

60 Hostile Questions about Christianity Answered

Steve Husting

Vexing Questions—Satisfying Answers

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*60 Hostile Questions About Christianity
Answered*

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1.

Is there any way to prove that God exists?

God can do what no one else can do. If you wanted to prove that you were God, you would probably prove it by accomplishing what ordinary mortals cannot do. Perhaps you would fly. Or disappear and reappear in a new location. Or raise someone from the dead. You might lift several trucks up in air and juggle them. Perhaps demonstrate invulnerability by diving into bubbling lava and walking out again. You could go to the nearest VA hospital and cause new limbs to grow.

In a secular culture, you might even submit to tests of all kinds so skeptical scientists could measure the results scientifically.

The Christian God was very careful to prove himself when he had the Bible written. He wanted to make sure you would recognize him as God

when he set his plan of salvation into effect. He did this by accurately telling us what the future holds. No person on earth, no medium or psychic, can claim the accurate prediction rate of God. God gave times, people's names, and place names so we could check out history and verify his work. He even gave us the name of a historical figure centuries before the fact!

Now if you wanted everyone to know that you, as God, was going to appear as a human being, you would explain what you would be like so you would be recognized. You could put in the city of your birth, where you would grow up, what kinds of deeds you would do, your temperament, your

purpose, even how you would die.

God did all that in the Old Testament. It was all in written form four hundred years before Jesus'

birth. The New Testament gospels follow Jesus and point out some of the places where he fulfilled the prophecies.

If you haven't been exposed to biblical proph-

He wanted to make sure you would recognize him as God when he set his plan of salvation into effect. He did this by accurately telling us what the future holds.

ecy before, let me give you several examples.

Daniel recounts in chapter eleven of his book of having received knowledge of future events from God. Written in the 6th century B.C., Daniel gives us an accurate description of events winding down to 199–198 B.C. He foresaw Alexander the Great's kingdom split up into four factions. The prophecy predicts details of the conflict between the Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties. Skeptics cannot believe the account was written before 164 B.C. Unlike Nostradamus' cryptic writings, Daniel chapter eleven describes plain schemes and conquests that are easily followed by the student of history.

Can you name the next president of the United States just two years ahead of time? Can you guess what name a friend will come up with for her new baby barely twelve months into the future? No? Well, how about naming a king who will not appear for another 150 years, and name his nation? The prophet Isaiah did just that. In Isaiah 44:28–45:1 God tells us that Cyrus, king of Persia, will decree regarding Jerusalem, "You shall be built," and regarding the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." In 2 Chronicles 36:22 and Ezra 1:1–3 we find that Cyrus did indeed come to power and

called the Jews to return to Israel and rebuild Jerusalem, which had been destroyed earlier.

Can you predict when the Messiah (God's chosen one, Jesus) will appear in the world? Daniel 9:24–25 tells us that the Messiah would die 483 Hebrew years after “the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem.” (Enemies of Israel had destroyed Jerusalem twice in Israel's history.) Nehemiah 2:1–8 tells us that King Artaxerxes issued that decree (March 5, 444 B.C.). 483 prophetic years (360 days to a year in the calendar of the ancient world) and seven days later, Jesus the Messiah was crucified.

How could a prophet accurately predict the dismantling of a world empire hundreds of years beforehand? How could a prophet give us the name, nation, and decree over a hundred years prior to the king's birth? How could a man foretell to the year the life and death of Jesus unless he really heard the voice of God? (I can't even predict which shirt I'll wear next week!) These are only a small sample of prophecies in the Bible. One quarter of the Bible is prophecy. Several archaeological discoveries have verified these and many other accounts. God has proven his existence

wonderfully.

What Do You Think?

- a. Nearly a quarter of the Bible is prophecy. Do you believe that consistent, accurate reporting of facts with names, places, and events hundreds of years in advance demonstrates a God-like intelligence behind the Bible?
- b. Most of us have no problem guessing or even gambling on various outcomes. In what ways do the prophecies mentioned above go beyond guessing?
- c. The coming of Jesus Christ fulfilled around one hundred prophecies. Another one hundred or so prophecies yet remain regarding his Second Coming. How many prophecies must be accurately fulfilled before someone should take God seriously?

2.

If the Bible says that love keeps no record of wrongs, then why does God, who is love, keep such records?

Love and judgment are two different things, not opposites, so they can exist together. A federal judge can sentence lawbreakers to prison and still go home and love his kids. Love and hate can also exist together.

When we love something, we sometimes hate its opposite. I like it when things are neat and organized,

We need to be careful not to over-simplify God and make him into a two-dimensional cardboard character.

such as an orderly home. By implication, I hate disorderliness. I love it when people treat me well; I hate it when someone's abusive.

God loves good; this means he hates evil.

God loves us; he is also loves justice. Like any good judge, he will note the evil that men do. The day is coming when God will judge everyone and give us what we deserve. But he will also forgive the wrongs when we turn to him in repentance. One verse that combines his love and justice is Romans 5:8: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This is like a federal judge offering up his son to take the place of the man he has condemned to death: Justice with compassion. God must judge sin, but in love, God chose to punish his son in our place so he could pardon us of all our sins.

We need to be careful not to over-simplify God and make him into a two-dimensional cardboard character. We make this mistake when we overemphasize a general observation (such as his love) and forget he has other traits. That’s like insisting that we compose a painting using only one color. God is love, but that is only one of his attributes. When you paint him with all the colors in the Bible, you’ll end up with a picture of surpassing beauty and majesty!

What Do You Think?

- a. Have you ever demonstrated love to one person and still justified passing judgment on another person?
- b. If you answered yes to the above question, does this show a defect in your character, or an innate ability to see that different people and situations demand personalized approaches?
- c. Have you ever found people judging you wrongly because they didn't know you well enough?

3.

Why did the Son of God die for us on the cross?

We have all sinned. Sin is breaking God's laws (1 John 3:4). Therefore we must pay the penalty for breaking his laws, just like we pay a penalty for breaking a traffic law. However, the penalty for breaking God's laws is death (Romans 6:23).

God does not want us to die for our sins.

*God in love sent his son
Jesus in the form of a
man to die in our place.*

We see through the animal sacrifices he initiated in the Old Testament times that he accepts a substitute for sin. When a

Hebrew sinned, he could bring a law-approved animal from his flock, such as a lamb, and give it to the priest. There he was to place his hand on the animal's head and confess his sin. His sin was transferred to the animal. The man then took a knife and killed the lamb. The lamb died for the man's sin.

God in love sent his son Jesus in the form of a man to die in our place. When Jesus was on the cross, God placed all the blame of the world upon him (Isaiah 53:5–10). Thus Jesus bore our penalty of death. He became the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). His death satisfied God’s sense of justice and showed us how much he loved us. Because of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice, all animal sacrifices are now obsolete.

Now, if we confess that we are sinners and trust Jesus, God will forgive our sins and grant us the righteousness we need for the kingdom of God (John 3:16).

What Do You Think?

- a. If Jesus died in your place, then doesn’t that indicate that God has already found you worthy of death, and your good deeds won’t help you to heaven?
- b. If Jesus’ death in your place was determined by God long ago, doesn’t that imply that God had already positioned a “lifesaver” within your reach?
- c. If Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross was the only thing that an all-knowing God could figure out to save you and still keep justice, shouldn’t that be reason enough to accept his plan?

4.

*If God created all things,
then who created God?*

It's only natural to be curious about how people invent things. When we admire the intricacies of a created object, such as the iTouch or the Sistine Chapel paintings, we naturally are curious about the creator. When people find out that I write,

From everlasting to everlasting, You are God. (Psalm 90:2)

they ask me where I get my ideas from. We enjoy reading biographies of famous people. We're fascinated by the way parents and other people shaped other lives.

We see the world with its strange creatures and fantastic formations and wonder about the one who created all things. Then we naturally wonder where God came from.

We ask, "If all things have a creator, then who

created God?” Actually, only created things have a creator, so it’s improper to lump God with his creation. God has revealed himself to us in the Bible as having always existed. The Bible says of the Creator of all things: “From everlasting to everlasting, You are God” (Psalm 90:2). In other words, with God alone there was no beginning and will be no ending. Even Jesus, who was born of Mary in Bethlehem, existed in spirit form before he came in the flesh as a baby in the manger.

What Do You Think?

- a. Is there any conceivable way a human being can create something out of nothing? Why or why not?
- b. Is a being’s ability to create matter from nothing a sufficient indication of God-like status? Why or why not?
- c. Are there any scientific or natural laws that govern creating something out of nothing?

5.

What if God does not exist after all?

If the Christian God does not exist after all ...

- Then how did the prophets plainly foretell of Jesus' coming, complete with the exact name of his birthplace, how he would die, even to pre-quote the words people will say around his crucifixion hundreds of years before they happened? Through approximately one hundred prophecies, the Bible carefully identifies the Son of God with specific details so we would recognize him when he came.
- How did the Bible accurately foretell the time Jesus will appear on earth, even naming a historically verifiable character (Cyrus) who was not yet born? No modern fortune-teller, psychic, or other holy book has the prophecy fulfillment track record of the Bible.

- Why didn't the first century Jews who were against the Christians deny Christ's miracles? They accused him of being in league with the Devil rather than deny that he healed the blind and raised people from the dead. Why did they have to make up a story that his disciples had stolen his body? Jesus said he would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven. The Jews circulated the report that his body was stolen from the tomb because they had to acknowledge that it was indeed missing. The disciples of Jesus were persecuted to death for supposedly robbing the body. If they had hidden the body as the Jews claimed, then they could have produced the body and escaped death.
- Why does the fossil record show only a handful of disputable transitional samples linking fish to amphibian or any other species? Archaeologists have unearthed millions of fossils—more than enough to find a single undisputable example of evolution.
- How did the male and female sexual organs, perfectly suitable for the other, appear in nearly every specie of animal? It is ludicrous to accept the idea that male and female sexual

organs evolved in lockstep over many millions of years across virtually every kind of beast.

These facts are incomprehensible apart from the existence of a Creator who wants to make himself known to us. Through the prophecies, he wrote the Bible in a way that showed himself as the author. Through creation he shows us several of his attributes, such as order and law.

What Do You Think?

- a. If the Christian God did not exist, would you be relieved? Why or why not?
- b. Was your answer to the above question based on what you know about God through personal reading of the Bible, or through other peoples' comments?

6.

Why did God create an evil Devil?

The Devil and demons are fallen angels. God did not create an evil angel. God created Lucifer, who was God's beautiful choirmaster (Isaiah 14:12–15, Ezekiel 28:12–15). Lucifer later turned his own heart against God. It wasn't God's fault that Lucifer turned against him, for he fell through pride.

After God created Adam and Eve, Lucifer coaxed Eve to eat the fruit God forbade them to eat in the Garden of Eden because he wanted to get back at God. Now Lucifer chooses to hurt God by hurting you, God's creation.

What about us? Is it God's fault if we turn against him, or our fault? Yet God made a way for all of us to come back to him forgiven and blessed: through faith in Jesus Christ, his son.

What Do You Think?

- a. Did you once believe that God created an evil angel? If so, where did that information come from and why did you accept it?
- b. Animals, bugs, and viruses need to feed on other living things to stay alive. Are they really evil on that basis?
- c. How would you define evil?

7.

*Is it true that if I simply believe
in Jesus I'll get to heaven?*

Yes! The Bible tells us to trust in Jesus to save us rather than trust in our good character or good deeds. The problem is that we'd rather believe that we are good persons; that our good deeds earn us a place in heaven.

This is where people get defensive. Who wants to believe that he is worthy of hell? The Ten Commandments are to help us see that we are sinners. If you break one of the Commandments, you are guilty as a law-breaker and thus not acceptable for entrance into heaven. One commandment tells us not to covet our neighbor's goods or wife (Exodus 20:17). If we wished we could have anything that the person near us has, we've broken this commandment, and we are sinners and in need of salvation from hell. Justice must be served. But God calls us to believe in Jesus and he will

forgive all. Continue with God and he will change us from the inside out.

It seems so simple—“believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31a)—but people resist because pride holds them back. Pride in our religious or ethnic heritage, accomplishments, wealth, knowledge, and so on, can present excuses that prevent us from believing in Jesus. Society has taught us that those factors are good and important. The Bible tells us that these considerations are not enough to merit the righteousness we need for heaven. Only faith in Jesus will grant us that entrance.

God opens the door to heaven to all people in the world through faith. If you don’t have enough good deeds, wealth, knowledge, or family connections, or if you believe you have sinned too greatly, these factors are not enough to withhold God’s acceptance of you through simple faith in Jesus Christ.

Is faith simple? Yes! But not when you want to get into heaven another way.

What Do You Think?

a. Many people can’t believe because believing in something involves accepting something without evidence, or even in contradiction to plain evidence. Do you hold the same objection?

b. If God prophesied among more than one hundred times in Scripture that Jesus would be born in a certain city, die in a particular manner through no crime of his own, speak certain words, have certain tasks and purposes, experience opposition, and many other traits—all of which came to pass—wouldn't that be enough of a foundation to believe?

c. Did you know that the world's definition of faith and belief is different than the Bible's definition? Jesus pointed out his miraculous works to John the Baptist to prove that he was the Messiah. In John chapter seven the people were evaluating whether Jesus was the Messiah by his miraculous works, while others compared the circumstances of his birth to Scripture prophecy to determine if he was the one God promised to send. Does that sound like the Bible is asking us to believe without evidence?

8.

*How can we know or believe in Jesus
now when we can't see him?*

We believe by logical inference in countless things we can't see. We can't see the wind, but we can see the leaves blowing, feel the breeze on our arms, or hear the sound of the gale.

Lawyers seek to prove the invisible all the time. How many times in a television courtroom drama have you ever seen a lawyer place an object on the table and say, "Your honor, I'd like this motive entered as exhibit twenty-three." We can't see a motive, but we can infer it by the evidence. Juries do not need to be one hundred percent sure, but can render a confident verdict if it's beyond a reasonable doubt.

We can infer the presence of Jesus in different ways. Historical documents, religious and secular, affirm his historical existence. The Bible has an excellent reputation among today's archeologists

for its helpful portrayal of ancient customs and locations of cities. The book of Acts in the New Testament has been a boon to archeologists because of its many accurate period references. Historical records overwhelmingly favor the existence of Jesus and the accuracy of the Bible.

We have enough evidence that places Jesus' life during the early decades of the first century A.D. You can believe in him now because the documents recording his death, burial, and resurrection are trustworthy.

However, this question is more than about knowing whether Jesus existed. You want to know how Christians can know him and follow him with assurance now. It all starts with the purpose for why Jesus Christ came: he came to save us from our sins. Our sins have separated us from God, just like you and your friend are separated if you offend him or her grievously. When we come to God acknowledging our sins and repent of them, God forgives us. When we act upon the Bible's teachings on how to live with other people and how to please God, then we'll find God following through in our lives.

I remember when I led a woman at my job to Christ. It wasn't until several months after reading the Bible that she came to me and said, "I know now." When you follow the Bible, you'll feel the breezes of God's work upon your life. You won't

see him, but you'll know of his work in your life by inference. God wants to prove himself to you!

What Do You Think?

- a. Have you ever read a media's account of a court case and decided that the defendant was innocent or guilty before all the evidence was in?
- b. If yes, how could you be so certain, since you probably have never met the defendant before? Did you need very much information before you made your decision?
- c. Did you know that other historical writings apart from the Bible mention Jesus? They refer to him as a real person, not a myth or legend.

9.

Who is more powerful, God or Satan?

Quite a few people think of God and Satan as opposites engaged in a tug-of-war of good versus evil. That's just not so.

We know God is more powerful because God created the universe and Satan didn't. We also know God is more authoritative because in the book of Job,

Satan brings disaster upon Job only with God's permission, and he couldn't go beyond the limits God placed on him (see Job 1:6–12, 2:1–6).

The book of Revelation tells about the Lord Jesus coming back to earth and taking Satan up

The book of Revelation tells about the Lord Jesus coming back to earth and taking Satan up like a plush doll and casting him into a pit for a thousand years.

like a plush doll and casting him into a pit for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1–3). There is no thrilling Jackie Chan-style fighting there. Satan is locked up until God releases him for a short time, but then he unceremoniously casts the Devil into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:7–10). If this were a WWF tournament, the fans would demand their money back!

What Do You Think?

- a. When we think of who is the most powerful, we often think in terms of fighting or brute strength. Are you assuming that God and Satan are of average human build?
- b. Can we sensibly compare any individual's power to the power of someone who created all things from nothing, who knows all things, has no beginning or end, and sees the sweep of eternal past and future?

10.

Isn't it illogical to believe in a God?

It is very logical to believe in how God has revealed himself in the Bible. God said, “Come now, and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18). He does not want us to abandon reason when we talk about the Bible or spiritual life.

Archaeologists use the Bible to help them understand their finds in the Middle East, so the Bible is accurate in its historical details. The medical profession has used the Bible to understand the human body (such as the blood is the life of the body, so it's important to wash or sterilize hands before operating on patients).

The American fathers drew upon their religious heritage in part when drafting the Constitution of the United States. Nutritionists have learned which foods are good for us to eat through the Bible. Our legal system includes several

concepts from the Bible, such as the need for two witnesses. In all these ways and others we see that the Bible has passed the test of reason.

And God proves his existence with logic. He tells us what is going to happen and names names and chronicles events that we can examine in history. Read the gospel of Matthew and examine the passages where it says, “It is written,” and you’ll see several areas where God prophesied what Jesus would be like or what would happen to him centuries in advance. He wanted to make sure you know that the Bible came from God, so he put prophecies in there that only a God can know.

The Bible is not against reason, for as we have just seen, it has been used to aid in serious research across a number of disciplines.

What Do You Think?

- a. If you think it is illogical to believe in a God, perhaps you think this way:
 - Hinduism includes a belief in many gods, for which there are no evidences of their existence.
 - Hinduism is a religion.
 - Christianity is a religion.
 - Therefore, Christianity has no proofs for the existence of its God either.

That is the same as thinking this way:

- An orange has dimpled skin.
- An orange is a fruit.
- An apple is a fruit.
- Therefore, an apple has dimpled skin.

Do you believe Christianity must be illogical simply because you can't believe in the gods of other religions?

b. Have you ever examined the evidences for Christianity and its God separately from the other religions?

11.

*Does God reward those who
choose to believe in him, and
punish those who don't?*

When I give my child gifts, I do it because I love him and want to demonstrate my love that way. But when I reward him, it's because he did what I told him to do.

In the same way, God gives us the undeserved

	gift of eternal life
<i>God punishes those who do</i>	when we believe in
<i>not believe, for they have</i>	Jesus. Afterward,
<i>rejected God's mercy. Be-</i>	rewards enter the
<i>lieve in him, and you'll</i>	picture when we
<i>know mercy and forgiveness.</i>	obey God and serve
	him. Why should

I believe or trust in him? One reason is that I have broken his laws and stand before him as a

condemned criminal who is worthy of punishment, yet God has graciously made it possible for me to escape my fate by extending mercy on the basis of faith. This is different from trusting in my good works to escape hell. So God punishes those who do not believe, for they have rejected God's mercy. Believe in him, and you'll know mercy and forgiveness.

After believing in him, we may learn how to serve him. If I serve the Lord freely with my own volition to the end, the Lord will reward that service in various ways. One of my favorites is to hear him tell me, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

With great sacrifice comes great compensation:

Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"

So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:27-28)

What Do You Think?

- a. If a police officer told an armed criminal to drop his gun or be shot, would the criminal deserve what happened if he did not believe the officer meant what he said?

- b. If God says that we will escape punishment if we trust in his son Jesus, would we deserve the consequences if we decided not to believe him and his way of deliverance?

12.

What's wrong with thinking of God as being black?

Since the Scriptures say that God exists from eternity past to eternity future with no beginning or end, it would be disconcerting to think of God as possessing any kind of nationality—he was present before any nation existed on earth!

It's a different story with Jesus. When the Son of God became flesh, born of a virgin, he took on the ethnicity of his mother. Jesus could not be born

just anywhere. God wanted to make sure we could identify his son when he came, so through prophecy he gave us particular features to look for.

One of the identifying features of Jesus Christ

It's very important that we see the Messiah as Middle Eastern, because God said that's how we will be able to identify him.

was his birthplace. Remember when the wise men followed the star and came to Herod asking where the King of the Jews would be born? Herod consulted with the scribes, who found the verse in the Bible that indicated that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel” (Matthew 2:6, quoting Micah 5:2, which was written hundreds of years earlier). Through fulfilled prophecy we know Jesus is God’s Messiah, whom God sent to save us from our sins. If Jesus was born in any other city, then he would not fulfill the prophecy and would be a false prophet.

Why can’t Jesus have been an African born in Bethlehem? Because God had proclaimed in advance that the Savior of the World would come through King David. The two genealogies in Matthew and Luke trace Mary and Joseph’s lineage to King David, a Jew.

So it’s very important that we see the Messiah as Middle Eastern, because God said that’s how we will be able to identify him. This means that we need look for no other Savior, for he has already come! Through him God will deliver us from sin and bring us into a relationship with himself.

What Do You Think?

- a. If you are a non-Jewish believer, would you feel closer to Jesus if he were your own nationality? Why or why not?
- b. Are you reluctant to accept Jesus' Jewish ethnicity? If so, can you trace that hesitancy to its roots?

13.

Why does God hate homosexuals?

You probably get the idea that God hates homosexuals from the many public radio and television figures and even street evangelists who have spoken against homosexuality using slurs and put-downs. You get the idea that God hates homosexuals because these individuals, who supposedly represent God, vilify them. I have read disturbing web site articles written by Christians who condemn homosexuals—and even other Christian groups—with harsh language.

But what does the Bible actually say? God abhors acts of bestiality, adultery, and homosexuality (Leviticus 18:20, 22, 23). He told the Israelites not to engage in these acts because for these acts God was using the Israelites to drive the inhabitants out of the land: “For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants”

(see Leviticus 18:24–25). God is holy and wanted to dwell with the Israelites. If the Israelites wanted God to remain in their midst and bless and protect them, then they must accept these conditions of the covenant God made with them.

The moral parts of God's covenant, which tell us how we are to behave before each other, continue with his believers today. Therefore, many believers are afraid that God will bring judgment on their nation if it

accepts homosexuality, and a society's acceptance of homosexuality will advance other immoral forms of sexuality. So, many conservative people are outspoken about homosexuality.

Many believers are afraid that God will bring judgment on their nation if it accepts homosexuality, and a society's acceptance of homosexuality will advance other immoral forms of sexuality. So, many conservative people are outspoken about homosexuality.

Homosexuality is an unnatural form of the sex act, since it involves using the sexual organs in ways they were not designed. This creates revulsion among mainstream conservatives.

I see two factors in view here. First, if we as individuals want to be holy and enjoy a relationship with God, we must refrain from engaging in what God has forbidden, including adultery and

homosexuality. Being tempted to engage in such relationships is not sin; practicing the behavior is sin. Are you a Christian considering engaging in homosexuality or adultery? Then you will compromise your walk with God. Unfortunately, Christians have lost credibility in their stand against homosexuality because of their own many cases of adultery and divorce. But this does not mean God has changed his mind regarding homosexuality or adultery! Both are still abhorrent to him.

Second, homosexuals are not being singled out by God today as meriting special disfavor. The Scriptures tell us that all of us have sinned and fallen short of God's standard. As a result, God's wrath rests upon all of us—unless we come to him in faith and repentance. Through faith in Jesus Christ, all sin will be forgiven, and through the power of the Holy Spirit sin can be resisted.

What Do You Think?

a. My wife has often thought that I hated certain foods because I preferred other foods to eat. I had to tell her that I do not hate the other foods; I just like these other foods better. Do you think God hates certain individuals just because he favors something else?

- b. Have you ever been accused of hating because someone did not like you disagreeing with him or her? Have you ever noticed that people think it's hatred if people disagree with their views, but not hatred if it aligns with their thinking?
- c. Why do people equate hate with disagreement? Can people agree to disagree with a civil attitude?
- d. If a heterosexual is against the practice of homosexuality, and a homosexual is against the heterosexual's reasons for it, who is hating who?
- e. Have you ever heard fiery rhetoric by homosexuals against heterosexuals? Aren't such displays of "hatred" protected free speech?

14.

*Doesn't the Bible say that
God created evil?*

Here is the verse:

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7 KJV)

The word evil in this passage has been mistranslated in the *King James Version* of the Bible. As it is with our English sentences, we must derive the meaning from the context.

The writer adopted a form of writing unique to poetic Hebrew literature which incorporates parallelism and word contrast. For instance, light and darkness are opposites. But what about peace and evil? Evil is not the opposite of peace. For the passage to be a successful parallelism, evil should

be replaced by a word representing lack of peace. Newer translations of the Bible have corrected this verse. Instead of peace and evil, *The New King James Version* says, “peace and calamity.” The *New International Version* says, “prosperity and disaster.”

But what is the passage really saying? The chapter containing this verse is fascinating. In the first eight verses of the chapter, and the last portion of the previous chapter, God tells us that he will use Cyrus, king of Persia, as his tool to free the Israelites from captivity far from their land and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple: “Who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, ‘You shall be built,’ and to the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid’” (Isaiah 44:28).

What’s amazing about this passage is that Cyrus will not exist for another 140 years! Here is an example of prophecy where God names a person before he existed and tells him what he’ll do. Indeed, through Cyrus, God delivered the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. This passage tells us that God brought the Jews into darkness and calamity through their captivity, and God will again bring them light and peace when Cyrus releases them.

What Do You Think?

- a. Have you ever had someone take your words out of context, forcing you to explain what you meant? What does it mean to take something out of context?
- b. When you read a story, do you read only a small portion of the page in order to make sense of it? Or do you read the entire story from the beginning to understand the flow of the story?
- c. Do you believe the Bible would be better understood if one read it from the beginning to the end?

Violence

15. Why would God command violence toward the Israelites in the Old Testament? 54
16. Why would the law put a child to death for hitting or cursing his parents? 56
17. If God is pro-life, why did he command the slaughter of infants and children in the OT? 59
18. Why did an angry God kill everyone at the Flood? 62
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15.

Why would God command violence toward the Israelites in the Old Testament?

Do keep the violence in perspective. God made a covenant with the people of ancient Israel. The covenant through Moses stated that God would bless them with his protection and provision if they obeyed him, and visit them with war, death, diseases, and other judgments if they turned away from him (Deuteronomy 28:1–68). They knew these conditions in advance and accepted them.

We make a similar agreement with the laws of our land. If we murder someone, we can expect punishments in the form of incarceration or the death penalty. However, we hope the penalties for breaking the law will deter most people.

Today a new covenant is in effect between God and his people. The blessings of the old covenant depended on how well the ancient Israelites

obeyed God, and they failed miserably. The new covenant rests on God's faithfulness and promises, neither of which can fail. We enjoy the blessings of the new covenant when we act in faith toward God.

Why did God treat the nation of Israel so violently? When the nation of Israel turned its back on trusting God, he afflicted the nation in various ways according to his agreement with them. When Israel returned to God, he forgave them as he promised, then brought them peace and prosperity again. The violence was not capricious, but used judiciously to encourage them to return to a proper relationship with their God.

What Do You Think?

- a. Do you agree that criminals deserve the violence they experience in prison? Do you agree ruthless street criminals deserve to die when they are killed by a rival street criminals? Why or why not?
- b. Do you agree with the laws of the land that will result in imprisonment or confiscation of your driver's license if you violate certain state vehicle laws?

16.

*Why would the law put a
child to death for hitting
or cursing his parents?*

Here are the two verses:

And he who strikes his father or his mother
shall surely be put to death.

And he who curses his father or his
mother shall surely be put to death. (Exodus
21:15, 17)

Remember that this was part of a covenant between God and his people. If they did indeed want God to live in their camp and lead and bless them, then in addition to the blessings he promised, they had to accept a stricter code of conduct with its severe punishments. After all, this was a holy God in their midst protecting them and promising peace, prosperity, and protection—

which he by his own power could actually give them.

In God's plan, the parents would receive the highest honor in the society, and thus are worthy of the highest respect of the children. In many societies, parenting has been greatly devalued, with absent fathers, kids born out of wedlock, and child abuse abounds.

We cannot use these laws in our land because our laws do not reflect a covenant between God and man. Now we have the freedom to curse our nation's leaders and belittle the soldiers who have spilled blood to protect this liberty. We may insult and disobey our parents. If we do these things, we won't be punished by God; nevertheless, we'll still suffer the consequences of strained relationships.

In God's camp, the people were held to a higher standard because the reward God was going to give them for their faith was much greater than any earthly ruler could bestow—life in the kingdom of God with lasting riches and joys unbounded.

Ever since the Twin Towers in New York City were attacked by extremists who have sworn to destroy America, we Americans have accepted more laws and inconvenience than we have ever accepted before. Searches at airports are prolonged and flight delays are commonplace. Surveillance cameras are going up at a rapid pace. Civil liber-

ties are eroding. We allow these happenings in the interest of greater safety. How much more would we accept the death penalty for cursing our parents if we knew that the God who opened the Red Sea to save us, the God who destroyed the whole Egyptian army single-handedly, has expressed his intentions to love us and protect our nation against all enemies forever?

What Do You Think?

- a. Suppose there were a guarantee that your country would experience everlasting peace and freedom from war and disease, and every citizen would prosper in health into old age. However, the law of the land specified capital punishment for chewing gum, smoking, spitting in the street, and children cursing their parents. Would you accept these inconvenient conditions to gain unlimited protection and prosperity?
- b. If God had first destroyed all our enemies, would you find the above agreement more acceptable?

17.

*If God is pro-life, why did he
command the slaughter of infants
and children in the OT?*

If we believe in freedom, why do we imprison our own citizens? If we believe in freedom of speech, why do people sue others for slander? If we believe in equal opportunity employment for all, then why would Democrats refuse to hire a Republican for a high-level staffer position? If people believe in tolerance, why do they suppress opposing viewpoints?

Every rule has exceptions. Every action has nuances and context. God is pro-life in that he places great worth on human life. Yet he has been willing to sacrifice the lives of the wicked that good lives may continue unharmed (that's one reason why we put lawbreakers in prison, isn't it?).

But that's not the whole story, for how can God justify killing infants who have harmed no

one? First, let's move away from the idea that the people in those days were like your next-door neighbor in a quiet suburban setting who whistles while he grills burgers in the back yard. Meanwhile, his children are splashing happily in the pool, tossing a beach ball while Fido barks joyously and the wife entertains her friends on the patio, shielded from the hot sun under an umbrella.

What really happened back then will make you flee town in terror. The population was accustomed to homosexuality and bestiality. From our enlightened perspective since the free love movement in the '60s, we know that STDs must have abounded in man, woman, baby, and livestock in those days (especially since they had no concept of "safe sex").

If that were not bad enough, the neighbor's barbecue took a turn for the gross. The "grill" would be a huge metal statue of their god, turning red-hot from the bonfire around it. Of course, their god would demand a human sacrifice, and sure enough, the neighbor would toss your own baby alive into the arms of the figure (as happened in 2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 32:35).

With the prevalence of STDs, the resident Amaleks being sworn enemies of Israel, and the corrupting influence of a repulsive culture of death, it is no wonder why God commanded several entire communities to be eliminated (Deuter-

onomy 9:4).

Children were not always slain. In Deuteronomy 20:10–11, we learn that the Israelites were not to randomly destroy all cities, but first propose peace to each city they encounter. If the city would surrender to serve them, the inhabitants were spared their lives. If they rejected the terms of peace, only the men were killed while the women and children were spared.

What Do You Think?

- a. If you love your terminally ill pet, would you take offense if someone called you evil if you put your pet to sleep?
- b. Have you ever applied a label to someone, only to find that the person had enough individuality to show that the label was too restrictive?

18.

Why did an angry God kill everyone at the Flood?

Here is what the Bible actually says:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. (Genesis 6:5–8)

The men God created became so horrible that you would not want to live next door to them.

You would fear for your life and the lives of your children and friends. Here's an example of how bad it was: one of the people boasted to his wives, "I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me" (Genesis 4:23b). If you hurt one of these people, they would kill you and boast to others what they did to you.

This passage gives us an insight into God's character. Does

it portray God as
vengeful, angry, or
bored? Actually, God
was very sorry to take
the course he did.

God did not
wipe out every per-
son at the first signs

of evil. When Cain killed his brother Abel, God did not kill him, but put a mark on him to protect him from others who would want to kill him. God had much patience as he waited for men to change themselves and do right. He waited so long that there was only one good person left—Noah. So God in sorrow decided to start over again after giving the world plenty of chances before it destroyed itself and corrupted the last man standing.

This passage gives us an insight into God's character. Does it portray God as vengeful, angry, or bored? Actually, God was very sorry to take the course he did.

Not only did God wait until the last minute, but he warned the people of the coming judgment. Noah received warning about the flood a hundred years in advance, and he told the people around him (2 Peter 2:5). Enoch, who lived in the days before the Flood, also warned the people to get ready for God's judgment, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them" (Jude 14–15a). All warnings were without effect. The men received the punishment due them—a world of murderers received the death penalty.

People point to other nice persons or themselves and ask why God would destroy such people at the Flood. There were no more "nice" people left in the world but one, so the comparison between that world and ours is not appropriate. What did God do for the one left? Noah heard the voice of God and heeded the warning. God saved him. Will you hear his voice and turn to him in faith and be saved?

What Do You Think?

- a. When someone is murdered, how quickly should the perpetrator be caught? Was God wrong

to have waited a long time before bringing judgment?

b. God will bring judgment again. He has warned us in advance of the coming judgment, even to give us particulars regarding the signs of the times. Is it right for him to warn us in advance?

c. Do you believe in the death penalty for murder?

d. What's the best course of rehabilitation to help those who boast when killing others?

e. If God is a God of judgment, are you glad he has waited a long time in your case before carrying out any verdict?

19.

Why did God tell Moses to kill children?

Here is the passage:

Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately. But keep alive for yourselves all the young girls who have not known a man intimately. (Numbers 31:17–18)

I read an article of a mother who lives in a gang-infested part of town with her son. Each morning the child dresses for school and the mother checks to make sure he's not wearing any gang-affiliated colors. Then they pray for his safety. The boy sets off for school, taking a zigzag, maze-like route down alleys and neutral streets to avoid gang members who intimidate other youth.

Reading of youth gangs in newspaper articles like these help me see how bad it can get among the youth. The stories of children killing on

campus tell me how bad it can get even with the young. Stories like these shine a glaring beam of light illuminating the problem facing the Hebrews as God brings them into the land he promised them. In other words, we're not talking about Boy Scouts here.

The Hebrews could not possibly reform the youth of the land they were entering. God was bringing the Hebrews into the land to judge the peoples of gross sin. God is the judge of the whole Earth and it is his prerogative to execute judgment. God did not call the Israelites to destroy all children in the land, however, and he even gave the reasons why children should be killed in this one instance: "Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord" (Numbers 31:16). This passage tells us that God limited his judgment to a specific group of people, including their children, for a specific purpose. According to the passage quoted at the beginning of this answer, not all children were to be killed.

Amazingly, God chooses to withhold punishment more often than not. God has declared that all of us today have sinned and are worthy of death. He does not desire that we perish in hell, and for the most part has resisted carrying out the

punishment we all deserve. Instead, he invites us to believe on Jesus Christ that we may escape the coming judgment.

What Do You Think?

a. Several children in schools and campuses in recent years have opened fire on teachers and children. If the killers had lived, should they have been tried as children or as adults in the courts? Why or why not?

b. America dropped atom bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in WWII, killing an estimated 120,000 men, women, and children. Was the act justified, even though children were killed? Why or why not?

20.

How could God accept slavery?

What comes to mind when you think of the word slavery?

Plantations. Back-breaking labor under the hot sun. Harriet Tubman. Whippings. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Slave auctions. The Civil War. Abraham Lincoln and the Proclamation of Emancipation. Frederick Douglass. Chattel. Slave ships. *Gone with the Wind*. The Underground Railroad.

The word slave is loaded with pictures of anguish and horror. One hundred years has not dimmed the bitterness and depravity of the history of slavery in America. The Old Testament gives directions to the Hebrews on what to do with servants. These passages appear to sanction slavery as practiced in early America.

In a book by the Rev. Theodore D. Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*¹ (1837), we find that all is not what it seems. In his book, Theodore plainly lists the many ways the servants (slaves) of the Old

Testament were completely unlike the slaves of the Old South. Let me summarize some of those differences here. We'll see how words used in one age don't mean the same in a different age and culture.

Let's first define our term. As defined in the Louisiana civic code, "A slave is one who is in the power of a master to whom he belongs; the master may sell him, dispose of his person, his industry, and his labor; he can do nothing, possess nothing, nor acquire anything, but what must belong to his master." The question we must ask is, "Does the Bible sanction that definition of slavery?"

Immediately after The Ten Commandments were given in chapter twenty of Exodus, God declares, "He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:16). In contrast, if oxen were stolen and killed, the thief would be required to pay the owner back with five oxen. Capital punishment for a man's death shows the enormity of the crime in God's eyes. (See also Leviticus 24:17–18, 21). How different from the slave traders of old who kidnapped black men in their country and brought them here to sell.

Remember that God's great purpose for raising up Moses was to lead the children of Abraham out of Egypt—out of slavery!—to a place of freedom.

The Bible speaks of men who "bought" their

wives. Yet none of these stories showed that what was bought became chattel with no rights of their own. Contrary to America's and England's history of slavery, the wives who were bought were held in high esteem and had rights under the law. The servants who were bought were also held in esteem, had homes and families of their own, and even had servants of their own. When servants were bought, they were paid for their services in advance. It was their services that were bought, not their bodies and souls.

Where the Old South slaves worked from morning to evening day after day, the servants of the Old Testament had the same vacation days and holidays as their masters. Adding up the Sabbath days, feast days, holy days, and other occasions, the law provided that master and servant work only about half of each year!

To buy is often used with the meaning to get. We've used the word in the same way. Benedict Arnold was bought by British gold, yet no one ever called him a slave. "Every man has his price" at which he may depart his scruples, but we still don't consider him slave property.

Consider other traits of the Old Testament servants that distinguish them from being property of their masters.

- The Hebrew servant could compel his master to keep him (Deuteronomy 15:12–13).

- The servants entered into covenant with God (Deuteronomy 29:10–13).
- They were guests at family and national festivals (Deuteronomy 12:12).
- The foreign servants were protected under law equally with other members of the community (Deuteronomy 1:16, 19).
- The law required that the Hebrews love the stranger, including their foreign servants (Leviticus 19:34).
- Servants frequently became heirs of their master's property (1 Chronicles 2:34–35, Matthew 21:38, Proverbs 17:2).
- They were required to be paid (Jeremiah 22:13).

OT servants were not sold. If they were caught with wrongdoing, they were let go, not sold. We see in Galatians 4:1 that a master's own firstborn child was regarded no more highly than a servant. King Saul called David “my servant,” yet David ate at Saul's table, married his daughter, and remained close to Saul's heir apparent, Jonathan.

The OT servants had many opportunities to escape their alleged slavery as the family males went to several required feasts several times a year. Abraham had over three hundred servants—how

could his family keep watch over them all? Did he and his wife take turns throughout the day riding shotgun? The servants were hired hands, not shackled slaves.

The servants in ancient Israel were not chattel, but hired hands, very much like our independent entrepreneurs today.

In some instances, the Old Testament regulates slavery of non-Israelite foreigners. In those cases, God is not condoning slavery, but seeking to control it. Regulation does not mean acceptance—God gives rules regarding divorce, yet he hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Also, though God gave many laws regarding animal sacrifice (Leviticus 1–5), yet God “did not desire” them (Hebrews 10:5).

Recently, the lawmakers in California were seeking ways to control the illegal immigration problem in the state. One idea floated was to grant driver’s licenses to illegal aliens. Upon the attendant hue and cry, the idea was shelved—because it would appear to grant legal status to the illegal community. This is the same charge people lay on God for regulating slavery!

What Do You Think?

- a. Were the slaves of the Old South required to

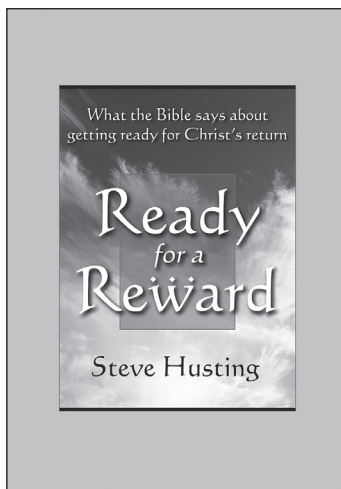
be paid? If the servants of the OT were, how does that affect their status in your mind?

b. Were the slave owners of the Old South required to love their slaves? If the master in ancient Israel disobeyed this law, would you think it was God's fault for including the law or the lawbreaker's fault?

c. If God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, does God still sanction slavery for modern times?

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