets are not? Why am I alive, and what happens after I die? But the famed author Leo Tolstoy once said, “Without knowing what I am and why I am here, life is impossible.” So I would challenge you to take a little time to stop and think about life. Go stand on the shore and stare out at the sea, or lie on the grass and gaze into the sky, or go outside on a dark night and marvel at the stars while pondering the meaning of it all. Where did the universe come from? How did it begin? Why am I alive? What will happen to me after I die?

While science has theories about the origins of life, the very fact that they are called “theories” means these mysteries are still unsolved. These theories are simply man-made speculations to try and explain life without religion, through scientific evidence, but it can never be done. Even the greatest scientist will admit that there is no real answer to the origin of life. No scientific theory can explain the beginning. That is why religion exists. Religion is the search for answers to the deeper questions of life: Where did the universe come from? Why am I alive? What happens after we die? Solving these, and other deep issues, is the purpose of religion.

What if your life is a gift? What if you were given this life for a reason? What if there is a meaning for your life, and you are supposed to discover that meaning? Multitudes don't search for answers to the

greatest questions of life because they don't care, but the moment we begin to ponder the meaning of life is the moment we break through the veil of complacency, and we really begin to live! Author and humorist Terry Pratchett writes, "If you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, then you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong." Sadly, I fear many are going in the wrong direction.

So often, we begin our journey of life with such high hopes and dreams, only to be finally let down, discouraged, and disappointed by life. Then, in the end, we die. Ironically, as high as our hopes may be, life must end in tragedy. The moment we are born, we slowly begin to die. Death comes to all of us, and yet most of us don't like to think about it. As a result, most people are not ready when they die. Others concoct theories about death and have hopes of life after death, but their hopes are not based on concrete philosophy as much as on feelings. It does not matter what you think will happen after this life ends if you are wrong. To this most essential question, we must find the truth.

Those who criticize, make light of, and ultimately reject religion will subsequently fail to find the keys to life beyond the grave, because the answer is in religion. Religion unveils the unseen world, giving us a peek into the fourth dimension. It is the key to solving the mysteries of life. It shows the path to finding life beyond this life. That's why religion is so important. While so many people like to criticize religion, everyone is heading toward death, and no one likes to think about it, so most die unprepared. Why would we

fail to prepare for this profound event? The most important thing in life is to be ready for death, and yet we must find out how to get ready. The answer to this, and other mysteries, is found in religion.

Religion reveals the key to getting from this life to the next life, and yet so many people refuse to look at religion. Perhaps they think religion is not cool, or too unscientific, or merely for weak people, so they not only fail to discover their purpose in life, but they also fail to prepare for the next life. As a result, many will tragically fail to reach the next life, losing out on the wonderful gift of eternity. However, for those who want to find the passage from this life to the next, religion is the key. Still, let us be warned that this is not an easy search. There are many different religions and many roads that wander off the path of truth, but there is only one correct path.

Today, many like to say that all religions lead to the same end. They say, "As all rivers run to the sea, all religions lead to life," but this is not true. Just as there is only one correct answer to a simple math problem, there is only one correct answer to how the world got here, why you are alive, and how you can find the next life. There is one correct path, and your job is to find that path. While this journey will at times be difficult, all who search with their whole heart are promised to find the true path. The problem is that most people are not really willing to search with their whole hearts. They search half-heartedly and give up their search just as easily as they started it, never finding answers. Still, those who really search for answers will find them.

Imagine that someone tells you that there is a suitcase with a million dollars buried in a nearby field,

just beneath the surface, and you can have all the money in it if you can find it. How long and hard would you dig for the treasure? Would you only dig in a couple of spots, then give up? Of course not! You would continue to dig until the entire field was dug up! And yet, the chance to live forever lies before each of us. All we have to do is find the answer to the mysteries of life, and yet so few people are willing to dig! If you really want to find the key to eternal life, you must put forth the effort to search, and I would encourage you to start by searching the number one best-selling resource.

The best-selling religious book of all time is the Bible. While some call this a Western book, this claim is foolish. The Bible was written before America or the modern nations of Europe existed and it has been embraced by people in every culture. The Bible is a book without limits, but some would like people to believe it is a fairy tale, only for Western culture, and that the stories have no relevance for us today. In spite of this, the Bible has proven to be a divinely inspired book on many levels. Not only has it predicted the future repeatedly, including the rise and fall of nations, but it has supernaturally changed countless lives. Billions of people across the globe have had their lives miraculously changed by reading this book.

Every year the Bible is the number one best-selling title around the world. Why? Could it be that this book has real answers to the mysteries of life? Could it be that this book tells us what the meaning of life is, why we are here, and the best path to travel? Could it be that this book informs us how to get from this life to the next life? Clearly, this book must be

different than other books for it to be the world's number one best-seller every single year. Year after year, millions around the world convert to Christianity because this religion offers real answers to life's mysteries, real help for this life, and real advice on how to find life beyond the grave.

You may choose not to believe in God, or in the Bible, and you may claim that religion is for fools, but wouldn't it be more foolish to refuse to contemplate the teachings of the Bible when it is offering so much, and so much is at stake? Think about it. Imagine that you are living in poverty. Your house is small and dirty, and a man hides a million-dollar diamond in your home and says you can have it if you find it. You tell the man, "I don't believe you hid a million-dollar diamond in my home," so you refuse to look. As a result, you live out your life in poverty, when all the time you could have been rich if you had simply searched. Perhaps you refused to look because you didn't want to look foolish, but wouldn't it be foolish *not* to look?

Think about it. If there was even a tiny chance that the diamond could be in your house, you would be a fool not to at least check, and yet so many refuse to read the Bible when it is offering more than a million dollars. Even if there is a tiny chance that the promises of the Bible are true, you should read the entire book as if you were looking for buried treasure. This book provides answers to the greatest mysteries of life, promising offers of hope, joy, and even life after death. You would be a fool not to at least look, and God's promise is, if you "seek" Him, He will reveal Himself and give you "everlasting life" (Jer. 29:13; John 3:16).

Chapter Two – The Big Bang and Evolution

The big bang theory claims that the universe came into existence when a singularity magically appeared from nothing, started spinning, turned extremely hot, and then exploded, creating the entire universe and everything in it. Many today simply believe this theory by faith because “science says” it happened, but stop and think about it for a moment. The theory of entropy states that order does not come from chaos. If you exploded a pile of metal, it would not make a car, or if you exploded a pile of wood, it would not make a house. Of course, the universe is far more complex than a car or a house, yet popular scientific theories claim that the universe brought itself into existence through an explosion, and many have fallen for it.

While science claims to use evidence for its theories, the Bible uses the same evidence. Check it out. Two main pieces of evidence used to support the big bang theory are the discovery of light particles in space in 1965 by Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, along with the expanding universe, as seen through the Hubble telescope in 1923. They claim the light particles are evidence of the big bang, and since the universe is expanding, it must have been contracting; thus, reversing the process, they assume that it came from nothing, exploded, then spread outward into space. The problem is that these findings perfectly match the description of creation in the Bible.

Long before the scientist found light particles in space, the Bible said that the universe began with light in space. The process began when God said, “Let there

be light,” sending light into space (Gen. 1:3). Since this was written long before the big bang theory, it is more credible to say scientific evidence supports the Bible. Still, there is more. After creating the universe, God “stretched out the heavens,” as the Hubble telescope revealed (Jer. 10:12). The Bible says He “spreads,” or “stretches out the heavens” as an ongoing process (Job 9:8; Isa. 44:24). Again, this was written thousands of years before science discovered the expanding universe, so the Bible, creation, and God are all supported by scientific evidence.

While some accuse Christians of believing a fairy tale because they claim that God created the universe, these same people claim that the universe created itself from nothing, and yet if you were walking in the woods and you saw a house framed, you would assume that the house had a builder because houses don’t build themselves. In the same way, when we see a planet perfectly adapted for life, we should assume that it also had a Builder, as the Bible says, “For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God” (Heb. 3:4). The fact that the earth is perfectly adapted to human life should at least cause us to question the theory of creation.

Just think. Our planet is in the perfect location, with the perfect elements needed for life. Among our main needs are food, water, and air. The earth has a built-in water purifying cycle called the hydrologic cycle, a built-in air purifying cycle called the oxygen-carbon dioxide cycle, and the plants we eat produce seeds to give us the ability to produce an endless supply of food. Earth gives us an endless supply of the things we need to survive. In addition, the earth has a sun and

moon, providing light and heat. If the sun were only a little closer to earth, the planet would burn up, and if a little further, we would freeze. The moon is situated at the perfect distance, with the axel of the earth tilted at such an angle as to not only regulate the ocean waves to keep them from flooding us but also to give us the seasonal changes and so much more.

If the big bang is true, how did the laws of nature develop? These laws are so perfect that if you drop a penny from an airplane, you can calculate the minute it will hit the ground. You can also calculate the exact minute the sun will rise in one hundred years, and how does the scientist explain this? The scientific explanation to the amazing universe is, 'we are really lucky,' but this luck explanation can only go so far. Think about it. If someone picked the winning lottery one hundred times in a row, you would know that the odds were too high, and the lottery was fixed, and yet the odds of this world happening by chance are infinitely greater.

The theory of evolution then builds on the big bang theory, claiming that life appeared from non-life when lightning struck a chemical pond, suggesting that this first simple cell gradually evolved over billions of years. The theory claims that complex life evolved from mutations, but just stop for a moment and think of that word, 'mutant.' What image comes to mind? If you are honest with yourself, you will admit that the image is not good. That is because mutations turn out bad at an infinitely greater percentage than they turn out good, and yet the theory of evolution claims that life, reproduction, our amazing bodies, and more are the product of "good" mutations.

In addition, evolution claims that life evolved by gradual “numerous, successive, slight modifications,” but according to the biochemist Michael Behe’s theory of irreducible complexity, a body full of complex coordinating systems could not have evolved one piece at a time because most of the body parts and systems are dependent on the others for survival. For example, the blood cannot exist without the heart, which in turn cannot exist without the blood. Both have to be present at the same time to work. It’s like a car. If you remove one small part of the engine, the entire car fails. In natural selection, if one part evolved without its collaborating parts, it would die off according to the theory of natural selection because it has no benefit. Systems could not have evolved this way. It is scientifically impossible.

If you think about this, it’s rather ironic. The big bang theory says an explosion created order, beauty, and structure. Not usually what explosions create. Evolution says mutations created order, beauty, and structure. Again, that is not usually what mutations create. Then evolution says that we evolved through slight modification, which again defies logic. Both of these theories defy simple common sense. They are not supported by the evidence we see in the practical world around us. Exploding wood does not create houses, and most don’t want babies to be born with mutations. Of course, at the foundation of both of these theories is the idea that things are evolving from worse to better, which again defies science.

Clothes wear out. Cars rust and break down. People grow old and die. Adding time to any equation is not usually helpful, but harmful. Time does not

naturally make things better. According to the second law of thermodynamics, time makes things worse, and yet these popular scientific theories defy this simple fact. Ironically, the Bible tells us what many are afraid to admit. It says people do not get better. They “grow worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13). It says, “our outward man is perishing” (2 Cor. 4:16). The universe is not getting better, but rather “the whole creation groans and labors” (Rom. 8:22). That’s why Jesus said not to store up treasures on earth, “where moth and rust destroy” (Matt. 6:19). The Bible gives us simple, practical science.

Today masses of people have been led to believe they are the offspring of apes, but there are multiple problems with this theory. Evolution claims that life began when lightning sparked some chemicals to life from non-life, but science has never proven that this can happen. Still, even if something did spark to life, what are the odds of it surviving and reproducing before it fizzled out? And why would it reproduce if it didn’t have a brain? Of course, science knows that the beginning is still so unclear that it is far from fact. That’s why scientists continue to look for different theories, like aliens or multi-verses. While many people flatter themselves that they are intelligent because they “believe in science,” the Bible says “the wisdom of this world is foolishness” (1 Cor. 3:19). The idea that the universe exploded into existence from nothing is foolish. The idea that life came from non-life is foolish. The idea that humans are the ancestors of apes is foolish. The only reasonable explanation for our amazing planet, the universe, and intelligent life is God. Both science and common sense affirm it.

Chapter Three – Does God Exist?

Imagine that you look into the sky and you see a cloud shaped like a dog. When you tell your friends, they look up, and then one friend says, “I see it too.” Still, most of them don’t see it and reply, “You’re crazy. I don’t see anything but clouds.” As you insist, a couple more people see the image of a dog in the clouds and say, “Oh yes, there’s the tail.” Another says, “I see the ears.” Suddenly, once they see it, they cannot stop seeing it. It’s clear. They know for a fact it’s there because they have seen it, but the ones who don’t see it start getting frustrated. The fact is, just because some did not see the dog in the clouds doesn’t mean it was not there. It simply means that some of them did not see it. Similarly, because you have not experienced God does not mean He isn’t real.

It has been said that when a little baby doesn’t see you, you stop existing in their mind. Their little minds are so limited in understanding that what exists is limited only to the things they see. Some people grow up but never grow out of that concept. While millions around the world claim to have heard God’s voice, seen His miracles, and experienced Him personally in their lives, some people refuse to believe because they have not personally experienced God. Maybe it’s time to broaden your mind a little and admit that maybe God has revealed Himself to these people, even though He has not revealed Himself to you yet.

There are millions of people around the world who have heard God speaking to them; as the Bible said, “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it’” (Isa. 30:21). Millions have

seen God perform miracles in answer to their prayer and have personally experienced Him working in their lives. Of course, there are also millions of people who have never heard or experienced God. Obviously, those who have experienced God are the ones who say that He is real. Those who have not experienced God are the ones who claim that He does not exist. So what group should we listen to? Who do we believe? The answer is simple. Let me illustrate.

Let's pretend one hundred police all over the city are looking for a lost boy. Finally, one police officer calls on the radio and says, "I just saw the boy. He was wearing a purple shirt with the word 'Champions' on it." After that, two more police officers in the same area call and say, "I saw him too, wearing the same shirt." Obviously, just because most of the police did not see him doesn't mean the boy was not there. It just means that the others did not see him yet. If you were trying to find the boy, you would not ask the ones who did not see him. You would ask the few police officers who did see the boy because they are the ones who have the evidence! Similarly, if you are trying to find God, you go to the ones who have seen Him.

If you want to find out if God is real, do not ask the atheist or those who have not seen Him. Go to those who have experienced God and they will tell you where to look. Since I have experienced God, I can tell you for a fact that He is real. I have seen the dog in the clouds. I have heard God's voice speaking in my mind. I have seen the miracle of answered prayers. And I am not the only one. Millions across the globe have experienced God. The question should be asking is not, "Does God exist?" It is, "Have you found Him yet?"

Just because you have not seen, heard, or seen evidence of God does not mean He isn't real. I assure you, God is real. The only problem is that many people have not found Him yet, for reasons illustrated in the following story.

David was playing hide and seek with his children. After he hid, his two boys started looking for him, but when they could not find him, they started to grow tired of looking, and they finally gave up. They became distracted and started playing another game. Like those children, many people start out casually searching for God, but when they do not immediately find Him, they realize the search is going to require more effort than they had planned. They soon get distracted by life and give up their search, claiming that God must not exist, simply because they did not find Him, while ignoring the overwhelming evidence of all the others who are experiencing God.

The reason people are on different levels of finding God is that we are all on different levels of searching for God. If the children had kept looking diligently, they would have eventually found their father. In the same way, if we search diligently for God, we will eventually find Him. God's promise is, "you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). God does not reveal Himself to just anyone who casually looks for Him, because the Christian life requires earnest effort. Those who are not even willing to make the effort to find God will never be able to make the effort that it requires to follow God, so God requires people to search with their whole heart.

Think of it this way. Imagine that the boss of a big company tells his workers, “I will give a million dollars to everyone who gives me a good day of work today.” Let’s say you work casually, just like any other day. When you ask the boss if you will receive the money, he says, “No way! I was offering you a great reward, and you didn’t even try to work harder for it!” Similarly, God is offering us an amazing gift. Those who find God will be given a chance to live again and see loved ones again after this life is over, in a place where there is no more death or pain. If this is true, then we should be willing to at least make an effort to look for God!

Think of God as a treasure map. There have been people all through history who have searched treasure maps, knowing that there was only a small chance that the map was legitimate and an even smaller chance that they would actually find the treasure. Still, in spite of the small odds, some gave up everything to follow these maps. They did not make their sacrificial journeys knowing for a fact they would find treasure but simply hoping it was true. Now imagine if you were given a map that showed a hidden gold mine twenty miles from your home. The chance that you might find millions would at least lead you to make some kind of effort to find the treasure, and yet many are unwilling to search for God’s treasure, or else they search casually and half-heartedly.

God is offering us eternal life. The fact that many have found God is proof that the offer is true, whether you believe it or not. You may say, “I don’t believe it because I can’t see God,” but that does not change the fact. When the coronavirus pandemic hit the world, you

could have said, “I don’t believe in the virus because I can’t see it,” but that would not stop you from getting sick. Just because a person does not believe it does not make it untrue. You may choose not to believe that one plus one is two, but that does not change the fact. God is still real, and He is offering eternal life to those who find Him.

Just because you have not found God does not mean He is not real. Rather, it may mean you have not looked hard enough, or been patient enough, or wanted God enough, or were willing enough. I know from personal experience. So often, we think we are waiting on God to reveal Himself to us when the truth is that God is waiting on us to be ready for Him, so He can reveal Himself. At twenty-six years old, I came to the point in my life when I was ready to find God. It was at that time that God finally revealed Himself to me, and He will do the same for you when you are ready, but you must be willing to seek God with all your heart. Like those who are searching for hidden treasures, you must be willing to give up everything in your search for God. Then you will find Him.

The reason many people do not find God is that they are not willing to make the sacrifice it takes to find Him. God is offering us eternal life in a place where there is no more pain, and we can see dead loved ones again. He has explained the way to find this gift in the book He has given to humanity, called the Bible. Like those searching for buried treasure, if we believe there is even a remote chance that the Bible may be true, we will at least read the entire book, and those who really search, while patiently waiting for God to reveal Himself, will eventually find God.

Chapter Four – Is the Bible True?

On the morning of September 11, 2001, the nation watched in terror as a hijacked airplane flew into the first tower of the World Trade Center, taking with it hundreds of lives on impact. Throughout the building, people heard the explosion and felt the building sway. In a state of panic, many began to call the operators below, inquiring, “What should I do?” Some of the operators on duty were telling the people to stay put and wait at their offices, while others were telling people to evacuate at once. On that morning, whether you lived or died depended largely on what you were told and who you chose to listen to. Today, life and death still depend on what you are told and who you choose to listen to. There are so many voices around us telling us what to do and how to live, but each is different than the other. How can we know which voice to listen to, who to follow, or who has the truth? Sadly, many have concluded that there is no truth.

In spite of this, God says, “I am the way, the truth” (John 14:6). While some claim there is no one single truth, God says there is truth, and His way leads to the truth. The truth about where you came from. The truth about why you are alive. The truth about what happens after death. Answers to these and more truths are all found in an ancient book called the Bible. In the Bible, God not only gives answers to the mysteries of life, but He also gives us instructions on how to live the best way possible, how to enter into a relationship with Him, and how we can one day live forever. While many continue to sift through the voices, searching for the best path in life, the One who created us has

revealed the path to the best life possible; a path of joy, peace, and hope. That path is laid out in the Bible.

Still, many people are skeptical about the Bible. They claim that it was a man-made book, and it cannot be trusted, but the Bible claims that it was not really authored by men. It says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16). While men wrote the words, “they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). The Bible claims that God told them, showed them, and inspired them with the words to write in the same way that if a paralyzed man dictated a book for someone to write, the person who used the pencil would not be the author, but the one who spoke the words. The author is the one the thoughts originated from. That’s how the Bible can be written by men and still be authored by God. While many skeptics raise arguments against the Bible, this book continues to stand up against the attacks from its critics.

While some have challenged the historical accuracy of the Bible, the Bible has consistently proven to be historically true and accurate. For example, there have been some who claimed that certain people and places in the Bible never existed, such as King David, the Hittite nation, or the Moabites. Many have questioned biblical accounts of the Flood and the Tower of Babel. Others have said that Israel was never captured by Babylon. Doubts about the Bible stories continued to circulate, but over time, historical artifacts were continually found to prove that the Bible was true.

The discovery of the Moabite Stone revealed that the Moabite nation, recorded in the Bible, was a real nation. The discovery of the Lachish letters, in 1935, revealed communications and conflicts between

Babylon and Israel, just before Israel was taken into captivity. In 1906, Turkey uncovered thousands of Hittite documents, proving that the Hittite nation existed, and that the Bible was historically true. As late as 1993, we had no proof of King David's existence. Skeptics of the Bible used this as evidence that the Bible was not true, but again the skeptics were silenced when archeologists found proof of King David's existence in an ancient mound called Tel Dan, north of Israel, where reference to the ancient king of the Bible was inscribed. While the Rosetta Stone and King Tut's tomb give us evidence of the biblical accounts of ancient Egypt, the Behistun Rock contains accounts of the Flood, Creation, and the Tower of Babel, as described in the Bible.

The proof of biblical accuracy is overwhelming. There is enough archeological evidence of the Bible's accuracy to write multiple books, and yet this is not the only evidence we have of the Bible's accuracy. Some have claimed that even if the Bible were true, we could not trust its accuracy because it has been rewritten and translated, but the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls destroyed this lie. Between the years 1947 and 1956, approximately nine hundred ancient writings and segments were discovered along the coast of the Dead Sea, containing many Bible manuscripts. When these ancient manuscripts were compared with the ones that we have today, they found that there were no errors in the translation significant enough to change the meaning of the actual Bible verses, disproving the claim that the Bible cannot be trusted due to changes in translation.

More significant is the fact that the Dead Sea Scrolls contain writings from the book of Isaiah, that date back to no earlier than 100 B.C. What is so amazing about this is that Isaiah made predictions about the coming Messiah that were not fulfilled until over one hundred years later. In addition, even the most liberal estimation of the book of Daniel puts the writings as late as the second century B.C. This still leaves skeptics with a problem since the book of Daniel predicts future events beyond the fall of the Roman Empire, over six hundred years later. The fact is, these ancient writings have been discovered, supported, and confirmed as reliable historical documents, and while people continue to question their accuracy, evidence has continued to pour forth from multiple discoveries that reveal their authenticity. While some may question the Bible's authority, those who are looking for evidence to accept the Bible as true, and accurate, have been given more than enough evidence.

Still, some have tried to claim that science disproves the Bible, as if science and the Bible were somehow at odds, warring against each other. This is another lie promulgated today that must be exposed. The truth is that science is just starting to catch up with the Bible. Science used to teach that air was weightless, light was fixed, and the earth was flat, but thousands of years ago, the Bible spoke of the round earth, the movement of light, the weight of the wind, and more. Long before scientists discovered the truth about these things, the Bible spoke of modern scientific discoveries like the expanding universe, the rain cycle, blood as the source of life, and more. While some scientists thought to prove that the Bible was flawed, science actually

helped affirm the authority of the Bible. The fact is, science is constantly changing, but the scientific facts in the Bible have remained accurate all through history, proving the Bible is the authority in science.

Still, perhaps the most amazing proof of the Bible's inspiration is its power to change lives. God claims to work through the "word of God, which also effectually works in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). The Bible claims that it has the power to change us, give us a new life, and make us holy. This is evidenced by countless stories of alcoholics becoming sober, addicts becoming clean, homosexuals turning their lives around, and more. The Bible seems to have a living power within it that changes man into a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). And this power can be yours, but it is only obtained by faith.

On September 11, as the buildings prepared to fall, one man called the operator for advice. The operator urged him to return to his desk and wait, but he decided not to listen to the operator because he anticipated the seriousness of the situation. As a result, the man lived. The same decision rests before you. You must choose who you are going to listen to. While the world urges you to ignore the Bible, God appeals: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life" (Deut. 30:19). Please don't make the wrong decision about something so important. Just look at the evidence. The Bible has proven itself faithful by history, science, prophecy, and the personal experiences of those who have tested it. There is a reason why the Bible is the number one best-selling book of all time. Why don't you put the Bible to the test and read it today?

Chapter Five – Who Is Jesus?

After God created the earth, He created the first couple, Adam and Eve. While created pure, they were given the freedom to sin, but God warned them that sin was deadly. If they chose to sin, it would corrupt their holy nature, and they would have to die. Sadly, the first people decided to disobey God, and sin. As a result, sin destroyed their purity, planting a sinful nature within them. This nature was passed from generation to generation, down to us today. As a result, sin has “entered the world, and death through sin” (Rom. 5:12), but God made a plan to save us from death and give us another chance to live. In order to do this, God would have to come to earth and die for us.

God initiated the greatest rescue plan ever, but the plan would not go into effect immediately. Many years would pass before the event occurred. During that time, God would send messages to the world through His faithful prophets, telling all who wanted to escape the power of death how He would come and take our death penalty so that we could once again have a chance to live forever with Him in heaven. Over time, God continued to send messages to earth through the prophets. These messages were recorded in the writings of the Bible, detailing how He was going to come and rescue us. All through the ancient writings we were told that God was to come in the form of a man, and that He was to die for us, giving us clues on how to identify Him when He came.

First, to prove that it was God, His life would begin by a miracle birth. We are told in the ancient writings that “the Lord Himself will give you a sign:

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). His life would begin with a miracle when a woman who had never known a man would conceive, and God would plant His seed inside her. This would be the first sign to look for. Still, many other signs would follow that would help us to identify God when He came. God gave us signs all through the Bible, so that anyone wanting another chance at eternal life could look at the signs to identify the coming Deliverer.

There are over one hundred clues given in the Bible that help us identify His coming. Let’s look at some of them. After the clue that He would be born through a virgin, we are told that He would be born through the family line of the patriarch Jacob and that His birth would be accompanied by a special star (See Num. 24:17). The writings also say that He would be born in Bethlehem, stating, “Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel” (Mic. 5:2). While He was to be born in Bethlehem, the prophecies said He would preach and teach “in Galilee,” where He would “proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Isa. 9:1, 61:2).

The ancient prophecies not only reveal the coming and ministry of the Messiah, but they reveal the purpose of His coming, giving us details about His death for humanity. The prophecies said He would be betrayed, struck, sold for thirty pieces of silver, pierced to death, and yet although poor, He would be buried with the rich. We are told, “He is despised and rejected by men” (Isa. 53:3). “I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the

beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting” (Isa. 50:6). “So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver,” “then they will look on Me whom they pierced” (Zech. 11:12, 12:10).

At the death of the Messiah, we are told that “they made His grave with the wicked – But with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth” (Isa. 53:9). And all this was done so that God could take the death that we deserve. We were to die with the wicked for our sins, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5). Through the prophecies of God’s word, He has promised to come to earth and take our death in order to rescue us. Still, the prophecies listed above don’t even come close to revealing all the predictions that God has given us in His word.

Again, there are over one hundred prophecies in the Bible, all pointing forward to the greatest rescue event of history. The prophecies have revealed how God would come, when He would come, where He would come, and what He would come for. They told us the family line He would come through, the town He would be born in, the territory He would minister in, and so much more. Every prophecy must be fulfilled in one person. If one of the prophecies were wrong, then we would have to keep searching, but all these prophecies have been fulfilled in one Man, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

Jesus was born in Bethlehem through the family line of Jacob. His birth was accompanied by a special

star. His ministry in Galilee was proven by many miracles. He was rejected by His own people, sold by His friend for thirty pieces of silver, and pierced to death, exactly as predicted. More than one hundred prophecies were all exactly fulfilled in this one Man. What is more amazing is that the beginning and end of Christ's time on earth are confirmed with two great signs! Again, regarding His birth, we read, "the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son" (Isa. 7:14). The sign of His coming was marked by a virgin birth. The final sign would be the sign of Jonah.

When asked for a sign that He was the Messiah, Jesus replied, "no sign will be given... except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:39–40). The sign of Jonah is the sign of the resurrection. After His death, the prophets affirmed, "You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption," "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave" (Ps. 16:10, 49:15). The resurrection was the final, conclusive evidence that Jesus was truly the Messiah, God on earth.

When Jesus came back to life after He died, His resurrection was the seal of His promise to everyone on earth that death had been defeated, and we would have the chance to live again. God's plan worked. God took our death so that we could live again, and His resurrection revealed that all who die in Christ will one day live again. That's why the ancient prophecy said, "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God

will wipe away tears from all faces” (Isa. 25:8). His resurrection is the promise of our deliverance from death. While we will all die in this life, God has shown us that those who accept Jesus Christ will have the opportunity to be raised to life again, just as He was raised again to life after He died. Through Christ, death has been defeated for all who will accept Him.

While some question the resurrection, Christ “presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3). There is much proof that the resurrection was real. After the resurrection, Christ was seen by hundreds. While they did not have video cameras back then, we have written accounts from some of those eyewitnesses who were so convinced of the fact that Christ rose from the dead that they were willing to die rather than deny the resurrection. But perhaps the greatest proof of the resurrection is the fact that Christ still appears to millions around the world today. Still, in spite of the evidence, Christ said that many could not be “persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

Even if you choose to disbelieve, it will not change the fact that Christ is alive. While many have experienced Him, Christ said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Christ has given us evidence in prophecies, miracles, eyewitness accounts, and in the resurrection. Christ defeated death so all who accept Him may live in heaven forever. When He ascended to heaven, He left us with the promise, “I will come again,” but those who refuse to accept Christ will be disappointed when they “see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory” (John 14:3; Mark 13:26).

Chapter Six – Why Christianity?

While attending a creative writing class in a community college, my class was asked to write a poem. I wrote one called “The Race,” alluding to life as a race and concluding the poem with the words, “I know it’s hard, but hold on. Even if you suffer loss, just keep your eye fixed forward, set upon that lonely cross.” Upon peer review, one classmate said, “If you would just leave the reference to the cross out, the poem would have a more universal appeal.” In spite of the suggestion, I left the reference in because I felt that the cross was the heart of the poem, just as the cross is the heart of true religion. Let me explain.

In essence, the ultimate goal of every religion is to become a good person. It’s not really about the reward. It’s about attaining some level of goodness. Most religions strive to reach this goal through their efforts. Many religions teach that their gods have been offended by sin. As a result, each is on a quest to calm the anger and regain the favor of their gods, but Christianity is different. While some say all religions are the same, Christianity is really the opposite of other religions.

While other religions seek to calm the anger of their gods by being good, the Christian God, while offended by sin, still loves the sinner (See Rom. 5:8). In most religions, people try to calm the anger and fix the relationship of their offended god, but the God of Christianity loves us in spite of our sins, so He makes the first move to fix the relationship. In other religions, men chase God, but the God of Christianity comes to *us*. Other religions try to appease their gods through

sacrifice, but the Christian God is sacrificed for *us*. Other religions base their hope of reward on being good enough, but the reward of Christianity is based on God giving us *His* righteousness.

The central issue of every religion is the heart. Most religions believe that we are basically good at heart. They believe people are naturally good, and if we follow the heart, it will ultimately lead us to a good life. They feel that the purpose of this life is to follow the inclinations of the heart, which will eventually lead them to a good life, and gain them some reward in the end. While most have adopted the idea that the heart is naturally good, Christianity is honest enough to tell us the truth; that the heart is naturally sinful.

Christianity tells us what most of us already know, but are afraid to admit. Most admit that they are far from perfect and have done many bad things, but few will admit that this is the result of a sinful heart. Fortunately, the Bible is honest enough to tell the truth. It says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). The Bible says the heart is not good, but full of selfish desires that lead us into sin, and yet most people don't even know the heart is bad. "Who can know it?"

This foundational belief of good heart versus bad heart determines how a person lives. If a person thinks they have a basically good heart, which occasionally goes a little off the path, they will follow the inclinations of their heart, trusting where it leads, while trying to put a leash on it to control it. This reminds me of the guy who was walking his pet lion on a leash when it suddenly broke free and devoured a three-year-old child. So many people think they have their

passions under control when they are suddenly pushed over the edge and lash out. All of us have a limit that pushes us over the edge, and unless we have Christ holding the leash of our hearts, we will be in trouble when the crisis comes. We cannot control the heart.

Some religions work tirelessly to try and tame the human heart. Catholics do acts of penance or live in monasteries. Muslims perform ritual prayers and fasting. Jews have lists of laws. Buddhists, Hindus, and even atheists have rituals they use to try and tame the heart, but Protestant Christians recognize the impossibility of this. According to the Bible, “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). Even our best effort is not enough to make us good. Prayer rituals, fasting, sacrifices, and penance are all useless in this area, and yet tragically, many spend their entire lives in these different religions, striving to tame the human heart, only to find out in the end that their efforts were futile.

There is an old song by Neil Young in which he sings about his long journey through life, trying to find a “heart of gold.” He sings how he has gone all over the world in his search for a heart of gold, and now he is getting old and he still hasn’t found it. This song fittingly represents the plight of many who strive all their lives to obtain some level of peace with their gods through good works, sacrifices, and other rituals, only to find that their efforts were futile. As the Jews sought to gain God’s favor by their sacrifices, God finally cried out, “I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats,” concluding, “Bring no more futile sacrifices” (Isa. 1:11, 13). David understood this. He

said, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart” (Ps. 51:17).

While all other religions seek to obtain the favor of their gods by works, Christianity recognizes the impossibility of gaining God’s favor by our actions. Jeremiah said it best when he asked, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil?” (Jer. 13:23). The point is, we cannot be good with a bad heart, so God appeals, “get yourselves a new heart” (Eze. 18:31). While other religions try to fix the old heart, God says efforts to obtain holiness with the old heart are useless. That would be like trying to get strong enough to jump over the Grand Canyon. Impossible! We need a new heart, but we can’t get it by fasting, penance, sacrifice, or works. The only way to get it is by asking Jesus into our hearts. When we do this, God will “take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh” (Eze. 11:19).

My cousin was born with a bad heart and eventually had to get a heart transplant. Similarly, we also need a spiritual heart transplant because all the rules, rituals, fasting, pilgrimages, and ceremonies are not enough to make us holy. The only way to be holy is by receiving a new heart, but not just any heart will work. It will do no good to get another bad heart. We need a holy heart. God knew the only way we could obtain holiness was to get the heart of God, so Jesus offered to take our bad heart and give us His good heart. This is the greatest trade ever.

Since our hearts cannot be tamed, the only way to fix the problem is to crucify the human heart and get a good heart in its place. This is the exchange that took

place on the cross (See Gal. 2:20). When Jesus died, He took our sinful heart, or mind, and crucified it, offering us His heart or mind. That's why Paul says, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ" (Phil. 2:5). While some claim Jesus was just a man, this exchange could never work with a man. Jesus affirmed He was the great "I AM," claiming to be "God" (John 8:58, 10:33). Because Jesus is God, He is able to take our death and give us His mind, that we may be "partakers of the divine nature," taking part of God's nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

You see, Christianity offers something no other religion offers. It offers a cross. Jesus initiates the relationship by taking our sinful heart, crucifying it on the cross, then putting the heart of God inside us because we have a bad heart that is beyond repair. No matter how hard you try, your efforts and rituals will not save you. God does not want your futile efforts. He requires holiness. Since you cannot do this yourself, Jesus promised to do it for you. The only way to get this is by laying aside your pride, the prejudices of your religion, accepting Jesus as the Messiah, and asking Him to come inside your heart and make you holy. Jesus said, "I am the way ... No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). This is affirmed in the book of Acts, where we are told, "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). By inviting Jesus into your heart and letting Him change you, you can have peace. His word to you is, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Won't you stop resisting God, stop trying to make yourself holy, and accept Christ today?

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