

A Gamers' Guide to the Gospel

A pointer to the ultimate program and why you should care

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For my great-grandchildren

And those who will follow

“You don’t stop playing because you get old;

You get old because you stop playing.”

Preface

(from website home page)

Squeak wasn't her real name. As far as the tiny twelve year old half-elf knew, she had never been given one. Someone at the orphanage where she had been dropped off as a newborn pinned it on her and it stuck. At age ten she was on her own.

The raggedy, barefoot street urchin, pickpocket and thief was deep in the bowels of the ancient crypt, hoping to pocket enough overlooked coin and jewelry to buy a ride far away from the local guard. It wasn't safe to walk. Getting robbed wasn't the worst thing that could happen to a small girl alone on the road. Squeak was fast on her feet but not fast enough to outrun an arrow or a bandit's hound.

Dusty glass prisms embedded in the walls of the crumbling ruin gave her just enough light to see and move silently. Stealth was what she was good at but this wasn't a candle maker's shop in the hours before dawn. The undead tomb guardians were silent now; maybe their given abilities had long since faded away but the bones littering the floor served as a solemn warning and she stepped carefully through them without a sound.

Tears of disappointment filled her eyes. Previous looting seemed complete. Retracing her steps towards the hidden entrance, she spotted something beneath a skeleton: a fat coin purse! As she pulled it from beneath the bones and picked it up it fell apart in her hand, gold jingling to the stone floor followed by a shuffling sound from the next chamber---her only path out. Maybe she had frightened a rat. It didn't sound like a rat! Heart pounding, she scooped up what coins she could and ran.

As she rounded a corner the wight raised its axe and the last thing Squeak saw in this life was the headlights of a speeding vehicle. No hitting the F9 key in hardcore mode. (What?! At this point the webpage shows a screenshot of a fatal accident).

Poor Squeak. She didn't make it, but that's okay---she's not real. The picture above IS real and illustrates just how fast we and our friends and loved ones can lose the "ride" that we were born with. But, fast or slow, sooner or later it's time to either level up or face the ultimate fail.

Chapter List

Since some of the subject matter is continuously on the move, I expect to be doing subsequent revising. Therefore, the pages are not numbered. Sorry for the inconvenience.

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Introduction

“God is his name; the cosmos is his game.”

This little book is probably going to ‘piss off’ a lot of people, Christians included, along with atheists and those of other worldview belief systems. And when you start it off with a sentence like that, you just know that it’s not going to be another helping of your usual Christian cuisine. That’s okay. Jesus pissed off a lot of people himself. It’s written by a gamer for gamers, not the ladies sewing circle (although you might be surprised by what they talk about). If my occasional use of *mild* language overly offends you, then I suggest that you either stop reading or get over it.

I’m not going to climb into the rarified air of the academic elite so that you need to keep a search engine open just to know what I said (Dude, this guy must be smart! He uses big words!) Nor do I intend to confuse those outside of Christianity by gumming up the pages with Christianese. And, BTW, I’ll use poetic license as I see fit. Grammar police, you have been warned!

Just so you know, I’m a non-denominational Christian of nearly fifty years, raised in the Southern Baptist tradition. Personal experience, coupled with countless hours of study has convinced me that God is for real, that Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be and that the Bible is God’s Word, front to back, although it is very often misinterpreted, misunderstood and misapplied---even by those claiming to believe in it. I’m not a Young Earth Creationist and I will tell you why. So, no duping---you have this info right up front.

The second half of the twentieth century on down saw more and more people finding Christianity to be less and less relevant to their lives, starting especially with my own baby boom generation. They regard the Christian Bible as a mashed-up mix of unscientific myth, contradictions, invented and distorted history and bias. And the central figure, Jesus---a radical nice guy who may have thought that he was God and ended up paying for it. Why should anyone believe any of it, still less try to live by it?

Why indeed, when every version of the Bible that you pick up seems to say things a little bit differently and sometimes more than a little bit differently; when respected biblical scholars disagree over dating, content and meaning; when the majority of the intellectual elite snicker in its face.

This is a pointer to Christianity, but not in the traditional sense. That’s been done and done well over the centuries---for the few Christians willing to take the time to dig into it. Hey, let’s own it guys---most Christians have never even *read* the Bible, let alone studied it. I’m also convinced that the Christian church has allowed the presentation of these truths to become dated; that it is presenting a nineteen-forties witness to a twenty-first century Western world. But I’m

not pushing a ‘different gospel’, just another way of sharing the Gospel (heresy hunters and the faint of heart take note).

As I said, I’m a gamer and this is aimed especially at gamers; for those familiar with the genre and for all those who have come and are coming of age in a scientifically, technologically minded online culture. There just *might* be more than a little similarity between VR (virtual reality) and reality-as-it-is---beyond look-alike, beyond make-believe. And if my ‘what ifs’ turn out to be nothing but crap, at least some of them can make for good illustrations. You just can’t top Jesus’ teaching parables, but a lot of them go right over the head of a generation which is totally unfamiliar with life in biblical times. I recently used an illustration from Dungeons & Dragons to explain the concept of God’s foreknowledge, and a Wiccan girl’s eyes lit up and she exclaimed, “Yeah! Now I’ve got it!”

One potential problem with trying to make the Christian witness more understandable to the twenty-first century world by adding science, technology and gaming to the mix is that this stuff tends to have a ‘shelf life’. It changes rapidly. Today’s ‘bleeding edge’ technology turns into tomorrow’s unusable junk. Scientific theories get ‘patched’ and sometimes tossed aside as new information becomes available. So, keep that free advice up front.

I’ll get into subjects that are uncomfortable, if not off-limits, to most Christians but which have gained a lot of popular traction over time, including ghosts, angels and demons, reincarnation, UFOs (seriously) and other phenomenon under the so-called New Age umbrella, as well as the perceived bogeymen of science such as evolution, Big Bang theory, climate change, and some of the more bizarre concepts like time travel, extra dimensions and Multiverse Theory. I’ll also explain why *genuine* science and skepticism are neutral and necessary and not the enemies of the Christian faith that so many presume them to be.

We’ll get into the topic of NDEs (near-death experiences), why they often appear so much alike and yet so different, and what they may indicate, if anything, about life after death including the concepts of heaven and hell.

I have added a glossary of terms for certain gaming language not defined in the body of the book. I don’t expect everyone who reads it to understand these terms, including gamers coming into the genre after the terms go out of date (which they will).

The select bibliography at the end of the book includes theists, atheists and others who do not share a common concept of reality---in all fairness, if one is going to voice an opinion on a world view then he or she needs to pay reasonable attention to what all sides have to say.

This book is FREE (why pay more?) It’s a short read. Copy it, print it out, share it, whatever. Don’t sweat the copyright. Jesus said to his disciples that as they had received freely, so they should freely give (Matthew 10:8). I’ll buy that.

Skepticism

“Say it ain’t so!”

I’m a skeptic, and that includes being skeptical about skeptics---but skepticism gets a bad rap. Many people equate skepticism with atheism and they are not the same. True skepticism is less about being a “doubter” and more about using reason and critical thinking in an attempt to arrive at truth, wherever it leads. Atheism is disbelief or a lack of belief in God or gods which, for the present at least, can be neither proven nor disproven. Like theism and other ‘isms’ it is a position based on faith whether its adherents like the definition or not.

Bear with me a minute, so you’ll know where I’m coming from.

I grew up at a time in America when belief in God was an accepted given and deeply ingrained in the public sphere. We had Christmas and Easter activities and plays in public schools along with morning Bible reading and prayer until my sophomore year in high school when the Supreme Court put an end to it. Mom took me to Sunday school and church until at age eleven I witnessed an ugly display of racism by my Sunday school teacher outside of the church environment. Granted, this was Florida, 1958. He didn’t know that I saw him, but I refused to go back and, since my parents were not racists, they did not insist. So I came of age with a nominal belief in God, but I had not yet become a Christian.

At age twenty, while in the army, I was going to church with a Christian girl to spend time with her and, more or less, to stay on her good side. I wasn’t looking for God. After a few weeks of doing that, God called me. It wasn’t a gentle invitation; it was a powerful direct order. I was an American soldier. I knew what a direct order meant. So on that Sunday morning in Baltimore, Maryland I became a Christian---an ignorant baby Christian.

And then my life just sort of went to hell. I’ll spare you the details but, since I felt that God had let me down, I went looking into New Age occultism for answers. I left the army, met and married another Christian girl who wanted nothing to do with my occultism, dragged her out of her church, had two kids and had another on the way. At that point my wife declared that, since she had personally dedicated our children to God, she was going to start taking them to church and I could either go along or stay home. I figured that she and the kids could go, while I would go a couple of times just to stay on her good side and then say that it wasn’t for me. That was my game plan.

So we went, and the totally unexpected happened. It was like God rushed up and threw his arms around me. I turned my back on the New Age, threw out all of my occult books and material, and never looked back. About a year later God called me into a ministry of the written word. With three kids under the age of four with a stay-at-home mom, I had no way to go to seminary so I

brought the seminary to me, piece by piece, with hundreds of books worth thousands of dollars over forty plus years---not only commentaries, histories, theologies and other subjects from a Christian academic perspective, but science (my favorite subject in school).

And I remain a skeptic. Unlike many of my fellow Christians, I am not afraid to stare science, philosophy, other belief systems including atheism, scientism and you name it in the face. I told God long ago that if I found anything that could knock him off the throne, then off the throne he would go. His response was, “Go for it.” I went for it, I’m still going, and God’s still there.

Skepticism and faith are at the heart of science---I’m not duping. The unrelenting search for truth no matter where it leads, including the willingness to modify or even toss out old theories and misunderstandings, coupled with the faith that the truth is out there and can be found. Likewise, skepticism and faith are at the heart of Christian doctrine in its true form. Many scientists, although in the minority, are also Christians.

Some atheists have taken the position that one cannot hold science and Christianity within the same mind without the result being *cognitive dissonance*, the short explanation according to Wiki being “*the mental stress or discomfort experienced by an individual who holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time, performs an action that is contradictory to one or more beliefs, ideas or values, or is confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas, or values.*” Bullshit. Properly understood, there is no conflict. God stoops to address a very primitive culture in language that it can understand. Science compares the present with the past and sees itself riding the crest of the wave into an ever expanding future of knowledge and technology. True that, but there are some in the field who think that science has nearly “arrived” when it has only just begun (“Are we there yet?”). But in fact, *our* science is an infant and all that it has discovered thus far are its fingers and toes. Doubt that? By its own admission, science declares that a nanosecond ago in the span of cosmic time our humanoid ancestors were climbing down from the trees and now we have just about ‘got it’. Right. To assume that we stand at the pinnacle of scientific knowledge, well, compared to 1100, 1750, 1930, perhaps we do; but what about 2075, 3131, 10,001? Let’s not be naïve. Let’s encounter another civilization a mere million year blink in advance of our own and see how much we *really* know.

The late scientist and popular explainer of science, Carl Sagan, advised us to be open-minded but “not so open-minded that our brains fall out”. The other side of the coin is to not be so close-minded that nothing can penetrate.

Sagan called science a ‘candle in the dark’ and, used intelligently, it is. But there are those who hold the candle at arm’s length, peer into the darkness beyond the little circle of light and confidently declare what is, and what is not, out there. Why is that not surprising? Man, the smart-ass, snug and smug in his own wisdom, usually thinks that he knows more than he actually does. Albert Einstein was not so bold. He once asked his physics students how much of reality that they thought the human race collectively possessed. They put their heads together and, to their credit,

came up with a little less than two percent. The great physicist said that he would accept that as an answer but thought that the figure was too high. Sagan asked in his *Demon-Haunted World*, pgs. 322-23, “What’s wrong with admitting that we don’t know something? Is our self-esteem so fragile?”

On the other hand, there are Christians who, by their own misunderstanding of the Bible and of what God is and has been about in his dealings with the creatures on this planet, cling to the simplified explanations given by God to a primitive people like a pit bull clings to a bone (spoiler alert---interference here is not for the faint of heart).

Here’s a truth statement that you can take to the bank: “What is, is. What isn’t, isn’t--- whether we know it or not; whether we understand it or not; whether we believe it or not; whether we like it or not. “What is, is; what isn’t, isn’t.” Switch out “was, wasn’t” for “is, isn’t”, same difference.

Want to hear another one? Let me tell you another one. “There is no such thing as the supernatural.” If something, including an ultimate creator God, does not conform to reality-as-it-is (not as we *think* it is, or want it to be), then it is not natural, nor is it supernatural---it is nonsense. We may not ‘get it’ because our collective human minds and our primitive science and technology are not yet capable of getting us there, but, trust me guys, the truth is out there.

My high school journalism teacher made us memorize this old, well known poem by Rudyard Kipling and to keep it up front while chasing a news story. Thank you, Miss B, wherever you are.

“I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.”

Here are a few ‘quotes from my notes’:

“A point of view is open to discussion on the basis of evidence. Bias, on the other hand, is a prejudice that filters out everything that doesn’t fit a preformed conception.” Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Exposing Myths About Christianity*, Pg. 17.

“... physicalists shift from science to metaphysics when they assert that only what science can investigate is real. This is a simple declaration of a philosophical worldview, not a scientific proposition.” Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Exposing Myths About Christianity*, Pg.132.

“The cure for a fallacious argument is a better argument, not the suppression of ideas.” Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*, pg. 429.

“... at the heart of science is an essential balance between two seemingly contradictory attitudes – an openness to new ideas, no matter how bizarre or counterproductive, and the most ruthlessly skeptical scrutiny of all ideas, old and new. This is how deep truths are winnowed out from deep nonsense. The collective enterprise of creative thinking and skeptical thinking, working together, keeps the field on track.” Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*, pg. 304.

“We cannot put our minds in a lockbox.” Sez Hoo??

“We may be entitled to our own opinions, but we are not entitled to our own facts. Believing a statement is one thing; that statement being true is another.”, Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, pg.124.

“The great tragedy of science---the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact.” Thomas Henry Huxley

“Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn’t go away.” Philip K. Dick, quoted by Jim Baggott, *Farewell To Reality*, pg.6,

“...although everyone has access to the same evidence, the presuppositions implicit in a person’s philosophy determine the perspective from which he or she views the data, leading to different conclusions about which explanation best fits the evidence.” Gerald Rau, *Mapping the Origins Debate*, pg.20.

“The most sophisticated deception of all is self-deception.” Thomas Georges, *Digital Soul*, Pg. 90.

“I wish there were a genuinely skeptical community. I’m afraid that just about every skeptic I’ve ever met is a pseudo skeptic. A real skeptic says, ‘I don’t know about parapsychology and PSI, and the explanations we have so far don’t satisfy me. I want to look at the data!’ But the skeptics I’ve encountered claim to know already that there’s nothing to it, and then they break all the rules of scientific procedure to go about their debunking. Skepticism, as it is generally practiced, is neither legitimate science nor legitimate skepticism.” Charles Tart quoted in *Closer to Truth: Challenging Current Belief*, Pg.73, Robert L. Kuhn, editor.

“Our science is a drop, our ignorance a sea.” William James quoted in *Science and Religion: Are They Compatible?*, pg. 331, edited by Paul Kurtz.

“Despite advertisements to the contrary, science is not a juggernaut that relentlessly pushes back the frontiers of knowledge. Rather, science is an interconnected web of theoretical and factual claims about the world that are constantly being revised and for which changes in one portion of the web can induce radical changes in another. In particular, science regularly confronts the problem of having to retract claims that it once confidently asserted.” William A. Dembski, *No Free Lunch*, pg.316.

“It is an outworn myth, moreover, to represent science as a presuppositionless description of reality.” Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol.1, pg.255.

“Experience proves this, or that, or nothing, according to the preconceptions we bring to it.” C.S. Lewis *God in the dock*, quoted by Colin Brown in the introduction to *Christianity and Western Thought*, pg.9.

“Facts must control dogmas, and not dogmas facts.” Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 7, preface.

“It is error only, and not truth, that shrinks from inquiry.” Thomas Paine

The Cosmos

“Turtles all the way down”

Surprisingly enough, theists and atheists come to very similar conclusions as far as the origin of *reality-as-it-is* is concerned. To the theist, it is a self-existing everlasting creator; “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1). To the atheist, with nature as his/her god substitute, reality just ‘is’. Victor J. Stenger, in *God and the Multiverse*, states “Indeed, no law of physics was broken in bringing our universe into existence. And, of course, no law of physics was broken in bringing the multiverse into existence, since it always existed”. Stenger goes on to quote the eminent physicist Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow in their 2010 book *The Grand Design*, “Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going.” Carl Sagan, in his renowned *Cosmos* series, stated “The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be.” Magic! OK, that wasn’t nice. But the above *are* all faith statements without an ounce of concrete scientific evidence to back them up.

Then there are those like the late *former* atheist, Antony Flew, who, while not becoming a Christian, finally came to a position of belief in a creator God after a lifetime of examining what evidence there was. Poor Antony Flew. Most of the aggressive New Atheists of recent days do not even mention the name of their one-time champion.

The theist’s position is that God has engaged with, and revealed himself to, an infant race of intelligent creatures, either personally or through chosen representatives or both. The atheist’s position rests on the brainpower and technology of an infant race of intelligent creatures to come up with answers on their own. Honest theistic philosophers, theologians and scientists attempt to arrive at solutions by viewing the data from all sides.

Theists are often accused of relying on the so-called *God-of-the-gaps* solution to resolve the ultimate origins of the cosmos and everything therein. Can’t explain it? Not a problem---God did it, end of story. “The Bible says it; I believe it and that settles it!” Atheists don’t buy that for a moment. They just know that however it came about, ‘God’ did *not* do it. “Science doesn’t say it; I don’t believe it and that settles it!” Then they turn around and pull a *nature-of-the-gaps, all by itself* response out of the proverbial hat. But that’s just kicking the can down the road.

Once upon a time, not so long ago, scientists in the know held that the universe was static. It had no beginning. Neither did it have an end. It was just ‘there’ and it didn’t change much, except at the local level. General relativity and the observed expansion of the universe nixed that idea but, under the Steady State theory, the universe was still held to have neither beginning nor end. Then came the discovery and confirmation of the Big Bang. Oops! The universe *did* have a beginning after all, roughly 13.8 billion years ago (according to *our* spacetime) and the details could be

traced back to within a minute fraction of a second after the event. Jesuit priest and scientist George Lemaitre, father of the Big Bang Theory, called it “a day without yesterday.” Believers in a divine creation rejoiced, sort of, although a lot of them abhorred the details. God did it! Yay! “Bah!” said scientists, and like Winnie the Pooh contemplating a good bit of rising water, decided that they must “have an escape”. Enter Multiverse Theory.

Multiverse Theory is a fascinating fruitcake of disparate but sometimes complementary speculations on reality as it is, and particularly *why* it is as it is. It is especially concerned to explain the ultimate origin of *our* universe in particular, and why it seems to appear finely tuned to support life, without the need of a designer/creator. It has its big-name fans within the scientific community and also its detractors. As some have pointed out, it is not testable, at least not at our present level of technology and expertise, it is not falsifiable, and therefore it is not even science---best left, perhaps, to the ruminations of philosophers and theologians and the brainstorming of science fiction writers. Scientist and science writer Jim Baggott in *Farewell to Reality* called some of the speculative theories of theoretical physics including the multiverse, superstring theory and supersymmetry as being examples of “fairy tale physics”, “abstracted, theoretical speculation without any kind of empirical foundation” and “not science.” But that’s okay. Science grows out of speculation---just don’t lay it onto students and the general public as scientific fact without the proof, for that is just another glaring example of *scientism* (Google it up, kids, and share it with your science teacher for extra credit---just kidding). Nobody has been “blinded by science”---scientism is another matter.

One version of Multiverse Theory, distilled from the bong water of theoretical physics, has the cosmos birthing universe after universe and universe from within universe, splitting off ad infinitum, no beginning and no end; baby universes popping into existence by means of quantum fluctuations in the cosmic vacuum and rapidly expanding/inflating. Right. No room for God here. Truth is indeed often stranger than fiction, but try wrapping your mind around that one. Then again, there’s “nothing new under the sun”. One version of an old cosmological fable had a primitive tribesman explaining to an explorer that the earth rested on the back of a giant turtle. When asked what the turtle was resting on, he replied, “Another turtle”. Hoping to cause him to think through the implications of his belief, the explorer then asked him what *that* turtle was resting on. Growing annoyed with the thick-headedness of the explorer, the native replied, “It’s turtles all the way down!” As Roy Abraham Varghese pointed out in Antony Flew’s *There Is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, “Absolute nothingness means no laws, no vacuums, no fields, no energy, no structures, no physical or mental energies of any kind---and no ‘symmetries’. It has no properties or potentialities.”

Welcome to the magical realm of *Neverwas*. You can’t really go there, except in your head, because it is not and never was. No quantum fluctuations can arise there, for there is no *there*, real, virtual or potential for them to arise from.

Nonetheless, I'm going to indulge in some speculation myself (told you I did), that what we perceive as the universe may indeed be part of a multiverse and reside as a type of instance, to use game terminology, within the mind of God. But that's for another chapter.

How 'big' is the universe/multiverse? We don't know. Like minnows swimming in an ocean of spacetime, or the inhabitants of Dr. Seuss's Whoville (*Horton Hears a Who!*), it's big to *us*. And what most of us really want to know is how *we* fit into the big picture. Until fairly recently, the best that science could deduce was that Earth was the center of the universe and sun, moon and stars revolved around it. There are those who *still* believe it. Man was the *measure of all things* and all creation revolved around him. Theology put heaven and God at the center, with Earth the 'playing field' where the action was taking place (the really important stuff anyway).

Little did 'those in the know' know that the sun was a star, a very ordinary star, and that the earth and other planets revolved around it; that the sun was roughly 30000 light years from the center of a galaxy of 200 billion or more other stars, many with earth-like planets (ELPs) of their own; that this galaxy was only one of at least 100 billion galaxies in the *observable* universe; that all this only accounts for about five percent of 'stuff' that science can account for, the other ninety-five percent being still unidentified *dark matter and dark energy*.

Whether you think God or the Great Turtle of atheistic cosmology did it, what are the odds that we are all by our little lonesomes out here in the cosmos?

FUBAR

“Mos Eisley Spaceport. You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy.”

Obi Wan Kenobi to Luke Skywalker, *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*

FUBAR---a U.S. Military acronym for “messed up beyond all recognition” (Okay, I changed the first word out of respect for your Great-Aunt Minnie, but you know what it is). And that pretty well describes the planet we all know and love; if it was created or terraformed to be in the state in which it is and was in the past, then somebody did a piss-poor job. I’ll have to side with Charles Darwin on this one; watch what your kitty does with a mouse and then conclude that a good God designed it this way. And that’s just for starters. It’s butt-ugly, guys, and all the theological squirming you can toss at it is not going to clean it up. There may be a “peaceable kingdom”, populated by happy creatures that don’t kill and eat one another somewhere out there among the stars but it’s not Earth.

Here is a sample of possible explanations for how our world came to be the way it is, some more plausible than others.

- God created a beautiful, perfect world, and man and Satan messed it up. Well, there is no doubt that man can mess it up and, if he had a little help from some ‘frenemies’, the result would compare to what a group of unsupervised three year olds could accomplish in the kitchen. The fly in this soup, however, is that there is absolutely no scientific evidence that Earth has *ever* been in a pristine state.
- Aliens were trying to terraform the place and achieved a less than hoped for result. Maybe they gave up and left. Maybe they had a picnic and forgot to clean up. Maybe it’s a biolab in this little backwater of the galaxy. Maybe some other aliens crapped on the experiment. Maybe they just tinker with it off and on. Maybe they tossed in a few critters. Hey, a lot of people, including reputable scientists and not just sci-fi writers, have tossed out these ideas but, so far anyway--- no scientific proof.
- The history of the planet is about what one would expect to find if nature took its course and things evolved on their own---natural ‘happenings’, including some catastrophic ones, taken into consideration. This is the current scientific theory for earth and other habitable planets that no doubt abound in the cosmos.
- Some combination of the above, including theistic evolution with modification. That is to say that evolution is but one tool in God’s toolbox and that he can and does step in any-time, anywhere in the cosmos to do whatever he pleases either personally, as Jesus demonstrated, or through agents at his disposal.

I have friends (for now, anyway), including those in ministry, who adhere to some version of Young Earth Creationism (YEC). Sorry guys, but that's not going to fly *unless* we really are living in some sort of simulation---and that notion has been put out there as well. Scientific knowledge is necessarily a work in progress, but current theory places the sun and its planets at roughly 4.6 billion earth years, and that of *this* universe at roughly 13.8 billion earth years. This is way beyond the six thousand, ten thousand, forty thousand, whatever date proposed by YEC.

YEC adherents further propose that dinosaurs co-existed with our human ancestors and, along with other extinct species and corrupt humans, perished in a world-wide flood. While there is a widespread racial memory of a flood, the scientific evidence certainly does not bear out an event global in nature. A large number of prehistoric wildlife *did* live alongside early man, including *possibly* pockets of late dinosaur types such as the flightless raptor species *Terror Bird*, but certainly not the likes of T-Rex and its 'friends'.

Proponents of YEC, in their desire to uphold a literal interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis, have unintentionally brought the Bible as God's word into disrepute. This is beyond unfortunate and totally unnecessary, considering the damage done to the Christian message and witness and to those impacted by it, but we will deal with this in a later chapter.

As far as strictly atheistic science is concerned, humans appear to be the highest form of intelligent life operative on this planet and perhaps the universe. They are (somewhat) clever animals evolving from earlier primate ancestors, totally material in nature. The mind, the sense of self and free will remain nebulous but appear to arise from within the brain/body construct in contact with its surroundings. There is no soul and no afterlife to pass into at death. To be sure, this is an assumption based on faith, given the incomplete knowledge that we possess, but it is the best that science can come up with on its own for now given the current state of the art at its disposal. Okey-dokey, but science doesn't have all the cards---and when you don't have all the cards you are definitely not playing with a full deck.

Genesis 1-11

“The world is changed. I feel it in the water. I feel it in the earth. I smell it in the air. Much that once was is lost. For none now live who remember it.”

“And some things that should not have been forgotten were lost. History became legend, legend became myth.”

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings (film)*

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). And in seven literal earth days! Sweet---that settles that, right? Until fairly recently, nearly everyone in the Western world was familiar with that account and most believed it whether or not they thought it through. But like a child’s Mylar birthday balloon a week after the party, it’s been looking kind of beat down. It’s been floating a foot off the floor, getting picked on by the cat and now maybe it’s about time to give it the steak knife and slip it into the trash while the kid’s not looking. Or flatten it out and hang it on her wall for awhile, so she doesn’t throw a fit.

I had a talk with a first year Christian college student recently who was conflicted to the point of depression between her chosen field of medical science and her and her family’s long-held belief in Young Earth Creationism. Her professors and fellow students were giving her grief about her faith and implying that she was not going to go far in the field unless she adjusted her beliefs; while her pastor, family and church friends urged her to remain true to God and the Bible. Long story short, my explaining that she really *could* have the cake and eat it too fell on deaf ears---as it usually does---and she went away holding back tears.

As I stated in the introduction, I agree with most Christians that the Bible is God’s word, preserved through the guidance of God’s spirit and valid for all time. Young Earth Creationists aside, however, the accounts of primeval history in Genesis 1-11 often come across as an embarrassment to scientifically aware Christians and as proof to non-believers that the Bible is a collection of biased and distorted history, myth and just plain nonsense. But this comes from a misunderstanding.

There was once a baby born to Hebrew slaves in the land of ancient Egypt, forced to be abandoned by his mother and rescued by an Egyptian princess. Raised and educated in the lore and tradition of his adopted family, he was ultimately called by the God of his birth parents to head a rebellion and to lead the Israelite slave nation out of Egypt to the land long promised by God to their forefathers. This man, Moses (a good Egyptian name), is credited with recording and/or causing to be recorded the majority of the first five books of the Bible, which were edited into final form long after the history described therein had taken place. The first book, Genesis, is a compilation and editing of oral and possibly some written tradition of primeval history and the

family history of the forefathers of the Israelite nation. This traditional material had been handed down for generations by Israelites for Israelites (not New Yorkers). It was given to a pre-scientific and mainly illiterate people, who believed in a flat earth covered by a domed sky punctured by points of light called stars, two great lights that governed day and night and an underworld populated by denizens of the dark and by the souls of the dead.

Genesis 1-11 differs majorly from the creation accounts of the surrounding nations in that it credits the origin of the cosmos to one caring and concerned creator God, not a multitude of capricious and warring gods. It shares with many other ancient accounts a legend of a fall from a higher estate in a pristine environment and the coming of a great flood that all but wiped the human race from the face of the planet. Along with many other Christians, I believe that it presents a true portrayal in *story book form* of the pre-historical past as it relates to humans, the precise details of which have been lost and clouded by the mists of time, but adequate to explain, as to a child (and our race is *still* in its infancy), the loss of a healthy relationship with the earth, ourselves, our fellow humans and God.

When I was an only child of five I asked Mom where babies came from, to which she replied, “Go ask Daddy”. No doubt they had their game plan drawn up in advance, so I went and asked Dad. He gave it to me straight up, no duping; “Daddy planted a seed in Mommy and it grew into a baby and that was you.” And that was a perfectly correct answer for a little kid in the early nineteen-fifties---better than the BS that most of my peers got, if they got anything. There is a “need to know” for a kid and another for a scientist. A beginner’s reader about the body and a medical textbook can both be factually true, but not on the same level.

Genesis 1 and 2 are separate creation accounts that have been incorporated into the Bible, and they differ enough to trash a *literal* reading right off the bat. There may very well have been a great flood (Genesis 6-9) and a man named Noah who saved himself, his immediate family and a host of animals by superintending the building of an ark, but the specific details don’t hold water (pun intended). To give one example, as someone pointed out long ago, Mt. Everest certainly existed in the days of Noah and it would take water rising 726 feet a day for the purported “forty days and forty nights” to cover it. Mt. Everest, “young” as mountains go, is roughly five and a half miles above sea level; pushed to that height over geological ages by the collision of tectonic plates (see continental drift). The average ocean depth is roughly 12,100 feet or a little over two miles. Assume the one mating pair of kangaroos coming off the ark a step ahead of predators also coming off the ark---it’s a long way to hop from Mt. Ararat in Turkey to Australia and involves, among other hardships and dangers, a serious water crossing. OK, so maybe it took generations? But there is no trace of kangaroo remains along the way. Sorry folks, but scientifically speaking, a *world-wide* flood as described did not happen. The required evidence is just not there. The late Young Earth Creation champion Dr. Henry Morris (whom I respected very much), labeled Christians who attempt to point out the true scientific facts of the matter “compromisers”, while presenting volumes of pseudoscientific ‘evidence’ to back up his own claims. On the other hand, Jesus, still speaking to a primitive, pre-scientific audience (remember the

‘need to know’?) refers back to Noah’s flood and that it happened suddenly, so there is no reason to disrespect it as having no basis in fact. Something *did* happen, but the details are lost.

There are lots of lovers and haters of Genesis 1-11 out there and they have labored mightily to present their cases, so if you have a ‘need to know’, have at it. Rather than bore you with more trivia, I’ll instead bore you with a little ‘what if’ account of my own imagination, based on Genesis 1-11. I might rough it out something like this. The cosmos exists in God (Acts 17:28). It’s his thought realm actualized. It is not the same as God, okay? That is pantheism, a universe of “God stuff” from the moon and stars, plants and animals, rocks and water, to the booger in your nose. That’s stuff all right, but it’s not God. It is code which has its ultimate origin in God. Everything that is, is code. God himself is eternal code of the highest possible order, but apart from the code running on his ‘system’. I’m not talking about panentheism here either, just so you know. There are some similarities but also serious differences. Try this thought experiment: build a dream house in your mind. OK, maybe just one room. Put some thought and effort into it. POWs have done this in an elaborate way in order to keep sane while in captivity, then built it IRL (in real life) after their release, using still more code. Got it? Good. Now it’s there in memory (code), for awhile anyway. It took time (code) and energy (code) to create it, and the whole process from start to finish is code. It’s possible now to get the material (more code) that your hands (code) can touch (code) ---you get the point. All that is, is code. Molecules, atoms, quarks, strings if they exist, forces, gravity, reality yet unknown, yada, yada, yada, all code.

God really *is* a trinity---god in three persons. That’s a wee bit hard to get our minds around, and the early church struggled to understand its implications as recorded in the Bible. Another civilization sharing the cosmos, a few million years ahead of us, just might have that down pat. But fools do rush in, right? And since I’ve been called a fool (among other things), I’ll take a shot at it. All that is, was or ever will be *resides* in God the Father (sorry, Carl). This includes God the Son and God the Spirit. All three are eternal. All three together planned, built and govern the cosmos, although it is God the Son who is credited with doing the physical work. God can create, uncreate and tinker on the fly when it suits him to do so. The one who designed, built and implemented the code initially can do whatever he jolly well pleases with it. Jesus proved that by performing “miracles”. We do it too, kid you not, on a still tiny scale. You ‘simply’ manipulate code, that’s it. You can call it using ‘cheat code’ if you like, but I’m not *that* foolish. I’m looking over my shoulder here! We don’t know how ‘big’ the cosmos is (from our perspective), and there may be more than one universe incorporated into it. Heaven is there. Hell is there. God only knows what is there.

Here comes analogy, and remember what I said in an earlier chapter? Analogies are useful, but they tend to break down if you push them too far. Jesus referred to his followers as sheep, but they don’t go “baa” and come with wool. God the Father cannot ‘go’ anywhere in the cosmos because the cosmos is in him. But through the Spirit he is totally connected. God the Son can go anywhere in the cosmos. BTW, Jesus is not God the Father’s ‘avatar’---they are eternally one but distinct. Just so you know.

We refer to the United States Supreme Court in the singular (the Court) even though it is comprised of nine persons, each with his or her own mind and opinions. God is comprised of three persons who are beyond tight; they are of one essence and one mind.

God is aware of the passage of time in the cosmos, like I am aware of the passage of time in various scales on the game worlds running (in part) on my own system but, as an eternal being, he has “all the time in the world”. Time is not exactly how it appears to us and it *may* be possible to travel backward and forward in it. God is content to initiate a ‘big bang’ (not an accurate description, but it will do) and allow things to ‘evolve’ into worlds filled with creatures, some of which he will eternally adopt as children endowed with his own spirit. He has created the cosmos to be shared and enjoyed and is intensely interested and involved in what goes on here. He doesn’t just wind it up like an old toy and then kick back and watch it ‘happen’; that is an error known as *deism*. It is naïve to assume that our planet is the only home of intelligent life. The image of God does not have to confine itself to the human form. Your uber-great-granddaughter’s BFF and maid of honor might have seven eyes and ten legs and be as much a child of God as she is. The local intergalactic branch of David’s Bridal ought to be on top of that, right? The Bible stoops to address humanity’s embryonic self on the ‘need to know’ basis; this is called *accommodation*. Humanity, as it is, is in no position to reach for the stars.

God can and probably does create life forms (and I would qualify *highly advanced* sentient robotics and computer ‘birthed’ entities as types of life forms) that cannot deviate from his will. All life forms are code, but not all life forms are ‘embodied’ in matter as we know it at this stage, at least not all of the time. God the Father is spirit and is not embodied. The Holy Spirit is not embodied but can inhabit bodies, even ours. The human form involves a body/soul/spirit interface and we will get into that in another chapter. But primarily God wants family, children to populate and enjoy the realms that he has made; someone to love who will love him back and who will choose to obey him out of their own free will. Bots can’t do that. But free will involves risk---risk that children will disobey the directive, toss the manual and try to do things on their own. Like a fourteen year old and his peeps out at two in the morning in Mom’s “borrowed” car. Things can break bad and that’s what happened to our ancestral prototypes in the story of their corruption, rebellion and expulsion from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3.

The tragic account of Adam and Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden gets blown off as a fairy tale these days, but it has for long generations served to take a critical situation that would require a library to describe in historic and scientific detail and boiled it down to a story that even a small child can understand. How neat is that? The naïve couple got played into gambling away the farm, their inheritance and their lives along with it. It’s dead serious, but God’s got it covered---personally.

There have been many attempts to try and flesh out what really happened there. Logic dictates that they could not all be right, but they *could* all be wrong, in whole or in part. But, what the hey, speculation is free, so here goes.

The earth itself is not Eden. It is not pristine and never was. If it was intended to evolve and/or be engineered into a pristine inhabitable world (and that's a very big 'if') then something went horribly wrong. Look up *chaos theory* for extra credit if you don't already know it. There were humanoid creatures with a degree of intelligence on the earth long before Adam and Eve arrived on the scene. These creatures had potential. With some modification, they could receive God's spirit, grow and join their fellow children of God of all descriptions throughout the cosmos.

Eden was a colony; my best guess being that it was housed in a biodome---a closed pristine ecological environment suitable for creating, educating and training children of God on this planet in this neck of the galactic woods (too much sci-fi for you, Sport? time will tell). A biodome does not have to have a permanent surface; it could just as easily be created by a force field and we will be capable of doing that soon enough ourselves. It didn't rain there, duh, but was "watered" by an artificial irrigation system (check out Genesis 2:6). Things were nice in Eden---outside the walls, not so nice.

Now it gets seriously sketchy. The Bible has God the Son (all visible appearances of God in the Bible are of the Son) creating Adam's body from elements on hand and bringing him to life. That's a very simple but accurate description of how you and I got here---code. It doesn't fill in the details, but don't snicker; we are right on the verge of doing it ourselves. How? Well, it's not like the old *Far Side* cartoon showing God at his worktable rolling out snakes from clay and saying to himself, "Boy, these things are a cinch!" It's detrimental to the cause for Christians to pass out childish explanations, except to our own 'littles' who are too young to understand anything else. God the Son visits the garden, taking stock of the project, but it appears from the story as it is presented and from many other biblical accounts of divine/creature interaction that means---and other entities---were involved.

When God the Son, as the last or second Adam, took on human flesh in order to clean up the mess that had been made in Eden, he was carried and birthed through the body of a human female. Educated fools used to roll their eyes at that account and many still do but, bodywise, such things are well within our own reach. One of my daughters is a three time egg donor, and I have three biological grandkids, all conceived in a lab, all carried and birthed by a surrogate and taken home to be loved and raised by three couples unable to have children the usual way. A virgin does not need sex to have a baby.

As implied above, the Eden colony was high tech. I would surmise that Adam and Eve were prototypes capable of receiving God's spirit, created using edited genetic material from existing humanoids and either carried to term by humanoid mothers or (and I think this more likely) lab grown. They were raised, naked and comfortable in their own skins and educated, possibly but not necessarily together, from infancy by nonhuman entities under God's directive. Intended to be the progenitors of a race capable of bringing the planetary environment and its life forms into line with God's will, their mental capacities were probably off the charts. At a suitable stage of

development, they were joined and blessed by God to complete each other sexually and start a family.

The above imaginary scenario was no doubt carried out countless times throughout the cosmos on worlds containing life forms capable of enhancement, or colonized directly from elsewhere, as we potentially may do ourselves one day. One thing for sure though; God wants healthy, for things to go well for all concerned. Cancer can't be allowed to spread; to go off-world. Rebellion doesn't fly. But that's what happened to our cute couple at Eden.

At this point in the narrative, the newlyweds are exploring and enjoying their marital relationship and looking forward to caring for and, ultimately, expanding the colony to the four corners of the planet. As a newborn race they are continuing to grow in knowledge and consciousness under the direction of God---plainly put, they are still God centered, still in adolescence and still in school. Let's call Adam and Eve *Homo sapiens sapiens 2.0*. They are mortal, capable of being killed or dying by accident, but possessing a powerfully enhanced immune system and designed for a very long lifespan with many years of reproductive capability. Once again, we are on the doorstep of bringing these things about ourselves. The more time goes on and science discovers, the less the events described in the Bible seem 'far-fetched'.

The Eden account in its storybook form is loaded with the symbolism necessary to get its point across to all, young and old, who may read and/or hear it down through the ages. It has been taken word for word literally in as many different translations and paraphrases as you like. It has been made, especially in days of yore, to teach that married sex, or some expression of it, was 'bad' but necessary for the propagation of the race. It has been taught that the pain of childbirth is a punishment on all women for the sin of their primeval mother---it's not.

Enter the serpent, better known as Satan or the devil by the time of the New Testament. It/he was not a snake. Could it have been an intelligent off-world reptilian agent, perhaps one of the workers or instructors assigned to the colony? Maybe. A worst case scenario and one that seems to find support elsewhere in the Bible, is that it was the overseer in charge under God's directive, an angel of the highest rank. We will get to angels and try to bring our identification of them up to speed in another chapter.

An overpowering pride and corruption had grown in Satan's mind, leading to the insane notion that he could succeed in leading worlds and the angelic realms in rebellion against God. The newly formed Eden colony would seem to be an easy prize. Adam and Eve had not yet matured to the point of receiving the pure immortality intended for all children of God, but if they could be corrupted they could become powerful allies in Satan's cause---at least able to hold Earth as a base while the rebellion grew elsewhere. A rebellion destined for a classic fail.

One question that has troubled Christians down the foggy mists of time and added support to atheistic explanations is why does a supposedly all-knowing God allow such things to take place? There are several opinions amongst Christian theologians and philosophers as to how

much of the future God *chooses* to know in advance, whether it is fixed, open, or some mixture of both. Want to fry your brain? Try to follow the argumentation (I have listed a couple of books for your enjoyment in the resource list at the end of this book). I am in the “mixture” camp, namely that God could have but chose not to create a clockwork universe populated with totally incorruptible (read boring) bots, but chose to create a dynamic evolving universe populated by diverse life forms, some of which he could grow and work with and adopt as his own immortal children to love and share his creation with. Did I suggest in the introduction (tongue in cheek, of course) that God is a ‘gamer’? Well, maybe. But in doing so, he deliberately opened himself up to happiness and joy, frustration and grief. To up front, on purpose choose to be surprised by what his creatures/children do with their given free will. This does not make him the author of evil. As Norman L. Geisler stated in *If God, Why Evil?*, “Thus God made evil *possible* by creating free creatures; they are responsible for making it *actual*”. And as C.S. Lewis stated in *God in the Dock*, “...God has not chosen to write the whole of history with his own hand”.

Adam and Eve, their psyches still at a formative, malleable stage, open to suggestion and instruction, had been expressly forbidden by God *not* to eat from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* that grew along with the *tree of life* in the middle of the garden. Well, these are obviously not literal trees, and I have read many attempts at explanation but none that totally satisfy. It may be that we are just not, at this stage of our limited mental abilities, able to fully comprehend the reality behind the symbolism. And that’s okay; it’s no shame to admit that we just don’t know. But Satan was able to use the forbidden ‘tree’ to dupe the young couple into distrusting and disobeying God, and that’s all it took, to borrow another illustration from *Star Wars*, to turn them to the ‘dark side’. ‘Eating’ the fruit of the ‘tree’ had nothing to do with coital sex, oral sex, or any other expression of sex engaged in between the couple before their fall from a state of innocence. God is not in the business of designing and blessing marital union and then condemning the enjoyment of it.

But wait a minute. The couple had been created and married, naked and unashamed, and now were covering their genitals with ‘fig leaves’ and hiding from the appearance of God in the garden. It’s no wonder that medieval scholars and preachers so often equated sex as being at the root of the problem. There was obviously a breakdown somewhere, caused by their disobedience to God at the instigation of Satan. The story itself relates that Satan had persuaded Adam and Eve that God was holding out on them and that, by partaking of the fruit of the tree, they could become gods in their own right, knowing and deciding for themselves what was good and what was evil. Having brought about their downfall, Satan mocked them. They were already mental giants, being prepared to tame a world, and here they were, running around as naked as the dumb animals that shared the colony with them and mating more than any of them. This was not how young ‘gods’ were supposed to act.

The *fall of man*, so often referred to in Jewish and Christian circles, was from a state of *God-centeredness* to a state of *self-centeredness*. The bond between the newly founded human race and God was broken. What’s more, the God-centered bond between husband and wife was bro-

ken. Love turned to lust, mutual submission to manipulation and dominance, tenderness to abuse, unconcerned innocence to embarrassment and shame.

The Son of God called the confused and embarrassed pair to the carpet to hear from their own mouths what they had done and why they were hiding and covered with leaves. Their response, “Because we were naked”. “So? I made you that way. Who told you that there was a problem with it? Have you partaken of fruit from the tree that you were not able to ‘digest’ and which I forbade you to eat? I told you up front that it would lead to your deaths, both physically and spiritually. Because of the rebellion that you and the serpent have entered into, the core of your being is corrupted and the bond between us broken. This colony has failed. I have no choice but to banish you from Eden, to send you out into the world from which you were taken. Nonetheless, I will deal personally with the serpent for what he has done; to overturn his plans and destroy all that he hopes to achieve and I will deal personally with your descendants to restore, in time, the bond that was broken”.

The serpent received its own sentencing. He/ it had plotted rebellion, destroyed a colony, corrupted the initial couple and caused them to be turned out into a harsh and broken world. A fallen angel, if that is indeed what it was, is beyond correction and mercy; the Bible does not say why. If the serpent, aka Satan, was embodied in Eden, he is not embodied now. As the evil Sauron was cut down in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* and reduced to a disembodied spirit, so it was with Satan. He is not the big badass of the cosmos that so many, even many Christians, give him undeserved credit for, but rather a petty ‘gangsta’ in the local hood. Even so, as ‘Prince of the Poisoned Realm’ he retains some power and is not to be taken lightly. In all probability, he and the angelic rebels who followed him are confined to this planet and/or the local galactic neighborhood, awaiting the carrying out of the sentence imposed by God upon them, but we will get to that later on in the book.

But back to the pair of distraught teenagers who were about to play a real-life version of *Survivor*. They had surely been receiving instruction about how to expand the colony into the world outside, but not this soon. Eden would have necessarily been large enough to accommodate a sizeable population, but even the first child was yet to be born. Had God achieved initial success with the first pair, perhaps he would have gone on to produce many more in order to insure an adequate gene pool--I know, speculation upon speculation.

God is not cruel. Barefoot and naked was fine under the dome, but once outside Adam and Eve would need protection. They would not be coming back. The initial wave of colonists intended to begin the world restoration process would have been given all that they needed in the way of clothing, provisions, gear, weapons and probably vehicles to insure success. As I said before, God uses means to carry out his programs in the spacetime universe. Yes, he can create and manipulate matter on the fly, but he is not a fairy tale wizard. See, God the Son as Jesus of Nazareth walked and rode a donkey. If he had come in modern times instead, he might have been driving a truck and I’m not kidding (after all, he was a carpenter, and carpenters need trucks, right)? Just

so you know, though, Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem leading up to his trial and execution carries significant meaning not apparent on the surface and fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy from the book of Zechariah.

It would have been counterproductive to provide the couple with clothing and gear that could not be replaced. They would sooner or later encounter *Homo sapiens sapiens* 1.0, the sentient race of humanoids who shared their appearance and the majority of their genetic makeup. They would need to blend in. Adam and Eve were vegans or vegetarians. The tame animals that shared Eden with them did not include predators. They had never been exposed to death. But now they were to learn a hard and sad reality lesson at the hand of God. Animals were killed and their hides cured to provide them with the necessary protection of clothing, as practiced by their near ‘cousins’ outside. Because of their need to learn, they were probably required to participate in the process. Leaves were not going to get the job done. This was the inescapable result of their rebellion. Innocent animals that they had known and grown up with had to pay with their lives in order to protect the lives of rebels who did not deserve it. This painful object lesson was to echo down the ages, as a sign and reminder that “without the shedding of blood, there is no remission/covering of sin.” (Hebrews 9:22). I deserve to die, but another has died in my place. Ultimately, the Son of God himself was to prove as good as his word by the shedding of his own blood on the cross, thereby providing for the restoration of the God/human bond and making a fool of Satan in the process.

Were there initially guardians provided by God to give the struggling pair a leg up and ensure that they were not eaten by some wild beast or had a spear run through them? Maybe. The entry point to the Eden colony was protected by off-world creatures or bots of some type, and what appears to be electrical and/or laser devices. I’m not making this stuff up; look for yourselves (Genesis 3:24). Animals weren’t going in, humanoids weren’t going in, Adam and Eve weren’t going in.

Many have tried to find traces of Eden over the years. That would be neat, but I doubt that it still exists. It was most likely disassembled and moved to another useful location in the cosmos. I mean, why would God approve of wasting resources? There have been a number of proposals as to where it *was*, most opting for somewhere in Africa or the Middle East. If it existed before the end of the last glacial epoch, the site may even now be under the waves.

As far as dating goes, if we go strictly by the Genesis account, things don’t add up. The description is majorly short on detail as would be expected after being passed down orally for thousands of years. What counts for our benefit is the *story* as it stands. The extremely long life spans of the original pair and their descendants seemed outrageously fantastic, until recent scientific research hints that achieving that result over the long term just might be possible.

Genetic research seems to indicate that everyone on the face of this planet, no matter what their so-called racial differences, traces back to a small population group in Africa well over 100,000

years ago. These humanoid creatures, possessing a growing degree of intelligence continued to evolve and became the stock from which Adam and Eve were taken and enhanced. Many modern humans also carry a trace of Neanderthal genes, owing to interbreeding in the past. As an interesting side note, the Neanderthal race did not advance technologically in the roughly 170,000 years that they lived on this planet until near the end when they encountered modern humans. This is in spite of the fact that their genetic makeup is nearly 99.5 percent identical to ours. Advanced intelligence and language appear to be the key.

As expected, Adam and Eve soon had a baby. In fact, they had a lot of babies (girls names are never mentioned in the Bible, not even the sisters of Jesus, unless they have an important role to play), but only three boys are named; Cain, Abel and Seth. As forewarned by God, childbirth in the wild was going to be a painful experience. This was not a punishment, but simply a fact. Had she remained in Eden, Eve would have had all the benefits of the best medical technology.

As Cain and Abel grew to maturity, both brought an offering to God of the fruit of their labor. Cain brought some of the produce that he had grown while Abel killed a firstborn animal from the flock that he raised and presented a choice offering. God accepted the offering given by Abel but rejected Cain's. It is generally assumed that Cain did not give his best, as Abel did, and that is the reason why his offering was rejected. Another explanation put forth was that Abel was presenting a sacrificial victim, in acknowledgement of his own sin. According to the narrative as it stands, they were not eating meat until after the flood. Animals would be raised to provide covering or, perhaps, dairy products.

The tale grows darker still. Upon having his offering rejected, Cain lured Abel into the field and murdered him; with the result that God laid a curse on his agricultural efforts and drove him away to the land east of Eden. Cain was concerned that whoever found him would kill him, so God marked him in some unknown way to prevent that from happening. Biblical literalists have a bit of a hard time explaining this, since Adam and Eve and their own children were presumed to be the only humans on the face of the earth at this time. They don't buy into *Homo sapiens sapiens* 1.0, so the stock answer is that it was his own brothers (Seth was not yet born) and sisters (unmentioned at this point). Cain soon had a wife and son. Who was the wife? Again, the literalist answer is that it was a sister. That's possible, but the more likely explanation is that Cain encountered a band of primitive hunter gatherers terrified of his mark and awed by his stature and his advanced intelligence. Cain found himself to be a 'god among men'.

Over time the enhanced descendants of Adam and Eve, their corrupted natures intact, grew in number and spread, no doubt dominating, enslaving and murdering the primitive groups that they encountered. *Homo sapiens sapiens* 1.0 and 2.0 were identical, or nearly so, in physical appearance, and there was an abundance of desirable women free for the taking from amongst the conquered population. This is related in Genesis 6 with the explanation usually dividing into two camps. The *sons of God* mentioned here were either direct descendants of the first pair, which I

think far more likely, or were off-world beings (angels) close enough genetically to be able to produce offspring with human females. At any rate, the end result was not good.

The Bible declares that the corrupted population mix spreading from the vicinity of Eden was beyond salvaging and that God was sorry that he had made them. By allowing free will and self-limiting his own knowledge of all future events, he had suffered a major disappointment. Now he must exercise his options. One would be to allow them to dominate and enslave the entire planet and, with their advanced intelligence, in time develop a civilization capable of interstellar travel---‘space Nazis’. An eternal being thinks in the long term. This may well have been part of Satan’s plan, and it may have happened elsewhere (as a side note, observe the warnings given by Stephen Hawking and other scientists about the naiveté of attempting off-world contact. The recipients may not all be ‘friendlies’). The other option was to destroy them, and this was what God chose.

As I stated above, there is no *genuine* evidence of a world-wide flood occurring on this planet, although there have been plenty of Young Earth Creationists and other biblical literalists who have labored to prove that there was. There have even been suggestions that the ark was a spaceship and that the human race came from off-world. That’s theoretically possible, makes for good science fiction and yes, our own descendants may have to ‘get out of Dodge’ themselves one day if we continue to screw things up, but I don’t think that this is what the Bible is talking about.

Of the explanations that have been put forward one involves the Black Sea flood at the end of the last glacial epoch, as ice melted and rising sea levels broke through a narrow strip of land into what had been a large freshwater lake with a sizeable population living on or near its shores. Scientists differ on the level of the original lake, how much of the original shoreline area was flooded and how quickly this event took place. No doubt lives were lost and populations displaced. The sight and sound of the huge amount of water pouring through the breach had a terrifying effect on the local inhabitants who scattered for their lives. How were they to know if and when this ‘spigot’ was going to turn off? The mountains of Ararat are not far away, and they would seem a logical place to flee to.

Another explanation is an ocean impact of a comet, asteroid or meteorite causing a massive tsunami initially, pushing a wall of water up the Tigris-Euphrates Valley as far as Mt.Ararat and a number of lesser tsunamis to follow due to aftershocks. Tremendous winds and torrential rains would necessarily follow in the aftermath. Much smaller than the event which took out the dinosaurs, it would nevertheless make the tsunami that struck Japan in 2011 look like a pebble dropped in a pond. One recently discovered candidate still awaiting positive confirmation as to its date and origin is the Burckle Crater in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar. If the object broke up in the atmosphere prior to impact, other oceanic sites with resultant flooding may also have been involved. The proposed date of this event is around 5000 years ago and would have majorly serious consequences for the coasts of India, Africa and Madagascar as well as for the Mesopotamian region, the home of Noah. Survival would have been slim to none for anyone

caught up in this event (unless they had constructed an ark. Models of the ark built from specifications in the Bible prove it to be a very seaworthy craft). Personally, I think that this explanation has promise, but the jury is still out.

Stuff happens, but could God himself have directed this object to its point of impact either by himself or by third parties at his command? He had already decided to destroy the degenerate race resulting from the fiasco at Eden. Human civilization has just entered the space age and is even now planning to redirect objects of this nature away from an earth impact should the need arise. So, could one be pulled in and directed to a point of impact? Ya think?

To reiterate, although a *worldwide* flood did not happen, I am going to accept that an event capable of destroying a certain worldwide and beyond threat *did* happen and that a man named Noah saw the construction of an escape vessel through to completion at God's command. If Noah had been involved in shipbuilding at the time, his contemporaries may have had no idea about the nature of the ark project. Although the degenerate descendants of the first modified pair did not have access to the technology of Eden, they did have enhanced intelligence, enhanced life spans, and plenty of slave labor at their disposal. Mercifully, for the "innocents" caught up in the overthrow, the end came quickly.

In the aftermath of the flood, as the descendants of Noah ventured forth to start over from scratch, they naturally tended to stick together, and 'soon' began construction of a city centered upon a multistory observatory and 'worship center' (worship, that is, of 'gods' of their own imaginations as the memory of the true God of creation and Eden grew more and more distorted and faded from memory). These guys were still carrying enhanced genetic code although it was already becoming diluted through interbreeding with Earth's original population. Furthermore, they were using a common speech. God could see in advance that this was not going to end well. The Genesis story, as usual, is short on detail but some event (another disaster, slave revolt, or whatever) caused them to leave off the building project and become scattered throughout the surrounding population groups. The language itself would soon dissolve into the multitude of other native tongues and disappear. It did not take long for interbreeding to wash out the code modifications, and life spans quickly assumed the range that is common today, although scattered pockets of "giants" and other remnants of *Homo sapiens sapiens* 2.0 persisted for a time before vanishing altogether.

That's it. Remember I said that this is a 'what if' account. It sounds plausible enough to me, although it is probably full of holes and there are a lot of other ways that things could have played out. The point I was trying to make is that Genesis 1-11 is a *storybook retelling of real events* and that if these events could be described in terms of modern day history and science they would not appear 'fantastic' at all. Two often overlooked examples of Eden stand out--the unusual irrigation system and the futuristic entry defense mechanism. Where would ancient writers get concepts like these if not from legends based on reality?

I'll briefly sketch another possibility and that is to move the Eden colony and modified humanity far back, relatively speaking, into the past when *Homo sapiens sapiens* branched off from an earlier *Homo sapiens* stock. Then followed tens of thousands of years of major primitivity until at last some semblance of civilization began to emerge. This is more in line with accepted science, which of course finds no room for either the colony or the genetic enhancement.

This imaginative proposition is also in line with the old sci-fi 'lost colony' scenario. A starship carrying a couple thousand colonists, all technicians or scientists in their own right, runs into trouble and is lost in space. Millennia come and go, but at last the deserted ship is found in high orbit around an unremarkable but life supporting planet far from travelled space lanes.

A search party goes down and what does it find? Several warlike tribes of naked, tattooed savages worshipping a sky god who passes overhead on a nightly basis and an assortment of his/her "gifts"; relics from the original colonists. A shaman waves a crusted laser pistol, but of course it doesn't do anything. The natives are scared out of their gourds. Attempts at communication prove futile. Some of the search party ends up in the pot, but the rest make good their escape, taking with them the shaman's infant daughter who grows up to become a starship commander. In a cosmos of this magnitude, stranger things could happen.

Anyway, I think that the first example would likely be closer to reality, if either would.

Quotes from my notes:

"Many evangelicals have developed strongly held views and practically dare anyone to challenge those views. If that is the case, then introducing new evidence and insights into the discussion can be as unwelcome as an oncologist's report." *The Lost World of Scripture*, pg.293 by John W. Walton and D. Brent Sandy, InterVarsityPress, 2013. (The same may be said for many scientists and skeptics).

"...ages are no more infallible than individuals; every age having held many opinions which subsequent ages have deemed not only false but absurd; and it is certain that many opinions, now general, will be rejected by future ages, as it is that many, once general, are rejected by the present." *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill.

Milky Way Outpost 5,011

“The right man in the wrong place can make all the difference in the world. So, wake up, Mister Freeman. Wake up and...smell the ashes...” G-Man, *Half Life 2*

Kiwanja, Dunia, Verden, Maa, Erde, Earth---just a few of the names inhabitants of the little blue top that we all know and love and live on call it. I'll just tag it Milky Way Outpost 5,011 and then go back to calling it Earth because Milky Way Outpost 5,011 is too much of a hassle to type more than a couple of times. And, besides, I made it up.

To the Israelites of antiquity and to Christians until very recently, who knew that there were other worlds besides the one that they lived on? Although the Bible makes veiled references to angels and to powers and rulers in the ‘heavenly realms’, the reality was (and largely still is) totally beyond their comprehension and they were/are bound to a one world concept. Only recently has the discovery of planets orbiting other stars, many rocky rather than gaseous and orbiting in the habitable zones of their suns, been confirmed and the list is growing exponentially. If only a tiny percentage were capable of sustaining life, the result would be in the trillions.

We don’t know what any theoretical inhabitants of Kepler 22b, orbiting in the habitable zone of its Sun-like star 600 light years distant would call us, nor what the inhabitants of any of the outposts scattered throughout the nearby (2.5 million light years) Andromeda Galaxy would think of us. There are three more ‘closer to home’ candidates orbiting the brown dwarf star Trappist-1 a mere forty light years out and one right next door, orbiting Proxima Centauri which, at 4.2 light years distance, is the closest star to the sun. This isn’t *No Man’s Sky* or the latest edition of *Galactic Civilizations*; we’re talking some serious real estate here.

The thought that it’s not just ‘us and God’ can threaten to let the air out of a lot of balloons. How does God manage to keep up with all this territory and have relationships with children who look nothing like us, but are far ahead of or behind us intellectually and technologically? How would God the Son appear to an insectoid scientist or to the inhabitants of a totally aquatic world? Like a human? That would probably be too unsettling, at least initially, and especially for the ‘littles’. Since the image of God is spirit, not flesh, why would it matter? It doesn’t, so we can just note it in passing and save it to file.

God is not ‘caused’ nor is he self-caused; he is eternally self-existent; the same claim atheistic science credits to the cosmos on an impersonal level. He is the ultimate life form and all that is, or was or ever will be proceeds from him. The 13.8 billion earth year universe/realm that we live in (there may be others) was initiated and runs as a type of program, for lack of a better description, within the mind of God. At its beginning it could be held (not really---too quick, too hot, too heavy) in the palm of your hand. By his Spirit, God is in total contact with every component past, present and, to the extent that he has set it up, future. As he declared to the prophet Jeremi-

ah (23:24), “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” He is the ultimate multitasker. So, can he hear every prayer on every world, in every galaxy, in every universe, no matter how he chooses to address them? Aye!

The important thing for us to consider is what has been going on *here* since the deal went down at Eden. Satan succeeded in gaining temporary control of this little game square and the Bible acknowledges as much. Jesus called him the “prince of this world” (John 12:31) and the disciple John wrote that “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Whether God intended for this planet to become a major hub or a galactic way station, he wanted his human children to clean it up and care for it. But under the influence of that ‘playa’ Satan, all they have done to date is gang-rape it. Tough soup for Satan and his peeps though; you can’t outwit the Gamemaster. Creaturely free will aside, he should have known that God would have a contingency plan.

If Adam and Eve had not become corrupted at their spiritual core and invariably passed that defect down the generations (how we do not know--yet), they would have gained immortality and gone on to the next stage. Yeah, it’s out of our radar range for now, but in analogy they would have successfully completed the tutorial, leveled up and started in on the *real* adventure.

Since this is God’s game, he gets to make the rules. Infected, defective entities cannot level up; they must be quarantined and/or destroyed---unless someone, somehow could remove the virus and restore them to health. Someone did---his earthly name is Jesus. But I’m getting ahead of myself.

Just so you know, I’m not going to drive you through the Bible step by step. It’s long and it’s deep. If all of the written material on the world’s religions, sects and cults, past and present, put together, amount to a pond, what has been written on the Bible is an ocean. Scholars agree and disagree over dates and meanings. Without understanding to whom it was written, what their culture was, what their understanding was, why and when it was written, what genre was being used, what language was used and how it translates into the language, understanding and place in history of the reader, it can very easily be misinterpreted and misunderstood. There is no lack of postmodern revisionists, deconstructionists and fable mongers happy to spin it into a bowel of meaningless mush, even going so far as to proclaim that there *is* no actual history of ancient Israel, but that the Bible is largely an invention of later day writers. I’ll do some ‘what if’ to try and fill in the blanks, but at least I’ll admit it. These dudes are serious.

The earliest books of the Bible were compiled and edited into final form long after the events described therein. There are human errors of dates, numbers and details in spite of pronouncements to the contrary by those claiming strict inerrancy, but none that alters the fact that this *is* an account of God working out his plan for this planet and for his children in spite of all visible and invisible opposition. The New Testament is virtually error free. We need to avoid the extremes of buying into a naïve Biblicalism on the one hand and blowing it off as a fable on the oth-

er. By and large the Bible *is* the word of God and those who disregard it do so at great personal risk, and not only to themselves but to those whom they love and care for.

At Eden, God told the serpent, aka Satan, that through the womb of the young woman he had taken advantage of would come future generations of children, one of whom (Jesus) would crush his head.

God likes to start at square one and go from there. Furthermore, he seems to love a challenge. If Satan thought that he could “outwit, outlast and outplay” (*Survivor*) the creator of the cosmos at his own game, it just goes to show how desperate and deranged he really is. In Eden, the future first parents of the planned new race got duped and blew it. This time around, God would select an already mature man with an infertile wife and utilize them to make his next move. Why he chose this particular man, Abram of the ancient city of Ur, is known only to him but trust and obedience along with timing seem to be major keys. By this time the whole world had long since lost the knowledge of one creator God and had come to believe in a fantasy card deck of gods and goddesses. Abram, whose name God later changed to Abraham, would have initially been no exception.

There is a small stretch of territory in the Middle East, bordered on the west by the Mediterranean, insignificant but for one reason---it lay between the major world powers of antiquity. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome and lesser kingdoms passed through it on their way to trade and to war and therefore sought to control it for their own interests. It was the perfect place and time span in history to execute a plan.

God called Abram/Abraham to leave his extended family behind and along with his wife, Sarai/Sarah, his nephew Lot and personal servants, travel to the above mentioned territory and live there. God directed him to walk the length and breadth of this extended plot of land and through a series of visions promised to give it to his descendants who were to become (although he and his wife were well along in years and childless at the time) as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. God further told Abraham that his descendants would become slaves in a foreign land and return to the land of promise in the fourth generation because the current inhabitants had not yet become as morally degenerate as they would in the future and thereby justify the need to clear them out.

Abraham and Sarah were distant descendants of the Eden colony, and although the age span of that line was rapidly declining, it was still well beyond what we see today. Abraham reached the age of 175 and Sarah 127. Their ‘miracle baby’ Isaac (so-called because Sarah was ninety at the time and past the stage of reproduction) lived to 180. Their grandson Jacob/Israel passed at 147. The ancient Egyptians considered 110 to be the ideal time to die.

Jacob/Israel (see, God had renamed him as he had Abraham and Sarah) resettled in Egypt during a time of widespread famine and when the Hyksos, a fellow Semitic group of conquerors, were

in power. Jacob's long missing son, Joseph, had overcome a series of adverse circumstances by the manipulation of God and risen to become second-in-command of the kingdom.

Years passed. The Egyptians didn't like the Hyksos and eventually succeeded in driving them out. They didn't like the Israelites either, since they were kin to the Hyksos, had multiplied like rabbits, and posed a possible threat to the kingdom in the event of war. The Egyptian overlords forced the Israelites into slavery and sought to control their numbers by killing their male babies at birth (a classic fail similar to some of the dumb-ass demographic 'solutions' being carried out today).

One such baby boy was rescued by an Egyptian princess, who named him Moses. The child was raised and educated in the culture of his adopted family, but as an adult was forced to run for his life after murdering an Egyptian whom he saw beating an Israelite. After many years of exile and establishing a family, God called him to return to Egypt and lead the Israelite slave nation to the land promised generations before to their ancestors. Pharaoh wasn't buying it. You probably know the story, at least the media versions, so I won't repeat it here. Let's just say that God progressively leaned on the Egyptians until they were compelled to drive the Israelites from the land and then kicked their butts proper like when they tried to get them back.

This just might be a good place to make a statement, although my fellow Christians may not like how I say it. God loves. God is very patient. He thinks and plans long term. He's running his game. He'll cut you a break, sometimes many breaks in the process of trying to get your attention, but there *is* a limit. He'll let you hang yourself with your own rope. It's a big cosmos after all and there's a lot going on in it. He doesn't have to put up with crap from any person, any entity, any nation or any world. Think what you want, do what you want---but consider yourself warned.

The Israelites and those who tagged along were now free from their Egyptian masters, but still bound by their own invisible chains. God gave them laws and ordinances that, if obeyed, would have resulted in health, happiness and prosperity in a land promised to their forefathers. He fought battles for them. They were to become a kingdom of priests, sharing the message of God with the world in preparation for the coming of God the Son and the restoration of the sick and quarantined planet---but noooo. In spite of a visible and powerful manifestation of God's presence accompanying them, they disobeyed, they bitched and moaned, they were fearful and distrustful, they were immoral, they worshipped the make-believe gods that they had known in Egypt and wanted to return there---until God finally told Moses, "That's it!"

There are theologians who tie themselves in knots trying to prove that God does not *really* change his mind, disregarding the repeated plain declarations that he can and does. God was about to put an end to the obstinate swarm of misfits and start over once again with Moses, until Moses talked him out of it. But because of their rebellion, only two of the adults who left Egypt, Joshua (who succeeded Moses) and Caleb, were allowed to enter the land of their inheritance;

one by one, the rest perished in the desert. Their children and grandchildren, toughened from years of wandering a harsh environment, were to enter as conquerors, eliminate the existing population and live there.

This part is hard to wrap your head around, and I'll tell you straight up that I have problems with it. It is one of the prime reasons that so many have turned away from the Old Testament in disbelief and disgust, and this includes many Christians, especially young Christians. Explanations of why God would call for what we call an atrocity of war are all over the map. Some have pointed out that these early accounts were compiled and edited over centuries before coming into the form that we have today, and that is true. Maybe some facts have been lost or altered. It is suggested that perhaps it was Moses, Joshua and later leaders rather than God who called for the slaughter. Some have implied that even the babies and children were spiritually polluted by generations of their culture's involvement in demonic religions and had to be 'put down' before they grew up in that state. Others have even callously quoted the old military slogan, "Kill 'em all; let God sort 'em out!"

Somewhat more "comforting" (at least to me) solutions have been offered. As we see in the Middle East today, many may have seen what was coming and hit the road. Jericho, for example, was a walled fort city. There is no possible way that it could have accommodated the population of the surrounding countryside who most likely fled for their lives. Only soldiers and a handful of civilians would have tried to make a stand there. It has long been a position of the church that children who die before being mature enough to make a choice for God are not accountable and therefore eternally safe in his presence. If that is the case, then a terrified child, crying and peeing herself before having her head lopped off is even now in a realm far beyond anything we can imagine, while the warrior who did it may very well be in hell---just saying.

As far as editing of material goes, it was finalized following a period in history when the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah had themselves been conquered, brutalized, murdered and carried off into slavery. It has often been assumed that, quite naturally, those responsible for the work would not be inclined to cast their ancient enemies in a positive light.

The conquest was never completed and the inhabitants that remained did indeed prove to be a trap to the incoming Israelites who increasingly adopted the 'worship' practices of their false gods, including cult sexual rites and child sacrifice. As the Israelite tribes attempted to claim their allotted portions of the territory, they were often bested and put under the thumbs of those who did not feel inclined to give them up. Only during a period in which the nations of the region were weak did Israel, under King David and his son Solomon, become a power in their own right.

It was not to last. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, opted to play the tyrant and alienated the Israelite tribes, ten of which split off to become the northern Kingdom of Israel with its final capital at Samaria. This left the tribes of Judah and Benjamin along with some individual members of the

other tribes to constitute the southern kingdom of Judah under the Davidic line with the capital at Jerusalem.

Long story short, the illegitimate worship of God at the phony cult centers of the northern kingdom went bad in a hurry. That, along with the degenerate worship and overall lifestyle adopted from the surrounding nations ultimately led to their defeat and deportation by the power of the day, Assyria. Judah was later to follow and for the same reasons, conquered and carried off by the new world leader, Babylon.

These guys had been warned. Repeatedly, God called and sent prophets to bring his message to both kingdoms, imploring them to put aside their false thoughts and practices and return to him but they would not listen. Nonetheless, the prophet Jeremiah, in spite of all messages of impending doom that God required him to deliver, also foretold that Judah would return to the land after spending seventy years in Babylonian captivity. This took place as foretold following the overthrow of Babylon by the Medes and Persians.

All but a handful of adults who had gone into captivity lived to return and that at a very advanced age. It was the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of the original captives who would construct a new but less elaborate temple to replace the one destroyed by the conquerors and who would rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The Persian ruler commanded that the worship utensils carried off to Babylon be returned to their original duties. BTW, the Ark of the Covenant, if it still exists, has never been located although there have been unverified claims to the contrary.

What had been the southern kingdom of Judah became a Persian province, later to come under the rule of Greece and then Rome as major powers rose and fell. Having finally gotten the message that God was to be taken seriously, the Israelite aka Jewish religious leaders were scrupulous to a fault over observance of the Law of Moses, and added much besides. They lived and died in hopes of a promised coming deliverer, the Messiah, who would throw off the conquerors yoke and chains and bring in an everlasting kingdom of Israel. For roughly four hundred years, no new prophet (at least a genuine one) would arise to bring a word from God.

Messiah, part one

“I love it when a plan comes together”

Hannibal, *The A-Team*

Once again the time was ripe for God to take the next step in his plan to release rogue planet Earth along with its creatures and inhabitants from bondage and to put a certain ‘griefer’ in his proper place. Rome was the new world leader and had imposed its rule of law and order, the Pax Romana (Roman peace) on the widespread realms under its control. Roman roads, Roman troops and the lowering of territorial restrictions made travel across the realm relatively quick, safe and easy, much as travel across the Eurozone is (or was) today. Greek and Latin had come to be the common written and spoken languages, facilitating communication.

The Son of God had been out and about the cosmos from its beginning, teaching, observing, governing, delegating and otherwise relating to the creatures and children dependent on him for life, love and well being. All in all, things were going pretty well but in a spiral arm of one galaxy an inhabited planet was in trouble. And when any of God’s children are hurt and unhappy, God’s not happy. God was about to pull off a once-for-all cosmic-shattering event.

In the sleepy little Galilean town of Nazareth, a very young teenage girl (12-14 likely, since girls of the region typically married soon after the onset of their first menses) named Mary was about to receive some troubling news. Whether in a vivid dream or waking vision, a messenger from God appeared and told her straight up that she had been chosen to give birth to the long awaited Messiah, and that she was to name him Jesus. When Mary pointed out the fact that she was still a virgin, the messenger explained simply that, not to worry, God, through the Spirit, would take care of the details. Not exactly a message that a girl would rush out and announce to family, friends and the young carpenter to whom she was betrothed. Betrothal during these times was a way more serious commitment than today’s engagement. Sexual union was supposed to wait until after the formal wedding ceremony.

Mary did the sensible thing and kept the message to herself. Maybe it was only a dream after all. Surely stuff like this didn’t happen. It happened. Her period didn’t arrive on schedule. Maybe she was just late. Maybe it was only a missed period. That happened sometimes to her friends and relatives, right? She waited anxiously, but the bleeding didn’t start and morning nausea did. Her mom was giving her ‘looks’ and she wasn’t the only one. The situation was heartbreaking. God had really put this innocent kid on the spot. She only wanted to marry and be with her young man, Joseph, have his babies and run her own household and now this. Her dreams were coming to an end and she hadn’t done anything wrong.

Mary had to tell the truth, but who was going to believe her? Her mom could have called in a physician or, more likely, a midwife to verify the ‘proof’ of her virginity, but an intact hymen was not necessarily an indication that no sexual congress had taken place nor was the absence of one proof that it had. The Bible gives no details, nor should it, but suffice it to say that tears and tempers reigned supreme. Joseph was shattered as well. He wasn’t buying Mary’s tale. She had cheated on him, but because of his love, he made up his mind to divorce her privately to spare her disgrace as much as possible. An official betrothal required an official divorce. He may very well have had to endure angry words and maybe more than words from Mary’s parents and relatives.

Meanwhile, the same messenger who had appeared to Mary appeared to Joseph in a dream and verified the truth of the matter. Why didn’t he tell him sooner? Good question, but once again, timing is everything. An official wedding soon took place with the private understanding that intercourse would have to wait until after the child arrived. Mary and Joseph knew, and *maybe* the family or some of them believed, that Mary was still a virgin. The word on the street, however, was that the nice young couple had jumped the gun and they may as well ‘own’ it. After all, Mary wasn’t the first local girl pregnant at the altar and she wouldn’t be the last. And what was to be said for it? At best, the truth would not have been believed, and at worst may have gotten Mary in serious trouble. Mary found this to be a good time to get away from the gossip and pay an extended visit to a much older cousin, Elizabeth, who was having a long hoped for baby of her own after many years of infertility---a baby known to history as John the Baptist.

As a side note, and as I mentioned in another chapter, a virgin birth is easily achievable by any scientifically advanced civilization including our own. A special ops medical team could infiltrate an unsuspecting village in the dead of night, temporarily neutralize any human or animal likely to sound an alarm, implant a modified embryo into a sedated girl and pass away like a shadow on the breeze. Anything man can do, the Creator of the cosmos can do better. We don’t know how he pulled this off, but I’m sure Star Trek’s Mister Spock would have found the details “fascinating”.

Considering the conception of the Son of God, this is a seriously delicate area to be messing around with and not likely to be appreciated. Remember that in the chapter on Eden, I proposed that the first Adam was created using enhanced genetic code and not born from a male/female pairing---Eve likewise. They were without spiritual defect (sin) initially until crashing later and passing the resulting abnormality along to each succeeding generation. This doctrine is known as *original sin*. The Son of God did not have a permanent body, although he no doubt took whatever form was needful as to time and place, until fusing with the child in Mary’s womb. He did not have the name of Jesus until the messenger’s (angel’s) instruction to Mary. The Bible refers to Jesus as the last or second Adam. He was indeed fully human and fully God. Whatever defect inherent in the human genetic code, including the still undetected ‘spiritual’/ other dimensional code had been remedied and the resulting child was completely without any stain of sin as had

been the first Adam originally. He was the *only* one capable of restoring the God/human bond broken at Eden.

Messiah's birth had been foretold in numerous, if cryptic, passages in the Old Testament. Hundreds of years prior, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed that from the land of Galilee would come a male child in the lineage of David destined to rule his kingdom forever; one who would be called "*Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*" (Isaiah 9:1-7). This was not to be your typical infant.

Rome was taking a census, one of many, and this is why the precise dates and details have long been the subject of controversy. Joseph and Mary, who was by now in the late stage of pregnancy, went to be registered as required by law. They did not travel alone as depicted on stamps and Christmas (not holiday, thank you very much) cards. Many others were making the trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, including friends and family, and the young couple traveled with them. This nailed another well known ancient prophecy that the coming Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. To read the prophecy is to get the chills, that the infant's "*origins/goings out are from of old, from ancient times/days of eternity*" (Micah 5:2); in other words, from before the beginning. This was light years beyond anything that they imagined or could possibly imagine. The Creator of the cosmos, the 'Big Banger' himself, had laid aside (emptied himself the Bible puts it) his knowledge and power and was about to enter the game at level one. Not the level one where you wake up in prison, get sprung somehow and find a rusty dagger---the *real* level one. I don't mind telling you that this scares the crap out of me. The Son of God was now in the most precarious position imaginable. He was totally helpless. He knew absolutely nothing. He had enemies, one in particular. He could have failed, and if he could *not* have failed he would not have truly been the second/last Adam and able to take our place. This was hardcore mode. There would be no hitting the F9 key. Fail and it would be "game over"---and we would all be screwed!

Mary was now in labor. Bethlehem was small and crowded and the couple could find no room to stay until an innkeeper had compassion and let them use the stable or cave where the animals were housed. It was better than giving birth in the street. Mary probably had help from a local midwife or another experienced mother, maybe even her own. Other family members had made the journey with them from Nazareth. Girl children especially, to be moms themselves soon enough, would be excited to witness the event and see the new baby.

Even though Mary, barely beyond childhood herself, knew what to expect, had probably witnessed birth and maybe even been allowed to assist, this was miles beyond any agony that she had ever experienced. Screaming helped a little. With a final push the little one entered the world, had his umbilical cord tied off and cut, was cleaned up and rubbed with oil and salt. Wide eyed children, some of them visibly shaken by what they had witnessed, tried to push in to see. At last an exhausted teenager held and prepared to nurse her newborn son. She and Joseph

looked at each other. Could this tiny, red, squalling, flailing and kicking baby *really* be the Messiah?

Now, in apology to my Catholic friends and my dear departed grandmother, who counted her rosary beads every night at bedtime, there is a sticky matter than needs to be cleaned up. As the Bible makes clear, Jesus was Mary's *firstborn* son and that Mary and Joseph did not have sexual relations until after her required period of purification from childbirth according to the Law was completed. God blessed the couple with four more sons, who are named, and daughters whose names are not, as usual in Scripture, given but since they are spoken of in the plural were at least two. The ancient church, with its superstitious squeamishness of even God-ordained marital sex and unable to come to grips with these facts, long ago invented the fable of Mary's perpetual virginity, and thereby dishonored her, the sanctity and blessing of marriage, and the triune God. They meant well, but the result is not good, ultimately leading to an unholy lifting up and praying to a human being when *no one* deserves to be in that position but God alone. However, in all fairness, how would the Catholic Church untangle itself from a doctrine that has not only been in place over the long centuries, but has gathered additional false doctrine as well? Not by inserting cousins in place of siblings or sons and daughters of a supposed much older Joseph.

On the other hand, a study of God's choosing of Mary is fascinating. He did not choose just anyone---he chose *her*. This had to be a girl with a particular bloodline, of a particular age, a healthy virgin of particular character, from a particular place, under particular circumstances, at a particular time in history. This would seem to narrow the choices down to one---Mary of Nazareth. That, to me, is awe inspiring enough.

The crowd drifted away; just another little Jewish baby, nothing special. Thankfully he seemed to be normal and healthy. If the whole thing seemed beyond belief to the family entrusted with his care, God did not leave himself without witnesses. In fields near the town, shepherds were looking after the flock under their charge. Better there than back in their pen in Bethlehem with all the noise and confusion. Suddenly one of God's agents popped in with a birth announcement---not an event for the faint of heart, but some things can't be helped. "Don't be scared. I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. A savior, Messiah, has just been born in Bethlehem of David. Here's what to look for; you'll find the baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding trough". Suddenly, many more angels appeared, praising and giving glory to God and proclaiming peace to those on whom his favor rests. The Bible doesn't say, but these guys had been tracking mother and child from the start and, trust me, they were "armed and dangerous"---bad news dudes for anyone or anything trying to bring harm. As Mr. T would say, "I pity the fool!"

After the angels/agents returned to their other duties, the shepherds rushed to Bethlehem to see for themselves and share the news with the new parents and throughout the town. "On the wine", some probably said, while others didn't know what to make of it. This was the first confirmation to Mary and Joseph that what they had been told up front was for real. It would not be the last.

When the baby was eight days old he was circumcised according to custom and the Law of Moses and given the name of Jesus. When the forty day period of Mary's purification from childbirth was completed, the young parents took their little one to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and to offer the required sacrifice in accordance with the Law. Since they were poor, this was either a pair of doves or two young pigeons (Luke 2:24, Exodus 13:2,12, Leviticus 12:1-8).

There was a righteous and devout man in Jerusalem by the name of Simeon, who had been told by the spirit of God that he would not die before seeing the Messiah, the Christ (they mean the same thing). The Spirit led him to the courts of the temple and when Mary and Joseph brought the baby in, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying *"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and for glory to your people Israel."* Needless to say, the parents were floored and Simeon spoke directly to Mary, *"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."*; stunning and chilling words for the parents of a newborn. At the same moment, an aged prophetess, Anna, approached them, giving thanks to God and speaking about the child to everyone who was longing for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2:25-38).

In the land of the East (most likely present day Iraq, Iran, Yemen or Saudi Arabia) Magi/wise men (astronomers/astrologers) had been observing unusual phenomena in the heavens---a comet and/or something other than a comet. From ancient times, the astrologers of this region had studied and charted the heavens. What they were now seeing was unprecedented; it could only mean one thing in their estimation---a mighty king had been born to the Jews! They must go and see! A group of them carefully chose presentation gifts and along with their retinue of guards and servants set out on the journey.

Where else to inquire but at the capital of Jerusalem? No one knew what to answer them; Herod the Great was "king". Herod, who murdered his second wife, his mother-in-law and three of his own sons, was not inclined to allow rivals. He was disturbed at the news on top of already being 'disturbed' and called for the chief priests and teachers of law in order to find out where the prophesied Messiah was to be born. That was clear from Micah 5:2---Bethlehem of Judea. Herod called the Magi in secretly to find out when the 'star' had first appeared and sent them out to find the exact location on the pretense of wishing to go and worship him.

Going on their way, the object that they had been observing "went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was" (Matthew 2:9), a pretty good indication that it was not a comet or star, but probably the 'ride' carrying the same 'band of angels' that the shepherds had encountered. By this time, Jesus was a toddler and the little family was lodged in a house. Entering, the Magi saw the child with his mother, bowed down to worship and presented the gifts that

they had brought to honor the new king. If no one else knew who the child was, they were convinced. Meanwhile, their servants had procured lodging or erected their master's tents. During the night the Magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod and so returned to their own country by another route.

After the visitors had gone, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to immediately take Mary and Jesus and escape to Egypt and stay there because Herod was about to search for the child in order to kill him. They left in the night, and although the Bible does not say, you can bet your last bitcoin that an unusual 'star' went with them.

Now follows the troubling account of Herod, realizing that he had been outwitted by the Magi, ordering the murder of all male babies two years and under in Bethlehem and the vicinity in hopes of eliminating the Messiah. The Jewish historian Josephus, who records a number of Herod's other atrocities, does not mention it. Herod did not live long following this event and died a horrible death. We do not know how long Jesus and his parents stayed in Egypt, but once again an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to take his little family and return to Israel because those who were trying to take the child's life---were dead. We have no idea who else got 'paid back' for murder and attempted murder but the implication is that it was more than just Herod. Some may even have received their own visit from an angel---just saying.

Messiah, part two

“Hear my words that I might teach you; Take my arms that I might reach you. “But my words like silent raindrops fell...”

The Sound of Silence: Simon and Garfunkel (1965) Disturbed (2016)

Back in Nazareth, Joseph and Mary set up their new household; Joseph probably working alongside another, older carpenter, perhaps his own father or uncle. Mary saw to their little one and her home duties, receiving help from friends and other family members and giving back in return.

There is no authentic account of Jesus' childhood and life up until entering upon his public ministry at age thirty, except an exceptional account of his conversing with the teachers in the temple court at Jerusalem at age twelve. The gist of the story is that by this time he had come to know who he was, but no other details are given. As far as we know, he was a good kid who grew up to be a good guy, respected in the community, a carpenter like his earthly father before him. Although he was fully God, in order to be truly human as well and carry out the mission that he, along with God the Father and God the Spirit had planned, this included “emptying himself” and developing normally within the human body/brain/spirit construct (Philippians 2:5-8).

I can try to make some ‘educated guesses’ from infancy on so that there is *something* to fill in the blanks. He woke up hungry and instinctively cried. Thunder startled him and he cried harder. He learned to crawl. He pulled himself up, took a few steps, fell and hurt his nose, cried for his mother. He got sick and threw up. A neighbor girl’s cat scratched him. A cousin snatched his favorite toy right out of his hand. He was learning to talk a little. He had some teeth! Mary weaned him and got pregnant, making her and Joseph excited and happy. He spilled his food and was scolded. He felt the new baby moving in his mom’s tummy and felt left out after he was born.

He learned to read and write. He went to the synagogue. There and at home he was told the stories of God and the histories of his earthly people. He saw Roman soldiers. Sometimes they were nice, many times not. He worked alongside Joseph and got good at his trade. He was strong. He would not defend himself but would defend others, physically if necessary. Town bullies learned to watch their step. More than one village girl had a crush on him. A sister’s best friend had *more* than a crush; she had her heart set. He felt the same way about her and prayed to his *real* father but the answer was no. He kept his distance, broke her heart, broke his own as well. His sister screamed at him. His course was set and his life dedicated to God but no one understood. As the Bible makes clear, in order to pass the test that Adam had failed, he would be tempted and tested in every way common to humanity, yet without sinning---not even once (Hebrews 2:14-18, 4:14-16, John 8:46).

Just so you know, Jesus *could* have married, had children and remained sinless within his person *but* ---it was not part of his mission and destiny. Any theoretical children would have carried the error code of original sin inherited from the mother. Contrary to fictional accounts, Mary Magdalene was a follower and friend---not his wife.

The story of Jesus' life or of his three year earthly ministry alone would fill a library, as the apostle John pointed out (John 21:25). Only the bare essentials are given in the Bible---who he was, where he came from, where he was going, what he taught, what he came to do and did and what he would do in the future in conjunction with the Father and Spirit in order to wrap things up. It's simple unless you overthink it and it's enough. I suggest that you do yourself a favor and read it. Don't buy into the revisionist crap masquerading as scholarship that he did not claim to be God the Son appearing in the flesh and co-equal with God the Father, because he did. If the Old Testament is sketchy in part because of centuries of editing, the New Testament is not. Outside of a couple of minor mistakes, you can pop it in the bank.

No prophet of God had arisen in Israel for hundreds of years until John the Baptist began his ministry, which included a call to repentance and baptism for the remission of sins. His message included the proclamation that one was coming after him who would baptize, not with water, but with the Holy Spirit and with fire. This message, which drew large crowds, was unprecedented. Jesus himself came to be baptized and John would have forbid it but for Jesus' insistence. Jesus had no sin of his own but here at the beginning of his public ministry was preparing to take the sin of the entire world upon his own shoulders. At the baptism, the Spirit came upon Jesus in visible form and an audible voice of the Father gave testimony that this was indeed the Son; whether or not anyone other than Jesus and John witnessed this manifestation is not recorded. From this point on, the Spirit remained with Jesus constantly. He had passed the test as a man and was now prepared to minister and to pass the test as the God/man. He now had as much knowledge and power as he would receive until coming into the fullness of his former eternal glory following his death, burial, resurrection and reunion with the Father. Incidentally, this account gives clear testimony to the three-in-one nature of God, since Father, Son and Spirit are all included.

Following the baptism, Jesus retreated into the wilderness to fast, pray and prepare to engage the duties that awaited him. Satan tagged along to tempt him as he had tempted Adam in hopes of causing him to sin and blow the mission. Classic fail, that, making the griefer 'rage quit' and slink off to think things through.

I'm not going to go through Jesus' works and teachings line by line. I can't do justice to the Bible itself and the four gospels can be read through easily in a couple of evenings. His physical and spiritual healings, including the reversal of death, were works of compassion. They, along with the demonstrations of his control of the natural world were also confirming 'signs' that his words rang true and that he was exactly who he claimed to be, namely God in the flesh. As he told his disciples, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) and the Jewish leaders, "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30).

The core of Jesus' teaching was to love God one-hundred percent, with all of one's being and to love one's neighbor as one's own self; this included praying for enemies and, as far as possible, trying to win them over. He taught to forgive others as God had forgiven them. By the same token, he taught that there was indeed a dark and dangerous side of reality, including dark and dangerous entities to go with it. Life beyond the grave was real. Hell, as well as heaven, was real; demons were real---we'll get to that stuff later in the book.

Jesus drew large crowds, some sincerely into him and his teaching, most just curious or wanting the provision and healing that he had shown himself capable of. Upon witnessing his miraculous feeding of thousands of people, the crowd attempted to take him by force and make him king. Many acknowledged him as a prophet, some as the promised Messiah. Here was one capable of throwing off the chains of Rome and bringing glory and world domination to Israel! They ignored the teaching of the Old Testament prophets of his coming as servant and savior, and concentrated on his distant coming in power and glory to take back the broken world that rightfully belonged to the triune God.

Jesus spoke plainly, and the apostles reiterated, that those who believed in him and trusted in him would live forever, even though they may pass through bodily death initially. Believers still alive at his return in glory would be transformed, but never pass through physical death. This was the restoration of the God/human bond broken in Eden. There is nothing strange or other-worldly about it; just the destiny designed by God for all of his children, wherever and whenever in the Cosmos they may be.

Jesus had enemies, out front and 'solid' and other-dimensional denizens of the unseen, interlocking reality. Although a number of the Jewish leaders secretly believed in him, most took him to be a false prophet and probable insurrectionist who would bring down the wrath of the Roman overlords. As long as he was not plotting rebellion (and they could see no evidence that he was), Rome could care less. What was one more god, sect or cult to Rome, who had plenty of its own, as long as peace and allegiance stood firm?

Done, and done

“You can’t win, Darth. If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you could possibly imagine.” Obi Wan Kenobi, *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*

For nearly three years Jesus taught his followers and disciples, particularly the core twelve chosen to accompany him as he traveled about teaching, healing, expelling demons (real parasitical agents, bro, not the usual disorders of body and mind), and raising the newly dead to life. One disciple, Judas, was destined to betray him.

As the planned end of his earthly mission drew near, Jesus began to teach the twelve that he was going to Jerusalem; there he would be taken and tried by the Jews and handed over to the Romans to be beaten and put to death by crucifixion, and that on the third day following his execution he would rise from the dead.

Understandably, the disciples didn’t get it. How could this possibly happen to the one who could raise the dead and stop a storm in its tracks; to one who admitted to them that he *was* in fact the Messiah? They did not *want* to get it. They were looking forward to being at his side when he wrested control from Rome and brought in the glorious new kingdom of God.

Jesus took three of the disciples, Simon Peter, James and John up a high mountain, possibly Mt. Hermon, and there was transfigured in glory before their eyes. Moses, who had died long years before and the prophet Elijah, who had been visibly removed to parts unknown by agents/angels of God and their vehicle of transportation, appeared with Jesus, discussing the very plans that the disciples had doubted. A bright cloud surrounded them and God the Father spoke from the cloud, saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5).

Shortly before the events surrounding Jesus’ execution, burial and resurrection an event occurred that has puzzled Christians down through the years. In the village of Bethany, near to Jerusalem, Jesus had good friends in a man named Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. Lazarus became very sick and his sisters sent word to Jesus, who was many miles away. Not only had he healed multitudes, he had on occasion healed at a distance. Jesus did not come, nor did he heal at a distance. He merely sent message that the illness would not end in death, but that it was for the glory of Father and Son. He waited two more days, gathered the disciples and told them that Lazarus had ‘fallen asleep’ but that he was going to Bethany to wake him up. When they misunderstood what he meant, Jesus told them plainly that Lazarus was dead. Upon their arrival, they found the two sisters brokenhearted and disillusioned; they both told Jesus, “If only you had come our brother would not have died!” Jesus reassured Martha that her brother would rise again, which Martha took to be at the end of the age. Jesus told her plainly, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and

believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25). When Jesus saw the grief of the sisters and those who had come to grieve with them and offer comfort, he himself broke down and cried in spite of knowing what he was about to do. The situation called for it but it went way beyond that. Many had died and would die who were forever lost and he carried (and still carries) that grief in his heart.

Lazarus had been in the tomb four days, wrapped in strips of linen with spices for burial, as was the custom of the day. Jesus ordered the stone sealing the tomb removed over Martha’s objections that the body would be badly decomposed and that there would be a foul odor. Giving thanks to the Father, Jesus commanded Lazarus to come out, which he managed to do, still in his grave wrappings. Being unwrapped found him perfectly well. There has been a lot of speculation over this one. Was Lazarus decomposed or his body held in some kind of suspended state? We don’t know, but one thing is absolutely clear. Even if he was not ‘totally dead’ when entombed (The idea is absurd, but it has been put out there), he was certainly very sick. Even a healthy individual would not have survived being wrapped up and entombed for four days in that environment.

Now, this is what is usually overlooked. Even many Christian teachers, preachers and writers miss it. Why did Jesus wait four days? It was a sign and testimony *performed ahead of time* of Jesus’ own death, burial and resurrection. Jesus was in the tomb *three* days; Lazarus topped this by a full day. Jesus knew very well that doubters and fabricators of tales would pop up in regards to his resurrection (and, of course, they are still at it). It was known by the Jewish leaders that Jesus had revealed up front what would happen to him and that he would rise on the third day. They did their best to keep him in the tomb (no dice) and on top of that had a guy *well known to be dead and buried four days* up and well and walking around. No wonder that they wished to kill Lazarus to eliminate the testimony, but that would have incriminated them majorly and added to their consternation and embarrassment. Guys, don’t be duped by the BS that Jesus’ miracles and the events of his death, burial and resurrection didn’t happen. There were *way* too many eyewitnesses, thousands, for his enemies to counter.

Jerusalem and the surrounding villages were filled with crowds coming to observe the Passover. When word got around that Jesus and his disciples and followers were approaching, they were excited. He was even riding a donkey in fulfillment of the long-awaited prophecy of the coming true king of Israel! His disciples, too, were caught up in the moment. Surely, this would spell the end of Roman domination and Israel’s glorious new age would begin! The crowds greeted him with shouts of joy, spreading branches and even their valuable cloaks on the road before him.

Jesus entered the temple area and cleaned house, literally, driving out all who were buying and selling there, and overturning the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling sacrificial doves. “It is written,” he said to them, (quoting from the Old Testament) “‘my house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’” (Matthew 21:12, 13). This did not endear him to the Jewish leaders, many of whom had long been looking for a way to

get rid of him. After performing some healings, and since the hour was late, Jesus returned to Bethany for the night. Some of those who had joyously welcomed his arrival were probably wondering why Roman soldiers were still around; doubt was beginning to creep in. (Likewise, doubt has set in amongst many scholars who find discrepancies of details in the four Gospels. This is easily accounted for by the memories and perspectives of those responsible, like four differing eyewitness accounts of even a recent accident).

Here comes another puzzle that most Christians miss. On the way back to the city, Jesus went to a fig tree to pick a few figs and found it had none, so he laid a curse on it and it withered; one Gospel says it withered immediately, another says they found it withered the next day, the other two do not mention it. Oh, the poor freakin' fig tree! It wasn't even the season for figs! Why did Jesus do that? It seems so out of character. Simple; Jesus was acting out a chilling sign based on Jeremiah 8:13. The Messiah, the Son of God, had come in the flesh and was, for the most part, being rejected, especially by the Jewish leaders. All but a handful reject him to this very day. He would give up his life in accordance with the divine plan while Jerusalem, with its magnificent temple, would be reduced to rubble by the Romans and the survivors scattered to the four winds.

Back in Jerusalem, Jesus continued to teach, heal and further infuriate the Jewish leaders. They looked for ways to arrest him but were afraid of the crowds of common people there for Passover week, many of whom *did* believe in him. Others were disappointed that he had not tossed out the Romans, including one of the twelve, Judas Iscariot. Judas went to the Jewish leaders and sold him out for thirty pieces of silver (thereby fulfilling yet another ancient prophecy) and together they hatched a plot to have him arrested.

There is a lot of mystery surrounding Judas Iscariot that has not been possible to totally resolve up to this point. Some have speculated that he was trying to force Jesus' hand. He had seen his power and knew that he could do to Rome what he had done to the fig tree. That he was a dupe of Satan was known to Jesus from (or before) the time that he selected him as one of the twelve. Satan was *trying* to run his game; God was running his. There could only be one 'winner'.

Jesus had arranged for a large upper room in the city in which to eat the Passover meal with his disciples. Before the meal, he himself assumed the duties of a servant by washing their feet, thereby setting the example that their duty was to serve each other and their fellow man---not to lord it over others. During the meal (The Lord's Supper/Last Supper) he initiated the rites of observance; to eat the broken bread as the symbol of his body, broken for them and to drink the wine from the common cup, symbolizing his blood, the blood of the new covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Continuing to reiterate his approaching death, Jesus gave last teaching and instructions to the eleven (Judas having already left to carry out his part of the arranged plot). He told them plainly that they would all fall away and leave him alone (yet another Old Testament prophecy about to be fulfilled). Simon Peter swore that he would never fall away. Now things are starting to get a

little spooky and, once again, most Christians miss the depth of what is going on. Jesus told Peter straight up that before the rooster crowed with the coming dawn, he would deny *three times* that he even knew him. Peter declared that even if he had to die with Jesus, he would never deny him and all the other disciples said the same.

Leaving the meal, Jesus and the disciples traveled on to a grove on the Mount of Olives. Asking the disciples to keep watch and pray, he went a short distance further to pray to the Father and prepare himself for what he knew lay just ahead. It was nearly too much to bear. He asked his Father that, if it was possible, to remove the ‘cup’ from which he was destined to drink, but no---he must drink it and drink it alone. Only he, as the second/last Adam, could put to right the failure of the first Adam. A little hard to get, is it? As the creator of a cosmos in which free will was allowed in order for God’s children to be born, Jesus was taking on himself full responsibility for all of the sin and suffering which had taken place or would ever take place. Adam and Eve were free-will creatures; they were not bots. And through their fail their descendants would inevitably fail. It would not be possible for them, no matter how hard they tried, to cross the broken bridge between themselves and God. For souls designed for immortality, for union with God, to wander forever on the wrong side of the bridge or fall into the darkness beneath the gap was a fate way worse than physical death. Only one could lie across the gap so that others could cross---Jesus. As he himself put it, “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

I admit that I didn’t grasp the significance of this until, many years ago, I had a waking vision. I had not been praying or even thinking along these lines. I was floating in the blackness of space and before me, as far to the left and right as I could see, was an undulating wave of living orange light. Somehow I perceived that it was, or represented, God the Father. A little below it to the right of center was a white ball of living light (I don’t know how else to describe these things) which was drawing me in like a sci-fi tractor beam. Again, I ‘knew’ that this was God the Son. As it enveloped me I felt a love so indescribable that it felt like I was being crushed and I felt that I would die if I remained there. Along with the love was an unbearable agony and grief for all of the sin, sadness, pain, suffering, tears, cruelty and death that ever was or ever would be, including my own part of it. It only lasted a few seconds, but it was the most profound experience of my life. I was being shown what Jesus had voluntarily taken upon himself on the cross of crucifixion and was still carrying! It goes without saying that what affects the Son affects the Father and Spirit as well, seeing that they are totally one. I had always thought that God was somehow ‘above it all’---I know better now and for many years could not talk about the experience without breaking down in tears. And just so you know (because the thought is sure to pop up), I’ve never done drugs.

Jesus returned to his ‘watchers’ to find that they had fallen asleep. He woke them in time to see Judas Iscariot leading temple guards and officials sent from the high priest, carrying lanterns, torches and weapons in order to arrest him and ‘bring him in.’ The ensuing events demonstrated that it was *Jesus* and not the ones there to arrest him who was in total control of the situation. When he asked them who they were looking for and they replied “Jesus of Nazareth”, he replied,

“I am he” (“*I am*” is the name God gave in reference to himself when he revealed himself to Moses). When he said that, they recoiled and fell to the ground. When they attempted to lay hands on Jesus, Peter drew his sword, meaning to split the skull of the high priest’s servant, missed, and took off an ear. Jesus healed the man on the spot and ordered his disciple to put the sword away. No one laid a hand on Peter (what are the odds?). As Jesus was consenting to his arrest (how else would you put it?), he declared that, had he asked, the Father would have at once sent a huge company of angels/agents to rescue him (and probably do a little ‘collateral damage’ in the process). Trust me; they were around and on call. We are learning to do some ‘stealth’; God has it perfected.

As Jesus was admitting that he was the man they were looking for, he told the soldiers and the rest of the ‘posse’ to let his disciples go, which they did. Again, do you see anything unusual? Jesus was manipulating them like puppets. It’s like Obi Wan Kenobi in the first Star Wars movie telling a storm trooper patrol leader out looking for R2D2 and C3PO who were right there in the vehicle with him that, “These aren’t the droids you’re looking for.” Funny that, eh? After the disciples had made their escape, the guard came to their senses and tried to grab an innocent bystander, who left his flimsy night covering in their hands and ran away naked.

Led off to trial, Jesus was brought before the high priest and a number of the other Jewish leaders. Reading accounts of Jewish law and procedure outside of the Bible indicates that this mockery of a trial was in fact highly illegal. It is also obvious that not all of the Jewish leaders were present or even ‘invited’. False witnesses were brought in but gave conflicting testimony. Seeing that things were going nowhere, the high priest put Jesus on oath, asking him directly if he was the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, to which Jesus replied in the affirmative. Each Gospel has the account a little differently, but they all agree that Jesus told them straight up that, yes, he was the Christ (So much for the jackass conclusions of modern day ‘scholars’ that Jesus never made this claim). This was all that the high priest and members of the kangaroo court needed to hear and since he had made the direct claim of equality with God, they declared him worthy of death according to Jewish law.

While all this was going on, Peter had returned and slipped in to see what was going to happen. The man, who had tried to split the head of the high priest’s servant, had guts, but not as much as he thought. Somehow, he had ‘forgotten’ that Jesus had just told him shortly before that he would deny him, not once, not twice, but three times. Peter was confronted, three times, that he was with Jesus and three times he denied it, the last time with an oath, swearing that he never knew the man. At the third denial, the rooster crowed and Jesus, who was some distance from Peter, turned and looked straight at him. Amazed and ashamed at his own cowardice, the disciple fled in tears into the night. I said in the introduction of the book that I was going to piss some people off; I have and am about to do it again. So be it. Most Christians rag on Peter for his behavior. He ragged on himself, which is understandable. If I’ve heard it preached, taught and written on once, I’ve heard it a thousand times. I’m not buying it. In my opinion Jesus, in order to save his disciple’s life, told him up front what he was going to do and then manipulated him just

as he had manipulated those sent to arrest him. What do you think would have happened to Peter if he had been taken? Sure, he would have been hanging on a cross alongside his master. Jesus would not allow it. Peter would in fact be crucified; upside down it is said, but not yet. God had more important work still in store for him. As I said before, this is God's game---and he can jolly well run it any way he chooses.

When Judas Iscariot realized that his plan had backfired, he tried to return the money paid him to betray Jesus, declaring that he had sold out innocent blood, but the Jewish leaders would have none of it. Throwing the money into the temple, he went out and hung himself.

Although the Jewish leaders had, in their eyes, found Jesus worthy of death, they were under the thumb of Rome and had no authority to execute anyone. They carried him bound before the Roman governor/prefect Pontius Pilate to have him crucified according to the method imposed by Rome on non-Roman subjects. Pilate was a cruel and vicious ruler whom, as uncertain accounts have it, was finally exiled by Rome for his accumulated misdeeds, but he wanted no part of Jesus of Nazareth. When he discovered that Jesus was from Galilee, he tried to pass him off on the Galilean ruler, Herod Antipas, who was in Jerusalem for the Passover. Jesus would not even speak to Herod, who had imprisoned and murdered John the Baptist and so was sent back to Pilate. To his credit, Pilate declared that he found no fault in Jesus and made repeated efforts to release him, even having him flogged as a lesser punishment in hopes of appeasing the Jews, but all to no avail. It had been customary, as a token of good will, for the Romans to release a prisoner of the Jews' own choosing during the festivities and Pilate picked the worst offender on hand at the time, making the crowd choose between him and the miracle worker from Galilee. Surely they would choose Jesus over Barabbas, himself under the death sentence for murder and insurrection. Incited by their own leaders (and Satan, driving them all on) they chose Barabbas and cried out for Jesus to be crucified. Seeing that he was getting nowhere, but rather that a riot was about to take place, Pilate called for water and washed his hands before them, declaring "I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility!" All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:24, 25); a particularly bad choice of words, that! And so, Pilate gave the orders to have Jesus crucified.

This just might be a good time to jump in and shoot down an explanation of the miraculous happenings surrounding Jesus that have been (I'm not joking) put out there once in awhile. It has been suggested that Jesus was not God, but a 'spaceman', an off-world representative of a highly advanced civilization. I'll admit that angels are not medieval fairies with wings, but are agents under God's command that no doubt do employ some pretty sophisticated technology. Theoretically, an advanced civilization *could* duplicate most of Jesus' miracles *including the resurrection* ("Beam me up, Scotty!"). Notice I said 'could'. But no freakin' space cadet with all that power at his disposal is going to allow himself to be flogged, spit on and nailed naked to a cross in front of his enemies, let alone carry all the sin and suffering of this world and probably the entire cosmos on his shoulders. He showed me, for just a few seconds, a glimpse of what he took on himself and I never want to see it again! So don't hand me the spaceman version---seen?

It was the rule that the person sentenced to be crucified had to carry his own cross, or rather the cross member, to the site of execution. This strong carpenter, already beaten, flogged, suffering from exhaustion and loss of blood, staggered under the load, requiring the Roman guard to grab a passer-by and order him to carry the cross member the rest of the way. Stripped naked and, with a mock ‘crown’ of thorns pressed on his head, the creator of the cosmos allowed himself to be nailed and tied hand and foot to the cross, refusing the drugged wine offered to somewhat deaden the pain. To his left and right were two thieves suffering the same fate. The Roman guard detail divided up his clothes amongst themselves and cast lots for his robe, in fulfillment of another prophecy. After all, he would not need them again.

Among those nearby were some close to him, including his own mother. I would not dare to intrude on what was going through her heart and mind. Those passing by mocked him, as did the Jewish rulers, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.” (Luke 23:35). Many have overlooked that this comment bears testimony that the authorities were well aware of the miracles that Jesus performed.

Jesus was crucified around nine in the morning. At noon, an unnatural darkness covered the land until three in the afternoon. Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Here again, Christian confusion has turned the greatest shout of victory ever proclaimed into an anguished sob of abandonment. God the Father, unable to look at the cosmos of sin that Jesus had ‘owned’ had supposedly turned his back on his Son! Come on, guys, don’t you study your Bible? (I’m talking to the teachers, preachers and writers who ought to know better and I don’t care who taught this baloney or when). Jesus is quoting the first verse of Psalm 22, written hundreds of years before. Open your eyes and read it! Not only does it prophesy precisely what is taking place at the cross, it ends in total victory! Talk about turning the tables!

Trust me, the Jewish leaders on hand knew *exactly* where he was coming from. After receiving a drink of wine vinegar put up to his mouth on a sponge, Jesus cried, “It is finished” and released his spirit into the hands of the Father. Take note of this; no one ‘killed’ Jesus. They crucified him and when the totality of sin was paid for in full, he quit the body. He had told the Jews that no one would take his life; they had tried multiple times to lay hands on him and/or kill him before his appointed time only to have him just walk away. He had power to lay down his life at will and the power to take it back, which he was soon to demonstrate. Once again, he is in absolute control of every aspect of the situation. No one does God mode better than God!

At the moment of death there was an earthquake and the curtain of God’s temple, separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, through which only the high priest could pass once a year on the Jewish Day of Atonement, was torn in two from top to bottom. The temporary blood sacrifice of animals, which merely symbolized what Jesus had just accomplished, was now rendered null and void, although it continued in practice for years to come. From that moment until forever, those born into the trap of sin and self (that’s all of us, dude) are enabled to “own” it, cry “help!” and hand themselves over to God. Those bought and paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus

might screw up; hell, we *will* screw up! God will discipline his children, severely if necessary (been there, experienced that. I was a slow learner, ok?) but he will *never* “unfriend” us.

The following day was a special Sabbath and the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies of the crucified left on the crosses, so they went to Pilate to request that the victims’ legs be broken to hasten death and the bodies be removed. Death by crucifixion was known to last up to several days. When Pilate was told that Jesus was already dead (verified by one of the soldiers thrusting a spear into his side, bringing a flow of blood and water, a sure indication of bodily death---search it up) he was amazed. Consequently, Jesus legs were not broken. These circumstances fulfilled still more Old Testament prophesies.

Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish ruling council and secretly a disciple, approached Pilate to ask for the body of Jesus. Given permission, Joseph and Nicodemus, who was also a secret disciple and council member, removed the body, wrapped it in strips of linen with a large quantity of spices as was the burial custom of the Jews (and as Lazarus had earlier been prepared) and placed it in Joseph’s own newly constructed tomb. Rolling the large stone (a stone wheel riding in a cut out groove) in place to block the entrance, the men left for the evening.

Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders, afraid that Jesus’ disciples would steal the body and fabricate a story that he had risen from the dead, went to Pilate and requested a Roman guard and that the tomb be sealed. Yes, the guard was Roman (they requested it from the Roman governor), facing the prospect of execution if they fell asleep or failed their duty. Yes, not being suicidal, they looked to see if a body was in there before sealing it. No, Pilate did not play a joke on the Jews by having the guard dispose of the body, as has been implied.

On the morning following the Sabbath, Mary Magdalene and one or two of the other women (yes, there are discrepancies in the accounts owing to the different sources and the number of years that had passed before the Gospels were compiled) came to the tomb. Two angels are mentioned, one angel is mentioned, no angels are mentioned. An angel ‘neutralized’ the guards and rolled away the stone versus the stone was already rolled away. Jesus appeared to the women or just to Mary Magdalene. Peter (or Peter and John) went to the tomb and witnessed the body wrappings, presumably still intact. All accounts agree that the tomb was empty. All the Jews would have had to do would be to produce the body of Jesus and that would have been the end of it. They had every incentive to do just that; they could not. The early church made no attempt to reconcile accounts in the Gospels, indicating that they were satisfied with the explanation that I have given. Consider the ‘trial lawyers lament’ that the only thing worse than one eyewitness is two eyewitnesses.

The bottom line is this, that all accounts bear witness that Jesus appeared (and disappeared) in the flesh to the eleven and to many other disciples numerous times over a period of several weeks, teaching and commissioning them to spread the Gospel worldwide before visibly returning to God the Father. The disciples were able to touch him, see and feel the wounds of crucifix-

ion and the spear wound in his side, and observe him eat in their presence. Sometime later, a seriously dangerous enemy of Christians, who had been responsible for the arrest, imprisonment and death of many, met Jesus in a vision while on the road to Damascus, was converted and commissioned to spread the good news of the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) alike. This man, Saul of Tarsus, better known as the Apostle Paul, was himself responsible for much of what came to be included in the New Testament.

The Bible has a lot to say about Jesus, the Son of God, returning to this vicinity to wrap things up and put the icing on the cake. We'll get to that, but first I'll take a shot at giving the accounts of angels some respect and credibility.

“Dude! Visitors!”

The above clever quote is snagged from a *South Park* welcome mat.

The first earth satellite was launched in 1957 and for a few years the technology generated considerable public interest. Early on, people would go outside and look for them and, even as the newness of it wore off, would still tend to watch them if they were observed traversing the night skies overhead. Once one had seen a few, they could not be mistaken for a star, meteorite, plane, weather balloon or anything else. Appearing as moving stars, they kept to a straight path from horizon to horizon. Although traveling at orbital speed, they appeared from an observational viewpoint to maintain a slow, steady pace.

On a spring evening in 1968, I was sitting on a front porch in Tampa, Florida with two friends, drinking beer and making general conversation. No, we were not drunk. None of us were into drugs. Two of us were U.S. Army veterans, two of us were married with kids, one of us (me) had his eye on the cute girl across the street who would become his wife the following year. As we sat there, we observed what we assumed to be a particularly bright satellite orbiting from (roughly) north to south. I had taken an early interest in the ‘space race’ and remarked that it was probably one of the ‘balloons’, early inflatable communication satellites with reflective surfaces from which radio waves from the planet could be bounced off. We went out into the yard to get a better look. This was roughly between eight and nine o’clock, clear, dark sky with a few wispy clouds.

There was a large tree to our west and, as we watched, what appeared to be another, ‘dimmer’ satellite cleared the branches, traveling from west to east at a slightly faster speed. It was obvious that it would cross the first object’s path at a ninety degree angle, and actually appeared to be on a collision course. I commented that one could easily be many miles above the other.

Sure enough, from our vantage point, the objects ‘merged’. The first object continued on its path to the south until we lost sight of it as it passed over the roof of the house behind us. The second, however, began to execute a pronounced, perfect sharp angle ‘zigzag’ pattern while continuing its overall direction into the east and still maintaining the same orbital velocity. After performing about a half dozen of these maneuvers, it grew rapidly smaller and dimmer and disappeared. We all agreed that, in our opinions, it had accelerated straight up. This was to be my first and last ‘UFO’ sighting. I and one friend were open to the possibility of extra-terrestrial ‘visitation’ although neither of us had more than a minor interest. My other friend was a sworn atheist and skeptic on the matter. His comment was, “I sure hope that belongs to us and not the Russians.” This was because we all agreed that nothing ‘known’ to human technology could possibly execute the pattern observed. We all agreed that it appeared to be a craft of some kind and came to the same conclusion that the zigzags seemed to be evasive maneuvers (I doubt that now) leading

my skeptical friend to declare, “Well, we know one thing; whoever they are, they have an enemy”.

So just what did we see? A probe? A family of four passing through the local ‘hood’? A space creature of perhaps best unknown identity cavorting about above the atmosphere? The skeptics whom I shared this with generally gave the pat answers (Venus, a weather balloon, falling space junk, atmospheric anomaly, “You’re making it up!”).

These things, whatever they are, have been tracked on radar. They have appeared to the eye but *not* to radar. They have been fired on by pursuing jets and apparently hit on occasion but took no obvious damage; they have played ‘cat and mouse’ with pursuers; as far as I am aware they do not return fire.

Just so you know, the experience did not turn me into a ‘UFO fanatic’. I have read a handful of books and articles, pro and con, on the subject over the years including those from the seemingly “sworn debunkers” in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, to which I subscribe. I will certainly agree with those who have studied and investigated the matter from a scientific perspective that the vast majority of cases can be explained as innocent misperception. Of course, there are the outright hoaxes. That leaves a small percentage that remains unexplained. Unfortunately, there are those who believe that almost any sighting of this nature is proof of “alien” visitation and those who would not believe it to be possible if an ‘ET’s’ equivalent of a dog ran up and bit them on the ass. Both groups fall into the *fallacy of composition or part to whole* (search it).

Many Christians do not believe and do not want to believe that there may be other worlds throughout the cosmos inhabited by intelligent beings that look similar to or perhaps very different from us. As far as they are concerned, the image of God consists of the human physical as well as the spiritual form. They are locked into a “heaven and earth” concept and I am afraid that any physical off-world contact would come as a major shock to their psyches and to their belief system, especially if the ‘visitors’ were to announce that all major belief systems were no more than children’s fairy tales. The Bible goes so far as to warn that even if an ‘angel from heaven’ should come bringing a contrary message than the gospel of Christ then he/she/it should be condemned (Galatians 1: 6-9). Primitive societies are easily duped and, compared to an even slightly more advanced society, ours would definitely rank in the primitive range. As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, many scientists including Stephen Hawking caution that off-worlders may not necessarily have our best interests at heart. An ‘invasion’ does not have to be of the sci-fi, ‘humanity’s last stand’ variety to be destructive.

The Bible has a lot to say about angels of both good and bad variety. A few accounts appear to be of truth presented as story, as in the book of Job, and others of doubtful nature, as in the account in John 5:4 (which is not included in all versions). Sometimes they are referred to as messenger spirits and appearing in dreams and visions, other times appearing and interacting in physical form. An angel appeared to spring Peter out of prison and struck him on the side to

wake him up (Acts 12:1-18). Sometimes a carrier, a craft of some nature, is described. The events detailed in the book of Ezekiel, although almost always taken by Biblical commentators to be of purely visionary nature, are about as close to a primitive description of a ‘UFO’ type of craft as is possible to get.

The accounts of *the* (as opposed to *an*) angel of the Lord, known as theophany, are taken to be appearances of God the Son in pre-incarnate form; that is, before becoming one with the human form and being born as Jesus of Nazareth.

I will risk being presumptuous and suggest that accounts of fire coming down from “heaven” and consuming sacrifices and the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the vicinity (in this case called down by angelic ‘spotters’ appearing incognito as ordinary men and who agreed to spare the town of Zoar) were carried out from aerial or orbital craft at God’s directive. As I said in another chapter, employing ‘ordinary’ agents, means and devices at his discretion does not make God less than God. He doesn’t have to fire off a bolt from heaven like some Greek ‘god’ and simple is usually all it takes to get the job done.

Thousands of years of human history don’t amount to squat in the long term. Scripture indicates, the words of Jesus most clearly, that God the father has an event calendar drawn up for this little blue piece of the program; to clean things up, wrap things up and install major updates. He refers to angels as, among other things, harvesters and sorters of the inhabitants of the earth; escorting some to the next level and sending the rest to the recycle bin (just doing their job, dude). Some classes of angels may even be bots; those referred to as ‘destroyers’ may fall in this category.

The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, speaks of hostilities in the ‘heavens’, past and future, with our own planet (at least) involved. These are beyond cryptic and I am not going to try my hand at unraveling them. There are hints that angels of God and angels who followed Satan in his rebellion are in conflict and that some pretty bad enemies have been taken down and ‘imprisoned’. This planet and its near vicinity just might be in quarantine, off limits, in lockdown.

Some have suggested (or claimed) with a straight face that there are hidden UFO bases in remote areas of the planet, usually underwater. I have my doubts but, if we can’t locate an airliner that goes into the drink, how would we rule it out?

Angels appear and disappear a la Star Trek; they hide in plain sight (2 Kings 6:17). Much of what is said about them appeared mythical, impossible---until recently. We are in the very early stages of being able to understand and do what they have been said to do; particle beams, projection of matter, hologram technology, cloaking technology, other dimensions; even the possibility of time travel has been taken into serious consideration. To quote Arthur C. Clarke’s Third Law, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic”.

To quote one maxim of Murphy's Law, "nothing is ever as simple as it looks". There are other little understood aspects of reality out there and, since they can impact Christians along with everyone else, often in a hurtful way, I'll take them up in the next two chapters.

Bugs in the System

“Yesterday upon the stair

I met a man who wasn’t there.

He wasn’t there again today

I wish, I wish he’d go away”

From the poem *Antigonish* by William Hughes Means

I think the above lines are kind of neat because, about thirty years ago, in the very house in which I am writing this, I *did* meet a man upon the stairs that once led to the attic but had been converted to an upstairs apartment. Startled him, I did. Well, actually, it was a floating translucent “orb” (search it up) about the size of a soccer ball descending the stairs as I snatched open the stairway door. I took it for a man because a young man wearing pants but no shirt had been seen on several occasions in the upstairs apartment by other family members, and footsteps were heard from time to time when no one was up there. It was the footsteps that had led me to investigate. The teenagers were off at sleepovers. My pregnant again wife was asleep in our bed. No lights were on in the house, upstairs or down. I saw the orb and the orb “saw” me and took off at an angle through the stairway ceiling. I had pre-determined to order it out in Jesus’ name the next time it showed up, and I did so in a loud voice in the chance that it was still on the premises (like, right behind my back?) And that worked, sort of. No more visuals, no more footsteps. But stuff, big stuff, gets knocked over upstairs just often enough to be annoying or the ‘crash’ that sends us up there looking doesn’t show anything wrong (note: this seems to have disappeared since the upstairs apartment has been continuously occupied). Spoons (never the knives or forks) disappear to the point that it long ago became a family joke (‘Joe’ is taking the spoons again); we don’t buy the ‘good’ ones anymore. Then again, they just might have run off with the missing socks. So, do I think that we had/have a bona fide spirit of a deceased individual on our hands? I doubt it.

Nearly everyone has their own personal or family ghost stories, and I’ll share two more (those are all I have), way less benign, before getting into where I am going with this. The house that we lived in for fifteen years before moving here appeared to have a definite problem which I added to by being heavily involved in the occult and/or ‘New Age’ for the first few years (spoiler alert: don’t hold on to a lit firecracker and don’t get within ‘aggro range’ of the occult). A man in a blue work uniform was seen, once by me and twice by my wife. Shadow people (search it) were a common occurrence. Both of us experienced disturbing personality changes; me to the point of apparent ‘possession’. I’ll spare you the details. Neither of us was doing alcohol or drugs or had any history of psychological illness. Thankfully, our three older children, all born while

we lived there, were not affected. I turned back to Christ during this time and the personal manifestations went away, but not the shadow people or the reoccurring acrid smell of smoke when nothing was burning. Not knowing or understanding at the time how to deal with these things (our pastor advised us to sell the house and get out), we finally sold and left whatever it was behind. And, no, we didn't do the right thing and reveal to prospective buyers that there just might be a problem.

Before any of the above and shortly after being discharged from the Army at age twenty, I went fishing with two friends and their wives and kids. They had just jointly rented a small furnished frame house the week before. After the fishing trip we returned there and enjoyed a couple hours of conversation before I went home and they went to bed---or tried to. While I was still there, the three small boys were asleep on a double bed in an adjoining room, but kept falling off one after another. All appeared to be dreaming at once and tossing in their sleep, which I witnessed myself after one dad called me in to see. A final 'thump' revealed a child lying in a corner clear across the room. At that point, and not thinking much about it, I headed home.

The next day I went to visit the sister and brother-in-law of one of the new renters to find out that both families had showed up at their door in the middle of the night with tales of a serious 'haunting'. One wife had awoken to see her husband 'floating' a few inches above the bed and speaking in the voice of an old woman. He himself said that he was awake but could not move. When his wife screamed, he fell back on the bed. That event got everyone up. Cold spots were moving around the rooms in a warm Florida September night with no air conditioning. The dog was acting scared and 'nuts' and barking at something no one could see. At that point, they thought it wise to 'get out of Dodge'. The dog would not come to them, so they left it behind.

While I was listening to this tale from the sister and thinking to myself that they had let their imaginations run away with them, the two families were off looking for another house to rent. They caught up with me that afternoon and persuaded me to follow them to the first house and help them retrieve their belongings. Well, I went in and got the most important stuff at their direction while they stood outside in the yard. I observed nothing out of the ordinary. They would not set foot in the place in broad daylight, and this including two grown men (one an Army veteran) and one very frightened wife. Some stuff got left behind; the dog was never found. While we were still there, the wife met the mailman and got a change of address card. He told her that he had been on the route for several years and *no one* had stayed there more than a week or two except for one family who made it two months. The ones who had given him a reason for leaving, and not all did (he had gotten used to asking), told him that the house was haunted.

On the other hand, the house in which I grew up, a rambling two story that had started life as the carriage house and servants' quarters of a large estate in the late 1800's and had been added on to over the years was about the spookiest looking place you could imagine, but was haunted by nothing but the typical Florida bugs and an occasional mouse.

Interesting. Having had some first-hand ‘adventures’ along these lines led me to study the subject at some length from both Christian and secular perspectives. This was before the round of ‘ghost shows’ came out on television. I watched a few with a skeptical eye, as always, but they added little to what I had already absorbed in print. My *Skeptical Inquirer* goes about its bi-monthly debunking, typically choosing easily refuted examples to knock down.

A *somewhat* related experience happened to my mom when she was in her twenties and still living at home. One brother, ever off on an adventure, had signed on to a tramp steamer that was then in the Indian Ocean. This was in the nineteen-thirties with an occasional letter or postcard arriving way late the only means to keep in touch. Mom dreamed; in her dream she saw her brother lying in a bunk aboard ship. Bearded, emaciated, yellowish in color, and his arm in a cast, he appeared the picture of death. A stout, bearded middle-aged man in what appeared to be a ship’s officer uniform came in to see him with a serious look on his face and at this point Mom awoke. Over breakfast the next morning Mom shared the dream, as we tend to do, with her parents, sister and other brothers and the matter was soon forgotten.

Several months later, Mom’s brother arrived home, cleanly shaven and the picture of health, bringing souvenirs and tales of his adventures. Over breakfast he shared how he had grown a beard, broken his arm, contracted malaria and was sick to the degree that the ship’s doctor, fearing for his life, informed the captain who came to offer prayer and encouragement. The captain was the man Mom had seen in her dream. As he told of these things, the rest of the family turned pale. Somehow Mom, very much alive and asleep in her bed in Rutherford, New Jersey, had ‘travelled’ halfway around the world to a ship in the Indian Ocean. Or had she? Another hint that our reality is a lot more complicated than it appears and shares some similarities with what at this stage is embryonic virtual reality (VR).

To quote Bob Dylan in his *Ballad of a Thin Man*, “... something is happening here but you don’t know what it is, do you Mister Jones?” We are pretty much at an impasse at being able to unravel phenomenon of this nature, as far as our current technology and expertise goes and rare is the serious scientific investigator willing to risk her reputation and career chasing ‘spooks’ in an academic atmosphere largely hostile to any explanation other than that arising from various causes within the human body/brain/mind. No telescope, no planets; no microscope, no germs; no ‘ghost detectors’, no dice. Too bad, that, but in order for science to remain on course it *must* accept only that which can be proven and be ready to modify or change entirely that which it has held to be valid if new information arises. Speculation sometimes leads to new or updated information; most often not. Nonetheless, I will speculate.

The human body/brain/mind combo is capable of pulling plenty of stunts, with or without the help of ‘schrooms’ or other reality benders. When it comes to the bizarre or unusual, “seeing is believing” should not be the first explanatory choice on our list. I’ve placed a few easy to read books on the subject in the resource list that you may find informative and those are only the ones from my own library. I occasionally ‘see’ apparitions, sometimes of an alive or dead friend

or family member and sometimes of a total stranger, appear as I am in the early stages of sleep. A few months ago a particularly nasty looking old man popped up; I flipped him off and turned over. I know what those things are; a trick of the mind that occurs especially to old people (I am a great-grandfather) and nothing whatsoever to do with bona fide entities, but enough to send some faint souls screaming from the room.

An interesting type of phenomenon that has countless examples is a ghost, ghosts or a ghostly scene, confined to a locale, reappearing to a number of individuals over a period of time. Sometimes there have been photos, most turning out to be illusions or outright fakes but seemingly not all. Where two or more people are present, all may not 'see' something. An apparition may walk through a wall where a door used to be or ascend stairs that are no longer there. They rarely acknowledge or interact with witnesses. This has led some to speculate that reality-as-it-is is an advanced type of program and that manifestations of this nature are artifacts or 'bugs' in the system. A number of scientists, including Einstein and Kurt Godel, have suspected that our concept of time is an illusion, that the past may not be 'gone' in the manner customarily assumed, that it may overlap with the present on occasion and that it may even be possible to 'revisit' it.

But what of ghosts that *do* interact? Family members and friends have appeared to many at the time of their death or during a brief period thereafter; occasionally they may linger. Some bring messages, some seem confused, and some just appear. Other interactive manifestations *do* appear to be associated with dwellings and locales. Could this indicate life of some nature continuing in this realm beyond bodily death? From my Christian perspective and from what I have considered and dissected from personal experience and from what I have studied with an open and yet reasonably skeptical (not head-up-the-ass skeptical---sorry, it was called for) I feel that the answer is a tentative yes. Again, genuine science is not able to provide an answer at this point in time.

Some ghosts appear to be less than whole; fragments of a personality lost in the system, often fixated on some (usually troubling or traumatic) experience. They may be 'bugs', mini programs embedded and looping within the main program. Where do unresolved multiple personalities 'go' when the host dies?

The Bible has very little to say about ghosts. A medium reportedly called up the spirit of the Israelite judge and prophet Samuel at the request of King Saul with less than happy results (1 Samuel 28). After his resurrection, Jesus mentioned ghosts only to reassure his disciples that he was *not* one.

Demons are another matter entirely. The word *demon* has a superstitious, medieval, troll under the bridge sound to it that invites a roll of the eyes, a snicker and an incredulous shake of the head. The Bible doesn't specify what they are; only *that* they are and that they are rebels unrelentingly opposed to God. They are not mental and/or physical maladies although both may on occasion be associated. They are intelligent entities of some sort and appear to share the same diverse personalities as do humans and (I would suspect) intelligent off-world life forms; some

‘appear’ harmless or even helpful; others not so much. Some are vulgar, some dangerous and some even murderous. A Wiccan priest once told me that there were spirits about that could harm and a few that could even kill, and that without proper safeguards were best left well enough alone. That was coming from a Pagan perspective. He was serious and for those who insist on playing with fire I would suggest that you take his advice, and in addition I would implore you to turn your back on *anything* of an occult nature and turn to the Lord (this free advice coming from one that has had his ‘a-double-s’ singed).

The Bible makes it clear that even though Satan was defeated at the cross, he and his minions will continue to fight on until, after the return of Christ to this planet, they are put down once and for all. In the Second World War of the previous century the demonically driven empires of Japan and Nazi Germany were whipped long before the end came for them. Demons take the old adage to heart that “you’re not beaten when you lose; you’re beaten when you quit”. They do not like to be disembodied. Jesus indicated that when one loses its grip on an individual it will, like a flea on a dog, search out another host or sometimes return; so in that sense they may be said to be spiritual parasites.

It is thought that some demons may be ‘fallen angels’ who followed Satan in his rebellion. The sincere and devout Muhammad was deceived by a being masquerading as Gabriel, an archangel of God, given the Qur'an and thus was instituted the world class counterfeit that countless honest, believing souls have lived and died for. The Qur'an is not the word of the Creator and Muhammad was not his prophet. If he was being truthful, another ‘angel’ duped Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism and thus was paved another dead end road to nowhere. For Satan, the rule is ‘whatever works’ as long as it redirects devotion to him and away from the only true God and Creator of the cosmos.

The so-called spirit guides (those that are bona fide and not invented) of channelers are demons, no matter how ‘helpful’ they may appear. They often attach to a child and follow him or her through life unless driven out. Some follow family lines through generations. Pin them down and they will either disown Christ and Christianity outright or spin a convoluted yarn worthy of the best of the best fantasy writer in the genre. Passing themselves off as long dead Atlantean warriors, Egyptian sages, so called ‘Ascended Masters’ or whatever, they are cosmic-class dupers of the highest order. But, hey, if you are into this stuff don’t feel like I’m looking down my nose. As a new Christian and feeling disillusioned with God, I spent several years in the New Age and fell for all of this crap. Edgar Cayce, a sincere Christian, was possessed by a ‘helpful’ spirit that produced diagnoses and prescribed cures while its host was in a trance; these having a degree of accuracy. Having gotten its foot in the door, however, the demon soon began spilling its guts about the fabled continent of Atlantis, which was scheduled to ‘rise’ again in 1968, reincarnation and similar nonsense (which I took very seriously at the time). Being a Christian well versed in the Bible, Cayce was initially disturbed by these ‘revelations’, but was ultimately persuaded to accept them. Being a Christian does not make one immune to being taken advantage of.

Demons can and will pass themselves off as ‘angels of light’ and can slip through the cracks of charismatic churches embracing manifestations of tongues, prophecies, healings and the like. Pastors and elders of these congregations need to be especially observant.

It is easy to spot Satan at work in the demonically driven ‘dog soldiers’, the unholy warriors of ISIS, Al Qaeda, Taliban, Boko Haram and their ilk. They are only the latest extreme examples of the age-old rebellion against the creator of the cosmos and his children, and the seventy virgin paradise that some of them have been duped to think they are dying for will be a ‘reward’ beyond their worst nightmare. We’ll get to the fuzzy subjects of heaven and hell in another chapter; they may be hard to get your head around but, trust me, they are real.

So much for Satan’s headline grabbing shock troops. I tell you straight up that *any* world religion, ideology or cult group that does not have God (Father, Son and Spirit) at the absolute center is Satanic *although their followers are almost never consciously aware of the fact*. Away with pansified ‘political correctness’; Buddhism, Islamism, Hinduism, Communism, Wicca, tribal religion past and present, phony ‘gods and goddesses’, hate mongering extremist groups, black, white or green, including those who dare pass themselves off as Christian, New Age cults of any flavor, any pseudo-sophisticated, pseudo-scientific trick deck and (add your favorite illusion *here*) is not of God and will only leave the most sincere follower stranded in darkness on the wrong side of a broken bridge. For many, that is beyond sad. You can choose your friends but you cannot choose your family. What is an Islamist to do, whose father, grandfather, great grandfather on back for generations were all Muslims? Acts 17:30 indicates that God will overlook the times of ignorance, but now commands all who hear the truth to turn from past false beliefs and turn to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. But, just so you know, becoming a Christian does *not* make you and your loved ones immune from sickness, death, disaster, rape, disillusionment, demonic attack or anything else that plagues the human race as a whole. You are in a war zone for real---get used to it

Anything that leaves the mind and spirit vulnerable, including the misuse of alcohol and drugs; anything of an occult nature, including screwing around with a Ouija board (which even most occultists warn about); murder, including abortion; sexual promiscuity and perversion; pornography; child and/or animal abuse; involvement in false religion and cults and in-your-face rebellion against God is an open invitation to demonic intrusion. I have been guilty of some of these. Nonetheless, God offers forgiveness to you as he has me if you will renounce these things and the soul shriveling sin of unbelief and accept forgiveness through his Son. In the next chapter I’ll elaborate a bit on the illusive and deceptive belief in reincarnation, since many, including Christians, have entertained the possibility that it may be genuine.

Born again...again...again...again

“Play it again, Sam.”

The afternoon autumn sun was warm on Mia’s skin as the eight year old explored the light woods behind her grandparent’s house, subconsciously aware of where she was stepping with bare feet long conditioned to going without shoes. A shiny red apple was bouncing around the pocket of her gingham dress and she needed to find ‘just the right place’ to eat it.

She heard the stream before she saw it. Maybe she could find some nice pebbles to add to her collection. Hiking the dress up past her knees, Mia squatted in the stream and sifted through the smooth stones, finding a pretty blue hippopotamus and a yellow lion. The stream was narrow, clear as glass; she could see the pebbly bottom and the little school of zebra fish that fled as she waded across. The far bank was squishy---Mia liked squishy.

Most of the trees were alike, but Mia saw a different one, a big different one like she had never seen before, with branches close enough to the ground and bark rough enough for her fingers and toes to grasp---perfect for climbing. Soon she was twenty feet off the ground, sitting cross legged on a big limb and leaning back against the trunk. Now she could eat her apple.

Mia awoke suddenly, still in the tree. The sun was going down, a big scary purple sun that made everything look funny. A strong wind was blowing, pulling more leaves off of the trees. Now she was on the ground, running, afraid of the wind and the purple sun and in trouble too, for sure.

Mia snapped awake, heart pounding, momentarily not knowing where she was, but the surroundings pulled her back to reality. She was in her bedroom, in the bed she shared with her husband, in the house her family had lived in for eleven years; Chicago, where she had been born and raised, gone to school, got married, had kids, risen to the top of a multinational corporation.

Looking at her reflection in the bathroom mirror, she thought, “Who the hell are you?” Wandering into the kitchen, seventeen year old Kevin looked at her with suspicion. “You okay, Mom? You look kinda zoned out.” “Had a dream, Kevin---one crazy weird dream.”

Later that morning, at the desk in her executive office, she still felt zoned out. “Oh my God, it was just a dream, but wow!” Just a bizarre dream, but it had formed a memory in her mind as real as any other past experience and she would remember it for a long time. She had nothing in her life to hook it to. She was a big city kid. She had never run around barefoot, waded streams, climbed trees. Her grandparents, both sets, lived in Chicago. She was forty-seven, not eight.

Maybe she had dreamed a past life memory. Mia pondered the thought, but there were things too unreal to belong. Pebbles didn’t come in those shapes and colors. Surely, no woodsy stream

was *that* clear, with little zebra fish like the ones in the break room aquarium. And for double-damn sure, the sun *did* not, *could* not turn scary purple. She hated purple. If only that hadn't happened, she mused; if only she hadn't dozed off, she could have climbed down and explored some more before going back in plenty of time to avoid a spanking. She had been having fun---no worries, no deadlines, no pissy people to deal with. Mia sighed, then laughed; "If only."

If Mia is seeing a psychologist as part of her 'total health and well being' regimen, he or she may well find hidden significance in the dream. Mia's selection of the right tree and her climbing it could signify her climb to the top of the corporate ladder where she is enjoying the fruits (the apple) of her labors; the carefree barefoot freedom of childhood her desire to be free of the pressures of her life; the exploration and the wistful desire even later at work to climb down and continue on, the desire to try new things; the pebbles that she collected could also figure into that as additions to her other successes; the scary purple sun and wind and the punishment that she knew awaited her would signify her fear of trying and failing. In other words, Mia is conflicted. Recommendations and continued visits would follow.

On the other hand, a therapist with New Age leanings may well put a different spin on it and if she or he embraces hypnotic 'past life regression' some serious strangeness comparable to chasing a will-o'-the-wisp through a midnight swamp is likely to ensue; all the more so if entities claiming to be 'spirit guides' pop up. How could Mia, who couldn't walk to the mailbox without wincing over stepping on a small stick *experience* walking unconcernedly through woods and climbing a tree? Like many vivid dreams, she felt as if she had 'been' there as surely as she had been in a two-hour meeting the day before. Could she have fallen from the tree in another life, left her broken body and run off in spirit form like the murdered girl in *The Lovely Bones*? Well, no, because I made her up for illustration purposes but there are plenty of strange and similar experiences out there and with the explosion of the New Age into the Western world during the last third of the last century a lot of people, including many Christians, have entertained the thought, "could I have lived before?"

I became a Christian while serving stateside in the U.S. Army, and soon thereafter was assigned to a unit in Germany. After being there for a few weeks my father died suddenly and I soon found myself back in the states and out of the service, having received a hardship discharge in order to care for my mother who was unable to work and had no other means of support. Meanwhile, my fiancé had met someone more suitable and broke the engagement (in retrospect that turned out very well for me and I hope that it did for her). These two events coming back to back left me heartbroken and disillusioned. I knew next to nothing about God other than my mom's bedtime prayers, Sunday school and church as a child, and public school prayer, lessons and presentations before the Supreme Court fixed all that. The New Age was coming in big time, along with the hippies and I embraced both (minus the drugs), pulling my new girlfriend/wife out of her church and along with me. I still believed in God; just not the Christian version of God.

I read everything that I could on the occult, including reincarnation. I charted horoscopes, tried my hand at automatic writing, used a pendulum for divination and scared the crap out of my wife and a friend with a demonstration of ESP. While the wife, an artist, sketched a picture, I lay in the next room and tried to pick up and draw what she was drawing. I only 'saw' and drew shapes, but they turned out to be the shapes of everything that she drew. In that unhealthy frame of mind, we moved into the second house described in the previous chapter and within a few months I had become seriously 'possessed', which lasted until several years later I renounced all aspects of the occult and turned back to Christ.

During these years I had a very vivid dream in which, during the closing months of World War Two, I found myself to be a young Luftwaffe pilot killed in an accident on the ground; run down by an out-of-control Me-109 whose wounded pilot had landed and was attempting to take off to rejoin the action. I was hit by the propeller and can still remember the 'smack'---no pain, just sudden shock and I awoke. Mind you, my dad served in the United States Army Air Force with a B-17 heavy bomber group during this era and I was very proud of him. Well! I pieced that together with a few personal characteristics and things from my childhood (like turning on the lamp to make sure that the box fan was not coming at me in the dark, building airplane models and volunteering to play the German in our childhood war games) and convinced myself that this was indeed how I had come to an untimely end in my 'past life'. I told this tale to my family and a number of others.

So, could there be any truth to it? Could God have had mercy on a young man, raised in Nazi Germany and no doubt indoctrinated in the Hitler Youth, who died before having an opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? Honestly, I don't know and have no way of knowing until I meet him face to face. I *do* know this, that God can do whatever he wants to whomever he wants and that no power in heaven or earth can prevent him. But there are many other possible explanations for incidents of this nature and, if I were you, I would not reject Christ and bet my eternal destiny on coming back around for another go at it.

Reincarnation is *not* taught in either the Old Testament or New Testament, although the concept was known during these times from contact with surrounding cultures and taken up by various sects and cults. What *was* taught was life followed by death and judgment. The Old Testament concept of an afterlife was a shadow existence in the underworld, or Sheol, although there are some hints of resurrection. The New Testament teaches resurrection, paradise and heaven with God for the believer and hell for the unbeliever. Altogether, the concepts are very sketchy (at least to those of us still breathing air) and continue to be open to theory and debate amongst Christians.

The account of Jesus' healing of a man born blind in John 9 has the disciples asking whether the man or his parents sinned to cause his unfortunate condition. Some Jewish theory considered whether a child could sin while in the womb. Jesus dismissed these suggestions and stated that his condition and healing were for the glory of God. When Jesus asked the disciples who people

thought he was, they replied that some thought John the Baptist, some Elijah or one of the prophets. Of course John the Baptist was only recently dead while Elijah had been taken up by “angels” and his subsequent state or whereabouts were unknown. These accounts do *not* prove reincarnation but do indicate that the concept was known.

A book that I read in preparation for this chapter (I will not recommend it) involves a noted psychotherapist coming to believe in the reality of a long convoluted series of past lifetimes, some male, some female, working out ‘karma’ with the aid of spirit guides and ascended masters and all speaking through a hypnotized young woman. This patient came to him for help, and after ninety-three alleged past lifetimes was initially sleeping in her closet and remained quite amoral at the conclusion of many therapy sessions; so much for the benefits of ‘karma’. The ‘enlightened’ teaching of these ascended masters, *read demons with an agenda*, amounted to (pardon me) quite the crock of shit. It is the same old lie, that one could attain to ‘Godhood’, that Satan used to grief Adam and Eve.

Spirit possession most likely accounts for the above case and many like it. Demons can travel from host to host and age to age picking up a history of memories along the way. Some ghosts may try to inhabit another body and that may well be what I left myself open to when living in a haunted house. Sensitives can seemingly pick up past events from different locations. If our understanding of time is incomplete, as some scientists suspect, the past may still exist in some form and be accessible under certain conditions. Hypnotic regression is notorious for producing false memories, especially if led on by a quack practitioner and all the more so when “spirit guides” invite themselves to the party. Movies, novels, games, daydreams and actual current-life events weave themselves into our ordinary dreams and under hypnosis can do likewise. A gullible medium or dream hypnotist (neither of whom I would ever consult) could conceivably connect my “memory” of the imaginary Mia with long ago watched episodes of *Little House on the Prairie* and have me telling of a life as a little girl in the 1870s. Oh and BTW, one of my modded *Skyrim* characters is a raggedy little barefoot street urchin, pickpocket and thief. She steals apples among other things and of course I have given her a name---it’s not Mia.

The belief in bodily rebirth/redeath arises in many forms from prehistoric times, but the ones commonly taught and practiced today are variations of Indian religions (Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism) and it is these, along with Celtic, Norse and others that are embraced, usually in a light, hobbyistic, cop out kind of way, by the New Age. They are all religions of ‘works’ and the polar opposite of Christianity; if one is true, the other is necessarily false. There are more than twice as many people living in the world today than when I was born in 1947 but proponents of the doctrine have devised theories to try and account for the exponentially increasing number of souls (NPCs anyone?). Religions teaching a path of reincarnation look inward rather than upward and, like a dog chasing its tail, go nowhere. The history of India is a classic example.

There is an additional danger to buying into this mindset. For those raised on video games, especially those of the role playing genre, a created character (genuine alter-egos for some who are seriously invested) can be erased and a new one made. A young New Age gamer who doesn't like what she sees in the mirror and whose boyfriend just dumped her might conclude that life sucks and decide to hit "delete" in hopes of rolling up a better self.

Spoiler alert: don't die without Christ---no duping, you'll be sorry.

Nightfall

“And the shadow of the day
Will embrace the world in gray
And the sun will set for you”

Linkin Park, *Shadow of the Day*

Breaking news: Christians not to experience afterlife! You read that right, Sport; everyone else *will* pass away and experience an afterlife happening of some nature but not Christians. For them it's a whole new game, literally, because they are going to leave the tutorial (in game terminology) behind, level up and start to experience what will be a never-ending story; a never-boring adventure in bodies designed to never wear out, never get sick or hurt and never die. Humanity raised to the highest power, sharing the same type of body that Jesus Christ himself took on upon reunion with his Father.

Christian theologians have produced different takes on the above and come to differing conclusions as to exactly how and when this will fall into place, but all arrive at the same future state as being eternity with God. This was not an afterthought on God's part, to bring children into being and share an eternal loving relationship with them, but planned from before the beginning. This was what Adam and Eve were designed for and what they and their descendants would have experienced if they had not fallen in with a rebel leader. Ultimately, God through Christ paid a heavy personal price to override that bad decision and its consequences. The *free* (why pay more?) gift of eternal life through Christ is offered to all who will accept it. It's for you! Bow the knee to God and take it!

Christians are sold on an ultimate eternal state, but differ considerably on the details. Most hold to a physical resurrection of the dead; both those blessed to spend forever with God and those condemned to a hell of some nature. Then opinions go in every direction. Many find that the Bible teaches a spiritual existence with God, for those who are his, after death of the physical body and while awaiting resurrection at the return of Christ to this realm. I am in this camp. Other sincere believers feel that the deceased individual is ‘asleep’ or even passes out of existence awaiting resurrection. Ever been out cold under general anesthesia? The surgical team could be playing poker on your chest during their coffee break and you would never know about it unless somebody squealed. Either way, the Christian is good to go.

For those who think that there *is* no soul or spirit incorporated in the human body, and not all are atheists, the end result of life with God would still be a reality. Got nuked? Not a problem! Since God holds the precise pattern of all that Jane Doe ever was, he can recreate her and modify her

on the fly; sort of like importing a favorite character into the latest version of a game only way better. Jesus made it plain that even the hairs of our heads are numbered (Mathew 10:30, Luke 12:7) and he wasn't joking. And, BTW, if he chooses to recreate the puppy that died in Jane's arms when she was five years old there is nothing to stop him---just so you know.

What does an immortal resurrection body look like? We don't know. The Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 15 states that it is not made of flesh and blood. The Apostle John, Jesus' closest disciple, in First John 3:2, doesn't know but states that, at the return of Christ, Christians will be like him and see him as he is. Jesus himself said that they would be like the angels (Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, Luke 20:35, 36). The idea that we may not look like we do now gets some Christians bummed out; so does the stated fact that sexual expression will not even be a possibility in the eternal, redesigned body. That's okay; if you don't miss playing in your crib at one year of age, you won't miss this life either once you level up.

The Bible states, but not in explicit terms, that there will be gradations of blessings, rewards, duties and opportunities in heaven (and, I hope, throughout the cosmos) for God's sons and daughters, based on what they did on earth with their free gift of salvation and adoption. Mine just might involve a mop and broom but I'll take it. Many Christians will suffer loss for their failure to perform but they too will be saved (First Corinthians 3:10-15 for one example).

The world that we find ourselves in is seriously messed up. Its physical and spiritual realms are twisted beyond recognition, but it's the best that most will ever see. It's a halfway house; the closest that the unbeliever will ever get to heaven and the closest that the believer will ever get to hell. For those dying without being bonded with Christ, earthly existence is "a long day's journey into night" like the old bumper sticker philosophy ("life's a bitch and then you die") but for those bought and paid for by him it is "a long nights journey into day."

If you lose your body, where will you live? There are some scientifically-minded speculators who feel that an artificial immortality may soon be achievable through a total brain scan of a soon-to-be-deceased individual followed by an upload of the data into a "copy" (read SIM) in an online world and/or into a robotic entity. Such a copy need not look like the original in appearance or even be of the same sex. Interesting and probably doable, but what would be the outcome? A zombie. Not a brain-eating sci-fi zombie, but an AI entity lacking a soul but that thinks that it is real, like the clueless inhabitants of Tad Williams' classic *Otherland* series. And what happens when Mister Roboto gets offed by a truck or the server gets hacked by terrorists? Now we're talking about *real* identity theft; no pay, no play! But, the results could be darker still; what if the brain is merely an interface between lower and higher dimensional reality? What might a soulless high intelligence be capable of? Anyway, God has already perfected the concept and has you covered so whether the bona fide coming reality is good for you or not exactly what you had in mind is still, for the presently uncommitted, a valid choice. Sad to think that your SIM might be enjoying a fine wine after sex on satin sheets while the *real* you is wandering the wastelands where useless souls go to 'live'. Long live the dead!

I said in the introduction that we would get into NDEs (near death experiences) and here we are. NDEs were hot in Christian publishing for awhile, like angels were before that, but not so much anymore since one popular book that had everyone excited turned out to be pure fiction. The concept is nothing new and not by any means restricted to Christians. Even the Apostle Paul may have had one, possibly when he was stoned by his enemies and left for dead (2 Corinthians 12: 1-4, Acts 14: 19, 20).

I've talked with a number of people, including Christians, who 'died' and were then resuscitated, but none that claimed to have experienced a NDE. On the other hand, a former fellow worker had been thrown from his convertible as a teenager and found himself about twenty feet above the scene; watching a front wheel of the upside-down vehicle spin and seeing his unconscious body lying on the ground. He felt fine and at peace until an old man showed up and told him that he could not stay where he was. Immediately, he awoke in his body, cut and bruised and feeling awful but otherwise all right. Later, while serving with the Marines in Vietnam he had some close calls but said that he never feared death after the accident experience. The old man who appeared to him turned out to be his deceased grandfather whom he had never met or even seen a picture of until his mom produced one (his mom and grandfather had been estranged).

The incident described above involves a so-called out-of-body experience and can occur under other circumstances apart from those in which the individual has been certified as being clinically dead and then revived. The out-of-body experiences of some emergency room or surgery suite patients, in which they see and hear what is going on around them or even in another location and view their bodies from above or to the side have been reported on numerous occasions. These experiences can also occur under other conditions, such as in dreams (like what happened to my mom as described in another chapter) or in trance states. Sometime they just 'happen'. And for some they lead to an experience of another realm taken to be heaven or even hell.

Some people report being drawn into a light, others pulled at high speed through a tunnel (maybe a wormhole---just guessing). Those heading to the 'right place' are sometimes accompanied by angels. The described experiences usually have a similarity to them but there are numerous differences as well. No two seem exactly alike. Dead friends and relatives appear as a welcoming committee, including some never met in life; there is a wall with a gate---sometimes you can go in, sometimes not (it's not your time yet); sometimes Jesus shows up. There may be animals, angels, grass, flowers, fountains, beautiful colors, music including celestial choirs, a vision of God's throne, other neat stuff. Super. But just as you are recovering from the initial shock and starting to enjoy it you are told that you can't stay and bingo, you're back in the body and probably not a happy camper.

So, have those returning to tell the tale really experienced heaven? Maybe. Maybe they experienced 'paradise', a sort of pre-heaven concept---or maybe heaven and paradise are the same? Some have claimed to visit heaven short of dying while others have seriously been pronounced dead. Either way, they are not 'dead like Fred' because Fred is *not* coming back. So a group is

there to meet and greet, but where is everyone else? It would seem with Christians dying in droves worldwide 24/7 that there would be a steady stream passing through the gate, but no.

Out-of-body experiences in the earthly realm can often be verified by collaborating evidence; heavenly visits, not so much. One child claimed to have met a little girl and was told that she was his older sister who was miscarried and whom he had known nothing about, at least consciously. That was touching and, considering all the children who never come to birth because of miscarriage or abortion, I very much hope is true. But hoping is not validation.

What to make of these experiences? The basic scientific theory, not holding to the so-called ‘supernatural’, is that they are purely mental constructs built, like vivid dreams, from hopes, fears and memories of all sorts, either from real life, stories, games, films and so forth. Another is that the individual actually had an experience of some nature but, upon awakening, the brain kicks in and reworks the data.

My own guess is that these individuals *may* be experiencing what is known in game terminology as an *instance*; that is, a scenario prepared just for them. I monked for a lot of PUGs (pick-up groups) in the original *Guild Wars* and, once the party was assembled and things hashed over, the leader would start the mission. Other groups may be playing the same scenario at the same time but we would not see them and they would not see us. Just a thought.

Now for the bad stuff. What about hell and who gets to go there? ISIS thugs who scream “God is great!” while cutting off the head of a crying ten year old in front of her parents? Abortionists who pull arms and legs off tiny, living babies like a twisted little boy who pulls the wings from butterflies? Yeah, those are high on my list of candidates, but what of the kind-hearted little old lady who professes atheism? The devout Muslim who wouldn’t harm a fly? What of those who have lived and died and never heard of Jesus Christ, which would include the myriad of our own ancestors? Do the math; you have two biological parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents (keep going). Pretty soon they are all pagans without a doubt and guess what? Had a *single* one been cut from the deck before passing on the genetic code then you, Sister Christian, would not be here---period.

Truthfully, it is not up to me—or you. The deluded killer may yet turn and be saved. God may somehow provide a way for those who never heard to accept or reject the sacrificial death of his Son on their behalf. But make no mistake; anyone who hears and then turns away is heading for some serious trouble. A hardening sets in, sometimes fast, sometimes slow until the door of opportunity is shut and locked. It is the Christian’s responsibility to show and tell, warn and pray, but each soul will stand or fall based on his or her own ownage or disownage of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The Devil can’t drag you to hell. He has no power or authority there. The deranged one who thought to usurp at least a portion of God’s realm and rule there rather than serve his Creator and Master is not now in hell and does *not* want to go there nor do his demonic minions. The Bible

refers to hell as an eternal fire prepared specifically for him and for those (angels, humans or off-worlders) that choose to follow him. Jesus, more than anyone else in the New Testament, spoke of it as did those personally instructed by him.

But, as ideas and opinions of heaven are all over the map, so are those of hell. One imaginative speculator theorized that a black hole could fit the description of hell or the way in (inescapable darkness; time slows to a ‘stop’; ultimate heat and pressure and possibly entrance to another realm). Sweet dreams, playa!

Many, if not most, Christians are disturbed about the medieval picture of fire and brimstone. I’m not comfortable with it. But, frankly, that picture is a pretty good representation of what the Bible actually says. It’s kind of hard to water it down, no pun intended. But do all *really* share the same degree of ‘reward’? Will good old Uncle Joe, who just couldn’t quite believe in Christ before that fatal heart attack be standing next to Hitler? What about uber-great-grandpa Ooog-loog out on the hunt circa 10,000 BC, who turned left when the mammoth turned right?

Is hell presently open or closed? Are the souls of those who won’t be in heaven there? In some temporary holding place? Will the worst of the worst burn forever and others just be deleted from the ‘server’? Are there other realms of sorrow and despair that go on forever or maybe fade away? Could there possibly be ‘children of the Devil’, human in appearance only? Could there be NPCs (non-player characters), human in appearance only? These ideas and more have been tossed out there and not just by fantasy and sci-fi writers.

I’ll leave it like this. Heaven is real. Hell is real. Whether we understand them or not. God is all powerful and can do whatever he likes whether we like it or not. Opinions other than his don’t count. It’s his cosmos. God is just and can be counted on to act justly. You have an opportunity. Don’t blow it.

End Game

“A wizard is never late, Frodo Baggins. Nor is he early. He arrives precisely when he means to.”

Gandalf, *Lord of the Rings (film)*

Wherever you look people are making predictions but that is nothing new; it has been going on from way before recorded history. They roll the bones, they pop the shrooms, they run the program. They all have one thing in common; they almost always flop. Financial insiders predicting collapse of the world economy, usually so they can offer you some gold; conspiracy theorists warning of a government takeover of the country inspired by a shadowy ‘elite’; doomsday pronouncers “sitting in the back room, waiting for the big boom” in the form of a global cataclysm. Astrologers tend to fare about as well.

Christians have been just as guilty. They want Christ to come, beam up the ‘elect’, give Satan and his peeps, human and otherwise, what they’ve got coming to them and make this cluster frap of a planet into what it ought to be. I want that too. Read the Bible and you will see that the early Christians, including Paul, expected Christ to return at any time, possibly in their own lifetimes, and so it has been for the past two thousand years. Every generation has looked at unfolding events, suspected certain individuals as being the ‘Antichrist’ and arrived at its own assortment of upcoming scenarios.

I’m not going there. Jesus indicated that he would indeed return to claim his own and to set things right but that not even he knew the day or hour that his Father had set by his own authority. Therefore, he instructed his followers to get ready and keep ready; good advice, because their own earthly ends would indeed come and for many it would come suddenly.

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, is a classic example of *apocalyptic* genre common in its day and written entirely in the symbolic. The clear statement that it *is* symbolic is given in chapter one, verse twenty and yet many Christians interpret it literally. Several respected Christian leaders have made fools of themselves and the faith by claiming that Christ is going to literally come riding out of heaven on a white horse and then blamed the skeptics for laughing at them. Chapters 1-3 describe actual churches and historical events but from that point on interpretation tends to go off the rails. Christians have seen events unfolding in their own day, compared them to the symbolism and decided that they were living in the ‘last days’ while the centuries roll right along.

Yet, there are a couple of described happenings that would not have been realistically possible until recently and that are growing more possible by the day; one being the means to totally control an individual’s ability to buy, sell and live his/her life (Revelation13:11-18) and the other being the worldwide ability to witness an event currently taking place anywhere in the world

(Revelation 11: 7-10). Without today's technology it is difficult to see how these things could take place, but don't forget that this would even more describe *tomorrow's* technology. The scenario could play out either in the near or far distant future.

As for the future of the United States of America, it had everything going for it, beyond what any nation had ever received but chose to spit in God's face, flip him the bird and laugh about it. If there was ever a self-centered nation, it is America. It drives God and Christianity from the public sphere and seeks to restrict Christians from upholding God's standards. Like ancient Greece and Rome, it has embraced the collective morals of a dog. It floats cluelessly and shamelessly down the sewer along with the turds and condoms and lifts itself up as the example that it thinks the rest of the world should emulate. Some example!

'Racial' discrimination and hatred has returned with a vengeance after it had appeared that Dr. Martin Luther King's dream was in the process of becoming a reality, and this in spite of the Bible's stating and science's proving that the concept of race exists only in our hearts and minds and not in our skin or other so-called 'racial' characteristics.

Climate change. There are alarmists out there but I'm not one. I'm not blind either. I know global warming and cooling have come and gone over the ages long before humans came on the scene. I know that we are not responsible for everything that goes wrong, but---we *are* responsible for a good bit of it. There is such a thing as a 'tipping point' where things can go south in a hurry. We are fooling around with nature, with chemistry, with genetic engineering, in ways that we barely understand if at all and that can and will bite us if given half a chance. The old scientific cliché is true, that "if something *can* be done, it *will* be done."

The Bible warns repeatedly that the shedding of innocent blood pollutes the land, yet America has defiled its land from east to west, north to south with the blood of millions of innocent unborn girls and boys; not only giving them into the hands of 'legal' murderers (some who actually claim to be Christians) but into the hands of ghouls who 'harvest' their remains for research and profit. All too often even the memory of these little ones is washed away like tears in the rain but there is One who does not forget. The unborn are sacrificed daily upon the altar of 'reproductive freedom' as in ancient times unwanted newborns were often sacrificed on the altars of pagan gods. Those whose duty it has been to set the standard and to uphold the right have sold them out (you know who you are), from the president on down the political line, the supreme and lower courts, the scientific, medical and business communities and, sadly, even churches and denominations. All alike have innocent blood on their hands and none of their lame excuses will wash it away. We have proven ourselves no better in this regard than Nazi Germany. This is not to deny that there are *many* sad and difficult decisions to be made along these lines; nonetheless, murder is as God sees it, not as fallen and corrupt humanity sees it. He is the *only* judge that counts and he has made it clear that no *unrepentant* murderer has any place in his eternal kingdom. The operative word here is *unrepentant*. I know a number of brothers and sisters in Christ who have

been guilty of the crime of abortion and who have turned to God in sorrow and repentance and been forgiven.

The Bible makes it clear that when an individual or nation continues to turn the back on God that he will ultimately turn his back on them. America is running on fumes. Slowly but surely, God is removing the wall of protection that he placed around this country. The nation that once fought and defeated two powerful enemies at the same time can no longer claim victory over lesser nations and ragtag groups of terrorists. Our government has totally lost the confidence and respect of the populace. Jobs are evaporating. Families are falling apart. Churches are emptying out. The education establishment is failing our children who continue to fall behind those of other nations in academic excellence.

The one remaining thing that may be keeping America afloat is our military support of the nation of Israel, and this may well have been God's design from the beginning. I'll go out on the limb here and say that if we ever turn our backs on Israel that it may be 'game over' for us. Trust me, if Israel finds itself surrounded and helpless before enemies bent on its destruction, God *will* intervene and Christ himself *will* return to this planet. Armageddon is *not* a fairy tale.

The many, many games, films and novels with a sci-fi, end time base that have gripped the public's imagination lately fall like a shadow across the land. It is almost as if the population, with a subconscious sense of dread, expects something to happen.

Earth is only one little planet among many in a vast cosmos, yet its creator cares about it and loves its inhabitants enough to walk among them and give his life for them. Whether Satan's rebellion started here or elsewhere amongst the stars, it is here that he is driven to ground, makes his last stand and meets his end. The cancer, the virus, the malware will be eradicated from the system, God will be all in all, and the heavens will be at peace.

More Than an Avatar

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." *John 14:9 NIV*

You're not going to be around here long, Sport, so who and what do you want to pin your hopes on? Spoiler alert: Here are a few non-starters.

Not the false "prophet" who, along with his followers, rampaged across the Middle East, North Africa and Southern Europe, murdering, raping, and enslaving the populace and who hold these and other regions in thrall to this day.

Not the tail chasing, self absorbed path to "enlightenment" offered up by the gurus of Hinduism and Buddhism that has left countries and regions under its spell in darkness, ignorance and poverty.

Not the "old gods and goddesses" of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas who were as phony as their counterparts in your favorite video game but, made to sing and dance by their demonic puppet masters and the corrupted minds of their followers, reveled in lustful fertility rites and human sacrifice.

Not the shroom poppers, acid droppers, tarot casters, spell casters, crystal ball gazers, palm readers, psychics, channelers, astrologers, science fiction cultists and all of their various and sundry peeps tripping gaily along in the wrong direction after the pied piper of delusion.

Not the myopic masters of communism who can't see past the ends of their foggy glasses but whose robotic "vision" holds billions of poor thralls in its icy, iron grip.

Not the know-it-alls of scientism who spin speculation into "assured fact".

Did I leave anybody out? Sorry.

Who then? Why, the One all others love to hate, of course!

The great stumbling block, for all world views outside of Christianity, is how an infant born in the long ago Middle East could possibly be equal to God; indeed to be God in the flesh.

Let me reiterate what I related earlier in the book. God is an eternally existent three part unity of personhood---Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thusly identified so that our puny minds can get a handle on it. This is what it takes to create and sustain a cosmos. The cosmos and everything in it is not part of God. It is his creation and he is not dependent on it in any manner, shape or form. He could will it out of existence in a heartbeat and still remain. We are creatures. You and I may be blessed to be adopted by God as his children but we will never attain godhood.

As Jesus taught, "God is Spirit" (John 4:24), and through his Holy Spirit is totally and eternally in touch with every aspect of his creation. Since God the Father does not have a physical form and since the entire creation exists within his being (Acts 17:27-28), no one has ever "seen" him as he is (John 1:18). Visible manifestations of God in the Old Testament, as in his appearance to Abraham, Moses and others, and not encounters with angel servants, are known as theophanies or Christophanies. I'll chance it and call them avatars. Most assuredly, God is not a burning bush (Exodus 3) nor is he contained within one, but that is how he got the attention of and communicated to Moses on that particular occasion.

On the other hand, God the Son existed with the Father and Spirit from eternity in incorporeal form. It was he, in conjunction with the Father and Spirit, who created the cosmos to begin with and who, at a predetermined time and place in history, took upon himself human form within the womb of a teenage virgin. He lived, walked and taught among us, was crucified, died, was buried and rose again in order to quell a rebellion and to redeem not only a fallen race but a fallen creation.

The Old Testament, now referred to as the First Testament by some, has many prophesies and references concerning the first and second coming of the Messiah, the Christ. To Christians, he is Jesus of Nazareth, the very Son of God. Orthodox Jews reject this identification and the witness of the New Testament. Muslims regard Jesus as a prophet, but totally reject the New Testament witness to his deity.

Many modern "scholars", and I use the term loosely, have declared that Jesus never claimed to be the second person of the Godhead appearing in the flesh. That is pure bunk. Below is a list of testimonies from the New Testament, which, in its entirety, declares Jesus to be the eternal Son of God and coequal with the Father.

New Testament Quotes

Matthew 1:18-25 "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). (Isaiah 7:14)

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus".

Matthew 3:13-17 "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Matthew 10:32-33 "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will also disown before my Father in heaven."

Matthew 11:25-27 "At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Matthew 16:13-17, 20 "When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

"Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah." (note: this was because the time was not yet right. See also Mark 8:27-30).

Matthew 16:27 (Jesus speaking of himself, using the title Son of Man, since from his incarnation he was fully human as well as fully deity as the Son of God). "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done."

Matthew 17:1-9 "After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face

shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters---one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Matthew 17:22-23 "When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." And the disciples were filled with grief."

Matthew 20:17-19 "Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the twelve aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

Matthew 24:27, 30, 44 (Jesus addressing his disciples) "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory."

"So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Matthew 25:31-33 (From Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."

Matthew 26:39,42, 53-54 (From Jesus' words in the garden of Gethsemane) "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

"Do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must happen in this way?"

Matthew 26:63, 64 (Jesus answers the high priest in the affirmative) The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." "You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Matthew 27:54 (At the site of crucifixion) When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Matthew 28:16-20 (The final verses of Matthew, known as The Great Commission) Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Mark 1:1 "The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God."

Mark 1:9-11 "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 1:23-24 "Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--- the Holy One of God!"

Mark 2:5-12 (see also Luke 5:17-28) "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up,

take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Mark 2:27-28 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Mark 3:11-12 "Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him."

Mark 5:6-8 "When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

Mark 8:38 "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Mark 9:2-9 "After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us pit up three shelters---one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.) Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead."

Mark 9:30-32 "They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it."

Mark 9:36-37 "He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Mark 10:32-34 "They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

Mark 12:35-37a "While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

" 'The Lord said to my Lord;
"Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.' "(Psalm 110:1)
David himself calls him 'Lord.'
How then can he be his son?"

Mark 13:26-27, 32 (Jesus referring to the time of his return) "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens."

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Mark 14:61b-62 "Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Mark 15:33-38 (note: these verses are often seriously misunderstood as implying that the Father has turned his back on his Son as he carries the sin of the world on the cross. This is not the meaning. Jesus is quoting the first verse of Psalm 22, written by David hundreds of years prior. The psalm is prophecy, not only declaring exactly what is taking place at the cross, but ending in total victory).

"At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" (which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?).

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Luke 1:26-38 "In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendent of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word of God will ever fail."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her."

Luke 2:8-14 "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

Luke 2:23-32 "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,

which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light of revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

Luke 3:21-22 "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

Luke 4:33-34 "In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an impure spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, "Go away! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are---the Holy One of God!"

"Be quiet!" Jesus said sternly. "Come out of him!" Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him."

Luke 4:40-41 "At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.

Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah."

Luke 9:28-36 "About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters---one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen."

Luke 10:16 (Jesus addressing his disciples) "Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me."

Luke 10:21-22 "At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do."

All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

Luke 18:31-34 "Jesus took the twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about."

Luke 20:41-44 "Then Jesus said to them, "Why is it said that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself declares in the Book of Psalms;

" 'The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet." '

David calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"

Luke 22:66-71 "At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them. "If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us."

Jesus answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"

He replied, "You say that I am."

Then they said, "Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips."

Luke 23:44-46 "It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he said this, he breathed his last."

John 1:1-18 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John (note: referring to John the Baptist). He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God---children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ") (note: John the Baptist was three months older than Jesus). Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God (note: referring to the Father), but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."

John 3:12-18 (From Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus) "I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven---the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

John 3:31-36 "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

John 4:34 "My food", said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."

John 5:16-30 "So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

"Very truly I tell you; whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of man.

"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out---those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."

John 5:36-47 "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish---the very works that I am doing---testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

"I do not accept glory from human beings, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me. If someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

"But do not think that I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

John 6:28-29 "Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the work God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

John 6: 37-40 "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

John 6:44, 46, 57 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day"

"No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father."

"Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."

John 7:14-17 "Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?"

Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own."

John 7:28-29 (Jesus speaking) "I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."

John 7:33-34 "Jesus said, "I am with you for only a short time, and then I am going to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am you cannot come."

John 8:12-19 "When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

Then they asked him, "Where is your father?"

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

John 8:42 "Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come here on my own; God sent me."

John 8:54-58 "Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, who you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

"You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am." (note: "I am" was the name God called himself when meeting Moses at the burning bush---Exodus 3:13, 14).

John 10:14-18 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me---just as the Father knows me and I know the Father---and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life---only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

John 10:22-42 "Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one"

Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"

"We are not stoning you for good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

Jesus answered them, "It is not written in your Law, 'I have said you are "gods"? If he called them 'gods', to whom the word of God came---and scripture cannot be set aside---what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father." Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp."

John 11:40-44 (From the account of Jesus restoring life to a man dead four days).

"Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."

John 12:44-46, 49-50 "Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

"For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

John 13:20, 31-32 "Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."

When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself and will glorify him at once."

John 14:1-11 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

Phillip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Phillip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves."

John 14:23-31a "Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

"You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world (note: Satan) is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me."

John 15:15 "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

John 15:23, 24 "Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father."

John 15:26, 27 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father---the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father---he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."

John 16:12-15 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

John 16:27, 28 "No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father"

John 17:1-25 After Jesus had said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life; that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no

longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.

"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am not of the world. My prayer is not that you would take them out of the world but that you would protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one---I in them and you in me---so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

John 18:10-11 "Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

John 19:6-7 "As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!"

But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

The Jewish leaders insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

John 20:16-17 "Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (Which means "Teacher")?

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

John 20:21 "Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

John 20:30-31 "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Acts 1:1-11 "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

Acts 2:22-24, 31-36 "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

"Seeing what was to come, he (note: David) spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet."

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

Acts 7:54-56 "When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 9:19b-22 "Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah."

Acts 10:34-43 "Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached---how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen---by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one who God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Acts 17:1-4 "When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women."

Acts 17:29-31 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone---an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day

when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

Acts 18:27-28 "When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah."

Acts 22:6-16 "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

" 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked.

" 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

" 'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.

" 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

'A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly regarded by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

"Then he said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

Acts 26:22-23 "But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen--that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

Acts 28:23-24 (Paul in Rome) "They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe."

Romans 1:1-4 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God--the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit

of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."

Romans 3:21-26 "But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came through Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood---to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

Romans 4:23-5: 2a "The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him (note: Abraham) alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness---for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."

Romans 5:8-11 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

Romans 5:17 "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!"

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

Romans 7:24,25a "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Romans 8:1-4 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God

did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Romans 8:29 "For those God knew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."

Romans 8:31b-39 "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all---how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died---more than that, who was raised to life---is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." (Psalm 44:22)

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 15:5-6 "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Romans 16:25-27 "Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith---to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen."

1 Corinthians 1:1-9 "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ---their Lord and ours:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way---with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge---God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as

you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

1 Corinthians 1:22-23 "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

1 Corinthians 3:23 "...and you are of Christ and Christ is of God."

1 Corinthians 6:11 "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

1 Corinthians 8:6 "...yet for us there is but one God, the Father from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

1 Corinthians 15:56-57 "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Corinthians 1:1-3 "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

2 Corinthians 1:18-20 "But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No". For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us---by me and Silas and Timothy---was not "Yes" and "No", but in him it has always been "Yes". For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God."

2 Corinthians 2:14-15 "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."

2 Corinthians 4:4-6 "The god of this age (note: referring to Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves

as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

2 Corinthians 10:5 "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

2 Corinthians 13:14 "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Galatians 1:1-5 "Paul, an apostle---sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead---and all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Galatians 4:4-7 "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir."

Ephesians 1:1-2 "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Ephesians 1:3-10 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption

to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will---to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment---to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ."

Ephesians 1:17-23 "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Ephesians 2:4-10 "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions---it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith---and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God---not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Ephesians 3:10-12 "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence."

Ephesians 3:14-21 "For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge---that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."

Ephesians 6:23-24 "Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."

Philippians 1:1-2 "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all God's holy people in Jesus Christ at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Philippians 2:5-11 "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death---even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Philippians 3:20-21 "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Philippians 4:19-20 "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen."

Colossians 1:3-4 "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people---."

Colossians 1:13-14 "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Colossians 1:15-20 "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Colossians 2:9-10 "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority."

Colossians 3:1-4 "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory."

Colossians 3:17 "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

1 Thessalonians 1:1, 9b-10 "Paul, Silas and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace to you.

They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead---Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep (note: dead), we may live together with him."

2 Thessalonians 1:1-2 "Paul, Silas and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

1 Timothy 1:1-2 "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,
To Timothy my true son in the faith:
Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

1 Timothy 2:5-6a "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people."

1 Timothy 5:21 "I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism."

1 Timothy 6:13-16 "In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time---God, the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen."

2 Timothy 1:1-2 "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

To Timothy, my dear son:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Timothy 1:9-10 "He saved us and called us to a holy life---not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel"

2 Timothy 4:1 "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ---"

Titus 1:1-4 "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness---in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior,

To Titus, my true son in our common faith:

Grace and peace to you from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior."

Titus 2:11, 13-14 "For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people

"---while we wait for the blessed hope---the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

Titus 3:4-7 "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the wash-

ing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

Philemon 1: 1, 3 "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker---

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Hebrews 1:1-14 "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

For to which of the angels did God ever say,

"You are my Son;
today I have become your Father"?

Or again,

"I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son"?

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,
"Let all God's angels worship him."

In speaking of the angels he says,

"He makes his angels spirits,
and his servants flames of fire."

But about the Son he says,

"Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever;
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions
by anointing you with the oil of joy."

He also says,

"In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands,
They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
You will roll them up like a robe;
like a garment they will be changed.
But you remain the same,

and your years will never end."

To which of the angels did God ever say,
"Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a footstool for your feet"?

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Hebrews 3:6a "But Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house."

Hebrews 4:14 "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."

Hebrews 9:14-15 "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance---now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant"

Hebrews 9:23-28 "It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."

Hebrews 10:4-14 "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you have prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.

Then I said, Here I am---it is written about me in the scroll---
I have come to do your will, my God!"

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"---though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."

Hebrews 10:19-22a "Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, ---."

Hebrews 12:1b-2 "And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Hebrews 13:20-21 "Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

James 1:1 "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:
Greetings.

1 Peter 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade."

1 Peter 1:18-21 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

1 peter 2: 4-5 "As you come to him, the living Stone---rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him---you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1 Peter 3:18, 21b-22 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit."

"It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand---with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."

1 Peter 4:11 "If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen."

2 Peter 1:1-2 "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:
Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."

2 Peter 1:16-18 "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain."

2 Peter 3:18 "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

1 John 1:1-7 "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched---this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"

1 John 2:1-2 "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father---Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

1 John 2:22-25 "Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist---denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us---eternal life."

1 John 3:23 "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us."

1 John 4:2-3 "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."

1 John 4:9-10 "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

1 John 4:13-15 "This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God."

1 John 5:1-12 "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

This is the one who came by water and blood---Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony; God has given us eternal life, and this life is

in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

2 John 3, 7, 9 (2 John has one chapter only) "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.

I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."

Jude 20,21 24,25 (Jude has one chapter only) "But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy---to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

Excerpts from the Book of Revelation The Book of Revelation is a prime example of apocalyptic literature; a genre of prophetic writing that developed in post-Exilic Jewish culture and was popular among early Christians. The obscure and extravagant imagery has led to a wide variety of interpretations down through the centuries into the present day. That being said, it honors Father, Son and Holy Spirit from beginning to end. I have kept my quotations to a minimum.

Revelation 1:1-2 "The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw---that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Revelation 1:4-6 "John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and father---to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen."

Revelation 3:19-22 "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Revelation 5:11-14 "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders, In a loud voice they were saying:

"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
forever and ever."

The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped."

Note: This scene is in heaven and the Lamb in these verses is referring to Jesus Christ.

Revelation 19:11-16 "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." (note: quoting Psalm 2:9). He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

Revelation 21:22-27 "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Revelation 22:1-5 "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit every month. And the leaves of the

tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever."

Revelation 22:12-13, 16-17, 20-21 "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.'

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen."

This concludes the quotations from the New Testament.

Epilogue

“Jesus Christ, Superstar, you really *are* who they say you are”

For an exponentially growing number of the baby boom generation on down, the ‘word’ to describe Christianity and the Christian church is “pfft”. Christians and naïve go together like popcorn and butter. Gentle Jesus and the wimps. Long ago and far away, but not far enough away. The return of Christ? Vaporware.

For the most part, the church in the Western world deserves to be tagged in this manner because it has little credible witness to the degenerate culture that it has melded with and because it has not brought the presentation of the Gospel up to speed for those immersed in the increasingly ever online information age. Shorts and flip-flops in the sanctuary? Not a problem. Multiple wide-screens and snack bars? Sweet! But those changes are not the kinds of things that I’m talking about. Those making the rush hour commute into Atlanta just might have a hard time identifying with the culture and citizens of a sleepy little first century Galilean town. Failure to connect.

Ask a dozen people, including Christians, what picture pops into their head when you mention Adam and Eve and most will ‘see’ some variation of a scene from a child’s book (A twenty-something white couple, discreetly naked, in an idyllic country scene along with happy animals and a sinister looking snake hiding in the branches of an apple tree). How neat is that!? Most will mentally group it with other stories from childhood; with Cinderella and Winnie the Pooh and give it the same credibility and significance.

Ask them about Jesus. They’ll likely picture a Jewish man in his early thirties with shoulder length hair and a beard and wearing sandals and a robe; holding children in his lap or standing up in a tossing boat commanding a storm to stop or hanging on a cross wearing a loincloth. We don’t know how long his hair was or if he even had a beard. He was naked on the cross because that’s how the Romans did it. They can’t imagine him peeing over the back of a boat or separating two younger sisters having a hair pulling contest. Most have a hard time getting their heads around him being fully human; and especially can’t get how one fully human could also be fully God. The Bible makes it as plain as possible that the creator of the cosmos has entered his creation to up front and personal take full responsibility, get the bugs worked out and get it ready to present to the Father (1 Corinthians 15 for a prime example).

The majority of Western Christians have never even read the Bible through, much less studied it. Oh, they’ve read and heard plenty of passages but can’t put them in context. Sunday school kids used to memorize verses and quote them in Bible drills but couldn’t tell you what came before or after or what they meant. Try that with any other book and see where it gets you. There are Christians of twenty, thirty, forty years still sucking a bottle.

Resources for serious study in the form of commentaries, histories, theologies, apologetics and other works are readily available in print and/or online but most Christians ignore them (“too hard to understand”, “I’m too busy”, “that stuff is for preachers and teachers”). I’ve seen several church libraries ignored and shut down because no one was interested. Funny that, because there seems to be plenty of time for everything else including ‘reality’ shows and serial novels that go on forever. In other parts of the world, such as China, India and Islamic countries, where believing in and following Christ can easily lead to loss, imprisonment and even death, the study of God’s Word is taken far more seriously.

Almost no one gets that they are essentially entities living in a beta program of ultimate complexity that makes the best VR simulation that humans or off-worlders will *ever* construct on their own look like the scribbling of a toddler. Slam your hand on the desk the next time you get ‘pwnd’ by a twelve year old girl gamer in PVP. You’ve had some science, right? You *know* that your hand and the desk are mainly empty space. Drill down as far as today’s science can go and beyond and it’s all math, all information, all code. You *know* that Danika Patrick’s ride becomes one with her, an extension of her mind and body, out on the track. Reality-as-it-is is strange but don’t get confused with the concept of *maya, illusion*; this is as real as it gets.

Sleep was once called ‘the little sister of death’. You drop off line, in a sense, every time you fall into that still little-understood state. A stealthy crook can slip into your bedroom, cop your iPad and car keys, eat the candy bar that you left on the dresser, flip you off and be down the road. Where were you, bro? You *might* have been wandering in some other realm that exists between your ears (and possibly beyond). You sure weren’t online. Now dogs can come online in a hurry. Maybe you should rush out and get one.

But let’s not overcomplicate things. No matter what your world view, your concept of reality, you are now *here*, at least as far as you know. You’re in hardcore mode and there are only four possible ways that it can end: level up (some version of heaven); level down (some version of hell); start over with a new avatar (reincarnation); game over (game over). No duping; you *will* get to experience one of the four. Hope it turns out good for you.

Spoiler alert: It’s Jesus FTW (for the win).

Acknowledgements

There are way too many servants of God to list here, whose books, sermons, lectures and other material over many years helped to fashion my understanding of God and his Word, but a special acknowledgement to Carl F.H. Henry and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

To a family in Baltimore, Maryland whose witness led a young soldier to Christ so many long years ago.

To my wife of nearly fifty years, Ella, whose love and witness led me back to Christ after several years of stumbling through the darkness of the occult and for her bearing up through years of having me hunched over a book or keyboard or “away” in my mind.

To Mom and Dad for all the love, guidance and prayers---looking forward to the ultimate reunion.

In memory of Dr. W. Hal Hunter, my father in the Lord.

To my brothers and sisters in Christ worldwide, many already leveled up, whose fellowship, deep discussions and prayers have meant so much.

To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; my eternal gratitude.

Glossary

This glossary refers to gaming, mainly online gaming, terms as they are used in the book dated 2016. Some terms carry other meanings (*ftw for the win* can also mean *f--- the world*. I do not use it in this way). Some terms unrelated to gaming are also included. Words, especially slang, can not only carry multiple meanings but can change or disappear altogether over time. I'll keep definitions brief and simple.

- **Aggro/ aggro range:** Aggro refers to hostile enemies. To draw aggro is to intentionally (or not) attract enemies. Aggro range is the distance from an enemy beyond which you will not be noticed and attacked.
- **AI:** Artificial intelligence.
- **Artifacts/bugs:** basically program malfunctions, usually visual and/or audio in nature.
- **Avatar:** a graphical representation of the user or the user's alter ego. It can assume a three dimensional form in games or virtual worlds.
- **BFF:** Best friends forever.
- **Bitcoin:** Basically a type of alternative digital currency.
- **BTW:** I use it exclusively to mean "by the way". It has many other meanings.
- **BOT:** I use it to mean an artificial intelligent agent, physical or otherwise, that can be designed and programmed to carry out specific instructions.
- **Bummed out:** Annoyed, upset or disappointed.
- **Channeler:** A person, such as a psychic medium, who speaks or claims to speak for non-physical beings or spirits.
- **Cheat code:** Gaming code, sometimes allowed in single player games but almost never in an online game. Allows player to manipulate the program in order to gain extra gold, extra ammo, to walk through walls, become invulnerable, etc.
- **Classic fail:** Major, often humiliating failure is the way in which I use it.
- **ET:** Extra-terrestrial, off-worlder, simply meaning an individual hailing from a world other than our own.
- **F9 Key:** Keyboard command usually used to reset the game program to an earlier, saved state in order to replay a bad experience. Opened the wrong door and set off an alarm? Hit the F9 key and replay that sequence (you did remember to save, right?).
- **Frenemy:** Combination of friend/enemy. One who pretends to be a friend but is actually an enemy.
- **FTW:** For the win. An act, ability or event that is responsible for victory. Outside of gaming it can be used in other senses.

- **Gamer:** A person who plays video games or participates in role-playing games. Gamers are certainly not all boys and men, nor are they all young, and this is becoming increasingly so over time.
- **God Mode:** Usually used as a cheat code that grants invincibility. I use it in the book in the sense of God's complete control over life and death (as well as over every other aspect of his creation/program).
- **Grief/griefer:** (In an online game or community) a person who harasses or deliberately provokes other players or members in order to spoil their enjoyment. In the real world, Satan is the prime example of a griefer; a formally high ranking angel, who rebelled against God and intends only to lead astray, hurt, kill and destroy.
- **Hack(ed):** Breaking into computers and computer networks, usually to do some mischief.
- **Hardcore mode:** In game terminology it can mean different things according to the game you are playing. Essentially, it is a real life emulator. For example, heat and cold *will* make a difference and (in the extreme) if you die, you're dead---game over.
- **Level up:** In a computer game there are a usually fixed numbers of 'levels' which the player achieves as she/he advances in the game. Reaching a new level usually grants added abilities and opportunities. In the book it refers to life with God beyond death.
- **Luftwaffe:** The German air force of World War Two.
- **Monk(ed):** In some games, as in Guild Wars, a healer with or without fighting spells and/or weapons. In a modern combat game a healer would be called a medic.
- **NPC:** Non-player character. In a single player game, all characters other than the player's character are NPCs and part of the program. In multi-player games, some characters (like a guard or a chosen follower) are NPCs, while other players have their own characters/avatars. In a tabletop, role-playing game, the game master controls the NPCs.
- **Off(ed):** Kill, killed.
- **Own it:** Admit it, take responsibility for it.
- **Peeps:** People; often used to refer to friends or associates.
- **Pfft:** A forced exhalation of air which produces the noise "pfft" and is done when you disagree with someone. Like saying, "yeah, right". Sarcastic expression.
- **Playa:** An individual good at the "game" they play, as in playing/manipulating others to get what they want.
- **PVP:** Player versus player in gaming, either in one-on-one or team competition, as opposed to PVE which stands for player(s) versus environment.
- **PWND:** Dominated, humiliated.
- **Rage quit:** Quit in anger, often after being beaten badly and/or humiliated.
- **Roll up:** Start a new character/avatar, either by accepting or selecting a pre-made as-is or selecting one and then modifying looks, attributes, etc.
- **Sci-fi:** Science fiction.
- **Seen? :** Understand? Get it?

- **Shrooms:** In the sense of the book, Hallucinogenic mushrooms.
- **SIM:** Simulated character or avatar in a virtual environment.
- **Sixed:** Killed.
- **Spoiler alert:** Giving away the plot or a portion of it. If you don't want to know, don't read/look. Often used as a warning. (Spoiler alert: the pixie has friends---big friends).
- **Spotter(s):** As used in the book, on-ground observers used to determine and direct fire to a specific target or targets.
- **Tutorial:** A learning version of a computer game designed to teach the basics before entering the 'real' adventure.
- **Uber:** super.
- **Unfriend:** Remove someone from a list of friends or contacts (as in common usage, on a social networking site).
- **Vaporware:** An announced coming game that is always (more or less) somewhere in the works but never shows up.

Select Bibliography

The following is a list of books and DVD lectures from my personal library which I considered in the years leading up to the publication of my little book and website. All were prepared with the general reader/viewer in mind. Many are from those holding an atheistic or agnostic world view.

As I noted in my book, I do not feel it fair or intellectually honest to comment on the nature of reality-as-it-is without considering the viewpoints of all concerned or to dismiss the genuine contributions of those who do not agree with my own Christian perspective. There is much to be gained from the study of this small sampling of works on the subjects, whether or not one agrees in whole, in part or not at all. Science is always in motion and subject to revision, so necessarily some of the content of this material has already been ‘patched’.

Our science is in its infancy and we have barely scratched the surface of all available knowledge. Many in their various fields do not seem to know this and slip from science into scientism in an attempt to erase God from the picture. I have not found their arguments to be persuasive.

So much for the science sources. I have not listed the Christian commentaries, histories, theologies, apologetics and works on specific subjects (such as prayer and the atonement), nor those on other subjects related to the book. To do so would be overly tedious to me and to the reader.

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The following is a list of lectures presented by *The Teaching Company* at www.thegreatcourses.com. They are available on DVD and audio and are also available for download. They are prepared with the general audience in mind.

A New History of Life with Professor Stuart Sutherland, University of British Columbia

Chaos with Professor Steven Strogatz, Cornell University

Cosmology: The History and Nature of Our Universe, with Professor Mark Whittle, University of Virginia

Dark Matter, Dark Energy: The Dark Side of the Universe with Professor Sean Carroll, California Institute of Technology

Mysteries of Modern Physics: Time with Professor Sean Carroll, California Institute of Technology

Philosophy of Science with Professor Jeffrey L. Kasser, North Carolina State University

Quantum Mechanics: The Physics of the Microscopic World with Professor Benjamin Schumacher, Kenyon College

Superstring Theory: The DNA of Reality with Professor S. James Gates, Jr., University of Maryland at College Park

The Higgs Boson and Beyond with Professor Sean Carroll, California Institute of Technology

The Theory of Everything: The Quest to Explain All Reality with Professor Don Lincoln, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory

Understanding Complexity with Professor Scott E. Page, University of Michigan

Understanding Gravity: Black Holes, Tides, and Curved Spacetime with Professor Benjamin Schumacher, Kenyon College

Added the below in reference to Revelation 11:7-10 and 13:11-18 in the chapter *End Game*

The Surveillance State: Big Data, Freedom, and You with Paul Rosenzweig, J.D. of the George Washington University Law School and former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security

