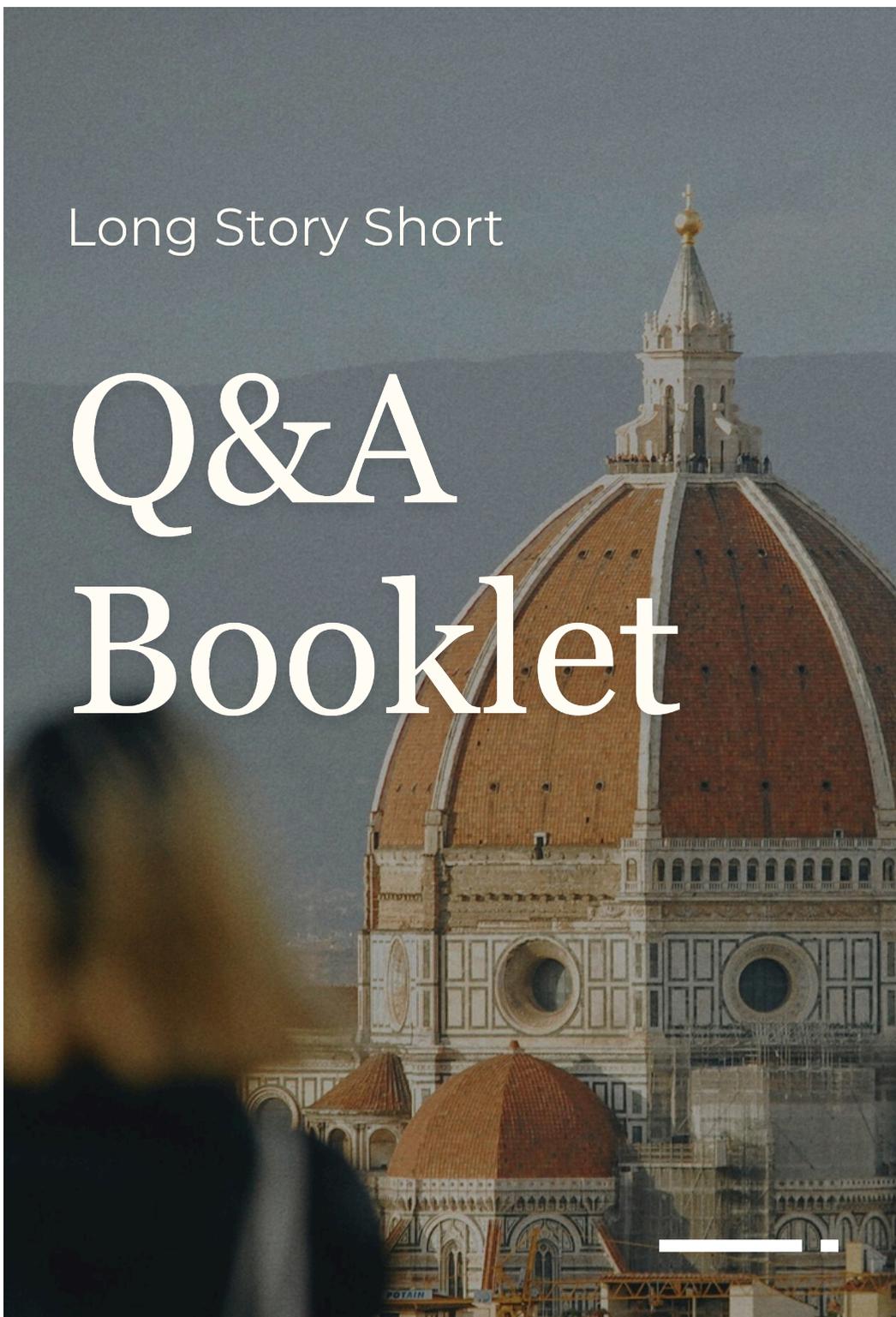


Long Story Short

# Q&A Booklet



# BEGINNINGS

*where did everything come from?*

## Q 1. Has the universe always existed? Or did it have a beginning?

### Short answer:

1. The Bible teaches that the universe has not always existed. The universe began when God created it (Genesis 1:1).

2. The biblical story also indicates that the universe is wearing out and, because things that wear out cannot be eternal, the universe must have had a beginning. We will discuss this point below.

### Discussion:

The universe cannot be eternal but must have had a beginning because it is wearing out. The Bible uses many different images to convey the idea that the universe is wearing out. Two of these are:

1. **The picture of a leaf.** A leaf will eventually wither and fall to the ground. The Bible uses this as a picture to help us understand that stars (like our sun) will wear out. Isaiah 34:4 records, *“All the stars in the sky will be dissolved... all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.”*

2. **The picture of clothing.** A garment will become frail and eventually wear out. That’s why clothing stores exist to continually replace our clothes. The Bible uses this as a picture to help us understand that the universe will not last forever but will wear out. Psalm 102:25–27 says, *“... the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”*

Things that wear out cannot be eternal. If the universe is wearing out, it cannot be eternal. If it is not eternal, it must have had a beginning.

## Q 2. Did the universe spontaneously come into existence by itself? If not, then what brought the universe into existence?

### Short answer:

The universe did not spontaneously bring itself into existence. This idea would mean that something came from nothing. But we all know that this is impossible. Maria in *The Sound of Music* was right when she sang, *“Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could.”* The popular notion that nothing suddenly exploded and became everything without a sufficient cause is absurd! Instead, the biblical story records, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1). The supernatural Creator God revealed in the Bible, who is distinct from and greater than the universe, brought the universe into existence.

### Discussion:

We know that the universe had a beginning (see question 1 above) – so there was a ‘time’ when the universe didn’t exist.

If the universe had just erupted and spontaneously brought itself into existence, this would mean that nothing had suddenly become something – an entire universe in fact! But this could never have happened because... something comes only from something – it can’t come from nothing.

The truth is that something that doesn’t exist cannot do anything at all – much less create itself! And if that’s the case, then the universe couldn’t have spontaneously come from nothing. So whatever brought the universe into existence must have been:

1. Distinct from the universe, because it must have existed before the universe did
2. Greater than the universe, because it must have had the intelligence and power to create the universe.

The biblical story records, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1). The universe didn't come from nothing. It came from someone. That someone, according to the Bible, is the supernatural Creator God, who is distinct from and greater than the universe. Because he is distinct from the universe, he is in a position to create it. And because he is greater than the universe, he has the intelligence and power to create it.

### Q 3. Who made God?

#### Short answer:

No one. The Bible views God as the “eternal God” (Deuteronomy 33:27). Isaiah 57:15 says that God is forever. He has no beginning and he has no end – *“For this is what the high and exalted One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy”*. God has always been the eternal God; therefore, no one made God.

#### Discussion:

Sometimes we can struggle to understand the idea that God is eternal. But since something cannot come from nothing (see question 2 above) and since something is here (e.g. the universe), there must have been something/someone that was eternal. When we ‘boil it down’, we have only two options:

1. **The universe is eternal** (but it can’t be – see question 1 above).
2. **God is eternal**, and the universe came from him.

## Q 4: Is it possible to be a Christian and believe in evolution?

### Short answer:

Yes. Some Christians believe that God used the evolutionary process as the way he brought the universe and all life into existence. To be a Christian is to be rightly related to Christ – not creation (John 1:11–13; 3:16; 8:24; 14:6). However, it appears there are some real problems trying to fit evolution with the biblical story.

Evolution is a very popular belief system that tries to explain life's origins apart from God. The implication is this: if God created us, then we are morally responsible to God but, if we simply evolved, then we are not responsible to anyone.

## Q 5: How do I become aware of God?

### Short answer:

There are at least two ways in which we can become aware of God. The first is through God's created world; the second is through the Bible.

### Discussion:

We will explore two ways in which we can become aware of God:

**1. Through creation.** The great thing is that God wants to be known. He is not hiding away where he cannot be found but has clearly revealed himself through creation. Romans 1:19–20 states, *“what may be known about God is plain... because God has made it plain... For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made”*. This verse is music to the ears of those who want to become aware of God because, through creation, God has made his eternal power and divine nature so easy for everyone to see and understand.

**2. Through the Bible.** There is no greater way of becoming aware of God than through the Bible. This is the place where God has spoken and told us everything he has to say about himself. People who want to know God need to spend time reading the Bible, learning about him.

## Q 6: What about the Trinity?

### Short answer:

As the biblical story unfolds, we find three distinct persons referred to as God: the Father (e.g. Romans 15:6), the Son (e.g. John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8) and the Holy Spirit (e.g. Genesis 1:2; 2 Corinthians 3:17). But the Bible is very clear that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Christians use the word 'Trinity' to explain how God can be one and three. Christians describe God as one 'being', who exists in three 'persons'. But what does this mean?

### Discussion:

Perhaps conjoined twins (sometimes known as Siamese twins) can help us understand how God is one 'being' but three 'persons'. Some conjoined twins share one body but they are two persons: two distinct personalities. One twin might like blue and the other might like red. One might favour sweet foods and the other might favour savoury. Sometimes conjoined twins share essential organs like the heart or digestive system. As a result, they cannot be separated. They are two persons in one body. In this way, conjoined twins can show us something special and unique about the triune God. What we are saying is that God is one 'being' but exists as three 'persons', just like conjoined twins have one body but are two persons.

There are small indications of the Trinity in Genesis 1. One example is Genesis 1:26 – *“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness”*. Evangelical scholars explain the words ‘us’ and ‘our’ in different ways. Some think that when God said, “Let us make mankind”, the “us” referred to angels (but mankind is not said to be made in the image of the angels, nor do angels create anything). Some think God was talking to himself as he thought about his decision to make humans (but this is doubtful because when God is reflecting on something he speaks in the singular, not the plural, e.g. in Genesis 18:17, God said, *“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”*). Some think the plural is like ‘the royal we’ (but it is doubtful because of Hebrew language conventions). If God were only a single person, we might expect the verse to read, “Let me make mankind in my image”. But it doesn’t – and, since we are made in God’s image alone, the plurals (“us”/“our”) in this verse probably represent God as a Trinity.

## Q 7. Is creation part of God?

### Short answer:

Pantheism (the notion that 'God is everything and everything is God') is a popular belief today and is found in Hinduism, Buddhism and New Age spirituality. Even people who do not belong to these religions embrace this idea. Pantheism says there is no absolute distinction between the Creator and creation – that the table I am sitting at is God, you are God, I am God, the cat is God, the universe is God. Why do people believe this? Because it is appealing – “If everything is God and if I am part of God, then I am accountable only to myself” – and faith in God is really faith in myself (my own potential).

The Bible makes it very clear that God is distinct from the universe. The Creator is separate from his creation – he created it! And that means, of course, that his creatures (us) are ultimately accountable to him.

## Q 8. Is there any scientific proof that God exists?

### Short answer:

No. Ultimately, there are no pure scientific proofs either for or against God's existence. This is because science investigates the natural world, not the supernatural world. Nevertheless, many scientists say that countless lines of evidence from the sciences do argue convincingly for the existence of a Master Designer whose 'signature' can be clearly seen within the natural world.

### Discussion:

It is important to remember in all of this discussion that 'science' is not a single unified discipline or body of knowledge. Rather, 'science' is made up of a multitude of different disciplines—each with their own approaches and methods for investigating some aspect of the natural world (e.g. physics is very different from archaeology which is very different from biology).

Yet, the scientific disciplines are usually similar at the most foundational level of method. And so, 'science' typically involves at least these basic steps before being able to claim any level of certainty, let alone 'proof': a research question; a hypothesis; repeated experimental observation in controlled conditions (often a laboratory); then verification; and, lastly, a conclusion.

This approach means that the big 'metaphysical' questions, such as the existence of God, are not directly 'measurable' by the scientific method. For example, God cannot be squished into a petri dish or suspended over a bunsen burner even once in a scientific experiment—let alone scores of times.

Now, having acknowledged the specific focus of science on the natural world, we need to qualify that a little further. And that is because we can still use a 'scientific mindset' to evaluate the evidence that the sciences provide for us from the natural world. We can take a logical, reasoned approach to all of the intricacy and complexity that we see around us, and conclude very appropriately that the evidence is way more consistent with an Intelligent Designer than mere chance.

And 'science' makes these inferences from the evidence to the best conclusion all the time. For example, archaeologists and linguists know that the best explanation of the famous Rosetta Stone, which has the same text in three languages, is not that the indentations were carved into the stone by the random actions of wind and rain. Rather, they are clear evidence of an intelligence which produced them. We know that written language, with all of its complexity, does not simply erupt from random natural causes. Written language points explicitly to the existence of a mind behind those symbols. That is why SETI (the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Research Project) is listening to the heavens with huge radio telescopes. If they hear a simple message from space (even as simple as our S.O.S in morse code), they'll conclude there is intelligent life out there.

In the same way, we can look at the incredible complexity of the genetic blueprint for life contained in DNA, and draw reasonable conclusions. Not that long ago, scientists used to think of a cell as a blob of gelatinous protoplasm. But as science has advanced we have learned that the cell is like a mini-city—with a power plant (mitochondria), production factories, transportation hubs and massive library (DNA). Each of those has highly specific functions. The level of informational complexity in every cell is simply astonishing. And it is all directed by the cell's information centre—its 'library'. This amazing discovery prompted Bill Gates, among others, to note that DNA is a language all of its own; it is, he says, "like computer code". And we know that computer code doesn't just spontaneously emerge on a screen from nothing; it has to be programmed by a computer programmer.

We can look at all the finely-tuned design variables at the macro level (the earth being the perfect distance from the sun for life not to freeze or fry; the atmosphere and magnetosphere that protects us from harmful meteor showers and sun flares). And we can also look at the micro level: the amazing code of life programmed into each cell's DNA.

No matter where we look in nature, the evidence speaks with eloquence. Meaning, as Christians, we can confidently conclude with the Apostle Paul: *“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made...”* (Romans 1:20). And we can likewise echo the words of the psalmist: *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands”* (Psalm 19:1)

## Q 9. Why can't I see God?

### Short answer:

We cannot see God because he is spirit, not matter.

### Discussion:

*"No one has ever seen God"* (John 1:18). God is spirit and not matter (John 4:24). Our physical bodies are able to interact with the physical world God created. Our senses of smell, touch, taste, hearing and sight allow us to interact with this physical world. Because God is spirit, we cannot see him as we can a waterfall, or smell him as we can a rose, or taste him as we can a freshly cooked gourmet dinner. We live with God by faith – not by any senses or feelings (2 Corinthians 5:7).

But, of course, while we cannot see God, himself, we can clearly see the evidence of his activity – in creation, for example. And in the record of his acts in the Bible.

## Q 10. Is God male or female?

### Short answer:

God is neither male nor female. God is spirit (John 4:24) and not matter and so is biologically neither male nor female.

# IDENTITY

*who am I?*

## Q 1. Why did God make human beings?

### Short answer:

The same reason for which he made everything else – to display his greatness.

### Discussion:

Some people think that God created humans because he was lonely and needed a friend. But he has never been alone or lonely! He has never needed a friend. God is a Trinity – he continually exists as three persons in one being: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Within this Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit there are ‘personal relationships’. The Bible tells us that before God created the world, the Father loved the Son (John 17:24) and ‘shared’ life with him in perfect glory (John 17:5). The Bible indicates there was also communication between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – “*Let us make mankind*” (Genesis 1:26). The Bible indicates there is constant communication between the Father and the Son (John 5:19–20). Because God is eternal, these relationships have existed forever. Because God is perfect, his relationships are perfect – perfectly satisfying and perfectly harmonious (no tensions or problems like there are in relationships between imperfect human beings who misunderstand each other).

Because God is love, a loving relationship existed in the Trinity eternally. So God did not make humans because he was lonely or needed someone to love. God made humans for the same reason he made everything else – to display his greatness!

## Q 2. A lot of people say we are descended from animals. Are we animals or are we unique?

### Short answer:

Taken at face value, Genesis 1 and 2 clearly argue for the uniqueness of human beings. We are not animals, nor did we come from animals – although we do have some things in common with animals.

### Discussion:

The Genesis story indicates we have some things in common with animals: (1) humans and animals were made on the same day; (2) both were formed from the dust of the ground; (3) both were made male and female; (4) both were told to increase; (5) both were given a vegetarian diet; (6) both were blessed by God; (7) both were given the breath of life; (8) both were called 'living creatures/beings' (creatures and beings are the same word in Hebrew – 'nepesh haya'); and (9) both were the work of the same Creator.

However, despite these similarities, the text of Genesis 1–2 clearly argues for the uniqueness of humanity, disallowing any idea that we are animals or came from animals.

1. **God made Adam from the dust of the ground** (Genesis 2:7) – the same ground that produced thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17–18), and to which Adam would return when he died (Genesis 3:19). Adam was not made from the animals (Genesis 2:7).

2. In Genesis 1 **the text gives four times as much attention to Adam** as it does to any other part of creation. This deliberate emphasis not only shows the uniqueness of Adam, but indicates that he is also more important than the rest of creation – animals included.

3. It is clear that **Adam did not belong to the animal world because Adam required the breath of life** to become a living being (Genesis 2:7) – the animals already had the breath of life (Genesis 1:21, 24, 30; 6:17). Had Adam evolved from the animals, he would have derived the breath of life from them, rather than having it directly and separately imparted by God, as is stated in Genesis 2:7.

4. **Adam found no counterpart in the animal world.** An animal could be his pet but not his partner. Nothing in the animal world corresponded to Adam (Genesis 2:19–20) – hence God intervened and made him a partner from his own body (Genesis 2:21–22; 1 Corinthians 11:8) – not from an animal.

5. **Adam and Eve were superior to animals** and were made to rule over them (Genesis 1:26, 28).

6. **The Genesis story keeps humans separate from animals.** When the text talks about them, it speaks of them as separate categories: animals (Genesis 1:24–25) are a separate creative act from humans (Genesis 1:26–28) – and this is made very clear in Genesis 2 (compare verse 7 with verse 19).

7. The fundamental difference between humans and animals is huge: **humans are made in God's image** (Genesis 1:27) – animals are not. Consequently, humans are God's designated rulers on the planet, while the animals are ruled over (Genesis 1:26, 28). Humans are of a different kind from all other creatures. Humans did not come from a non-human, sub-human or pre-human creature – they are in a special and separate category.

### Q 3. Does the Bible really say that Adam and Eve were real people and that the human race actually came from them?

#### Short answer:

Yes. The Bible teaches that Adam and Eve were the first humans and the actual parents of the whole human race.

#### Discussion:

Some people think the Adam and Eve story could never have happened the way the Bible says it did. Therefore, they call the story a 'myth' – an imaginary story deliberately made up to communicate a deeper spiritual meaning (a bit like a parable).

But the Bible presents Adam and Eve as real people in real history and the actual parents of the human race. Consider the following:

1. **The Adam and Eve story is just one of a whole series of historical accounts** that make up the book of Genesis. This means Adam and Eve are as real as are the other people in the Genesis story (e.g. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the 12 tribes of Israel, Noah, Cain and Abel).
2. **The genealogy of Luke 3:23–38** puts Adam together with other real people of history – among them: Nathan, David, Judah, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham. And, it lists Adam as the first person God made (verse 38). The point of the genealogy is that everyone comes from Adam.
3. **Jesus believed Adam and Eve were real people** who lived at a specific point in history (i.e. at the beginning) (Matthew 19:4–5). To say Adam and Eve were not real is to disagree with what Jesus believed.

4. **Paul taught that Adam was a real person** (1 Corinthians 11:8–9; 15:45, 47; 1 Timothy 2:13–14) and also that Adam was the actual parent of the human race: “From one man he [i.e. God] made all the nations...” (Acts 17:26).

This connection to Adam is vitally important for two reasons:

1. **It explains why every human being commits sin.** When Adam sinned, he actually became a sinner (a ‘sin-bent’ creature), who reproduced, in his own image (Genesis 5:3), beings who, like himself, have this inherently ‘sinful bent’ or ‘disposition’. That’s why no one needs to teach any of us how to sin. It comes naturally and flows out of who we are. If the human race has no real connection to Adam, then we must look elsewhere for an explanation for the reason sin exists everywhere and at all times.

2. **Salvation depends on the act of one man** (Jesus). Just as everyone is doomed by their real (biological) connection to Adam so, too, are people saved by their real (spiritual) connection to Jesus.

## Q 4. What does being 'made in the image of God' mean?

### Short answer:

It means that we are like God in ways that other creatures are not. God has made us to be like himself (in his likeness and image).

### Discussion:

To understand what it means to be made in the 'likeness and image of God', note Genesis 5:3: "... Adam... had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth". Seth being made in Adam's likeness and image means:

1. Seth was definitely not Adam
2. Seth was certainly related to Adam
3. Seth was clearly like Adam in ways that no one else was.

It's the same with human beings made in God's image because:

1. Humans are definitely not God
2. Humans are certainly related to God
3. Humans are clearly like God in ways that nothing else is.

It is this God-image that sets us apart from the animals. So, in what ways are we like God? We are creative beings (in the way we make things), self-aware beings (in the way we think about things), relational beings (in the way we love people more than we love things) and moral beings (in the way we know we ought to do the right thing). There are more ways as well: we are spiritual beings and we are rational beings. There may be more ways in which we are like God, but these are the main ones.

## Q 5. What does it mean when we say that humans are 'moral beings'?

### Short answer:

While 'moral' can mean 'good', here it means humans were made with a moral capacity, with the ability to understand 'right' and 'wrong'. We are therefore 'ethical' creatures. This makes us different from the members of the animal world. Mark Twain once said, "Of all God's creatures, only humans have the ability to blush."

### Discussion:

The following four things should be kept in mind:

1. **Every human has a moral capacity** because they are made in the image of God. That's why God was able to give Adam and Eve commands that could be obeyed or disobeyed: e.g. "*Be fruitful and increase in number*" (Genesis 1:28); "*Rule over... the ground*" (Genesis 1:28); "*you must not eat from the tree...*" (Genesis 2:16-17); etc.
2. **Every human has an inborn moral code** (Romans 2:14-15). At the deepest core of every human being, there is a moral library that contains all God's moral requirements. This is true for everyone – it is part of being made in the image of God. This means we have an instinctive and God-given understanding of what's right and wrong.

**3. Every human has a conscience.** The conscience is an invisible mechanism. It might help to think of the conscience as an imaginary committee of three invisible persons who live inside us. They study the moral code implanted in our minds and their job is to evaluate everything we do against that moral code. Before we do something, our conscience will evaluate our intended action/behaviour against the information contained in the moral code. It will then categorise that action as either good or evil and advise us of its conclusion by creating a feeling (a 'conviction') either to continue with what we plan to do, or to stop. Then, after we have done something, our conscience will evaluate what we have done against the moral code and, again, it will pass a judgement on our action as being either good or evil. If the verdict is 'good' then we feel satisfied. If the verdict is 'evil', we feel guilty. Animals don't have this moral capacity. Dr John Stott puts it this way: *"Our whole moral vocabulary (commands and prohibitions, values and choices, obligation, conscience, freedom and will, right and wrong, guilt and shame) is meaningless to animals. True, we can train our dog to know what is allowed and forbidden. And when it disobeys, and cringes from us by a reflex action, we can describe it as looking 'guilty'. But [in reality] it has no sense of guilt; it knows only that it is going to get walloped."*

**4. Every human is morally accountable to God.** Every action will be brought into judgement: *"here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil"* (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14). See also Revelation 20:11–15.

## Q 6. What does the Bible mean when it says that humans should 'rule the earth'?

### Short answer:

Humans are to exercise authority over the earth – developing its potential, realising its possibilities and harnessing its energies, for the good of humanity. But this needs to be done in ways that reflect the values, beauty, order and glory of the Creator, realising we ourselves are under his authority and are answerable to him for the way we develop the earth.

### Discussion:

The God of the Bible is the Sovereign God. "The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty... and armed with strength" (Psalm 93:1). Because we are made in God's image, there is something 'kingly' about us.

Although we are only creatures, we too have a measure of sovereignty. God gave us that sovereignty when he said, "Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28).

Three things should be noted:

1. **Humans should not be abusive over nature.** Power is always open to abuse and can easily be mishandled and misdirected. We can so easily cross the boundary from kingly authority into inexcusable destruction. In exercising our power, we should realise we are God's deputies ruling on his behalf, embracing his values and concerns. Rule does not mean exploit. We exercise authority as those who are under authority.
2. **Humans should not be slaves to nature.** While humans should not be tyrants over nature, equally, we should not become slaves to it. We are not here to worship nature. We are here to worship God and act for him as his representatives. Plants and animals do not have the same value as do human beings. In the refreshing and appropriate climate of environmental concern, we must be careful we don't elevate nature above humanity.

**3. Humans should be the lords of nature.** As 'kings of the earth', we should exercise our rule – well knowing that our authority is a delegated authority and that it is to be exercised on behalf of, and with full accountability to, the Creator. God is pleased when humans cultivate and transform the earth into vegetable gardens, and pleasure parks and forests. He intended that humans would domesticate animals and farm them for human use. God intended that humans would explore and harness all the secrets of science and carefully use the energies of the earth to make life richer and better for everyone. When that happens, God is very pleased.

## Q 7. Does the Bible teach that humans gradually 'appeared' on the planet?

### Short answer:

No. The creation of humans was a sudden and deliberate event. Adam and Eve were made as human beings.

### Discussion:

Genesis 1 and 2 uses four different Hebrew words to show that humans did not just accidentally 'appear':

1. **God said he would 'make' humans** (Genesis 1:26). The word 'make' (Hebrew: 'asah') simply indicates that humans were 'made' and did not spontaneously appear.
2. **God is said to have 'created' humans** (Genesis 1:27). The word here (Hebrew: 'bara') reminds us that God was very much involved in the creation of humans.
3. **God is said to have 'formed' humans** (Genesis 2:7). The word 'formed' (Hebrew: 'yatsar') is used to tell us that God deliberately made humans, just like pottery is deliberately made by the potter (Isaiah 29:16; 49:5).
4. **God is said to have 'made' humans** (Genesis 2:22). The word 'made' (Hebrew 'bana') is sometimes used of erecting a building and gives the idea of something deliberately planned and constructed.

## Q 8. Why did God make Adam from dust?

### Short answer:

God made Adam from the dust because God designed humans to be 'earthlings' – persons who were made to live on the earth.

### Discussion:

The New Testament also tells us that Adam was made from the dust (1 Corinthians 15:47–49). The Bible doesn't tell us specifically why humans were made from dust, but here are two possibilities:

1. God made humanity from the dust **to give him his bearings as an 'earthling'** – we live on the earth, work the earth, take our food from the earth and, when we die, we return to it.
2. God made humanity from dust **to remind him of his humble position as a creature** – dust is a symbol of that which is lowly and fragile.

Even though humanity is made in God's image, we must not over-reach ourselves and think of ourselves as being God. Humanity's high honour as God's deputy must be balanced with our lowliness. We are creatures. We are made from the dust. We are not, and never will be, God.

## Q 9. Is God a rational, logical being?

### Short answer:

Yes. The Bible indicates that God is a rational being. Everything about God, the world, ourselves and Christianity is rational.

### Discussion:

The Bible presents God as very much the intelligent One (Psalm 139:1–6) whose wisdom cannot be measured (Romans 11:33–36). His great mind has conceived and planned everything. God is never haphazard, irrational or illogical in the way he works. Everything is considered, planned and executed (Ephesians 1:11). He is the God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33), which is to say he thinks in order, works in order and creates an ordered existence. God's intelligent, wise, rational, logical ways are clearly evident.

**1. Genesis 1 shows God's rational thinking and logical planning.** The Bible says "*the heavens declare the glory of God*" (Psalm 19:1) – and the glory of his rational intelligence and wisdom can be seen in the Genesis account of creation. For instance, God did not make 'living creatures' (Genesis 1:24) until he had first provided them with a place to live – the earth (Genesis 1:1–9), and food to eat (Genesis 1:11–12). God did not make the sea creatures (Genesis 1:20–23) until he had first provided them with their habitat – the sea (Genesis 1:9–10). God did not fill the vast expanse of space with natural light-giving bodies like the sun and moon (Genesis 1:14–19) until he had first separated it out as 'space' (Genesis 1:3–8). God did not make woman as a helper for the man (Genesis 2:18–24) until first he had made the man (Genesis 2:7).

## 2. **The universe God made operates rationally and logically.**

Scientists can explore the universe because it is a logical, carefully coordinated and interconnected system. Everything works in a consistent, reasoned and cohesive way, which is exactly why it has been called a 'uni-verse'. It is why we can speak of the 'laws of nature' and why we can, in fact, do science. If everything were irrational and disconnected, there would be no science – and no school because there would be nothing to learn! Together, everything would be a disjointed, unconnected, jumbled, irrational confusion. It is precisely because there is rationality in the universe that philosophers have been able to discover and formulate (put together, not invent) systems of rational logic.

3. **God made humans rational beings.** Without rationality, we could not relate to God, to another human being or to the world in which we live – without reason, rationality and logic, everything would be meaningless and absurd. Rational laws govern human life (e.g. the law of identity and the law of non-contradiction, as explained below).

a. **The law of identity.** Adam would need to have known that God was in fact God, that Eve was in fact Eve, that animals were in fact animals and that Adam was in fact himself. Without that certain identity, there could be no reality, let alone relationship. In philosophical terms, this is called 'the law of identity'. If A is not A, then God may not be himself (he might be someone else); Eve might not be herself (she might be someone else); etc. Such a non-rational situation would make for total absurdity.

b. **The law of non-contradiction.** Adam would also need to know that God was not Satan, that life was not death, that right was not wrong, that obedience was not disobedience, that work was not idleness, that goodness was not badness, etc. In philosophical terms, this is called 'the law of non-contradiction'. Because of the law of non-contradiction, God cannot be Non-God or Anti-God. Without the law of non-contradiction, God could be God and Satan at the same time, and wrong could be right at the same time. Again, this would make things absolutely absurd.

# CATASTROPHE

*how did this world get so broken?*

## Q 1a. Did God create evil?

### Short answer:

No. Firstly, God is holy and cannot create evil. Secondly, evil is not a 'thing' and therefore was never created.

### Discussion:

There are two reasons why God did not create evil:

1. **God is holy** (Isaiah 6:3) and therefore he cannot make evil, do evil or encourage evil (Habakkuk 1:13).
  
2. **Evil is not a created thing.** Things are created, but evil is not a thing; therefore, it is uncreated. If it is uncreated, God cannot have created it. When we say evil is not a 'thing', we mean we can't take evil and put it in a cabinet on display, any more than we can capture a thought and put that on display. But the question arises: If evil is not a thing, what is it? Evil is better understood as a bad relationship between otherwise good things. Something is evil when it stands in a wrong relationship to something else. We commit evil when we violate God's boundaries and put two good things in a bad relationship. Note these examples:
  - a. **Sexual Immorality.** God made our bodies. Our bodies are good. God made us male and female. He planned human reproduction and sexual fulfilment in the context of marriage. Reproduction and sexual fulfilment outside of marriage are wrong. The bodies are good in themselves, but if they are in a bad relationship the act is said to be evil.
  
  - b. **Theft.** Money is good. The coins are well made, perfectly round and of good metal with a good imprint. They represent value accurately. We work to earn money to enable us to live. The thief's hand is good. It works well. The bones and muscles and nerves are in perfect working order. The fingers are strong and nimble. But when the thief takes our good money and puts it in his good hand, it is a bad relationship. The money does not belong there. An act of evil (theft) has taken place.

- c. **Murder.** The gun is good. It is made of good metal, is well designed, well crafted, the barrel is perfectly straight, the trigger is perfectly balanced and the gun can fire the bullet perfectly well. The hand that holds it is good. The head it is aimed at is also good. It is well connected to the body, the blood is flowing and the brain is working; the eyes can see, the ears can hear and the mouth can talk. But when the good gun is aimed and fired at the good head, it is a bad relationship. An act of evil (murder) has taken place.
- d. **Lies.** The words are good. They are perfectly adequate means of communication. They can be well combined and show perfect grammar. Put together, they make good sense and can convey the intended meaning. But if the good words fail to match reality because they are crafted to deceive, they are a lie. Once formulated, a lie has been conceived. Once it has been communicated, a lie has been told.

## Q 1b. Why did God permit evil?

### Short answer:

Because God is good, he must have permitted evil to exist so that a greater good would come from it. There are at least two ways that a greater good could come:

1. God permitted evil to display his greatness.
2. God permitted evil so he could destroy it forever.

### Discussion:

God did not create evil because he is holy, nor could he create evil because evil is not a 'thing' (see question 1A above). God, in his wisdom, permitted evil to exist. But why would a loving, good and all-powerful God even permit evil? The reason must be that it was the best way to bring about an even greater good. But what good could possibly be *that good* that God would permit something so awful as evil to exist? There are two possible answers:

**1. God permitted evil to show his greatness.** A diamond always looks its brightest when it is placed against the backdrop of black velvet. Sitting against this black background, the diamond sparkles like never before. This illustration is a little like God and evil. If there were no sin, we would never be able to:

- a. Experience the wonder of God's forgiveness
- b. See God's patience in the face of persistent sin
- c. See God's limitless love for the truly 'unlovely'
- d. Appreciate the light of God's holiness against the darkness of sin
- e. Know God's merciful help to those in misery
- f. Appreciate God's wisdom in face of extreme problems.

Incredibly, in God's great genius, he frustrates the purpose of evil by making it the occasion for his greater glory to shine!

2. **God permitted evil so he could destroy it forever.** By allowing evil to come into existence, God could deal with it and destroy it. And when evil is destroyed forever, God will make a new world for us... the best of all worlds... where evil can never again raise its ugly head because God has dealt with it and got rid of it. This new world will be full of people who choose only good and, because of this, evil will never again be possible! Dr Norman Geisler put it this way: *"A world where evil is not defeated is nowhere near as good as a world where it is defeated."*

## Q 2a. Who is Satan?

### Short answer:

Satan is a real, personal being. Once an angel of God, he is now the chief of all the fallen angels we call demons or evil spirits. Satan's consuming passion is to oppose God and destroy his purposes, which is why he is called 'The Adversary'.

### Discussion:

Satan is mentioned in seven Old Testament books and in every book of the New Testament. He goes by various names: Morning Star (Isaiah 14:12), Belial (2 Corinthians 6:15), Beelzebub (Matthew 10:25), the Devil (1 Peter 5:8) and the Dragon... the Ancient Serpent (Revelation 12:9). The Bible speaks of Satan as:

1. **A real personal being.** The Bible refers to him as a person (Job 1; Matthew 4:1–11). He is able to exercise his will (2 Timothy 2:26). He is highly intelligent (2 Corinthians 11:3).

2. **A fallen angelic being.** He was originally known as the 'Morning Star' (Isaiah 14:12) – in Latin, this name is 'Lucifer'. He is said to have angelic followers (Matthew 25:41; Ephesians 6:11–12; Revelation 12:7, 9). He is the chief of these demonic beings (Matthew 12:24). Despite a variety of scholarly interpretations, there is good reason to take Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:11–19 as speaking of Satan, the real personality behind (or possessing) the ancient Kings of Babylon (Isaiah 14) and Tyre (Ezekiel 28). Ezekiel 28:1–10 is about the historical, visible, human ruler who is King of Tyre. But Ezekiel 28:12–19 describes the supernatural, invisible, spiritual personality *behind* the King of Tyre. This invisible personality is said to be: a created (and therefore limited) being (Ezekiel 28:13, 15); once morally blameless (Ezekiel 28:12, 15); an angelic being (Ezekiel 28:14, 16) who once held an unequalled position (Ezekiel 28:14, 16) from which he is now barred (Ezekiel 28:16–19); and once full of wisdom and beauty (Ezekiel 28:12) but now totally wicked (Ezekiel 28:15) and destructive (Ezekiel 28:16).

## Q 2b. How did a perfect angel, who lived in a perfect heaven, become evil?

### Short answer:

We are not told. But we do know that:

1. Everything must have a cause;
2. God did not cause Satan's rebellion (see question 1A above); so
3. Satan himself must have simply decided to rebel out of his own free will.

### Discussion:

Apparently this evil did not come about through external temptation – there was nothing and no one outside of Satan to do the tempting. God did not and could not have tempted Satan or caused him to sin (James 1:13). Somehow this evil spontaneously erupted inside Satan's heart. Satan simply made a choice. The choice was horrendously wrong and evil was born.

## Q 2c. What was Satan's sin?

### Short answer:

We are not told that he broke a specific command, but we are told he became proud (Ezekiel 28:17) and refused to worship God and wanted to take God's place.

### Discussion:

As a creature, Satan was under obligation to worship the Creator but Isaiah 14:13–14 and Ezekiel 28:17 indicate that Satan refused to worship God at some point. Notice there are five 'I wills' in Isaiah 14:13–14:

1. *"I will ascend to the heavens"* – conclusion: Satan wants to control heaven (Isaiah 14:13).
2. *"I will raise my throne"* – conclusion: Satan wants a position above angelic status (Isaiah 14:13).
3. *"I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly"* – conclusion: Satan wants to rule the earth (Isaiah 14:13).
4. *"I will ascend above the tops of the clouds"* – conclusion: Satan wants all the glory (Isaiah 14:14).
5. *"I will make myself like the Most High"* – conclusion: Satan wants to own the heavens and the earth (Isaiah 14:14) and supplant God.

### **Q 3. Why didn't God imprison or destroy Satan the moment he rebelled?**

#### **Short answer:**

The Bible says that God has set the day when he will lock Satan up forever and throw away the key (Revelation 20:7–10). God has appointed the right time for Satan's final judgement and, when it comes, the severity of it will be completely justified. Meanwhile, Satan's continued activity ultimately serves only to achieve God's greater purposes.

#### **Discussion:**

The Bible reveals an important principle: God's judgement never comes until his wisdom declares the time is right. Like all his works, God's judgement is perfect. When he judges, it is always with the right measure and at the right time. For example:

1. In Noah's day, God withheld judgement until sin reached its full measure (Genesis 6:5–6, 11–13).
2. God withheld judgement on the Amorites until their sin reached its limit (Genesis 15:16).

In the meantime, Satan and his demons (fallen angels) are under God's control (1 Kings 22:19–22; Job 1:6–12; Ephesians 1:21). When God brings Satan to his final judgement, it will be perfectly timed, perfectly executed and perfectly justified, and God will be praised.

## Q 4. How did Satan get into the garden of Eden?

### Short answer:

We don't know how Satan got into the garden. The Bible simply says he was there.

### Discussion:

It could be that Satan was on the earth before Adam was created, which is why (for good reasons) some English translations say that God instructed Adam to 'guard' the garden (Genesis 2:15), and then to rule over the rest of the earth and control it (Genesis 1:26–28).

## Q 5. Was the serpent mentioned in Genesis 3 an actual animal and did it really speak?

### Short answer:

Yes, the serpent was an actual animal that Satan took control of and used to approach Adam and Eve.

### Discussion:

There are good reasons for believing the serpent was an actual animal used by Satan:

1. **The serpent is said to be one of the animals.** Genesis 3:1 and 3:14 refer to this creature as one of the animals.
2. **'Serpent' (in Hebrew) is a normal word for an actual snake** in the Old Testament (Genesis 3:1).
3. **God cursed the actual serpent above all the wild animals** (Genesis 3:14). This was separate from his curse on Satan himself (Genesis 3:15), indicating the animal itself was cursed because of its involvement.
4. **The New Testament puts the serpent and Satan together in three texts:** Revelation 12:9 – *“that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray”*; Revelation 20:2 – *“that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan...”*; and in Romans 16:20 – *“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet”*. These clearly indicate that it was Satan that was in view in the curse of Genesis 3:15. This indicates Satan used the serpent in such a way that he became identified with the animal.

5. Throughout the Bible, Satan uses people like Judas (John 13:27) or Peter (Matthew 16:23). Certainly **demons can enter animals and control them** (Matthew 8:28–34). So it is not at all impossible that Satan, the wisest of God’s angelic beings, should choose to use the serpent, the wisest of all the creatures God had made (Genesis 3:1), to approach Adam and Eve.

6. **Genesis 3 says the serpent spoke** (Genesis 3:1). The Bible records occasions when Satan took control of people – e.g. Judas (John 13:27) and actually spoke through them – e.g. Peter (Matthew 16:23). If demons can enter into animals (Matthew 8:28–34), then one presumes Satan can use them to speak, especially in the absence of another available human being. The New Testament is very clear that Satan was involved in this temptation (2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:14). It’s not an outrageous idea. The moment the animal spoke, Adam and Eve should have ‘heard the alarm bells ringing’ and dismissed the animal immediately. After all, they had control over the animals (Genesis 1:26, 28) and could have sent the serpent away. More than that, Adam and Eve already knew animals were not their counterparts and could not have a rational conversation with them (Genesis 2:19–20). The alarm bells should have been ringing very loudly. We can think only that Eve kept listening in this remarkably bizarre situation because of Satan’s extreme ability to distract and deceive.

## Q 6a. What is the significance of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

### Short answer:

It was one of two trees in the middle of the garden that had special significance. The tree was the symbol of God's moral authority – his right to determine what was good and what was evil. It was not to be eaten from (Genesis 2:17).

### Discussion:

The following is true about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:

1. It was **a real tree** like all the others that grew out of the ground (Genesis 2:9).
2. It was **an ordinary tree** – it wasn't full of magical powers. Neither was it poisonous. Like all the trees, it was good (Genesis 2:9). If animals ate the fruit, they would not have acquired wisdom, nor would they have died. The tree would have had no effect on animals.
3. It was special because **it was a symbol**. Even though it was a real tree, it had special meaning, like a monument. A monument is a real thing, and an ordinary thing made of concrete or stone, etc. – but it is also a special symbol. It stands for something. But what? It did not stand for the ability to understand the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' – Adam and Eve already had this ability. They could understand the difference between right and wrong before they ate from this tree. After all, as Eve explained to Satan, they already knew they shouldn't eat of this tree (Genesis 3:2–3). So it must have been something more than the ability to understand the difference between good and evil. It seems that this tree stood for God's moral authority – the right to determine what is 'good' and what is 'evil'. How do we know this? Notice three things:

- a. Satan realised that, if Adam and Eve ate from that tree, they would be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5). In other words, they would make their own decisions about what was right or wrong.
- b. While all trees, including this one, were “pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Genesis 2:9), Satan had convinced Eve that this tree would offer her something more – wisdom (Genesis 3:6). What wisdom? The wisdom to determine what was right and what was wrong.
- c. After Adam and Eve had eaten from this tree, God himself said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:22). God was saying humanity had overstepped its boundaries and had become like him – the final authority on what was good and what was evil. This was humanity’s attempt to displace God and elevate themselves to the place of absolute moral authority.

## Q 6b. Was the Tree of Knowledge really necessary? Wasn't God setting them up to fail?

### Short answer:

God was not setting Adam and Eve up to fail but the possibility for failure was a necessary part of their development.

### Discussion:

When Adam and Eve were created, they still had to undergo personal development:

1. **Adam and Eve needed to develop morally.** Adam and Eve were not created holy in the absolute sense; otherwise, like God, they could never have sinned. Neither were Adam and Eve created evil. Rather, they were created in the state of innocence – but an unconfirmed and untested innocence. This does not mean that Adam and Eve were not morally responsible at the moment of creation, because we know that they were created with a conscience (Romans 2:14–15). However, it seems that the good they did (i.e. naming the animals, caring for the garden, etc.), they did naturally and innocently rather than having to make a conscious judgement to do good instead of doing evil. God's command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge meant that Adam and Eve had to make a clear, conscious and deliberate choice of good. It was part of their moral development. If Adam and Eve had made the correct choice, they would have moved up into confirmed holiness (from which point on they would have been sinless). In making the wrong choice, they moved down into confirmed corruption (from which point on, they became sinful people).

2. **Adam and Eve needed to develop relationally.** Love is bound up with choice – if it's forced, it is not love. A robot programmed to say "I love you" does not, of course, love anything. Love is a freely chosen action and robots cannot choose. Humanity's greatest duty is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart... soul... mind" (Matthew 22:36–38).

Loving a superior is different from loving an equal. Children show love by being obedient to their parents. Humans show love for God by being obedient. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). This choice would enable Adam and Eve to show their love for God.

**3. Adam and Eve needed to develop volitionally (personally).**

Because humanity was made in the image of God, this included a measure of sovereignty and self-determination. Adam and Eve needed to be free to choose who they would be. They could not be other than human, less than human or more than human, but they could choose what kind of human they would be. So this choice between becoming holy and becoming sinful was a necessary one.

**4. Adam and Eve needed to develop spiritually.** This choice enabled Adam and Eve to make a decision about their spiritual allegiance – would they go with God or would they go with Satan? Because the choice presented by the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was a necessary one, God was not laying a trap or teasing his creatures. It was an essential part of Adam and Eve's development.

## Q 7. What was the Tree of Life?

### Short answer:

The Tree of Life was one of two trees in the middle of the Garden of Eden that had special significance. It represented God's gift of immortal/eternal life.

### Discussion:

There are four good reasons to believe the Tree of Life offered eternal and immortal life:

1. **A textual reason.** The words “live forever” (Genesis 3:22) mean to have continual existence and are often used in the Old Testament to refer to earthly existence. God put in extreme safeguards after Adam and Eve sinned to stop them from eating from the Tree of Life. God did that because they had already rebelled and were under the penalty of death. Consequently, they were not permitted to eat from the Tree of Life.
2. **A logical reason.** The two trees are set in contrast to each other (Genesis 2:9). If eating from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge would result in certain death (Genesis 2:17) – in all its dimensions: spiritual, physical and eternal – then, by contrast, to eat from the Tree of Life would result in abundant life – in all its dimensions: spiritual, physical and eternal.
3. **A biblical reason.** The ‘Tree of Life’ appears again in Revelation 22:2, 14 and 19. Genesis 3 and Revelation 22 are connected in this way: Genesis chapters 1–3 are the ‘introduction’ to the biblical story and Revelation 22 is the ‘conclusion’ to the biblical story. Both passages speak of an earthly paradise. Since the Tree of Life in Revelation 22 clearly represents eternal and immortal life, it must also be true of the Tree of Life in Genesis 3.

4. **A theological reason.** This tree offered physical immortality. God did not create Adam and Eve as immortal beings. Had God made them that way, then they would never have been able to die. But while God didn't make them immortal, neither did he make them mortal, that is, beings who would naturally die. Death came only through sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12). Had Adam and Eve not sinned by taking from the forbidden tree, they would have taken from the Tree of Life and lived forever, because this tree provides endless life. Had Adam eaten from the Tree of Life, he would have shared the fullness of God's blessings in his physical body forever.

## Q 8. If God is good, why is there so much death and suffering in the world? Will it ever end?

### Short answer:

God created a “very good” (Genesis 1:31) world where suffering and death did not exist. When Adam sinned against God, he and the planet suffered the consequences. Suffering and death came to the entire creation. But God promised to defeat evil (including suffering and death) and remove it forever!

### Discussion:

The Bible presents the story of suffering and death in the following way:

- 1. Suffering and death were not a part of the world that God created.** The Bible begins its story with a good God creating a “very good” (Genesis 1:31) world. The whole of creation was in perfect harmony. Humans were created to be vegetarian (Genesis 1:29) and were to rule over all the earth (Genesis 1:28). Even animals lived in perfect harmony, as they ate only plants and not each other (Genesis 1:30).
- 2. Adam disobeyed God (sinned).** The Bible continues its story with God giving the first human couple, Adam and Eve, free choice either to obey him by not eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil or to disobey him by eating from this tree. Tragically, they chose to take the evil option by eating from the forbidden tree (Romans 5:12).
- 3. Adam’s sin brought moral evil, suffering and death to every person.** When Adam disobeyed, he introduced sin into the world. Romans 5:12 says, *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned”*. Everyone descended from Adam is now born a sinner (Ephesians 2:1–3).

4. **Adam's sin brought natural evil – the earth is cursed.** While the world is a wonderfully beautiful place (Psalm 19:1–6), the ugliness of disease, suffering and death is also evident. There are floods, devastating earthquakes and famines that destroy the places where we live ('natural' evil). When Adam sinned, the whole of creation was cursed by God (Genesis 3:17–19) and subjected to frustration and groaning (Romans 8:20–22). All the natural evil we see in the world is a result of Adam's sin. That means the world is not always a good place; sometimes, it is very evil.

5. **God promised to defeat evil, suffering and death.** Genesis 3:15 says that while there will be "enmity" between Eve and Satan, one of Eve's descendants (the Messiah) would crush the head of Satan – just as a person stomps on the head of a snake – and that Satan will be eliminated. Revelation 20:2–3 and 10 say that Satan will one day be removed from the world. And, when evil is removed, God will create a new universe that will never again contain evil, suffering and death. Evil, suffering and death will be gone forever!

## Q 9. Why did Adam and Eve make loincloths out of leaves?

### Short answer:

They felt ashamed and needed to cover their wrongdoing.

### Discussion:

Genesis chapter 2 closes with these words: “Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25). That means Adam and Eve were completely innocent – just like naked children who, in their innocence, feel no shame. Only after Adam and Eve sinned were they aware of their nakedness (Genesis 3:7) and their shame (Genesis 3:10) and their need to cover their wrongdoing.

## Q 10. Why did God clothe Adam and Eve with animal skins?

### Short answer:

When Adam and Eve sinned, they made coverings for themselves out of fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). They made those coverings because they felt guilt and shame at having sinned against God. God replaced those garments with garments of animal skin (Genesis 3:21), a provision based on the death of an animal.

### Discussion:

1. **The garments of leaves (Genesis 3:7).** The context certainly suggests that Adam and Eve are trying to cover their wrongdoing and make themselves acceptable to God. But it wasn't working. Even though they had made aprons of leaves, Adam and Eve knew they were not acceptable to God and felt afraid of him (Genesis 3:7–10).

2. **The garments of skin (Genesis 3:21).**

a. **Where the skins came from.** While it's true that animals were also cursed because of Adam's sin (Genesis 3:14) and began to die as a result (Romans 8:19–21), these particular animals must have been deliberately killed – since insufficient time had passed for them to have died of natural causes.

b. **Why the skins were provided.** God judged Adam and Eve's disobedience with death (Genesis 3:19). That's why the leaves could never cover the guilt of sin – it required the payment of death. So God took the life of an animal and graciously used the skin of the animal as a covering to clothe Adam and Eve. It is important to understand that the provision of skins indicates that Adam and Eve were restored not to innocence and not to paradise, but to fellowship with God. They no longer needed to hide from God (cf. Genesis 3:7–10). But the return to paradise must await the new heaven and earth.

## Q 11. Why should the whole human race suffer the consequences of Adam's sin?

### Short answer:

Put simply, it's all about 'representation'. Adam was the 'official representative' for the human race. When he acted in the Garden of Eden, he acted for the whole human race. The Bible addresses this subject in Romans 5:12–21 (see the discussion below).

### Discussion:

Adam was the 'official representative' for the human race. When he acted in the Garden of Eden, he acted for the whole human race. It's called 'representation'. This principle is still at work today – here are two examples:

1. **Representation works in national politics.** Most nations are led by legislative bodies; each of these is called something like the 'House of Representatives'. The 'representatives' might be democratically elected or they might be appointed. But they are representatives who make decisions for their whole country – and the decisions they make affect each one of us very much. If they make a decision to raise taxes, we have to pay more tax. If they make a decision that the nation is at war, then everyone in that nation is regarded as being 'at war'.

2. **Representation works in sports, too.** If one member of the team scores, the whole team gets the point. If one member of the team disobeys a rule, the whole team is penalised – not just the offending player. Each 'represents' the whole team. And what each player does (good or bad) applies to the whole team. When Adam sinned, he sinned 'for us', 'on our behalf', and his sin was counted against the whole human race. That's why Paul said, "... *the many died by the trespass of the one man*" (Romans 5:15). "*The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation*" on the whole human family (Romans 5:16). Why? Because Adam was our representative.

At first glance, that might not seem fair. Why should everyone suffer because of the act of one man? Romans 5:12–21 explains God's wisdom in arranging things this way. You see, in the same way God made Adam the representative of everyone connected to him (by nature), so too God made Jesus to be the representative of everyone connected to him (by faith). Adam's one act in the Garden of Eden brought everyone connected to him (by nature) into judgement. Jesus' one act on the cross brings everyone connected to him (by faith) back to God. In other words, we 'get saved' the same way we 'got lost' – by the act of one man. Was it our act that got us in trouble with God initially? No. Was it our act that makes us right with God? No. Adam's one act in the Garden of Eden brought death to everyone connected to him. Jesus' one act on the cross brings life to everyone connected to him.

## Q 12. Why is Eve cursed with “pains in childbearing” and what are those pains?

### Short answer:

The pain is both physical (in childbirth) and emotional (in child-rearing). We are not told why Eve was subjected to physical pain in childbirth. Could it be possible that the pain Eve experiences as she brings a child into the world is a reminder that she helped bring sin into the world which is now a world of pain?

### Discussion:

In the curse, Eve is affected in her two most crucial roles: those of mother and wife. The “pain in childbirth” probably includes everything from the anxieties a woman has about becoming pregnant, to the physical discomforts of carrying the child, to the concerns over the health of the child in the womb, to the dangers of the birth process for both mother and child. Why physical pain in childbirth? Maybe, as suggested in the short answer above, the pain is to remind Eve that the world she brings her child into is itself a painful one – and that she and her husband made it that way. The happiness of motherhood is interrupted by times of sadness. This pain will overwhelm Eve all too quickly. Her sons’ bickering and jealousy will turn to resentment and hatred and then murder (Genesis 4).

### **Q 13. What is meant by: "your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you"?**

#### **Short answer:**

It means that there will be continual tension in the relationship between man and woman. The woman will try and dominate the man and the man will try to overpower the woman. Companionship is spoiled by the desire to control.

#### **Discussion:**

It seems best to understand that Eve's 'desire' for her husband is the desire to dominate and control her husband, just as sin desires to master (dominate, control) Cain (see Genesis 4:7 where the same word is used). And, just as Cain must gain the 'upper hand' over sin, so the husband will try to have the 'upper hand' over his wife sometimes in an oppressive and dictatorial way. The meaning is this: "you will have a tendency to dominate your husband and he will have a tendency to become a dictator over you". Here begins the 'battle of the sexes'.

# CONFUSION

*why are we all so different?*

## Q 1 What was wrong with Cain's sacrifice?

### Short answer:

The problem with Cain's sacrifice is that it was not a blood sacrifice.

### Discussion:

Some people think Cain's offering was rejected because it was not the best of his produce. However, there are good reasons for thinking that God rejected Cain and his offering because Cain had an attitude that led him to ignore the principle and practice of blood sacrifice as the only valid means of approaching God. While, the immediate text is not very detailed, there are good reasons for thinking that the problem with Cain's sacrifice was that it was bloodless:

1. The story of Cain (Genesis 4:1-16) cannot be separated from the **preceding context** in Genesis 3 where we find that sinners can approach God only on the basis of animal sacrifice (Genesis 3:21).

2. **Hebrews 12:23-24 contrasts Christ's sprinkled blood** (of self-sacrifice) **with Abel's sprinkled blood** (of animal sacrifice): *"You have come to... Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel"*. This suggests that Abel had practised blood sacrifice that was required by God.

## Q 2. Where did Cain find his wife?

### Short answer:

From all the other people that existed at that time.

### Discussion:

Finding a wife for Cain appears to be a problem because people think Adam and Eve had only three sons: Cain, Abel and Seth. So the question is posed: "If we are all descended from Adam and Eve, where could Cain have found a wife?" But consider the following:

1. The Bible never says Adam and Eve had only three sons.
2. The Bible says Adam had other sons and daughters. Genesis 5:4 says: *"after Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters."*
3. There were many others alive at the time Cain was ready to marry:
  - a. Notice in the genealogy of Genesis 5 how every male descendant of Adam "had other sons and daughters".
  - b. Notice that by the time Cain's son Enoch was born there were enough people to build and populate a city.
  - c. The population at the time of Cain would have been quite sizeable given the lifespan and fertility of the men mentioned in Genesis 5.
  - d. By the time Adam died at the age of 930 years (Genesis 5:5), the population might have even been in the millions.
4. Cain would have married one of his sisters or a close relative. Genesis does not condemn marrying one's sister or niece. It condemns only sex between parents and children. Even Abraham married his half-sister. The prohibition on marrying a sister or niece did not come into force until Leviticus (the time of Moses). Around the time of Cain, genetic defects would not have been an issue.

### Q 3. Who are the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6:1-4 and what is their great sin?

#### Short answer:

We can't be sure who the sons of God were. All we know is that what happened was something particularly evil that earned it a place among the many tragic evil stories of Genesis 4-10.

#### Discussion:

Scholars tell us that this is easily the most difficult passage to understand in all the Old Testament and caution us that no one can be absolutely certain about what sin is actually involved. There are three main opinions:

1. **Fallen angels.** The 'sons of God' were fallen angels who engaged in sexual activity with human females.
2. **Men of the godly line of Seth.** The 'sons of God' were the men of the godly line of Seth who intermarried with the daughters of the ungodly descendants of Cain.
3. **Demonised rulers.** The 'sons of God' were demonised rulers who sexually exploited the women of the lower classes.

All we know is that what happened was something particularly evil, which earned it a place among the many tragic, evil stories of Genesis 4-10.

Taken together, these several stories:

1. Show the continual moral and spiritual decline of humankind
2. Prepare us to understand God's grief and regret over making humanity (Genesis 6:6)
3. Explain the reason for God's awful judgement resulting in the flood (Genesis 6:7).

## Q 4. Why did God judge the earth so drastically at the time of the flood?

### Short answer:

Because humankind's sin was so extreme and had spread across the whole world.

### Discussion:

Scripture tells us that, at the time of the flood, evil was:

1. **Unrestrained.** Humanity's wickedness was "*great*" (Genesis 6:5), the earth was "*full of violence*" (Genesis 6:11) and had become "*corrupt*", or wrecked, ruined (Genesis 6:11–12). The world no longer served the purpose for which it was made.
2. **Universal.** The "*earth*" had become corrupt (Genesis 6:5, 11); i.e. "*all the people*" (not just some) had corrupted their ways (Genesis 6:12).
3. **Ingrained.** The problem was entrenched in the nature of humanity: "*every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil...*" (Genesis 6:5). The outward acts of evil were the result of inward, ingrained evil.
4. **Unstoppable.** Every "*inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil, all the time*" (Genesis 6:5). Evil had become a way of life.

Humanity's sin had reached huge proportions and there was no way back. The earth required a gigantic cleansing.

## Q 5. Why did God allow things to become so bad before he sent the flood?

### Short answer:

There are two reasons for God's delay in sending the flood. The first has to do with God's patience. The second has to do with God's righteousness.

### Discussion:

1. **God is patient.** He is "*the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger*" (Exodus 34:6; cf. Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:15; Psalm 103:8). The New Testament says: "*God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built*" (1 Peter 3:20). God was patient because he is "*compassionate*" (Exodus 34:6). He is "*not wanting anyone to perish*" (2 Peter 3:9; cf. 1 Timothy 2:4). God never gains pleasure from people perishing in their sin (Ezekiel 18:27, 32; 33:11). Had the people listened to Noah's preaching and turned to God, God would have changed his mind and held back his judgement – he always does (Exodus 32:9–10, 14; Jonah 3:10, 4:2; Jeremiah 18:7–8; Ezekiel 18:25, 27, 32). Dr Tony Evans says: "*God does not come out of nowhere and lower the boom on unsuspecting people who had no chance.*" God's delays are full of warnings and pleadings as he patiently contends with sinful humanity.

2. **God is righteous.** God will bring judgement for those who do not respond to his call to turn to him. "*The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished*" (Nahum 1:3). But God never judges prematurely (Genesis 15:14–16). God always waits until the measure of human guilt and rebellion have become entrenched and the people have passed beyond the point of no return before he enforces his judgement (cf. Matthew 23:32, 35; 1 Thessalonians 2:16; Revelation 6:11).

Even when he judges human sin, God is always patient and always righteous.

## Q 6. Why did innocent animals have to die in the flood?

### Short answer:

Because God was cleansing the whole of the corrupt earth, not just humans.

### Discussion:

God had said, *“I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground...”* (Genesis 6:7). Nothing is said about the fish in the sea (Genesis 6:7). The whole earth was *“corrupt”*, or wrecked, ruined (Genesis 6:11–12) and, therefore, the whole earth needed a gigantic cleansing – even the mountains were to be covered with the waters (Genesis 7:19).

It may be that humanity had used the animals in its extreme wickedness (e.g. bestiality – sexual activity between humans and non-humans) but it also may be that the animals and birds were simply casualties of the flood. Regardless, it should be kept in mind that, unlike humans, animals do not have an endless existence, so while the plight of animals is important, the plight of humans is even more significant.

It is interesting that God’s covenant agreement never to punish the earth by a flood again was made not only with humanity, but with every living creature that was in the ark (Genesis 9:9–16).

## Q 7. Was the flood worldwide?

### Short answer:

Biblical scholars are divided in their views on this question but there is evidence to suggest the flood was a worldwide phenomenon.

### Discussion:

Some think the flood was worldwide; some think it was regional; some think it was a local event; some think it covered simply the known world. *“It has generally been understood... the flood covered the entire surface of the earth”* – that is to say it was an ‘earth crisis’ (see Genesis 6:7,12–13, 17; 7:4, 19, 21, 23; 9:11). At the very least, we are to understand that all human life and animal life was totally destroyed except any that had been protected in the ark because the text repeatedly emphasises that the catastrophe annihilated all human and animal life on earth. The end result is absolute and non-negotiable. By the time God was done with his judgement, there were only eight human survivors: Noah, his wife and their three sons and their wives.

Evangelical scholars understand the flood in one of two ways:

1. **Regional/local.** Some see the flood as a judgement on the sinful people of Noah’s time. For these people, *“all the universality demanded is that which was necessary for the destruction of the human race.”* In this way, the flood could be regional or local and, at the same time, considered ‘universal’ because it destroyed all human life except for Noah and his immediate family.

2. **Worldwide.** Others understand the flood as a judgement on the entire planet, including humanity and the animal world (see the references to *“the earth”* in Genesis 6:13 and the references to the mountains being covered in Genesis 7:19–20, 8:4; Psalm 104:6–8).

## Q 8. Why is Babel important?

### Short answer:

Babel is important because it is a major point of departure. Up until this time, humanity was moving in a single group. There was one world, one people, one God. But, at Babel, things changed. As people groups were forced to spread out across the earth, new languages diversified, ethnic features developed, nations were formed, and various religions began. The world changed shape after Babel. While Babel was the beginning of new languages, new nations and new ethnic groups, the major issue was that, after Babel, distinct groups within the human family developed their own religions. For this reason, Babel has gone down in biblical history as “*the mother of all harlots*” (Revelation 17:5) – that is, it is the starting point of false religion.

### Discussion:

The story of the Tower of Babel does not suddenly pop up as an unexpected and unconnected ‘stand-alone’ episode in the Genesis story. It is just one of a series of stories that are piled one on top of the other to show how badly and how thoroughly sin had affected the whole world. There is the story of Cain and Abel, a story of jealousy, hatred, anger and murder (Genesis 4:1–16). There is the story of Lamech, a story of polygamy (having more than one husband or wife at the same time) and outrageous violence (Genesis 4:17–24). Then there is the story of the ruthless rulers – abusive leaders who sexually exploited any and every woman they could (Genesis 6:1–4). And then there’s the story of the flood, a story about how violence had fully corrupted the world (Genesis 6:5, 11–13). The story of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) is just one more story that shows how extremely corrupt the human race had become. Before (Genesis 4–9), humanity had sinned against God but now it was determined to build a tower to the heavens – a direct attempt at replacing God. And when God judged the people at Babel and confused their language, forcing them to spread out across the earth, they created their own religions and their own gods (see Romans 1:18–32).

## Q 9. Why did God want people to live all across the earth?

### Short answer:

When God made humans, he made them in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). As God's image-bearers, humanity was appointed ruler over the whole earth (Genesis 1:26, 28; 9:1-2). God wanted the human race to manage and develop his creation across the planet. To enable this to happen, humans needed to live throughout the earth.

## Q 10. Why did God impose different languages on the human family at Babel?

### Short answer:

Originally the whole world had only one language (Genesis 11:1). Then, at Babel, God “came down” and confused their language. This was God’s way of frustrating humanity’s plan to make a name for itself. And an effective means of making the human race obey his original command to spread out across the earth (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).

## Q 11. How did the different languages develop after Babel?

### Short answer:

The greater than 6000 languages and dialects spoken in the world today slowly developed from the several original languages God created at Babel.

### Discussion:

When the people at Babel refused to spread out and fill the earth, God intervened and gave them different languages – the ‘parent languages’ of the earth. Because of the confusion that resulted, it seems this almost immediately caused the human family to divide into different language groups. Consequently, those groups were forced to part company from one another and find their own places on the planet. While they did this – and as further family clans developed – each parent language began a long process of modification into sub-languages: one or two at the beginning and, eventually, hundreds. And because these hundreds of languages all developed from the one original parent language, they would have had similarities between them. For example, English and German are very similar. In English we say the word ‘water’, but in German it’s ‘Wasser’. The reason ‘water’ and ‘Wasser’ are similar is because originally German and English were one language. And even languages like Greek, Spanish and Russian are related to English and German, because all these languages go back to a common one. That’s why linguists (people who study language) classify these particular languages as belonging to the same linguistic family, called the Indo-European language family.

But all languages in the Indo-European family are so completely different from Hebrew – they aren't similar at all. That's why linguists classify Hebrew as belonging to a different language family – the Afro-Asiatic family. So there's no relationship between the Indo-European family and the Afro-Asiatic family.

The fact that some languages are similar while some are distinctly dissimilar fits the story of Babel well. The explanation for the examples used above is that English, German, Greek, Spanish and Russian all go back to one parent language created at Babel, but Hebrew goes back to a different parent language.

Although we don't know how many languages God created at the time of Babel, linguistic anthropologists (scientists who study human languages) have estimated that, had 10 to 20 actual languages been created, there would have been a sufficient source from which to develop the 10 to 20 major language families containing the more than 6000 languages and dialects we have today. So, if we accept the biblical picture, today's language families reflect the parent languages created at Babel.

## Q 12. Where did our cultural and physical diversity come from?

### Short answer:

Our one human family contains great **cultural diversity**. This variety developed gradually after God confused the language of the people at Babel.

**Physical diversity** also developed after Babel. As the new people groups formed, the gene pool in each group was reduced. With a smaller gene pool, different physical characteristics developed, including skin colour. Put simply, the reduced gene pool created genetic peculiarities within each group.

### Discussion:

1. **Cultural diversity.** Cultural diversity developed gradually after God confused the language of the people at Babel. As the different people groups spread across the earth, and even divided within themselves to form different family trees, cultural values and beliefs slowly changed, developed and were passed down from one generation to the next. While cultural diversity is a positive thing, and should be respected and celebrated, it is not sacred – that is, God did not create those cultures.

2. **Physical diversity.** Before the confusion of language at Babel, the entire population of the world lived together. This meant that there was one large gene pool. As people bred within this one population, genetic information was evenly spread. This meant that, before Babel, the population had well-mixed genetic material and, therefore, everyone would have had similar characteristics – including skin colour. As the gene pool for each group was reduced, genetic peculiarities began to develop.

Skin colour can look different and, because of this, we can think that people have different skin colours. But, actually, every person has the same dark-brown skin pigment called melanin.

The only difference is that some people have more melanin and some people have less. If someone has a small amount of melanin, their skin will look very light brown or 'white'. If someone has a large amount of melanin, their skin will look very dark brown or 'black'. Most of the world's population is somewhere in between, being middle brown in colour.

Because the people groups were separate after Babel, they could no longer 'average out' the genes for skin pigmentation by breeding within the larger, original, pre-Babel population. So some groups would have on average, more genes for a greater production of melanin. These groups would then develop darker skin pigmentation than would others.

Of course, any idea of superiority based on physical characteristics is just wrong. Modern genetics shows how closely related all people are. We make up one human family. We are all made in God's image. We are all descended from Adam and Eve through Noah. This is why racism is so wrong. To judge a person's worth based on the amount of melanin in their skin is biologically foolish, historically ignorant and morally highly objectionable.

## Q 13a. Does Genesis teach that there is only one God?

Before we proceed, let's remember – this is a hot topic! We live in an age of globalisation, multiculturalism and many religions. 'Ethnic spirituality' is a given and the people in your group may sincerely believe that there are different gods for different cultures. The idea that there is only one God for the whole world might seem to them to be a kind of intolerant and prejudiced 'Christian Colonialism' where Christians are trying to impose 'Western Religion' on minority cultures. While this discussion about there being only one true God is a discussion we must have, we must have it in a good spirit. Attitude is everything. So you may need to remind your group that we are trying only to understand the Bible's own message – we are not seeking agreement on the point, just an understanding that this is the Bible's point of view.

### Short answer:

Yes. Genesis 1 takes us back to the time when the universe was made and it makes it clear that, back then, there was only one God.

### Discussion:

The story of creation reveals the following:

1. **Genesis 1:1 credits the existence of everything we know to the Creator**, not to a number of creators (i.e. other 'gods'). The biblical story begins with the maker of "*the heavens and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1).
2. **Genesis means to convey that God acted alone when he made everything that exists** (Genesis 1:3–31; 2:2–3). When the text speaks of God creating, it refers to God as 'he' (third person singular) – "And God said... and he [not 'they'] separated the light from the darkness... and the darkness he [not 'they'] called 'night'" (Genesis 1:3–5). No other 'gods' helped him – 'he' made everything. God has no equals and he has no competitors. He is God alone.

**3. God the Creator alone gave full authority over the earth to humanity** (Genesis 1:28). God did not give power to any other or lesser 'gods' – only to humans.

**4. Genesis 1 is really making a statement against other 'gods'.**

Having come out of Egypt, where people believed in more than one god, the Israelites are now on their way to Canaan whose people also worshipped many gods. So, God gave the Israelites the story of Genesis 1 to convince Israel of three things:

- a. **They should not be afraid of the so-called 'other gods'.**
- b. **They should not be tempted to worship the so-called other 'gods'.**
- c. **They should always remember that Yahweh is God alone**, the maker of everything that exists and, therefore, they should trust, obey and worship only him. While some mistakenly worshipped the sun and the moon and the stars, Israel was to remember that Yahweh made the sun, moon and stars! They are not 'gods', they are simply non-living parts of creation. While others mistakenly worshipped fertility gods, gods of the sea and animal gods – Israel needed to remember Yahweh made the sea and the animals! They are his handiwork and he is God alone.

## Q 13b. When and how did alternative religions (the worship of 'other gods') begin?

### Short answer:

At Babel, the people left the one true God and, from that moment on, began creating their own religions and worshipping 'other gods'. This is why Babylon (the place where Babel was situated) is called "*the mother of all prostitutes*" (Revelation 17:5). It was the beginning place of false religion.

### Discussion:

The New Testament's record about what happened at Babel is found in Romans 1:18–23. Note the following:

1. **There was a time when all humanity "knew God"** (1:21).
2. **God had made himself clearly known through his creation** ever since the beginning of the world: so clearly known that there was no excuse for not recognising him and worshipping him (1:19–20).
3. **Humanity turned from the one true God**, refusing to worship him or give thanks to him (1:21).
4. **This turning from God was a dark and deliberate act** (1:18) that led to the increasing darkness of the worship of idols and false religion (1:21–23).

Romans 1:18–23 appears to be talking about Babel and not about Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they did not turn to idolatry. In fact, there is no record of idolatry anywhere from Genesis 1 through to 10. Idolatry appears only from the time of the Tower of Babel. Therefore Romans 1 seems to be talking about this point in time.

## Q 14. Did God actually create the different nations and determine the exact places they would live? Or did he just let it happen?

### Short answer:

The Bible says that God created the nations. Firstly, God himself sent the confusion of language that caused the separation of the earth's population into separate people groups (Genesis 11:6–7, 9). Secondly, God scattered the people groups across the earth (Genesis 11:8–9). Thirdly, the New Testament says, *“From one man he [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us”* (Acts 17:26–27).

### Discussion:

Acts 17:26 says that God not only made the nations but also marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

#### 1. **God “marked out their appointed times in history...”** (Acts 17:26).

God is God of all the nations of the earth (not just Israel) (Psalm 24:1; 83:1–18). God has determined the rise and fall of nations politically (e.g. Daniel 2:20–21; 2:36–45; 2 Chronicles 20:5–6).

Because God created the nations (Acts 17:26a), he is automatically ruler over them and it is his right to intervene in the affairs of any nation, in any way, at any time, for any reason.

#### 2. **God “marked out... the boundaries of their lands”** (Acts 17:26).

While each people group freely went in their own direction to find a place to live, the Bible indicates God was supervising their settlement – though they were unaware of it. The Old Testament records how God assigned specific territories to Gentile (non-Jewish) nations (Deuteronomy 2:5–9; 32:8).

Acts 17:27 also says that God marked out the boundaries of the lands where nations should live so that the nations would perhaps reach out and find him. But how would this cause the nations to seek God and perhaps reach out for him and find him? How does that work?

It seems that God allocated the nations specific places to live to the north, south and east of the land of Canaan (Ezekiel 5:5) – the land Israel would eventually occupy (Genesis 15:12–21). God specifically designed it this way. Canaan was a strategic piece of land – it was actually a natural ‘land bridge’ that connected the three great continents of the ancient world. All the camel caravan traders had to pass through Canaan. Once Israel took possession of the land of Canaan, God’s presence would dwell there (first in the tabernacle, later in the temple). As travellers and traders followed the ancient caravan routes through this land, they would be made aware of Israel’s God. Acts 17:27 says God designed it this way *“so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us”*.

# STRATEGY

*why Israel?*

## Q 1. What is the point of the stories in Genesis 4-11?

### Short answer:

The stories of Genesis 4–11 are designed to show:

1. How sin had contaminated all people and all nations.
2. How sin becomes steadily worse when unchecked.
3. The problem of sin is so severe that without God's intervention there would be no hope.

### Discussion:

Following the biblical story is very important at this point. The tragic stories of Genesis 4–11 are piled one on top of the other to show the tight grip sin had on the human race.

These stories show us three things about sin:

1. **Sin had contaminated the whole human race** – not just Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, they not only blotted their personal records, they also became contaminated by evil. They became 'fallen', flawed and broken creatures. When they reproduced, they produced sinners like themselves, so that the human race itself became a fallen, broken, sinful race. These stories show that sin that had affected the first couple (Adam and Eve) had also affected the immediate family (e.g. Cain and Abel), the wider community (e.g. Lamech's song celebrates community violence) and the whole world (the reason for the flood). Even after the flood, the ugly incident between Noah and his son Ham shows that sin lies in the hearts of even the best of us. There are no exceptions.

## **2. Sin is dynamic and, left to itself, naturally gains momentum.**

In the story of Cain and Abel, rebellion leads to jealousy, jealousy to hatred, hatred to murder. In the next story, Lamech's distrust of God leads to ruthless and excessive violence. In the story of the flood, violence had become a way of life. God's first commandment given to Noah after the flood was designed to stop this violence (Genesis 9:6). The story of Babel shows that rebellion against God grew into a total rejection of God. In other words, sin is never 'asleep'; it's always 'on the go'.

## **3. There is no answer to sin apart from God's intervention.**

Shortly after these tragic stories is the story of God's calling of Abraham to begin a new nation. In the genealogies (family trees), Noah's son Shem is mentioned twice (Genesis 10:21–32; 11:10–26). This points to his critical role as the progenitor (ancestor) of Abraham (Genesis 11:26) through whom God will bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1–3), rescuing them from the problem of sin.

## Q 2a. Why do I need to know about Israel?

### Short answer:

We need to understand Israel's role in the story of the Bible for two reasons:

1. Israel is the next major piece in the biblical story.
2. Israel was appointed as God's servant nation and the special custodian of his salvation to share with the whole world. Jesus himself said, "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22).

### Discussion:

It might seem unusual to include learning about Israel but the subject is important because:

1. **Israel is the next major piece in the biblical story.** We have been thinking about God, creation, humanity, the problem of evil and the condition of the nations after Babel. Between the appearance of evil (Eden) and the solution to evil (Jesus), there is this massive part of the Bible (Genesis 12 to Acts 2) that is all about Israel. The very size of the section indicates its importance. We can't just skip over it! If we do, the story of biblical Christianity will be distorted. So, from Genesis 12 onwards, Israel is where the greater part of the Bible story takes place and it continues to be the key focus of God's activity on earth until Acts 2. That's well over three-quarters of the Bible!
2. **Israel is God's servant nation chosen to bring God's salvation.** The story of Israel is not an interruption or a small tangent – it is an essential part of the story of salvation. God created and called Israel to be the means to enable him to bring the whole world a solution to the problem of evil (Genesis 12:1–3). Jesus himself said, "*salvation is from the Jews*" (John 4:22).

## Q 2b. Why did God create the nation Israel?

### Short answer:

To bless *all* the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3).

### Discussion:

Genesis 12:3 makes it clear that God would use Israel to bring his blessing to all the families of the earth. Added to this is the fact that God called Israel to serve him as a priestly nation (Exodus 19:5–6). Priests do not exist for themselves – they have an intermediary role – their role is to be mediators between God and the people. God called Israel to this priestly role, to be an intermediary nation that would bring God to the nations and the nations to God. Having told the people of Israel that he created them for his glory (Isaiah 43:7), God then told them: “*You are my witnesses... and my servant*” (Isaiah 43:10; cf. 43:12; 44:8). God did not choose Israel as a replacement nation because the others had rejected him. He chose Israel as a servant nation through whom he would reach and bless all the nations of the earth. As his servant nation, Israel would bring to the world:

1. The knowledge of the living God
2. The Scriptures
3. The Messiah (Romans 9:4–5).

## Q 3a. Did Israel have a special relationship with God?

### Short answer:

Yes. Israel is always spoken of as God's 'chosen' nation.

### Discussion:

God told Israel: *"You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth"* (Amos 3:2). This verse alone unmistakably singles out Israel as God's special nation. Scripture elsewhere tells us that Israel is:

1. **God's "firstborn" son** (Exodus 4:22). This itself, is a title of special privilege.
2. **God's "treasured possession"** (Exodus 19:5).
3. **God's "holy [i.e. separated] nation"** (Exodus 19:6).
4. **God's "kingdom of priests"**. Israel was a priestly nation with the unique privilege and responsibility of bringing the nations back to the one true God (Exodus 19:5–6).
5. **God's beloved nation** – "the apple of [God's] eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10; Zechariah 2:8).
6. **God's "covenant" nation** (Romans 9:4). To enter into a covenant (a legal contract) with someone was a serious and sacred act. Israel's covenants were formal, legal and binding contracts that bound Israel to God (and God to Israel) for ever in a special relationship unknown to the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:12).
7. **God's protected nation**. God had put a hedge around Israel with blessings for those who honour Israel and curses for those who treat her disrespectfully (Genesis 12:3).

8. **God's uniquely privileged nation.** No other nation had the privileges God gave Israel (Psalm 147:19–20; Romans 9:1–5). Of all the nations, Israel's relationship with God is unique: *“Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have...? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you...?”* (Deuteronomy 4:33–34).

## Q 3b. Was it 'fair' that God gave Israel this special relationship?

### Short answer:

God sovereignly chose the nation of Israel in order to bless all the nations of the earth. God's choice of Israel is rooted in:

1. His sovereignty
2. His grace
3. His righteousness.

### Discussion:

God's choice of Israel is rooted in:

1. **His sovereignty.** God can do whatever he wants. Because God is the Sovereign Creator of the earth, all of it belongs to him – “The earth is the LORD’s... and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1–2) – and he can do with it “whatever pleases him” (Psalm 115:3; cf. Jeremiah 27:5). He is the potter and the nations are the clay: “*Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?*” (Romans 9:21). He can choose Israel because he is our Sovereign.

2. **His grace.** God didn't chose Israel because he thought she would be spiritually better than everyone else – she wasn't (Deuteronomy 9:4–6). He didn't choose Israel because she was the biggest and greatest of the nations – she wasn't (Deuteronomy 7:7). Nor did God choose Israel because he thought she was an exceptionally clever candidate – she wasn't (Deuteronomy 8:17–18). God's choice of Israel was wholly undeserved! His glory is most greatly seen when he takes the most unlikely and most unworthy, and graciously reveals himself in and through them (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26–31).

3. **His righteousness.** Everything God does is right – because every decision comes out of his infinite knowledge, wisdom, holiness, justice and goodness. One day, we will see fully that God's choice of Israel was indeed the right one, just like every other decision God has ever made.

## Q 4. When God chose Israel, did he abandon all other nations?

### Short answer:

Yes and no. Yes, because, following the time of Babel, God allowed the nations to follow their own religions – but not without consequences (Acts 14:16; Romans 1:18–32). No, because God did not stop his love for the nations or his sovereign control over their political futures.

### Discussion:

Remember three things:

1. God still loves the nations and chose Israel to bless them. God told Abraham that through him “*all the peoples on earth will be blessed*” (Genesis 12:3). When God called Israel to be his priestly nation (Exodus 19:5–6), it was so he could bring the nations back to himself. God is not localised, tribalised or culturised – God is the God of all the peoples (Genesis 9) and all the nations (Genesis 11).
2. God is still God of the nations, even though the nations may not acknowledge him. God is related to the nations as their:
  - a. **Sovereign Creator** (Genesis 11:6–7, 9). He allocates their national boundaries and political futures (Deuteronomy 32:8; Acts 17:26–27).
  - b. **Civil legislator**. He prescribed government for the nations (Romans 13:1–7).
  - c. **Moral governor**. His moral law is in every person’s heart (Romans 2:14–15).
  - d. **Gracious provider**. He cares for them whether they worship him or not (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:17).
  - e. **Supreme ruler**. He has authority over all the kingdoms of the earth (Daniel 2:21) and can intervene in any nation at any time.

3. God has allowed the nations to pursue their own religions (Acts 14:16) but not without consequences – “*God gave them over*” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28) to the results of their false religions. But, as we have said, this does not mean that God has abandoned the nations forever or stopped caring for, or about, them. It simply means that God has given them freedom to reject him, thought that rebellion carries consequences.

## Q 5. Why did God choose Abraham to be the father of Israel?

### Short answer:

We do not know why.

### Discussion:

According to Genesis 15:7, Nehemiah 9:7 and Acts 7:2, Abraham lived in Ur in lower Mesopotamia, the southern part of Babylonia. According to Joshua 24:2–3, Abraham’s family worshipped “other gods” at that point. These gods would have been ‘invented’ at the time of the Tower of Babel. We don’t know if Abraham was an exception to the family’s idol-worshipping religion, or whether God sovereignly revealed himself to Abraham while he was a worshipper of idols (Acts 7:2). It seems there were others, like Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18–20), who had resisted idol worship. We are not told why God sovereignly chose Abraham instead of someone else.

## Q 6. What was so unique and important about Israel's religion?

### Short answer:

Five things. Israel's religion was:

1. Monotheistic. Israel had only one God – Yahweh.
2. Prescribed. God gave Israel her belief system; she did not think it up.
3. Sacrificial. Animal sacrifice was a dominant feature of Israel's religion.
4. Messianic. Israel's hope focused on one individual person – the Messiah.
5. Universal. Israel's Messiah would be the world's saviour (deliverer).

### Discussion:

Israel's religion was:

1. **Monotheistic.** Israel had only one God – Yahweh. Other religions worshipped many gods (polytheism) but Israel was called to worship the only true God (monotheism). Deuteronomy 6:4 said, *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”* Because there is only one God, the first commandment said, *“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image...”* (Exodus 20:3–4).

2. **Prescribed.** God gave Israel her belief system; she did not think it up. While all other religions were devised and developed by people, the Bible says Israel's religion came to them directly from God – through various divine disclosures and revelations. God first revealed his plans to Abraham (Joshua 24:2–4; Acts 7:2) and later prescribed the Law for Israel (Exodus 19–24), including all the details about her system of worship (Exodus 24–40). From Moses to Malachi, the prophets of Israel repeatedly explained how *“the word of the Lord came”* to them, which is why the prophets always said, *“This is what the Lord says...”*

3. **Sacrificial.** Animal sacrifice was a dominant feature of Israel's religion. Blood sacrifice was not unique to Israel. The concept of blood sacrifice was so important that virtually all ancient religions included it in their systems. But those sacrifices were probably warped 'leftovers' from animal blood sacrifice practised ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:21; 8:20; Job 1:5). As soon as God created the nation of Israel, he set up the practice of blood sacrifice as an integral part of her people's religion. These sacrifices were given to address the problem of sin. A holy God could live among a sinful people only on the basis of substitute sacrifice. Without those sacrifices, Israel could never have had God's presence with her in the tabernacle/temple. Sin is a serious business. God cannot live with anyone unless sin is dealt with through sacrifice.

4. **Messianic.** Israel's hope focused on one individual person – the Messiah. The moment Adam and Eve sinned, God gave a serious promise that he would provide a deliverer (Genesis 3:15), and that sin and evil would not last forever. God would put an end to the miserable cycle of suffering and death. How? The promised deliverer would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). This means that human history is moving toward a final conquest of evil and a total transformation of the world. God will achieve this through the promised deliverer, later known as the Messiah, the Lord's Anointed One. Who this promised deliverer would be, how and when he would come, and what he would specifically do to fix the sin problem would be revealed only gradually over hundreds of years. This information came slowly through the prophets. By the time the Old Testament had been written, God had provided a clear and concise picture of the Messiah's identity, personality and role (Luke 24:25–27).

5. **Universal.** Israel's Messiah would be the world's saviour (deliverer). Long before God created Israel, he had the whole world on his heart! In fact, that's why he made Israel – so he could bless all the people of the earth (Genesis 12:1–3). This is why God called Israel a “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:5–6). No priest exists for himself but to serve and help others. As God's priestly nation, Israel was to stand between God and the nations of the world. Israel's job was to bring the knowledge of the one true God to the nations and to bring the nations to faith in the one true God. That's why God called the Israelites his “witnesses” (Isaiah 43:9–12; 44:8). Israel's message was clear: the God of Abraham was not a localised, tribal deity but the one true God, Yahweh, the possessor of heaven and earth (Genesis 14:19). Besides him, there is no God. Unlike the ancient gods who were believed to have authority over various geographical areas, Yahweh operates across the whole world – because it belongs to him. Israel was strategically placed in the middle of the nations to shine her light for Yahweh (Ezekiel 5:5; Deuteronomy 32:8).

## Q 7a. When did animal sacrifice begin?

### Short answer:

It began in the Garden of Eden when God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins (Genesis 3:20–21).

### Discussion:

As far as the Bible is concerned, the first animal sacrifice took place immediately after Adam and Eve sinned. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they could approach God freely. They had an intimate and informal fellowship between them. But once Adam and Eve sinned, free access to God was over! Now because of humanity's sinful condition, God required an animal sacrifice and God himself provided it (Genesis 3:21). Genesis 4:1–16 indicates that sacrifice was a key part of the first family's religious faith. It is important to note that, as far as the Bible is concerned, animal sacrifice was not humanity's idea. It did not originate with the various world religions that were devised and developed after the time of the Tower of Babel. The Bible says it was God's idea and that he established it as soon as sin entered the world. When God created the nation of Israel he ensured sacrifice was a key part of Israel's religion.

## Q 7b. Why did God require animal sacrifice?

### Short answer:

The penalty for sin is death (Genesis 2:17). Because God is holy and just, the penalty of sin cannot be avoided – it must be paid. Because God is loving and gracious, he diverted the penalty away from the sinner and on to the substitute animal.

### Discussion:

The sacrificial system is an extraordinarily gracious provision from a holy God to sinful people. By means of the system of animal sacrifice, God can maintain his holiness and, at the same time, accept sinful people – the just penalty for sin having been paid by a substitute.

By offering sacrifices (national or personal), the people were:

1. Confessing their sinfulness and their sins to God
2. Acknowledging that their sin deserved death; when the people laid their hands on the head of the substitute animal, their sins were symbolically transferred to the animal (Leviticus 1:4; 3:2; 16:21)
3. Expressing faith in God's word that such a sacrifice would be an acceptable payment and bring forgiveness to the person offering it (the offerer).

## Q 7c. Does animal sacrifice mean that God is blood-thirsty and doesn't care about animals?

### Short answer:

No. Animal sacrifice is an extreme measure that shows the seriousness of sin.

### Discussion:

1. **God cares for animals.** Animals were part of God's creation that he had already called good (Genesis 1:31). It is obvious from the Law of Moses that God cares for animals. Under that Law, domesticated animals were to have the same day of rest (the Sabbath day) as humans had (Exodus 20:10); they could not be cruelly exploited (Deuteronomy 25:4) any more than humans could be cruelly exploited (Deuteronomy 23:24–25). The people had to look after animals even if they did not like their owner, did not know their owner or even if they were ownerless (Exodus 23:5; Deuteronomy 22:4). But humans have been given control over animals (Genesis 1:26). They are not made in the image of God as humans are (Genesis 1:26–27) and, therefore, they are not sacred – they can be used for food, clothing, leather goods, etc. But even in using animals for food, the Law demanded that animals be caused the least amount of pain (Leviticus 22:28; Deuteronomy 22:6–7). Even the Sabbath law could be broken if an animal was in pain or in danger of dying, as Jesus showed (Luke 14:5).

2. **God has required the use of animals for sacrifice.** As the Sovereign Creator and the offended deity, it's God's right to determine how sin will be paid for and forgiven. God's decision to use animals as sacrifices for sin is not meant to lower our opinion of animals. Instead, animal sacrifice should make us realise the seriousness of sin. God thinks of sin in such serious terms that he has imposed the penalty of death for those who sin. By its sin against God, humanity owed its very life as a payment to God, and animal sacrifice is the best way to recognise the dreadfulness of that penalty.

### **3. Animals are suited to sacrifice precisely because they are innocent**

**of wrongdoing.** Because animals are not made in the likeness of God, they are not 'moral' beings. They have no moral capacity. In fact, *"our whole moral vocabulary (values and choices, obligation, conscience, freedom and will, right and wrong, guilt and shame) is meaningless to animals."* They are not capable of moral guilt. Therefore, they are guiltless and morally innocent. So if we ask what the poor animal did wrong to be selected as a sacrificial offering, the answer has to be: "Nothing at all!". The animal had done nothing wrong – and certainly nothing worthy of death. But that is precisely the point! Because the animal had done nothing wrong, it was a guiltless and innocent living creature. And so, it was perfectly qualified to symbolically stand in the place of the guilty living person, and offer its guiltless life in substitute payment for the life of the guilty one.

## Q 8. Why did each animal have to be perfect?

### Short answer:

The animal had to be perfect, not just because God deserves the best, but to show it was in full health, and that the only possible explanation for its death was as a ritual sacrifice for sin.

### Discussion:

An animal selected for sacrifice had to be “*without defect or blemish*” (Leviticus 22:21) – it couldn’t be blind, wounded, sick, malnourished or imperfect in any way. A person was not permitted to drag an already-dead animal to the altar and present it before God. After all, that dead animal might have died for any number of reasons other than as a sacrifice for sin. It might have been poisoned or starved to death, drowned or been accidentally killed (be it by a person or another animal), or it might have died of some sickness. The animal had to be in excellent health, not just because God was worthy of the very best, but because there needed to be no misunderstanding about how and why the animal had died. In ritual sacrifice, the animal had to be purposefully and deliberately killed and its fresh blood poured on the altar by a priest as an acknowledgement of that person’s sin and spiritual indebtedness to God.

## Q 9a. Did animal blood take sins away?

### Short answer:

No. The book of Hebrews tells us that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). But offering the blood of animals did result in real payment and forgiveness (Leviticus 1:4), if the sacrifice was offered in faith.

### Discussion:

1. It is clear that in the Old Testament **when animal sacrifices were offered in faith, real forgiveness was freely available** (Leviticus 1:4; 2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 32:1 and 103:12; Isaiah 38:17). That forgiveness was real – it was not fake, hesitant or ‘half-baked’. On being forgiven, the offerer had a sure word that the particular sin in question was gone (Leviticus 1:4). God had taken it away.

2. **But Hebrews 10:4 says that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins.** So how could God forgive on the basis of animal sacrifice?

3. **Unknown to the offerer, God’s forgiveness was not granted because of the value of the animal’s blood.** Instead, God’s forgiveness was being granted because of the value of the blood of Jesus. Even though Jesus had not yet died, his death had been set in place as a sure thing before the beginning of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8). In reality, God was granting true forgiveness – but it was based on the value of the death of Jesus. So when the offerer brought their animal sacrifice, God graciously credited to that sacrifice the saving value of the blood of Jesus, yet to be shed. In other words, even though the Old Testament worshipper was unaware of Jesus’ future sacrifice, amazingly it was only on the basis of Jesus’ shed blood that the Old Testament offerer was forgiven. But the moment Jesus died, no more sacrifices were necessary, because his blood (unlike the blood of animals) took away the sin problem forever (Hebrews 10:16–18).

## Q 9b. Why did sacrifice need to be repeated continually?

### Short answer:

When the offerer brought a sacrifice for a particular sin, real forgiveness was obtained for that sin. The problem was that, after the offerer had been forgiven, they would sin again, requiring the need for another sacrifice. It was an endless process – day after day, year after weary year... until the death of Christ.

# MESSIAH

*what's so special about Jesus anyway?*

## Q 1. Is there evidence for Jesus' existence outside of the Bible?

### Short answer:

Yes, there are secular writings that refer to Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings, his alleged miracles, his death and his alleged resurrection.

### Discussion:

There are a number of ancient secular documents from Rome and regions within the Roman Empire that make reference to the real historical person known as Jesus of Nazareth:

1. **Caius Suetonius Tranquillus** (Roman historian who lived during the reign of Roman Emperors Trajan and Hadrian, and was secretary to Hadrian). In Claudius 25.4, a section in *"The Twelve Caesars"*, Suetonius referred to Jewish Christians who followed "Chrestus their leader" and who, in AD 49, were expelled from Rome (cf. Acts 18:2).

2. **Cornelius Tacitus** (Roman historian who lived from AD 55 to AD 120, Governor of Asia/Turkey around AD 112, famous for his writings, *Annals* and *Histories*, which, together, span the period from the death of Caesar Augustus in AD 14 to the death of Domitian in AD 96). Tacitus referred to Christians as followers of "*Christus, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator [governor] Pontius Pilate*" (Annals 15.44). Tacitus confirms many historical details referred to in the Gospels.

3. **Pliny the Younger** (Roman historian, who also served some time as a governor of the Roman provinces of Pontus and Bithynia during the reign of Emperor Trajan). In his Epistles 10.96–97, Pliny referred to Christians who refused to worship Trajan and also refused to curse their leader "Christ". He also refers to how Christians worshipped Christ as 'a god'.

4. **Flavius Josephus** (Jewish historian who lived from AD 37 to AD 97, emigrated to Rome after AD 70, and served as historian to Emperor Vespasian). In his *Antiquities* 20.9.1, he refers to James, “*the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ*”. In *Antiquities* 18.3.3, Josephus makes reference to Jesus, his miraculous works, his identity as the Messiah and his resurrection.

5. **Lucian of Samosata** (a Greek satirist living in the Roman Empire and former government official in Alexandria, Egypt, during the reign of Hadrian). Lucian referred indirectly to Jesus in *The Passing of Peregrinus*, but the reference to Jesus of Nazareth as a real person is clear: “*The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day... who... was crucified... from the moment they are converted, [they] deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws...*”

6. **Thallus** (a historian, who wrote even earlier than when the Gospels were written and recorded a history of the eastern Mediterranean from the Trojan Wars until his own day). Apparently his work is lost, apart from a few fragments, but his work is referred to by Sextus Julius Africanus (historian of third century AD, born in Libya but emigrated to Jerusalem – wrote the five-volume *History of the World* in about AD 220). Africanus takes issue with Thallus over the uncanny darkness observed by all at the time of the execution of Christ. Thallus had tried to explain the darkness as an eclipse of the sun. Africanus argued against him, saying it was impossible at full moon (Passover) for there to be an eclipse of the moon because, at that time, relative to the position of the earth, the moon is situated opposite the sun.

## Q 2. Aren't these secular (non-religious) references to Jesus really quite limited and insignificant?

### Short answer:

It is true that there are not many secular sources that refer to Jesus of Nazareth. But the secular information that is available is quite significant.

### Discussion:

For reasons why there are not many ancient sources that mention Jesus, see question 3 below. But, what *is* available is significant. When summarised, the secular sources listed under question 1 give us enough information to form a reasonably broad outline of Jesus' life:

1. Jesus existed in Israel.
2. Jesus taught in Judea.
3. Jesus was called 'Christ'.
4. Jesus' followers were called 'Christians'.
5. Jesus' followers worshipped him as a deity.
6. Jesus' followers were devoted to him and refused to worship Caesar.
7. Jesus had a brother called James.
8. Jesus was known to be wise.
9. Jesus was known as the Jews' King.
10. Jesus was called 'Messiah'.
11. Jesus had a reputation for miracles or 'magic'.
12. Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.
13. Jesus' tomb was empty.
14. Jesus' followers claim that he rose again, and endured persecution for that belief.

*"Overall, at least seventeen non-Christian writings record more than fifty details concerning the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus..."* 102

### Q 3. Why has secular history recorded so little about the life of Jesus if he is so important?

#### Short answer:

There is no short answer to this question – see the discussion below.

#### Discussion:

There are many reasons why there are not more secular references to Jesus of Nazareth:

**1. Not many documents from the ancient Greeks and Romans survived.** There does not appear to be much ancient documentation (AD 30s to 60s) available on any subject. Philo, the Alexandria-based Jewish philosopher (20 BC to AD 50), was a prolific writer but his interest was in exploring how Jewish religion influenced Greek culture/philosophy – so he would have had no specific interest in a controversial countryside preacher called Jesus. Other than Philo, from the AD 30s (Jesus' lifetime) there are only fragments from the inexperienced historian Paterculus; from the AD 40s, some fables of one writer, Phaedrus; from AD 50s and 60s, works remain from only a few writers including Seneca (a Roman governor/politician).

**2. Jesus didn't register on the Roman 'Richter scale'.** John P Meier, a modern-day 'Jesus scholar', reminds us that we need to see Jesus in perspective. While Jesus had a significant impact in Galilee and Jerusalem, on the big scale of things, Jesus was never thought of as being significant to the Roman authorities. Meier says: *"Jesus was a marginal Jew leading a marginal movement in a marginal province of a vast Roman Empire."* This marginalism relates not only to Jesus, but to others in Israel at that time. For instance, even Pontius Pilate is not mentioned in any Roman histories, except when Tacitus refers to him in connection with Jesus. In fact, there is nothing mentioned about any Roman governor of Judea.

3. **People claiming to be the Messiah were ‘a dime a dozen’ in Jesus’ time** and many think that Jesus was only one voice among them – so he was not singled out for special attention. Even the miraculous nature of Jesus’ ministry was labelled as ‘superstition’ and not believed to be true at all by many (Matthew 12:24).

4. **Religion did not figure prominently in ancient Greek and Roman histories.** The Romans were way more interested in the politics of the empire than the claims of small ‘fringe’ religious groups (cf. remarks made by Festus regarding Paul in Acts 25:19).

5. **Tactical omission.** Some historians showed their disapproval of those with whom they did not agree by completely ignoring them. This could also explain why Jesus is not mentioned more often in secular sources.

## Q 4. Is it true that Christians rely almost totally on the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament for information about Jesus? Can the Gospels be trusted to give us reliable information about Jesus?

### Short answer:

Yes. Christians take the four *Gospels* and the rest of the *New Testament* as their primary and sufficient authority for their belief that Jesus of Nazareth actually existed and was the Christ, the Son of God. Christians believe the Gospels provide a reliable history of Jesus because:

1. They were written by men determined to record the truth
2. The information in them conforms with what we know of history at that time.

### Discussion:

There are seven points that support the truthfulness of the Gospel writers:

1. **They wrote honestly.** That is, they were committed to investigating and reporting the facts (Luke 1:1–4). Matthew and John were ‘direct’ eyewitnesses of all that happened, having been with Jesus from the beginning (Matthew 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16; Acts 1:12–13, 21–22). Mark and Luke were not apostles but were ‘indirect’ witnesses: Luke was a ‘no-nonsense’ historian who went to great efforts to collect eyewitness accounts (Luke 1:1–4) and was a travelling companion of the apostle Paul; and Mark was the apostle Peter’s personal writing assistant. As witnesses, they were certainly ‘in the know’. Critics have supposed that, because the Gospel writers had a theological agenda (i.e. to favourably present Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah), their histories cannot be trusted. But, in response, three things must be said:

- a. **Having a theological agenda probably made them even more careful and precise in their reporting.** They would not want anyone to criticise their historical reports and therefore question their theology/research.
- b. **The love they had for Jesus and the respect they had for telling the truth was so deeply ingrained they recorded precisely what he said and did.**
- c. **People with ideological agendas can still write the truth** – as did the Jews who recorded the history of the holocaust. Of course they were passionate about their cause, but that does not mean they weren't accurate. Just because someone is French and is passionate about French history does not mean they cannot write an accurate history of France! In fact, someone who is passionate about French history is likely to be very exact in their presentation.

## 2. **They wrote with integrity – even if the truth made them look bad.**

They included the Jesus story 'warts and all'. There are things in their Gospels that, had the authors been even slightly biased, they might well have left out. For example, embarrassing things (like Peter's denial, or like James and John's crass jostling for power and position in the coming kingdom, or like the disciples falling asleep during their watch in the crucial hours of Gethsemane). Difficult things (like Jesus saying he did not know the day or the hour of his return, or his cry from the cross, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" [Matthew 27:46]). Or demanding things, like "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Matthew 5:48), or "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children... such a person cannot be my disciple*" (Luke 14:26).

Clearly, the Gospel writers were not constructing a doctored account to pull the wool over their readers' eyes. Otherwise, they would have left out these embarrassing and difficult bits. No, the reason they included them was they were committed to telling the story as it really happened – warts and all.

3. **They wrote freely and independently.** None of them was forced into producing a contrived or concocted story. That's why there are differences between all four Gospels. Scholars report a 10% to 40% variable range of material between the Gospels. But those differences are important and we should be glad for them. They show the writers were not being controlled to produce a piece of religious propaganda. The writers were free to present their own perspectives. Despite the variations between the Gospels, there are no real contradictions.

4. **They wrote plainly.** The record they present is clear and plain. There is no attempt to hide anything to avoid criticism or objection. The Gospel records were open to the most intense scrutiny – they were able to be read by the eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus (friends and enemies) who were still alive when the Gospels were written (Acts 2:22). Had the Gospel records contained false information, the eyewitnesses would have no doubt exposed any errors.

5. **They wrote bravely.** They wrote knowing they may well pay the ultimate price for their efforts. As it turns out, 10 of the 12 New Testament apostles were killed because of their religious beliefs. The question is: Would such men die for what they knew to be a story full of lies?

6. **They wrote accurately.** Luke's writings (Luke and Acts) have proved to be extremely accurate. Luke mentions the names of many people, 32 countries, 54 cities, nine islands and, so far, archaeologists and historians have found no discrepancies between what Luke says and verified history. Also, archaeologists have been finding proof of places in John's Gospel including the pavement stone (John 19:13), the existence of the pools of Bethesda (John 5:2) and Siloam (John 9:7), and Jacob's well (John 4:6). Recent archaeological and historical discoveries have only confirmed the truthfulness and reliability of the Gospels. Serious scholars are also prepared to say that, to date, neither archaeology nor history has disproved anything in the Gospels and Acts.

Of course, geo-historical accuracy does not prove Jesus was who he claimed to be. But it certainly adds to the reliability of the credibility of the Gospels as a whole – including the truthfulness of their message. So archaeology ‘tips the scales’ and helps us trust the Gospel record that says Jesus actually claimed to be the Messiah.

7. **They wrote reasonably quickly.** While skeptics of evangelical Christianity have always insisted the Gospels were written long after Jesus lived, there is very good reason to believe that Matthew, Mark and Luke were all written by eyewitnesses of Jesus and their associates before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. (see question 6 below).

The early dating and eyewitness character of the Gospel accounts certainly establishes their solid historical reliability.

## Q 5. What makes Christians think the writers of the Gospels could remember the words and works of Jesus so accurately?

### Short answer:

The Gospel writers could remember the words and works of Jesus accurately because:

1. Events recorded within 30 years do not require extreme recall
2. They lived in a world that practised the discipline of 'oral tradition'
3. Jesus said and did things more than once (John 21:25)
4. Jesus was a memorable teacher (rabbi) who taught and acted in 'unforgettable' ways
5. Written records of Jesus' life and teachings were available long before the Gospels were written
6. The Holy Spirit gave special help in the recall process.

### Discussion:

The Gospel writers could remember the words and works of Jesus accurately because:

#### 1. **Events recorded within 30 years do not require extreme recall.**

A gap of 30 years, between the event and the recording of it, is close enough to guarantee a very accurate recall. As we age, we can still easily remember events and conversations going back 40 to 50 years (weddings, funerals, births, engagements, reunions, career events, friendships, school experiences, childhood holidays, etc.). Sometimes when relating such events or conversations we say, "I remember it like it was yesterday". In fact, many reliable histories (books, TV documentaries) use this kind of 'eyewitness recall' as they retell the events of the past. If we have that recall, surely the writers of the Gospels had that recall over a much shorter period of time – especially given the significance of all they witnessed.

**2. They lived in a world that practised the discipline of ‘oral tradition’.**

The Gospels were not written on the spur of the moment. They were written after years of telling the story over and over again in an ancient (pre-technical) society skilled in the discipline of memorisation and ‘oral transmission’. Each time the story was told, it was subject to exacting criticism and correction – from both supporters and non-believers. ‘Oral transmission’ was the key method of preserving important information and the process was subject to serious scrutiny.

**3. Jesus said and did things more than once** (John 21:25). What has been recorded would have been the substance of his repeated sermons over a three-and-a-half-year period.

**4. Jesus was a memorable teacher who taught and acted in unforgettable ways** – both in what he said and the way he said it. His teaching was calculated so it would never be forgotten (Matthew 7:28–29; John 7:46). The people said it clearly: “No one ever spoke like this man!” (John 7:46). What Jesus said and did, he said and did repeatedly in the most unforgettable ways over a three-and-a-half-year period. His words and works would have been firmly fixed in the minds of the eyewitnesses.

**5. Written records of Jesus’ life and teachings were available long before the Gospels were written.** Luke specifically mentions the existence of these eyewitness records – that there were many of them, and that he used them in writing about the life of Jesus (Luke 1:1–4).

**6. The Holy Spirit gave special help in the recall process.** This ensured that they had a perfect recall of all he said and did (John 14:26).

## Q 6. How long was it between the events of Jesus' life and the writing of the Gospels? How can we be sure there was only a short time between these events?

### Short answer:

There's not really a long time between the events of Jesus' life and the writing of the Gospels. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke were written by AD 61–62 at the latest and many scholars think John's Gospel could have been written anywhere between AD 55 and AD 95.

### Discussion:

An early date for the writing of the Gospel records makes the Gospels very believable because:

1. They were written close enough to the time of the actual events of Jesus to ensure accurate recall
2. Eyewitnesses were still alive and would have corrected any errors in the Gospel records
3. This closeness of time means there was not enough time for myth to develop and change the real history of Jesus.

Evangelical scholars have always argued that the evidence actually points to the Gospels being written very soon after Jesus lived. Here's the basis of their argument:

1. **The Book of Acts had to be written before AD 70** because it doesn't record the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). Something so momentous as the destruction of Jerusalem could not have been missed.

2. **The Book of Acts had to be written before the mid-60s AD** because there is no mention of the Jewish war with Rome (AD 66).

3. **The Book of Acts had to be written before AD 62** because, while Acts mentions a good deal about James, Peter and Paul, it doesn't include any of their deaths (James died AD 62, Paul and Peter mid-to-late 60s).

4. **Luke's Gospel had to have been written before AD 62.** Luke's Gospel, being volume 1 (see Acts 1:1–2), had to be written before the book of Acts, being volume 2. If Acts (volume 2) was written in AD 62, then the Gospel of Luke (volume 1) must have been written earlier than AD 62.

5. **If the Gospel of Luke was written around AD 61–62 then, in all probability, Matthew and Mark's Gospels must have been written even earlier, perhaps in the 50s.** Even liberal (non-evangelical) critics agree on a very early date for the Gospels, e.g. William Foxwell Albright (probably the most famous of all American archaeologists), Colin Hemer (contemporary English classics scholar) and Dr John A T Robinson (former Bishop of Woolwich and leader of the 1960s' 'Death of God' movement). This means that the earliest Gospels were written within 25–30 years of Jesus' death and resurrection.

## Q 7. Why do critics of evangelical Christianity argue that the Gospels were written at a later date?

### Short answer:

By putting the writing of the Gospels at a later date, the critics then feel comfortable arguing that too much time had passed for there to be any accurate record of the words and works of Jesus. This means the issues about the difficult teachings and miraculous works of Jesus can be avoided.

### Discussion:

Critics of evangelical Christianity have always been keen to put the writing of the Gospels somewhere between the late first century and well into the second century AD. By doing this, they put considerable distance between the events of Jesus and the recording of them – at least 100 years. Then they argue that because the records were written much later than the original events happened, they cannot be reliable records of those events. Who could possibly remember what was actually said and done that long ago? Who could tell what had been exaggerated, added to or distorted over such a long period of time? Then they suggest that the Church of the second century made up these documents to show what they wanted to believe about Jesus and what they wanted others to believe as well. In other words, for liberals, the Gospels were dressed up as if they were actual history. But, they say, the Gospels in no way represent a true picture of the life of the real Jesus.

This late dating system conveniently solves some of the problems critics have about Jesus. For instance, it allows them to suggest that the stories about his miraculous powers and predictions were, in fact, distortions and exaggerations (if not downright lies). For the critics then, the records are ‘spiritual myths’ – manufactured stories that contain spiritual principles. By arguing for a late date of the writing of the Gospels, they then say we have no way of knowing the real Jesus or his gospel.

But this late dating of the Gospels by the critics seems to have been a groundless and deliberate attempt to undermine the Gospel records. And, it ignores the ample evidence of their eyewitness’ credentials.

## Q 8. Who has the original Gospel writings? If we don't have the original Gospels, doesn't this destroy the credibility of the Jesus story?

### Short answer:

No one has the originals. They have not been preserved and therefore do not exist. However, we have reliable copies of the originals.

### Discussion:

Not having 'originals' is not just a 'Bible' problem! When we start to think about the writings of the ancient past (like the classical works of other writers, e.g. Homer, Plutarch, Suetonius, etc.), we have to readily admit we do not have the originals as they were written on materials that perished as they aged. But no one doubts that originals of these classical works existed. If we have copies, we know there must have been an original (in the same way 15 photocopies of a paper mean there must have been an original document or, in the same way, 135 art prints mean there must have been an original painting).

Because reliable copies of the original classical works exist (and, in some cases, there are about ten manuscript copies of these classical works in existence), historians accept these ancient works as real history. No one doubts that the originals existed and no one doubts the manuscript copies are reliable records of ancient history. As we read ancient history, we are reading copies of copies of copies – but we also know we are reading real history. In contrast, the credibility and reliability of the New Testament text is much better attested than that of the well-established classical works of history, in two ways:

**1. There are a huge number of New Testament manuscripts in existence.** The best-supported classical work is Homer's Iliad (643 copies). Most of the classical works are based on only 10 to 20 copies. But the New Testament is supported by more than 24,000 manuscripts – in round figures, there are 5700 Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin manuscripts and 9300 other early versions (e.g. Syrian, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, etc.).

In addition to the New Testament manuscripts, we have over 100,000 letters written by the early Christians and the Church Fathers and, in those 100,000 letters, reference is made to 99% of the New Testament's 8000 verses – which gives even greater confirmation of what had been written! The great meticulous New Testament scholar and textual critic Bruce Metzger has claimed that, even if we had lost all the Greek manuscripts and all early translations, *“we could still reproduce the contents of the New Testament from the multiplicity of quotations in commentaries, sermons, letters... of the early Church Fathers.”*

**2. The New Testament manuscripts were written very much closer to the originals.** As for the classical works, there is a big gap of time between the originals and the manuscript copies. For instance, the history of Thucydides (written from 460 BC to 400 BC) is based on eight manuscripts dated about AD 900 – that is 1300 years after the original. Aristotle's Poetics was written around 343 BC but the earliest copies we have are dated around AD 1100 – that is 1400 years after the original. Plato lived from 427 BC to 347 BC but our copies of his writings are dated about 1300 years later. The smallest gap is for Homer's Iliad (400 years) but, for most, there's a gap of 750 to 1600 years. As for the New Testament, we have copies of some parts of the New Testament books dated approximately AD 95, some 28 copies of whole New Testament books from AD 200, *“and most of the New Testament, including all the Gospels are available in the Chester Beatty Papyri from 150 years after the New Testament was finished”.*

## Q 9. Did Jesus claim to be the Messiah?

### Short answer:

Yes. Three of Jesus' recorded claims to be the Messiah are found in Matthew 16:16–17, Matthew 26:63–64 and John 4:25–26.

1. Matthew 16:16–17. When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was: *“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.’”* Jesus didn't object to Peter's answer but highly approved of it! Jesus even said that God had revealed his Messiahship to Peter and then he blessed Peter for giving the correct answer.

2. Matthew 26:63–64. At Jesus' trial before he was crucified, he claimed to be the Messiah even though this would land him in big trouble: *“The high priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’ ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied.”*

3. John 4:25–26. When a Samaritan woman told Jesus that she was expecting the coming Messiah, *“Jesus declared, ‘I, the one speaking to you—I am he.’”*

## Q 10a. What does it mean that Jesus is 'Messiah'?

### Short answer:

The word 'Messiah' means 'anointed one'. When the Bible says that Jesus is the Messiah, it means that Jesus is God's specially anointed servant. God had other servants who were referred to as his anointed servants (e.g. Israel, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus) but God predicted the coming of one special anointed servant, Jesus the Messiah.

## Q 10b. Where was it predicted that the Messiah would be both God and man?

### Short answer:

Some Old Testament predictions that the Messiah would be God and man are found in Psalm 110:1, Isaiah 9:6–7, Jeremiah 23:5–6 and Micah 5:2.

### Discussion:

The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be both God and man. The following four prophecies show this:

1. **Psalm 110:1.** *“The LORD says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”* Psalm 110 was a psalm of David. The first person referred to in the psalm is Yahweh, translated as “LORD”. The second person referred to is “my lord”, meaning David’s Lord. So who was David’s Lord? When David wrote this psalm, he was the King of Israel. No one was greater in position than King David. The only person greater than David would be the Messiah (his descendant).

Yahweh says to the Messiah to sit at his right hand. We learn from 1 Kings 2:19–20 that someone who sits at a king’s right hand is given equal authority to the king. When one king made a formal visit to another king, he would sit at his host’s right hand because they were both equals. Since the Messiah is invited to sit at God’s right hand, it follows that the Messiah must be equal with God.

2. **Isaiah 9:6–7.** *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”*

In this prophecy, Isaiah calls the Messiah, who will rule over David's kingdom on David's throne, a "child", "son" and "Mighty God". The two names, "child" and "son", show that the Messiah will be a human male and will begin as a baby "born" "to us". The phrase "Mighty God" has been taken by some to mean 'mighty hero', but, since it is used in the very next chapter (Isaiah 10:21) of Yahweh (God), it should be taken in the same way here in Isaiah 9:6.

**3. Jeremiah 23:5–6.** *“The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.”* Jeremiah teaches that the LORD (Yahweh) will raise up for David a king. This refers to the Davidic king, the Messiah, who would be descended from David (see also Jeremiah 33:15) – this means the Messiah is a man.

The name of the Messiah is revealed in this prophecy. The Messiah will be called, “The LORD [Yahweh] Our Righteous Savior”. Both “Yahweh” and “Righteous Savior” express the Messiah’s nature and character. Since God calls the Messiah “Yahweh”, the Messiah is of course Yahweh (God).

**4. Micah 5:2.** *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”* This prophecy in Micah teaches that the Messiah will come from one of the clans of the tribe of Judah and will be born in Bethlehem. This means the Messiah will be a man. The prophecy further describes the origin of the Messiah as being “from old, ancient times”. These words used in this specific phrase are the strongest Hebrew words that could be used for an endless past and mean that the Messiah is eternal. Since God is the only person who is eternal, this verse teaches that the Messiah is the eternal God.

## Q 10c. Why did the Messiah need to be God?

### Short answer:

There are two reasons why the Messiah had to be God: (1) he needed to be God to restore the world into a place of peace; and (2) he needed to be God to restore the people to himself.

### Discussion:

The Messiah needed to be God because:

1. **He would restore the world.** In the future, the Messiah will change the world into a place of perfect peace (Isaiah 9:7). No human being could change the world into a place of perfect peace. Isaiah 9:6 tells us that the human Messiah will bring universal peace because he is also the “Mighty God”.

2. **He would restore people to God.** To do this, the Messiah needed to pay the penalty for sin. The penalty for sin was eternal separation from God (Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:14; 21:8). The Messiah needed to be eternal so he was able to pay the penalty of eternal separation. Because Jesus was an eternal person (God), the separation Jesus would suffer on the cross had an eternal dimension to it (see question 5 below in the study of Jesus’ death).

In short, only God can fix the consequences of sin and the cause of sin.

## Q 11a. Did Jesus actually claim to be God?

### Short answer:

Yes. The Gospels tell us Jesus claimed to be God in three ways:

1. Jesus said he was equal with God.
2. Jesus used God's actual names for himself.
3. Jesus exercised God's exclusive rights as his own.

### Discussion:

#### 1. Jesus said he was equal with God:

- a. **Mark 14:36.** When Jesus prayed, he called God "Abba, Father". The Jews called God 'Father', but never 'Abba, Father'. That was a term used only by Christ. By saying "Abba, Father", Jesus was claiming to be of the same substance as the Father – just as any son is of the same substance as his father.
- b. **John 5:16–18.** When the Jews persecuted Jesus for healing people on the Sabbath, Jesus defended his actions by saying, "*My Father is always at his work to this very [Sabbath] day, and I, too, am working*". Jesus is saying that what he did on the Sabbath was actually the work of God himself. The Jews understood precisely what Jesus was saying and tried to execute him because, "*he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God*".
- c. **John 10:30–39.** Jesus said: "*I and the Father are one*" (John 10:30). While some (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses) argue Jesus is not claiming equality with the Father, the Jews' decision to execute Jesus for 'blasphemy' (John 10:31–33, 39) and Jesus' lengthy response (John 10:32, 34–38) show that Jesus fully intended his words to be taken as a claim to be God. Jesus has clearly said that he is God's Son (John 10:36). If a man has a son, the son will automatically be of the same substance (i.e. the man's son will, like his father, be a human being). If an ape has a son, the son will be an ape of the same substance as its father. If a dog has a son, it too will be of the same substance as its father (i.e. a dog).

And if God has a Son, the Son will be of the same substance as his Father (i.e. he too will be God). Jesus is clearly claiming to be equal with God because he is of the same substance as God – he is God's Son. Other verses where Jesus speaks of himself as God's Son include Matthew 11:25–30, Matthew 24:36 and John 3:16–18. Other verses where God speaks of Jesus as his Son include Matthew 3:17 and Matthew 17:5.

- d. **John 14:9–11.** Jesus said: *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”*

Note: While Christians are sons (and daughters) by adoption, Jesus is God's *only* son by divine nature (see John 3:16, Luke 1:32,35; 3:22; 5:7)

## 2. Jesus used God's actual names for himself:

- a. **Matthew 22:41–46.** Jesus is going 'head-to-head' with the Pharisees about his claim to be Messiah. Jesus quotes a Psalm about Messiah – Psalm 110:1. In that Psalm (v. 1), David says his Messianic son (descendant) was also his 'Eternal Lord' (Hebrew: 'Adonai'): *“The LORD [Yahweh] says to my Lord [Adonai]: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’”*

By claiming to be David's Messianic son, Jesus is also claiming to be David's Eternal Lord, as shown in Psalm 110:1! That means Jesus is taking to himself the name 'Adonai', the common Old Testament name for God used in place of Yahweh. In taking this name, Jesus is making himself equal with God.

- b. **John 8:12.** Jesus said: *“I am the light of the world.”* In describing himself this way, Jesus was equating himself with Yahweh – *“The LORD is my light and my salvation”* (Psalm 27:1). cf. John 8:58–59. Jesus said: *“before Abraham was born, I am!”* Jesus was taking the divine name of Yahweh to himself (cf. Exodus 3:14).

d. **John 10:11.** Jesus said: *“I am the good shepherd.”* Jesus was taking the divine name to himself – *“The LORD is my shepherd”* (Psalm 23:1).

### 3. **Jesus exercised God’s exclusive rights as his own:**

a. **Jesus exercised God’s right to forgive sins** (Matthew 9:1–8; Luke 5:20–21). We can forgive those who sin against us (Matthew 6:12, 18:35; Ephesians 4:32) but we cannot forgive anyone’s sin against God or other people. In forgiving sins, Jesus was making himself equal with God.

b. **Jesus exercised God’s right to give eternal life** (John 4:13–14; 5:39–40; 6:27, 33, 40, 47–51, 58; 10:28–29; 11:25–26).

c. **Jesus exercised God’s right to raise the dead.** In the Old Testament, only Yahweh could raise the dead (John 5:21) but Jesus exercises that right (John 11:43–44) and claims he will raise from the dead all who believe in him at the last day (John 6:39–40).

d. **Jesus said that his words, like God’s words, would last forever.** Isaiah the prophet said, *“the word of our God endures forever”* (Isaiah 40:8). Jesus said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away”* (Matthew 24:35). Jesus was claiming his words are as eternal as God’s words.

e. **Jesus said he would exercise God’s right to judge every human being:** *“the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father”* (John 5:22–23). Jesus claimed to have the authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (John 5:27). See also Matthew 25:31–34, 41 and 46 where Jesus claims to be the one who sends people to eternal punishment or to eternal life.

## Q 11b. What does it mean that Jesus is the 'Son of God'?

### Short answer:

The term 'Son of God' means two things: (1) that Jesus is God's appointed King; and (2) that Jesus is God's unique Son.

### Discussion:

#### 1. In the Old Testament, 'son of God' was used in a royal sense

(2 Samuel 7:11–16; 1 Chronicles 17:10–14; Psalm 2:7). The kings of Israel were referred to as 'God's sons'. Therefore, 'Son of God' is a title indicating that Jesus is God's appointed King (Messiah).

#### 2. In the New Testament, 'Son of God' was used in a relational

**sense.** In John 5:17, Jesus called God "his Father", meaning that Jesus was calling himself God's 'Son' in a relational sense. The Jewish leaders who heard Jesus call God his 'Father' "tried all the more to kill him". Why? They reacted this way because, by calling God his own 'Father', "he was... making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). When Jesus called God his 'Father', he was claiming to be God's unique 'Son' (i.e. fully equal with God).

## Q 12. If there is only one God, how could Jesus claim to be God? If Jesus were God, wouldn't this make two Gods?

### Short answer:

There is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6, 8; 1 Timothy 2:5) but there are three persons in the God-being – we call this the Trinity.

### Discussion:

From the beginning of the Old Testament, we know there is only one God – he is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. But we also know there is some kind of plurality in God: “*Let us make...*” (Genesis 1:26), “*Let us go down...*” (Genesis 11:7). By the time we are halfway through the Old Testament, Isaiah clearly predicts a man would come (Isaiah 7:14) who would also be God (Isaiah 9:6–7). When we get to the New Testament, we have three persons spoken of as God: God the Father (Matthew 6:1, 4, 6, 8–9; Ephesians 1:3), God the Son (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8) and God the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14; Acts 5:3–4).

The New Testament clearly presents all three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as fully God. But the New Testament still teaches there is only one God – not three (1 Timothy 2:5)! Because the Bible teaches a Trinity, Jesus could claim to be God. He is the second person of that Trinity.

## Q 13a. Why did Jesus do miracles?

### Short answer:

The miracles of Jesus show God approved of Jesus and his teaching.

### Discussion:

The miracles of Jesus show God approved of Jesus and his teaching. Nicodemus said, “*Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him*” (John 3:2; cf. Acts 2:22).

**1. Miracles were signs of God’s approval of the message and the messenger** in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God gave his messengers public approval by including miracles in their ministries – e.g. Moses (Exodus 4:17); Elijah (1 Kings 18:1–46); Elisha (2 Kings 4:8–37), etc. In the New Testament, God gave his messengers public approval by including miracles – e.g. the 12 apostles (Matthew 10:1) and Paul (2 Corinthians 12:11–12).

**2. The miracles of Jesus are no different in quality from the other miracles** recorded in the Old and New Testaments. They simply provide God’s seal of approval on Jesus and his message. Jesus’ message was unique: he was the Messiah, the Son of God. The miracles show that God agreed with his claim.

a. **The miracles of Jesus proved that he was the Messiah.** When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether he was the true Messiah or whether they should be looking for another (Matthew 11:2–3). Jesus answered John by reminding him of the miracles that he was doing (Matthew 11:4–6). By doing these miracles, Jesus was showing he was the Messiah and he could bring about the utopian Kingdom promised in the Old Testament (Isaiah 29:17–19; 35:5–6; 42:1–7). Nothing was beyond Jesus’ ability to control – disease, death, climate, productivity, demons. He controlled everything – and this was a sign that he was the true Messiah and could establish the long-anticipated Kingdom.

b. **The miracles of Jesus proved that he was God** (Mark 2:1–12).

Miracles on their own do not prove anyone is God – otherwise Moses, Elijah, Elisha, the 12 apostles and Paul could all claim to be God because they all did miracles just like the miracles of Jesus. Jesus' miracles, however, showed that God was agreeing with his claim to be God. Under any other circumstances, anyone claiming to be God would be guilty of blasphemy and executed under Jewish law. But the case of Jesus of Nazareth was unique – God was actually confirming Jesus' claim through miracles. When Jesus told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven (Mark 2:5), the Pharisees predictably accused Jesus of blasphemy – since giving forgiveness was strictly God's business (Mark 2:6–7). Understanding their way of thinking, Jesus asked, *“Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’”* In other words, the miracle Jesus did showed that God completely agreed with Jesus' claim to be God, and that he also completely approved of Jesus handing out forgiveness. Forgiving sins was a very appropriate thing to do, because Jesus was God.

## Q 13b. Do people need more miracles today to enable them to believe in Jesus?

### Short answer:

No.

### Discussion:

1. **The Gospel of John**, a gospel written to create belief (John 20:30–31), **says ‘no’**. The Holy Spirit so inspired and crafted John’s Gospel that it would serve for all time as the Gospel that creates belief: *“these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [what is written] you may have life in his name”* (John 20:31).

2. **Jesus says ‘no’** (Luke 16:27–31). Jesus told the story of Abraham and the rich man who was in Hades. The rich man begged for a special, miraculous communication from the world of the dead (Luke 16:30) so his five living brothers would realise the warning and escape the coming judgement in hell. Jesus said Abraham refused the request: *“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them... If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets [the written Old Testament], they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead”* (Luke 16:29–31).

The conclusion is clear: the written record is sufficient for belief in Jesus.

## Q 14. What do true miracles look like?

### Short answer:

The Bible points out an obvious difference in quality between supposed 'miracles' and the true miracles that characterised Jesus and God's other messengers in both the Old and New Testaments.

### Discussion:

It is clear that Jesus' miracles were unique. Witnesses of Jesus' miracles said, "*Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel*" (Matthew 9:33)

- 1. Jesus' miracles happened instantly, not gradually.** Notice the word 'immediately' and the idea of immediacy in connection with Jesus' miracles (Matthew 8:3, 13, 15, 26, 31–32; 9:6–7, 22, 25, 30). Even when Jesus touched the blind man twice before the man's sight was fully restored, that would have taken no more than two minutes. Jesus' miracles were immediate not gradual in their effect.
- 2. Jesus' miracles were comprehensive, not selective.** He healed every disease and sickness (Matthew 4:23–24; 9:35) and this was true of his apostles – Jesus "gave them authority... to heal every disease and sickness" (Matthew 10:1). Nothing was 'off limits' or beyond their scope.
- 3. Jesus' miracles were complete, not partial.** If a blind man was healed, the sight in both eyes was fully restored. If a paralytic was healed, both legs were healed – enough for the man to take up his bed and walk!

4. **Jesus' miracles were long-lasting, not momentary.** There is no indication that things were worse in a day or two or even a week or two. There is no mention of people having to come to Jesus for follow-up healings. It's possible that those who were healed of blindness may have eventually suffered from more eye problems in later life – and one supposes Lazarus (John 11:1-44) would have eventually died again since there is no record that he was translated to heaven. But each miracle was so substantial that it appeared to have lasted a lifetime, not just two weeks or two months or two years.

5. **Jesus' miracles were meaningful, not random.** They were not random acts of power performed just for the sake of it. In other words, Jesus was not about turning donkeys into Ferraris, or blowflies into Boeing 747s'. They were 'signs' pointing to a whole new quality of life in the coming Kingdom (Matthew 11:2-6). In other cases, they were showing God's approval of Jesus' claim to be God (Mark 2:1-12). But they were never showy displays of power just for the sake of it (see question 13A above).

## Q 15. Was Jesus really born of the Virgin Mary and why was this necessary?

### Short answer:

Two Gospels definitely say that Jesus' mother was a virgin and the other two (along with the rest of the New Testament) assume it. The person we now know as Jesus actually existed before his birth as God the Son – the second person of the Trinity. Therefore, he did not need a beginning – he already existed. What he needed was a human body – and this was specially arranged by the intervention of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

### Discussion:

Two Gospels definitely say that Jesus' mother was a virgin:

1. **Matthew 1:18–25 makes it clear that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.** These verses teach that Jesus was conceived not by Joseph but by the Holy Spirit (in fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14). Joseph did not have a sexual relationship with Mary until after Jesus was born. Notice Matthew 1:16 said, “*Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah*”. This clearly shows Jesus was born of Mary.

2. **Luke 1:26–28, 34–35 makes it clear that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.** These verses teach that Mary was a virgin while she was engaged to Joseph and that her pregnancy was created by the Holy Spirit.

Strange as it may seem, the man we know as Jesus did not need a personal beginning. He already existed as God the Son. When a couple come together and procreate, a whole new person is conceived. In Jesus' case, this was absolutely impossible because he already existed as the second person of the Trinity. He ‘came down’ from heaven to earth (John 6:41–42). Therefore, he did not need a beginning – he simply needed a human body for his birth on earth. So there was no need for a reproductive act on Joseph's part. The moment Mary conceived, God the Son left heaven and took up residence in the womb of the virgin. He was brought into the world by a woman.

## Q 16. Why is it important to think about Jesus' perfect life?

### Short answer:

There are two reasons why we should think about Jesus' perfect life:

1. To show that Jesus is perfectly 'sane' even when claiming to be God.
2. To show Jesus was sinless and therefore a suitable saviour.

### Discussion:

There are two reasons we mention Jesus' perfect life:

1. **To show Jesus was perfectly sane.** While the Gospels present Jesus as a real human being (human birth, human body, human DNA, gender, racial identity, normal human development), obviously we can't say Jesus was 'normal' in the sense that he was like everyone else – he just wasn't. For one thing, he wasn't sinful. For another thing, he wasn't naturally mortal. Because he was without sin, death was not 'ticking away' inside him like it is inside every other human being. This is probably the reason we never read of Jesus being sick. Jesus died only because he became [deliberately] "obedient to death" (Philippians 2:8). Also, he is said to have worked some extraordinary miracles. So, he wasn't the normal, 'run-of-the-mill' human being like the rest of us. Yet we can say that the Gospels present him as being perfectly 'sane'. There is no sign of psychological or emotional or irrational behaviour in Jesus. He had enemies but there are no signs of paranoia in him; in fact, his enemies were so real they eventually crucified him. There were times when Jesus was deeply sad and troubled – but there's no sign of depression. His claims were quietly and deliberately stated and carefully thought out. His works of power were obvious for all to see – his enemies could not deny them, they could claim only that an evil source caused these powers (Matthew 12:24). The reason for highlighting Jesus' perfect life is to emphasise that Jesus was perfectly sane, even though he claimed to be God.

**2. To show Jesus was sinless and therefore a suitable saviour.** If someone cannot swim, they cannot hope to save someone drowning in a fast-flowing river. Why? Because they have the same problem – neither can swim. If someone is blind, they cannot act as a guide for another blind person. Why? Because they have the same problem. If Jesus has come to save us from sin, he cannot have the same sin problem we have. The fact of Jesus' sinlessness means that there is no doubt about his ability to save us from sin.

## Q 17. Could Jesus have sinned?

### Short answer:

Jesus could not have sinned, because he was God and God cannot sin.

### Discussion:

We answer 'no' because, while the New Testament teaches that Jesus was man, it also teaches he was God (see question 11A above). But (and this is a subtle but important point) the New Testament does NOT teach that Jesus was 'God *and* man' – as if the humanity of Jesus and the deity (God-ness) of Jesus could be separated. Instead, it teaches that Jesus was 'the God-man' – in whom deity and humanity were perfectly and inseparably united. Because of this, Jesus could not sin.

Two important verses teach this:

1. "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).
2. "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13).

## Q 18. What was the point of Jesus' temptation?

Sometimes question 17 leads to this question about Jesus' temptation (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). Note two things:

1. The temptation was not to see *if* Jesus could sin, but to show that Jesus could *not* sin – because he was the Son of God. This is why the Holy Spirit deliberately led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by Satan (Matthew 4:1).
2. Even though Jesus could not sin, the temptation was still real. A row boat can attack a battleship and, while the attack might look quite ridiculous, it would still be a real attack. Even though Jesus could not sin, Satan still tempted him. Jesus would have felt the evil strength in Satan's attack, the power of Satanic persuasion, the hunger pains of a 40-day fast and the need to consciously resist this attack. The temptation was not a trivial experience for Jesus because we are told he needed angelic help, both during the temptation (Mark 1:13) and after it (Matthew 4:11).

# **SALVATION**

*how can one man save the world?*

## Q 1. Why is Jesus' death so important?

### Short answer:

Because the death of Jesus is *the* single most important feature of the Christian faith.

### Discussion:

1. **Jesus' death is central to the story of the Bible** – everything moves towards it and proceeds from it.
2. **Jesus' death is central to the Christian life** – it is the basis of all our blessings, and the benchmark for our love.
3. **Jesus' death is central to the life of the Church** – it is continually celebrated in communion.
4. **Jesus' death is central to the worship of heaven** – the slain, but resurrected Lamb holds centre stage there (Revelation 5).
5. **Jesus' death is central to the Christian gospel** – it is at the core of the good news (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). We cannot forget this! *“A lot of people are calling on Jesus Christ's name for a lot of things these days: peace, happiness, healing, power, better relationships, and freedom from debt or addictions. But none of these are what the Bible focuses on when we are told we need Christ. We need Christ because we have sin that needs to be paid for. These other things are side benefits... if God chooses to grant them.”* That's why Paul told the Corinthians: *“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”* (1 Corinthians 2:2).

## Q 2. Why did God plan Jesus' death before the world began?

### Short answer:

God's plan of Jesus' death before the world began shows two things:

1. **Jesus' death was no accident**; it was central to God's eternal plan. It was not an afterthought (as if it were God's 'fix-up-quick' idea).
2. **God loves sinners so much**, he planned their salvation before they even sinned (see question 3 below).

### Q 3. Does God really love sinful people?

#### Short answer:

Yes – and not reluctantly or hesitatingly! God is an enthusiastic, generous lover of sinners!

#### Discussion:

While this question grows out of question 2 above, it is so important that we have given it space on its own. The mood of this truth must permeate Long Story Short studies. We can see God's love for sinners because before they had ever sinned (before they had even thought of sinning!), God knew they would sin and loved them so much he planned their rescue before he ever created the world! John 3:16 makes this obvious: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..."*. And this was not in a 'spur-of-the-moment' way – he deliberately calculated the gift of his Son before the world began.

God's love for sinners is the subject of Jesus' three famous parables in Luke 15. Note Luke 15:1: *"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus."* Jesus' attitude to sinners was so positive and welcoming and accepting, that the Pharisees noted it and counted it against Jesus (Luke 15:2) because they despised sinners and tax collectors. Then Jesus tells three parables that show God's attitude to sinners. He loves them and pursues them: like a shepherd looking for his lost sheep (Luke 15:3–7); like a woman looking for a lost coin (Luke 15:8–10); and like a father looking for his lost son (Luke 15:11–32). God's love for sinners is real. The reason God loves everyone is because everyone is made in the image of God.

## Q 4. How could a loving God plan to punish his innocent Son with crucifixion?

### Short answer:

The question rightly assumes that the Bible story of salvation involves three separate entities: a Holy God, a world of rebellious sinners and an innocent Jesus. The answer to the question is found in the mystery of the Trinity.

### Discussion:

It's an important question. To be brutally honest, because of the way the Christian story is told sometimes, people could easily get the idea that God the Father is a bit like a 'heavenly bully' who exploited his Son Jesus (the innocent bystander), forcing him into an agonising, torturous execution for the crimes of a no-good, rebellious world to enable the Father to achieve his secret agenda. But this seriously misrepresents the biblical story in three ways:

1. **It is not a drama of three separate entities** – only two are involved: God and sinful humans. The Father is God and Jesus is God – two persons but one entity. God is not grabbing a 'third party' outside himself to suffer the penalty. In fact, God is actually inflicting the penalty on himself! 2 Corinthians 5:19 says: *“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ...”*

2. **God did not exploit Jesus** – *“God is light; in him there is no darkness at all”* (1 John 1:5). This means God is perfect and sinless and he is incapable of exploiting. But, apart from that, Jesus himself never indicates he was exploited.

3. **Jesus was not a disinterested bystander** – Jesus was (and had always been) a wholehearted and willing participant in the crucifixion (Hebrews 10:5–9). Jesus 'joyfully' fulfilled his Father's plans (see John 15:10–11) and laid down his life voluntarily, not under any sense of pressure (John 10:17–18). As the Second Person of the Godhead, Jesus not only perfectly understood the plan of salvation – he was perfectly committed to it.

## Q 5. What was the ransom price that Jesus paid?

### Short answer:

The Bible talks about three kinds of death that come as a result of sin: spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death. Jesus suffered all three kinds of death on the cross when he paid the penalty for sin.

### Discussion:

#### 1. **The penalty for sin includes spiritual, physical and eternal death.**

- a. **Spiritual death.** When Adam and Eve sinned they experienced 'spiritual separation' from God – that's why they were afraid of God (Genesis 3:10) and why they hid from God (Genesis 3:8). God highlighted that spiritual separation by asking (for the very first time), "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).
- b. **Physical death.** Adam and Eve would return to dust (Genesis 3:19; 5:5).
- c. **Eternal death.** Our sin against an infinitely holy God means that he is infinitely offended. Because he is infinitely offended, we incur an infinite punishment. We are finite creatures (we are not God) so the only way we can pay an infinite penalty is to pay the penalty for an infinite amount of time. To experience physical death without first fixing the problem of 'spiritual death', results in separation from God forever, i.e. eternal death (Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:14; 21:8). There is no recovery from eternal death.

#### 2. **Jesus suffered spiritual, physical and eternal death when he paid the ransom price for sin.**

- a. **Jesus suffered 'spiritual death'** (separation from God) on the cross. He cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Jesus' question reveals two things:

- i. **Jesus was experiencing separation from God.** He uses the word ‘forsaken’, which means ‘abandoned’. Any other time in his life, he addressed God as “Father”, or “My Father” or “Abba Father” (such terms are used 191 times in the Gospels). At the beginning of his suffering on the cross, Jesus says, “Father, forgive them...” (Luke 23:34). And, at the end of his suffering on the cross, Jesus says, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). But here, at the most intense moment, Jesus (fully conscious) cries out to God because he cannot sense the Father’s loving presence – only the harsh justice of God.
- ii. **Jesus did not deserve that separation.** That’s why Jesus asked, “Why have you forsaken me?” He is personally innocent of any sin that would rightfully incur such a judgement (John 8:46). He knew he was the Father’s well-beloved Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). He knew God would not reject a good man – so he asks the question ‘Why?’
- b. **Jesus suffered ‘physical death’** (separation of body and spirit) on the cross as a result of his spiritual death (see above). Jesus died physically – they certified his death (John 19:33) and buried his body (Matthew 27:57–66; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Physical death occurs when the human spirit is separated from the human body (James 2:26). In a deliberate act of dying, Jesus committed his spirit into his Father’s hands (Luke 23:46) and then “breathed his last”. Jesus’ physical death was the result of his spirit leaving his body.
- c. **Jesus suffered ‘eternal death’** (eternal separation from God) on the cross. An infinite being can experience an infinite punishment even though the suffering occurs in a finite amount of time (the time on the cross). Jesus was an infinite being (he was God) and so he suffered this infinite punishment (eternal death) on the cross.

## Q 6. Did Jesus really pay the ransom price/penalty for all sin, for all people, for all time?

### Short answer:

Yes!

### Discussion:

#### 1. **Jesus paid the ransom price for all sin.**

- a. **Jesus paid the penalty for sin in full.** After Jesus experienced the agonising separation from the Father that made him cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, he then said, “*It is finished!*” (John 19:30). This term was used in the Greek business world for officially cancelling a debt that had been paid in full (i.e. for the whole amount). Upon full payment, the Greek word ‘*tetelestai*’ (meaning ‘it is finished’) was written across the invoice.
- b. **All our sins are forgiven.** If “all our sins” are forgiven (Colossians 2:13), it can be so only because Jesus paid for “all our sins”.
- c. **Christians “have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”** (Hebrews 10:10).

2. **Jesus paid the ransom price for all people.** Had Jesus died for only one person, he would not have had to suffer one bit *less* than he did. However, in dying for the sins of every single person in the world, Jesus also did not have to suffer one bit *more* than he did. Jesus’ sacrifice for sin was the perfect payment for every person.

- a. **Precise statements in the Bible.** There are many precise statements in the Bible that say Jesus’ one-time death was sufficient to remove all the sins of all people for all time. These include:
  - i. **Hebrews 2:9.** “... [Jesus] suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone [i.e. for all people]”.
  - ii. **Hebrews 9:26.** Jesus “has appeared once for all [i.e. once for all sin, for all time and for all people] at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself”.

iii. **1 John 2:2**. Writing to those who were already Christians, John said... *“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world [i.e. once for all sin, for all time and for all people]”*.

iv. Other statements in the Bible. **John 1:29, 1 Timothy 4:10** and **1 Peter 3:18**.

b. **Insight from the Day of Atonement**. On the tenth day of the seventh month, Israel celebrated the great Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29–30), arguably the most significant day in Israel's religious calendar. On this day, God provided a way for all the sins of all the people of Israel to be wiped clean.

Two goats were used in this ritual. One was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled about the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place and the bronze altar (Leviticus 16:15–19). The other was taken live to the High Priest, who would put his hands on the head of this live goat and then “confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head... The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness” (Leviticus 16:21–22). The day was to be regarded as a special day, “a day of sabbath rest” (Leviticus 16:31). The Israelites were called on to “deny themselves” (Leviticus 16:29, 31) – that meant they had to personally observe the rituals of the day, showing genuine remorse for their sins by fasting. Individuals who refused to show remorse by fasting were expelled from the community (Leviticus 23:29) and those who did not respect the day were executed (Leviticus 23:30).

Now, the Day of Atonement clearly shows one sacrifice was ‘sufficient’ for all the sins of all the people of Israel for a whole year – but that sacrifice was efficient only for those who personally embraced it (i.e. observed it). In the same way, the Book of Hebrews says Jesus' one sacrifice is sufficient to cover all the sins of all the people of the whole world for all time (Hebrews 2:9; 9:26). But it is only efficient (takes effect) for those who personally embrace that sacrifice and rely completely on it.

Those who disregard this sacrifice and disbelieve (i.e. 'non-believers') will come into the judgement of the second death in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

3. **Jesus paid the ransom price for all time.** Jesus died for all people in the past, present and future. No sin has been left out. That's why Christians can never come into condemnation (Romans 8:1) – even though Christians will commit many more sins in the future. According to Romans 8:38–39, nothing in the present and nothing in the future (including the sins of the present and the sins of the future) can ever condemn us or separate us from God's love. Every single sin, even the future ones we haven't yet thought of, have been paid for by the death of Jesus.

## Q 7. Can we genuinely tell someone that Jesus really did die in their place?

### Short answer:

Yes.

### Discussion:

Because the death of Jesus was 'sufficient' for all (see question 6 above), we can genuinely and confidently tell someone Jesus did actually die for them. His death was for them – all they have to do is embrace him as the one who made the acceptable sacrifice to God for sin. Jesus *“came to seek and to save the lost”* (Luke 19:10).

Question: Who was lost? Answer: Everyone.

That means Jesus came to seek and to save every lost person.

But God saves only those who receive him. This is what Paul meant (1 Timothy 4:10) when he said *“God... is the Savior of all people [because Jesus' death is sufficient], and especially of those who believe [for whom his death is efficient]”*.

## Q 8. Why did Jesus speak of his death as a ransom payment?

### Short answer:

Because Jesus came to fix the problem of sin, and sin had a price tag attached to it – ‘death’.

### Discussion:

God had been ‘straight up’ with Adam and Eve – sin was a serious crime that carried the death penalty (Genesis 2:17). Nothing but the payment of that penalty would fix the sin problem. No amount of reasoning, regretting, repenting, reforming or ‘turning over new leaves’... would ever remove the sin problem. It could be paid for only in death. God is infinitely holy and always just. There are no compromises. When Jesus said he came “*to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45), he was saying he had come to fix the sin problem by paying the price God had set on sin. He had come to die in the place of sinful mankind.

## Q 9. To whom did Jesus pay the ransom?

### Short answer:

To God.

### Discussion:

Some have suggested that Jesus paid the ransom to Satan. But Satan never set the price of sin, God did (Genesis 2:17). It was God's holiness and justice that had to be satisfied. Therefore, Jesus offered himself to God in death as a full payment of the penalty for human sin.

## Q 10. What has God done with our sin?

### Short answer:

He has given them all to Christ! They are gone! The Bible has lots of different ways of saying the same thing. Our sins have been: taken away (1 John 1:29); forgiven (Romans 4:7; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13); not counted (or remembered) against us (Romans 4:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Hebrews 8:12;10:17); and paid for (Mark 10:45).

# RESURRECTION

*is conquering death even possible?*

## Q 1. Why is the resurrection so important?

### Short answer:

The resurrection is important because it proves:

1. Jesus is God
2. Jesus is the Messiah
3. Everything Jesus said is true
4. Jesus has defeated Satan and will eventually destroy him
5. Jesus has defeated death and will eventually destroy it
6. Those connected to Jesus by faith will be resurrected
7. Jesus has completely paid for sin
8. Jesus will judge the world.

### Discussion:

The resurrection is important:

1. **It is a proof that Jesus is God.** The reasoning is that:
  - a. Jesus predicted he would raise his own body from the grave (John 2:19–22)
  - b. In claiming that he would raise his own body, Jesus is claiming to be able to do what only God can do – raise the dead
  - c. If Jesus did rise from the dead by his own power, he is God!
2. **It is a proof that Jesus is the Messiah.** The reasoning is that:
  - a. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah (Matthew 26:63–64; John 4:25–26)
  - b. The Messiah would establish God's kingdom forever (Isaiah 9:6–7)
  - c. Jesus could not do this if he stayed dead (Matthew 16:13–16, 21)
  - d. Jesus rose from the dead, proving he was who he claimed to be (the Messiah who would one day establish God's kingdom).

3. **It is a proof that everything Jesus said is true.** Jesus predicted his own resurrection many times (Matthew 16:21, 20:18–19, 26:26–29) and he even said that he would raise his own body from the grave (John 2:19–22). If Jesus was right in something this important, we can be certain he was correct in everything else he said.

4. **It is a proof that Jesus has defeated Satan** and will eventually destroy him (John 16:11; 1 Corinthians 15:21–24; Revelation 20:1–3, 10).

5. **It is a proof that Jesus has defeated death** and will eventually destroy it (1 Corinthians 15:21–26, 54–57).

6. **It is a proof that those connected to Jesus by faith will be resurrected** (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

7. **It is a proof that Jesus has completely paid for sin** (Romans 4:25). The resurrection of Jesus is proof that we have been declared righteous before God (justified). That means Jesus' death for our sin was so fully and completely acceptable to God that God has raised Jesus to life to prove the account has been settled in full! The debt has been completely paid – Jesus can live again. For instance, when a person commits a crime and is sentenced to imprisonment, they must remain imprisoned until they have completely paid the penalty for their crime. Once they have paid for their crime, they must be set free. Jesus so completely paid the penalty for our sin (death), that he was set free (resurrection).

8. **It is a proof that Jesus will judge the world** (Acts 17:31). Jesus said he was the judge of all men and that God the Father has committed all judgement into the hands of his Son (John 5:22–23, 27).

The resurrection is proof that Jesus is God and the coming Judge of every human being. Paul confirmed this: "... he [God] commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31). If people were confused about Jesus in his lifetime, there could be no doubt or confusion about who Jesus was after the resurrection. It is unmistakable: he is declared to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4) – including the power to judge.

## Q 2. Does someone have to believe in the resurrection to be a Christian?

### Short answer:

Yes.

### Discussion:

Yes, for two reasons:

1. The resurrection of Jesus is the absolute foundation of the Christian faith: “... *if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith*” (1 Corinthians 15:14). The resurrection is key to one’s personal Christian faith.

2. The resurrection of Jesus is an integral part of the Christian confession: “*If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified...*” (Romans 10:9–10a).

### Q 3. Did the resurrection really happen?

#### Short answer:

The resurrection of Jesus was a real, historical and physical event – like any other real, historical and physical event.

#### Discussion:

The resurrection of Jesus was as real, historical and physical as were the Battle of Hastings, the Great Fire of London and the landing of man on the moon.

1. **Jesus' physical resurrection was confirmed by over 500 witnesses** (1 Corinthians 15:3–8).

2. **Jesus' resurrection body was real:** it could be seen and recognised (Matthew 28:7, 17; Mark 16:7; Luke 24:31; John 20:16); it could speak (John 20:19); it could walk; it could eat food (Luke 24:41–43; Acts 1:4); it could be touched (John 20:25–28); and it could be held on to (Matthew 28:9; John 20:17).

3. **Jesus' resurrection body was the same body that went into the tomb** – it bore the actual wounds of the crucifixion in hands, feet and side (John 20:25–28) and still does today (Revelation 5:6)!

4. **Jesus said his resurrection body had flesh and bones** (Luke 24:39).

5. **Jesus' resurrection was a historical event** that could be pinpointed in space-time history – it occurred “on the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4) after he was crucified.

## Q 4. What is the basic case for the resurrection?

### Short answer:

The evidence is simple and straightforward. There are two key points as well as an additional confirming point:

1. The empty tomb
2. The appearances of Jesus after his tomb was found empty
3. Secondary evidence (the transformation of the disciples).

### Discussion:

The confirmation of the resurrection rests on two primary pieces of evidence as well as some confirming evidence:

1. **There is an empty tomb.** The empty tomb cannot be adequately accounted for apart from by the resurrection of Jesus (see questions 6 to 12).
2. **The resurrection appearances.** There are in excess of 500 independent witnesses to the physical resurrection of Jesus which occurred on 12 separate occasions over 40 days to diverse groups of people, and included many different levels of verification – touching Christ, hearing Christ, seeing Christ, watching him eat, etc.
3. **Confirming evidence.** In addition to these two primary pieces of evidence, there is a secondary strand of evidence: the 'transformation of the disciples'. What can possibly explain the radical transformation that took place in the disciples – one which saw the disciples change from being a fearful group of runaways (Matthew 26:56) to fearless, unstoppable preachers of the resurrection (Acts 4:5–22) – each of whom would suffer and eventually die for their faith?

## Q 5. Is it unscientific to believe in the resurrection?

### Short answer:

No. Let's remember three things:

1. Only some scientists argue against the resurrection of Jesus. There are equally capable scientists who argue for his resurrection.
2. The resurrection is a matter for historical investigation not scientific investigation – the resurrection cannot be proved or disproved scientifically.
3. What drives a lot of 'opposition' to the resurrection of Jesus is that there is so much at stake if it is true. People from all walks of life and every academic discipline can struggle with the implications of the resurrection: that Jesus is God, our only saviour, the Judge of all the living and the dead (see question 13 below).

### Discussion:

The key point is that the resurrection belongs to history and not a scientific laboratory.

For instance, if we wanted to investigate on which day World War 2 began, we would undertake a historical (not scientific) investigation. We would check eyewitnesses' accounts, historical documents written by different world rulers, news clippings and TV footage, etc. We would not go to a scientific laboratory and try and do experiments. Why? Because the day when World War 2 began happened once, cannot be repeated and cannot be observed happening today in a laboratory. This means the question is a matter of historical investigation, not scientific investigation. Just because the day World War 2 was launched happened only once does not mean it is not a reliable fact to be believed. For the same reason, just because the resurrection of Jesus happened only once does not mean it is not a reliable fact to be believed.

## Q 6. Could the resurrection be explained by saying the disciples went to the wrong tomb?

### Short answer:

No.

### Discussion:

This is the 'wrong tomb' theory.

1. **The proposal.** The disciples were upset, confused and very worried. It was dark and they went to the wrong tomb.

2. **The response.** The 'wrong tomb' theory is faulty:

- a. **All the authorities had to do was take the disciples to the correct tomb and unveil Jesus' corpse.**
- b. **Later, in broad daylight, John and Peter found the same tomb to be empty** and they saw the burial clothes too. There was no mistaking the tomb (John 20:6–8); they had the right place, for sure.

## Q 7. Could the disciples simply have been hallucinating and actually never have seen a physically resurrected Jesus?

### Short answer:

No.

### Discussion:

This is called 'the hallucination' theory.

1. **The proposal.** The disciples were so mentally distraught and sleep deprived through the time of Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion that they were actually hallucinating.

2. **The response.** This theory is faulty:

- a. **There is good evidence the disciples were in a sound state of mind** – e.g. Thomas flatly refused any belief without hard evidence (John 20:24–25).
- b. **There were 516 separate witnesses to the physical resurrection of Jesus**, on different occasions, in different geographical locations, by both men and women over 40 days. This excludes any possibility of such people all hallucinating about the same event (1 Corinthians 15:6).

## Q 8. Can the resurrection be explained by saying the disciples actually had seen a ghost?

### Short answer:

No.

### Discussion:

This is the 'ghost' theory.

1. **The proposal.** The disciples actually saw a 'spirit' and assumed Jesus had risen from the dead.
2. **The response.** The theory is faulty:
  - a. **Jesus demonstrated his physical status.** The Gospels report that the disciples actually thought they were seeing a spirit but Jesus invited them to examine him closely by touching (Luke 24:36–40). Then Christ ate real, physical food in front of them (Luke 24:41–43) – something a spirit could not have done.
  - b. **The actual 'physical' resurrection was verified by at least 516 people** – not all of them could have been mistaken.

## Q 9. Can the resurrection be explained by saying Jesus wasn't actually dead?

### Short answer:

No.

### Discussion:

This is called the 'swoon' theory.

1. **The proposal.** Jesus didn't die but was in a coma when they took him down from the cross and put him in the tomb. After three days in the cool of the tomb, he recovered enough to take off the grave clothes, move the stone and overpower the guards and escape.

2. **The response.** The 'swoon' theory is faulty:

a. **It requires that we believe in a near-death Jesus who:**

- Was exhausted from lack of sleep (Mark 14:32–41)
- Had four large wounds in his hands and feet
- Had a large spear wound in his side that had probably pierced his lungs and heart (John 19:34)
- Had suffered the excruciating agony of the crucifixion (Mark 15:24–34)
- Had been embalmed and buried and...

**After three days in the tomb, suddenly recovered sufficiently to:**

- Undo approximately 34 kilograms of bandages (John 19:39–40)
- Move a 1000-kilogram stone
- Overpower 16 Roman guards
- Walk kilometres to meet the disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13–31) on those feet that had nails driven through them.
- Present himself convincingly as the resurrected Lord of Life and conquering king over and over again in scores of settings (some, multiple-days' journey from others) to hundreds of witnesses (some of them being highly skeptical).

The truth is, this is asking us to believe too much. Given that kind of suffering, Jesus could not have made it out of the burial clothes, let alone his tomb!

- b. **It overlooks the fact that the Roman soldiers** (familiar with death by crucifixion) **knew Jesus was dead**, made doubly sure he was dead by stabbing the spear into his side (John 19:34) and gave Pilate the guarantee he was dead (Mark 15:44–45).

It takes a huge leap of irrational faith to believe those alternative theories, whereas belief that Jesus really did rise from the dead is a reasonable, logical response to the overwhelming weight of historical evidence.

## Q 10. Can the resurrection be explained by arguing the disciples stole Jesus' body to 'stage' the resurrection?

### Short answer:

No.

### Discussion:

This is called the 'stolen body' theory.

1. **The proposal.** The disciples were so desperate to secure the future of their 'Jesus movement', they stole the body to 'stage' Jesus' resurrection.
2. **The response.** This theory is faulty for seven reasons:
  - a. **It overlooks the fact the Jews and Romans had anticipated and taken precautions** against such a thing happening (Matthew 27:63–64).
  - b. **It is unlikely that 11 disciples** (if they all showed!) **would have had the ability to overpower a Roman watch** of 16 soldiers, break the Roman seal (on penalty of death) and then move the 1000-kilogram stone to steal the body of Jesus.
  - c. **It doesn't explain how and where the disciples might have successfully hidden Jesus' body** so it couldn't be found by the authorities.
  - d. **It doesn't explain why the disciples** (generally all honest and sane men) **would have suffered so greatly** for what they knew to be such an obvious lie.
  - e. **The disciples would not have had time to unwrap the body** of Jesus from the burial clothes. Nor would they have had the time or the presence of mind to neatly fold "the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head" (John 20:6–7).
  - f. **It doesn't consider how unlikely it would have been for 11 men to continue the lie.**
  - g. **If the body were stolen, the soldiers would have been punished by death.** But they weren't (Matthew 28:12–15).

## Q 11. Could the Jewish/Roman authorities have worked together and removed Jesus' body and buried it somewhere else?

### Short answer:

No.

### Discussion:

This is the 'precaution' theory.

1. **The proposal.** The Jewish and Roman authorities took precautions against the possibility of a resurrection by removing the body and taking it into custody.

2. **The response.** The 'precaution' theory is obviously faulty:

- a. **Why put the Roman seal and guards in place if they had the body in their custody?**
- b. **Why not stop the whole resurrection madness by presenting Jesus' corpse?** This would have immediately destroyed Christianity once and for all – something they could have done and, given half a chance, *would* have done.
- c. **The authorities would not have unwrapped the body of Jesus and left the burial clothes in the tomb.**

## Q 12. Why are there so many theories which attempt to disprove the resurrection?

### Short answer:

The resurrection is under constant attack because Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### Discussion:

Saying Christ is risen from the dead is “like a knife pointed at the throat of the irreligious man, and an irreligious man whose religion is threatened will fight... like a tigress fighting for her cubs.” Some people are desperate to disprove the resurrection, simply because so much is at stake (see question 1 above).

# JUMP

*what's my next step?*

## Q 1. What do I need to believe to become a Christian?

### Short answer:

Someone becomes a Christian when they can say that they sincerely believe four things:

1. That Jesus of Nazareth was a real person.
2. That he was God in human flesh.
3. That he died to take God's punishment for their sins.
4. That he rose again on the third day and returned back to his Father.

Believing that much, that person then turns in faith to this risen, glorified Christ, abandoning any confidence in self or anyone or anything else to make themselves acceptable to God, and embracing (receiving, taking, trusting) that living glorified Christ as the only one who can make them right with God.

## Q 2. How much faith do I need to have to become a Christian?

### Short answer:

It is not the amount of faith but the object of faith that is important.

### Discussion:

Becoming a Christian is not about having a lot of faith – as if there were something ‘special’ about faith. Jesus said that the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds (Matthew 13:31–32) and that his disciples only needed faith the size of a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20)!

Salvation is not about the amount of someone’s faith but is a matter of where that faith is placed – is it in Christ? It is Christ who saves – not faith (John 1:11–12)!

### Q 3. How do I get faith?

#### Short answer:

Faith is simply believing that Jesus died to take God's punishment for our sins and rose again from the dead as a result, and personally receiving (owning, trusting) the Jesus who died (see question 1 above). The good news about Jesus is not hard to understand but it is very hard to accept. It is good news that anyone can understand the gospel!

#### Discussion:

1. **The gospel message is not hard to understand.** We can all understand John 3:16 and, if we gave ourselves a couple of minutes, we could put it in our own words or explain the meaning of it in simple terms to a friend. We do not have to be Christians to understand the simple gospel message. That's why the gospel is to be taken to every person in the world (Mark 16:15) – because everyone can understand it.

2. **But while the gospel message is easy to understand, it is very hard to accept** – for at least two reasons:

- a. **The gospel can seem absurd.** The idea that God can forgive us for all our sins and make us acceptable to him forever, because of something a man called Jesus did, when he died, way back in AD 30, on the other side of the world, in a culture completely different from our own, just doesn't seem to make sense to us. How can something that happened way back then, way over there, make me acceptable to God now?
- b. **The gospel can seem insulting.** The idea that we are made acceptable to God – not because of who we are, or what we have done or haven't done – but solely on the merits of another (a man called Jesus) seems very insulting. We don't like that we are not considered good enough for God the way we are. And we don't find it easy to accept that our works do not and cannot count, but that it's all his doing.

It feels degrading. It makes us look like spiritual beggars, totally dependent on God's charity.

So we reject the gospel idea as very foolish – not because we don't understand the concept – but because we do understand it! This is what the Bible means when it says, "*the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...*" (1 Corinthians 1:18). The message of "*Christ crucified... [is] foolishness to Gentiles*" (1 Corinthians 1:23). In other words, we think the whole idea is too ridiculous and too insulting. We can be thankful to God for the convincing work of the Holy Spirit who enables us to acknowledge the 'wisdom' of the gospel so that we can receive Christ.

## Q 4. Doesn't 1 Corinthians 2:14 say non-Christians cannot understand the gospel?

### Short answer:

No, it doesn't.

### Discussion:

In 1 Corinthians 2:14 Paul says three things:

1. **“The person without the Spirit does not accept** [or receive for themselves] **the things that come from the Spirit of God...”** The word 'accept' does not mean the person without the Spirit cannot 'understand' but that they cannot eagerly, willingly accept with pleasure, embrace as true, the words given by the Spirit.

2. **The words of the Spirit seem foolishness to us before we become Christians.** This does not mean the words of the Spirit are unintelligible to us. Jesus expected people without the Spirit to understand the Old Testament (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4)! People who were not Christians could understand Paul's message about Jesus (see Acts 17:32; 18:4) but they mocked it as 'foolishness' (1 Corinthians 1:18).

3. The word translated as 'understand' in 1 Corinthians 2:14 actually means **the person without the Spirit cannot 'know' in a deeply personal, experiential way**, the things of the Spirit of God. In other words, before we are Christians we can easily understand the gospel concept but we do not personally welcome it as true or embrace it as personally relevant.

## Q 5. What changes can a person expect to see in their life after they become a Christian?

### Short answer:

Becoming a Christian leads to some big changes. This is to be expected because when someone becomes a Christian they are born into a new family (John 1:11–12). These changes come *as a result* of being ‘born again’, they are *not the means* to being born again. We are saved by faith (Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8–9), not by making changes to our lives.

### Discussion:

When someone becomes a Christian, they can expect to discover a whole range of new experiences:

1. **Enormous relief.** There is enormous relief in knowing the following:
  - a. The penalty for being a sinner has been paid for us by Jesus himself (Mark 10:45).
  - b. Our sins can never be counted against us (2 Corinthians 5:19).
  - c. Christians can never be condemned by God because they are seen as being ‘in Christ’ (Romans 8:1).
  - d. Christians have been freely credited with a perfect righteousness from God (2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9).
  
2. **New confidence.** Christians are boosted with a super-confidence (or inner assurance):
  - a. Christians know they have eternal life (1 John 5:11–12).
  - b. Christians know God is their Father (Romans 8:14–17).
  - c. Christians know they can never be separated from God’s love by anything or anyone (Romans 8:31–39; John 10:28–29).
  - d. Christians know they have an ‘understanding helper’ in heaven (Hebrews 4:14–16) i.e. Christians know Jesus constantly appears in heaven as their advocate (1 John 2:1).
  - f. Christians know they will be with God forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

3. **Deep joyfulness.** As Christians discover all God has done for them and all God has planned for them, they are deeply joyful. This joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness comes and goes because it depends on circumstances. Joy doesn't depend on circumstances. Christians are joyful regardless of their circumstances. Joy comes from knowing we belong to God and from experiencing all the blessings of salvation (Ephesians 1:3–14).

4. **Changing values.** The moment someone receives Christ, they are 'born again' into God's family and become his child (John 1:11–12). In this spiritual rebirth, they receive God's nature (2 Peter 1:4). And this new nature starts making itself felt. Old ways of living are slowly but gradually replaced with new ways of living (Ephesians 4:17–32; Colossians 3:1–14; 2 Peter 1:3–11). Christians soon realise not only that Jesus died to take their punishment but that, in his death, he also 'bought' them for himself (1 Corinthians 6:19–20; 1 Peter 1:17–19)! And they begin to look for new ways they can serve him and bring honour and glory to him by the power of God's indwelling Spirit.

5. **New interests.** With the new birth come new appetites and interests. Christians want to pray, to worship God, to confess their sins, to express their gratitude and to bring their needs to him (Matthew 6:9–13). Christians develop an appetite for the Bible. They have a desire to bring glory to God by the way they live (1 Corinthians 6:20; 10:31). And Christians want to share their faith and show others the love of Christ.

6. **Vital relationships.** They realise that, in the family of God, they are not the only child... and they find they have a whole new world of relationships to discover with their Christian brothers and sisters.

7. **A fresh set of problems.** This new life creates new problems, too:
- a. New relational problems. Christians will sometimes experience tension in friendships and family relationships as people adjust to a 'Christian's' new thinking, priorities and lifestyle.
  - b. New issues. Things that once weren't important become important. As a result, there are 'growth pains' as we move from one way of living to another (Ephesians 4:17–32).

## Q 6. Can a new Christian be certain about their salvation? Is assurance important?

### Short answer:

Yes, a new Christian can be certain about their salvation. When the Bible talks about someone becoming a Christian, it uses the language of absolute certainty. It is vitally important that a person is reminded that they know for sure that they have salvation.

### Discussion:

The modern mind seems to reject certainty when it comes to issues of religion. But when the Bible speaks of someone becoming a Christian, it uses the language of absolute certainty. In fact, the gospel message carries its own guarantee! Here are some of the certainties:

1. **John 1:12–13.** “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” It is certain that those who receive Christ have the right to call themselves the children of God.

2. **John 3:36.** “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.”

- a. It is certain that, the moment a person believes in the Son, that person has eternal life.
- b. It is certain that a person who does not believe does not have life but is under God’s wrath (condemnation).

3. **John 5:24.** “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

- a. It is certain that the believer has eternal life (now).
- b. It is certain the believer will not be condemned (then).
- c. It is certain that, at the moment of believing, the Christian has passed out of death and into life.

4. **John 6:40.** “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

- a. It is certain that everyone who believes in the Son has eternal life.
- b. It is certain that the one who believes in the Son will be raised at the last day.

5. **1 John 5:11-12.** “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

- a. It is certain that God has provided eternal life.
- b. It is certain that eternal life is in his Son.
- c. It is certain that, if someone has the Son, they have eternal life.
- d. It is certain that if someone doesn’t have the Son, they do not have eternal life.

It is vital Christians have the assurance of eternal life:

1. **Assurance is part of the gospel.** The same verses that promise eternal life for the one who receives Christ also declare the certainty of eternal life for the one who believes! The good news of the gospel message carries its own guarantee. It is impossible to believe the gospel without believing the words of assurance. They cannot be separated from the same Bible passages.

2. **Assurance is necessary for Christian living.** No one can begin to move into the new lifestyle (Galatians 5:16–26; Ephesians 4:17–32) if they are not sure they have the new life itself!

## Q 7a. Why is it important to think about hell?

### Short answer:

Because everyone will exist forever in either heaven or hell.

### Discussion:

Jesus made it clear from the start: there are only ever two ways: the broad and the narrow (Matthew 7:13–14), and two foundations: the sand of false teaching or the rock of Jesus' teaching (Matthew 7:24–27). And there were only ever two destinies: eternal punishment on the one hand, and eternal life on the other (Matthew 25:46; John 5:28–29). Revelation 20:11–15 clearly teaches that there will be a judgement called the Great White Throne. At that judgement, the Book of Life will be consulted and anyone “*whose name was not found written in the book of life [the record book of all who have faith in Jesus] was thrown into the lake of fire*” (Revelation 20:15). We have only this life to determine our destiny... after death comes judgement (Hebrews 9:27) – not reincarnation (rebirth of a soul in another body) or another chance to get it right.

## Q 7b.What is hell like?

### Short answer:

Hell is a place of everlasting, irreversible conscious torment.

### Discussion:

Jesus described hell in these terms:

1. **A specific place:** the “blazing furnace” (Matthew 13:42, 50). Revelation describes hell as a place of “burning sulfur” (Revelation 14:10). It is called “the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). For the unbeliever, *“they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur”* (Revelation 21:8).
2. **Inescapable torment.** More than once, Jesus said people would be thrown into the fiery furnace (Matthew 13:42, 50). Revelation says unbelievers (including the beast and false prophet) would be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:14–15). The imagery suggests total immersion in inescapable torment.
3. **Conscious torment.** That people suffer consciously in hell is clear from the words Jesus used to describe hell – it is a place *“where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* (Matthew 13:42, 50). Revelation describes people in hell being “tormented” (Revelation 14:10).
4. **Intense torment.** The use of words like ‘blazing furnace’ (Matthew 13:42) and ‘lake of burning sulfur’ (Revelation 21:8) suggests the most excruciating pain ever known.
5. **Physical and spiritual torment.** The Bible teaches that unbelievers will have resurrection bodies suited to eternal judgement, just as believers will have resurrection bodies suited to eternal life (Daniel 12:1–2; Matthew 10:28; John 5:28–29). The Bible consistently teaches resurrection bodies for all, believers and unbelievers alike. This suggests the suffering will be mental, physical and spiritual – exactly the kind of suffering Jesus experienced for us on the cross.

6. **Everlasting torment.** Jesus referred to hell as a place where *“the worms that eat them do not die [because the people are never destroyed], and the fire is not quenched”* (Mark 9:48). This describes unending suffering. It is an “eternal fire” (Matthew 25:41) and an “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46). Revelation puts it this way: *“the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night...”* (Revelation 14:11); they *“will be tormented day and night for ever and ever”* (Revelation 20:10).

## Q 8. Isn't hell just the absence of God?

### Short answer:

No. Hell is torment because God is there exercising his judgement (Revelation 14:10–11).

### Discussion:

God is everywhere (Psalm 139:7–10) including hell! At the final judgement, the Bible says that *“those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus... will be... shut out from the presence of the Lord...”* (2 Thessalonians 1:8–9). But the Bible also says God is in hell. Those who suffer in hell suffer *“in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb”* (Revelation 14:10–11). Is this contradictory? No... we are best to understand that both descriptions are true: people in hell are shut out from God's loving presence and shut in to God's dreadful presence as he executes his eternal judgement.

## Q 9. Isn't hell just for Satan and his angels?

### Short answer:

No. Hell was designed for Satan and his angels (Matthew 25:41) but is shared by human beings who do not believe in Christ (Matthew 10:28; 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:8–10; Revelation 14:9–11; 20:11–15).

## Q 10. Are there different levels of punishment in hell?

### Short answer:

That's what is strongly implied in the New Testament.

### Discussion:

God is infinitely righteous. His judgement is always perfectly measured. Jesus speaks of judgement day being more bearable for some than it will be for others (Matthew 11:20–24), suggesting that greater sin brings greater judgement (John 19:11). The picture of the final judgement (the Great White Throne) suggests the same thing – John sees people judged “according to what they had done” (Revelation 20:12–13), which indicates the judgement is according to (appropriate to) their works. It could not be any other way with an infinitely holy God. Clearly, one lie cannot be punished to the same degree as one murder.