

Session Thirty-One

Session Discipline:	Fasting
Session Verse/Passage:	James 1:27, Psalms 146:9
Session Purpose:	To engage students in a fast designed to deepen their love for Christ and for widows and orphans.

Preparation:

- **IMPORTANT:** *In advance of this week's session, you will need to enlist a couple of people, who will share their testimonies and participate in a question and answer time. One of these people needs to be an orphan, and the other a widow. If you do not know of someone in your church or community who is or was an orphan, and now is a believer and could give a testimony of how God has worked in their life, then you may consider contacting (if you are an Oklahoma church) the Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children offices (405-942-3000 x4628) to check on the availability of one of the current or former OBHC students coming to share at your meeting.* Here are some things to keep in mind about these testimonies:
 - The testimonies should highlight any of the difficulties that come with being an orphan or a widow.
 - The testimonies should focus on the individual's perception of God's provision for dealing with those difficulties.
 - The testimonies should direct students to how they can be sensitive to the needs of orphans and widows.
 - The question and answer time should be a time where students can openly ask questions that may not come up in the testimony time.
- Make as many copies of the Fasting Sign-up Sheet as you will need. This list is simply for you to keep a record of those who are committed to the fast. Also, print copies of the *Fast Cards* to cut out and distribute to each participant of the fast for them to use as a reminder.
- Make several copies of each of the handouts, "Facts About...Widows" and "Facts About...Orphans." The large group will be split into two groups during the session, and one group will receive the "orphans" handout and the other will receive the "widows" handout.

Session Teaching Plan:

- **Step One – 15-20 min.** Gather students together and tell them this week they will be participating in the discipline of fasting. Tell them they will be fasting for the purpose of focusing their attentions on Christ's heart for widows and orphans. Break the students into two groups; one that will discuss issues concerning widows and one, which will discuss issues concerning orphans. Distribute several copies of the "Facts About Widows" handout to one group and several copies of the "Facts About Orphans" to the other. Tell the groups you will give them about 10 minutes to read the facts and the verses on the handouts and discuss the questions at the bottom of each page. Ask the students to begin. At the end of 10 minutes, lead the students in a talkback session. Have each group report their answers to the entire class. Allow for some honest discussion.

- **Step Two – 20-25 min.** Introduce your pre-selected guests and allow them time to share their testimonies. Be sure you have prepped your guests with the suggested information for testimonies from the **Preparation** section of this session. Once the testimonies have concluded, allow time for students to ask questions of the guests. Thank your guests for coming and then, lead your students in a special prayer time for your guests. Have the students surround them, lay their hands on them and pray for them. It is suggested that you ask for at least 3 students to pray and then close the prayer time by having a leader pray.
- **Step Three – 15 min.** Refocus the students' attention and tell them this week they will be participating in a Level 2, Convenience Fast. They will fast from any or all of the following items for two days: Ipod, Text Messages, Emailing, Computers, Cell phones, or another convenience of their own choosing. Remind students they have the opportunity and the responsibility to care for the widow and the orphan. Tell students to remain as quiet as possible while you read a few scriptures. Read:
 - Deuteronomy 10:17-18
 - Job 29:12-13
 - Psalm 68:5-6
 - Proverbs 15:25
 - Mark 12:41-44
 - End with these two verses: Psalm 10:17-18
- **Step Three – 5 min.** Remember to have students sign the Fasting sign-up sheet and to take a Fast Card as a reminder to fast during the week.

Facts about...Orphans

“Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

James 1:27

“The LORD protects foreigners and helps the fatherless and the widow, but He frustrates the ways of the wicked.”

Psalms 146:9

In the World

- There are 150 million orphans; 8% of all children are orphans
- 42,200 children are orphaned every day
- 10.6 million (8%) of all children will die of preventable causes before age five
- 5.4% of all children will die before age one

In Africa

- Every 15 SECONDS, another child becomes an AIDS orphan
- Every DAY 5,760 more children become orphans
- Every YEAR 2,102,400 more children become orphans
- 143,000,000 orphans in the world today spend an average of 10 years in an orphanage or foster home
- Approximately 250,000 children are adopted annually, but...every YEAR 14,050,000 children still grow up as orphans and AGE OUT of the system
- Every DAY 38,493 children AGE OUT
- Every 2.2 SECONDS, another orphan child AGES OUT with no family to belong to and no place to call home

In Ukraine and Russia

- 10%-15% of children who age out of an orphanage commit suicide before age 18.
- 60% of the girls are lured into prostitution.
- 70% of the boys become hardened criminals.
- Many of these children accept job offers that ultimately result in their being sold as slaves. Millions of girls are sex slaves today, simply because they were unfortunate enough to grow up as orphans.

Group Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think God is so concerned about orphans?
- From the facts listed above, which ones stir your heart the most?
- In what ways can your youth group minister to orphans?

Facts about...Widows

“Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

James 1:27

“The LORD protects foreigners and helps the fatherless and the widow, but He frustrates the ways of the wicked.”

Psalms 146:9

In America

- Three out of four women outlive their spouses.
- The average age of widowhood is 56, and only 7 out of 100 of these widows will remarry.
- By age 65, more than half of all married American women are widowed.

In Developing Countries

- When their husbands die widows in developing countries rarely have the right to inherit property or to have their rights enforced. They are frequently evicted from their property, their possessions taken from them, and often their children are also removed from their care and protection.
- Most widows live in severe poverty
- Widows are particularly vulnerable to violence, sexual abuse and rape. Domestic violence is particularly common.
- Homelessness, illiteracy, and poverty lead widows into exploitative work situations.
- The extreme poverty and precariousness of the widow's lives leaves their children, and particularly their daughters, in extremely vulnerable positions. Daughters of widows are more likely to marry very young, and become widows themselves, thus recreating the cycle of poverty in their own lives and in the next generation.
- Thousands of widows are very young; many are actually children.

Group Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think God is so concerned about widows?
2. From the facts listed above, which ones stir your heart the most?
3. In what ways can your youth group minister to widows?

FASTING CARD

Fasting Items: Level 2 – Conveniences

(Ipod, Text Messages, Emailing, Computers, Cell phones, other)

You have agreed to fast from any or all of the items listed above for two days this week.
(You can choose which days, but they must be back to back).

Remember, you are fasting for a purpose greater than self-deprivation. As you long for the item(s) you are giving up, focus on these two things: Christ, for whom we should consistently long, and the widows and orphans in the world.

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Session Thirty-Two

Session Discipline:	Evangelism
Session Verse/Passage:	2 Timothy 2:15
Session Purpose:	To engage students in developing tools used to defend the faith.

Preparation:

- Print a copy of each of the four statements of belief. Use masking tape to mark off four areas on the floor of your meeting room. Place the following in the middle of each of the marked off areas:
 - One of the belief statements
 - A legal notepad
 - A pen
- Other supplies you will need: 4 Bibles, printed copies of each of the Apologetic Response Articles (the size of these articles range from 3 to 32 pages, so make sure you print these well in advance of the meeting)
- **OPTIONAL:** *You may want to close out the year by providing your students with a copy of Mere Christianity, by C. S. Lewis. You can find reasonably priced copies online at www.amazon.com. This is a classic apologetic.*

Session Teaching Plan:

- **Step One – 10 min.** As students arrive, divide them into four groups. Assign each group to one of the marked areas on the floor of your meeting room. Tell the groups they have 10 minutes to write out as many responses as possible to the belief statement assigned to their group. They cannot use any resources but the following: pen, paper, and their minds. (No Bibles or outside sources. They can write down scriptural responses, but they must do so from memory.)
- **Step Two – 10 min.** Get the students' attention and read 2 Timothy 2:15. Now tell students they will be given another 10 minutes and they may use their Bibles as a resource for their responses. Encourage them to build a strong biblical argument for their response.
- **Step Three – 25 min.** Distribute to each group the Apologetic Response Article associated with the group's belief statement. (Ex: The article entitled, "The Problem of Suffering" would be given to the group with the belief statement, "There is too much suffering in this world for God to exist.") Tell the students to divide up the information in the article among the group and begin to fashion an even deeper response to the belief statement. They cannot use the article itself as their response. They should attempt to write a concise 3 to 5 bullet point answer, that represents an informed, strong biblical response.
- **Step Four – 15 min.** Have groups share their belief statements and responses. Encourage students to look for opportunities to share God's truth as they encounter these belief statements at school or at other places and times in their lives. (Option: Distribute copies of "Mere Christianity" to students and encourage them to read this classic to strengthen their faith.) Close in prayer.

The Problem of Suffering

by Trevor Major, M.Sc., M.A.

Just to be human is to deal with emotional and physical pain on a day-to-day basis. This is the practical and existential problem of suffering that affects, and is affected by, our world view. Even Christians, who confess a living God (Matthew 16:16), may wonder: Where is this God when we need Him? Why doesn't He **do** something? These questions may lead to doubt, and then to disbelief. Atheists see only vindication in events like the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. They hear a mother on the evening news proclaiming, "It's a miracle that my baby survived," and wonder: Would it have been much bother for God to have done the same for everyone else? This is not a new argument. But given academic freedom in the modern secular university, unbelievers are able to wield the extent and depth of human suffering with devastating effect on ungrounded faith.

If we understand the intellectual problem of suffering, we may have a better chance of coming through the emotional side of the problem. However, my primary goal is to defend theism, and Christianity in particular, against the charges leveled by atheists. In so doing, I intend to show how one common tactic may distract us from a God-centered response.

THE ARGUMENT

The intellectual problem of suffering is a challenge unique to theists. By "theist" I mean anyone who believes in a Being Who exists beyond or outside the natural world, yet Who is able to be involved in the course of human events. This excludes deists, for example, who believe that a Supreme Being created the world, and left it alone. Christians, Jews, and Moslems, for the most part, count themselves as theists. Specifically, most readers of this article will be Christians who believe that God has attributes that are infinite in degree: that He is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, and so on.

Then the following question arises: How do we reconcile the existence of suffering with the existence of an all-loving, all-knowing God? The argument goes something like this:

1. If God is all-powerful, He could do something to prevent or end suffering.
2. If God is all-loving, He would want to prevent or end suffering.
3. There is a tremendous amount of suffering in the world.
4. Therefore, God either is not all-loving or not all-powerful.

The reason I say that this is a problem for the theist is that the atheist does not believe in the first two premises. He rejects that there is a God Who **could** do something about suffering if He had the power, and he rejects that there is a God Who **would** do something about

suffering if He had the inclination. He does not deny the third premise—that there is suffering. Like every human being, he faces the existential problem of suffering. As far as he is concerned, suffering **just is**: it is part of our unplanned, purposeless existence. We live, we die—end of story. Only for the sake of the present argument does the atheist grant God’s existence. All he is asking us to do, as theists, is reconcile or justify suffering, given that God is supposed to be an all-loving and all-powerful Being.

Skirting the Problem

Some people have tried to sidestep the problem by denying one of the three premises listed above. This was the approach taken by Harold Kushner, a Jewish rabbi who lost his son at an early age to a cruel and debilitating disease. God is infinitely good, Kushner concluded in his immensely popular book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (1981), but He is not all-powerful.

Other theologians have suggested that God neither is infinitely powerful nor infinitely good, but only in the **process** of acquiring these attributes. So it is understandable that there should be imperfections in our world because God, while great, likewise is imperfect or incomplete. Like Kushner, their “solution” is to abandon the God of conventional theism (e.g., Edwards, 1972, p. 213). Unfortunately, as John M. Frame has observed, such a finite god offers no “sure hope for the overcoming of evil” (1994, p. 157). In the end, this god is not the God that most Christians would want to defend.

Finally, someone may wish to deny the third premise by maintaining that suffering is not real. What we call “suffering,” they might say, is just an illusion. This is the position of Eastern mysticism, not of theism. Spinoza, a radical Jewish philosopher, maintained that evil was mere deprivation. When we think we are suffering, all we are doing is acting like children who have been denied toys or candy. If only we had a complete picture of reality, Spinoza would say, we would know God, and nothing would appear imperfect. But for Spinoza, nature and God were one and the same. Again, this is not the God of theism. Most Christians, like most atheists, acknowledge that suffering is all too real. Indeed, that Jesus suffered for the sake of mankind is a vital element of the Christian faith (Matthew 16:21; Luke 24:26; Acts 17:3; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 2:20-25; 4:12-19; etc.).

Dismissing the Problem

So, let us say that we want to deal with this problem without giving up any of God’s essential characteristics. Where do we begin? One approach is to maintain that no explanation is necessary. We, as mere mortals, should not have to “justify the ways of God to Men” (to use a phrase of John Milton’s). Or, in the words of a Simon and Garfunkel song, “God has a plan, but

it's not available to the common man." If God is Who we think He is, then there must be an explanation, but it is beyond our grasp.

Alvin Plantinga (1977) takes a more defensive approach. He points out that suffering, and the claims about God, are not contradictory. It is **not** like saying, for example,

Only birds have feathers.

Tweety has feathers.

Therefore, Tweety is not a bird.

Clearly, the last line contradicts the preceding lines. But where is the contradiction in affirming both that there is suffering, and that God is an all-loving and all-powerful Being? What a critic must do is supply some extra premises (e.g., Mackie, 1990, p. 26). He would have to insist, for instance, that the theist's perfectly good God always would eliminate evil insofar as He could. That there is so much evil is supposed to show that God is not all-good. Further, a critic would have to insist that there are no limits to what this Being could do. That there is so much evil is supposed to show that God's powers are limited.

The trouble is, these additional claims for what God would or could do fail to take into account a complete picture of God. For God to "eliminate evil insofar as He could" still may mean that we have a lot of evil in the world, because to reduce it any further might violate one of God's other attributes. We simply do not know what conditions would make the existence of both God and evil logically contradictory (also see Pike, 1990, pp. 48,52). As to God's power, there are no limits as to what He **could** bring to bear in any one situation. However, the **actual** power He uses would depend on other characteristics, such as grace, love, mercy, and so on. At the time of His arrest, the Son of God could have called on twelve legions of angels, but not without contradicting the promises of His Father in heaven (Matthew 26:52-56).

Plantinga has given us a good place to start. Theists could say, at least initially, that there is nothing irrational about believing in God and acknowledging the reality of evil. Still, people may think that this is a problem that Christians need to address. Have we got anything more to say?

Answering the Problem

One reason to suspect that there must be more answers is that the Bible—the foundation of our faith (Romans 10:17)—is not exactly silent on the subject. The Book of Job shows that God stood back and allowed a man to suffer at the hands of the Adversary. Job's world collapsed around him. He lost his property, his children, and his health. During this time, he had no idea why these things were happening to him. Job's wife told him to "curse God and

die" (2:9). Three of his friends thought terrible sins must lie at the root of such misfortunes. Job himself came to question God's goodness and power. In the end, of course, Job regained his faith, wealth, and much more.

But could we say that all these terrible events were necessary? Perhaps we can learn something from these events, but how can we justify the collateral damage? A great wind collapsed a house on Job's children, killing everyone inside (1:18-19). Natural calamities killed his animals, and raiders killed his servants (1:15-17). Was all this death necessary to teach Job, and us, a lesson about suffering?

And what about the death of Christ? Maybe—just maybe—the skeptic might go along with us and agree that Jesus had to die to save us from our sins. But why did He have to die with such humiliation, with scourging and beatings, and a tortuous death on the cross? Why did God not do a better job of arranging events so that His own Son could die in a more humane way? Besides, if humankind is guilty, why not punish the whole of mankind? Why did it have to be taken out on Someone else?

To those outside the faith, all this makes no sense, yet it is central to Christianity. And therein lies the problem. When I say it "makes no sense," I mean it makes no sense without appeal to religious concepts found in Scripture. "But why should I believe the Bible?," a critic will respond. That is a good question, to which Christians can offer all sorts of good reasons, but that is not what the skeptic has asked us to do in this case. The fact is, every concept important to Christianity comes from the Bible, and so it is to the Bible we must go if we are to find answers that are consistent with the claims we are making about Christianity. Ultimately, I suspect, this is why well-grounded Christians remain immune to the atheists' attacks on this front. To some degree or another, they know that suffering does not reflect badly on what they understand of God.

Likewise, if we introduce concepts such as sin, salvation, miracles, and so on, the atheist often will respond, "Yes, but they depend on the existence of God. If God does not exist, then these explanations disappear." Again, whether God exists is beside the point. Atheists have challenged us to reconcile certain attributes of God with the existence of evil. They were not challenging us (on this occasion) to defend the existence of God. The very problem, as it is posed to us, grants that God exists.

This is such a common tactic that I must make this point absolutely clear: the atheist cannot accuse us of a contradiction within our faith, and then block us from introducing the entire content of that faith (as opposed to discussing just the logical claims that are made about God's attributes). Perhaps this is why the argument gets bogged down in philosophy, when really, it is a theological issue. Marilyn McCord Adams agrees:

Where the internal coherence of a system of religious beliefs is at stake, successful arguments for its inconsistency must draw on premisses (explicitly or implicitly) internal to that system or obviously acceptable to its adherents; likewise for successful rebuttals or explanations of consistency (1990, p. 210).

SOME ANSWERS

The Origin of Suffering

As is often the case, the Book of Beginnings is the best place to start in dealing with fundamental questions. Genesis tells us that God put Adam and Eve in the Garden, and gave them access to the Tree of Life. They would live forever as long as they could eat from this tree (Genesis 3:22), but they were not immortal. God told them not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, otherwise they would surely die (Genesis 2:17).

At some point, apparently not too long after the creation week, Satan tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit and she, in turn, convinced Adam to do the same. This brought judgment from God. He separated them from the Tree of Life, and promised that people would suffer, and that Satan would be defeated (Genesis 3:14-19). It is difficult to grasp the enormity of this situation. We suffer—even innocent children suffer—because of the sin of two people. How could God allow so much suffering to exist for so long?

God is Sovereign

From God's perspective, the first step is not to answer a question like this, but to deal with our accusations. Job is a case in point. The old patriarch accused God of

- judging him falsely (9:20)
- wronging him (19:6)
- persecuting him (19:22)
- not judging the wicked (24:1-12), and
- ignoring all his good works (31:1ff.).
- Job's cry, like our own, seems to be "Why God? **Why?!"**

God's response was to ask some probing questions of Job:

Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it.... Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified? (40:2,8).

In his questioning, Job assumed that God was at fault. His three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—assumed that Job was at fault for some great sin that he must have committed, and God chastened them for this presumption, too (42:7ff.).

Finally, young Elihu recognized that, on occasion, suffering can have a purpose. God can use it to judge the wicked, strengthen the faithful, aid the oppressed, and bless the righteous. And yet, throughout his criticism of Job, the level-headed Elihu affirmed the sovereignty of God: “Why do you contend with Him? For He does not give an accounting of any of His words” (33:13).

Paul followed the same theme in Romans 9. The apostle was responding to a “not fair” claim on the part of Jewish Christians. Apparently, some of them felt that they, as descendants of Abraham, merited a greater share in the inheritance of God’s kingdom. Of course, as Paul pointed out in verse 8, it is the children of the **promise**, not the children of **flesh**, who were to be the children of God and, therefore, heirs of salvation. He illustrated this with the example of Esau and Jacob. Some might point out that Jacob’s having a higher place than his older brother was an injustice, but God had a plan that did not take into account manmade customs of inheritance. To anyone who would accuse God of being unjust in this case (vs. 14), Paul would remind them of God’s sovereignty: “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (vs. 15).

While he was at it, Paul dealt with another familiar accusation: “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’” (vs. 19). In other words, “if the things that happen in my life are God’s will, then surely they are out of my control, and if my life is not my own, then why should God hold me responsible for the things I do? It’s not fair for us to suffer if God is supposed to be in control.” Again, Paul responded with a countercharge: “Who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (vs. 20). Our duty is to do what is right, not to worry about what God is doing and why.

On returning to the original question concerning Gentiles, Paul pointed out that God had been working throughout history to bring about His mercy. Along the way, He suffered the disobedience of Gentiles and Jews alike. God “endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (vs. 22). But, by His teaching and the unveiling of a redemptive plan, God had made “known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy” (vs. 23). Both Jews and Gentiles were vessels filled with iniquity, but God rescued those whom He called, and has filled them with His mercy (vs. 24).

God is Just

Paul’s comments about mercy lead us to a second response: not only is God sovereign, but His mercy demonstrates that He is just. Mercy is revealed in God’s redemptive plan: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God’s goal is redemption. He does not wish suffering on any of us; He wishes that we were with Him in heaven where there is no pain and suffering. Let us revisit Romans, but chapter 3 this time. Paul wrote: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation [an appeasing sacrifice—TM] by His blood, through faith” (vss. 23-25a).

By justifying us, God shows that He is just; by making us righteous, He shows that He is righteous. We are justified through faith

...to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (vss. 25b-26).

Often we think of God's justifying us, but here we see that God's justness is revealed to us at the same time. This was not so evident to the people of the Old Testament who lacked the clear testimony of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. If God already has revealed so much to us in history, we can only wait in wonder to see what will be revealed to us in the future: "If we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (Romans 8:18,25).

In Frame's view, Romans is the New Testament equivalent of Job. It is as much about the justification of God (a theodicy) as it is about the justification of man.

Romans confirms, therefore, what we have seen elsewhere in Scripture. (1) We have no right to complain against God, and when we do, we expose ourselves as disobedient. (2) God is under no obligation to give us an intellectually satisfying answer to the problem of evil. He expects us to trust him in spite of that. (3) God's sovereignty is not to be questioned in connection with the problem of evil; it is rather to be underscored. (4) God's word, his truth, is altogether reliable. (5) As a matter of fact, God is not unjust. He is holy, just, and good (Frame, 1994, p. 178).

CONCLUSION

God **is** all-good, God **is** all-powerful, and yes, there is an abundance of suffering. People have struggled with this apparent dilemma throughout the ages. Sometimes we mortals may try to vindicate our God by presuming to know His mind, but God says "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:19). In short, God is sovereign. There is nothing wrong with asking "why" questions, but when they turn into accusations, we challenge His sovereignty. Why was this woman raped? Why did thousands die in a tropical cyclone? No one can answer these specific questions adequately, anymore than the two-year old can understand why she must undergo heart surgery (Adams, 1990, p. 217; see also Frame, 1994, pp. 150-151). The little girl does not hate her parents for the pain, but continues to love and trust them based on her life experience.

Given the tremendous amount of suffering in this world, could we not assume that God is sovereign, but some sort of malevolent ruler? On the contrary, Christ's willing sacrifice on the cross has shown God to be just.

Well-grounded Christians, I am convinced, have a strong intuition that the atheists' standard arguments on the problem of suffering are wrong. The answers they find have

more to do with the “how” of Christian faith, than the “why” of presumption against God. They want to respond with Job, and they want to respond with Christ, because these examples make sense out of suffering for them, but the atheists always try to block this part of the conversation. They ridicule the Bible and the Christian experience. They give anecdotal stories about people who lost their faith in the face of suffering. They admit freely that the intellectual problem of suffering was crucial to their own walk away from faith. And, if all else fails, there is the old standby of incredulity: “I just can’t believe you [are stupid enough to] worship a God Who [is so heinous that He] would allow so much suffering in this world.” Yet the conditions of the discussion at the very outset assume that God exists. From that point on, it does not matter **for the sake of argument** whether the critics believe that the Bible is true, or that we all are sinners in need of salvation, or that God raised His Son from the grave. As Adams argues:

Just as philosophers may or may not find the existence of God plausible, so they may be variously attracted or repelled by Christian values of grace and redemptive sacrifice. But agreement on truth-value is not necessary to consensus on internal consistency. My contention has been that it is not only legitimate, but, given horrendous evils, necessary for Christians to dip into their richer store of valuables to exhibit the consistency of [an all-loving, all-powerful God] and [the existence of evil] (1990, p. 220).

This “richer store of valuables” for the Christian includes not only an intellectual acceptance of God’s sovereignty and justice, but an abiding experience of God in their lives. Hope for a better world has enabled Christians to survive the worst of times. This is not an explanation for why we have suffering, but a justification of God’s love, in that we would expect our Creator to endow us with the ability to find an essential worth in our own existence (Adams, 1990, p. 216).

Contrary to the atheists’ assertion, a Christian’s faith in God is not a humiliating emotional crutch, but a source of joy in overcoming the practical and existential problem of suffering. Christians, I believe, know within themselves that their faith has been a source of strength. All they see in the atheists’ charges is an allegation of internal inconsistency leveled by people who, frequently, know little to nothing of Scripture, and who, perhaps, never have experienced a full, spiritual life.

Only by being faithful to God can we attest to the perfect revealing of His redemptive plan, which is for us to live with Him forever. “Don’t you think it’s awful,” the atheist speaks with incredulity once more, “that God will condemn all those people who don’t bow down and worship Him and only Him?” What would be worse is if there were no God to punish the Neros, Hitlers, and child molesters of this world. There is a God, if there is any justice at all. In the meantime, the words of Peter remind us that the Lord “is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God is just before us; the only question that remains is: Are we just before Him?

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Reasoning About the Resurrection of Christ

by Eric Lyons, M.Min.

The resurrection of Christ is central to the faith of every Christian. Without a firm belief that "God has raised Him from the dead" (Romans 10:9), salvation from sin is impossible. Paul wrote: "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Without the good news of Jesus' defeat of death, the Gospel is void of its power to save mankind (cf. Romans 1:16). If Christ was not "raised from the dead by the glory of the Father," there would be no "newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Rather, every accountable person would lie "dead in trespasses" (Ephesians 2:1,5) without hope of becoming "a new creation" in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Truly, the resurrection of Christ provides the substance for the Christian's hope and the solid foundation on which to build his faith.

Is it any surprise, then, that first-century evangelists put so much emphasis on Jesus' resurrection? Peter specifically mentioned how the apostle chosen to take the place of Judas was to become a witness of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:22). A short while later, Peter preached to thousands of Jews in Jerusalem a sermon that hinged on the empty tomb of Christ (Acts 2:24,31-32). He then spoke in the temple about the Lord's resurrection (Acts 3:15,26), and afterward witnessed to this fact before the highest court of the Jews (4:10; 5:29-32). The apostle similarly witnessed to the Gentiles, beginning with Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:30). Paul repeatedly spoke of the resurrection of Christ in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:30,33,34,37), reasoned from the Scriptures about it in Thessalonica (Acts 17:3), and then gave testimony of this fact before both Festus and Agrippa (Acts 26:22-25).

First-century Christians frequently discussed the resurrection of Christ and were prepared to defend it using logical arguments comprised of sufficient evidence (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Acts 1:3; 26:22-23). Christ's resurrection was fundamental to their faith and prominent in their preaching. It should be no less today. Hundreds of millions of people on Earth disbelieve in Jesus' death-defying power. Skeptics scoff at the idea of Jesus coming back to life. Infidels in classrooms and media outlets throughout the world adamantly argue against it, alleging that "the bodily resurrection of Jesus did not happen on good biblical grounds," and it certainly "did not happen on good historical grounds" (Barker, 1996).

In the past, we have discussed various irrefutable proofs for the resurrection of Christ (see Butt, 2002). In this issue of *Reason & Revelation*, we respond to four questions that skeptics are fond of asking as they attempt to discredit the Bible's portrayal of this earth-shaking event (Matthew 28:2).

WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT JESUS' RESURRECTION?

Most anyone who has spent much time reading the Scriptures knows that the Bible writers mentioned several individuals who rose from the dead. After the widow's son of Zarephath died, Elijah prayed to God, "and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived" (1 Kings 17:22). A few years later, the prophet Elisha raised the dead son of a Shunammite (2 Kings 4:32-35). Then, after Elisha's death, a dead man, in the process of being buried in the tomb of Elisha, was restored to life after touching Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:20-21). While on Earth Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Mark 8:21-24,35-43), as well as the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-16), and Lazarus—who had been buried for four days (John 11:1-45). Matthew recorded how after Jesus' death and resurrection "the graves were opened; and **many** bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (27:52-53, emp. added). Then later, during the early years of the church, Peter raised Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36-43), while Paul raised the young man Eutychus, who had died after falling from a third-story window (Acts 20:7-12).

All of these people died and later rose to live again. Although some of the individuals arose very shortly after death, Lazarus and (most likely) the saints who were raised after the resurrection of Jesus were entombed longer than was Jesus. In view of all of these resurrections, some have asked, "What is so important about **Jesus'** resurrection?" If others in the past have died to live again, what makes **His** resurrection so special? The former editor of *Biblical Errancy*, Dennis McKinsey, once mockingly asked:

Why would it [Jesus' resurrection—EL] be of any consequence since...many others rose before Jesus? By the time he rose this was a rather common occurrence. I would think it would have been met by a resounding yawn rather than surprise followed by: So what else can you do? Adam's act of coming into the world as a full grown adult is more spectacular (n.d.).

Given the fact that Jesus is not the only person ever to come back to life, what is it that makes His resurrection unique? Why is the resurrection of **Jesus** more significant than any other?

First, the resurrection of Jesus is more significant than any other resurrection simply because the inspired apostles and prophets said that it was. Critics may sneer at this response, but it is a valid point. Jesus did certain things that others did, including being raised from the dead, but His actions were more significant because of the statements attached to them. Consider the miracles Jesus performed in order to set Himself apart as the Son of God and promised Messiah. Many people throughout the Bible worked miracles in order to confirm their divine message (cf. Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:1-4), but only Jesus did them as proof of His divine **nature**. Once, during the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, a group of Jews surrounded Jesus and asked, "How long do you keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly" (John

10:24)? Jesus responded to them saying, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me.... I and My Father are one" (John 10:25,30). These Jews understood that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God in the flesh (cf. 10:33,36), and Jesus wanted them to understand that this truth could be confirmed by the miracles that He worked.

The miracles testified to His deity (John 20:30-31). Why? **Because He said they did** (10:25,35-38; cf. John 5:36). The miracles that Jesus performed bore witness to the fact that He was from the Father (John 5:36), **because He said He was from the Father**. A miracle in and of itself did not mean the person who worked it was deity. Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Peter, Paul, and a host of others worked miracles, with some even raising people from the dead. But none did so for the purpose of proving they were God in the flesh. The apostles and prophets of the New Testament worked miracles to confirm their message that **Jesus** was the Son of God, not to prove that **they** were God (cf. Acts 14:8-18). Jesus, on the other hand, performed miracles to bear witness that **He** was the Son of God, just as He claimed to be (cf. John 9:35-38).

Similarly, one fundamental reason that Jesus' miraculous resurrection is more important to a Christian than the resurrections of Lazarus, Tabitha, Eutychus, or anyone else who was raised from the dead, is simply because the Bible writers explained that it was more important. There is no record of anyone alleging that Lazarus was God's Son based on his resurrection, nor did the early church claim divinity for Eutychus or Tabitha because they died and came back to life. None of the aforementioned individuals who was resurrected ever claimed that the resurrection was proof of deity, nor did any inspired prophet or apostle. On the other hand, Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). His resurrection was different because of Who He was—the Son of God. Thus, just as the miracles He worked during His earthly ministry testified of His divine message, and hence His divine nature, so did His resurrection.

A second reason why Jesus' resurrection stands out above all others is because it alone was specifically foretold in the Old Testament. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter affirmed that God had raised Jesus from the dead because it was not possible for the grave to hold Him. As proof, he quoted Psalm 16:8-11 in the following words:

I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence (Acts 2:25-28).

Peter then explained this quote from the book of Psalms by saying:

Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses (Acts 2:29-32).

The apostle Paul also believed that the psalmist bore witness to Christ, and spoke of His resurrection. In his address at Antioch of Pisidia, he said:

And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” Therefore He also says in another Psalm: “You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:32-39).

Where is the prophecy for the resurrection of Jairus’ daughter? When did the prophets ever foretell of Eutychus or Tabitha’s resurrection? They did not. No resurrected person other than Jesus had his or her resurrection foretold by an Old Testament prophet, nor did any inspired apostle or prophet in the first century apply Old Testament prophecies to them. This certainly makes Jesus’ resurrection unique.

Third, Jesus’ resurrection is more significant than any other because He prophesied numerous times that He would rise from the dead, even foretelling the exact day on which it would occur. Jesus told some scribes and Pharisees on one occasion, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, **so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth**” (Matthew 12:40, emp. added). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recorded how Jesus “began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and **be raised the third day** (Matthew 16:21, emp. added; cf. Mark 8:31-32; Luke 9:22). While Jesus and His disciples were in Galilee, Jesus reminded them, saying, “The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and **the third day He will be raised up**” (Matthew 17:22-23, emp. added).



Christians do not serve a lifeless lord, but a Risen Redeemer
Whose tomb was found empty nearly 2,000 years ago.

Just before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus again reminded His disciples, saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. **And the third day He will rise again**" (Matthew 20:18-19, emp. added). Jesus' prophecies concerning His resurrection and the specific day on which it would occur were so widely known that, after Jesus' death, His enemies requested that Pilate place a guard at the tomb, saying, "Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure **until the third day...**" (Matthew 27:63-64, emp. added). They knew exactly what Jesus had said He would do, and they did everything in their power to stop it.

Where are the prophecies from the widow's son of Zarephath? Did he prophesy of his resurrection prior to his death? Or what about the son of the Shunammite woman that Elisha raised from the dead? Where are his personal prophecies? Truly, no one who rose from the dead except Jesus prophesied about his or her own resurrection. And certainly no one ever prophesied about the exact day on which he or she would rise from the dead, save Jesus. This prior knowledge and prophecy makes His resurrection a significant event. He overcame death,

just as He predicted. He did **exactly** what he said He was going to do, on the **exact** day He said He would do it.

Fourth, the uniqueness of Jesus' resurrection is seen in the fact that He is the only resurrected person ever to have lived and died without having committed one sin during His lifetime. He was "pure" and "righteous" (1 John 3:3; 2:1), "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). He was "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19), "Who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). No one else who has risen from the dead ever lived a perfect life, and then died prior to his or her resurrection for the purpose of taking away the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29). Because Jesus lived a sinless life, died, and then overcame death in His resurrection, He alone has the honor of being called "the Lamb of God" and the "great High Priest" (Hebrews 4:14). "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many," and because of His resurrection, "those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28).

Finally, and perhaps most important, the significance of Jesus' resurrection is seen in the fact that He was the first to rise from the dead **never to die again**. Since no one who has risen from the dead is still living on Earth, and since there is no evidence in the Bible that God ever took someone who had risen from the dead into heaven without his dying again, it is reasonable to conclude that all who ever rose from the dead, died in later years. Jesus, however, never died again. He rose from the grave to live forevermore. All others who previously were raised from the dead, died again, and are among those who "sleep" and continue to wait for the bodily resurrection. Only Jesus truly has conquered death. Only His bodily resurrection was followed by eternal life, rather than another physical death.

Skeptics have argued that "it's the Resurrection, per se, that matters, **not the fact that Jesus never died again**" (see McKinsey, 1983, p. 1, emp. added). However, the inspired apostles said otherwise. Paul actually linked the two together while preaching in Antioch of Pisidia, saying, God "raised Him from the dead, **no more to return to corruption.... He whom God raised saw no corruption**" (Acts 13:34,37, emp. added). Paul also impressed upon the minds of the Christians in Rome how Jesus, "having been raised from the dead, **dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him**" (Romans 6:9, emp. added). [Is it any wonder Paul testified before Agrippa and Festus how Jesus was "the first to rise from the dead" (Acts 26:23)? "[H]e was the first who rose again from the dead to return no more into the empire of death" (Clarke, 1996).] Jesus said of Himself: "I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive **forevermore**" (Revelation 1:17-18, emp. added). Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews argued for a better life through Jesus on the basis of His termination of death. One reason for the inadequacy of the old priesthood was because "they were prevented by death." Jesus, however, because He rose never to die again, "continues forever" in "an unchangeable priesthood," and lives to make intercession for His

people (Hebrews 7:23-25). As so often is the case, skeptics comment on the Bible without really knowing what the Bible says. To say, that “it’s the Resurrection, per se, that matters, not the fact that Jesus never died again” (McKinsey, 1983, p. 1), is to deny (or ignore) what the apostles and prophets actually stated.

Whether or not Eutychus, Tabitha, Lazarus, etc., rose from the grave, our relationship with God is not affected. Without Jesus’ resurrection, however, there would be no “Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). Without Jesus’ resurrection, no suitable High Priest would be able to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). Without Jesus’ resurrection, we would have no assurance of His coming and subsequent judgment (Acts 17:31). Without Jesus’ resurrection, “we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Jesus’ resurrection **is** significant—more so than any other resurrection. Only Jesus’ resurrection was verbalized by inspired men as proof of His deity. Only Jesus’ resurrection was prophesied in the Old Testament. Only Jesus foretold of the precise day on which He would rise from the grave—and then fulfilled that prediction. Only Jesus’ resurrection was preceded by a perfect life—a life lived, given up, and restored in the resurrection for the purpose of becoming man’s Prince, Savior, and Mediator. And, only Jesus rose never to die again.

WHY IS CHRIST CALLED THE “FIRST FRUITS”?

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wrote at length concerning the resurrection of the dead because some of the Christians in Corinth taught “that there is no resurrection of the dead” (vs. 12). As one of his proofs for the Christian’s eventual resurrection, Paul pointed to the fact that Christ rose, and showed that the general resurrection stands or falls with Christ’s resurrection, saying, “if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile” (vss. 16-17)! After hypothetically arguing from the absurd in an attempt to help the Corinthian Christians to see that their stance on the final resurrection completely undermined Christianity, Paul proceeded to demonstrate that Christ **had** risen, making the resurrection of the dead inevitable. It is in this section of Scripture that some find a difficulty. Beginning with verse 20, Paul wrote:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep**. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But **each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits**, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, emp. added).

In view of the fact that Jesus was not the first person ever to rise from the dead (as previously discussed), some have questioned why Paul twice described Jesus as “the firstfruits” from the dead. Did Paul err? Was he ignorant of all of the previous resurrections? In what sense did Paul speak of Christ as “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep”?

One could respond reasonably to these questions by pointing out the aforementioned fact that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead—**never to die again**. In this sense, Christ is “the firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5). Another (and perhaps better) explanation to the question surrounding 1 Corinthians 15:20,23 and Paul’s use of the word “firstfruits” (Greek *aparche*) is to recognize the metaphor Paul employed. Under the old law, the firstfruits were the earliest gathered grains, fruits, and vegetables that the people dedicated to God in recognition of His faithfulness for providing the necessities of life. The Israelites were to offer to God a sheaf of the first grain that was harvested on the day after the Sabbath following the Passover feast (Leviticus 23:9-14). Paul used the term “firstfruits” in this letter to the Corinthian church to reinforce the certainty of the resurrection. Just as the term “firstfruits” indicates that “the first sheaf of the forthcoming grain harvest will be followed by the rest of the sheaves, Christ, the firstfruits raised from the dead, is the guarantee for all those who belong to him that they also will share in his resurrection” (Kistemaker, 1993, p. 548). Jesus is God’s “firstfruits” of the resurrection. And, like the Israelites, God will gather the rest of the harvest at the final resurrection. Paul seemingly wanted the Corinthians to understand (by way of metaphor) that Christ’s resurrection is **a pledge** of our resurrection. It is inevitable—a full harvest guaranteed by God Himself.

ON WHAT DAY DID JESUS RISE FROM THE DEAD?

The most frequent reference to Jesus’ resurrection reveals that He rose from the grave **on** the third day of His entombment. Matthew and Luke both record Jesus as prophesying that He would rise from the grave on this day (Matthew 17:23; Luke 9:22). The apostle Paul wrote in his first epistle to the Corinthians that Jesus arose from the grave “**the third day** according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4, emp. added). And while preaching to Cornelius and his household, Peter taught that God raised Jesus up “**on** the third day” (Acts 10:40, emp. added). Skeptics are quick to contend, however, that these scriptures contradict various other passages. For example, Jesus predicted that He would “be killed, and **after** three days rise again” (Mark 8:31, emp. added). On another occasion, Jesus told His apostles how His enemies would “mock Him and spit upon Him, and scourge Him, and kill Him, and three days **later** He will rise again” (Mark 10:34, emp. added, NASB). In addition, He informed the Pharisees that He would be in the heart of the Earth for as long as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish—for “three days and three nights” (Matthew 12:40). How can a person be expected to believe that Jesus rose from the grave if Jesus and the Bible writers could not even decide whether He rose from the grave on the third day or the fourth day?

In an attempt to solve this difficulty, some seemingly well-meaning individuals have espoused the idea that Jesus must have been crucified on Wednesday or Thursday, rather than on Friday (eg., Scroggie, 1948, pp. 569-577; Rusk, 1974, pp. 4-6). Because Jesus could not possibly have been in the grave for three nights if He died on Friday and rose on Sunday, some believe He must have died a day or two earlier. However, this is highly improbable. First, Mark 15:42 states that the evening of Christ's crucifixion "was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath," and "[b]oth the Scriptures (Matt 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14,31,42) and Josephus indicate the day of preparation is the day before the weekly Sabbaths, namely, Friday" (Hoehner, 1974, 131:245; cf. Josephus, 16:6:2). Second, if Jesus died on Wednesday and rose on Sunday then He must have risen from the grave **on** the fourth day rather than "the third day." What's more, all attempts to place Jesus' crucifixion and burial on Wednesday or Thursday instead of Friday are based more on a misunderstanding of a Hebrew idiom concerning time than actual evidence.

While statements such as "on the third day," "after three days," and "three days and three nights" may appear contradictory at first glance, in reality they harmonize perfectly if one understands the more liberal methods ancients used to reckon time. In the first century, any part of a day could be computed for the whole day and the night following it (cf. Lightfoot, 1979, pp. 210-211). The *Jerusalem Talmud* quotes rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, who lived around A.D. 100, as saying: "A day and night are an Onah [a portion of time] and the portion of an Onah is as the whole of it" (Shabbath ix. 3, as quoted in Hoehner, 1974, 131:248-249, bracketed comment in orig.). Azariah indicated that a portion of a twenty-four hour period could be considered the same "as the whole of it." Thus, in Jesus' time one would have been correct in teaching that Jesus' burial would last "three days and three nights," even though it was not three complete 24-hour days.

Scripture is peppered with references which demonstrate that a part of a day was oftentimes equivalent to a whole day.

- According to Genesis 7:12, the rain of the Noachic Flood was upon the Earth "forty days and forty nights." Verse seventeen of that same chapter says it was on the Earth for just "forty days." Obviously, "forty days" and "forty days and forty nights" refer to the same time period in this context.
- During the reign of King Ahab, Israel and Syria "encamped opposite each other **for seven days**" (1 Kings 29:20, emp. added). Yet, "**on** the seventh day the battle was joined" and Israel killed 100,000 Syrian foot soldiers (29:20). Clearly, the two armies did not occupy their camps for a full seven days, but for six days and a part of the seventh. The remainder of day seven was spent in battle.
- When Joseph's brothers came to visit him for the first time since selling him into Egyptian bondage more than a decade earlier (Genesis 37:12-36), Joseph incarcerated

- them for “three days” (Genesis 42:17). The text then reveals that he spoke to them “**the** third day,” and 42:18-24 represents them as being released that day—i.e., the third day. If Joseph’s brothers (with the exception of Simeon, 42:24) were released on day three of their imprisonment, then the “three days” they spent in the prison (42:17) are not equivalent to three 24-hour periods, but rather parts of three days.
- When the Israelites visited King Rehoboam and asked him to lighten their burdens (2 Chronicles 10:3-4), he wanted time to contemplate their request, so he instructed Jeroboam and the people of Israel to return “**after** three days” (10:5, emp. added). Verse twelve of that chapter indicates that Jeroboam and the people of Israel came to Rehoboam “**on** the third day, **as the king had directed**, saying, ‘Come back to me **the third day**’” (emp. added). Fascinating, is it not, that even though Rehoboam instructed his people to return “**after** three days,” they understood him to mean “**on** the third day” (cf. 1 Kings 12:5,12).
 - When Queen Esther was about to risk her life by going before King Ahasuerus uninvited, she instructed her fellow Jews to follow her example by not eating or drinking “**for three days, night or day**” (Esther 4:16, emp. added). Yet, the text then tells us that Esther went in to the king “**on** the third day” (5:1, emp. added).

By studying these and other passages, one can see clearly that the Bible uses expressions like “three days,” “the third day,” “on the third day,” “after three days,” and “three days and three nights” to signify the **same** period of time. Again, “[a]ccording to the Oriental mode of reckoning, three consecutive **parts** of days were counted three days” (Jamieson, et. al., 1997, emp. added).

From Acts 10, we can glean further insight into the ancient practice of counting consecutive days (in part or in whole) as complete days. Luke recorded how an angel appeared to Cornelius at “about the ninth hour of the day” (approximately 3:00 p.m.; 10:3). “**The next day**” (10:9) Peter received a vision from God and welcomed visitors sent by Cornelius. “**On the next day**” (10:23) Peter and the servants of Cornelius departed for Caesarea. “**And the following day** they entered Caesarea” where Peter taught Cornelius and his household the Gospel (10:24). At one point during Peter’s visit, Cornelius spoke about his encounter with the angel of God. Notice carefully how he began the rehearsal of the event. He stated: “**Four days ago to this hour**, I was praying in my house during the ninth hour...” (10:30, NASB, emp. added). Although the event really had occurred only 72 hours (or three literal days) earlier, Cornelius spoke of it as taking place “four days ago to this hour.” Why four days instead of three? Because according to the first-century method of reckoning time, a part of the first day and a part of the fourth day were counted as whole days. Surely one can see how this information aligns itself perfectly with Jesus’ burial taking place on Friday and His resurrection occurring on Sunday. A part of Friday, all day Saturday, and a part of Sunday would be considered **three** days in ancient times, not one or two.

Even though in 21st-century America some may find this reasoning somewhat confusing, similar idiomatic expressions are used frequently today. For example, we consider a baseball game that ends after only completing 8½ innings a “9-inning game.” And even though the losing pitcher on the visiting team only pitched 8 innings (and not 9 innings like the winning pitcher from the home team), he is said to have pitched a **complete** game. Think about the college student who explains to his professor that he worked on a research project “day and night for four weeks.” He obviously does not mean that he worked for a solid 672 hours (24 hours x 7 days x 4 weeks) without sleeping. It may be that he worked from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m. for four weeks on the project, but not 672 sleepless hours. If he only slept five or six hours a night, and worked on the project nearly every hour he was awake, we would consider this person as one who truly did work “day and night for four weeks.” Finally, consider the guest at a hotel who checks in at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, and checks out at 3:30 p.m. Thursday—less than 24 hours later. Did the man stay one day or two days at the hotel? Technically, the guest was there for less than one full day (24-hour period), yet the hotel legally can charge him for two days since he did not leave before the mandatory 11:00 a.m. checkout time. Considering how flexible we are in measuring time, perhaps we should not be surprised at how liberal the ancients were in calculating time.

Further evidence proving that Jesus’ statements regarding His burial were not contradictory center around the fact that even His enemies did not accuse Him of contradicting Himself. No doubt this was due to their familiarity with and use of the flexible, customary method of stating time. In fact, the chief priests and Pharisees even said to Pilate the day after Jesus was crucified: “Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘**After** three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure **until** the third day” (Matthew 27:63-64, emp. added). The phrase “after three days” must have been equivalent to “the third day,” else surely the Pharisees would have asked for a guard of soldiers until the fourth day. Interesting, is it not, that modern skeptics charge Jesus with contradicting Himself, but not the hypocritical Pharisees of His own day.

The idiomatic expressions that Jesus and the Bible writers employed to denote how long Jesus would remain in the grave does not mean that He literally was buried for 72 hours. If we interpret the account of Jesus’ crucifixion, burial, and resurrection in light of the cultural setting of the first century, and not according to the present-day (mis)understanding of skeptics, we find no errors in any of the expressions that Jesus and the gospel writers used.

DID JESUS HAVE THE SAME PHYSICAL BODY AFTER HIS RESURRECTION AS BEFORE?

A gentleman once e-mailed our offices at Apologetics Press, questioning whether Jesus had the same body after His resurrection as He did before being raised from the grave. According

to this man, Jesus “appeared to people He knew but nobody recognized Him.... It’s as though He had a different body”—and possibly one that was not physical.

At the outset, it is incorrect to assert that “nobody recognized Him,” because Matthew 28:9,17 clearly implies that at least some of Jesus’ disciples knew Who He was and worshiped Him. Moreover, that Jesus had essentially the same body after His resurrection that He had when He died on the cross is evident from at least three different passages. In Luke 24:39, Jesus stated: “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” Jesus expected His disciples to observe **His physical** body. Later in the same chapter, we read that Jesus ate a meal with His disciples (24:42-43; cf. Acts 10:41). And then in John 20:25-29, which is the most frequently cited passage in defense of Christ having a physical body, Jesus asked Thomas to touch His nail-scared hands and reach into His side that had been pierced with the Roman spear.

But what about those occasions when some of His disciples did not recognize Him? Do such verses as Luke 24:31,37 and John 20:10-16 represent a contradictory element in the resurrection story? First, just because the text says that the disciples thought they had seen a spirit when they actually saw Jesus (Luke 24:37), does not indicate that He looked different. Since they knew He had been killed, seeing His resurrected body caused them to think that He was in spirit form rather than physical. On one occasion, before Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, His disciples were startled at His appearance, supposing He was a ghost (Mark 6:49). A similar thing happened to Peter when some thought his unexpected presence must have been an indication that it was “his angel” (Acts 12:15).

Second, the reason the two disciples who were traveling on the road to Emmaus failed to recognize Jesus initially was not because Jesus had a different body, but because God miraculously prevented them from recognizing Him. Luke 24:16 indicates that at the beginning of their conversation with Jesus “their eyes were restrained,” but then just before Jesus vanished from their sight, “their eyes were opened and they knew Him” (24:31). Thus, the disciples’ recognition ability failed, not because Jesus possessed a different body, but because their eyes were miraculously restrained.

A final person often mentioned as not having recognized the Savior (allegedly because Jesus had a different body) is Mary Magdalene. John 20:11-18 certainly testifies of her initial inability to identify Jesus. The question is: Was Mary’s failure to recognize Jesus **her** fault, or the result of Jesus having a different body? As with the above cases, there is no indication in John 20:11-18 that Jesus had anything other than His risen crucified body (cf. 20:25-29). There are at least four possibilities, however, as to why Mary failed to recognize Jesus right at first.

1. The Sun may not have risen all the way yet, thus making it difficult to see (cf. 20:1).
2. Mary was engaged in deep weeping that likely obscured her vision (20:11,13). In fact, the first words Jesus said to Mary were, "Woman, why are you weeping?" (vs. 15).
3. Considering Jesus' clothes were taken from Him when He was crucified (John 19:23-24), and that the linen cloths which were used in His burial were lying in the tomb (John 20:6-7), Jesus likely was wearing clothes that made His exact identity less conspicuous at first glance. Perhaps His post-resurrection attire was similar to what a gardener or watchman would wear (cf. John 20:15).
4. It also is possible that Mary's eyes were restrained miraculously, as were the eyes of the disciples with whom Jesus conversed on the road to Emmaus.

Once all of the Scriptures are taken into account, one can see that Jesus physically rose from the grave in essentially the same body that was crucified on the cross. The fact that some of Jesus' disciples did not immediately recognize Him in no way contradicts His physical resurrection.

CONCLUSION

The inspired accounts of the risen Redeemer have been the focus of much criticism through the years (cf. Barker, 1992, pp. 178-184; McKinsey, 2000, pp. 447-454). However, when the honest, open-hearted student of the Bible looks carefully at the evidence, he will come to realize that these criticisms are actually the result either of insufficient knowledge or hardened hearts. Truly, the more one studies the passages of Scripture in which Jesus' resurrection is discussed, as well as the historical context in which this momentous event occurred, the more he will see how incredibly accurate and trustworthy the Bible writers were.

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What Does it Mean to Say Jesus is the "Son of God"?

by Brad Bromling

Q.

What does it mean to say that Jesus is the "Son of God"?

A.

The New Testament employs a variety of terms in its effort to define the personal identity of Jesus. Strictly speaking, His name simply is Jesus (meaning "Yahweh is salvation"). Recognition of His messiahship quickly led His followers to call Him **Christ** (*christos* is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word Messiah), **Christ Jesus**, and the more common **Jesus Christ**. In addition, He also is called:

- **Lord**—an Old Testament designation for God, as well as a term of respect like "Sir";
- **Son of Man**—the designation Jesus most often applied to Himself that can indicate "a human," or point to a mysterious heavenly figure (Daniel 7:13);
- **Son of David**—an indicator of messianic lineage; and
- **"I AM"**—an apparent echo of the unutterable divine name (Exodus 3:14).

All of these titles make exalted claims for the Man from Galilee. For many Christians, though, **Son of God** is the most familiar term used to identify Jesus. This is understandable in light of passages like 1 John 4:15: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God," and John 20:30-31: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." There is power in the confession that Jesus is the "Son of God," but what does it mean?

The earliest Christians were Jews who were familiar with at least two distinct applications of the term "son of God." In the first place, the term had a general application to all Israelites. When their ancestors were held in Egyptian bondage, Moses was sent to Pharaoh with these words: "Thus says the Lord: Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me" (Exodus 4:22-23; see also Hosea 11:1). Through the years, Yahweh loved, protected, comforted, and chastened Israel, just as a loving parent would nurture and discipline children (Malachi 2:10; Isaiah 66:13; et al.).

The second usage was more specific. Historically, the term had a royal connotation for many nations of the Ancient Near East. It was commonplace for Egyptian, Babylonian, Canaanite, and Roman rulers to be called "son of God" (Fossum, 1992, pp. 128-137). These kings even were deified and surrounded by legends about their miraculous births—often including stories of gods copulating with humans (Sanders, 1993, pp. 243-245).

This royal connotation also was known in Israel, although they did not deify their kings (O'Collins, 1995, p. 117).

When the New Testament writers referred to Jesus as “Son of God,” they sometimes employed the term in ways that echoed these two common uses. After those who threatened the life of the child Jesus died, Joseph was given instructions in a dream to return from Egypt to his homeland. When Matthew reported this event, he said it fulfilled Hosea 11:1: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son” (see Matthew 2:15). In other words, Jesus was God’s Son as an Israelite, and in a real sense, the **True** Israelite.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus’ ministry began with a pronouncement from heaven: “This is my beloved Son...” (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11). The same is heard at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). In the Gospel of John, the baptizer testified that Jesus “ranks ahead of” him, and by virtue of the Spirit’s descending upon Jesus, he testified that Jesus is the “Son of God” (John 1:30, NRSV). These references are reminiscent of the decree of royal sonship (Psalm 2:6-7; see also Luke 1:32-33). When the Jewish leaders put Jesus on trial, they asked: “Are you the Son of God, then?” Satisfied with His answer, they told Pilate Jesus was claiming to be “a king” (Luke 22:70; 23:2). As Jesus died on the cross, the only accusation assigned to Him was, “This is the king of the Jews” (Luke 23:38). According to Paul and the writer of Hebrews, this regal distinction was especially manifest after Jesus was raised from the dead (Acts 13:33; Romans 1:4; Hebrews 1:5).

While Jesus’ identity certainly included these then-prevailing ideas of sonship, it is obvious they do not exhaust the significance of the term for Him. Over and over again, Jesus referred to God as His Father (Matthew 7:21; 10:32; 11:27, et al.). Since the Jews also saw themselves as sons and daughters of God, this should not have bothered them. But it did bother them, precisely because they perceived Jesus to be making a unique—and seemingly blasphemous—claim of sonship.

This uniqueness reached its zenith when Jesus addressed God as “Abba, Father” in prayer (Mark 14:36). “Abba” was the word a Jewish child used to refer to his or her “original person of reference” (i.e., mother or father). This bespoke an “unheard-of closeness” between Jesus and God (Moltmann, 1993, p. 142). Jesus demonstrated this closeness throughout His life. And it was in this intimacy that Jesus’ sonship is best defined. Gerald O’Collins has observed:

[Jesus] not only spoke like “the Son” but he also acted like “the Son” in knowing and revealing truth about God, in changing the divine law, in forgiving sins, in being the one through whom others could become children of God, and in acting with total obedience as the agent of God’s final kingdom (1995, p. 126).

To see through the eyes of faith that Jesus is the Son of God is to see that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

Finally, in the Gospel of John, Jesus referred to Himself as the “Son” Who was “sent” from the Father (John 3:16-17; 5:23; 6:40; 10:36). Clearly, this is a special claim. On one of those occasions, Jesus based His authority to heal on the Sabbath on the fact that His Father was working. This infuriated some of the Jews. John explained: “Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

In summary, to identify Jesus as the Son of God is to acknowledge His genealogical connection to Israel, His right to the throne of David, and His unparalleled nearness to God. To **confess** that Jesus is the Son of God is to declare as true Jesus’ claim: “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

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Is Evolution a "Fact" of Science?

by Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Origins. The mere mention of the word has the power to evoke deep-seated emotions, because this is one issue on which almost everyone has an opinion. From the very earliest times, men have inquired about their origin, and the question, "Whence have I come?" has not been far from either their minds or their lips. In our day and age it often is the case that **any** discussion of origins stirs quite a controversy, as proponents of competing theories battle each other in public debates, in the news media, in the classroom, in the courtroom, and through the printed word.

Such controversy, however, is not always bad. While it is true that at times more heat than light has been generated, this is not necessarily the case. Not infrequently, people who have had the temerity to question have been rewarded by the fruits of their inquiry. In many instances, people have been caused for the first time to consider seriously (or reconsider) their own privately held positions on these matters. They have sought answers, and have been amazed at the evidence (or lack of evidence) supporting their belief system—when previously they may have been somewhat complacent about the matter of their own beginnings. Oftentimes, as people have explored the matter of their ultimate origin, they also have discovered, quite inadvertently, certain implications that invariably accompany the suggested scenarios—implications that affect them in their everyday lives as they consider such weighty matters as ethics, morals, truth, and a host of other concepts of real importance to humankind. The controversy over origins (rather, the end results of that controversy) may have proven either a blight or a blessing, but to those who go to the trouble to investigate, one thing is certain: the quest never is dull.

There are two fundamentally different, and diametrically opposed, explanations for the origin of the Universe, the origin of life in that Universe, and the origin of new types of varying life forms. Each of these explanations is a cosmogony—an entire world view, or philosophy, of origins and destinies, of life and its meaning. One of these cosmogonies is known as **evolution** (often referred to as organic evolution, the theory of evolution, the evolution model, atheistic evolution, etc.). The second alternate and opposing view is **creation** (often referred to as special creation, the theory of creation, the creation model, etc.).

ATHEISTIC EVOLUTION DEFINED

The term "evolution" derives from the Latin word, *evolvere*, which means literally to "unroll, unfold, or change." The word "evolution" may be used legitimately to speak of a bud's development into the flower, the metamorphosis of the butterfly, or even the production of new varieties of organisms (see Bales, 1971, 2[3]:1-4). However, this is not what the average person has in mind when he speaks of evolution. In everyday parlance, the word carries quite a different meaning.

In 1960, G.A. Kerkut, the renowned British physiologist and evolutionist, authored *The Implications of Evolution*. In that small-but-powerful volume, he defined two theories of evolution that are of importance for the discussion here. He termed one of those the Special Theory of Evolution (often referred to as **microevolution**). This is the kind of evolution to which practically all people subscribe, and over which there is no controversy. It suggests that limited change, within narrow limits, occurs throughout all living things. I know of no one who would deny this point. Creationists agree to its factuality, as do atheistic evolutionists. Years ago (to list just three examples), Brangus cattle, Cockapoo dogs, and 1,000+ varieties of roses did not exist. But today they do. Why? Simply stated, it is because evolution has occurred.

But as everyone recognizes, this "evolution" produced only small changes that did not cross what biologists refer to as "phylogenetic boundaries." That is to say, the Brangus is still a cow, the Cockapoo is still a dog, and (to employ an old adage), a rose by any other name is still a rose. While the Special Theory of Evolution allows for change **within** groups, it does not allow for change **between** groups. It is not the Special Theory of Evolution that I will be investigating in the pages that follow; rather, I intend to examine the other theory of evolution mentioned by Kerkut.

In addition to the Special Theory, Dr. Kerkut also identified, defined, and discussed what he termed the General Theory of Evolution (often referred to as **macroevolution**). He stated: "On the other hand, there is the theory that all the living forms in the world have arisen from a single source which itself came from an inorganic form. This theory can be called the 'General Theory of Evolution'..." (1960, p. 157). This is what is referred to commonly as organic evolution, atheistic evolution, or simply "evolution." Through the years, numerous investigators have offered various definitions of evolution. The same year that Dr. Kerkut offered his definitions, Simpson wrote:

Evolution is a fully natural process, inherent in the physical properties of the universe, by which life arose in the first place, and by which all living things, past or present, have since developed, divergently and progressively (1960, 131:969).

This definition has been accepted widely because of: (a) Dr. Simpson's reputation in the evolutionary community; and (b) its succinct statement of what evolution is and allegedly does. Previously, Simpson and his coauthors had defined the theory by suggesting:

First, there is the theory of evolution in the strict sense. This states that all living organisms have evolved from common ancestors in a gradual historical process of change and diversification. The theory rejects the notion that all organisms were designed and created at the beginning of time (Simpson, et al., 1957, pp. 25-26).

Dr. Simpson's Harvard colleague, the famous zoologist P.D. Darlington, reiterated these same points twenty-three years later.

The outstanding evolutionary mystery now is how matter has originated and evolved, why it has taken its present form in the universe and on the earth, and why it is capable of forming itself into complex living sets of molecules. This capability is inherent in matter as we know it, in its organization and energy.... It is a fundamental evolutionary generalization that no external agent imposes life on matter. Matter takes the form it does because it has the inherent capacity to do so. This is one of the most remarkable and mysterious facts about our universe: that matter exists that has the capacity to form itself into the most complex patterns of life (1980, pp. 15,234).

While disavowing its factuality, creationists agree with evolutionists about the definition of their theory. One creationist publication defined evolution as:

...the hypothesis that millions of years ago lifeless matter, acted upon by natural forces, gave origin to one or more minute living organisms which have since evolved into all living and extinct plants and animals, including man. The theory of evolution has to do with the origin of life and the origin of species, and should not be confused with the ordinary development or natural history of living plants and animals which we see all around us and which is an entirely different phenomenon. In its wider aspects, the theory of evolution embraces the origin and development of the whole universe... (*Evolution*, n.d., p. 7).

Wilbert H. Rusch, a creationist, defined evolution as:

...the theory that large groups or kinds of basic organisms change with the passage of time. Then it is held that their descendants will now be as different from them as they were different from their ancestors. It would follow that, given the passage of a sufficient time span, the life forms at any given point in time will be radically different from the life forms present at any time during the past. It really involves what might be termed transspecific change. According to this theory, modern plants and animals are all the modified descendants of plants and

animals from the past. All present taxa are then somehow descended from a common ancestry over vast periods of time. This would call for a continuum from the beginning of life to the present, with no distinct groups. This continuum would be made up of all fossil as well as present forms of life... (1991, pp. 13-14).

Notice the common thread running through each definition. First, evolution is a **fully natural** process. Second, no "external agent" (i.e., "Creator") is responsible for inanimate matter becoming animate; evolution "rejects the notion that all organisms were designed and created...." Third, all life descended (evolved) from a common source, which owes its own existence to inorganic matter. Fourth, evolution is a process of "change and diversification" which ultimately produces living organisms that develop "divergently and progressively." In summary then, by definition evolution precludes the supernatural, a Creator, any divine guidance of the natural processes involved, and the creation of organisms as separate and distinct entities not having descended from a common ancestor.

IS ATHEISTIC EVOLUTION POPULAR?

Although atheistic evolution is not nearly as old a viewpoint as creation, it has amassed to itself a rather large following among the peoples of the world. R.L. Wysong, in his book, *The Creation-Evolution Controversy*, commented that "It is downright hard to find anyone who does not believe in evolution in one form or another" (1976, p. 63). Conway Zirkle stated that "practically every educated man believes in evolution.... [E]volution is incorporated in the thinking of our time" (1959, p. 19). A university biology textbook used widely for almost two decades began with these words:

Organic evolution is the greatest principle in biology. Its implications extend far beyond the confines of that science, ramifying into all phases of human life and activity. Accordingly, understanding of evolution should be part of the intellectual equipment of all educated persons (Moody, 1962, p. 1x).

For the past century, evolution has been in the limelight. And for the past quarter of a century or more, it has been taught as **scientific fact** in many elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, as well as in most colleges and universities. As Stephen J. Gould of Harvard put it: "The fact of evolution is as well established as anything in science (as secure as the revolution of the earth around the sun)..." [1987, 8[1]:64, parenthetical comment in orig.]. There can be little doubt that belief in evolution is popular. But **why** is this the case?

WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE IN EVOLUTION?

As we make our way through the pilgrimage called "life," on occasion we invariably stop to reflect upon the nature and meaning of our own existence, because such matters variously enthrall, excite, or intrigue us. Nowhere is this more evident than in regard to our ultimate origin. Few there must be who do not pause, at some point in their earthly sojourn, to ponder such topics as the origin of the Universe, the origin of planet Earth, the origin of various life forms on the Earth, the possibility of life on other planets, and even their own origin and destiny.

One of the most mind-numbing mysteries for those who do **not** believe in evolution is trying to understand the people who **do**. [Perhaps evolutionists feel the same exasperation in regard to creationists' beliefs, but on that point I am less qualified to judge.] This observation is not intended to be derogatory, but is offered merely as a statement of fact. As one who writes and lectures often on the topics of creation and evolution, I frequently am asked the question: "Why do people believe in evolution?" Often the question is phrased in what are intended to be complimentary terms: "Why is it that so many **obviously intelligent** people believe in evolution?" Neither question is easy to answer because generally the querist wants a simple, concise response. It is difficult for him to understand why people whom he accepts as "obviously intelligent" believe a concept such as evolution that he, personally, considers so unworthy of acceptance or recommendation by intelligent people. It has been my experience that rarely is there a singular reply that can provide an answer to such a question, because rarely is there just a single reason that can explain adequately why a person believes what he does. Especially is this true in regard to belief in evolution.

At times, the controversy that centers on the topics of creation and evolution has generated more heat than light. This does not necessarily have to be the case, however. In an open society, the topic of origins, and the varying views that people hold on origins, ultimately will be discussed; in fact, they **should** be discussed. But because the subject matter has to do with deeply held convictions, emotions often run high. One good way to avoid emotional entanglement, and the "more heat than light" syndrome that generally accompanies it, is to work diligently to comprehend the other person's position as completely as possible, and therefore to discuss it as accurately and calmly as possible in any given situation. That task is made easier if there exists—at the beginning of the discussion—a basic understanding of **why** the person believes as he does. Again, especially is this true in regard to belief in evolution.

While it may seem somewhat of a truism to suggest that people believe in evolution for a variety of reasons, realization of this fact, and a legitimate exploration of the reasons people offer for believing what they do, can go a long way toward a better understanding of opposing views found within the creation/evolution controversy. With better understanding comes improved communication. And with improved communication comes increased opportunity for dialogue—which can set the stage for the presentation of other viewpoints that perhaps have

not been considered previously (e.g., in this particular instance, persuading the evolutionist to consider the evidence for creation).

As I respond to the question, "Why do so many **obviously intelligent** people believe in evolution?" I hope to be able to provide a better comprehension of the system of organic evolution, and of the people who accept it. Included among the reasons why people believe in evolution are the following.

Reason #1

There can be little doubt that many today believe in evolution simply because it is what they have been taught. As I stated earlier, for the past quarter of a century or more evolution has been taught as scientific fact in most educational settings—from kindergarten through graduate school. Marshall and Sandra Hall noted:

In the first place, evolution is what is taught in the schools. At least two, and in some cases three and four generations, have used textbooks that presented it as proven fact. The teachers, who for the most part learned it as truth, pass it on as truth. Students are as thoroughly and surely indoctrinated with the concept of evolution as students have ever been indoctrinated with any unproven belief (1974, p. 10).

In their book, *Why Scientists Accept Evolution*, Bales and Clark confirmed such an observation. "Evolution," they wrote, "is taken for granted today and thus it is uncritically accepted by scientists as well as laymen. It is accepted by them today because it was already accepted by others who went before them and under whose direction they obtained their education" (1966, p. 106). People believe in evolution because they have been taught that it is true.

Reason #2

To suggest that many people today accept evolution as true merely because they have been taught to believe it does not tell the whole story, however. Intellectual pride enters into the picture as well. Who among us does not want to present at least the appearance of being smart and well educated? Over the last century, we have been led to believe that if we wish to be considered intelligent, then we should believe in evolution, because intelligent people all over the world believe in evolution. As Henry Morris well stated the issue: "The main reason most educated people believe in evolution is simply because they have been told that most educated people believe in evolution!" (1963, p. 26).

Consider the hypothetical example of two college students discussing their professors and courses. One of the students, Joe, asks his friend, Mark, the following question: "Hey, Mark,

do you believe in evolution? My professor says all smart folks do." Honestly, what is Mark supposed to say? If he says, "No, Joe, I don't believe in evolution," by definition he has admitted to being outside the sphere of all the "smart folks." On the other hand, if he says, "Yes, Joe, I do believe in evolution," he may be admitting to a belief based not on an examination of the evidence, but on the idea that he does not wish to be viewed by his peers as anything but "smart." Undoubtedly, many people today fall into this category. They do not accept evolution because they have seen evidence that establishes it as true. Rather, they believe it because doing so places them in the same category as others whom they consider to be intelligent.

Reason #3

Further exacerbating the problem is the fact that evolution has been given a "stamp of approval" by important spokespersons from practically every field of human endeavor. While there have been those from politics, the humanities, the arts, and other fields who openly have defended evolution as factual, in no other area has this defense been as pronounced as in the sciences. Because science has seen so many successes, and because these successes have been so visible and well publicized, scientists have been granted an aura of respectability that only can be envied by non-scientists. As a result, when scientists champion a cause, people take notice. After all, it is their workings through the scientific method that have eradicated smallpox, put men on the Moon, prevented polio, and lengthened life spans. We have grown used to seeing "experts" from various scientific disciplines ply their trade in an endless stream of amazing feats. Heart surgery has become commonplace; organ transplants have become routine; space shuttles flying to the heavens have become standard fare.

Thus, when evolution is presented as something that "all reputable scientists believe," there are many who accept such a statement at face value, and who fall in line with what they believe is a well-proven dictum that has been enshrouded with the cloak of scientific respectability. As philosopher Paul Ricci has written: "The reliability of evolution not only as a theory but as a principle of understanding is not contested by the vast majority of biologists, geologists, astronomers, and other scientists" (1986, p. 172).

Such statements leave the impression that evolution simply cannot be doubted by well-informed, intelligent people. The message is: "All scientists believe it; so should you." And many do, because, as Marshall and Sandra Hall have inquired: "How, then, are people with little or no special knowledge of the various sciences and related subjects to challenge the authorities? It is natural to accept what 'experts' say, and most people do" (1974, p. 10).

The simple fact is, however, that truth is not determined by popular opinion or majority vote. A thing may be, and often is, true even when accepted only by the minority. Believing

something based on the assumption that “everyone else” also believes it often can lead to disastrous results. As the late Guy N. Woods remarked: “It is dangerous to follow the multitude because the majority is almost always on the wrong side in this world” (1982, 124[1]:2).

Reason #4

Without a doubt, there are many who believe in evolution because they have rejected God. For those who refuse to believe in the Creator, evolution becomes their only escape. They generally make no pretense of believing it based on anything other than their disbelief in God. Henry Fairfield Osborn, one of the most famous evolutionists of the early twentieth century, suggested: “In truth, from the earliest stages of Greek thought man has been eager to discover some natural cause of evolution, and to abandon the idea of supernatural intervention in the order of nature” (1918, p. ix). Henry Morris has noted: “Evolution is the natural way to explain the origin of things for those who do not know and acknowledge the true God of creation. In fact, some kind of evolution is absolutely necessary for those who would reject God” (1966, p. 98).

Sir Arthur Keith of Great Britain wrote: “Evolution is unproved and unprovable. We believe it because the only alternative is special creation, and that is unthinkable” (as quoted in Criswell, 1972, p. 73). Professor D.M.S. Watson, who held the position of the Chair of Evolution at the University of London for over twenty years, echoed the same sentiments when he stated that “evolution itself is accepted by zoologists, not because it has been observed to occur or can be proven by logically coherent evidence to be true, but because the only alternative, special creation, is incredible” (1929, 123:233). Almost seventy years later, evolutionist Richard Lewontin wrote:

Our willingness to accept scientific claims against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science **in spite** of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, **in spite** of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, **in spite** of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to naturalism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door. The eminent Kant scholar Lewis Beck used to say that anyone who could believe in God could believe in anything. To appeal to

an omnipotent deity is to allow that at any moment the regularities of nature may be ruptured, that miracles may happen (1997, p. 31, emp. in orig.).

These kinds of statements leave little to the imagination, and make it clear that those who make them believe in evolution not because of the evidence, but instead because they have made up their minds, *a priori*, that they are not going to believe in God.

In his text, *Man's Origin: Man's Destiny*, the late, eminent United Nations scientist, A.E. Wilder-Smith, observed: "Darwinism and Neo-Darwinism, rightly or wrongly, have been used everywhere in the East and West, in the hands of the atheists and agnostics, as the main weapon against the biblical doctrine of origins" (1975, p. 31). For the person who stubbornly refuses to believe in God, belief in evolution becomes automatic. Similarly, opposition to God, the Bible, and the system of origins the Bible describes, becomes just as automatic. Whenever a person rids himself of God, he simultaneously (even if unwittingly) embraces evolution. By his disbelief, he has eliminated creation as an option regarding his origin.

Reason #5

Another reason people offer for their belief in evolution has to do with the fact that there is so much evil, pain, and suffering in the world. No rational, well-informed person can deny the widespread and unmistakable occurrence of "bad" things that happen, often engulfing those who seem undeserving of such tragic events. To some, no explanation from religionists—regardless of how elaborately stated or elegantly defended that explanation may be—ever will provide an adequate answer to the conundrum of how an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God can allow atrocities to fill His specially created world (see Thompson, 2000, pp. 95-105).

Evolution, on the other hand, provides what appears to be a perfectly logical explanation for such a scenario. According to evolutionary dogma, throughout the history of the world various species (including man) have been engaged in a struggle for survival and advancement. Charles Darwin (borrowing a phrase from his friend, English philosopher Herbert Spencer) referred to it as "survival of the fittest." The evolutionist—because of the nature of his theory—is forced to view the Universe and everything within it as the end result of numerous purposeless accidents. All living things, including man, exist on the Earth not because of any Grand Plan, but because of fortuitous occurrences that resulted from chance happenings in nature. And, to survive—and thrive—in such a world may seem to justify a "might makes right/strong subjugates the weak/to the victor go the spoils" attitude. "It's a jungle out there"—and in the jungle it is the law of tooth and claw that prevails.

Since man is viewed as little more than a naked ape, why should he somehow be exempt from the perils that continually befall other species of animals? These animals live their entire lives with one eye looking over their shoulder, as it were, because they exist in a dog-eat-dog world with no set moral standard. Man, according to evolutionary theory, is no different. His claim to fame lies in the fact that (so far) he occupies the last rung of the evolutionary ladder.

But nature confers on him no special rights, privileges, or protection. In a world where evolution is considered as true, and "survival of the fittest" is touted as nature's way of weeding out the weak, it should be no surprise that evil, pain, and suffering exist. In fact, from the evolutionary vantage point, whenever competition occurs for such things as food supplies, adequate shelter, reproductive advantages, etc., humanity has to learn to cope with evil, pain, and suffering. Granted, at first this may sound harsh, but from the evolutionists' perspective it is consistent, and offers an attempted explanation for the undeniable existence of "bad" things in our world. Unfortunately, all too often the answers offered by religionists for the problem of evil, pain, and suffering have fallen short of the mark, and as a result people have accepted evolution as providing a legitimate explanation for a very real problem in their lives.

Reason #6

As unpleasant as it is to have to admit it, some people believe in evolution because they have heard about, witnessed, or experienced firsthand the mistakes of religionists through the ages. Whether it is the offering of young virgins to an imaginary deity, the burning of alleged witches at the stake, or the adultery of a highly visible televangelist, the truth of the matter is that on occasion believers in God have set a very poor example—one that sensitive, thinking people naturally would have difficulty following.

To some, the very history of religion makes it suspect from the outset. Attempts to force people to accept a certain religion (as in the Crusades), or misguided attempts to squelch open discussion of important issues (as in the Catholic Church's censure of Galileo), have left a bitter taste in the mouths of many. Add to that the hypocrisy of, or word spoken in anger by, a person who wears the name "Christian," and the damage may be such that even in a lifetime it cannot be repaired. The result is that those who have been offended want nothing whatsoever to do with the God of the Bible, and as they reject Him, they also reject His account of the creation of the world in which they live.

Reason #7

While it is undeniable that some reject creation because of inappropriate conduct on the part of those who advocate it, likewise it is true that some reject God, and creation, to excuse or

legitimize their own inappropriate personal conduct. In other words, they believe in evolution because it allows them to avoid any objective moral standard of behavior. It keeps them “out of reach” of any deity. It provides a subjective climate of situation ethics where any and all behavior, no matter how absurd or perverse, is acceptable. It nourishes a “do your own thing” attitude that precludes rules and regulations, in a vain attempt to circumvent the guilt that inevitably comes from doing wrong.

In the evolutionary scenario, humans are merely the last in a long line of amoebas, crocodiles, and orangutans resulting from fortuitous cosmic accidents. In such an arrangement, it is futile to speak of “personal responsibility.” There exists, in the grand scheme of things, no reason why one “ought” or “ought not” to act a certain way, or to do/not do a certain thing. Aldous Huxley stated the matter succinctly in his article, “Confessions of a Professed Atheist”?

I had motives for not wanting the world to have meaning; consequently, assumed it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find reasons for this assumption.... The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics; he is also concerned to prove there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do.... For myself, as no doubt for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. **We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom** (1966, 3:19, emp. added).

If Huxley and his cohorts had abandoned belief in evolution and accepted the existence of God, it would have “interfered with their sexual freedom.” Realizing that, they chose instead to abandon belief in God. That left them with only one option—belief in evolution. It was not something they did because of the weight of the evidence. Rather, it was something they did because they desired to avoid personal accountability to the Creator. Their actions belied their motives. As Woods remarked: “Convince a man that he came from a monkey, and he’ll act like one!” (1976, 118[33]:514).

Reason #8

Lastly, we may state that some people accept evolution because they are convinced that it is the correct answer to the question of origins. They have examined the evidence and, on the basis of their examination, have concluded that evolution is the only plausible explanation for the Universe and all that it contains. These people generally are both sincere and open-minded. They are not attempting to rid themselves of the idea of God. They do not feel the need to be “intellectually correct.” They are not reacting to unkind treatment at the hand of

religionists. They are not searching for a way to justify worldly behavior. They simply believe the evidence favors evolution, and thus have accepted it as the correct view of origins.

IS EVOLUTION A "FACT" OF SCIENCE?

When we talk about the origin of the Universe and those things in it, we cannot speak as eyewitnesses or firsthand observers. None of us was present when the origin of the Universe occurred. Therefore, any scientific discussion must be based on assumptions, hypotheses, and theories put in place after the fact.

An **assumption** is something taken for granted, and represents a legitimate starting point for an investigation. A **hypothesis** is an educated guess or tentative assumption. A **theory** is a plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles to explain phenomena.

It generally is alleged by the more spirited evolutionists that evolution has been proven, and therefore must be spoken of not as theory, but fact. As far back as 1944, evolutionist W.W. Howells wrote in *Mankind So Far* that "there is also the mystery of how and why evolution takes place at all.... Evolution is a fact, like digestion..." (p. 5). On May 2, 1966, Nobel laureate Hermann J. Muller circulated a manifesto that affirmed:

It has for many years been well established scientifically that all known forms of life, including man, have come into being by a lengthy process of evolution. There are no hypotheses, alternative to the principle of evolution with its "tree of life," that any competent biologist of today takes seriously. Moreover, the principle is so important for an understanding of the world we live in and of ourselves that the public in general, including students taking biology in high school, should be made aware of it, and of the fact that it is firmly established even as the rotundity of the earth is firmly established (1966, p. 2).

Affixing their names to Dr. Muller's manifesto to signify their agreement were 177 of the world's most eminent evolutionary scientists.

In this day and age, most evolutionists no longer speak of the "theory" of evolution, but refer instead to the "fact" of evolution. The widely accepted Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, financed by the National Science Foundation, organized the entire treatment of biological science around the "fact" of the evolutionary framework of life history. Almost all books on biology published by secular publishers for at least the past two generations have been written as though evolutionary presuppositions were fact instead of theory. In introducing the papers in the three-volume work on evolution stemming from the 1959 Darwinian Centennial Convocation in Chicago, Sir Julian Huxley eulogized Darwin as follows:

Charles Darwin has rightly been described as the “Newton of biology”; he did more than any single individual before or since to change man’s attitude to the phenomena of life and to provide a coherent scientific framework of ideas for biology, in place of an approach in large part compounded of hearsay, myth, and superstition. He rendered evolution inescapable as a fact, comprehensible as a process, all-embracing as a concept (1960a, pp. 1-2).

Huxley maintained that “after Darwin it was no longer necessary to deduce the existence of divine purpose for the facts of biological adaptation” (1946, p. 87). Compare also Huxley’s categorical statement at the Chicago convocation: “In the evolutionary pattern of thought there is no longer need or room for the supernatural. The earth was not created; it evolved. So did all the animals and plants that inhabit it, including our human selves, mind, and soul as well as brain and body. So did religion” (1960b, pp. 252-253). Jacques Barzun, in his book, *Darwin, Marx, Wagner*, raised this question:

Why was evolution more precious than scientific suspense of judgment? Why do scientists to this day speak with considerable warmth of “the fact of evolution,” as if it were in the same category as the fact of combustion, which “may be observed by anyone who will take the necessary trouble”? (1958, p. 65).

Barzun went on to point out why evolution is accepted as a fact, by stating that it gave scientists complete freedom over “everything in heaven and earth without restriction.” He also observed that it put everything under one cause (1958, p. 65).

The codiscoverer of the DNA molecule, James Watson, is on record as stating: “Today the theory of evolution is an accepted fact for everyone but a fundamentalist minority” (1987, p. 2). Joining Dr. Watson in that assessment is Harvard paleontologist, Stephen J. Gould, one of the evolutionary establishment’s fieriest apologists, and an indefatigable crusader on behalf of organic evolution. He is a cogent writer, a gifted speaker, and a tireless worker for “the cause.” He also is one of science’s most prolific and best-read authors (along with such late colleagues as Carl Sagan and Isaac Asimov), and is highly regarded in many scientific circles (the January 1982 issue of *Discover* magazine voted him “Scientist of the Year”). Through the years, Dr. Gould’s articles have appeared not only in refereed scientific journals (e.g., *Nature*, *New Scientist*, *Science*, et al.), but in popular science magazines as well (*Discover*, *Omni*, *Science Digest*, *Science Digest*, et al.). Therefore, when Dr. Gould speaks, many people listen. To quote him directly: “When we come to popular writing about evolution, I suppose that my own essays are as well read as any” (1987, 8[1]:65). And therein lies the problem.

In the January 1987 issue of *Discover*, Dr. Gould authored a lengthy article titled “Darwinism Defined: The Difference Between Fact and Theory.” In this particular article, Gould expressed his extreme agitation at the inability of certain people (who should know better, he said) to

properly address evolution by its rightful designation—as a **fact**, not a theory. The specific cause (this time) for his discomfiture was an article in the September 30, 1986 issue of the *New York Times* by Irving Kristol (“Room for Darwinism and the Bible”). Dr. Gould acknowledged both his dismay and dissatisfaction at the apparent inability of people like Mr. Kristol to distinguish (to use his own words) “the central distinction between secure fact and healthy debate about theory” (p. 64). Dr. Gould then explained himself when he noted:

Facts are the world’s data; theories are explanations proposed to interpret and coordinate facts. The fact of evolution is as well established as anything in science (as secure as the revolution of the earth about the sun), though absolute certainty has no place in our lexicon. Theories, or statements about the causes of documented evolutionary change, are now in a period of intense debate—a good mark of science in its healthiest state. Facts don’t disappear while scientists debate theories (p. 64, parenthetical comment in orig.).

Later, Gould commented that “...evolution is also a fact of nature, and so do we teach it as well, just as our geological colleagues describe the structure of silicate minerals, and astronomers the elliptical orbits of the planets” (p. 65).

What could be clearer? Dr. Gould wants everyone to know that evolution is a fact. **How** evolution occurred may be considered by some to be merely a “theory,” but **that** evolution has occurred is a fact not open for further discussion. Gould even commented, “I don’t want to sound like a shrill dogmatist shouting ‘rally ‘round the flag boys,’ but biologists have reached a consensus...about the fact of evolution” (p. 69). [In a guest editorial in the August 23, 1999 issue of *Time* magazine, Dr. Gould boasted that “evolution is as well documented as any phenomenon in science, as strongly as the earth’s revolution around the sun rather than vice versa. In this sense, we can call evolution a ‘fact’ ” (1999, 154[8]:59).] Dr. Gould is upset because there are those who refuse to acknowledge evolution as a fact. According to him, “Evolution is a fact, like apples falling out of trees” (as quoted in Adler, 1980, p. 95). Gould’s colleagues could not agree more. In the March 1987 issue of *Natural History*, Douglas J. Futuyma wrote in his review of Richard Dawkins’ book, *The Blind Watchmaker*:

In the last ten years or so, evolution has been under severe attack, especially in the United States. It is important here to recognize the distinction between the proposition that evolution has occurred and the theory that describes the causes of evolutionary change. That evolution has occurred—that diverse organisms have descended from common ancestors by a history of modification and divergence—is accepted as fact by virtually all biologists. “Fact” here means a proposition, like the proposition that the earth revolves about the sun, supported by so much evidence that to disbelieve it would require disbelieving a large, successful edifice of scientific achievement. The historical reality of evolution is doubted chiefly by creationists, mostly on doctrinaire religious grounds (96[3]:34).

Of course, such renowned scientists as Gould and Futuyma are not even willing to concern themselves with creationists. In fact, Dr. Gould commented:

I don't speak of the militant fundamentalists who label themselves with the oxymoron "scientific creationists," and try to sneak their Genesis literalism into high school classrooms under the guise of scientific dissent. I'm used to their rhetoric, their dishonest mis- and half-quotations, their constant repetition of "useful" arguments that even they must recognize as nonsense.... Our struggle with these ideologues is political, not intellectual. I speak instead of our allies among people committed to reason and honorable argument (1987, 8[1]:64).

This point should not be overlooked. Gould suggests that his concern is about people who are "committed to reason and honorable argument." That, by his definition, would eliminate any and all "creationists."

The purpose of the writings of Gould and Futuyma (and other evolutionists) is to convince people to stop speaking of the "theory" of evolution, and to speak instead of the "fact" of evolution. But, in order to accomplish this, they have to redefine the word "fact" as it is used in science. I might note here that they are by no means the first to attempt such a redefinition. Simpson and Beck tried the exact same thing in their biology text, *Life: An Introduction to Biology*, and ended their "redefining" section by claiming that theories ultimately

...may be just as certain—merit just as much confidence—as what are popularly called "facts." Belief that the sun will rise tomorrow is the confident application of a generalization. The theory that life has evolved is founded on much more evidence than supports the generalization that the sun rises every day. In the vernacular, we are justified in calling both "facts" (1965, p. 16).

A fact usually is defined as an actual occurrence or something that has actual existence. With that standard-usage definition in mind, consider the following.

Charles Darwin, in his *Origin of Species*, stated: "Long before the reader has arrived at this part of my work, a crowd of difficulties will have occurred to him. Some of them are so serious that to this day I can hardly reflect on them without being in some degree staggered" (1859, p. 158). Theodosius Dobzhansky, the late, eminent geneticist of the Rockefeller University, stated in his book, *The Biological Basis of Human Freedom*: "Evolution as a historical fact was proved beyond reasonable doubt not later than in the closing decades of the nineteenth century." Yet two pages later he stated: "There is no doubt that both the historical and the causal aspects of the evolutionary process are **far from completely known**. ...The causes which have brought about the development of the human species **can be only dimly**

discerned" (1956, pp. 6,8,9, emp. added). Notice Dobzhansky's admission that both the historical (what Gould refers to as the "fact" of evolution) and the causal (what Gould refers to as the "theory" of evolution) are "far from completely known."

In other words, on the one hand evolution is declared to be a fact, yet on the other hand it is acknowledged that the process is "far from completely known," with its causes "only dimly discerned," and the difficulties "staggering." Evolutionist W. LeGros Clark wrote: "What was the ultimate origin of man? ...Unfortunately, any answers which can at present be given to these questions are based on indirect evidence and thus **are largely conjectural**" (1955, p. 174, emp. added). Kerkut, as an evolutionist, stated:

...I believe that the theory of Evolution as presented by orthodox evolutionists is in many ways a satisfying explanation of some of the evidence. At the same time I think that the attempt to explain all living forms in terms of evolution from a unique source...is premature and **not satisfactorily supported by present-day evidence**.... [T]he supporting evidence remains to be discovered.... We can, if we like, believe that such an evolutionary system has taken place, but I for one do not think that "it has been proven beyond all reasonable doubt." ...It is very depressing to find that many subjects are being encased in scientific dogmatism (1960, pp. vii, viii, emp. added).

After listing and discussing the seven **non-provable assumptions** upon which evolution is based, Dr. Kerkut then observed: "The first point that I should like to make is that these seven assumptions by their nature **are not capable of experimental verification**" (p. 7, emp. added).

This stinging rebuke of the alleged factuality of evolution is not an isolated instance. W.R. Thompson, while Director of the Commonwealth Institute of Biological Control in Canada, penned the "Introduction" to the 1956 edition of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, in which he wrote:

Darwin did not show in the *Origin* that species had originated by natural selection; he merely showed, on the basis of certain facts and assumptions, how this **might** have happened, and as he had convinced himself he was able to convince others.... On the other hand, it does appear to me that Darwin in the *Origin* was not able to produce palaeontological evidence sufficient to prove his views but that **the evidence he did produce was adverse to them**; and I may note that the position is not notably different today. The modern Darwinian palaeontologists are obliged, just like their predecessors and like Darwin, to **water down the facts** with subsidiary hypotheses which, however plausible, are in the nature of things unverifiable (pp. xii, xix, emp. added).

Evolutionists dogmatically assert that evolution is a fact, yet admit that it: (a) is based upon **non-provable assumptions** that are “not capable of experimental verification”? (b) bases its conclusions upon answers that are “largely conjectural”? (c) is faced with evidence “adverse” to the available facts; (d) must continually be found guilty of “watering down the facts”? and (e) has both historical and causal aspects that “are far from completely known.” Little wonder Dr. Kerkut stated concerning the theory of evolution: “The evidence that supports it is not sufficiently strong to allow us to consider it anything more than a working hypothesis” (1960, p. 157). Robert Millikan, Nobel laureate in physics, opined: “The pathetic thing is that we have scientists who are trying to prove evolution, which no scientist can ever prove” (1925). What a far cry from the assessments of Gould and his colleagues in the modern evolutionary camp.

Someone might object, however, that the quotations I have employed (from evolutionists such as Dobzhansky, Clark, and others) to document the nonverifiability of evolution were written during the 1950s and 1960s. Much scientific research on evolution has occurred in the decades that followed, and thus it might be considered unfair to rely on such “dated” critiques of a concept like evolution that changes so rapidly and that has been studied so intently.

My response to such an objection would be to point out that I used the quotations from the 1950s and 1960s intentionally, in order to document that the situation over the past four decades has not improved. By the 1970s, for example, little had changed. At the height of his professional career, Pierre-Paul Grassé was considered by many to be France’s greatest living zoologist. In fact, Dobzhansky wrote of him: “Now one can disagree with Grassé, but not ignore him. He is the most distinguished of French zoologists, the editor of the 28 volumes of *Traité de Zoologie*, author of numerous original investigations, and ex-president of the Academie des Sciences. His knowledge of the living world is encyclopedic” (1975, 29:376). In 1977, Grassé wrote in *The Evolution of Living Organisms*:

Today our duty is to destroy the myth of evolution, considered as a simple, understood, and explained phenomenon which keeps rapidly unfolding before us. Biologists must be encouraged to think about the weaknesses and extrapolations that theoreticians put forward or lay down as established truths. The deceit is sometimes unconscious, but not always, since some people, owing to their sectarianism, purposely overlook reality and refuse to acknowledge the inadequacies and falsity of their beliefs.

Their success among certain biologists, philosophers, and sociologists notwithstanding, **the explanatory doctrines of biological evolution do not stand up to an objective, in-depth criticism.** They prove to be either in conflict with reality or else incapable of solving the major problems involved (pp. 8,202, emp. added).

Three years later, in 1980, British physicist H.S. Lipson produced a thought-provoking piece in the May issue of *Physics Bulletin*, a refereed science journal. In his article, "A Physicist Looks at Evolution," Dr. Lipson commented first on his interest in life's origin and, second, on his non-association with creationists. He then noted: "In fact, evolution became in a sense a scientific religion; almost all scientists have accepted it and many are prepared to 'bend' their observations to fit with it." Dr. Lipson went on to ask how well evolution has withstood the years of scientific testing, and suggested that "to my mind, the theory does not stand up at all."

After reviewing many of the problems (especially from thermodynamics) involved in producing something living from something nonliving, he asked: "If living matter is not, then, caused by the interplay of atoms, natural forces, and radiation, how has it come into being?" After dismissing any sort of "directed evolution," Lipson concluded: "I think, however, that we must go further than this and admit that the only acceptable explanation is **creation**." Like other evolutionists who have voiced similar views, Dr. Lipson hardly is ecstatic about his conclusion—a fact he made clear when he wrote: "I know that this is anathema to physicists, as indeed it is to me, but we must not reject a theory that we do not like if the experimental evidence supports it" (31:138, emp. in orig.).

Just a little over a year later, on November 5, 1981, the late Colin Patterson (who at the time was the senior paleontologist of the British Museum of Natural History in London, the editor of the professional journal published by the museum, and one of the world's foremost fossil experts) delivered a public address to his evolutionist colleagues at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. In his speech, Dr. Patterson astonished those colleagues when he stated that he had been "kicking around" non-evolutionary, or "anti-evolutionary," ideas for about eighteen months. As he went on to describe it:

One morning I woke up and something had happened in the night, and it struck me that I had been working on this stuff for twenty years and there was not one thing I knew about it. That's quite a shock to learn that one can be misled so long. Either there was something wrong with me, or there was something wrong with evolution theory (1981).

Dr. Patterson said he knew there was nothing wrong with him, so he started asking various individuals and groups a simple question: "Can you tell me anything you know about evolution, any one thing that is true? I tried that question on the geology staff at the Field Museum of Natural History, and the only answer I got was silence." He tried it on the Evolutionary Morphology Seminar at the University of Chicago, a very prestigious body of evolutionists, and all he got there "was silence for a long time and eventually one person said, 'I do know one thing—it ought not to be taught in high school.' " He then remarked, "It does

seem that the level of knowledge about evolution is remarkably shallow. We know it ought not to be taught in high school, and that's all we know about it."

Dr. Patterson went on to say: "Then I woke up and realized that all my life I had been duped into taking evolution as revealed truth in some way." But more important, he termed evolution an "anti-theory" that produced "anti-knowledge." He also suggested that "the explanatory value of the hypothesis is nil," and that evolution theory is "a void that has the function of knowledge but conveys none." To use Patterson's wording, "I feel that the effects of hypotheses of common ancestry in systematics has not been merely boring, not just a lack of knowledge, I think it has been positively anti-knowledge" (1981; cf. Bethell, 1985, 270:49-52,56-58,60-61).

Dr. Patterson made it clear, as I wish to do here, that he had no fondness for the creationist position. Yet he did refer to his stance as "anti-evolutionary," which was quite a change for a man who had authored several books (one of which was titled simply *Evolution*) in the field that he later acknowledged was capable of producing only "anti-knowledge."

Colin Patterson was not the only one expressing such views, however. Over the past two decades, distinguished British astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle has stressed the serious problems—once again, especially from the fields of thermodynamics—with various theories about the naturalistic origin of life on the Earth. The same year that Dr. Patterson traveled to America to speak, Dr. Hoyle wrote:

I don't know how long it is going to be before astronomers generally recognize that the combinatorial arrangement of not even one among the many thousands of biopolymers on which life depends could have been arrived at by natural processes here on the Earth. Astronomers will have a little difficulty in understanding this because they will be assured by biologists that it is not so, the biologists having been assured in their turn by others that it is not so. The "others" are a group of persons who believe, quite openly, in mathematical miracles. They advocate the belief that tucked away in nature, outside of normal physics, there is a law which performs miracles (provided the miracles are in the aid of biology). This curious situation sits oddly on a profession that for long has been dedicated to coming up with logical explanations of biblical miracles.... It is quite otherwise, however, with the modern miracle workers, who are always to be found living in the twilight fringes of thermodynamics (1981a, 92:526, parenthetical comment in orig.).

In fact, Dr. Hoyle has described the evolutionary concept that disorder gives rise to order in a rather picturesque manner.

The chance that higher forms have emerged in this way is comparable with the chance that a tornado sweeping through a junk-yard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein (1981b, 294:105).

And, in order to make his position perfectly clear, he provided his readers with the following analogy:

At all events, anyone with even a nodding acquaintance with the Rubik cube will concede the near-impossibility of a solution being obtained by a blind person moving the cubic faces at random. Now imagine 10^{50} blind persons each with a scrambled Rubik cube, and try to conceive of the chance of them all **simultaneously** arriving at the solved form. You then have the chance of arriving by random shuffling at just one of the many biopolymers on which life depends. The notion that not only biopolymers but the operating programme of a living cell could be arrived at by chance in a primordial organic soup here on the Earth is evidently nonsense of a high order (1981a, 92:527, emp. in orig.).

Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe (who is a professor of astronomy and applied mathematics at the University College, Cardiff, Wales) went even further. Using probability figures applied to cosmic time (not just geologic time here on the Earth), their conclusion was:

Once we see, however, that the probability of life originating at random is so utterly minuscule as to make the random concept absurd, it becomes sensible to think that the favourable properties of physics on which life depends, are in every respect deliberate.... It is therefore almost inevitable that our own measure of intelligence must reflect in a valid way the higher intelligences...even to the extreme idealized limit of **God** (1981, pp. 141,144, emp. in orig.).

Hoyle and Wickramasinghe suggested, however, that this "higher intelligence" did not necessarily have to be, as far as they were concerned, what most people would call "God," but simply a being with an intelligence "to the limit of God." They, personally, opted for "directed panspermia," a view which suggests that life was "planted" on the Earth via genetic material that originated from a "higher intelligence" somewhere in the Universe. But just one year later, in 1982, Dr. Hoyle wrote:

A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that **a superintellect** has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question (20:16, emp. added).

Three years after that, in 1985, molecular biologist Michael Denton authored *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, in which he stated:

In this book, I have adopted the radical approach. By presenting a systematic critique of the current Darwinian model, ranging from paleontology to molecular biology, I have tried to show why I believe that the problems are too severe and too intractable to offer any hope of resolution in terms of the orthodox Darwinian framework, and that consequently the conservative view is no longer tenable.

The intuitive feeling that pure chance could never have achieved the degree of complexity and ingenuity so ubiquitous in nature has been a continuing source of scepticism ever since the publication of the *Origin*; and throughout the past century there has always existed a significant minority of first-rate biologists who have never been able to bring themselves to accept the validity of Darwinian claims. In fact, the number of biologists who have expressed some degree of disillusionment is practically endless.

The anti-evolutionary thesis argued in this book, the idea that life might be fundamentally a discontinuous phenomenon, runs counter to the whole thrust of modern biological thought.... Put simply, no one has ever observed the interconnecting continuum of functional forms linking all known past and present species of life. The concept of the continuity of nature has existed in the mind of man, **never** in the facts of nature (pp. 16,327,353, emp. in orig.).

In 1987, two years after Denton's book was published, Swedish biologist Søren Løvtrup wrote in an even stronger vein:

After this step-wise elimination, only one possibility remains: **the Darwinian theory of natural selection**, whether or not coupled with Mendelism, **is false**. I have already shown that the arguments advanced by the early champions were not very compelling, and that there are now considerable numbers of empirical facts which do not fit with the theory. Hence, **to all intents and purposes the theory has been falsified**, so why has it not been abandoned? I think the answer is that current evolutionists follow Darwin's example—they refuse to accept falsifying evidence (p. 352, emp. added).

In his 1988 book, *The Cosmic Blueprint: New Discoveries in Nature's Creative Ability to Order the Universe*, Australian physicist Paul Davies wrote: "There is for me powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all. It seems as though somebody has fine-tuned nature's numbers to make the Universe. **The impression of design is overwhelming**" (p. 203, emp. added). That same year, evolutionary physicist George Greenstein wrote:

As we survey all the evidence, the thought insistently arises that some supernatural agency—or, rather, Agency—must be involved. Is it possible that suddenly, without intending to, we have stumbled upon scientific proof of the existence of a Supreme Being? Was it God who stepped in and so providentially crafted the cosmos for our benefit? (1988, p. 27).

In 1992, Arno Penzias (who fourteen years earlier had shared the 1978 Nobel Prize in physics with Robert W. Wilson for their discovery of the so-called "background radiation" left over from the Big Bang) declared:

Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one with the very delicate balance needed to provide exactly the conditions required to permit life, and one which has an underlying (one might say "supernatural") plan [p. 83, parenthetical comment in orig.].

In his 1994 book, *The Physics of Immortality*, Frank Tipler (who coauthored with John D. Barrow the massive 1986 volume, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*) wrote:

When I began my career as a cosmologist some twenty years ago, I was a convinced atheist. I never in my wildest dreams imagined that one day I would be writing a book purporting to show that the central claims of Judeo-Christian theology are in fact true, that these claims are straightforward deductions of the laws of physics as we now understand them. I have been forced into these conclusions by the inexorable logic of my own special branch of physics (Preface).

One year later, NASA astronomer John O'Keefe admitted:

We are, by astronomical standards, a pampered, cosseted, cherished group of creatures.... If the Universe had not been made with the most exacting precision we could never have come into existence. It is my view that these circumstances indicate the universe was created for man to live in (1995, p. 200).

Then, in 1998, evolutionist Michael Denton shocked everyone with his new book, *Nature's Destiny*, when he admitted:

Because this book presents a teleological interpretation of the cosmos which has obvious theological implications, it is important to emphasize at the outset that the argument presented here is entirely consistent with the basic naturalistic assumption of modern science—that the cosmos is a **seamless unity which can be comprehended ultimately in its entirety by human reason and in which all phenomena, including life and evolution and the origin of man, are ultimately explicable in terms of natural processes....**

Although this is obviously a book with many theological implications, my initial intention was not specifically to develop an argument for design; however, as I researched more deeply into the topic and as the manuscript went through successive drafts, it became increasingly clear that the laws of nature were fine-tuned on earth to a remarkable degree and that the

emerging picture provided powerful and self-evident support for the traditional anthropocentric teleological view of the cosmos. Thus, by the time the final draft was finished, the book had become in effect an essay in natural theology in the spirit and tradition of William Paley's *Natural Theology* (pp. xvii-xviii,xi-xii, emp. in orig.).

Such quotations could be multiplied almost endlessly. Even a cursory examination shows that there is much more that is "unknown" than "known" in the evolutionary scenario.

First, evolution cannot be proven true unless nonliving can give rise to living—that is to say, spontaneous generation must have occurred. Evolution, in its entirety, is based on this principle. But what evidence is there that the concept of spontaneous generation is, in fact, correct? What evidence is there that life arose from nonlife? In their 1965 biology textbook, *Life: An Introduction to Biology*, evolutionists Simpson and Beck begrudgingly admitted that the spontaneous generation of life "does not occur in any known case" (p. 261). Twelve years later, in his book, *Until the Sun Dies*, Robert Jastrow, the founder and former director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies at NASA, summarized the situation as follows:

According to this story, every tree, every blade of grass, and every creature in the sea and on the land evolved out of one parent strand of molecular matter drifting lazily in a warm pool. What concrete evidence supports that remarkable theory of the origin of life? There is none (1977, p. 60).

Four years after that, in 1981, renowned British astrophysicist Sir Fred Hoyle complained in *Nature* magazine:

The likelihood of the spontaneous formation of life from inanimate matter is one to a number with 40,000 noughts after it.... It is big enough to bury Darwin and the whole theory of evolution. There was no primeval soup, neither on this planet nor on any other, and **if the beginnings of life were not random, they must therefore have been the product of purposeful intelligence** (1981b, 294:148, emp. added).

A decade later, in 1991, Hoyle and Wickramasinghe published in *New Scientist* an article with a catchy title ("Where Microbes Boldly Went") but a dismal message—dismal, that is, for evolutionists who are forced by their theory to believe in the concept of biochemical evolution that allegedly produced the first life on Earth by chance processes.

Precious little in the way of biochemical evolution could have happened on the Earth. It is easy to show that the two thousand or so enzymes that span the whole of life could not have evolved on the Earth. If one counts the number of trial assemblies of amino acids that are

needed to give rise to the enzymes, the probability of their discovery by random shufflings turns out to be less than 1 in $10^{40,000}$ (91:415).

Those “40,000 noughts” with which Dr. Hoyle was struggling in 1981 still were a thorn in his side ten years later. And the situation has not improved in the years since. One of the “scientific heavyweights” in origin-of-life studies from an evolutionary viewpoint is Leslie Orgel, who has spent most of his professional career attempting to uncover the secrets of how life began on this planet. In the October 1994 issue of *Scientific American*, Dr. Orgel authored an article titled “The Origin of Life on Earth” in which he admitted:

It is extremely improbable that proteins and nucleic acids, both of which are structurally complex, arose spontaneously in the same place at the same time. Yet it also seems impossible to have one without the other. **And so, at first glance, one might have to conclude that life could never, in fact, have originated by chemical means....**

We proposed that RNA might well have come first and established what is now called the RNA world.... This scenario could have occurred, we noted, **if prebiotic** RNA had two properties not evident today: a capacity to replicate without the help of proteins and an ability to catalyze every step of protein synthesis....

The precise events giving rise to the RNA world remain unclear. As we have seen, investigators have proposed many hypotheses, but evidence in favor of each of them is fragmentary at best. **The full details of how the RNA world, and life, emerged may not be revealed in the near future** (271:78,83, emp. added).

It is not enough, of course, “just” to establish the possibility of spontaneous generation/biochemical evolution. Evolutionists also must explain the origin of the dazzlingly complex DNA/RNA genetic code that is the basis of every living organism. But, just as their fanciful-but-failed scenarios for the explanation of the naturalistic origin of life have left them lacking any substantive answers, so their theories regarding the origin of the genetic code have failed just as miserably. One evolutionist, John Maddox, confessed as much in a curiously titled but revealing article, “The Genesis Code by Numbers,” in *Nature*.

It was already clear that the genetic code is not merely an abstraction but the embodiment of life’s mechanisms; the consecutive triplets of nucleotides in DNA (called codons) are inherited but they also guide the construction of proteins. **So it is disappointing that the origin of the genetic code is still as obscure as the origin of life itself** (1994, 367:111, emp. added).

Second, not only is the inability of **how** to get life started a serious stumbling block for evolutionists, but now the **where** of this supposed happening has been called into question as well. Hoyle and Wickramasinghe have argued that life fell to Earth from space after having evolved from the warm, wet nucleus of a comet (see Gribbin, 1981, 89[3]:14; Hoyle and Wickramasinghe, 1981). Sir Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the DNA molecule, has suggested that life actually was sent here from other planets (1981). Meanwhile, back on Earth, Sidney Fox and colleagues have proposed that life began on the side of a primitive volcano on our primeval planet when a number of dry amino acids “somehow” formed there at exactly the right temperature, for exactly the right length of time, to form exactly the right molecules necessary for living systems (1977). Evolutionists are fond of saying (remember Gould?) that there is no controversy over the **fact** of evolution; it is only the “how” about which they disagree. Not true. They cannot even agree on the “where.”

Of course, some evolutionists will attempt to argue that such matters are not properly discussed as a part of the evolutionary process, and that evolution *per se* only applies to biological change. Dobzhansky, however, settled that issue when he stated:

Evolution comprises all the stages of development of the universe: the cosmic, biological, and human or cultural developments. Attempts to restrict the concept of evolution to biology are gratuitous. Life is a product of the evolution of inorganic matter, and man is a product of the evolution of life (1967, 155:409).

Third, in his January 1987 *Discover* article, Dr. Gould, discussed some of the “data” that establish evolution as a “fact” (his statement was that “facts are the world’s data”). An examination of these data **disproves** the very thing that Gould was attempting to prove—the “factuality” of evolution. He commented:

We have direct evidence of small-scale changes in controlled laboratory experiments of the past hundred years (on bacteria, on almost every measurable property of the fruit fly *Drosophila*), or observed in nature (color changes in moth wings, development of metal tolerance in plants growing near industrial waste heaps) or produced during a few thousand years of human breeding and agriculture (8[1]:65, parenthetical items in orig.).

Dr. Gould thus wants us to believe that such changes **prove** evolution to be a fact. Yet notice what the professor conspicuously omitted. He failed to tell the reader what he stated publicly during a speech at Hobart College, February 14, 1980, when he said:

A mutation doesn’t produce major new raw material. You don’t make new species by mutating the species.... That’s a common idea people have; that evolution is due to random mutations.

A mutation is **not** the cause of evolutionary change (as quoted in Sunderland, 1984, p. 106, emp. in orig.).

On the one hand, Gould wants us to believe that bacteria and fruit flies have experienced “small-scale changes” via genetic mutations and thus serve as excellent examples of the “fact” of evolution. But on the other hand, he tells us that mutations (“Small-scale changes”) don’t cause evolution. Which is it?

On March 4, 1982, Colin Patterson participated in a radio interview for the British Broadcasting Corporation. In that interview, he admitted: “No one has ever produced a species by mechanisms of natural selection. No one has ever gotten near it and most of the current argument in neo-Darwinism is about this question: how a species originates” (1982). If evolution does not occur by mutation, and it does not occur by natural selection, how, then, could evolution be considered a “fact”? The only two known mechanisms have been admitted—even by evolutionists—to be completely impotent in this regard. Keith Thompson, professor of biology and dean of the graduate school at Yale University, admitted as much when he wrote in the *American Scientist*:

Twenty years ago Mayr, in his *Animal Species and Evolution*, seemed to have shown that if evolution is a jigsaw puzzle, then at least all the edge pieces were in place. But today we are less confident and the whole subject is in the most exciting ferment. Evolution is both troubled from without by the nagging insistence of antiscientists [his term for creationists—BT] and nagged from within by the troubling complexities of genetic and developmental mechanisms and new questions about the central mystery—speciation itself (1982, p. 529).

Further, notice that in his article Gould made the same mistake that Darwin made 128 years earlier—extrapolating far beyond the available evidence. Darwin looked at finches’ beaks, and from small changes he extrapolated to state that evolution from one group to another had occurred. Gould looked at changes in fruit flies or bacteria and did exactly the same thing, all the while failing to tell the reader that the bacteria never changed into anything else, and the fruit flies always remained fruit flies. If the “data” are the “facts,” and if the “data” actually **disprove** evolution, how is it then that evolution can be called, in any sense of the word, a “fact”?

The standard-usage dictionary definition of a fact is something that is “an actual occurrence,” something that has “actual existence.” Can any process be called “an actual occurrence” when the knowledge of how, when, where, what, and why is missing? Were someone to suggest that a certain skyscraper had merely “happened,” but that the how, when, where, what, and why were complete unknowns, would you be likely to call it a fact, or an “unproven assertion”? To ask is to answer. Gould, Futuyma, Simpson, and other evolutionists may ask us to believe

that their unproven hypothesis somehow has garnered to itself the status of a "fact," but if they do, they will have to come up with something based on evidence to substantiate their wishful thinking. Merely trying to alter, for their own purposes, the definition of fact will not suffice. Pardon us for our incredulity, but when the best they can offer is a completely insufficient explanation for life's origin in the first place, an equally insufficient mechanism for the evolution of that life once it "somehow" got started via naturalistic processes, and a fossil record full of "missing links" to document its supposed course through time, we will continue to relegate their "fact" to the status of a theory (or better yet, a hypothesis). Adulterating the definition of the word fact is a poor attempt by Gould (and others) to lend credence to a theory that lacks any factual merit whatsoever. Theodore N. Tahmisian, a nuclear physicist with the Atomic Energy Commission, once stated:

Scientists who go about teaching that evolution is a fact of life are great con men, and the story they are telling may be the greatest hoax ever. In explaining evolution we do not have one iota of fact.... It is a tangled mishmash of guessing games and figure juggling (as quoted in Jackson, 1974, p. 37).

James E. Lloyd, editor of the *Florida Entomologist*, condemned evolution with faint praise (while simultaneously attempting to prop up its alleged factuality) when he wrote:

Evolution is, for all practical purposes, fact. Natural selection, though it may be tautological and philosophically a poor theory in the various ways it is usually stated (e.g., "survival of the fittest"), and perhaps not even capable of being falsified, is nevertheless profound and axiomatic. It provides the most useful insight for problem solving that biological science has, and is the heart and soul of behavioral ecology (1982, 65:1).

Natural selection, says Lloyd, is a tautology (i.e., it reasons in circles). Yet its major flaws notwithstanding, evolution is to be accepted as a "fact" all the same. If this is the best evolutionists have to offer as support for their claim of evolution's factuality, it should be obvious to even the most casual observer that such a claim is completely vacuous. Little wonder, then, that evolutionist Michael Denton wrote concerning Darwin:

His general theory that all life on earth had originated and evolved by a gradual successive accumulation of fortuitous mutations, is still, as it was in Darwin's time, a highly speculative hypothesis entirely without direct factual support and very far from that self-evident axiom some of its more aggressive advocates would have us believe (1985, p. 77).

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I believe Jesus
lived, but he
was not the Son
of God.

There is too
much suffering
in this world for
God to exist.

The origin of man is the evolutionary process.

Jesus was a great leader, but he did not resurrect from the dead.