

Foundations of Faith - Part 3

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In this third part of my series of essays about faith, I will be discussing how allegedly God-inspired writings should be approached and then presenting how the Bible falters when this approach is applied to it. This essay will be quite long, but even so, I am sure it will still fail to address some of the readers' questions. However, I will try to make my case as clear and concise as possible.

The Approach

When reading a supposed God-inspired text, or for that matter any writing that is urging us to not only believe what is written but to alter our philosophy and our actions, reason is the only feasible approach. Faith is not. I say this because faith asks us to accept something without sufficient evidence. Reason, on the other hand, asks us only to accept that which can be proven. If faith is used as the deciding factor in whether or not to believe a particular text, then it is equally valid to accept any text. Do you choose to believe the Bible by faith? How about the Koran? Or the writings of the Buddha? If you choose to believe any of these writings by faith, then by what means can I convince you that you are wrong? Can I reason with you? No. Your belief is not based on reason and therefore cannot be shaken by it. Even if the writings are full of contradictions, it does not matter. You believe them by faith. No reasoned arguments pointing out the contradictions will matter to you. You have received a secondhand revelation via the "inspired" author. In fact, I may be considered a blasphemer for even questioning the "divine" text.

A society infiltrated by faith is one in which no real communication of ideas can occur. Each will believe what he chooses to believe and will not listen to any reasoned arguments to the contrary. Reason, however, allows men to communicate and persuade. A society permeated by reason is one in which men can show the fallacy of other men's ideas by pointing out bad premises or bad logic. When presented with undeniable facts and the reasoned conclusions that follow, rational men will abandon their false beliefs and cling only to true ones.

Perhaps we should have some kind of happy medium consisting of both faith and reason. How can this be done? How much faith is enough? How much reason is enough? What should I do if my faith conflicts with my reason? If I find that my faith has contradictions, do I discard reason and just accept the contradictions? If I decide to discard all or just a part of my faith to eliminate the contradictions, have I not accepted reason as the proper way to make decisions, not faith? In short, a combination of faith and reason is unworkable, as one will necessarily have to decide between them at some point in his life.

Don't we use faith every day of our lives? When we cross a bridge, do we not have faith in

the engineers and construction workers that built the bridge? No. What we have is a trust based on experiential evidence. We know that there are many bridges, and most of them do not collapse. However, though the trust is based on evidence, it is not 100 percent unwavering. When we cross a bridge, we know that there is a possibility of collapse. We decide that the benefits of getting to the other side outweigh the small chance of destruction. We have made a rational decision. If a large number of bridges fell apart tomorrow, we might very well reevaluate our situation and try to avoid crossing bridges until our trust is restored. Faith, on the other hand, would have us believe that the bridge we are about to cross will not collapse even if every other bridge in the world has just collapsed. In other words, faith is an unwavering belief that something is true despite the evidence. Do not confuse rational risk-taking with faith.

A rational approach to evaluating writings does not allow for reinterpretation. The text must stand as is within its context. Reinterpretation is a common means of trying to reconcile one's faith with one's reason. It usually occurs when two or more passages of text believed by faith are shown to be contradictory. If the person is not willing to accept a contradiction (i.e., give up reason), he will commonly try to change the meaning of one or more passages of text (typically the ones that he likes the least) to reconcile them with the others. This is known as rationalization, which is the process of trying to make the irrational rational. This process is invalid. If a contradiction exists, it must be accepted as such. This, of course, puts a dent in the credibility of the writing. Remember that challenging allegedly God-inspired texts is not challenging God. Rather, it is challenging the person who wrote the text or is promoting it as unerring. If text accepted as God-inspired cannot be challenged, how can false texts ever be exposed?

There you have it, the proper means of evaluating a writing that is trying to persuade you to change your beliefs and actions. Keep in mind that this approach needs to be applied continually. One cannot study just so much, decide that the text is inspired, and then never bother challenging the writing again. Something could have been missed. This critical approach is valid for all of our beliefs, however gained. Reason must continue to be our filter of beliefs. The process by which reason is applied is known as logic, or non-contradictory identification. In other words, a reasoned approach to our beliefs does not allow us to hold any contradictory beliefs. This is simply saying that it is impossible for A to equal not-A. The Law of Identity, $A=A$, must be upheld. If an individual discovers that he is holding contradictory beliefs, one or more beliefs must be discarded. Perhaps his premises were wrong or his logic was flawed. The error must be identified and corrected such that none of his beliefs are contradictory. This is not an easy process. It requires much study and thought. However, it is the only means by which man can determine truth.

What About God?

If reason should be used as a guide for living, then what about God? Is it reasonable to believe in God? Since there is no proof of God's existence, the pure answer is "No." Then what is the rational explanation for the existence of the universe? Currently there is none. Any theory about the origin of the universe must be considered speculative since there is not yet enough information to draw a rational conclusion.

When trying to explain the existence of the universe, which is perceptually evident, there

are many problems. If the universe (meaning all space, time, and matter) has always existed as it currently does, then how did we arrive at this particular point in time? After all, if time extends infinitely into the past, then we exist an infinite amount of time from the beginning. How can this be? It would take forever to get here. Perhaps the universe cycles, meaning that it comes into existence, lasts for a long time, and then fades into nonexistence, only to reappear for another period of time. This way, the time in which we now exist is a finite "distance" from the beginning of the current cycle. But there have been an infinite number of cycles. We now have the problem of how we got to the current cycle. So, does the universe have to have a unique beginning for us to exist at this point in time? Based on information currently available, I believe so. But how could something, the universe, proceed from nothing? This makes no sense either based on man's current knowledge of physics. This leads many people, including scientists investigating the origin of the universe, to speculate that there is a necessary being that exists in a realm outside the confines of space, matter, and time. However, being confined by space, matter, and time, *we* have no scientific means by which to test such a theory. Of course, many other theories are possible (I have a friend who has made up a few natural theories to show that they are as easy to make up as supernatural theories), none of which can be proven true or false. Therefore, it really boils down to what is easiest to believe: a necessary being, the universe proceeding from nothing, or another unprovable theory.

With the current lack of knowledge about these matters, any theory could be believed by faith, but not by reason. The reasoned approach would reserve judgment until more information is available. However, with sufficient information nowhere in sight, I understand why some people need to believe something now. I have no quarrel with that. In fact, I find myself tending to believe that a necessary being, which I call God, created the universe. Even so, it is not so much what one believes about the origin of the universe, but what one does with that belief. It is one thing for someone to speculate that God exists. It is quite another thing for that person to claim that God has communicated with him, directly or through an intermediary, and that his beliefs and actions are guided by God, especially if his beliefs and actions are irrational.

Look at early man. He attributed to the supernatural things that were later found to be natural and thus explainable scientifically. For instance, some early men believed that lightning and thunder were due to the gods fighting. Some believed that active volcanoes were the gods seeking revenge on sinful men. These examples show why a belief in God cannot be held as an absolute. It could be that one day man will discover a natural cause for the universe and explain its existence without the need for a god. However, until that time I see no harm in some people attributing the universe's existence to a necessary being who exists outside the confines of the universe, just as there was no harm in early man claiming that the gods were responsible for lightning and volcanoes. However, harm does occur when this belief results in people acting irrationally because they think they know God's will. For example, when early men thought the gods were angry, they sometimes took it upon themselves to appease them. Thinking they knew what the gods wanted, they might sacrifice a virgin, a child, or an animal. Even today, people act irrationally because they believe they know God's will.

If God does exist, there are certain attributes I believe He must possess based on observing nature, which He created. I listed a few of these in my first essay and discussed them in detail. Two

of these attributes were truthfulness and consistency, the former meaning not propounding what is not real, and the latter meaning not accepting contradictions. Regardless of how the universe was created, man has been blessed with the gift of logic. This gives him the ability to reason and draw conclusions about the proper way to live. It is a great ability, one that should not be taken lightly. However, many men do not value this gift. They refuse to think, leaving that for others to do. This has to be the greatest sin of all. Allowing others to think for you can lead to destruction. A charlatan loves this type of person. One way a person can refuse to think, and thus cast aside his greatest gift, is to blindly accept a writing that claims to be inspired of God when it can be rationally proved inconsistent. If the writing directs people to act irrationally, then great harm can befall man. To act irrationally based on a supposed God-inspired text necessarily depends on man using faith rather than reason as his means of living. Faith allows for anything to be believed no matter how irrational. Reason does not.

What About The Bible?

As I wrote in my previous essays, it was when I saw contradictory and irrational passages in the Bible that I gave up studying it. I was a rational person trying to force-feed myself faith. It did not work. Rather than use reinterpretation, I used evasion. I simply quit studying in order not to have to face the challenge to my faith. It has only been within the last few years that I have been able to confront myself and say unabashedly that reason is the only proper (i.e., moral) means of living. Upon confronting myself, I necessarily had to reject the Bible because of its irrationality and contradictions. Below, I discuss some major areas of conflict. All quotes are from the Authorized Version of the Bible.

1. To Kill Or Not To Kill, That Is The Question.

And the LORD said unto Cain, Where [is] Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: [Am] I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now [art] thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; ... (Genesis 4:9-11)

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, [here] I [am]. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only [son] Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. (Genesis 22:1-2)

Here is a clear contradiction within just a few chapters of the first book of the Bible. God informs Cain that the spilling of innocent blood is wrong. However, just a few pages over, we see God testing Abraham's faith by asking him to take the innocent life of his son. Would God ask someone to commit an evil act? Why would he ask one person to commit murder while condemning another person for the same deed? Some might say (and I have actually heard it said) that murder is only wrong if initiated by a person, not if performed out of obedience to God. But if this is the case, and if we believe in supernatural intervention, how can we know whether it is God

or Satan asking us to commit the murder? If God does indeed ask people to commit acts that He has already indicated are immoral, how can we know that the Son of Sam was not directed by God to murder those women, as he claimed he was? How about Charles Manson? You see, once you accept the notion that God directs people to commit immoral acts (which are not considered immoral since God directed them), you can no longer pass judgment on anyone's actions, regardless of how heinous, because he or she may have been acting according to God's will and thereby absolved of any wrongdoing.

Some years ago, my wife and I were in a Wednesday night Bible study. We were discussing the means by which God communicates with man. The preacher, who was conducting the class, said that he once dreamed a sermon. Upon awaking, he wrote it down and delivered it the next Sunday morning. He asked us if we thought the dream was of God or just happenstance. There were varying opinions. Then the following question arose: If we believe that God has communicated with us, how can we know for sure it was really Him? I said that we could know it was *not* God if the message contradicted the Bible because God would not ask us to do something He had already said was wrong. There was general agreement among the participants. As the discussion drifted to another topic, I began thinking about the Abraham and Isaac story and realized that my previous statement had been wrong! I told the class my error. I have thought about this class often over the years and have concluded that if indeed God did ask Abraham to murder his son, the only proper response would have been, "But no, Lord, this I cannot do. For as you have taught us, spilling innocent blood is wrong." God's reply would be, "You have answered well my son. Live long and prosper."

We all know that we need to be as consistent as possible when teaching our children. If we teach them it is wrong to hit another child without provocation, and then we ask them to do that act, the child becomes confused. If humans are wise enough to know this, surely God is. If you believe that God can and will ask you to commit immoral acts, then be prepared to be asked to stab your spouse, gouge out the eyes of your children, and rob your neighbor blind. If you are asked to do these things, it will be your opportunity to fulfill the oxymoronic prophecy of that great song, "The Impossible Dream." You can march into hell for a heavenly cause.

You may be saying, "But God stopped Abraham before he actually killed Isaac." This is true, but it could have been otherwise as we will see in the next section.

2. To Kill Or Not To Kill, That Is The Question - Reprise

Thou shalt not kill. (Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17)

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, [and] utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: ... (Deuteronomy 7:1-2)

God may have stopped the slaughter of Isaac at the hands of Abraham, but He did not stop the slaughter of the seven nations listed above. The people in these nations were utterly destroyed (see Joshua chaps 11-12). The justification given for this slaughter was that God had given Abraham the land over 400 years before, and now it was time for his descendants to possess it. Also, no one in the God-deeded land was to be left alive, including children, because they and their descendants would ultimately lead the Israelites away from Jehovah and into paganism. Let's examine this justification.

As you may remember, God supposedly promised Abraham a large quantity of land running from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (Genesis 15:18-21). However, neither he nor his immediate descendants ever possessed it in their lifetimes. Later, Abraham's grandson, Jacob, and his descendants, moved to Egypt during a famine and stayed there. Their offspring eventually became slaves under an evil Pharaoh. Many years later, after escaping, they wander in the wilderness for 40 years and then move in, under the leadership of Joshua, to take the land they had supposedly been promised.

What proof did the Israelites have that they owned the land and had a moral right to force other inhabitants off it? None, other than their word. Was this sufficient? Obviously not. If someone's word is all it takes to make a claim on a material possession, honest individuals and nations would be at the mercy of any charlatan or expansionist nation that comes along. Hitler and the Fascists used this technique, as did Lenin, Stalin, and the Communists. They claimed some type of superiority over the rest of humanity -- based on race, class, God-given favor, or whatever -- and then made a claim on their possessions, including their lives. The Israelites used the same tactic. They claimed superiority over the other nationalities based on being chosen by the one and only true God. They invaded and took over the land that other people owned and, in order to assuage their consciences, their leaders and priests insisted that God had directed their actions.

Some people may say that the mere fact that the Israelites did indeed overcome the inhabitants of the "promised land" shows that God was behind them. This is incorrect. Sometimes evil does triumph over good. Hitler was successful for many years, and it took a concerted effort to stop him. The Communists were successful for many years until their recent downfall. Look at the Roman emperors. In short, "Might makes right" is not right. Sometimes evil does win over the good, at least for a time. It takes rational thought to determine what is right and what is wrong. It then takes rational persuasion to convince others.

What of killing all the inhabitants of the land in order to prevent their descendants from leading the nation of Israel astray? It is an obvious breach of morality. People should not be punished for what they or their descendants might do in the future. Only individuals who have already committed an offense should be punished. This is what justice is all about. To do otherwise is unjust and immoral. Also, if a large number of Israelites can be led astray by a small number of pagans, what does that say about the faith of the chosen people? Not much. Apparently God's alleged chosen people were very weak of faith. This being so, why did not God choose one of the other nations?

3. To Kill Or Not To Kill, That Is The Question - Reprise Reprise

And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. ... And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she [was his] only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. ... And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her [according] to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. (Judges 11:30-31, 34-35, 39)

I present these verses for those of you who may have thought that God allowed Israel to massacre the inhabitants of the "promised land" because they were evil and deserving of death (although I'm not sure how the young children would meet those qualifications). Here is a case where a man vows to make a burnt offering of the first thing to emerge from his house if God would give him a victory. I have serious doubts about the intelligence of a man who would make such a vow. Surely, he knew that a family member was a likely candidate for the sacrifice. Perhaps his mother-in-law was always the first one to come out and meet him, and this was a way to justify getting rid of her once and for all with the blessing of his family. Whatever his reasoning, the vow was made, and when his virgin daughter, who was also his only child, emerged first from the house, he was very sorrowful. (His mother-in-law must have been sick in bed.) Jephthah believed that he must fulfill the vow no matter how heinous and immoral the act. Even his daughter agreed with him! After two months of mourning her virginity, she returned to her father and he burned her to a crisp. Notice that God did not intervene. Apparently He agreed with the decision. Reasonable? In Bible vernacular, "May it never be!"

4. Who Called the Census?

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. (2 Samuel 24:1)

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

If you read the verses surrounding these two verses, you will see that they are referring to the same census. This is a blatant contradiction. On the one hand God called the census. On the other hand Satan did. Were the two Opposites of the Universe colluding? This seems to be the only way to reconcile these verses. But actually, there is another explanation.

The book of 2 Samuel was written before the Babylonian captivity; the book of 1 Chronicles was written afterwards. It may be surprising to some of you that the 1 Chronicles

reference above is the first time that Satan is mentioned in the Bible. There will be some who will say that Satan was mentioned back in Genesis when he took on the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden. However, a careful reading of the Adam and Eve story reveals that this is not true. I have yet to find a verse in the entire Bible that says that the serpent was actually Satan. There are a few places where Satan is called a serpent in that he was crafty like the serpent in the garden. But nowhere does it say that the serpent was indeed Satan. The serpent in the garden was just a serpent, albeit a talking serpent. Apparently, there are several myths that describe a wicked serpent punished by having to crawl on its belly. (Supposedly, the serpent was originally an upright creature.) This is what the Bible version describes.

It seems that the Jews were not aware of Satan until after the Babylonian captivity. What does this suggest? Evidently the Babylonians believed in Satan, and the Jews embraced that belief while living among them. It all makes sense. Before the captivity, both good and bad supernatural events were attributed to God. After the captivity, this began to change. More and more God was credited with good supernatural events, whereas Satan was credited with the evil ones. The culmination of this thought is found in the New Testament where you see the all-good God manifested in Jesus, who battles the all-evil Satan.

5. The Keeper of the Law

And the man that committeth adultery with [another] man's wife, [even he] that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. (Leviticus 20:10)

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. (Matthew 5:17)

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with [his] finger wrote on the ground, [as though he heard them not]. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. (John 8:3-7)

The Law of Moses clearly stated that adulterers were to be put to death. Yet, Jesus, who claimed to be on Earth to fulfill the Law, forgave an adulterer. Did he obey the Law by forgiving her? Clearly not. In fact, since the Bible teaches that if you break one law, you are guilty of breaking them all (James 2:10), Jesus was a Lawbreaker.

I have heard it said that the Jews who brought the adulterous woman to Jesus were just trying to trap him and were not at all interested in keeping the Law. This is true. However, does the motivation of these scribes and Pharisees negate the Law? Of course not. In fact, since God had commanded that adulterers be killed, it would be a sin to not kill her. Thus, Jesus was a sinner.

What about Jesus' justification for not stoning the woman, which was that the stone throwers were no more sinless than she was? It is not consistent with the Law. God gave the law about killing adulterers to known sinners. He knew that the people executing adulterers would be sinners. The difference is that the sinners doing the stoning *would not* be guilty of sins worthy of death while the person being stoned *would* be guilty of such a sin. Now don't get me wrong, I believe that the way taught by Jesus is the better way. What a person does sexually is no one's business except a spouse or a parent (if the sexually active person is a minor). Even for these people, it is not a matter to be handled with death. It is a matter for the family or the courts to work out. The point I am making is that Jesus did not obey the Law as it was given by God in the Old Testament. It is an inconsistency that cannot be ignored.

Finally, Jesus said a sinless person could cast the first stone. Was there a sinless person there? Yes. Jesus was supposedly sinless. Why did he not cast the first stone?

6. The Devil Lord Made Me Do It

What shall we say then? [Is there] unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then [it is] not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will [have mercy], and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed [it], Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? [What] if God, willing to shew [his] wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Romans 9:14-24)

I quoted this verse in my last essay and discussed it briefly. However, it is so important, I decided to include it in this essay, also.

The quotation above is clear. God purposely creates people predestined for glory and others predestined for destruction. In addition, the person destined for destruction cannot even question why he was made that way, and he will be held responsible for his actions even though he had no choice in the matter. Be wary of any religion that says you cannot question God's actions. It is not open to critical analysis. It is asking people to accept what the "divine" writings say by faith only. Only writings that have irrational elements in them cannot stand up to a rational critique.

Some say that God only used Pharaoh because He was already an evil man. If this is true

then why did not Paul let us in on this bit of knowledge? Paul says God hardens whom He desires, not just those who are evil of their own accord. In the book of Exodus, God tells Moses before he even goes to Pharaoh for the first time that He will harden Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21).

Some say that we cannot question God because He is wiser than we are. It is true that the Creator of the universe would have to be wiser than man. However, I believe His wisdom would be greater, not different. We have the power of reason and logic to guide us in our decisions in life. If indeed God did create the universe, then He is the one who gave us these powers. Therefore, if a "divine" writing asks us to discard these tools and use faith only, we must consider it invalid.

7. The Hometown of Joseph and Mary

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem ... When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt ... But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. (Matthew 2:1,14,19-23)

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) ...

And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. (Luke 2:4,39)

Did you spot the problem with these two passages? Matthew's account suggests that Joseph and Mary were living in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. Since Herod was out to kill Jesus, they went to Egypt. After they were there for a while, they tried to return home to Bethlehem, but since Archelaus was in power, they went on to Galilee and resided in Nazareth.

In Luke's account, Joseph and Mary were originally from Nazareth and only went to Bethlehem because of a census. After his birth and some rituals at the temple in Jerusalem, they immediately returned to Nazareth. There was no trip to Egypt. Also, there was no apparent attempt to murder the child.

These are strikingly different accounts of the birth of Jesus. They cannot be reconciled without twisting or adding to the text.

8. How Can I Be Saved?

And he shall burn all his fat upon the altar, as the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall make an atonement for him as concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him. (Leviticus 4:26)

For [it is] not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and [sacrifices] for sin thou hast had no pleasure. (Hebrews 10:4-6)

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (Luke 13:3)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2:38)

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

What [doth it] profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be [ye] warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what [doth it] profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. (James 2:14-18)

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:13)

Throughout recorded history, man has sought ways to ease his guilty conscience. Of course, to have a guilty conscience, you must be able to understand that you have done something wrong. To understand that you have done something wrong, you must be able to form the concepts of right and wrong. To form the concepts of right and wrong, you must be able to reason. Thus, only rational creatures can feel guilty. Man, being the only creature on the Earth possessing these abilities, is the only creature capable of feeling guilt. However, the mere fact that man is rational does not guarantee that he will draw the correct conclusions about what is right and what is wrong. He must also start with the correct premises and use correct logic. If he simply accepts by faith

another person's definition of right and wrong, he may suffer unnecessary guilt or feel guiltless after engaging in evil. The concepts of right and wrong must be worked out with proper rational thought, not accepted blindly. Well, enough of this, let's get on with the essence of the discussion.

What does the Bible have to say about how man can obtain "forgiveness" for sin and thus obtain "salvation?" Well, it depends on where you look. The methods used in the Old Testament (OT) are radically different from those in the New Testament (NT). There are even variations within the two testaments themselves.

The OT presents a physically based forgiveness system, with countless sacrifices of animals for specific sins and also for annual feasts. The Israelites were also required to tithe of their income. These rituals were to assure God's favor on His chosen people. Whereas some sins could be forgiven by offering a sacrifice, others were worthy of death. Also, God's blessings were reserved for the chosen: the Israelites. Their religious laws and their civil laws were one and the same. It was a theocracy. God's blessings were dependent upon the chosen ones continuing to obey the Law. Sometimes the sinfulness of just one person resulted in God rejecting the entire nation (see Joshua chap 7). Thus, it was a collectivist system. All could be held accountable for the actions of an individual. Slowly, the physical began to turn to the spiritual in the latter parts of the OT, especially in the writings of the prophets, culminating in the NT.

You might be wondering how the Israeli system of religion came about if not commanded by God. It seems quite clear. The priestly class set up the system to lessen their toil. Life was not easy in those days. People had to shepherd flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, farm the land, build their houses, etc. The sacrificial system of Judaism was the perfect answer for the priestly class. If the people believed that tabernacles and temples should be built by them and that they needed to sacrifice animals for the remission of their sins, the priests would have a life of luxury, relatively speaking. They would have nice dwelling places built by the people, and all of their food would be provided by the sacrificial animals. All the time, the people would believe they were doing these things for God.

The NT presents a spiritually based forgiveness system, with faith being the predominant means by which man is "saved." The faith was to be in the fact that Jesus Christ was the son of God and that he died for the sins of the world. Giving was strongly encouraged, but no particular amount was mandated. Man's faith made him right before God. All sins could be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31), the meaning of which is questionable. God's blessings were for all people, not just the Israelites. Religious laws and civil laws were separate. Christians were to obey the civil laws as long as they did not require them to disobey God's laws. God's blessings were based on the faith of the individual; no one was held responsible for the actions of another. It was an individualistic system. Each man stood alone before God. However, socially, Christianity was collectivist in nature. Christians were expected to share with others who were in need. I call this semi-voluntary socialism.

However, among the NT writers there was disagreement about the role of faith and works in the salvation process. Paul indicated that faith was the only ingredient, and this was a gift from God. When given to the chosen, it produced good works in the receiver; however, the works

played *no part* in the saving process. James, however, suggests that a person can have faith without works, but it is a dead faith and cannot save anyone. One must purposefully adjoin works to faith to make it a living, saving faith. In other words, our salvation *is* dependent on our works.

Of course, I have generalized quite a bit in the above discussion, but I believe it presents the essence of the differences in the NT writers. It is because of these differences that there are so many denominations with differing beliefs about how one obtains salvation. Some believe that man is predestined for heaven or hell without regard to what he does in this life. Others believe that simply believing that Jesus is the son of God is sufficient for salvation, but that a loss of that belief will result in damnation. Others believe that actions (i.e., works) play a role in salvation. You cannot just believe in Jesus and then do as you please. You must repent and live a godly life. You must be baptized. You must confess Christ before men. You *must* do this and that. You *must not* do this or that.

The range of beliefs is incredibly wide. One person told me that once you became a Christian, there was nothing you could ever do to sever that relationship with God. Even if you denied God with your last breath and told Him you did not want to be saved, you would still be saved. Another person told me that once you became a Christian, you could never fall away. However, if you came too close to denying your faith, God would take your life before you actually severed the relationship. (I am *living* proof that this theory is wrong.) I heard of a preacher who stated in a sermon that anyone who did not attend a service of the church, apart from being on his death bed, was bound for hell. Before condemning any of these beliefs, please remember that there is some justification for each. It depends on which verses of the Bible you emphasize. Since there are contradictory statements in the Bible about these matters, it is natural for different readers to come to different conclusions.

In the midst of all this confusion about how one is saved, there are statements, such as the quotation from 1 John shown above, that indicates we can know we have eternal life (i.e., that we are saved). How can we know such a thing when there is no objective means by which to judge our beliefs and actions? For instance, if it is true that sin separates us from God and that the only means of repairing that severed relationship is to have faith in Jesus Christ (whatever that entails), then what of the young child that tells his first lie? Would he be lost if he died immediately after telling the lie? Some say he has to reach the age of accountability before he is held responsible for his sins. When does this occur? Is it the same for all children, or different? Usually the answer is that the child will be held responsible when he is able to understand he is a sinner and needs forgiveness. But how much time elapses between this realization and the time that the child accepts Jesus Christ? What happens if the child dies in the interim? What if a person lives in a culture that has no knowledge of Jesus and the need for his forgiveness? Can a person who dies at the age of 100 never reach the age of accountability? If the people in this culture are not lost due to their ignorance, why do we send missionaries there? All that could accomplish is the damnation of some or all of them. How can they be lost if they have no knowledge of how to be saved? Wouldn't that be unjust of God? The point I am making is that there is no clear criteria given in the Bible about what constitutes salvation. Therefore, it is impossible to know whether you are saved or not.

If you accept the Bible by faith, then you are accepting the contradictions mentioned

above. You are saying that it is possible for A to equal not-A. Reason has been abandoned.

9. Resurrection Accounts

1 In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first [day] of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. 2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. 3 His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: 4 And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead [men]. 5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. 6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. 7 And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you. 8 And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. 9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. 10 Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. 11 Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. 12 And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, 13 Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him [away] while we slept. 14 And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. 15 So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. 16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, [even] unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:1-20)

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the [mother] of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. 2 And very early in the morning the first [day] of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. 3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? 4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. 5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. 6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. 7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. 8 And

they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any [man]; for they were afraid. [9 Now when [Jesus] was risen early the first [day] of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. 10 [And] she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. 11 And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. 12 After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. 13 And they went and told [it] unto the residue: neither believed they them. 14 Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. 15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. 17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. 19 So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. 20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with [them], and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.] **(Mark 16:1-20, verses 9-20 are not in the most reliable manuscripts)**

1 Now upon the first [day] of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain [others] with them. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. 3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments: 5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down [their] faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, 7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. 8 And they remembered his words, 9 And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary [the mother] of James, and other [women that were] with them, which told these things unto the apostles. 11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. 12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass. 13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem [about] threescore furlongs. 14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened. 15 And it came to pass, that, while they communed [together] and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. 16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. ... 30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed [it], and brake, and gave to them. 31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. 32 And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn

within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? 33 And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, 34 Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. 35 And they told what things [were done] in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. 36 And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace [be] unto you. 37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. 38 And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? 39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. ... 44 And he said unto them, These [are] the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and [in] the prophets, and [in] the psalms, concerning me. 45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 And ye are witnesses of these things. 49 And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. 50 And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. 51 And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: 53 And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen. (Luke 24:1-16,30-39,44-53)

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: 3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: 4 And, being assembled together with [them], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, [saith he], ye have heard of me. 5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. 6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. (Acts 1:1-9)

20:1 The first [day] of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre. 2 Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus

loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. 3 Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. 4 So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. 5 And he stooping down, [and looking in], saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. 6 Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, 7 And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. 8 Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. 9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. 10 Then the disciples went away again unto their own home. 11 But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, [and looked] into the sepulchre, 12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. 14 And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. 16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. 17 Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and [to] my God, and your God. 18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and [that] he had spoken these things unto her. 19 Then the same day at evening, being the first [day] of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace [be] unto you. 20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them [his] hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. 21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace [be] unto you: as [my] Father hath sent me, even so send I you. 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on [them], and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: 23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; [and] whose soever [sins] ye retain, they are retained. 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. 26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: [then] came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace [be] unto you. 27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust [it] into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. 28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

21:1 After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he [himself]. ... 10 Jesus saith unto them, Bring

of the fish which ye have now caught. 11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken. 12 Jesus saith unto them, Come [and] dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. 13 Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. 14 This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. (John 20:1-28; 21:1,10-14)

A detailed reading of the resurrection accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke (including Acts), and John reveals many contradictions. In fact, there are so many that the Gospel Parallels book that I own, written by Bible scholars, does not even attempt to harmonize them. Whereas most of the text of the Synoptic Gospels is shown side-by-side, the resurrection accounts are shown serially. I have read a few attempts to harmonize the resurrection stories, but none were successful. Why is it important for these accounts to be consistent? Because the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the entire Christian religion. Even Paul says that if Jesus was not resurrected, then our [Christians] preaching and faith are in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14). Therefore, if the resurrection accounts are inconsistent, the credibility of the Bible is seriously weakened, if not destroyed.

To aid in the comparison of the passages shown above, I have put together a table showing the portions in question.

Matthew	Mark	Luke & Acts	John
Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (mother of James?) go to the tomb just before dawn.	Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome go to the tomb very early.	Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, and other women from Galilee go to the tomb very early.	Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb while it is still dark.
A severe earthquake occurs due to an angel rolling the stone away from the entrance of the tomb.	(No earthquake mentioned.)	(No earthquake mentioned.)	(No earthquake mentioned.)
The guards at the tomb are afraid of the angel.	(No guards mentioned.)	(No guards mentioned.)	(No guards mentioned.)
One angel sits on the stone outside the tomb.	One angel is in the tomb as the women enter it.	Two angels appear inside the tomb after the women enter it.	Mary Magdalene reports the empty tomb to the disciples. Peter and another disciple go to investigate. After they leave, Mary Magdalene looks inside the tomb and sees two angels.
The angel says that Jesus	The angel says that Jesus	The two angels say that	The two angels ask Mary

Matthew	Mark	Luke & Acts	John
has risen and that the women should go tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee.	has risen and that the women should go tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee. The women say nothing to anyone because they are afraid.	Jesus has risen.	Magdalene why she is weeping. She responds. The angels do not speak any other words.
On their way back to Jerusalem, Jesus greets the women who hold to his feet and worship him.	[Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene.]	(No mention of Jesus talking to any women.)	After Mary Magdalene answers the angels, Jesus appears to her outside the tomb.
Jesus instructs the women to go tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee.	[No mention of what Jesus said to Mary Magdalene but she reports his appearance to the disciples.]	The women report what the angels said. Peter goes to the tomb and finds only the linen.	Jesus tells Mary Magdalene to stop clinging to him because he had not yet ascended to the Father. He then instructs her to tell the disciples that he is going to ascend. She tells this to the disciples.
The guards are told to say that the disciples stole Jesus' body while they were asleep.	(No guards are mentioned.)	(No guards are mentioned.)	(No guards are mentioned.)
(No mention of Jesus meeting two men outside the city.)	[Two men walking to the country see Jesus. They report it to the others.]	Two disciples (one was named Cleopas) on the way to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection meet Jesus but are prevented from recognizing him. After talking for quite a while, Jesus reveals himself to them. The two men go immediately to Jerusalem and report what has happened to the eleven and others with them.	(No mention of Jesus meeting two men outside the city.)
The eleven go to Galilee to meet Jesus. When they see him, they worship him, but some doubted. Jesus gives them the great commission.	[Jesus appears to the eleven while they are reclining at the table. There is no indication of where they are located. A different version of the great commission is given to them.]	Jesus appears to the disciples on the same day as the resurrection while the two men who saw Jesus on the road to Emmaus are relating their story. Jesus eats with them and then speaks of his fulfillment of prophecies. He tells them to remain in	Jesus appears to the disciples (except Thomas), who are behind closed doors for fear of the Jews. He breathes the Holy Spirit into them at that time. After eight days, he appears again. This time Thomas is present. Later, Jesus

Matthew	Mark	Luke & Acts	John
	<p><i>Note: The square brackets [] indicate text that is not in the most reliable manuscripts.</i></p>	<p>the city until they receive the Father's promise, which was to be a clothing of power from on high. The book of Acts reemphasizes Jesus' command to not leave Jerusalem until they received the Father's promise. They received the promise when they were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.</p>	<p>appears to some of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias (also called the Sea of Galilee). These disciples had apparently gone back to fishing. Jesus assists them with a catch, eats breakfast with them, teaches them a lesson on love, and speaks of John's long life. No great commission is given.</p>

Comparing these resurrection passages side-by-side, it is easy to see the discrepancies. Differing number of women went to the tomb. Only one writer speaks of a severe earthquake and guards at the tomb. Differing number of angels appear at different locations and in different ways. One writer does not mention that Jesus talked to any women. Two writers mention an appearance of Jesus to two disciples in the country; two do not. In the book of John, Jesus asks Mary Magdalene not to touch him because he had not yet ascended to the Father. In the book of Matthew, the women hold to Jesus' feet, worshipping him, with no reprimand. However, the most damaging of the inconsistencies is what the disciples did after Jesus' resurrection.

Some of you may be saying that the differing number of women and angels is a small detail. Perhaps some writers just failed to mention the others. However, Paul sets the stage for being picky. Please read Galatians 3:16 where Paul makes a big deal about the difference in the singular "seed" and the plural "seeds" when referring to Abraham's descendent(s).

Others will say that these are just differing perspectives of the same events. No one expects witnesses in a trial to tell the same story about something they observed. True. But these witnesses are not claiming to be inspired by God, either. When you have widely varying accounts of an event from supposedly God-inspired men, something is amiss. If God is the author of truth, He cannot inspire inconsistent stories where, at most, only one can be true and the rest false.

Let's turn our attention to the biggest problem with the resurrection stories: the actions of the disciples after the resurrection. Matthew emphatically states that the angels and Jesus himself instructed the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee for a meeting, which they do. Luke emphatically says that Jesus appeared to the disciples on the day of the resurrection and instructed them to stay in the city of Jerusalem until they received the Father's promise, which was the power of the Holy Spirit. They received that gift on Pentecost. John says that Jesus appeared to the disciples twice in Jerusalem and at least once in Galilee. However, the meeting in Galilee was at the Sea of Tiberias, not a mountain as stated in Matthew. Mark's account is rather odd. The most reliable manuscripts end at chapter 16 verse 8 where the women heard the angel but were afraid to

tell anyone. The remaining verses were probably added later. They seem to be a summary of the endings of the other Gospels, briefly mentioning Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene and the two men in the country. These accounts cannot be reconciled. Some are in error, or they are all in error. This is a serious blow to the credibility of the Bible.

Conclusion

This is the last of my essays on the foundations of faith. The series presents a history of my philosophical journey: starting as a theist, then becoming a Christian, then a theist again, and finally ending as an agnostic with passive theistic leanings. I did not take this journey lightly. It was an intense struggle that lasted many years. I went through periods of great highs and great lows. I read a lot of literature and had hours of discussions with friends. I was quite depressed when I saw my faith waning. I prayed intensely that God would show me the truth, whatever it was. He never answered. If He is out there, He refused to grant me the knowledge that I, and many others, crave: where the universe came from, how I got here, and why I am here. I finally realized that without a direct revelation from God Himself, I had only one resource at my disposal: reason. I have now come to grips with this realization and am trying to use it to my advantage. The depression I experienced while trying to reconcile my faith is gone. It has been replaced with happiness -- happiness in knowing that I already have the ability to determine truth. It is the ability to reason. My search has not ended; it has only just begun. I intend to continue my search for truth until the day I die (and hopefully afterwards, also).

Based on my new approach to life, do I totally reject the Bible? Of course not. I just no longer accept those parts that are inconsistent and irrational. The Bible says that murder is wrong. That is rational, and I accept it. It also says that stealing is wrong. This I also accept. However, I do not accept these moral codes because I believe them to be part of a God-inspired text. Rather, I accept them because they are rational.

So, what about the foundation of faith? It has crumbled. But it has been replaced with a foundation of reason. Faith does not lead to truth; it leads to blindly accepting that which someone wants us to believe, no matter how false. Therefore, I now pledge that reason will be my guide. I will accept no contradictions.