

taste

not all the answers

These sheets cover some of the possible big questions that may come up. This course is not an apologetics course, its just a taste. These helps are at best sketchy, but are just meant to give you somewhere to start. If you don't know the answer to a question don't bluff, but rather say that you don't know, but will see if you can find out.

1. *Wasn't Jesus just a good man?*

When faced with this question by someone who commented that Jesus was only a great moral teacher CS Lewis famously wrote: 'Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or He was Himself deluded and self-deceived, or He was Divine. There is no getting out of this trilemma. It is inexorable.' Shorthand: Bad, Mad or God. This is a good place to start.

2. *What about other religions?*

It's worth stating that if Jesus is who he claims, then why go anywhere else (John 6.68). Next, whilst it is true that other religions may carry truths, they don't carry *the* Truth, that is the person of Jesus. (John 14:6) It is only Christianity that has him at its centre. That doesn't mean that we should not treat other faiths with respect as we would hope they would ours and find common ground (Acts 17:22-23), but even concepts of innate human dignity and rights of the individual come from Judaeo/Christian tradition. (Genesis. 1:26)

It's also worth saying that actually non-Christian religions simply do not have the kinds of objective evidence that supports Christian truth-claims.

3. *Why should we believe the Bible?*

'The Bible is an historical document of demonstrated accuracy and reliability. In every area in which it can be checked-out – historically, culturally, geographically ... and so on – it has been verified as factual by extra-biblical sources. It is full of information on the history of the Jews and other ancient civilizations, as well as early Christianity. It presents unique and invaluable information on the customs, languages, cultures, ethics, and religion of what is the foundation of all Western civilization.¹

¹ Story, Dan. *Defending Your Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1997.

4. *Is there a 'hell'?*

There are a number of differing views on this, however we stand with a good number of other evangelical Christians in a form of the 'annihilist' position.

We believe that sadly, there is judgement and separation for those who ignore God and the offer of his son in this life. *All* will face judgement (Acts 17:30–31, Romans 3:22) but those who know Jesus will be saved by him (1 John 4:17–18). In real terms that means judgment given (2 Corinthians 5:10, 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10; Revelation 20:11–15), realisation of their dilemma and ultimately destruction. The pain of that separation is real as individuals face the reality of all that they have missed in this life and that they will miss in eternity. They have known without realising the Love and life of God (that God generally shows to all his creation) they face a future fading into nothing outside of that.

We don't believe that the Bible teaches that they will be in a place of eternal torment. As God is the sustainer of life, without him life will stop (Revelation 20:14). Hell would not exist in its traditional form without God sustaining that with his life (Genesis 2:7; 1 Timothy 6:13). We see this as at odds with concepts of the death of death (1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 20:14–15) itself and God as we see revealed throughout scripture.

We appreciate that some may disagree with our particular position on the manner of judgment, but the result is the same.

5. *If God is so good, what about suffering?*

This question, which essentially is a question about the nature of evil is often given as the 'knock-down' argument by atheists to prove the non existence of God. Everyone wonders why bad things happen to good people; some wonder why bad things happen at all.

There isn't a neat answer but here are some helps. Evil is a non-thing. It's not created, its the absence of good. It wasn't God's idea, it appeared as we engaged in free will deciding that we know better than God (Genesis 3:1–7), something we still regularly do ourselves (James 1:13–15). God set about a plan from that moment to save us from its consequences (Psalm 33:10–11, 1 Peter 1:19), through Noah etc., Israel and finally once and for all through his son Jesus. It's not only that we have this flaw in us, creation itself is broken too. If it is asked why didn't he do something about it, he did, in his son and he will finally do away with evil, death and suffering when he returns and creates a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21). The delay may well be because he is waiting for as many as possible to respond to his son and his salvation (2 Peter 3:9). We do see God still working against evil through us and through his healing Spirit, but these are just foretastes of God finally setting all things right (Acts 3:21).

Helpful links:

<http://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/the-problem-of-evil-and-suffering-gracepoint-church>

<http://spu.edu/depts/uc/response/summer2k5/features/evil.asp>

6. *Isn't being a Christian all about being good?*

Lets hope not otherwise we are all lost! The idea that being a Christian is all about being good enough to go to heaven is ingrained, but simply not true and not christian. We will never be good enough to put aside our wrong. There is no 'plane of consciousness' where we believe that is possible. We can't solve our own problem. We have to admit we need someone beyond our ourselves. That's where Jesus comes in. The idea of Grace (as featured in the famous Hymn Amazing Grace) is that it is the free gift of God to save us (2 Timothy 1:9, Ephesians 2:8), we need to acknowledge our wrongdoing and accept his gift. Of course from that place we begin to want to live a better life, with God's Spirit transforming us. The fact that you can't work to save yourself it worries a lot of people, but that is the very heart of the gospel.

7. *What is the evidence that Jesus actually died and came back?*

This is a course in itself, but briefly, the gospel accounts themselves, the disciples weren't expecting it to happen, women were the first witnesses (a woman's testimony was not considered worthy to be used in the court of the day so why write that it was women who first saw Jesus?). Romans were good at killing people and guarding tombs, they rarely made mistakes, if the Romans could produce the body they would have done. Of course the biggest evidence is the millions today who believe in the risen Jesus when the church began with 120 people who were lost without a leader.

German Theologian Pannenberg says: 'The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live.'

Helpful link: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/jesus-resurrection>

8. *Did Jesus actually exist?*

A common question but one that needs to be answered. The answer revolves around are the Biblical and other non biblical reliable sources. Actually, very few scholars today doubt that he existed. There is more evidence for the life of Jesus than there is for Alexander the Great. Diagram below

Helpful link: <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-evidence-for-jesus>

9. *Isn't the God of the Old Testament all about Judgement and the new about love*

The OT was ethical enough for Jesus. He accepted the truth and ethical validity of the OT and he didn't find it to not be representative of the God who he knew as Father.

Don't forget the narratives describe what happened, not what necessarily what God was happy with. We assume wrongly that if a story is in Scripture it must be "what God wanted." We also assume that those on whom judgement fell were innocent, many of the countries in the area were violent, morally bankrupt and some practiced child sacrifice. Often some of the most difficult passages seem to suggest a one-off action to remove something truly evil.

Some of this comes from an idea that Jesus didn't say things that were hard and the Old Testament doesn't say things that are loving. Any time actually spent with the text suggest otherwise. ie:

Old Testament: Jeremiah 31:3 "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. Also: Deuteronomy 7:7-9; Isaiah 43:4, 66:13; Hosea 11:1-4, Zephaniah 3:17

New Testament: Matthew 12:36-37 'But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.' Also: Matthew 5:21-22, 30; Luke 12:47; John 2:13-17

10. *Do I need to go to church to be a Christian?*

The Church (not the building but the group of people) was Jesus' idea (Matthew 16:18) and he tasked it to be those who proclaim his kingdom and do good in his world (Matthew 28.18-20. He even described it as his body where we lived. See: 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 2:5

These two quotes add in some way to further answer that question:

'You don't have to be part of the team. You can go and kick a ball around in a field on your own if you want. Just have a plan for when the opposition turn up, thats all!' Milton Jones

The story goes that when Charles Spurgeon was asked this question he responded by removing a red hot coal from a fireplace. The coal grew darker and darker until soon he was able to touch it. He said "That's why!" When removed from the fire, the coal grows cold. When Christians are not around and meet with other Christians, they soon grow cold.

11. *Surely science has disproved God?*

This is a big misunderstanding about the purpose of science and that of religious thought. Statistics change, but over 51% of practicing scientists have a belief in a God of their own understanding.

Brian Cox put it well in an interview when he said ...

'I am not religious, however I think it's a misunderstanding of science and religion to say that they are mutually exclusive. I don't like that actually, it's an unnecessary conflict. There is a conflict if you are a literalist, if my religion says 'the world is 6k years old', we know it isn't, it isn't 6k years old, we know how old the universe is, how old the earth is very precisely. We know about the evolution of life. I think I wrote in the book, if I were religious, if I believed in God, I would say the most spectacular demonstration of the ingenuity of a creator is in setting up the laws of physics and the laws of the universe such that you could have such a wonderful thing as the biosphere on earth so life emerges, a tremendous property of the universe and we don't know where the laws of physics came from, its perfectly reasonable to say that I think someone set those up ... I don't believe that, I don't think its right to say that science rules that out, its called deism actually and some of the great thinkers of the last few hundred years have been lead to that view that these laws are beautiful ... they are beautiful, they allow us to exist and we are beginning to see how that story plays out. If I was religious I would say that is a celebration. I don't think it' a challenge. '

Helpful link: <http://biologos.org>

The New Testament Didn't Drop Out of Heaven

© 2009 BIBLE STUDY MAGAZINE & LOGOS BIBLE SOFTWARE

650

650

Homer's *Iliad*
800 BC

330

330

Euripides' Tragedies
400s AD

200

200

Demosthenes' Works
300 BC

55

Josephus' works
75-95 AD

20

Tacitus, *Annals*
100 AD

Livy, *History of Rome*
59 BC-17 AD

10

Caesar, *Gulf Wars*
100-44 BC

8

Herodotus, *Histories*
480-435 BC

Thucydides, *Histories*
460-400 BC

7

Plato
400 BC

Pliny Secundus,
Natural History
61-113 AD

X10

1

Gospel of Judas
100-199 AD

2

Gospel of Mary^a
100-199 AD

4

Gospel of Thomas^a
100-199 AD

6,000

New Testament
50-100 AD

» Total New Testament Manuscripts Compared to Other Ancient Works

Original statistics of graph derived from Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), pg. 408. Logos.com/GeneralBibleIntro

The stats for Josephus' works, Euripides' Tragedies, the Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary and Gospel of Judas were added. The stats for New Testament manuscripts and Homer's *Iliad* were updated based on Philip Wesley Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions* (Wheaton: Living Books, 1991). Logos.com/EarlyNewTestament

You can learn about New Testament manuscripts by using Geisler and Nix's volume and J. Harold Greenlee's *The Text of the New Testament*. To see images of New Testament manuscripts go to CSNTM.org

A. Josephus' works in its original Greek, including *Antiquities* and *The Jewish War*
B. Includes Coptic translations.