

THE BIBLE, AND THE QUR'AN AND JESUS

An analysis of the Christian Bible and the Qur'an, and how they relate to Jesus of Nazareth

These and other questions will be addressed:

- Was Jesus of Nazareth a real historical figure?
- What does the Qur'an say about Jesus?
- Did Jesus Claim to be God?
- Has the Bible been corrupted over time?
- Are there errors in the Qur'an?
- Did the Jews and Romans really execute Christ?
- Are there errors in the Bible"?
- What is the true test of religion?
- Do all religions lead to God?

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For more information on this subject, a single book stands out as recommended reading: "Answering Islam" by Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb.

FORWARD

This is not an attempt to disparage someone's religious faith. To the contrary, people of any faith are to be commended for their dedication. To be worth believing, a religion, faith, story or theory must be subject to and able to pass tests of historical veracity and logical consistency. Religious faith is not exempt from the rules of logic just because it is "religious".

No one lives without some degree of faith, even if only at a mundane level. When you purchase a box of breakfast cereal, you exercise a degree of faith that the contents are as they were described. You weren't there when the box was filled: for all you know it contains sawdust. But you have faith the product is as advertised. Similarly, people alive today were not around to witness the American Civil War. There is, however, ample evidence that it took place, and that it occurred just as the history books present it. No reasonable person would deny it as a historical event.

So it is the premise of this writing that faith and belief are indispensable to daily life. Because it is important, faith deserves to be tested and examined. Challenges to faith produce one of two possible results: either your faith is made more secure when the challenge is answered satisfactorily, or, error is discovered and you are moved to a position of truth and greater understanding. Both results yield a positive experience.

Continued belief in something that is provably erroneous places the believer squarely in the realm of delusions: much like the man who sincerely believes he is Napoleon, despite the evidence to the contrary. The strength of one's belief

ultimately has no effect on the actual truth of that belief.

With this in mind, this treatise examines Muslim beliefs and perceptions of Jesus of Nazareth. It will compare those beliefs and perceptions to the record of history. It will examine allegations of corruption of the Christian Bible, and will discuss Jesus' claim to be the unique Son of God. Finally, it will look at the Qur'an itself, and compare its teachings and records to the historical record.

"Test everything, hold on to the good." 1 Thess. 5:21

THE CENTRAL ISSUE

The most orthodox religions assume the existence of truth. Truth implies the existence of error, and mutually exclusive claims of truth cannot both be correct. Either Islam is correct in the assumption that "There is only one God, Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet", or Christianity is correct when Jesus states: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6). They cannot both be right.

In any debate between Christianity and another religion, the ultimate issue revolves around the person of Jesus Christ. If Jesus is the Son of God who came in the flesh to die for the sins of the world, then all other arguments must fit around that fact. Aware Muslims know that if Jesus died on the cross and conquered death in the bodily resurrection, their faith is in vain. Thinking Christians likewise recognize that unless Jesus did those things, their faith is empty.

Muslims believe Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet, and that his words should be obeyed. Surah 5:46 says:

"We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and admonition to those who fear Allah."

The Qur'an refers to Jews and Christians as "People of the Book": those who have been reading the Law and Gospel from before Muhammad. Surah 4:171 says:

"O people of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah anything but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which he bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His Messengers..."

The Muslim scholar Sulaiman Shahid Mufassir, in the book "*Jesus, A Prophet of Islam*" notes:

"Muslims believe all prophets to be truthful because they are commissioned in the service of humanity by Almighty God (Allah)."

The Qur'an explicitly denies, however, that Jesus was deity in the flesh or even the "Son of God" (which in reality is just another way of saying "God in the form of a man"). The remainder of Surah 4:171 reads:

"...Do not say "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son..."

Muslims insist the Bible has been "corrupted" and that teachings such as the Trinity and the deity of Christ are in error. The problem here for the Muslim is that their views on the Bible are critically flawed. One evidence for this is the internal inconsistency within the Muslim view of scripture itself; the other is that it is contrary to factual evidence.

QUR'ANIC AFFIRMATION OF THE BIBLE

The Qur'an itself teaches that both of the Old and New Testaments are a direct revelation of God. Surah 3:3 states:

"It is He (Allah) Who sent down to you (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the Criterion (of judgment between right and wrong)."

Surah 2:136 says that there is no difference in the revelations of the Bible and the Qur'an. It reads:

"...We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to Allah (in Islam)."

Now carefully consider Surah 5:44-48:

"It was We who revealed the Law (to Moses): therein was guidance and light... If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah has revealed, they are (no better than) unbelievers... We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and admonition to those who fear Allah. Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah has revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah has revealed, **they are** (no better than) those who rebel. To you We sent the scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah has revealed..."

Surah 5 clearly gives credence to the Old and New Testaments (the Law and the Gospel) as being from God. It refers to both as "guidance and light." We are then told to "judge by what Allah has revealed" in the Bible (again, the Law and the Gospel) and the Qur'an. We are instructed to use them both as our "guidance and light", and implied with this admonition (as well as plainly stated in the text) is the idea that **both** are in perfect unity as to their teachings and doctrine. Each revelation is said to confirm the previous, which should

result in an inerrant chain of divine thought. It would logically appear that a person should use all of God's revelations. This should not present a problem to the Muslim, as the Qur'an implies that there is perfect unity between them: indeed, why wouldn't we expect such unity from an infinitely wise, all-knowing and perfect God? The person who fails to investigate and judge by all that God has revealed is said to be a rebel and an unbeliever. It would appear that the Muslim should become quite familiar with the Bible as well as the Qur'an, as it seems they are obliged to discover their unity and contemplate the truths and teachings in both.

The 5th Surah is confirmed by four additional texts:

"The Qur'an is....a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it..." (10:37)

"People of the Book...stand fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that hath come to you from your Lord. It is the revelation that hath come to thee from your Lord." (5:68)

"If thou were in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee. The truth hath indeed come to thee from thy Lord." (10:94)

"And dispute ye not with the People of the Book...but say "we believe in the revelation which had come down to us and that which came down to you". (29:46)

The Qur'an repeatedly states that it harmonizes with the revelation that came before it: the Christian Bible. It tells the Muslim in Surah 10:94 to inquire of those who have been reading the Bible to verify Qur'anic scripture. It calls the Bible "the Word of God" in Surah 2:75, and "guidance and light" in Surah 5:46. The Qur'an sets a standard for itself by which it can (and according to Surah 5:48, should) be measured. At this point, whether the Bible itself is accurate or erroneous is now IRRELEVANT. According to Surahs 4:136, 5:44-48, 2:136, 10:37, 10:94, 29:46, and 46:9-12 the Qur'an agrees with the scriptures that precede it: logically therefore, IT MUST.

Yet the Bible and the Qur'an diametrically oppose one another on a variety of topics, particularly the subject of Jesus Christ:

The Bible: Jesus said he was the Son of God.

The Qur'an: Jesus was a prophet, the son of Mary, but no more.

The Bible: Jesus IS God.

The Qur'an: Denies Jesus' claim to deity and teachings like the Trinity.

The Bible: Jesus died on a cross.

The Qur'an: Jesus did not die but was only made to appear that way.

The Bible: Jesus rose again from the dead.

The Qur'an: Claims Jesus ascended to heaven but did not die.

The response to these contradictions by most Muslims will be that the Gospel message has been corrupted and no longer reflects its original message and teachings.

The Qur'an says in Surah 15:9:

"We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)."

Wouldn't this "message" include ALL of God's revelation? If the Almighty protects only some of his word, it implies that not everything He says is important enough to remember.

Muhammad clearly did not think the Biblical scriptures were corrupted, but argued that Jewish and Christian interpretation of the scripture was incorrect. Consider the following Surahs:

"You People of the Book! Why do you clothe truth with falsehood and conceal the truth, while you have knowledge?" (3:71)

"There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues; you would think it is part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book." (3:78)

"Can you (O ye men of faith) entertain the hope that they will believe in you? – Seeing that a party of them heard the Word of God, and perverted it knowingly after they understood it." (2:75)

One would not think that Muhammad, and certainly not God speaking through Muhammad would have asked anyone to accept a corrupted version of the Law and the Gospel, especially in light of the praise the Qur'an heaps upon them. And the Bible today is substantially identical to the Law and New Testament of Muhammad's time, since today's Bible is based on manuscripts that date back centuries before Muhammad.

MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE FOR BIBLICAL INTEGRITY

The Greek Manuscripts

Following is a list of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament:

- CODEX VATICANUS (AD 325-350) Preserved in the Vatican library and contains the entire Bible. The word "Vaticanus" is Latin for "Prophetic", and does not infer Roman Catholicism.
- Codex Sinaiticus (AD 350) Now in the British Museum. It contains nearly all of the New Testament and over half of the Old Testament.
- Codex Alexandrinus (AD 400) Also in the British Museum. Contains nearly the whole Bible.
- Codex Ephraemi (5th Century) Located in the Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. Contains the whole New Testament apart from 2 Thessalonians and 2 John.
- Codex Bezae (AD 450) In the Cambridge University Library. It contains the Gospels and Acts in both Greek and Latin.

- Codex Washingtonensis (AD 450) Contains the four Gospels. In the Smithsonian Institution, Wash. DC
- Codex Claromontanus (6th Century) Contains Paul's letters in Greek and Latin.
- Chester Beatty Papyri (AD 200) In Dublin University and owned in part by the University of Michigan. Three codices contain large parts of the N.T.
- Bodmer Papyrus II (AD 150-200) Contains the books of Peter and Jude just as we have them today.
- John Ryland Fragment (AD 117) Contains verses from John 18 just as they appear today.

There are around 5,700 other manuscripts of the New Testament, dating from the second century to the fifteenth century. Several hundred of these pre-date Muhammad.

The Early Translations

In addition to the Greek manuscripts, we have ancient translations of the New Testament that were made circa AD 150 in Syriac and Latin. They bring us very near the time of the originals. There are also others:

- **The Old Syriac Version** This was the name given to the Christian Aramaic, written in a distinctive form of the Aramaic alphabet. Contains all four Gospels.
- **The Peshita Syriac** This was the standard version produced between AD 150-250. More than 350 extant manuscripts of this version exist dating from the fifth century.
- **The Palestinian Syriac** Dated between AD 400-500. It is recorded that Polycarp (a disciple of the Apostle John) translated the New Testament into Syriac for Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabug.
- **Old Latin Versions** Testimonies show that these were in circulation in the third century.
- **African Old Latin** – Codex Rabbinensis Shows paleographical marks of having been copied from a second century papyrus.
- **Codex Corbiensis** (AD 400-500) Contains the four Gospels.
- **Codex Vercellensis** (AD 360)
- **Codex Palatinus** (5th Century AD)
- **Latin Vulgate** Translated by Jerome, secretary of Damasus, Bishop of Rome at his request between 364 and 384 AD
- **Coptic or Egyptian Versions** Believed to have been translated between 200-300 AD.
- **The Sahidic** Dated to the beginning of the third century.
- **The Boharic** (4th Century AD)
- **Middle Egyptian** (4th-5th Centuries)
- **Armenian** (400 AD)
- **Gothic** (4th Century)
- **Ethiopic and Nubian** (6th Century)

All of these versions were in circulation before Muhammad was born. They clearly reveal that the doctrines of our present Gospels have not been changed.

The Quotations

Not only do we have thousands of original Greek texts and translations, but there are numerous quotations of the New Testament by early Christian writers as well as by those who opposed the Gospel. Putting all of these together gives us a record of the whole New Testament, with only a few verses not quoted.

Justin Martyr (circa AD 114) made 330 quotations from the New Testament. Iraneus (circa AD 120-202) made 1,819; Clement of Alexandria 2,406; Origen 17,992; Tertullian 7,258; Hippolytus 1,378; and Eusebius 5,175. The list goes on. There is a large index of citations by the church Fathers of antiquity in the British Museum. It consists of 16 thick volumes and contains 86,489 quotations. From viewing them one clearly sees that the New Testament and teachings we have today are the same as those in the first centuries after Christ.

Yusuf Ali, the great Muslim scholar and translator of the Qur'an, cites Sir Frederick Kenyon as an authority on ancient manuscripts. Yet in his book "Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts", 4th edition, Kenyon concludes that:

"The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world."

The Lectionaries

This is a greatly neglected area, and yet the second largest group of New Testament Greek manuscripts is the lectionaries. Following the custom of the synagogue, according to which portions of the Law and Prophets were read at divine service each Sabbath day, the Christian church adopted the practice of reading passages from the New Testament books at services of worship. A regular system of lessons from the Gospels and Epistles was developed, and the custom arose of arranging these according to a fixed order of Sundays and other holy days of the Christian year. The lectionaries were usually rather conservative and used older texts, and this makes them very valuable in textual criticism.

Comparison With Other Ancient Manuscripts

The whole concept of corruption, crucial as it is to the Islamic claim, has absolutely no textual support. The Bible has overwhelming manuscript support that pre-dates Muhammad

by centuries. Indeed, as we have seen, there is more manuscript evidence for the New Testament than for any other book from the ancient world. To gain some perspective on this, let's look at how the N.T. compares with other ancient books, all of which are generally accepted as authentic and reliable with little debate. All of these classic works of literature have **FAR** fewer original copies to verify content, and a much larger time gap (between composition and earliest copies) than the New Testament.

Author/BOOK	Date Written	Earliest Copies	TimeGap (In Yrs.)	# of Copies
Homer/ILIAD	800 BC	400 BC	400	643
Herodotus/HISTORY	480-425 BC	AD 900	1,350	8
Thucydides/HISTORY	460-400 BC	AD 900	1,300	8
Plato	400 BC	AD 900	1,300	7
Demosthenes	300 BC	AD 1100	1,400	200
Caesar/GALLIC WARS	100-44 BC	AD 900	1000	10
Livy/HISTORY OF ROME	59 BC-17 AD	4 th Cen Part mostly 10 th	400/1,000	1partial/19
Tacitus/ANNALS	AD 100	AD 1100	1,000	20
Pliny Secundus/NATURALHISTORY	AD 61-113	AD 850	750	7
NEW TESTAMENT	AD 50-100 (many scholars believe all the NT was completed by 70 AD)	AD 114 fragment AD 200 several books AD 250 most of NT AD 325 complete NT	+50 100 150 225	5,366

For an ancient book, the New Testament is the most accurately copied book in the world.

The Old Testament

Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, the oldest Hebrew manuscript was dated about AD 900. This is because the Jews ceremonially buried older and damaged copies in a graveyard when new scrolls were completed. In "Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts", Sir Frederick Kenyon comments:

"The extreme care, which was devoted to the transcription of manuscripts, explains the disappearance of earlier copies. When a manuscript had been copied with the exactitude prescribed by a Talmud, and had been duly verified, it was accepted as authentic, and regarded as being equal with any other copy. If all were equally correct, age gave no advantage to a manuscript; on the contrary, age was a positive disadvantage, since a manuscript was liable to become defaced or damaged with the lapse of time. A

damaged or imperfect copy was at once condemned as unfit for use."

In the 1,300 years separating the Dead Sea Scrolls from the earliest previously known manuscripts, no change in the message of revelation crept in. The scrolls revealed 95% accuracy in the Hebrew Bible. The 5% variation consisted of obvious slips of the pen and variant spellings, but did not indicate any difference in doctrine or teachings.

Furthermore, if we have established that the New Testament is reliable, then we should note that Jesus and the apostles verified the Old Testament as reliable and made no mention of any corruption. Jesus says in Matt. 5:17-18:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, nor the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law..."

The apostle Paul says in 2 Tim. 3:16 that:

"All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..."

Paul is speaking primarily here of the Old Testament, as obviously not all of the New Testament had been written yet. It is doubtful that Paul would think something "corrupt" would be useful for training in righteousness. Finally, Peter indicates that he believed in the divine authorship of the "Prophecy of Scripture" in 2 Pet. 1:20-21.

Summary

If Christians in Muhammad's day were obligated to accept the Bible as per Surah 5:68, and if abundant manuscript evidence confirms that the Bible of today is essentially the same, then it follows that, according to the teachings of the Qur'an itself, Christians are obligated to accept the teachings of the Bible today. But the scriptures today affirm that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for our sin and rose again three days later. This, however, is contrary to the Qur'an. Thus, Muslim rejection of the authenticity of the Bible is inconsistent with their own belief in the inspiration of the Qur'an.

EVIDENCE FOR THE JESUS OF THE BIBLE

The Biblical Claims for Christ

At the heart of Christianity is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Muslims deny what the Bible clearly teaches: that Jesus died on a cross and rose again three days later. Yet it is this same Bible, as we have previously learned, that the Qur'an calls "guidance and light", the "Word of God", and says can be used to "judge all matters", including the Qur'an itself! Christians are told to stand by this revelation, and the Muslim is warned not to dispute with "The People of the Book". Finally, the Muslim is told in Surah 10:94 that if he is in doubt about Qur'anic revelation, he can ask "those who have been reading the Book from before thee". This Bible that the Qur'an

heaps praise upon, has as its central theme the death and resurrection of Christ. Christians not only recognize this as the central truth of Christianity, but also that it is the central proof that Jesus was the Son of God, Deity in human flesh.

Islam claims Jesus was a mere human being, a Prophet of God, superseded by Muhammad who was the last and the greatest of the Prophets. Christianity insists Jesus is God in human flesh. Whatever other points of commonality there may be between these two forms of monotheism, there is no adjudicating this conflict. Both beliefs are at the heart of their systems, and each is diametrically opposed to the other. Since the evidence for these claims is centered around Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection three days later, and since Muslims deny both, these claims will be the focus for this section.

Since we have already shown that the New Testament documents and witnesses are reliable, it remains only to see what they tell us about the claims of Christ. In brief, they inform us that Jesus of Nazareth, born of the virgin Mary:

- Claimed to be the unique Son of God
- Claimed to BE God in human flesh
- Died on a cross
- Rose from the dead

Remember that Islam denies all four of these points.

• Jesus' Claims To Sonship And Deity

Before discussing Jesus' specific claim to be the Son of God (Deity in the flesh of a man), we should briefly address the Muslim misunderstanding of this claim. The Qur'an seems to take an anthropomorphic view of the term "Son of God", inferring that it would mean Jesus was the product of physical relations. It is Surah 19:35 which declares:

"It is not befitting to (the majesty of) God that He should beget a son."

This, of course, is a straw man as both Christianity and Islam affirm Christ's virgin birth. One should also note, however, there are two Arabic words for son. The word **"walad"** denotes a son born of sexual relations. Jesus definitely is not a son in this sense. But there is another Arabic word for son, **"ibn"**, that can be used in a wider figurative or metaphorical sense. A traveler, for example, is said to be a "son of the road" (*ibnussabil*). It is in this sense that it makes sense to speak of Jesus as the "Son (ibn) of God".

Yahweh (YHWH) is the special name given by God for himself in the Old Testament. It is the name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14, when God said: "I AM THAT I AM". The Hebrew word "Yahweh" means "He Is", and is the third person form of the verb "I AM". When God speaks of himself he says "I AM", and when we speak of him we say "He Is". The name is often incorrectly spelled "Jehovah", a spelling and pronunciation that developed from combining the consonants from the name with the vowel points for "Adonai", another word for "Lord". This odd combination occurred because the Jews thought the name of God too holy to be uttered, and feared

violating Exodus 20:7 which says "You shall not misuse the name of Yahweh your God..." or Leviticus 24:16 which states that "anyone who blasphemes the name of Yahweh must be put to death...". The addition of the odd vowel points prevented even an accidental utterance of the divine name while reading scripture. Even today, the divine name "Yahweh" is usually translated as "the LORD" in all capital letters in most Bibles. "Lord", in upper and lowercase, denotes something akin to "Master", and not the divine name. See your Bible's preface.

While other titles for God may be used for men (Gen. 18:12 has Sarah referring to Abraham as "Adonai", which means "Lord" or "Master") or false gods ("elohim" or "gods" in Deuteronomy 6:14), Yahweh (YHWH) is only used to refer to the one true God. No other thing was to be worshiped or served (Exod. 20:5), and his name and glory were not to be given to another. Isaiah wrote:

"This is what Yahweh says... I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God" (Isa. 44:6)

Isaiah also writes:

"I am Yahweh; That is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." (Isa. 42:8)

Yet Jesus claimed to be Yahweh on many occasions. Jesus prayed,

"And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." (John 17:5)

But Yahweh of the Old Testament clearly said "I will not give my glory to another" (Isa. 42:8). Jesus also declares "I am the first and the last" (Rev. 1:17), precisely the words Yahweh uses in both Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12. Jesus says "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), but the Old Testament says "Yahweh is my shepherd" (Psalms 23:1). Further, Jesus claims to be the judge of all men (John 5:27; Matt. 25:31-33), but Joel quotes Yahweh as saying "...I will sit to judge all the nations on every side" (Joel 3:12). Likewise, Jesus spoke of himself as "the bridegroom" (Matt. 25:1), while the Old Testament identifies Yahweh in this way (Isa. 62:5; Hosea 2:16). While the Psalmist declares, "Yahweh is my light" (Psalms 27:1), Jesus says "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Perhaps the strongest claim Jesus made to be Yahweh is in John 8:58, where he says, "before Abraham was born, I AM!" This statement not only claims existence before Abraham, but equality with the "I AM" of Exodus 3:14. The Jews around him clearly understood his meaning and picked up stones to kill him for blaspheming (cf. John 8:58-59; 10:31-33). The same claim is made in Mark 14:62 and John 18:5-6.

The "I AM" claim in John 18 is particularly interesting. In verses 1-11 we read the story of Jesus' arrest by a detachment of Roman soldiers, officials of the chief priests and some Pharisees. The Bible says they were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. But instead of having to hunt for a cowering fugitive, Jesus steps out boldly to meet them and

asks who they are seeking. He is told they seek Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus replies, "I am he", but verse 6 records a peculiar detail that demands more attention than it usually gets. John 18:6 reads, "When Jesus said "I AM he", they drew back and fell to the ground". Roman soldiers, priests and Pharisees, upon hearing Jesus say "I AM", all simultaneously fall to the ground, kneeling in submission. There is no logical explanation for this behavior, as none of these people (and certainly not trained and indifferent Roman soldiers) would be expected to so honor someone they were about to arrest and kill, except in fulfillment of Isaiah 45:23 where Yahweh says "...before me every knee will bow." (See Phil. chapter 2)

- **Jesus Assumes The Prerogatives Of God**

Jesus claimed to be equal with God in other ways. One was by claiming for himself the prerogatives of God. He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). The scribes correctly responded, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?". So, to prove his claim was not an empty boast, he healed the man, offering direct proof that what he had said about forgiving sins was true also.

Another prerogative that Jesus claimed was the power to raise and judge the dead. He stated in John 5:25-29:

"I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live...and come out – those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."

He removed all doubt about his meaning when earlier in the same passage he states:

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." (verse 21).

But the Old Testament clearly teaches that only God is the giver of life (1 Sam. 2:6; Deut. 32:39) and the only one to judge (Joel 3:12; Deut. 32:35). Jesus boldly assumed for himself powers that only God has.

Jesus also claimed that he should be honored as God. He stated that all men should,

"honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father." (John 5:23)

- **Jesus Claims To Be The Messiah**

Even the Qur'an recognizes that Jesus is Messiah (Surah 5:14; 75). But the Old Testament teaches that the coming Messiah would be God himself. So when Jesus claimed to be that Messiah, he was also claiming to be God. For example, the prophet Isaiah (9:6) calls the Messiah "Mighty God". The Psalmist wrote of Messiah, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever" (Psalms 45:6; cf. Heb. 1:8). Psalms 110:1 records a conversation between the Father and the Son: "Yahweh says to my Lord (Adoni), "Sit at my right hand".

Jesus applied this passage to himself in Matt. 22:41-45. Jesus calls himself, or is called, "the son of man" 84 times in the New Testament. In the Messianic prophecy of Daniel 7, the son of man is called the "ancient of days" (verse 22), a phrase used twice in the same passage of God the Father (verses 9, 13). And Revelation 1:13-17 clearly shows the name refers to Jesus Christ himself.

Jesus also said he was the Messiah at his trial before the high priest. When asked, "Are you the Christ (Greek for "Messiah"), the son of the Blessed One?", Jesus responded: "I am; and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." At this the high priest tore his robe and said, "Why do we need any more witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy!" (Mark 14:61-64). What Jesus essentially told the high priest here was: "Yes, I am. And the next time we meet face to face, it will be ME judging YOU." Here, Jesus not only admits to being the Messiah, but at the same time claims the prerogative of Yahweh to judge the priest in the afterlife. There can be no doubt that in claiming to be Messiah (see also Luke 24:27; Matt. 26:64), Jesus also claimed to be God.

- **Jesus Accepts Worship**

The Old Testament forbids worshiping anyone other than God (Exod. 20:1-4; Deut. 5:6-9). The New Testament agrees showing that even the apostles refused worship (Acts 14:15) as did Angels (Rev. 22:8-9). But Jesus accepted worship on numerous occasions, showing his claim to be God. A healed leper worshiped him (Matt. 8:2), and a ruler knelt before him with a request (Matt. 9:18). After he stilled the storm, those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matt. 14:33). A group of Canaanite women (Matt. 15:25, the mother of James and John (Matt. 20:20), the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:6), all worshiped Jesus without one word of rebuke. But Christ also elicited worship in some cases, as when Thomas saw the risen Christ and cried out "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). This could only be done by a person who seriously considered himself to be God.

- **Jesus Claims His Words Equal with God's**

Jesus also put his words on par with God's. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago...But I tell you..." (Matt. 5:21-22) is repeated over and over again. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18-19). God had given the ten commandments to Moses, but Jesus said "A new command I give you: Love one another" (John 13:34). Jesus said "Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, nor the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law" (Matt. 5:18), but Jesus later says of his own words, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Speaking of those who reject him, Jesus said, "That very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day" (John 12:48). There is no question that Jesus

expected his words to have equal authority with God's declarations in the Old Testament.

• Jesus Accepts Prayer In His Name

Jesus not only asked men to believe in him and obey his commandments, but he also asked them to pray in his name. "I will do whatever you ask in my name...you may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" (John 14:13-14). "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you" (John 15:7). Jesus even insisted, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). In response to this the disciples not only prayed in Jesus' name (1 Cor. 5:4), but prayed to Christ (Acts 7:59). Jesus certainly intended that his name be invoked both before God and as God in prayer.

In view of these many clear ways in which Jesus claimed to be God, any unbiased observer aware of the Gospels should recognize, whether he accepts the claim or not, that Jesus of Nazareth did indeed claim to be God in human flesh. That is, he claimed to be identical to Yahweh of the Old Testament. In his book, *"Mere Christianity"*, C.S. Lewis (of *"Narnia"* fame) insightfully observed that when confronted with the boldness of Christ's claims, we are faced with distinct alternatives:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish things that people often say about him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would rather be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell."

Testing The Biblical Claims For Christ

To say that Jesus and his disciples made claims that he was God in the flesh does not in itself prove he is God. The real question is whether or not there is any good reason to believe that the claims are true. Jesus offered unique and multiple lines of miraculous evidence to confirm his claims, the very thing Muhammad recognized as the mark of a true prophet (See Surah 2:92):

- His fulfillment of prophecy
- His sinless life and miraculous deeds
- His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead

• His Fulfillment of Prophecy

There were dozens of predictive prophecies in the Old Testament regarding Messiah. The New Testament opens with a passage concluding that Jesus is "Immanuel" (God with us), which refers to the Messianic prediction of Isaiah 7:14. The very title "Christ" carries the same meaning as the Hebrew appellation "Messiah" (anointed one). Consider the following

predictions made centuries in advance that Jesus would be:

1. Born of a woman (Gen. 3:15; cf. Gal. 4:4)
2. Born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; cf. Matt. 1:21)
3. "Cut Off" (die) 483 years after the declaration to reconstruct the city of Jerusalem in 444 BC (Dan. 9:24-26)
4. Of the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3 and 22:18; cf. Matt. 1:1 and Gal. 3:16)
5. Of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; cf. Heb. 7:14)
6. Of the house of David (2 Sam. 7:12; cf. Matt. 1:1)
7. Born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; cf. Matt. 2:1 and Luke 2:4-7)
8. Anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 11:2; cf. Matt. 3:16-17)
9. Heralded by the Messenger of the Lord (Isa. 40:3 and Mal. 3:1; cf. Matt. 11:10)
10. That Jesus would perform miracles (Isa. 35:5-6; cf. Matt. 11:5)
11. Would cleanse the temple (Mal. 3:1; cf. Matt. 21:12)
12. Would be rejected by the Jews (Psalms 118:22; cf. 1 Pet. 2:7)
13. Die a humiliating death (Psalms 22 and Isa. 53; cf. Matt. 20:18-19) involving:
 - a. rejection by his own people (Isa. 53:3; cf. John 1:10-11; 7:5, 48)
 - b. silence before his accusers (Isa. 53:7; cf. Matt. 27:12-19)
 - c. mockery (Psalms 22:7-8; cf. Matt. 27:28-31)
 - d. piercing of his hands and feet (Psalms 22:16; cf. Luke 23:33)
 - e. death along with thieves (Isa. 53:12; cf. Matt. 27:44)
 - f. prayer for his persecutors (Isa. 53:12; cf. Luke 23:34)
 - g. piercing of his side (Zech. 12:10; cf. John 19:34)
 - h. burial in a rich man's tomb (Isa. 53:9; cf. Matt. 27:57-60)
 - i. casting lots for his garments (Psalms 22:18; cf. John 19:23-24)
14. That he would rise from the dead (Psalms 16:10; cf. Acts 13:35)
15. Ascend into heaven (Psalms 16:10; cf. Acts chapter 2)
16. And sit at the right hand of God the Father (Psalms 110:1; cf. Hebrews 1:3)

It is important to understand that these prophecies were written hundreds of years before Christ was born. No one could have been simply "reading the trends of the time" or just making intelligent guesses. Furthermore, notice the specific nature of the Biblical predictions, point to the very time, tribe (Judah), lineage (Davidic), city of birth (Bethlehem) of Christ. What is more, even the most **liberal** critics admit that the prophetic books were completed at least 400 years before Christ and the book of Daniel by about 165 BC. (See Jesus People Newsletter Vol. 32, issue 1, at www.jesuspeopleinfo.org for our article that explains Daniel was written much earlier.) Though there is good evidence to date most of these books much earlier (some of the Psalms and earlier prophets were in the 8th and 9th centuries BC), it would make little difference. It is humanly impossible to make clear, repeated and accurate predictions 200 years in the future. On the other hand, an

omniscient God can predict the future with no difficulty. So even using the late date for the Old Testament given by critics, the fulfillment of these prophecies in a theistic universe is miraculous and points to a divine confirmation of Jesus as the Messiah.

- **His Sinless Life**

The very nature of Christ's life demonstrates his claim to deity. To live a truly sinless life would be a momentous accomplishment for any human being in itself, but to claim to be God and offer a sinless life as evidence is another matter. Muhammad never did. Even the Qur'an speaks of Muhammad's need to ask God for forgiveness on many occasions. For example, in Surah 40:55 God told him "...ask forgiveness for thy fault." On another occasion God told Muhammad, "...ask forgiveness for thy fault, and for the men and women who believe" (Surah 47:19). This makes it absolutely clear that forgiveness was to be sought for his sins, not just for others (48:2). Yet Jesus stated he was without sin. When a woman was discovered in the act of adultery and was dragged before him, he issued an embarrassing challenge to her accusers: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). Gradually they slunk away until there was no one left. But a little while later in the same chapter, Jesus issues another challenge, this time concerning himself: "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (John 8:46). No one answered. They slipped away when he accused them, but when he invited them to accuse him he could stay and bear their scrutiny. They were all sinners; he was without sin. He lived a life of perfect obedience to God's will – "I always do what pleases Him" (John 8:29). There was nothing boastful about these words. He spoke naturally, with neither fuss nor pretension. It is not surprising, therefore, that we are told of Jesus' temptation, but nothing of his sins.

He never confesses his sins nor asks forgiveness, although he tells his disciples to do so. He shows no consciousness of moral failure. Jesus' self-conscious purity is astonishing in that it is utterly unlike the experience of all saints and mystics. The Christian knows that the nearer he approaches God, the more he becomes aware of his own sinfulness. Yet Jesus Christ, who seems to have lived in unbroken fellowship with God the Father, was free from all sense of sin. Some of Jesus' enemies brought false accusations against him (Mark 14:56), but the verdict of Pilate at his trial has been the verdict of history: "I find no basis for a charge against this man" (Luke 23:4). A soldier at the cross (Luke 23:47) and a thief on the cross next to Jesus (Luke 23:41) both agreed he was innocent. But the real test is what those who were closest to Jesus said of his character. His disciples lived and worked with him for several years at close range. They ate and slept together. They experienced the cramped confines of the same small boat. They even had a common purse (and a common bank account can be the cause of much dissension!). The disciples got on one another's nerves. They quarreled. But they never found in

Jesus the sins they found in themselves. Familiarity normally breeds contempt, but not in this case. It appears they shared Jesus' high opinion of himself. Peter called Christ "A lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:19) and added "No deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22). John called him "Jesus Christ the righteous one" (1 John 2:1; cf. 3:7). Paul expressed the unanimous belief of the early church that Christ "Had no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), while the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus was tempted as a man "Yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15). The apostolic testimony to the sinlessness of Jesus is all the more interesting because it is indirect. They do not set out to establish the truth that he was without sin. Their remarks are asides. They are discussing some other subject, and add almost as a parenthesis a reference to his sinlessness. Jesus also forbid retaliation on one's enemies (Matt. 5: 38-42) and, unlike Muhammad, refused to use the sword to spread his message (Matt. 26:52). Christ's impeccable character gives testimony to the truth of his claims.

- **His Miracles**

Beyond the moral aspects of his life, we are confronted with the miraculous nature of Jesus' ministry, which even Muslims will acknowledge is a divine confirmation of a prophet's claim. Jesus, however, did perform an unprecedented display of miracles. He turned water into wine (John 2:7), walked on water (Matt. 14:25), multiplied bread (John 6:11), opened the eyes of the blind (John 9:7), made the lame to walk (Mark 2:3), cast out demons (Mark 3:11), healed the multitudes of all kinds of sickness (Matt. 9:35), including leprosy (Mark 1:40-42), and even raised the dead to life on several occasions (John 11:43-44; Luke 7:11-15; Mark 5:35). When asked if he was the Messiah, Jesus used his miracles as evidence to support the claim, saying, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised" (Matt. 11:4-5). This outpouring of miracles was a special sign that Messiah had come (see Isa. 35:5-6). The Jewish leader Nicodemus even said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could do the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2). To a first century Jew, miracles such as Christ performed were clear indications of God's approval of the performer's message. But in Jesus' case, part of that message was that he was God in human flesh.

- **His Death and Resurrection**

We have considered the claims Jesus made for himself and the character which he displayed. We will now examine the evidence for his death on a cross and resurrection three days later. This third line of evidence supporting Jesus' claim to be Yahweh is greatest of them all. Nothing like it is claimed by any other religion. Yet it is only to be expected that a supernatural person should come to and leave the earth in a supernatural way. This is in fact what the New Testament teaches and what, in consequence, the church has always

believed. His birth was natural, but his conception was supernatural, His death was natural, but his resurrection was supernatural. His miraculous conception and resurrection are completely consistent with his claims to deity.

▪ Jesus or Someone Else?

According to many Muslims, Jesus was not crucified on the cross. Instead, Allah is supposed to have cast the likeness of Jesus on Judas whom the Jews then crucified. This conclusion is reached from the following Surah:

“That they said (in boast), “We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah”: but they did not kill him, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they did not kill him” (Surah 4:157).

Contrary to Islamic thought, nothing can be more certain than that the man whom the Jews crucified as Jesus was the same man they arrested in the garden of Gethsemane.

1. When arrested in the garden this man said: “Judas, are you betraying the son of man with a kiss? (Luke 22:48)
2. To those who were sent to arrest him he said: “Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me, but this is your hour – when darkness reigns.” (Luke 22:53)
3. Peter wanted to defend Jesus and cut off the right ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest. Jesus healed him, saying to Peter: “Put your sword back in its place, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?” (Matt. 26:51-54)
4. At the trial of this man before the Sanhedrin, witnesses stood up and spoke against him with the words: “We heard him say, “I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man” (Mark 14:58). Jesus did not deny it.
5. When the high priest said to him: “Are you Christ, the Son of the Blessed one?” Jesus replied “I am; and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:61-62)
6. When Pilate said: “You are a king, then!”, Jesus replied: “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37).
7. On the cross, this man prayed for those who crucified him: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34). Logically speaking, if this person was another man in the likeness of Jesus, he would be shouting out

that he was innocent, and that they were crucifying the wrong man!

8. The usual way in which the Jews would execute the death penalty would be by stoning. This was impossible since they were under Roman law, which would not allow this. Therefore the Old Testament, which stated that Messiah (whom Jesus claimed to be) would be crucified (see Psalms 22 and Zech. 12:10) revealed that the Jewish nation would be under the dominion of Rome many, many centuries before it took place.

9. When the believing thief on the cross next to this man said, “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom”, this man answered: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42-43).

Christ’s personal predictions of his death and resurrection also present evidence that it was Jesus himself, and not some other man, who went to the cross as Jesus (Matt. 17:1-9; 20:17-28; read Matt. chapter 26). It is totally illogical to believe that another man was crucified in the place of Jesus!

▪ Evidence for Jesus’ Death

Once again, contrary to Muslim belief, there is overwhelming evidence for Jesus’ death on the cross. Consider the following:

1. The Old Testament predicted that Messiah would die (Isa. 53:5-10; Ps. 22:16; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 12:10).
2. Jesus announced many times during his ministry that he was going to die (John 2:19-21; 10:10-11).
3. The predictions of his resurrection, both in the Old Testament (Psalms 16:10), and in the New Testament (John 2:19-21; Matt. 17:22-23) are based on the fact that he would die. Only a dead body can be resurrected.
4. The nature and extent of Jesus’ injuries would indicate that he must have died. He had no sleep the night before he was crucified. He was beaten several times and scourged (whipped with a flagellum that had bits of bone and glass imbedded, so it would strip the flesh from the victim). He collapsed on the way to his crucifixion carrying his cross. He hung on the cross from about 9 AM. (Mark 15:25) until just before sunset, bleeding from wounded hands and feet plus the thorns that pierced his scalp and deep wounds and missing flesh from the scourging. There would be tremendous blood loss from enduring this for more than six hours. Plus, crucifixion demands that one constantly pull himself up in order to breathe, causing unbelievable pain. All of this would kill nearly anyone even if they were previously in the best of health.
5. While on the cross, Jesus said he was in the act of dying when he declared: “Father, unto your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Luke further states, “When he had said this, he breathed his last.”
6. Jesus did not faint nor swoon, and was not drugged on the cross. In fact, he refused the drug customarily offered to the

victim before crucifixion to help deaden pain (Matt. 27:34).

7. The piercing of Jesus' side with the spear, from which came "blood and water" (John 19:34) is proof that he had died before the piercing. Hypovolemic shock (massive blood loss) would have caused a sustained heart rate that would contribute to heart failure, resulting in the collection of fluid around the heart and lungs. John would have had no idea why he saw blood and a clear water-like fluid coming out of Jesus' side, but this is perfectly consistent with what modern medical science would expect.

8. Roman soldiers were brutally efficient at killing. They didn't have to attend medical school to know what "dead" was, and they had a huge incentive to be sure: if a prisoner somehow escaped, they would be executed themselves. A common practice was to break the legs of the victim so they could no longer lift themselves up to breathe, thus hastening death. When the soldiers came to Jesus, they did not break his legs, as they saw he was already dead (John 19:33).

9. Pilate double checked to be sure Jesus was dead before giving the body to Joseph of Arimathea to be buried (Mark 15:44-45).

10. Jesus was wrapped in about 75 lbs. of cloth and spices and placed in a sealed tomb for 3 days (John 19:39-40; Matt. 27:60). If he was not dead by then, he certainly would have died from lack of food, water, and medical attention.

11. Non-Christian historians and writers from the first and second centuries record the death of Jesus. The Jewish historian at the time of Christ, Josephus, believed he died on the cross. He wrote, "Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross". Likewise, Cornelius Tacitus writes, "A wise man who was called Jesus...Pilate condemned him to be condemned and to die." He also noted that his disciples "Had reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive." The first century historian Thallus records the unusual darkness that fell upon the land during the crucifixion of Christ (see Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44), and spoke of it as an eclipse. The second century Greek writer, Lucian, speaks of Jesus as "The man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced a new cult into the world." Even the Jewish Talmud says "On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (of Nazareth)." There was a Roman writer, Phlegon, who spoke of Christ's death and resurrection in his "Chronicles", saying "Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that he arose after death, and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails." Phlegon even mentioned "The eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquakes which then took place." Finally, the Jewish Christian Justin Martyr notes in his "Dialogue with Trypho" that Trypho said "Jesus was a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified."

Compared with other events from the ancient world, the

crucifixion and death of Jesus gets an extraordinary amount of press, making it one of the more widely attested events of the day. The Jews wanted to put Jesus to death for his claims to deity. In their minds this was blasphemy, and warranted the death penalty. When Pilate said, "I find no basis for a charge against him", the Jews insisted: "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God" (John 19:7). The Jews could not have used the charge of blasphemy unless he claimed to be Yahweh. Had he claimed to be another god, or even some lesser form of Yahweh, they could have called him an idolater or merely insane, but could not have leveled a charge of blasphemy – much less made it stick. Yet when the Gospels were published the Jews did not contradict the Biblical record, which clearly states that they demanded Christ's crucifixion on the ground of blasphemy. Muslims deny that he made this claim, yet unbelievers living at the time of Christ give irrefutable proof that Jesus did so. Their law against false witness made it impossible for the Jews to bring a charge of blasphemy against Jesus unless they had heard him claim to be the Son of God (again, meaning God in the flesh). That is why the high priest asked: "Are you the Son of God?" at the trial of Jesus.

▪ Evidence for the Resurrection

If it is an established fact that Jesus died, then it is also a fact that he rose from the dead. There is equally strong evidence for both events. And if he did indeed rise again on the third day, this would miraculously confirm his claim to be God. Clearly, if true, the resurrection has great significance. If Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, then he was beyond dispute a unique figure. It is not a question of his spiritual survival, nor of his physical resuscitation, but of his conquest of death and his resurrection to a new plane of existence altogether. We do not know of anyone else who has had this experience. Modern man is therefore as scornful as the Athenian philosophers who heard Paul preach on the Aeropagus: "When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered" (Acts 17:32). Yet Jesus himself never predicted his death without adding that he would rise, and described his coming resurrection as a "sign". Paul, at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, wrote that Jesus was "Declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead." The earliest sermons of the apostles recorded in the book of Acts repeatedly assert that by the resurrection God had reversed man's sentence and vindicated His Son. Of this resurrection Luke, who is known to be a painstaking and accurate historian, says there are "many proofs." Certainly, many impartial students have judged the evidence to be very good. For instance, Sir Edward Clarke, K.C. wrote to the Rev. E. L. Macassey:

"As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences for the events of the first Easter Day. To me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the high court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. Inference follows on evidence,

and a truthful witness is always artless and disdains effect. The Gospel evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate."

What is this evidence? How can we be sure the story told to us by the Gospel writers is authentic? First, let's look at the apostles themselves. It is obvious they were not predisposed to believe the events to which they eventually gave testimony. They did not believe the report of the women that Christ had risen. Luke writes "Their words seemed to them like nonsense." (Luke 24:11). Even when some of the disciples saw Christ for themselves, they were "slow of heart to believe" (Luke 24:25). When Jesus appeared to ten apostles and showed them his crucifixion scars, "They still did not believe it because of joy and amazement" (Luke 24:41). And when they were convinced by Jesus' eating of food, their absent colleague, Thomas, protested that he would not believe unless he could put his finger in the scars of Jesus' hands (John 20:25). Second, he appeared to unbelievers as well. He appeared to his unbelieving half-brother James (John 7:5; 1 Cor. 15:7). He even appeared to one of the greatest unbelievers of the day and persecutor of the church – Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9; I Cor. ch. 15). If Jesus had only appeared to believers or those with a propensity to believe, the case could be made that the witnesses were prejudiced. But just the opposite is the case. Third, the witnesses had nothing to gain for their witness to the resurrection. They were persecuted and threatened with death for their testimony. Most of the apostles were martyred for their belief. People don't typically die gruesome deaths for a lie, especially when they are fully aware of the truth. Martyrs and hypocrites are not made of the same stuff. Fourth, if the apostles were going to fabricate a story, it is doubtful it would have included women as the first to discover the empty tomb. Women weren't exactly high on the social ladder, and by Jewish law could not even testify in court. So it would make no sense to create a fake resurrection story where the first people to find the empty tomb would not be considered reliable legal witnesses by Jewish custom. And what forger would state that the apostles did not believe Christ's predictions that he would rise again? It seems more likely that the Gospel narrative of Easter morning tells the story exactly as it happened, including the "embarrassing" fact that women were the first witnesses. And finally, there is the inadvertent testimony of the chief priests and the elders. When the guards who were posted at the tomb came and told them everything that had happened, the priests and the elders never tried to deny the empty tomb or even the resurrection. They merely told them to say that Jesus' disciples came during the night and stole the body. This in and of itself is implausible, as it would have required the guards to be asleep or otherwise derelict of their duty, which would have been punished by death. Why then, would they willingly implicate themselves of such an offense, unless they knew their superiors would not hold them accountable, since they too,

knew Jesus had actually risen? (Matt. 28:11-15)

Summary

The unbroken testimony from the Old Testament to the apostles and early church Fathers, including believers and unbelievers, Jews and Gentiles, is overwhelming evidence (particularly for an ancient event) that Jesus died and rose again, thus substantiating his claim to be the Son of God, Deity in human flesh. This is what the apostles taught, and what the church has believed from its inception. Pliny the younger (Pliny Secundus), Governor of Pontus and Bithynia, provides some relevant information from the view of Christ's disciples, some of whom had direct contact with the historical Jesus.

In a letter to the Roman Emperor Trajan in AD 96, he explains his first encounter with the Christian sect and their view of the risen saviour:

"They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as God..."

Note that these Christians, barely two generations removed from the historical Christ, worshiped him as God in songs of praise. Nonetheless, Muslims assert that Jesus was not worthy of worship and praise, but only of admiration as a messenger of Allah. And liberal critics who postulate that the deity of Jesus is a doctrine that was formulated centuries after the time of Christ are also here contradicted by the historical record.

ERRORS IN THE BIBLE

Before beginning an examination of the Qur'an, it would seem appropriate in the interest of fairness and full-disclosure to briefly discuss errors in the Christian Bible. Christians have always held that the Bible was the inerrant Word of God. Jesus himself called scripture "the Word of God" which "cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Jesus constantly referred to scripture, saying over and over again, "It is written." This phrase occurs more than ninety times in the New Testament, a strong indication of divine authority. If God cannot err and the Bible is the Word of God, then it logically follows that the Bible cannot err. This is not to say there are not difficulties in the Bible; for certain, any text that is thousands of years old is bound to have portions that are obscure to later readers. Minor copyist errors are not ruled out either. In fact, given the quantity of ancient manuscripts made over millennia, it's hard to fathom how human agents, involved in the painstaking task of hand-copying huge amounts of text, did not in fact make MORE slips of the pen. Even with the scribes double checking one another, errors would still be possible; ask anyone in the printing or typesetting fields today. There is no more divine guarantee against individual copyist error than there is against someone purposefully changing the scripture for their own purposes, as many cults often do. Peter mentioned those who distorted scripture do so "to their own destruction" (2 Pet.

3:16). And in Rev. 22:18-19 we are warned not to add or remove anything from the book of Revelation which by itself states the deity, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since a warning of the impossible would be unnecessary, one can only conclude that it is possible, however unwise or unethical, to alter the Bible.

But if the Bible is the Word of the Almighty, one would think He would have a vested interest in its preservation. Indeed, Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35). And as we have previously explored, the Bible has indeed been handed down through the millennia very much intact. Most of the difficulties people have with reading and understanding the Bible can be eliminated following simple "rules of thumb" for study:

1. Start with a modern translation. The King James was great in its day, but several hundred year old British English (which can be quite different from American English) is not always readily understandable, and can in fact add to the alleged contradictions. For example, in 2 Thess. 2:7 the King James version (KJV) says, "Only he who now letteth will let." This is probably speaking of the Holy Spirit who hinders the forces of sin. The English word "let" once meant "to restrain", but today has the totally opposite meaning. The New International Version (NIV) reads, "The one who now holds it back will continue to do so." And in Heb. 9:26 the KJV says, "But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." The end of the world has not come, yet Christ has already appeared. Therefore this is a false statement. The NIV reads "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." It was at the end of the Old Testament ages that Christ appeared, not at the end of the world. The KJV mistranslates the Greek word "aion" as "world". The word actually means "age". The KJV does this about 40 times. Each time is a mistake and unintentionally misleads the reader. Modern translations use many more and better ancient manuscripts than were available to the KJV translators. Three of the best currently available are the New International Version (NIV), the New Living Translation (NLT), and the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

2. Always take context into consideration. This is a common mistake not only of critical scholars, but sadly of many who interpret and teach the Bible. Most alleged "errors" can be cleared up merely by reading the preceding verse or two. As the adage goes, "A text out of context is a pretext."

3. Don't confuse general with universal statements. Critics often jump to the conclusion that unqualified statements admit no exceptions. They seize upon verses that offer general truths and then point with glee to the obvious exceptions. Such statements are only intended to be generalizations. The book of Proverbs has many of these, that by their very nature, offer general guidance, not universal assurance. Prov. 16:7 affirms that "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at

peace with him." This obviously was not intended to be a universal truth. Paul was pleasing to the Lord, and his enemies stoned him (Acts 14:19). Jesus was pleasing to the Lord and his enemies crucified him. Nonetheless, it is a general truth that one who acts in a way pleasing to God can minimize his enemies antagonism.

4. Recognize the limitations of translations. Even modern, highly accurate and readable translations may be unable to convey all the subtleties, nuances, and inferences that would be immediately apparent to a reader in the original language. Though not generally an issue, many passages benefit greatly from extra notation such as is found in Study Bibles or commentaries.

5. Understand the setting. The more knowledge you possess of the customs of the society, time period and geographical location you are reading about, the more the Biblical narrative will make sense to you. Once again, a Study Bible or commentary can give tremendous insight. For instance, in John 4:22 we read of Jesus telling a Samaritan woman,

"You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is of the Jews."

This statement is rather vague to western readers in the 21st century. What the reader would not know from this text is that the Samaritan "Bible" contained only the Pentateuch (Law of Moses). They worshiped Yahweh and expected a Messiah, but their rejection of all the inspired writings after the Pentateuch meant they knew little about him. And in Amos 4:2, the Lord says:

"The time will surely come when you will be taken away with hooks, the last of you with fishhooks."

Once again the modern reader might be puzzled why God would threaten someone with a fishhook. But according to Assyrian reliefs (pictures engraved in stone), prisoners of war were led away with a rope fastened to a hook that pierced the nose or lower lip. So to the ancients, this was no obscure threat: The Hebrew who heard it at that time understood that God was warning of Assyrian captivity.

6. Inspiration does not necessarily imply nor require dictation. Except for the ten commandments, which were "inscribed by the finger of God" (Exod. 31:18) and passages which specifically state "Thus sayeth the Lord", the Bible was not verbally dictated. The writers were not secretaries of the Holy Spirit. They were human composers employing their own literary styles and idiosyncrasies. These human authors sometimes used human sources for their material (Joshua 10:13; Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12). Forgetting the humanity of scripture can lead to falsely challenging its integrity by expecting a level of expression higher than that which is customary to a human document.

7. Be cautious when interpreting. No interpretation of scripture is valid that is not based on careful exegesis, that is, on

wholehearted commitment to determining what the ancient author meant by the words he used. This is accomplished by painstaking study of the key words, as defined in the dictionaries (Hebrew and Greek) and as used in parallel passages. Research also the specific meaning of these words in idiomatic phrases as observed in other parts of the Bible.

8. Give the Bible fair credit as a valid historical document. Whenever historical accounts of the Bible are called into question on the basis of alleged disagreement with the findings of archaeology or the testimony of ancient non-Hebrew documents, always remember that the Bible itself is an archaeological document of the highest caliber. It is simply crass bias for critics to hold that whenever a pagan record disagrees with the Biblical account, it must be the Hebrew author that was in error. Pagan kings practiced self-laudatory propaganda, just as their modern counterparts do; and it is incredibly naive to suppose that simply because a statement was written in Assyrian cuneiform or Egyptian hieroglyphics it was more trustworthy and factual than a document composed in Hebrew. No other document from the B.C. period affords so many clear proofs of accuracy and integrity as does the Old Testament; so it is a violation of the rules of evidence to assume that the Bible statement is wrong every time it disagrees with a secular inscription or manuscript of some sort.

Following these guidelines eliminates the alleged contradictions in the Bible as far as doctrinal errors. This leaves us with some transcriptional errors that primarily revolve around different spellings of names and some numerical inaccuracies.

Before we analyze this further, it is important to understand a little about the Hebrew language. Biblical Hebrew is characterized by a small, basic vocabulary and a lack of descriptive words and abstract nouns. The language is read from right to left. Very ancient Hebrew had no vowels, and consisted only of sounded consonants. In about the 5th century B.C., three letters were occasionally inserted to suggest the vowels a, e or i, and o or u. Centuries later, another system was employed to indicate vowels. In this system the vowels themselves were not normally written, but were indicated by a system of dots and lines, called "vowel points", which were added to an existing letter. And the characters themselves underwent some change over the centuries.

So in Genesis 36:26 we learn that "Hemdan" is a descendant of "Dishon". Now remember that ancient Hebrew had NO vowels, and is read from right to left. So in Hebrew script, his name would appear like this:

ndmh (NDMH)

However, some of the ancient manuscripts of 1 Chron. 1:41 spell his name as "Hamran" or Amram:

nrmh (NRMH)

The similarity between the letters "R" (resh) and "D" (deleth) in the Hebrew alphabet, and hence the discrepancy in the names, is obvious. In 2 Sam. 8:9 we see the name "Hadagezer", but in 1 Chron. 18:9 it is Hadagezar".

The visual similarity of these names is obvious. There are several instances of these kinds of errors, but because of context you are never unsure of who is being spoken about. As to the numerical errors, one must understand that the ancient Hebrew script did not have a separate set of characters for numerals as we do today. Instead they used letters to represent numbers. Large numbers would usually be written out, but there was no standardization of their order. For instance, the number 503 would be written just like the English order, "five hundred and three". Sometimes, however, the order would be reversed, such as "Seventy-seven years and seven-hundred years (777)". The same principle is at work copying numbers as it is in copying names. In a language without vowels and where several letters look alike, it is not hard to understand a situation where a scribe miscopies a few letters. The problem for the copyist is exacerbated by fading ink, cracking leather or parchment scrolls, and possibly a poor style of penmanship on the part of the previous scribe. Later generations were also not as familiar with the ancient alphabets.

Fortunately, the Hebrews considered the guardianship and preservation of their scripture a sacred duty, and took great pains to insure a high level of accuracy. Because of this, the errors are truly few and far between, and do not appear in all the manuscripts, making verification of the correct word or spelling possible. In fact, modern translations rarely suffer from these errors, because they had the luxury of access to far more original manuscripts than the translators of the King James Version had. There were 54 KJV translators who used fewer than ten original manuscripts, none of which were older than the 9th century and several of those were incomplete. A modern translation like the NIV on the other hand, was compiled by over 100 scholars who had access to over 5,000 manuscripts in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. This quantity of material makes it easy to spot errors and correct them in the translation: i.e., if two manuscripts out of 1,000 differ slightly in their content, it becomes fairly obvious which ones are likely in error. Most of the modern criticism of the Bible in regard to errors and contradictions seems to stem from the King James translation. This is not said to attack the KJV, but merely a statement of the obvious: because the KJV with its errors was used so widely and unilaterally for so long, of course it was the version the critics had to work with. In order to objectively criticize and study the Bible, one needs to look at more than one translation. It is beyond the scope of this writing to fully explore all alleged mistakes and discrepancies in the Bible. Here is what can be said of Biblical errors in summary:

- First, these are errors in copies, not the originals.
- Second, they are minor errors, often in the spelling of a name or numbers, and do not affect the story or any

teaching.

- Third, these copyist errors are relatively few in number.
- Fourth, usually by context or another scripture, we know which is in error.
- Fifth, not all manuscripts contain the error.
- Finally, though there is a copyist error, the entire message still comes through.

To this last point, let's consider an example. If you received a letter with the following statement, would you assume you could collect some money?

"YO HAVE WON \$10 MILLION"

Even though there is a mistake in the first word, the entire message comes through – you are ten-million dollars richer! And if you received another letter the next day that read like this, you would be even more sure:

"Y U HAVE WON \$10 MILLION"

This is why scribal mistakes in Biblical manuscripts do not affect the message of the Bible – and why studies of the ancient manuscripts are so important. A Christian can read a modern translation with confidence that it conveys the complete truth of the original Word of God.

AN EVALUATION OF THE QUR'AN

"Qur'an" is derived from an Arabic word meaning "to read or recite". Throughout the Qur'an we are constantly reminded that it is not a human or even an Angelic product, but is wholly from God Himself who is revealing it to the Prophet Muhammad:

"Praise be to God, who hath sent to His servants the Book, and hath allowed therein no crookedness." (Surah 18:1)

"The revelation of this Book is from God, the Exalted in Power, Full of Wisdom. Verily it is We Who have revealed the Book to thee in truth." (Surah 39:1-2)

"God Most Gracious! It is He who has taught the Qur'an." (Surah 55:1-2)

We are also told that the Qur'an is not simply a revelation from God but a book that finds its origin in a heavenly "Mother of the Book":

"Nay, this is a glorious Qur'an, (inscribed) in a tablet preserved!" (Surah 85:21-22)

"We have made it a Qur'an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand (and learn wisdom). And verily, it is in the Mother of the Book, in our presence, high (in dignity) full of Wisdom" (Surah 43:3-4; cf. 13:39)

Therefore, from the very beginning of Islam the Qur'an was considered by all Muslims as the Word of God par-excellence. So for Muslims the Qur'an is not simply regarded as their holy book, one of many other divine revelations, but

the Qur'an is the eternal Word of God that descended to Muhammad in order to be the final light and guidance for mankind.

So unlike the Christian Bible, the Qur'an was verbally dictated by God, and it was dictated to only one Prophet, Muhammad. Muslims also insist that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved down to the present day. Remember too, the Qur'an is a book from the middle ages, not an ancient book as is the Bible, so it is far younger. One God, one prophet, one book, only approximately 1,360 years old, perfect preservation. Compared with the 40 or so authors of the Bible (most of whom were spread out over time and could not collaborate), 66 books with their own literary styles, two languages, and extreme age, you would think the Qur'an to be decidedly more accurate and consistent than the Bible. In fact, based on its claims, one would expect Qur'anic revelation to possess a level of doctrinal unity, internal consistency, logic, accuracy, and literary sophistication unsurpassed in the history of the written word. Yet an evaluation of the Qur'an reveals disturbing contradictions and inconsistencies that, based on Muslim and Qur'anic claims of divine dictation and perfect preservation, are difficult to explain away. We have already established that the Qur'an claims to be in alignment with the Bible, yet is not. This itself is a tremendous contradiction and should give the reader pause for consideration: if the Qur'an is the unbroken Word of God and claims agreement with the Bible, how can it be that the doctrines and stories of the two books so diametrically oppose one another?

And finally, why would God say to Muhammad (and therefore to the reader of the Qur'an and those who **follow** Muhammad) that if you were in doubt about Qur'anic revelation, just ask someone who had been reading the Bible?

"If thou were in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee. The truth had indeed come to thee from thy Lord." (Surah 10:94)

Qur'anic Conflicts with the Bible

We have already explored the conflicts between the Qur'an and Bible on the subject of Jesus Christ. Let us briefly look at some others:

Pharaoh's wife adopted Moses (Surah 28:9)

Exodus 2:10 states that Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses, but the Qur'an says it was his wife. Had Pharaoh's wife adopted Moses, he would have been the son of Pharaoh himself and an heir to Egypt's throne.

The Trinity includes Mary (Surah 5:116)

Surah 5:116 states that Christians worship three gods: the Father, the Mother (Mary), and the Son (Jesus). A heretical sect of Christianity, the Choloridians, taught such a doctrine. Muhammad could have encountered this teaching in Arabia where it may have been held over by some until his time. For whatever reason, the Qur'an badly misrepresents Christian teaching. A similar misrepresentation occurs in Surah 5:73-75:

"They do blaspheme who say: "Allah is one of three." Obviously the accusation is against Christians and is a false assumption that the Trinity makes God one of three. Christianity has always held that God is one substance, three persons.

Pharaoh and the Tower of Babel (Surah 28:38)

The Qur'an says that a man name "Haman", a servant of Pharaoh, built a high tower to ascend to God. But the Babel tower occurs in Genesis 11, long before there were Pharaohs, and the name Haman is an even later linguistic development. The only "Haman" in the scripture is in the story of Esther in Babylon, long after the height of Egypt's glory.

Samaritans built the Israelite calf (Surah 20:85-97)

The Qur'an says that the calf worshiped by the Israelites at Mt. Horeb was molded by a Samaritan. The term "Samaritan" was not coined until 722 B.C., several hundred years after the exodus, when the idol was crafted.

The sacrifice of Ishmael (Surah 37:100-111)

Hebrew manuscripts for Genesis 22 do identify the son of Abraham who was laid upon the altar for sacrifice. The context clearly shows that it was Isaac, while Surah 37 in the Qur'an identifies Ishmael. This can only be supported by Muslim tradition and marks one of the two holidays in Islam.

Jesus was not crucified (Surah 4:157)

The Jews boast in (Surah 4:157) "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of Allah, - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them."

Blood is unimportant to Allah (Surah 22:34-37)

"And the beasts of sacrifice – We have appointed them for you as among Allah's waymarks; therein is good for you...The flesh of them shall not reach Allah, neither their blood. But godliness from you shall reach Him." Christianity, on the other hand, teaches the essential nature of blood, pointing toward the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Lev. 17:11 notes, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar: it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." The New Testament continues the theme in the work of Jesus Christ (See Heb. 9:22-28).

Qur'anic Internal Inconsistencies

In addition to the obvious misunderstandings of history and theology that conflict with the Bible, one can also find a number of facts and statements that do not match well with other statements found within the Qur'an.

Allah's day

How long is a "day" to Allah? Surah 22:47 states that Allah's day is equal to a thousand solar years, but in Surah 70:4 it is said to be fifty-thousand solar years long.

Soul reaper

Different passages offer conflicting accounts regarding who takes away human souls at death: The Qur'an says it is the

Angel of Death (32:11), Angels generically (47:27), or Allah himself (39:42).

Days of creation

How long did it take Allah to create the earth? Surahs 7:54, 10:3, and 25:59 state that creation required six days, but in 41:9-12 the creation narrative adds up to eight days.

Is Heaven or Earth older?

Which was created first? Surah 2:29 states clearly that Allah created the earth first and then heaven, but 79:27-30 reverses that order.

Noah's son drowned

According to Surah 21:76, Noah and all his family survived the flood, but in Surah 11: 42-43, one of Noah's sons is reported drowned.

Humankind's creation

From what substance were people made? The answers given are a blood clot (96:1-2), water (21:30), wet clay (15:26), dust (3:59), nothing (19:67), earth (11:61), or sperm drop (16:4).

Shirk as the unforgivable sin?

Does Allah ever forgive "shirk" (idolatry)? The Qur'an is unclear. The sin is listed as unforgivable in Surahs 4:48 and 116, but forgivable in 4:153 and 25:68-71. Abraham committed this sin of polytheism in worshiping moon, sun, and stars (Surah 6:76-78), yet Muslims believe that all prophets are without any sin.

Punishment for adultery

The punishment for adultery in Surah 24:2 is one hundred lashes for both the man and the woman. In Surah 4:15-16 the punishment is life imprisonment for the woman but no punishment for the man who repents and makes amends.

Christians in Heaven or Hell?

The eternal destination of Christians is in doubt. Surahs 2:62 and 5:69 teach that Christians shall enter paradise, but Surahs 5:72-73 and 3:85 say they will go to hell.

Pharaoh drowned or saved?

The Qur'an is unclear as to what happened to the Pharaoh who pursued Moses during the exodus. Surah 10:90-92 states that he survived the battle, but 17:103, and 43:55 indicate clearly that he drowned.

Surahs 39:23 and 4:82 make these discrepancies even more troubling:

"Allah has revealed (from time to time) the most beautiful message in the form of a book, consistent with itself, yet repeating (its teaching)" (Surah 39:23)

"Do they not consider the Qur'an (with care)? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy" (Surah 4:82)

Abrogation

It is at this point that we should mention the Qur'anic doctrine of "Abrogation" (or "nasikh"), which is essentially

where later pronouncements of the prophet declare null and void his earlier pronouncements. The Qur'an states:

"None of our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: don't you know that Allah has power over all things?" (Surah 2:106)

"Allah blots out or confirms what He pleases: With Him is the Mother of the Book." (Surah 13:39)

"When we substitute one revelation for another – and Allah knows best what He reveals (in stages), - they say, "You are but a forger": but most of them do not understand." (Surah 16:101)

One could conceivably argue that this doctrine explains **some** of the contradictions and conflicts we just examined; however, how does one "abrogate" **history**? Did Pharaoh live or drown? Which of the seven things was mankind made from? How long did creation take? God was there; you would think He would remember. Technically, abrogation itself is a contradiction: the Qur'an states: "...no change can there be in the words of Allah" (Surah 10:64), and "...there is none that can alter the Words (and decrees) of Allah" (Surah 6:34). How exactly can divine revelation be improved? One would think it would be perfect and true from the start. Even people of Muhammad's time must have recognized the altering of the words of God to be in error, as Surah 16:101 mentions that when he did, they called him a "forger". The Bible was written over millennia, and has no such concept as abrogation. To the Hebrew, God had spoken, and He did not stutter. While He may progressively reveal His nature and plan for mankind to different people and cultures through different periods of time, His decrees and character remain intact. But in the short 20+ years that the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad, suddenly the need for redaction arises.

CONCLUSION

The Greek philosopher Socrates said: "The life unexamined is not worth living." Had he been a religious man, he surely would approve the statement, "The faith unexamined is not worth believing." It is only logical and prudent to examine what one believes. A wise individual would want to be sure he was correct in his beliefs. You could sincerely **believe** that drinking a particular poison would actually be beneficial to your health, but neither your sincerity nor your belief would protect you from the deadly effects. It would be better had you examined the label, studied the evidence, and made sure you were correct before swallowing. The Bible implores us to "Test everything. Hold on to the good." (1 Thess. 5:21). God says in Isaiah 1:18 "Come, let us reason together." The Qur'an even says "...truth stands out clear from error." God is not intimidated by human reason. An infinite being could scarcely be offended by logic. And logically speaking, the Qur'an and the Bible cannot both be the Word of God, because God does not teach different and contradictory things at different points in history. Unless God lies, changes

His mind or makes mistakes – in which case He is less than God – both books cannot be divine. If God is less than God, then discussions of salvation, redemption, heaven and hell are moot because no God has spoken concretely.

The Bible affirms that God has spoken. The entire Biblical narrative is God's testimony of Himself, offering proof that indeed, "HE IS". Again and again in the book of Exodus we hear Him say "...and you will know that I AM God", as he offers one supernatural proof and sign after another. Throughout the Bible, God is just dying to offer proof and make Himself known to us. In the New Testament, we see Him doing just that in the person of Jesus the Messiah. All during His ministry, Jesus said who he was and offered miracles as proof of His claim. He never stopped challenging people to recognize Him. Even while dying, he used his final breaths to do what he had always done, try and alert those around Him of who He really was, when He cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; cf. Psalms 22:1). Hebrew males were taught the scriptures from an early age, and Jesus made what should have been an easily recognizable reference to Psalms 22. Jesus was saying, in essence, "look around you at the scene being played out – do you not recognize that everything you are witnessing was prophesied?" Indeed, Psalms 22 gives an eerily detailed prophecy of Messiah's death, down to the soldiers gambling for Jesus garment. Psalms 22 begins: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me...". The call, the plea to mankind to recognize God, to accept Jesus as Messiah, still goes out; but is anyone truly listening?

On Religious Pluralism

Today society tends toward religious pluralism – all roads lead to the same place. Yet Jesus said: "I AM the way, the truth and the life -- no man comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6). In John 10:1 Jesus says "I tell you truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber", but in verse 7 he plainly states, "I tell you the truth, I AM the gate for the sheep." Coming from someone who said He was God in the flesh and who offered proofs to back up His claim, these words are not just profound: they are sobering. Most people, and even other religions, are forced to admit that Jesus of Nazareth was at least a good man, if not a prophet. But how could he have been a "good man", much less a prophet of God, if he lied or was mistaken about the chief subject of his teachings: **HIMSELF**? Jesus seems to indicate that God does not grade on a curve. John 3:16 speaks of the love of God when Jesus tells us:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

Think of it: Jesus said God loved the world, and not just those who already loved HIM. By contrast, the Qur'an says in Surahs 2:190, 2:276, 3:57, and 4:36 that Allah does not love sinners, and according to Surahs 2:195 and 3:31 loves only

those who love him. Because the God of the Bible loved the world, he made a way of redemption for humans: believe on the Son of God and you will not perish the verse says. But while John 3:16 is one of the most often quoted and best loved verses in the Christian Bible, it is the very next verses that demand our attention. John 3:17-18 states:

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only son.”

Martin Luther, who started the Protestant Reformation, once wrote:

“We are not free from blame if we have a wrong faith and follow false teachers. The fact that we did not know will be of no help to us, for we were warned beforehand. Besides, God has told us to judge what this or that person teaches and to give an account. If we fail to do this, we are lost. Therefore the soul’s salvation of each person depends on his knowing what is God’s word and what is false teaching.”

The True Test of Religion

Human laws are evidence of both the existence and character of the human lawgiver. The types of laws they give tell us something about the lawgiver. Someone who makes harsh and legalistic rulings is often harsh and legalistic by their nature. The law of God in the Bible is “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-39; Lev. 19:18). Jesus himself said “All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:40). God has said that perfect obedience to this law of love is the necessary condition to receiving eternal life: “Keep My decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them” (Lev. 18:5). It would be impossible for a Holy and just God to command everyone to love him, unless He Himself loved everyone. If God did not love everyone, He would be a hypocrite, since God would be asking us to do something He had no intention of doing Himself. God’s law of love reveals to us that He is not like this.

We also find that God has pronounced His curse on all who break this law. This should not only be expected, but is necessary of a being we consider just and Holy. A perfectly just and Holy God would not be expected to tolerate rebellion against His ordinance.

Since the law of love reveals a loving lawgiver, it follows that a loving God would have, must have provided redemption for every sinner who would take Him up on the offering of life. Love does not forsake a loved one. The nature of love is to give of oneself for others, to meet the needs of a loved one with the best of our ability, regardless of the cost. Jesus said in John 15:13 “Greater love has no man than this, that he lay

down his life for his friends.” The law of love tells us about the lawgiver. The law of love assures us that God desires to meet the redemptive needs of every sinner, because He loved us. God may hate our sin (rebellion against the law of love), but earnestly desires our reconciliation with Him. Had God deliberately made some people with no ability to love Him, then their breaking the law could not be called sin.

The only true revelation of God, the only true revelation by God, must be one that reveals and proclaims that God has provided full redemption (paid the full price) for sinners.

It is exactly this kind of progressive revelation of God that we find in the Bible. A story of rebellion by the human race, and a revelation of a loving God with a plan to redeem humanity from the curse pronounced on that rebellion. The disobedience of man has robbed God of honor and glory that obedience would have brought Him. Any divine plan of redemption must restore to God all the honor lost through man breaking the law of love. If this were not so then, God would be the eternal loser (as a result of man’s sin), which of course, is impossible. In light of this, the only true revelation of God must reveal a plan of salvation that restores to God all the honor and glory lost through man’s sin.

Freedom of choice is absolutely necessary for a perfect and just God to gain honor from His creation. Man is not a robot, but a moral being. Freedom of will is necessary to morality and responsibility. Only choosing to act in accordance to God’s law can be called good in human beings. Only choosing to disobey His will can be called evil. If God were the cause of all human actions, then it makes no sense to reward them for doing good, or punish them for doing evil. It follows that God could not receive honor and glory from those who do His will, nor be robbed of it if they do evil. A perfect just and Holy being could scarcely be offended by someone who did evil if that person was merely doing what they were divinely appointed to do. In fact, if God causes all human actions, there can be no disobedience at all. There is no virtue in untested obedience. To deny human free will robs God of His receiving any higher form of obedience. What He would be receiving would be little more than the mechanical “obedience” of a plant that grows toward the light. In order to love, one must have freedom of choice, as you cannot force someone to love you. God’s plan of redemption is available to any who choose obedience to His law, resulting in eternal spiritual life. It follows then that a Holy and just God, one who cannot tolerate disobedience and sin, must remand those who rebel over to the curse He pronounced on such rebellion: namely, eternal separation from Himself, or spiritual death (Hell).

The hallmark of the one true revelation of God will be that God’s purpose to redeem mankind would be known from the beginning. Along with this would be known something of the person of the redeemer and the way to which He would accomplish redemption. This is precisely the kind of revelation that we see in the Bible. Nowhere else, in no other faith or religion do we see Deity expressed or revealed in this manner.

A Rational Possibility

Quantum physicists inform us that there are ten dimensions. These dimensions are provable mathematically, but few people can really grasp what a dimension outside of the three that we live in (four if you count time) even is. Most of us are perfectly capable of getting lost in our three dimensional space without a map or navigation device. Yet science tells us there are seven more “dimensions” beyond our own.

What if there was a being who lived in one or all of these “extra” dimensions? What if this being actually manufactured our dimensional space and everything in it? What would you call this being? Obviously, from our perspective this entity would have enormous power. Because he lives outside and beyond our space-time continuum, he would be able to see the past as well as the future with no problem, as he would be “over” or “outside” of time. If YOU were that entity, how would you describe yourself to beings like us who live simultaneously in three dimensions, yet are largely unaware of the other seven? Those creatures could hardly comprehend what you are; you would be forced to simplify your revelation by just telling them: “I EXIST”. That’s about all they could really understand. To give any further explanation would be like describing the color blue to someone who has been blind from birth: with no frame of reference, it would just be empty words to the hearers.

Isn’t it interesting that when God reveals Himself to Moses, the name he gives Himself is simply “I AM”. Basically, he told Moses “I EXIST”. This being then goes on to perform nature-defying miracles to prove to the ancient world that indeed, “HE EXISTS”. Approximately 2,000 years ago, we get accounts of a man who claimed to have come from the other-worldly dimension we collectively call “heaven”. He claimed to be the same “I AM” that Moses had met many centuries previous. According to all accounts, he performed nature-defying miracles to back up his claim. He said that he had made us and knew each of us before we were born. He even went so far as to say that the very hairs on our heads were numbered and known by him. The record then indicates that when he returned to his realm, he promised that we could follow him there, if we kept his commandments.

If an alien mothership hovered over the White House tomorrow, what response would the human race have? It would be called the biggest news story ever. “Finally”, they would say, “We know we are not alone in the universe”. Yet all the evidence indicates our planet has already been visited, and that we are anything but “alone”. Our very maker visited our world to get our attention, to tell us we are forgiven, to tell us how to live a better life and how to live on after physical death. Why can’t we accept as a legitimate possibility that this story is true, especially given the amount of evidence? God may not be a space-alien, but why is it inconceivable that there is something out there beyond us, an intelligence greater than our own that actually made us? And why isn’t the story detailing the advent of that intelligence, the visitation of our

planet, considered the big news story that it really IS? Perhaps 2,000+ years later our modern, rational society has the prevailing notion that it is simply a story, one of many, none of which can truly be verified. The evidence, however, is there. All one has to do is honestly look for it. Certainly, there were those in the first century who thought it was a fairy tale. So how did the apostles respond to those who were incredulous?

A Historical Gospel

The words of Peter still echo from the past, giving us his personal take on the incredible events that unfolded in his lifetime. In 2 Pet. 1:16-18 we read:

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”

Here, Peter puts it to his readers in plain, unmistakable language: “We aren’t making this stuff up! IT HAPPENED THAT WAY!” The Christian does not have a belief for the sake of something to believe. Were that the case, he could change the belief as it suited him, because it would only be a mental construct. The true Christian believes in Christ and the stories of the Bible because it is actual history: IT HAPPENED. The literary and archaeological evidence indicates that it happened the way the Bible records it, whether that fact suits our liking or not. Peter proclaims it well: we are dealing with historical reality, not mythos or hearsay. He goes on in verse 19 to say:

“And we have the word of prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place...”

Peter had experienced God in a unique way, witnessing the transfiguration of Christ. There is much emphasis in some Christian circles today on physical or emotional experiences, regardless of how or even if these experiences line up with Biblical teaching. Yet here is Peter, boldly asserting that his experiences, great as they were, all validated the Bible. He then says concerning scripture, “you will do well to pay attention to it.”

Unfortunately, many people who claim the name “Christian” pick and choose from the Bible what things they will do and follow. Yet Jesus asks in Luke 6:46, “Why do you call me “Lord, Lord”, and do not do what I say?” He states in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” From “selective obedience”, it’s easy to move on into outright heresy, and when distortion of the gospel message produces financial gain or personal prestige, there is no end to the twisting the scriptures will endure. Peter calls people who do this “ignorant and unstable”, and says that they “distort the scriptures to their

own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16). Earlier in the same letter, he warns that just as there were false prophets in the days of old, so there will be false teachers among the followers of Christ. He said they would introduce destructive heresies, and that many would follow them (2 Pet. 2:1-22). The apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: "But if even we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (Gal. 1:8). Paul thought this so important, he repeats it again in the following verse. We are not at liberty to "make it up as we go along", inventing doctrines for the sake of something to teach. How sad it is that many "Christian" ministers and teachers neither understand nor respect this principle.

Free To Choose

In the end, each of us must make a choice. We can choose to follow what God has decreed, and to believe in what he has done. Alternatively, we can choose to worship at the altar of philosophy or secular humanism. We can choose to just live a "good life", and hope for the best. We can even choose to ignore God altogether. But if there is a God (and if you're reading this, you probably think that there is), would it not make sense that He would have communicated with us, given us HIS plan, HIS instructions for how to deal with Him? If all roads truly did lead to God, wouldn't that just create confusion? Which path would you follow? Wouldn't God like you to follow one more than another? God would be accused of making it too confusing, of giving us too MANY choices and no indication of which one HE REALLY preferred.

History tells us that God had indeed spoken, and given humanity his plan. He asks only to believe in Him, believe in His forgiveness. He wants us to accept the fact that on our own, we can't be holy: our nature tends toward selfishness and sinfulness. He wants us to accept the fact that HE paid the very price set by Himself for man's sinfulness: death.

Think of it: God pronounces a penalty for sin. Then, because of love for His creation, He pays that penalty HIMSELF. No one can then accuse Him of being harsh or unjust: God's solution meted out justice that we deserved, but also provided mercy for those who would accept it. It cannot be said that God does not understand human suffering either. The ransom for our forgiveness involved Jesus suffering the most violent, gruesome and humiliating death ever devised on this planet: and this, at the hands of his own creation. Our redemption was not cheap.

Despite the costs, God offers forgiveness for free – just believe and accept it. Then he wants you to live your life: just live it the way Jesus commanded. In Matt. 28:19-20, Jesus says "...go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Jesus' command was that we "...love one another" (John 13:34). In fact, when asked by one of the teachers of the law, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The

second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these." (Mark 12:28-34). To accept God's forgiveness is to accept Jesus. To accept Him requires obedience to what He commanded. To obey His commands means we have to love one another. If we love God and love one another, everything else will fall into place.

For the most part, our creator leaves us alone to do what we want. It's our show, and we are free to make our world and our lives what we want. It's too bad more people don't accept God's law of love, because choosing to do things our own way does not seem to be making the world a better place.

For better or worse, however, we are free to choose our path: our choices are before us. In one respect, all religious roads **do** lead to God: no matter which one you choose, one day you will stand and give account to your maker. May the path you choose please Him.

"...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Yahweh)" (Joshua 24:15)

That if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord (Kurios)" [Kurios is the word used for God in the Septuagint] and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be* the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the son of God, God abides in him and he in God. I John 4:9-15

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