

## **SPIRITUAL ASPECTS**

### **Introduction**

I grew up going to church, but did not understand what impact it had on my day-to-day life or on my eternity. Although I'm sure that the leadership at that church was well intentioned, they never clearly explained to me how I could have a relationship with my creator and how I could be sure what would happen to me after I died. One day we attended a different church and the speaker explained that God cared deeply for me and created me to have a personal relationship with him, but that my pride and selfishness thwarted this relationship. He further explained that when Christ died on the cross, he was taking the punishment I deserved and that all I needed to do to begin a relationship with him was to accept the gift of his payment for my pride and selfishness. If I accepted his gift by asking him to forgive me and to begin making me the person he wanted me to be, he'd surely do so. In my opinion, this has been the best and most critical decision I have ever made.

I have often been asked as a Ph.D. level engineer what evidence I have for my faith. For me, this evidence can be broken into 5 categories: 1) Undeniable personal experience, 2) The uniqueness, brilliance and simplicity of basic Christianity, 3) Scientific evidence for the existence of God, 4) Reliability of the Christian scriptures, and especially the evidence for the resurrection of Christ from the dead and 5) Fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

Although I do not consider myself to be an expert in these 5 areas, my investigation into this has been substantial, so I will not include all the details here. However, I thought it was possible that someone might have a similar interest in these areas, so below I have summarized each area briefly. In addition, I'll provide some references for anyone who might want to pursue their own investigation.

### **Area 1: Undeniable Personal Experience**

I became a Christian over 30 years ago. During the time I have been a follower of Jesus, I have had a number of experiences that confirm both the existence of the supernatural as well as the specific characteristics of the God of the Bible. Some of these experiences have been, in my opinion, undeniably a part of the supernatural while others have been more subjective in terms of their origin. On the more subjective end of the spectrum, I have experienced literally hundreds of times when I believe God has specifically answered my prayers or prayers of those around me. These experiences range from what may be seen as more commonplace (asking God to help me to find something that I have lost) to the more bizarre (asking God to heal someone physically). On the less subjective end of the spectrum, I have had a number of experiences that I believe can only be explained by the existence of the supernatural. As it is easy for this type of experience to be misrepresented, I'd prefer to discuss these details with people individually. In that light, I'd be happy to share details of these experiences if you wish to call me, come by or email me. Suffice it to say that, based on these experiences, I am intellectually compelled to conclude that there HAS to be a supernatural component to the universe. Note that, based on these "undeniable personal experiences" alone I can not conclude that one

specific faith/belief system is correct, only that there must be a supernatural component to the universe. My conclusions regarding my specific faith are based on the other 4 areas discussed below.

### **Area 2: The Simplicity, Uniqueness and Brilliance of Basic Christianity**

I have had the privilege of studying a number of impressive scientific and philosophical theories, operational systems and world views. In my personal estimation, the most impressive of these by far is that offered by basic biblical Christianity. The basis for my evaluation is that I believe any rational theistic system must contain a god that has at least two basic characteristics: 1) Perfectly loving and 2) Perfectly just. These two characteristics, by their very nature, create what appears to be an unsolvable problem. If a system's god is perfectly loving, then that god would not want to condemn anyone. However, if god is perfectly just, then that god must hold us responsible for all of our actions (both good and bad). The brilliance of basic Christianity lies in the unique solution to this seemingly unsolvable problem. The God of the bible remains perfectly loving by offering the free gift of forgiveness to anyone who will simply accept it. This same God remains perfectly just in that every offense committed by every person who has ever lived was paid for when Jesus voluntarily sacrificed himself by dying on the cross. This is an ultimate, brilliant, "thinking-outside-the-box" solution to the fundamental issue regarding the nature of God. Every other belief system I have studied minimizes one of these two core characteristics of God. Systems that down-play god's love minimize the relational initiation one would expect from a perfectly loving god and leave one with a feeling that god is saying "you are left to figure this out yourself". Systems that minimize god's justice will lead you to believe that if you do enough "good" things, maybe you'll be lucky and god will overlook the "bad" things you have done.

Although these basic concepts of love and justice are simple enough for a small child to comprehend and accept, the biblical truths that under gird them have awesome breadth and depth. As my spiritual journey progresses, I continue to discover new aspects of the wonder of God's basic plan. If you would enjoy discussing parts of your journey, or hearing more about mine, feel free to give me a call.

### **Area 3: Scientific Evidence for the Existence of God**

There are many specific categories of scientific evidence for the existence of God. The scriptures themselves claim that nature speaks to the existence of God.

*"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."* Romans 1:20 Arguments against the spontaneous generation of life and macro-evolution are among those often discussed. Because one of my areas of engineering expertise is mechanical design, the evidence that proceeds from this discipline is particularly meaningful to me. As a "tip of the iceberg" overview of this evidence, note that the human body is loaded with features representative of an intelligent (actually brilliant) designer. Some of the more obvious features include aesthetic beauty (at least in my wife's case), redundancy, amazing form & function relationships and

modular, complex multi-functional systems. This last example (modular, complex multi-functional systems) include systems like the human eye. These types of systems in particular can not be easily explained by standard natural selection (evolutionary) processes; but instead point toward the work of an intelligent designer. This is because even the lowest level functionality of a system like this requires that all the components of the multi-functional system be operational. To argue that a system like the human eye could have evolved through natural selection would be somewhat like arguing that if all the separate parts of a computer were thrown into a box and shaken for a long period of time, eventually a computer would be created. Even if there were a natural selection type “advantage” for the shaken system if it were functional, because it is not incrementally functional (for example it will not work even if all the parts except the hard drive are correctly connected), the thought that the system would progressively develop through natural selection is not logical. For more information on this area go to [www.leaderu.com](http://www.leaderu.com) and do a search on the word “design”.

#### **Area 4: Reliability of the Christian Scriptures and Especially the Evidence for the Resurrection of Christ from the Dead**

The new testament (last 27 books of the bible) is the foundational document for orthodox Christianity. If these documents are not reliable, then a Christian’s entire understanding of the life, death and resurrection of Christ is flawed. A good place to start your investigation of this topic would be either the book by F.F. Bruce, The New Testament Documents, Are they Reliable? by Intervarsity Press or chapter 4 in More Than A Carpenter by Josh McDowell (Tyndale House Publishers).

The authenticity of historical manuscripts can not be evaluated by the scientific method because this method demands repeatability (and would therefore require going back in time to the original events). Historians have therefore developed a different method for validating a “historical hypothesis”. There are 3 tests that are often used to validate the hypothesis that an historical document is reliable.

The first test is the Biographical Test. This test asks the question “Since we do not have the original manuscript, how reliable are the manuscripts that we do have?”. By “reliable” here, we mean how significant are the differences between the copies we have and the original text written by the original author. This is answered primarily by determining two things 1) how much time elapsed between the original and the writing of the copies we have and 2) how many manuscripts (copies) do we have. In the case of the New Testament, we have manuscripts from between 50 and 90 AD and we have about 20,000 copies of different parts of the original texts. The originals were written around 30-40 AD. From an historical standpoint, this is a tremendous number of copies and they are very close (chronologically) to the original writing. In fact, there were still a number of eye witnesses alive when these manuscript copies were written. In order to compare this with another ancient writing, note that Aristotle wrote his poetics around 350 BC and we have 5 copies of this manuscript from about 1100 AD. These 5 copies with a gap of

about 1450 years are generally assumed to be authentic which puts the 20,000 copies of the New Testament documents with a gap of about 50 years in very good standing.

The second test is called the Internal Evidence Test. This test attempts to answer the question “Are the statements in the document accurate?”. There are 2 critical pieces of information used to answer this question. First, are the authors in a place to know if their statements are accurate and second is it likely that they intentionally lied. With respect to the first of these questions, most of the writers of the New Testament were eye witnesses, or talked with eye witnesses, of the events that they recorded. With respect to the second of these questions, the New Testament writers had a large number of opponents to their message. In this context, accuracy of the events would have been closely scrutinized. In addition, the moral content of the writings would have been severely undermined if the writings had been found to be inaccurate. Finally, the writers appear to make no effort to show themselves in a good light. In numerous places their short-comings are included in the documents. Take for example the numerous occasions where the disciples were having conversations about who was the greatest and were reprimanded by Jesus (see for example Mark 9:33-37).

The third test is called the External Evidence Test. This test asks if there is external evidence for the “truth” of the manuscript in question. This external evidence usually takes the form of either corroborating manuscripts or archeological evidence. In the case of the New Testament, both of these external evidences are substantial. For example, there are numerous non-scriptural historical manuscripts which are in agreement with historical events as they are cited in the New Testament. In addition, there are a great many archeological discoveries that corroborate New Testament details. Examples of both the non-scriptural historical documents and the archeological evidence can be found in the book The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Nelson Publishers, 1999, by Josh McDowell.

A somewhat separate but related topic is the evidence for the resurrection of Christ from the dead. This is related as the bible clearly states that Jesus died, was buried and rose from the dead 3 days later (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). In addition, the scriptures state that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is absolutely foundational to biblical Christianity (1 Corinthians 15:14). The topic is separate however, in that there is, in my opinion, very logical evidence outside of the biblical references for this historical event.

To begin this logical development, either the tomb that Christ was buried in was empty three days after his crucifixion, or it still contained his body. The only logical assumption is that it was empty because, if it contained Jesus’ body, either the Romans or the Jews would have produced that body. They had nothing to lose and everything to gain from stopping Christianity in its tracks (which would have been the case if the dead body of Jesus would have been produced).

So if we logically assume that the tomb was empty, then I believe three possibilities remain. First, Jesus could have survived the crucifixion, somehow released himself from about 100 pounds of burial wrappings, moved what was probably about a one ton stone

from the mouth of the cave he was “buried” in, over-powered the armed roman soldiers that were guarding the tomb and appeared to his disciples making convincing arguments that he rose from the dead and was the King of the universe. I believe this takes far more “faith” to believe in than that He actually rose from the dead. Secondly, the disciples could have stolen the body. However, they would have had to defeat the armed roman guard, move the stone, somehow convince about 500 of the other followers of Jesus that they were seeing Him in his resurrected form and finally they would have to all agree to die for what they knew was a lie. Again, this is far more difficult for me to accept than simply that God raised Jesus from the dead. If Jesus did rise from the dead, I believe this event is God’s seal of approval on Jesus’ claim to be deity, the Son of God and the only Savior of the world.

## **Area 5: Fulfillment of Biblical Prophecy**

*Isaiah 46:9-10*

*Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. (NIV)*

The God of the Bible claims to know the end from the beginning and He claims to make the future known in certain circumstances. This, it seems to me, is a great way to test the truth of the claims of the God of the bible. If He accurately and specifically tells of certain future events, this would certainly prove, at least, his existence. In my investigation of this area, I have chosen to break my findings into two categories. First, the prophecies regarding Jesus and second all other prophecies.

### **5.1 Prophecy Regarding Jesus**

The Old Testament (first 39 books in the bible) was written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. As we have many actual copies of the Old Testament texts carbon-dated before Christ, no serious scholar debates this fact. As I have already made arguments regarding the reliability of the New Testament, I will assume its historical accuracy for purposes of this argument.

The Old Testament (OT) contains hundreds of predictions concerning a person whom God would send to pay for the sin of the world (Isaiah 40:2 and 53:12) (the Jewish Messiah). I have personally studied over 300 specific instances where one can trace the OT prophecy to a fulfillment by Jesus in the New Testament (NT) [1]. [2]. Below is a list of just a few of my favorite examples:

- 1- Messiah will be born of a virgin – OT: Isaiah 4:20, NT: Luke 4:20
- 2- He will be called the Son of God – OT Psalm 2:7, NT: Matthew 3:17
- 3- He is the son of Abraham – OT Genesis 22:18, NT: Galatians 3:16
- 4- He will be born in Bethlehem – OT Micah 5:2, NT: Matthew 2:1
- 5- Magi will bring gifts – OT: Psalm 72:10, NT: Mathew 2:1-11
- 6- His ministry will begin in Galilee – OT: Isaiah 9:1, NT: Matthew 4:12

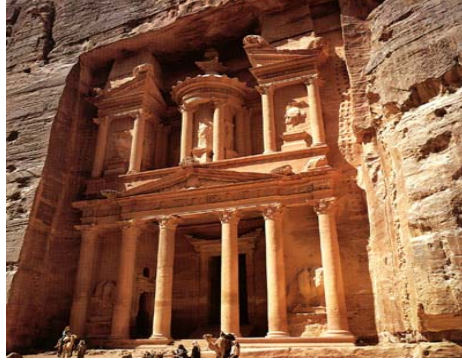
- 7- He will enter Jerusalem on a donkey – OT: Zechariah 9:9, NT: Luke 19:35
- 8- He will be betrayed by a friend – OT: Psalm 41:9, NT: Matthew 10:4
- 9- Price of the betrayal is 30 pieces of silver – OT Zechariah 11:12, NT: Matthew 26:15
- 10- He will be crucified with thieves – OT: Isaiah 53:12, NT: Matthew 27:38
- 11- His hands and feet will be pierced (crucifixion) – OT: Psalm 22:16, NT: Luke 23:33
- 12- His garments will be divided up by casting lots (rolling dice) – OT: Psalm 22:18, NT: John 19:23
- 13- None of his bones will be broken – OT: Psalm 34:20, NT: John 19:33
- 14- His side will be pierced – OT: Zechariah 12:10, NT: John 19:34
- 15- He will be buried in a rich man's tomb – OT: Isaiah 53:9, NT: Matthew 27:57-60
- 16- He will rise from the dead – OT: Psalm 16:10, NT: Acts 2:31
- 17- He will ascend back into heaven – OT: Zechariah 11:12, NT: Matthew 26:15

It has been argued by some that Jesus knew the OT and therefore simply fulfilled the prophecies as an act of his will. However, many of these are beyond the individual's control (where you are born, who your forefathers are, etc.) and it is difficult to believe that someone would purposefully choose to be crucified just to pretend to be someone that he knew he really was not.

From a statistical standpoint, the odds that a person would randomly fulfill only 8 of the specific items in this list is 1 in  $10^{17}$ . This is according to a statistical research publication by Peter Stoner [3]. The odds of fulfilling 48 of these prophecies is 1 in  $10^{157}$ . As there are 61 prophecies that most scholars consider to be "major" predictions concerning the Messiah and hundreds of other less significant predictions, it appears to be quite difficult, from a mathematical perspective, to dismiss the prophetic evidence that Jesus is the fulfillment of the OT prophecies concerning the Messiah.

## 5.2 Other Prophecy

Besides the prophecies regarding the Messiah, the OT is loaded with other prophecies. In many cases, non-believing scholars have looked at the historical accounts in the OT and have passed judgment saying that these events are historically inaccurate. Often this is because there has been little or no archeological evidence of a particular OT event or the kingdoms spoken of in the OT is not spoken about in other ancient documents. A relatively recent example is the kingdom of Edom including the rock city called Petra. This kingdom and city are mentioned numerous times in the OT but, until relatively recently, were assumed by non-believing scholars to be a fabrication. In 1812 the city of rock called Petra was rediscovered. I have been there and it is amazing. There are a number of very specific prophecies regarding what will happen to the Edomite people and the city of rock. Since its discovery in 1812, many ancient documents have been discovered detailing the history of the Edomite people and the city of Petra. The OT prophecies are fulfilled in intricate detail as can be seen in [2].



Picture of an Awesome Stone Structure at Petra (Jordan)

[1] Hebert Lockyer, **All the Messianic Prophecies of the Bible**, Zondervan Publishers, 1988.

[2] Josh McDowell, **Evidence the Demands a Verdict**, Here's Life Publishers, 1979.

[3] Peter Stoner, **Science Speaks**, Moody Press, 1963.

### **Summary**

Despite the substantial investigation I have made in the topics discussed above, as my spiritual journey has continued, I have become more and more aware of how many questions I still have. At the same time I have become more comfortable and confident in the basics of my faith. These basics, and the friendship with God that they facilitate provide meaning, direction and a growing peace for me personally. I really enjoy hearing other people's stories regarding the spiritual aspects of their life, so if you have a story you'd like to share, email me... my hope is that your spiritual journey would provide meaning and peace for you as mine has for me.