

A Simple Defense

Reasons to Believe in
Jesus the Messiah

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Introduction

The Yom Kippur war of 1974 was an economic drain on Israel. As a Jewish person who supports that country, I volunteered to work on a kibbutz (a kind of collective settlement). Around me were members with machine guns carried for protection against terrorist attacks. At 23, the truth of my mortality had not been clear to me. Now it was obvious that life could end at any time. There had to be more, but I did not believe in the existence of a God. At the same time, I saw the beauty and design in nature as I worked under the sun in the banana fields. Even the bananas were carefully covered in a hard skin to protect the soft fruit.

I wanted to believe that there is more than this troublesome life followed by death. But wanting to believe something does not make it true. On the other hand, it doesn't make it false. Despite my skepticism, it did not take much to convince me there is a God and that I am a sinner in need of a Savior. But learning more deeply why the Biblical faith must be true has been an ongoing study.

This booklet expresses my understanding of a profound truth. I offer it as a gift to those who want to settle in their own minds an eternal question: "Is there a God, has He revealed himself to the human race, and what should I do about that?"

At the conclusion, I will point you to excellent books and links that delve more deeply into this topic. This book is meant as an introduction to the evidence for the *Biblical* Christian faith — the faith of Jesus the Messiah. In this, I hope to succeed in mounting a simple defense for the truth of the good news of Jesus the Messiah.

Author's Note: Messiah and Christ are English equivalents of the Hebrew and Greek meaning "Anointed One"

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Many Truths to Nowhere

“There are many truths. I have my truth and you have your truth”. That’s a statement you’ll hear often these days. You would not say this if you were having an operation needing anesthesia, and the doctor said that in his truth you did not require anesthesia (“ouch!”). If you went to the bank you could not convince the teller of your truth that there are a million dollars in your account — hand it over! The lion in the zoo is not a camel even if you call it that— go try to ride it!

There is such a thing as truth, and what goes for the material world goes for the religious world. It is impossible to reasonably believe that contradictory statements are both true. Christianity declares that Jesus is God, Islam says He’s not. Both cannot be true.

At the same time, one cannot say “there is no truth” or “all truth is relative”. Once you do, you have attempted to declare an absolute truth! No, intuitively we know there is truth, and we all know that some things can be known. Much knowledge has been gained about the physical world through the field of science. History can be known by inference from documents and cross-checking. It is possible to also infer truth in the philosophical and religious worlds. Our sources are what we see in the universe as well as possible religious writings—there is a good deal of evidence!

We Are Here!

When you think about it, it is really an amazing fact that we are here. Couldn’t there just as well have been—nothing? But it is a fact, and we naturally ask the questions: why is there a universe and why do we exist in it? There are only two basic possibilities, either the universe had a beginning, or it is eternal.

There is a great deal of evidence indicating the universe is not eternal. The proven expansion of the universe implies it had a beginning. Scientists now speak of a “big bang”. Whether that model is true or not, evidence from Einstein’s theories also suggests a beginning. It appears that even time came into existence. Could everything have popped out of nothing with no cause? Could the universe have created itself? The basic laws of logic deny this.

Then we are left with a universe that began to exist, with everything in it, having been caused by “something”. That “something” could not be *in* and *part of* the universe, because it could not create itself. So we have “something” (or someone), outside the universe who created it. If this “something” were not eternal, we would have the same problem all over again—just one step back: what caused the something? No, there had to be something (or someone) outside the universe who *is* eternal and therefore not caused by anything.

This something (or someone) had to have the creative power to make something when there was nothing. But this is logically *possible*. The idea of the universe creating itself is logically *impossible*.

A Blue-Green Clockwork

You would never see a clock and believe it had come about by accident. By the same token, if you see something with design, you believe there is a designer. Look around you. There are beautiful hues of the blue sky and green plants and trees. Other colors abound, and every complex thing seems to be functioning according to a plan. It's amazing that the earth revolves around the sun and the moon around the earth! The earth rotates and the gravity is just right for human existence. The cosmological laws are perfect for material existence. The whole structure of chemistry is amazing and is just right for the existence of living things.

The human body is amazing. Granted it doesn't always function as we'd like, but there are reasons for that. The conclusion that some evolutionary process resulted in such complexity accidentally is only easy to accept if you first deny the possibility of a designer. It is difficult to see how the eye would function if gradually developed by natural selection: it works as a whole! It is similar with the living cell. Even atomic, chemical, and biochemical mechanisms show evidence of design.

I believe if we look around and really think about how things work, we will conclude there is design. Things don't work *exactly* as designed—according to the biblical view, it is because of the fall of man into sin and the consequences of that fall: imperfection and decay entered the world. Yet design is evident, and design implies a designer.

Is It Really Wrong?

Evolution has a hard time explaining the perception of right and wrong. It is said that for the functioning of society, cooperation and a sense of conscience developed. If that were true, there would be no objective right and wrong. As one evolutionist told me, she did not believe conscience had anything to do with right and wrong — but it was sure hard to shake the feeling that it did!

Let me suggest that our sense of the existence of right and wrong, good and evil, is true. It's awfully hard to shake it, and society would be in deep trouble if people really did live according to their morally relative philosophy! Thankfully, they generally do not go the whole way in living out their urges.

We say there is no morality but are quick to judge the other person when he or she wrongs us. It shows that deep down we believe in objective right and wrong.

The fact is that the existence of this consciousness within us of a moral standard is a strong evidence of a designer who is moral. It may be remotely possible to explain it by evolution, but that is not the most natural explanation.

Not only do we have a conscience, but we often have a sense of falling short of some higher standard or of our own standards. There is in fact a real standard that exists because there is a powerful, moral designer.

Behind the Curtain

The designer we have been talking about in fact fits the concept we have of God. Our concept of such a Being includes one who is powerful and can create something out of nothing. He is eternal and not created Himself, so He can be the cause of everything else. He is intelligent and therefore able to design, and He has made His design evident in the universe. So the idea of an accidental universe is a very weak explanation of things. Further, He is moral, and from Him we receive our sense of what is right and wrong, good and evil. And deep inside we have a sense that these are real things. If we try to explain them away, it is difficult to shake!

The One behind the curtain of Creation, then, is powerful, intelligent, and moral. He is invisible, and yet He exists. We don't see Him, but we can infer His existence from what He has made and how it all functions. We infer Him also from our very own beings—we are moral creatures, wonderfully made, with conscience and personality.

If we accept that there is such a Being, we can ask much about Him. Is He a personal being? Are we also personal because He made us like Him? Does He communicate with us? Does He care about our existence? And can we know Him personally? To all this, the Bible says “yes”.

Not Just the Force

If you have followed me so far, you might consider that such a Being called God exists. But what is He like? Is He an impersonal force like the “Force” of Star Wars. Does He have a Dark Side?

There are many different views of God, but generally they fall into a few categories. Polytheism claims the existence of many so-called gods. Pantheism has many varieties where an impersonal “god” is part of Creation—“god” is all and all is “god”. Dualism asserts a good and bad side of an impersonal “god”. Then there is monotheism—the existence of only one God. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam fall into this category, but there is also Deism, where God exists but may be uninvolved with His Creation.

We can rule out polytheism, since such religions do not have the concept of a powerful, intelligent, moral being, but rather capricious, weak “deities”. Dualism denies the absolute moral nature of God. Pantheism is popular among some. But consider that we ourselves are personal beings. It is evident then that God Himself is personal, as it is impossible for the impersonal to create the personal [suggested by philosopher Francis Schaeffer]. Evolution has the same problem, since the end result of the selective process can only be increasing complexity—never a truly personal being. Ultimately we would only be a bunch of chemicals with complex functions. We would never be truly personal. The leap from complexity to personality is an impossible chasm.

We are personal, and there is a personal God. This suggests that it might be possible to know Him!

What Did You Say?

At this point it is more difficult to answer the next question: “Can a person know God?”. Are some Deists right in their belief that God is not involved with His creatures? Is He a God who started the universe but a God “away out there who really doesn’t care” (as the 1965 song “He’s Everything to Me” by Ralph Carmichael wonderfully refutes)? There are many who testify of God’s involvement in their lives.

We can understand certain things from the universe. Its very existence and its inherent design, as well as our moral leanings, point to one self-existent, powerful, intelligent, moral Creator. Can we know more than that? I suppose that such a Creator would want to speak to those He created. But to answer that and other questions, we need something more.

It seems self-evident that this One we are talking about is infinitely greater than we. Yet we see that there are similarities. We are personal and He must be personal, since it violates sense to think that personal beings have been created by an impersonal force. While we are similar in that we are personal, He is quite different from us, and perhaps we can only know more if He reveals Himself to us. What we see when we observe the universe appears to be a statement. Now we must consider whether He has communicated in another way. Does He speak to people? Does He give dreams and visions? Does He indeed speak verbally to some people? Can they write down for everybody what He has said? We should consider this.

So Many Books!

Many religions claim that they have received revelation from God, and many have written books about what He says. We know that they cannot all be true, but are any true? The Eastern teachings such as Hinduism, where there are many gods, and Buddhism, where “god” is joined with nature, do not fit our conclusion regarding a self-existent, powerful, intelligent, moral Creator, who — because He must always have existed — created the Universe as something separate from Himself. The remaining religions to be considered are three that do believe in One God who might fit our definition: Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

It is said that Mohammed received revelations and that scribes wrote and organized the Koran from these. Yet Islam is based on the testimony of only one man during one lifetime. On the other hand, the sixty-six books of the “Old” and “New” Testaments of the Bible were written over a period of sixteen hundred years by forty different Jewish authors. Yet there is a continuity of theme and purpose. In Islam, Abraham is an important figure, but the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) have the advantage of family tradition. That is, the stories of “the first Jew” Abraham were passed down all the way to Moses, who wrote the Torah (Pentateuch), or the “Five Books of Moses”. Along with the Prophets and the Writings, the Hebrew Scriptures are surprisingly unified in their treatment of the God of Israel, who is also the God of the whole world.

To go further, the New Testament includes books written in the first century about Jesus and by His followers. There is a continuity that can be seen between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament regarding the Messiah. We understand that the authors were guided by God to bring His word to everyone as a testimony of the truth.

So Many Gurus!

The Bible says that “many false prophets have gone out into the world” (I John 4:1). Nevertheless, has God spoken? Through the writings of *true* prophets? If so, which writings? We have looked philosophically at the existence and nature of God. However, because of who God is, we cannot know all that we need to know by using our intellects. Because of the nature of an infinite, eternal, self-existent Being, the Creator has to reveal Himself to us. We cannot *discover* enough about Him by philosophy or nature. Instead, if there is a book of Scripture out there by which God has spoken to mankind, we may well be able to *recognize* it. In fact, if God has revealed Himself to us in writings and we carefully examine them with a desire for the truth, I believe we will *certainly* be able to recognize them—because He will make the truth clear.

We will discuss fulfilled prophecy as well as historical evidence that supports the faith of Messiah Jesus. At this point, I will make the general statement that a reading of the Bible may well prove to you its divine origin. It is indeed the eyewitness testimony of people, and it has the ring of truth in its rich detail and its consistent accuracy with the history of the times it covers. Yet it also is rich in ideas that are beyond human origin. Consider the high moral commandments of God in the Law of Moses and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and the idea of a Triune God (a trinity). Also, though the authors were many and the years long, there is a consistency of theme and purpose throughout the Old Testament that leads right into the New. I find the reading of it compelling. Perhaps you will too.

Theologian David L. Cooper offered the idea that the Bible is a book that a mere human being could not write if he wanted to and would never write if he could!

It’s Just Not Natural

Putting aside philosophy, the facts of history represent a whole other line of reasoning that leads us to the strong suggestion that the Biblical events really happened. We ought to consider, despite modern leanings against the supernatural, that the testimonies of the individuals involved in the events hold evidential weight. If we begin with the assumption that there is no God or the assumption that supernatural events such as miracles can never happen, we will not consider the historical evidence.

This idea that only natural events can happen is rooted in the idea that the natural universe is all there is, or as C.S. Lewis puts it, that the material universe is “the whole show”. But if it is correct to assert, as the arguments earlier have done, that there has to be a First Cause outside the universe, the “whole show” assumption is unwarranted. Rather, we should suspend judgment and actually look at the historical evidence as affirmed by the witnesses.

It is the trend today to accept that science has ruled out the possibility of supernatural events. The universe goes about its business in a regular fashion following regular laws. You can run a controlled experiment a thousand times and get the same result. Yet this regularity does not rule out an exceptional occurrence. You only conclude this if you assume there cannot be some source outside nature, if you assume in advance that there is no possible intervention in the natural order. If there is an eternal Creator, as we have asserted, creation is the largest miracle of all!

Total skepticism of historical evidence is not well-founded. Many facts of ancient history are well supported. For example, documentary evidence confirms that the first century testimonies about Jesus were accurately passed to us and that they have the marks of reliability.

Evidently It's True

Historical evidence is real evidence. It is often supposed that the Bible and the claims about Jesus Christ (Messiah Jesus) have to be proven scientifically or else they are not true. Yet many things can be known, and can *only* be known, in a manner unrelated to science. You cannot subject history to empirical experiments; it is a different type of knowledge, but it is *real* knowledge. Historical claims are testable by ancient documents and corroboration among such documents. Sometimes there is archaeological evidence, but not always. Historians come to a confidence about many matters that we all accept. For example, was Julius Caesar assassinated? We have a high confidence that he was.

Warren Wallace is a police detective who in his book “Cold-Case Christianity” explains the basis for making reasonable conclusions about past events based on evidence. The evidence he dealt with are documents and reports of interviews that are studied to determine the guilt or innocence of a suspect in a crime—sometimes committed 20 or 30 years before. The same kind of evaluation can be used to determine the truth or falsehood of ancient events, such as, to our interest, the resurrection of the Messiah Jesus. We will get back to that later. The principle is that things can be surely known given the whole weight of evidence. When it comes to the facts of the events surrounding Jesus, we have multiple eyewitnesses who set down the facts for us—facts that they were willing to suffer and die for rather than deny. They did not die for things they imagined to be true, nor for a lie, but things they knew they had truly seen.

Looking Back

Of particular historical importance is the resurrection of the Messiah Jesus. We have considered whether God has spoken to us in the Scriptures, but even from a mere human perspective, the testimonies of those writers have the ring of truth. The detail and the consistency with the history of the times is evident. There are four “Gospels” or testimonies to the events involving Jesus. Two of the Gospel writers, Matthew and John, accompanied Jesus in His ministry on this earth. A third Gospel writer, Mark, was a close associate of the disciple Peter. A fourth was a consummate historian, the doctor Luke, who was an associate of the Apostle Paul. Paul himself was a strong antagonist to the faith until he suddenly became a zealous believer, with no natural explanation. Rather, he testified that he received a visual and auditory revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven—he heard Him and saw Him. Many of the books of the New Testament were written by Paul, and Peter also wrote a couple. James the half-brother of Jesus, similar to Paul, had a change of heart when He encountered the resurrected Jesus.

We ought to consider, despite modern leanings against the supernatural, that the testimonies of these individuals hold evidential weight. They cannot be ruled out as only “religious” writings, since they testify of actual historical events. Also, they cannot be dismissed as “biased” accounts, because the belief they all came to was not something assumed in advance but based on something they witnessed—and were willing to die for rather than deny—that is, the bodily resurrection of the man Jesus.

A Fair Conclusion

It may be that we should be more demanding in seeking evidence of the resurrection than for other matters. It is reasonable, to some extent, considering the life-changing consequences of belief or unbelief. Nevertheless, if we establish an impossible standard, we will always come to the conclusion it is not true. Warren Wallace in his book “Cold Case Christianity” explains the rules of evidence that are used in a trial. The jury must come to a verdict that is beyond a reasonable doubt. There may still be questions and possible other explanations, but the evidence is enough to come to a true conclusion.

Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, in their book “The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus”, make a very interesting historical case. Most scholars agree on certain minimal facts: Jesus died on a cross and was buried. It is also understood that the phenomenon of belief in the resurrection spread like wildfire in the ancient world. Simple history is in agreement with this. For example, it is common knowledge that the faith expanded to the extent of coming to the attention of the Roman leadership, who eventually became persecutors. To come to a fair understanding of this, one must look for an explanation. To begin with, if the Jewish leadership who opposed this faith in Jerusalem were able to produce the dead body, faith in Jesus would have been a non-starter. The tomb was empty. Further, as mentioned, the disciples testified they had seen, held, and eaten with Jesus after His bodily resurrection. In addition, Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians that 500 of the “brothers” had seen the resurrected Christ. This could have easily been fact-checked and denied if untrue. It was the witness of the early believers to this actual historical event and to the resurrected person Jesus that led to the widespread acceptance of the faith

How Did They Know?

Another evidence is fulfilled prophecy. The testimonies of the writers of the New Testament confirm the predictions of the Old Testament. These are numerous. The background story is that man was created directly by God, placed in a paradise of lush vegetation to manage the land, and disobeyed a command of God, resulting in the continued sinfulness, illness, and death of all of the human race. Even in that situation, the Bible said that God would provide a Redeemer. The prophecies of Scripture became more and more specific as more revelation was given over time. In addition to being human, this Messiah would be the descendant of Abraham. He would be of the Tribe of Judah. He would be a descendant of David and ultimately reign forever. He would be born of a virgin. He would be God in the flesh, both God and man. He would be born in Bethlehem, but His origin would be eternal. He would die for the sins of the world but would be alive after death. He would come some time before the destruction of the Second Temple (which happened in 70 A.D.).

A forerunner would come to announce the Messiah. John the Baptist did this in the first century. He pointed people to Jesus, the “Lamb of God” who would take away the sins of the world. This greater “Lamb” was reminiscent of the many blood sacrifices given to Israel to make atonement for their sins and especially of the Passover lamb. The idea was that a substitute could take upon Himself the sins of the people and pay the death penalty in their place. The New Testament record wonderfully fits this testimony of the Messiah-Savior, followed by His resurrection.

There are still unfulfilled prophecies. Witnesses saw Messiah Jesus ascend into the clouds as a sign of his entrance into heaven. The Bible says He will return in the same way to judge and rule the world.

Let's Get Specific!

Finding the identity of the Messiah is like looking at the clues in a detective story, which we can solve—clues below are from the Old Testament (OT) and fulfillments from the New Testament (NT), with chapter & verse.

Clue: The Messiah would be human.

OT: *Genesis 3:15* “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed...”

(This is a little complex, but the main point here is that the Messiah would be the “seed”, born of a woman).

NT: *Matthew 1:18* “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.”

Clue: The Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah

OT: *Genesis 49:10* “The scepter will not depart from Judah. . . until he to whom it belongs shall come...” (NIV)

NT: *Hebrews 7:14* “For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah...”

Clue: The Messiah would be of King David's line

OT: *I Chronicles 17:11* (God To King David): “I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom...forever.”

NT: (*Genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 show Jesus as a descendant of David*).

Clue: The Messiah would die—for our sins

OT: *Isaiah 53:5* “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.”

NT: *Luke 23:33, 46* “When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. . .And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” Having said this, He breathed His last.”

NT: *I Corinthians 15:3-4* 3 “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now. . .”

Clue: The Messiah would be buried in a rich man's tomb

OT: *Isaiah 53:9* “His grave was assigned with wicked men,

Yet He was with a rich man in His death,

Because He had done no violence,

Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

[Note: they would have thrown Him in a common grave, but rich Joseph of Arimathea put him in his own tomb.]

NT: *Matthew 27:59-61* “And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb. . .

Clue: The Messiah would be resurrected.

OT: *Isaiah 53:10-11*

*“But the LORD was pleased
To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
He will see His offspring,
He will prolong His days,
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His
hand.*

(Isaiah tells us this one will die and rise—the past tense here is used prophetically for events future to the text).

NT: *Matthew 28:8-9* “*And they [Mary Magdalene and the other Mary] left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.*”

[Also chapters: Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20]

Clue: The Messiah would be conceived and born of a virgin and called “Immanuel” (“God with us”).

OT: *Isaiah 7:13-14* “*Then he [the prophet Isaiah] said, “Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.*”

(*Note:* This is the second of two prophecies in the passage Isaiah 7:1-16. The first was directed to King Ahaz but this one to the whole house [dynasty] of David. Despite the controversy about the Hebrew word “almah”, translated “virgin” here, there are really good linguistic reasons to believe it refers to a virgin. Also, the context reveals that the birth is a miracle.)

NT: (Virgin Birth, continued)

Matthew 1:18,22 “*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit....Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL’, which translated means, ‘GOD WITH US.’”*

Clue: The Messiah would be God in the flesh.

(Through human birth, God the Son would add humanity to His Deity, and become a truly human being, fully God and fully man).

OT: *Isaiah 9:6*

*“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”*

NT: *John 1:1-5,14* “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (NKJV)*

(*Note:* Here is the mystery of the Triunity of the One God, such that the second person of the Triune God, Jesus, could be with us on earth and pray to God the Father —yet He is One God with the Father. You don’t have to understand perfectly to believe in Messiah Jesus. No one fully understands this. We will continue to learn. ***The Deity of Christ, however, is an essential truth.***)

Counting the Time

If you have been impressed enough by all the clues to *consider* that there may be a God who sent a Messiah, the real clincher is Daniel's prophecy that gives the exact timing of His coming.

Daniel 9:24-26

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place. So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.

Daniel received God's prophecy through an angel hundreds of years before Christ. Even those who give the book a late date must put it before Christ. The seventy "weeks" are weeks of years, or literally "sevens" of years, so 490 years are decreed. The starting point is the decree to rebuild Jerusalem by either Cyrus or Artaxerxes after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem (scholars debate which king is in view). This work took seven sevens, or 49 years. Counting 62 sevens (434 years) from that point brings us to the birth of Christ or the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, depending on which king you use. The math is complicated due to Hebrew and Persian chronology. Either way, the count leads to Jesus. You see from the passage that the Messiah had to be cut off before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD. Who else could it be?

Sign of the Times

I mentioned earlier that we live in a time where truth is considered relative ("my truth, your truth"). We realized that there really is such a thing as truth. Yet in these "modern" times people are not thinking that. You may even have accepted this as the norm. We must be wary of simply accepting the assumptions that are current.

There are other philosophical assumptions that have grown up in the last few centuries. These have challenged what was believed for thousands of years, but we cannot assume that these assumptions are right just because they are modern. Naturalism and anti-supernaturalism are two such assumptions. Naturalism says that only what occurs naturally is possible, and anti-supernaturalism follows, affirming the absence of such things as miracles, which are not natural. Behind these is the assumption that God does not exist.

Certainly there have been many beneficial advances in science, and we have increased knowledge of the natural world. However, along with science, naturalism and anti-supernaturalism have been accepted as the norm. But science itself cannot prove these assertions. They are philosophical presuppositions. In thinking about God and Messiah, if you accept these assumptions in advance, you have already decided on a negative conclusion. Keep an open mind in your investigation.

If there is a God, who created the universe, he can intervene in His creation. You cannot assume that because things in the universe obey certain laws, they must always obey them. If you assume there is no God, you might think that. Look honestly at all the evidence. Then you can conclude whether God and His supernatural intervention are real. Then you can look at the history surrounding Jesus. Do not be swayed by unfounded assumptions.

Who Am I ?

If there is no God, we humans have a big problem. We cannot answer satisfactorily the question “Who am I?” or even “What am I?” If there is no God, we are the product of some natural process, perhaps the possessors of life because a bunch of chemicals got together in a primordial pool and somehow evolved to the beings we are—if we could even call ourselves “beings”. No, we can only say we are a bunch of chemicals organized into a complex entity. We cannot have any confidence in our thought processes. Paradoxically, those who deny the existence of God have no reason to think their minds have the capacity to make judgments about the existence of God! You cannot be confident judging metaphysical realities—things beyond what you can see and hear – if you believe you are a bunch of chemicals. You are then not personal!

However, such a conclusion strains reality. You know you have a mind that can use logic. You know you can think about unseen things. You have emotions and consciousness—very hard to explain if you are a bunch of chemicals. Would you really deny that are you able to love? That concept is meaningless if it is a chemical reaction.

The Scripture has the answer. Human beings are a special creation of God. The first chapter of the Bible declares that God made humankind. Psalm 8 declares the value you have in God’s sight:

*When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them? You have made
them a little lower than the angels.*

Where Do I Stand ?

It is fairly well known that the Bible declares we are made in God’s image. We have intellect, emotions, and will. We are personal. At the same time there are things about God that are beyond our nature. God is infinite, eternal, all-knowing, and all-powerful. He never changes. He is not subject to passions that cause Him to react to events or people apart from His will.

As we have affirmed, He loves humankind, but we have a problem. It is evident that humans are able to perform some loving and sacrificial acts. At the same time, we can do some very cruel things. Francis Schaeffer and many others speak of the nobility and cruelty of man. We are both noble and cruel. When we talk about our sin and sinfulness, it is important to remember that God loves us, values us, and sees the image of Himself in us. In the Bible, God is being honest with us.

The Bible affirms that the first man and woman were given a choice to obey God or disobey, and in the early paradise chose wrongly. They had been warned that death would be the consequence—separation from God leading to physical death and potentially eternal separation. In a way we may not fully understand, they represented all mankind in this choice. Consequently, we too are in a state of separation from God. We have also inherited a sinful nature. We ourselves are sinners by birth but also by choice.

Because of this and because God is holy and just , we are under His just displeasure—but He has provided a gracious way out. We can actually know God personally and have peace with Him, now and in eternity. We can have a loving personal relationship with Him forever.

Bad News, Good News

I would now like to spell out the Gospel (Good News) that this book is defending. I am not defending outward forms of religion, but an inner knowledge of and relationship with Jesus the Messiah. This personal faith in God is described in both testaments of the Bible.

God greatly values human beings. He created us all in His own image. The bad news is that we are all sinners by birth and by choice. However, it would be unbiblical and unrealistic to say we are as bad as we can possibly be at all possible times. We are able to do beneficial things, but we are nonetheless sinners and fall short of the glorious nature as humans that God intended for us. Our sinfulness is more than outward, as we even sin in the thoughts of our hearts. Because God is holy, there is a separation between a person and God that, without intervention, would become eternal. There will be a day of judgment, and we cannot stand before God on our own merits.

Look around. Do you really think that all the evil in the world is simply an evolutionary necessity? Look inside - it is in our hearts as well. But because He loves us, God provided an answer to save us.

The good news is that God the Father sent the Messiah Jesus to die for our sins. He paid our just penalty by dying in our place on the cross. He then rose physically from the dead, and many saw and interacted with Him and testified to this effect. Since Jesus is God in the flesh, His death was sufficient to satisfy a just and holy God. God the Father has chosen to accept Jesus' sacrifice as a substitute for all who will put their faith in Him. He gives forgiveness of sin and eternal life as a gift.

The Good News Went To the Jews First

God loves Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles) equally. Nevertheless, it happens that Jesus went first to the Jews to declare his Messiahship. You've probably heard that "Jews don't believe in Jesus". Well, there are thousands of us who do. The first "Christians" or "Messianic" were Jewish. They spread the word to the Gentiles (or "nations") in the first century.

I think there has been a bit of prejudice (that is, prejudging) among us Jews about Jesus. There are some understandable reasons, but they don't hold up to the truth when examined carefully. Terrible things were done to us in His name, but they were not His doing, and they were not done by His true followers.

We do not stop being Jewish when we believe in Jesus, anymore than an Italian stops being Italian, or an Irishman stops being Irish. In fact, biblically a Jew is a descendant of Jacob, who was the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. Being Jewish is a matter of descent, not of what one believes.

Typically, a Jewish person who believes in Messiah understands him to be a conquering King in the line of David. This is true, but the Scripture teaches that the Messiah would first have to suffer and die to pay the penalty for sin. Isaiah chapter 53 is the clearest indication of this, where it speaks of the suffering servant dying for the sins of Isaiah's people, that is, the people of ethnic Israel. The modern idea that Israel is here the suffering servant is refuted by the fact that the Servant dies for Israel; thus Israel cannot die for itself. The pronouns and presentation of the sufferings of the Servant are very personal. He is a human being who would suffer, die for sins, be buried, and rise from the dead.

Then the Good News Went To the Gentiles

As mentioned, God loves Jews and non-Jews equally, but Jesus went first to the Jews to declare his Messiahship. Since God loves the whole world (John 3:16), Jesus then instructed the early Jewish disciples to go into all the world to preach the Gospel, thus bringing those of the Gentiles (the “nations”) who would believe in Him into the place of blessing. Thus He created what the Bible calls “one new man” consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. This is also called the “church”, the worldwide congregation of believers, in its most general sense.

There is a tendency among some Gentiles to take their nominal faith in Christ for granted. You may have grown up in a particular church or denomination, and you may assume that being a member of that organization has settled your relationship with God. Perhaps your family has always professed Christ and you assume you are in a right relationship with God by being a member of the family. Or perhaps you go to church and are quite “religious”. Yet the kind of faith the Scripture talks about is more than a mere intellectual adherence to doctrine, and it is not passed down by heredity. There is a choice one makes to believe in Christ that is characterized in Scripture as a welcoming and trust in Him and in His death for our sins. It results in a personal relationship with Christ.

There is a tendency among some Gentiles who profess Christ, as well, to think in terms of the good works you can do to please and be accepted by God. However, the Scripture declares that salvation is a gift of God’s grace and cannot be earned. It is obtained through genuine, personal faith in Christ.

But what must I do?

What Must I Do ?

You may now be thinking that it’s true! If you’re not sure, some books are listed in the back that will help you. Above all, read the Bible, because it is able to make you “wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15).

If you believe the truth of what I have been saying, you are ready to put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The Bible teaches that we are all sinners and that we deserve an eternal separation from God, but God is willing to forgive our sins graciously and give us the free gift of eternal life.

Romans 3:23 . . .all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus .

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is hard to hear about our sin, but because God is holy, he sees sin differently than we do. Yet He made a way out! He provided a Savior. This is the good news: God loved us so much that He gave His only Son Jesus to die in our place on the cross.

John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

What must I do? (continued)

Jesus death was sufficient to pay the penalty for all of our sins. We benefit from this if we receive Him, if we believe in Him, if we put our trust in Him. (John 1:12).

John 1:12–13 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

How do we receive Christ? Romans 10:9 says

“...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The word “Lord” here means that Jesus is the Lord God. He not only died but He was raised from the dead—death could not hold Him in its grasp! (Acts 2:24).

Acts 2:24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Faith in Jesus is the only condition of salvation, and confessing is a way of expressing that faith. Why not tell Messiah Jesus that you do believe He is the Lord God in the flesh and that He died for your sins and was raised from the dead. In doing so, you will be trusting Him and welcoming Him into your life. He will not fail you. He will forgive your sins and give you the free gift of eternal life. He will give you a new spiritual heart and begin the process of making you what He wants you to be. The living Messiah Jesus loves you greatly—respond to Him today!

Bibliography

Books for Follow Up

1. I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist
By Norman Geisler and Frank Turek
2. He Is There and He is Not Silent
By Francis Schaeffer
3. The Case for A Creator
By Lee Strobel
4. The Case for Christ
By Lee Strobel
5. Cold Case Christianity
By Warren Wallace
6. The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus
Gary Habermas and Michael Licona
7. God in Eclipse
By John B. Metzger
8. Come and See: What We Know About God: Theology Proper
Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum (includes discussion of Trinity)
9. The Word of God: Its Nature and Content
Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum
10. Jesus Was a Jew
By Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum
11. More Than a Carpenter
By Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell
12. The Bible—biblegateway.com has free online Bible access to many versions in English and other languages

Links

Free Bible Reading Online at
Biblegateway.com

Resources From our Friends at Ariel Ministries:

<https://www.ariel.org/resources/come-and-see/studies>
(Messianic Biblical Studies by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum
The Bible, God, Messiah, Man, Sin, Salvation, and more)

For More Information about Faith in Messiah Jesus:

Messengers Messianic Jewish Fellowship

Messiahnj.org

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