



An Introduction To The Christian Bible

or Bible Babble for Beginners



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A. Overview



The Christian Bible is a divinely inspired collection of historical facts and the source of all knowledge for a vocal minority living among us. For another minority, it is strictly a human concoction originating from an ignorant, superstitious, and cruel age that has been manipulated over the years to benefit people in power. However, I believe the majority like me are unfamiliar with the intimate details contained within it, aside from a cursory knowledge of some of the more popular themes of a paradise lost, epic floods, and the birth of a savior who has inspired countless holiday movies about happy families and eggnog. We maintain this ignorance at our own risk.

To one extent or another the Bible influences many of the political and social events shaping the world today, in part because Christianity is the dominant religion in the western world. It's read for inspiration by those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6), misread by others to justify evils such as slavery (Noah's curse on his son Ham in Genesis), and used to defend the ongoing wars in the Middle East. Because it is used and misused so much it's important for us to have a basic understanding of the history of the Bible so everyone can determine how much authority it should be given.

The Bible as we know it today, had its start with stories passed down orally by people residing in the Levant region of the Middle East. This includes the land incorporated in present day Palestine and Israel. These oral traditions were transcribed to scrolls and parchments in the ancient languages of Hebrew and Aramaic and later modified by scribes to fill in perceived information gaps. To make these transcribed stories more accessible to most literate people of the expanded region, they were translated to the Greek language following conquest by Alexander the Great in the third century before the common era (BCE).

In the middle to late first century of the common era (CE), authors writing in the Greek language, decades after the fact, recorded stories of the life and teachings of a proclaimed Jewish Messiah living in Galilee. His name, Jesus of Nazareth. These recordings would be incorporated into the ceremonies and worship of the faithful and added to those already established. In the fourth century CE, a council of church leaders decided which stories and recorded teachings (from antiquity and from the earlier centuries CE) would be officially included in the Christian Bible, and these were subsequently translated into Latin. The officially recognized books of the Bible would later be modified by some prominent religious leaders

after the Protestant Reformation, and subsequently the Bible translated to the vernacular languages of the Christian world.

It can be assumed that with every transcription and translation, scribes and translators made their own edits to make reading flow somewhat coherently. This also allowed for editions more in line with inherent biases. If readers are familiar with the game “Telephone”, this can be thought of as this game played out over centuries by people from many parts of the Western World speaking different languages. In the end the host of the party would then decide whose version they thought most likely to be useful.

The Christian Bible is based on tales of ancient Jewish prophets and heroes comprising the Old Testament, and the establishment of new beliefs based on the reinterpreted life of Jesus of Nazareth found in the New Testament. The Old Testament with its stories of the persecution, exile, and defeat of the ancient Jews and of their God (who from a non-believer’s point of view reneged on every promise and failed them at every turn) is one of the most influential of all written texts, possibly surpassed only by the books of the New Testament. It is appropriate to think of the Bible as a series of books that are poorly edited, occasionally rediscovered, often misread, and frequently misquoted.

*For all you Bible thumpers out there
I've got some news for you
Jesus wasn't Christian
And his mother was a Jew*

Psalm 1 in the Book of Chuck

With a nod to the band AC/DC, for those about to read this, we salute you.

B. Old Testament



The Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, comes to us from the ancient Near East and is a compilation of narrative histories, laws, wisdom, prophecies and poetry from Yahweh worshipping communities located in Canaan, Mesopotamia and Egypt. The written version of the Old Testament was canonized between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE, but most of the biblical accounts probably originated between the 8th and 2nd centuries BCE as compilations of oral traditions and folktales circulating among a mostly illiterate culture. The early writings were most likely recorded in Hebrew and Aramaic but there are no surviving manuscripts from these early compilations, the earliest being the Dead Sea Scrolls dating to the 2nd century BCE. As a historical reference, the 8th century BCE was approximately the time when Homer was writing his Greek epics.

The first five books of the Old Testament include a narrative history of the creation of earth (Adam and Eve), the great flood (Noah's Ark), the emigration of the Jewish ancestors (Abraham) to Canaan, the exodus from Egypt (Moses), and the return of the exiled people from Babylon, and sets down laws for the worshippers of Yahweh to follow. These books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, alternatively known as the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, or the Torah (Hebrew for "law" or "teaching"). The stories and laws originated from many different authors and were written centuries or even a millennium after the time that they refer. Unlike the other four books, Deuteronomy differs in style and theology, was written as a first-person narrative, and refers to an abstract God who is omnipresent and not living in a temple (which was important for worshippers living in exile). Deuteronomy was probably included with the other four books because it's the only book which claims to be written by Moses, thus giving the other books with it the same moral authority.

The biblical law collections found in these five books include sacred laws for worship and rituals, and secular laws governing civil and criminal behaviors. The format and some of the laws follow that of the Code of Hammurabi from Babylon, written hundreds of years earlier. The laws so recorded include those known as the Ten Commandments of Exodus and Deuteronomy, although there may be more than ten and they aren't specifically numbered as such (See Appendix 12 for a more in-depth discussion of these laws). They include moral principles common to any human society (prohibitions against theft, adultery and murder), but also legislation most likely intended for a settled agrarian community and not for a nomadic people which would in fact be the case if they were given to Moses as he led a people out of Egypt and through a desert.

The story of Abraham would have relevance for other major religions incorporating Old Testament stories into their own histories. God proposed a covenant with the elderly and childless Abraham (he was 100 years old at the time) that he would become the father of a chosen people and great nation if Abraham agreed to worship God (El) as the supreme deity

(see Appendix 6 for a discussion of gods in the bible). Long story short, Abraham agreed, his 90-year-old wife, Sara, gave birth to a son, Isaac, and Abraham's descendants would go on to form the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Christians would later trace the lineage of Jesus of Nazareth back to Isaac and thus Abraham. However, Abraham had a first-born son, Ismael, from a liaison he had with Sara's Egyptian maidservant, Hagar, prior to Isaac being born. Muslims would later trace the prophet Muhammed's lineage back to this first-born son of Abraham.

The Prophetic Books of the Old Testament appeared during the later years of the divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah and were a response to the Babylonian exile and return of the Yahweh worshippers to the land of Canaan. The basic message of these books is that Judgement is coming but blessings will follow for those who repent. For the believers a prophet was a divinely chosen representative to the people, who having received God's message proclaimed it in oral or written form. "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14). This is a prophecy that would be extremely important for the writers of the New Testament.

The books of Samuel, Chronicles and Kings are books included in the historical and wisdom books. The life of King David, of David and Goliath fame, who supposedly ruled about 1000 BCE is narrated in these books. Tradition has it that he united the disparate tribes of Yahweh worshippers under a single monarch, and established Jerusalem as his capital. This was the origin of the united Kingdom of Israel and Judah (roughly where Israel is now located), with Jerusalem being the center of this important empire. However, archeological evidence seems to suggest there was no united Kingdom at that time, and Jerusalem was nothing more than a small highland village. It is to be noted that events included in the biblical literature were written about hundreds of years later and possibly based on oral traditions.

It was written that one of David's sons, Solomon, born from David's liaison with Bathsheba, built on and expanded the united kingdom and is credited with writing Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, included in the Books of Wisdom. "Go to the ant you sluggard, consider its ways and be wise" (Proverb 6:6). "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth – for your love is more delightful than wine" (Song of Songs 1:2). The Song of Songs, or Song of Solomon, was an ancient marriage manual that graphically portrayed the intimate love between a husband and wife. Solomon would know a thing or two about relationships. He supposedly had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3). It was prophesized that the coming Messiah would be a descendant of David through his son Solomon (Isaiah 11).

It was during the reign of Hezekiah of the Kingdom of Judah in the 8th century BCE that historians believe what would become the Old Testament began to take form, the result of royal scribes recording royal history and heroic legend. The books of Deuteronomy and Judges were compiled and added in the 6th century BCE, and the final form of the Hebrew Bible and Old Testament developed over the next few hundred years when Judaea was swallowed up by the expanding Assyrian Empire, followed by the Babylonians and then the Persians.

Following conquest of the region by Alexander the Great and the ancient Greek empire, the early Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek language in the 3rd century BCE. Known as the Septuagint, this Greek translation was the version of the Old Testament used by early Christian converts who were unfamiliar with Hebrew.

It is important to keep in mind that scribes who copied texts frequently added, changed, or omitted content without giving any indication in the manuscript that they had done so. It's also useful to know that there were two main kingdoms or territories of the Jewish people after the reign of Solomon. Judah in the south, including Jerusalem and the temple, and Israel in the north, including Samaria, the Sea of Galilee, and the Jordan River. Relations between these two kingdoms were often adversarial which led to separate myths regarding the history of the Jewish people. Over the centuries these myths would be melded together to produce a loosely coherent narrative.

The formation of the Old Testament in the middle first millennium BCE coincided with the Axial or Axis Age, the era which included the development of the great intellectual, philosophical, and religious systems that came to shape subsequent human society and culture in the known world. There was a shift or turning away from localized concerns and a move toward transcendence. Indian metaphysicians proposed solutions to help people attain liberation (moksha) from karma's effects with the advent of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. In ancient Greece Socrates was the exemplar of thinkers who emphasized the use of reason in the relentless investigation of truth. Chinese thinkers striving to unify the kingdom and avert civil war debated the appropriate "way" (tao or dao) to guide people with the beginning of Confucianism. Persian Zoroastrianism saw human history as a microcosm of the cosmic struggle between good and evil. Likewise, in the Old Testament the Hebrew Prophets came to view Yahweh as the supreme being who created heaven and earth and who shaped the destiny of all people.

The Old Testament would be included in the canon of the Christian Bible by church leaders in the 4th century CE, but not before there were serious attempts to exclude it from the official Christian canon. Marcion of Sinope was an important early figure in the early 2nd century CE Christian community. He would become the founder of the Marcionite Church, a Gnostic Christian sect that flourished from the 2nd to 7th century AD, and who was expelled from the church in 144 CE for heresy. Marcionites believed the God of the Old Testament was inconsistent, wrathful, and genocidal and excluded the books from their official bible. However, their views would lose out to those expounded by other important figures of that time including Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, and the Old Testament would eventually take its place in the official Christian Bible.

C. New Testament



The New Testament ostensibly tells the story of the life of Jesus of Nazareth (4 BCE – 30 CE) and the early days of Christianity. The New Testament contains 27 books written in Greek by 15 or 16 different authors between 50 and 120 CE, and can be divided into 4 groups: Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, Epistles, and the Apocalypse or Revelation. The four Gospels, which tell the stories of Jesus' life, ministry, and death, were written anonymously and came to be ascribed to disciples (Matthew and John), and associates of apostles (Mark and Luke). However, despite these attributions, none of the gospels were written by men who knew or encountered Jesus. Acts of the Apostles, written by the author of the third Gospel (Luke), describes the spread of the Christian church from Jesus' death to the death of the apostle Paul.

Following Acts are 21 epistles or letters which are records of correspondence between a church leader and a Christian community. Thirteen of these letters claim to be written by Paul, which can lead to a certain bias toward his teachings of a divine Jesus who transcended human existence. The last book in the New Testament is Revelation, a Christian apocalypse. The author of this book describes the events leading up to the destruction of this world and the appearance of the world to come.

These "official" books are not the only writings of the early Christians. Many other gospels, epistles, and apocalypses that are not included in the Christian canon are now known to historians including writings by the Apostolic Fathers, and a collection found at a dig near Nag Hammadi in Egypt. At the time these uncanonized resources were as authoritative as the four Gospels or Paul's letters. Some of these writings were gnostic (from the Greek word *gnosis* meaning knowledge), believing that God is inherent in all humans and that some people attain enlightenment through true knowledge. There were some gnostic Christians who thought Jesus was one of these wise men who taught his disciples in this philosophy.

To understand the history of the New Testament it's important to know the history of the occupation of the region by the Roman Empire. When the Roman general Pompey (106-48 BCE), conquered the East, including Judaea or Judah (63 BCE), he established regional client-kings who were responsible for keeping the peace, carrying out Roman dictates, and collecting taxes. Herod the Great, a follower of the Hebrew faith, was named King of the Jews (37-4 BCE), and although he renovated the Temple complex in Jerusalem, he was reviled by many Jews for his relationship with Rome. Upon his death, religious leadership passed to his sons who continued this close relationship with Rome, and who were in this role during the life of Jesus. A Jewish revolt against Roman rule took place in 66 CE (30 – 40 years after the death of Jesus) and succeeded in overthrowing the Roman and priestly hierarchy. However, this was reversed in 70 CE when Roman forces reconquered the region and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.

Jesus and his followers were strict devotees of the Jewish faith, and like others protesting before and during their time, preached about the coming Kingdom of God which would return

the land to Jewish sovereignty. This was in accordance with the Hebrew Bible that prophesized a coming Messiah who would free the Jewish people from bondage. Their belief was that an earthly kingdom would be established governed in accordance with the laws of Moses. Jesus and his followers vilified the practice of requiring believers to pay for sacrifices to be performed by the Jewish elite (high priests) at the main temple in Jerusalem, and this conflict with these power brokers determined Jesus' fate.

Jesus was probably influenced by time spent with the hermit prophet, John the Baptist. John was baptizing people in the Jordan River in preparation of the Final Judgement (which he considered imminent) and Jesus was baptized at this time. Jesus likely started his own cult after hearing John's teachings. John would soon be arrested and later executed by the son of Herod the Great. John had denounced the younger ruler's marriage to his divorced brother's wife which was illegal by Jewish law at the time. The execution of John was carried out around 28 CE.

Jesus's radical preaching regarding the corrupt nature of the Temple elite and the coming Messiah who would free the faithful from Roman rule put him in direct confrontation with the High Priests of the Temple, and most importantly, the Roman governor. The governor considered these ideas as seditious and subject to the common punishment for treason, which was crucifixion. This was the fate that awaited Jesus, and for many others preaching revolutionary ideals before and after him.

Jesus and his followers were illiterate tradesmen and fishers and Aramaic speaking, so there are no writings by Jesus, or his followers, included in the New Testament, nor any recorded documentation of their lives until decades after their deaths. The task of defining and rewriting Jesus's message fell to a group of relatively educated, urbanized, Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora. They essentially transformed Jesus from a revolutionary man trying to reform Jewish religious rites to a Romanized demigod, from a man who tried and failed to free the Jews from the rule of the Roman empire (which would suggest he was a failed messiah), to a transcendent being uninterested in earthly matters.

Saint Stephen was a Hellenized Jew (foreign born and Greek speaking) and is the first martyr of the new sect of the followers of Jesus. His conversion occurred during a stay in Jerusalem following Jesus' execution. Due to his opposition to the sacrificial cult of the Temple and belief that Jesus came to restore Mosaic law, he was condemned by the Temple priests who had him stoned to death for his heresy (33 CE). Stoning was the typical method of execution employed by the temple high priests, while crucifixion was preferred by the Romans. One of those in attendance for the stoning of Stephen was Saul of Tarsus, a Hellenist Jew travelling down from present day Turkey. At that time, Saul was a defender of the Temple governance and member of the Pharisees who strictly observed the traditional and written laws of Moses.

Saul would later come to be known as Paul after his conversion to the teachings of Jesus following a revelatory vision of a resurrected Jesus who appeared to him on the road to Damascus (49 CE). The Epistles of Paul are the earliest writings in the New Testament and date

to around 50 CE. Scholars have come to appreciate Paul as a primary driver of the religious movement that would become Christianity. Paul preached that Jesus would soon return from heaven and usher in the reign of God (not an earthly kingdom ruled by a Messiah but rather by God himself). This was important for many familiar with the Hebrew Bible in that a Messiah who was killed before freeing the Jews from bondage would be a false prophet.

Paul was interested in bringing these new teachings to Gentiles and lax Jews who may have been averse to the strict laws of Moses. As such, he preached that converts would not have to follow the ritualistic laws of the Old Testament. This put him in opposition to the original followers of Jesus, including James, the brother of Jesus, and Peter (later considered the first Pope), for both of whom Paul had contempt (Galatians 2:1-10). Paul preached an altogether new doctrine that would have been unrecognizable to Jesus the man.

Paul's ideas about a resurrected and divine Jesus massaged the issue of what constituted a true messiah. Paul was the first to call Jesus the Son of God. (Philippians 2:6-7). However, this should be put in the context of the time. Paul's use of the term "Son of God" didn't mean Jesus was the actual son of God, an idea blasphemous to Jews (and Paul was a practicing Jew), but rather that Jesus had possessed God's powers and spirit. After all, Jesus was "risen" from the dead by the grace of God, he did not "rise" of his own accord. The Jesus Christ of Paul's creation has utterly subsumed the historical Jesus of Nazareth in the Bible. The second century Church Fathers turned to Paul's writings to validate what would ultimately be the new Christian religion.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (by Roman legions after the Jewish revolt in 70 CE) was the historical event that cut the thread between the teachings of Paul's doctrine and the laws of Moses as followed by Jesus and his apostles. Jerusalem was no longer the center of what would become Christian doctrine, but the expansion of the new doctrine would be toward Rome. Paul was at the vanguard of this expansion up until his death in about 64 CE. At the time of his death, Paul was a major figure within the very small Christian movement, but he also had many enemies and detractors, and his contemporaries probably did not accord him as much respect as they gave Peter and James. His surviving letters, however, have had enormous influence on subsequent Christian belief and his place as one of the greatest religious leaders of all time is secure.

The first three Gospels are known as the Synoptic Gospels because they have much material in common, and to differentiate them from the Gospel of John which introduces new stories perhaps written to substantiate the teachings of Paul. Most biblical scholars agree that the authors of Matthew and Luke based their written accounts largely on those of Mark. Matthew and Luke both contain stories or allegories that are absent from Mark, which has led biblical scholars to hypothesize the existence of an undetermined source from which the shared material was drawn, referred to as Q, or the "lost source."

The first of the Gospels to be recorded was attributed to Mark and was written within a couple of decades after the death of Jesus. The actual author was a Greek-speaking individual living

outside of the region. Mark's readers were probably converted pagans because he occasionally explains Aramaic words and Jewish customs to his readers-explanations that would not be necessary for a Jewish audience. Mark himself may also have been a Gentile since he misunderstands some of these Jewish traditions. At the very beginning of his biography, Mark states that Jesus was the Christ or Messiah. The Gospel begins abruptly with John the Baptist's message of the coming messiah and Jesus' appearance as an adult. Jesus asks to be baptized and soon after Jesus is thrust into the wilderness where Satan tempts him, with Jesus emerging victorious. Mark introduces Jesus as the Son of God who Mark's congregation would relate to other "sons of God" teachers, prophets, and miracle workers. The original ending of this Gospel did not include an appearance by Jesus after his execution which was troubling for early readers. Scribes later added an ending more in agreement with the other gospels, and most modern scholars agree that these additional verses are secondary or added writings.

In Matthew, Jesus is unmistakably Jewish and there is an emphasis on Jesus' connection to two of the most important figures in Jewish history, King David and Abraham. This relationship is further underscored by the genealogy presented in Chapter 1 of this Gospel. Matthew fails to explain how the genealogy traces the connection between David and Jesus through that of Joseph who was married to Mary, the mother of Jesus, but who was not the biological father of Jesus. Rather Matthew stresses Jesus' importance to Judaism by modeling his birth and ministry on Moses' birth and mission. For Matthew, Jesus is the new Moses who has been anointed by God to free his chosen people from bondage and to institute the new law of the Jewish faith emphasized by the writing from Matthew 5:17 - "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law (Torah) or the Prophets (of the Hebrew Bible); I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

The Gospel of Luke was also written anonymously by a Greek speaker living outside of the region who may also have written the Acts of the Apostles. This gospel differs from the previous two in that Matthew has wise men visiting Jesus' birth and Luke has shepherds; in Matthew the angel speaks to Joseph, in Luke he speaks to Mary; Matthew records the flight to Egypt, Luke records the journey to Bethlehem. While Luke's genealogy does identify Jesus as a descendant of important Jewish leaders, it also suggests that Jesus belongs not to the Jews but to the entire world. Throughout his Gospel Luke describes Jesus as a prophet sent by God. In Luke 1:30-31 the author has an angel speaking to Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

John is the only Gospel that explicitly states that Jesus had a prior existence with God before birth and is divine in nature. In John, there is no birth narrative, and Jesus is not baptized by John the Baptist (at least it is not explicitly described). The temptation narrative is not present, Jesus does not preach an apocalyptic message and does not teach in parables. John's divine Jesus proclaims his identity openly: his discourses and signs are meant to reveal his true nature. Because Jesus' identity is abundantly clear, those who reject him are more strongly condemned than in the Synoptic Gospels. Like the other Gospels, the Gospel of John was written anonymously, though it has traditionally been attributed to John, son of Zebedee, thought to be

the "beloved disciple" mentioned in earlier writings. Some of the stories may go back to one of Jesus' followers, but the Gospel itself was written well after the deaths of the disciples and is the compilation of several different sources. The most well-known verse from John is 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

The Book of Acts narrates the missionary enterprise that begins at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit comes upon the Apostles and empowers them to work miracles and speak foreign languages. Just as the Jews reject Jesus in the Gospels, so the apostles are rejected in Acts. Some Jews and Gentiles, however, do follow these new teachings, notably Saul, also known as Paul. It is through Paul and others that the new teachings were spread among Gentiles in many of the provinces of the Roman world. The narrative in Acts goes to great lengths to explain why the message of the divine Jesus is not only for Jews. The cycle of Jewish rejection of the message and Gentile acceptance of it allows the author to show how Gentiles came to be a part of the people of God. The author insists that Gentiles need not convert, but he is equally adamant that the message is not contrary to Judaism. Acts attributes the delay of the end of the world to the necessity of spreading the gospel to the "ends of the earth" and thus sidesteps Paul preaching that the end was imminent.

Paul's writings, the Gospels, and Acts all had to account for issues with the historical life of Jesus which may have proved problematic for potential converts. The new doctrine had to emphasize that Jesus had ancestral lineage from King David from whom it was prophesized the new Messiah would be descended; that Jesus was of divine and not human nature; and that the responsibility for his execution didn't rest upon the Roman authorities but rather with the Jews of Jerusalem. This last issue was important if the new doctrine was to have any chance of making it more palatable to the Roman authorities. All the Gospels tried to shift ultimate blame for the death of Jesus from Pontius Pilate, a ruthless Roman governor known for sending multitudes to their executions, to the Jewish high priest, Caiaphas, and the Jewish population at large, who supposedly wanted Jesus executed. It also paved the way for two thousand years of antisemitism.

To prove direct lineage from King David who was believed to be from Bethlehem, it was necessary for Jesus to be born there even though he was from Nazareth. In the Gospel of Luke, it was written that Joseph was living in Nazareth and the family travelled to Bethlehem when Mary was pregnant, ostensibly to comply with a Roman decree that everyone was to return to the home of the patriarch's ancestral heritage for census and tax purposes. Conversely, the Gospel of Matthew states that the family was living in Bethlehem and there is no mention of them travelling there for a census. Joseph was the one who supposedly had ancestral ties to David, but if he was not involved in the conception of Jesus, it's debatable whether Jesus would have this required lineage. The direct lineage issue remains convoluted to say the least.

To prove the divine nature of Jesus, it was necessary that he be born from a virgin birth and later be resurrected from the dead. The Gospel of Mark, and most likely the Q source material (if it existed) did not have any references to a virgin birth. Only the gospels of Matthew and

Luke include such references and imply that Joseph had no role in the conception. The Gospel of John does not make any references to a virgin birth, and Paul's writings simply imply that Jesus was born of a woman.

The resurrection story is referenced in all four Gospels and the writings of Paul, although as previously noted this detail was added later to the Gospel of Mark. There is no mention of Jesus leaving the tomb, just that his tomb was found empty, and that Jesus later appeared to people who are identified differently depending on which author is writing about it. That Jesus was buried in a tomb seems unlikely in that Roman authorities would want the body to be left on the cross as an example to others considering seditious acts.

How Jesus became God can be tracked over time by examining the books of the New Testament in chronological order. The earliest, the writings of Paul, preached that Jesus became divine at the time of his resurrection (like those stories in Greco-Roman and Jewish myths). In the Gospel of Mark Jesus appears to become divine at his baptism: "You are my son and today I have begotten you". In the Gospels of Matthew and Luke it was insinuated that he must have been divine at his birth with stories of the virgin birth. In the Gospel of John, Jesus existed from eternity past and came down in human form to provide guidance for living a holy life. Finally, Jesus became one with God and part of a holy Trinity as established by official church decree in a later century.

The Book of Revelation, comprising the last group of resource material of the New Testament, is unlike any of the other books and most likely the least understood. One of the main reasons for its inclusion in the canon literature is that it tells us that Jesus is God. Revelation is the Apocalypse of John (who most religious scholars believe is not the same John who wrote the Gospel due to its very different writing style), and it was composed at the end of the first century CE. Contrary to popular belief it does not include a prediction of the end time, and nothing in it substantiates the concept of a "rapture". These are ideas that gained popularity in relatively recent times.

The Book of Revelation departs from the spirit of the stories about the life of Jesus and presents a more vengeful persona that will separate the believers from those following the anti-Christ, with the former joining Jesus in heaven while the latter burn in hell. Believers are compared to sheep who will ascend to heaven, and all others compared to goats who will descend to hell (cue the Cake song)! A very materialistic vision of heaven is presented with the concept of a city of gold and banquet feasts, which contrasts sharply with Jesus teaching a more aesthetic life in the Gospels.

Specific symbolic numbers are referenced in this Book, such as the mark of the beast (666) that was to be used to designate the non-believers. Modern scholars believe the number 666 was a clandestine way of referring to the emperor Nero, who persecuted early Christians and who many believed would come back as the anti-Christ. Transliterating the spelling of Nero Caesar into Aramaic and assigning Hebrew numbers to the Aramaic letters will result in this precise number.

D. Christianity Takes Root



By the end of the second century CE some cultivated pagans began to convert to Christianity. Clement of Alexandria (150 – 215 CE) was able to adapt the semitic God of the Bible to the Greco-Roman ideal. Clement had no doubt that Yahweh of the Old Testament and the God of the Greek philosophers were one and the same. He believed that Christians could become aware of the image of God inscribed in their own being by imitating Jesus the Christ.

The first ecumenical council of the new Christian church met in ancient Nicaea, now Iznik, Turkey, and was called by the Roman emperor Constantine I in 325 CE. Constantine was in the process of converting to Christianity and wanted to clear up the controversy over the true nature of Jesus, whether he was a divine being or a man. There was much debate at the time within the Christian community as to Jesus' true nature. From this council came the Nicene Creed (Jesus as God the Son), confirming the concept of the Holy Trinity, as well as official recognition of which books were to be included as sacred scriptures in the Bible.

Jerome of Stridon (later St. Jerome born 340 CE) translated the newly canonized Bible into Latin. In his translation Jerome included some late Jewish books originally written in Greek (called Apocrypha) into his compilation of the Old Testament. These however are not included in the original Hebrew Old Testament, but only in the Greek translation of it (the Septuagint). Jerome did add prefaces indicating that they were not part of the original Hebrew Bible, but later copyists neglected or omitted his prefaces, and soon Jerome's whole Latin translation was considered of equal authority.

After the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, some Protestant scholars refused to accept adding the Apocrypha to the Old Testament to maintain consistency with the Hebrew Bible. The very first edition of the King James Bible included the Apocrypha, but subsequent editions excluded them. Thus, to this day Catholic Bibles include the Old Testament with the Apocrypha (46 books in all), strictly Protestant Bibles exclude it (for a total of 39 books), but certain "ecumenical" Bibles (such as The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: Expanded Edition) include it as an appendix.

Appendix 1 – A Brief History of the Ancient Near East



Location

What constitutes the Near East has evolved over time. Originally, the term was used by western Europeans to denote the territory of the Ottoman Empire and Europe's Balkan Peninsula, to distinguish it from the Far East (China and beyond) and the Middle East (Iran to Myanmar). For this summary it shall be defined as the central part of what now constitutes the Middle East including regions on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea from Egypt to Turkey, and east to the Persian Gulf. The ancient lands that it encompasses are Mesopotamia (between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in modern Iraq), Persia to the east, Syria to the west, Canaan along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, Anatolia (modern day Turkey), and Egypt.

Prehistory

Beginning about 125,000 years ago, modern humans (*Homo Sapiens*) began to migrate out of the African continent into the Near East in search of more hospitable climates following periods of prolonged drought. The Northern Hemisphere experienced warm summers every 20,000 years during the last ice age, which created "green corridors" of warm, wet climate between Africa and the Near East. These favorable conditions may have encouraged *Homo Sapiens* to follow the animals they hunted for food and move north and east out of Africa. Migration most likely occurred in episodic waves of disbursement out of, and return to, Africa, dictated by the changing climate.

Finally, about 45,000 years ago migration out of Africa reached beyond the Near East and pushed all the way into northern Europe. During this time, as *Homo Sapiens* migrated into the Near East and beyond, they would have encountered another related hominin migrating south, *Homo Neanderthalensis*, the Neanderthals. The presence of Neanderthal DNA in modern humans suggests that interbreeding occurred between these two groups, whose descendants would include the people of the Near East who would shape the cultures of this historically significant region.

Mesopotamia

For thousands of years before the first urban centers appeared, farmers grew their crops and herders tended their flocks of sheep along the banks of the two great rivers of this region. Social and economic advantages resulting from successful agriculture practices led to the formation of larger communities of people living and working near one another. In the fourth millennium BCE, relatively large urban communities would become the centers of the world's first known civilizations. Mesopotamia would become known as the "cradle of civilization" with the development of a writing system for communication, monumental architecture, and a transition to more complex societies.

In the mid-twenty-fourth century BCE, the first empire was established after Sargon of Akkad, with his Akkadian army, wrested control of the other city-states of Mesopotamia and adjacent regions. His empire would stretch from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. As the founder of the first multinational empire in the world, his reign became legendary, inspiring many tales about him such as *The Legend of Sargon of Akkad*. His birth legend would include a tale about his humble beginnings when his mother, unable to keep the baby, placed him in a basket sealed with tar, which she then set adrift on the Euphrates River to be found by a servant of a king. This story would later resonate with the writers of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible. Sargon and his grandson would also be the inspiration of the fictional character Nimrod mentioned in Genesis.

The first Dynasty of Babylon would occur at the beginning of the second millennium BCE and would include the rule of King Hammurabi. He would bring the entirety of Mesopotamia under the control of Babylon and is best known for his famous *Code of Hammurabi* which served as a model for other writers of societal rules and regulations, including the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. During Hammurabi's reign, a relative peace would ensue throughout his empire, which was not necessarily typical of ancient times.

The Assyrian Dynasty, originating in upper Mesopotamia and in power from 900 to 600 BCE, created the most expansive empire to date in the Near East through its powerful army's use of new technology such as iron weapons and taller, more maneuverable chariots. It was the Assyrians who would sweep through Canaan along the eastern shores of the Mediterranean overrunning the many established kingdoms there, including Israel, Judah, Moab, Philistine, and Ammon.

Many elites from these various kingdoms would be forcibly relocated to the Assyrian homeland, a deportation policy commonly employed at that time to weaken the former political structure of the subjugated regions, and to provide needed labor and expertise for the conquerors. However, many of the craftsmen, farmers and common laborers were allowed to stay in the conquered lands to keep the economy functioning and providing tribute payments to the conquerors. Unlike Judah and Philistine, the Kingdom of Israel would essentially come to an end after this occupation with the remnants of the original social structure completely dissolved and absorbed into the culture of the invaders. Many of those that did remain in the area would form a society of people known as the Samaritans, mentioned in the New Testament of the Christian Bible.

After the fall of the Assyrian Dynasty, the Second or Neo-Babylonian Empire eventually came to power. Historically known as the Chaldean Empire, this empire would be the last ruled by monarchs native to Mesopotamia. Its greatest king, Nebuchadnezzar II, would rule from 605 to 562 BCE and would become famous for his military campaigns in Canaan (including the destruction of Jerusalem), his construction projects in his capital, including the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and for the pivotal role he was to play in Judaeon history and the later Jewish faith. Without the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and the dislocation of the Judaeon people, there would be no Hebrew Bible as we know it.

Nebuchadnezzar installed puppet rulers in the conquered states of Canaan, including Zedekiah in Judah who's mentioned in the Book of Jeremiah in the Hebrew Bible. But Zedekiah would eventually lead his people in opposition to Babylonian rule which prompted Nebuchadnezzar to overthrow Zedekiah, destroy the temple in Jerusalem, and to forcibly relocate the Judaeans to Babylon. This was also the same fate falling to those living in the semiautonomous regions of Philistine, Moab and Ammon, and those communities would be dissolved never to resume as functioning independent cultures.

Those people exiled to Mesopotamia surely included some placed in bondage, but also included many who would assimilate to their new surroundings, owning property and inter-marrying. Unlike those exiles from Philistine, Moab and Ammon, the former priestly caste from Judah would never give up their desire to return to their former home. It was these priests and their scribes who would codify the books of the Old Testament, including stories passed down orally from their ancestors, and develop new myths and histories to provide the foundation of a national identity for the diaspora.

Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned numerous times in the Hebrew Bible including 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, therefore, those books were obviously completed after his reign. In 2 Kings, he is introduced as the instrument of God besieging Judah due to the sins and corruption of the people there. And in Daniel, written in the Hellenistic period around 150 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar is presented as a philosopher king, or an enlightened despot, accepting the god Yahweh at the end of his rule. It seems remarkable that Nebuchadnezzar, the one person most responsible for the exile and captivity of the Judaeans, is shown to be a somewhat sympathetic figure in parts of the Old Testament. Centuries later, writers of the New Testament would portray Babylon and its kings as symbols of wickedness and sin.

Babylon was a world capital, with the "world" being the Near East for those living there, which surely included people from Anatolia, Persia and Canaan in addition to native Mesopotamians. The city streets must have been filled with a cacophony of sounds from the many different languages being spoken. The Tower of Babel reference in Genesis, a parable attempting to explain why people speak different languages, most likely came out of the writers experience of living in Babylon.

For the priests and scribes of the Yahweh worshipping cult living in Babylon, it was important to introduce their god as being omnipresent and not requiring the temple which was destroyed back in Jerusalem. In the Book of Genesis, Yahweh is introduced anthropomorphically as walking in the Garden of Eden, and as an invisible god commanding "let there be light." It is this latter presentation that was developed to unite the diaspora in a belief of a god that travelled with them and didn't require a permanent structure in which to reside as was the case with many of the other gods of the Near East. This concept would be a binding force to keep the Yahweh worshipping community tied together when other societies of Canaan would be dissolved. In many respects, it can be argued that the coming Jewish faith was founded in Babylon and not Jerusalem.

Persia

In late 6th century BCE, Cyrus the Great and the Persians rose to prominence in the Near East, culminating with their taking control of the important center of Babylon from the failing Babylonian polity. On the Cyrus Cylinder, a cone of baked clay with cuneiform writing, the victorious Cyrus is portrayed as having been chosen by the chief Babylonian god Marduk to restore peace and order to the Babylonians. Assuming supernatural legitimacy would be a concept used by rulers and prophets from other communities and cultures of the Near East.

After the Persians came to power, they began to allow foreign exiles to return to their homelands (should the exiled so choose). The Canaanites had been there about 100 years and while many chose to remain within Persian controlled Mesopotamia, those choosing to return to Canaan included the priestly caste and elites of Judah who longed for the lost power their ancestors had with the temple dominated religion of Yahweh worshippers. For these returning people, Cyrus would be held in high esteem for the deference shown to their religious beliefs.

In the *Book of Isaiah*, whose middle chapters were written in the post-Babylonian period, Yahweh summons Cyrus as the chosen one, the only Gentile in the Bible to be identified as a messiah or anointed one. The final chapter in Isaiah includes the introduction of Zion Theology which describes the Temple as a place where peoples from all the world would come to worship and interact, a reflection of the Persian ideology of multi-culturism. Persian culture would be a significant influence on people returning to Canaan.

Many of the stories of the Hebrew Bible were created or improved upon during time spent living in the Persian controlled regions. The story of Joseph in Genesis, very similar to the folktale narratives found in Persian culture at that time, references eunuchs, courtiers held in high esteem, during Joseph's time spent in Egypt. Eunuchs were not common in Egypt, but were in Persia, which suggests a story of Persian influence. The character of King Solomon was most likely based on the epitome of Persian royalty. Greek authors wrote about a Persian king who had 360 concubines, while in *Kings 1* it states that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

The *Book of Esther*, written in the middle 5th century BCE, describes the lives of the Judaeen community residing in Susa, near Babylon. It tells the story of Esther, who would marry Xerxes, King of the Persian empire, and Mordecai, her court guardian. The etymology of the name Esther can be traced to the Old Persian language referring to the Near Eastern goddess Ishtar, and Mordecai to the god Marduk of Babylon. There was no mention of Yahweh or temples in the *Book of Esther*, and it wasn't until later when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek that the name Yahweh was inserted liberally into the story.

The legacy of Persian culture would remain strong with the Yahweh worshipping culture. The Talmud, the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law was written in Persia between the 3rd and 4th centuries CE. Cyrus and the Persian empire are not mentioned in the New Testament after appearing significantly in the Old Testament, but even

today the decree of Cyrus the Great allowing the return of the Judaeen elites to Judah has appeared on Israeli postage stamps.

Egypt

Egypt is mentioned in the Bible more times than any other place outside Canaan. Biblical Egypt is the term used by historians and scholars to differentiate between Ancient Egypt (as it is portrayed in Judeo-Christian texts) and what is known about the region based on archaeological evidence. Although archeological evidence shows interaction between the people of Egypt and Canaan from as far back as 10,000 BCE, they do not otherwise corroborate the biblical account. The empires and kingdoms of ancient Egypt were already thousands of years in existence by the time the Hebrew Bible was codified as scripture, and there is historical record of this interaction between the regions. The migration of people into and out of Egypt and Canaan would be a continual occurrence over the millennia, and at times this took the form of invasion and conquest.

In the biblical account recorded in Genesis, Abraham and his wife Sarah took refuge in Egypt during a time of famine in Canaan (and the Pharaoh took Sarah as his wife for a time), Moses was raised in Egypt and had an Egyptian mother, Joseph (son of Jacob and Rachel) had an Egyptian wife and became an important advisor to the Pharaoh, and Solomon married the daughter of a Pharaoh. Yet there is no archeological evidence, or written accounts from second sources that can verify these biblical stories, most likely written many hundreds of years after they supposedly took place.

Thutmoses III, possibly the most successful king in expanding the empire of ancient Egypt, conquered much of the Near East in the early 1,400's BCE and won a decisive battle against a coalition of Canaanite rulers to begin Egyptian control of Canaan for the next three hundred years. It was during this time that the areas of Canaan functioned as vassal states or provinces of Egypt, and anyone living in Canaan would have been considered as living in Egypt. This could be the basis for origin stories taking place in Egypt as recorded in the Hebrew Bible.

Egypt was a significant influence on the people that lived in Canaan during the period of Egyptian rule and continued to be of interest to the writers of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. The story of Moses leading the Levites out of Egypt and to the Promised Land is an important event for people of the Jewish religion, and the flight to Egypt out of Judah by Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Mathew, is a favorite story of Christians. Egypt was both an empire to be feared, but also one to whom the Yahweh worshipping people sought assistance when attacked by other warring nations. To emphasize the importance of this interaction, the biblical name of Moses most likely is derived from the name of the Egyptian pharaoh, Thutmoses.

Canaan

The land of Canaan as the "Promised Land" is a central theme introduced in Genesis and developed throughout the Bible. The land's boundaries vary across different Biblical texts, but some suggest it was bordered by Mount Hermon to the north, Beersheba to the south, the Mediterranean to the west, and the Jordan River to the east. Ancient settlements such as Jericho were established before 10,000 BCE, and for thousands of years it witnessed the migrations of peoples into and out of its borders. It was an area fought over by empires from Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Egypt due to its central location in the region and its border with the Mediterranean Sea.

According to the biblical account, Abraham and his family migrated here from Mesopotamia, Moses led his people out of Egypt to its borders, Joshua invaded and laid waste to its Canaanite settlements including Jericho, Saul became the first king of the Israelites, David became the unifying leader, and Solomon reigned over a great kingdom of wealth and beauty. Biblical scholars would have these events taking place from the early second millennia to the early first millennia BCE. However, there is no historical evidence from archeology, or writings from the various empires which controlled the area to support any of these stories. They most likely are origin stories of a Yahweh worshipping people that were codified by the priestly caste and their scribes, many of whom lived in Mesopotamia in early to middle first millennia BCE.

The withdrawal of the Egyptians from Canaan in the 12th century BCE coincided with the violent and disruptive age known as the Bronze Age Collapse. Drought conditions may have played a large part in this collapse, but another factor may have been an incursion of seafaring invaders from the west. This led to a transition period in Canaan during which the political situation reverted to dispersed settlements with localized control.

The period following the withdrawal of Egypt would coincide with the biblical account of the conquest of Canaan by Jacob and the Israelites, who supposedly destroyed Canaanite cities while spilling much blood. The historical evidence, however, paints a much different picture. Over the centuries following Egyptian rule and the Bronze Age collapse, the dispersed settlements transitioned to a more regionally connected economy with increasing trade and commerce, including more centralized societies. These included the Philistine city-states in the southeast, of which Gaza was an important center, the regions of Israel and Judah on the west side of the Jordan River and Dead Sea, the Phoenician states bordering the sea to the northwest, the Kingdoms of Moab and Ammon to the east, Edom to the south, and Aram-Damascus to the north. It would seem the population of Canaan consisted of the same people (Canaanites) before and after this transition with no great incursion of a people invading the region and establishing their own culture and settlements.

The Hebrew Bible references a united Kingdom of Israel including the separate areas of Judah and Israel, which was supposedly in place sometime in the late second millennium BCE. While there is no evidence of a unified Kingdom of Israel, or the reign of David (the adopted son of

Saul and hero of the David and Goliath story), the archeological discovery of the Tel Dan Stele, dating to around 800 BCE, includes the only extra-biblical archaeological reference to a House of David. The once free-standing stone tablet refers to the defeat and deaths of the King of Israel and the king from the House of David by Hazael, king of the neighboring region of Aram Damascus. There is no consensus among historians regarding the meaning of the term “House of David”. It could mean the name of a place (like Bethlehem literally meaning the House of Bread in Aramaic or House of Meat in Arabic), the name of a kingdom, or as reference to a people. If the term House of David refers to a dynasty based on an actual king, it’s debatable if a passing reference from 800 BCE can be used as proof that a unified kingdom and founding ruler was in place hundreds of years earlier.

Regarding the name Israel, the biblical account tells of God giving Jacob that name with the meaning “one who struggles with God”. The earliest textual reference for the existence of a place called Israel comes from the Merneptah Stele, with an inscription by the pharaoh from Egypt who reigned from 1213 to 1203 BCE. This stone tablet primarily speaks of the pharaoh’s war with the ancient Libyans to their west and gives only passing reference to Israel at the end of the inscription when it lists several settlements that were overrun in Canaan. It reads “Israel is laid waste—its seed is no more” and would seem to refer to a group of nomadic people and not an actual nation or city-state.

The Mesha Stele found in present-day Jordan and dating to around 840 BCE includes a reference to King Mesha of Moab and his war with the Kingdom of Israel whose story parallels, with some differences, an episode in the Bible's Book of Kings. It’s the most extensive inscription ever recovered that refers to the Yahweh worshipping kingdom and bears the earliest certain extrabiblical reference to the god Yahweh. In the story, the Moabites and their god Chemosh prevail over the Israelites and their god Yahweh.

In Judah and Israel, post Egyptian rule, there does seem to be a beginning of a coalescence of people interested in developing a new culture and identity for themselves after being subservient to the whims of the Egyptian empire. There is evidence of the Yahweh worshipping people changing their eating habits by eliminating pork from their diet to differentiate themselves from other Canaanite kingdoms with whom they were in periodic conflict, such as the Philistines and Moabites. While there is no evidence of a wealthy, unified Kingdom of Israel with a lavish palace and great leader named Solomon, there does seem to be a growing economy developing new trade and commerce opportunities, like other kingdoms in Canaan. The seed of the story of Solomon seducing the Queen of Sheba could have been borne from an increase in trade with the Arabian Peninsula, the home of the land of Sheba. Perhaps not as romantic but vitally important to a growing economy.

With the return of exiled Canaanites from Babylon in the late 6th century BCE, including the descendants of the elite class of Judah and Israel, new ideas about a Jewish nation began to take shape. The exiles brought with them new myths about their ancestors’ origins and the importance of ritual worship. This was often at odds with the established life of those believers

who had stayed and worked the land for seventy years while the elite were exiled. Oral stories of past patriarchs and momentous events passed down over the centuries were added to new myths and stories from those returning from Mesopotamia, codified in a book which would become the Hebrew Bible. It may have been at this time that the Yahweh worshipping people of Judaea started to think of themselves as having a separate Jewish identity, not only worshipping a separate deity than their neighbors but also with a distinctive culture.

While there was a temple in Jerusalem that was destroyed during the war with the Babylonian empire in 586 BCE, there is no evidence of King Solomon building it. This temple would have been like other temples in Canaan constructed to Yahweh and the other gods worshipped by other Canaanite peoples. In 520 BCE when the exiled people of Canaan returned to the area many of these temples were probably rebuilt. For the Yahweh worshipper of Judah, this would become known as the second-temple period.

In the fourth century BCE, Alexander the Great and his Macedonian and Greek army defeated the Persians in a series of decisive battles that would lead to the conquest of Persia, Mesopotamia, Canaan and Egypt. Alexander would be proclaimed as descending from the gods, including being proclaimed a pharaoh in Egypt where inscriptions in Luxor record this historical event. Following Alexander's death in Mesopotamia, a series of Hellenistic leaders would rule over Canaan until the second century BCE. During this period the Hebrew Bible would be translated to the Greek language and become known as the Septuagint. This translation would be used two hundred years later by the followers of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth in converting those in the Greek speaking world.

The 160 BCE Maccabean revolt in Judah that occurred as a backlash against an attempt by authorities to Hellenize the greater Jewish community there, resulted in a Yahweh worshipping people taking control of the area. At that time, Jerusalem would become the capital of the autonomous and eventually independent Judaeian state ruled by the Hasmonean Dynasty. Up until this time, Jerusalem was considered a minor backwater by the former ruling empires and was not comparable in size or economic vibrancy to other Canaanite settlements. Localized control in Judah lasted for over a century, but internal divisions within the ruling family eventually led to power slipping away from the Hasmoneans with a new powerful empire from the west taking control, the Roman empire.

Herod the Great was appointed as the King of Judah by the Romans and would remain in power until his death in 4 BCE. Herod would renovate and add to the Jerusalem temple during his reign, building a perimeter wall around the Temple Mount, and incorporating Hellenistic, Roman and Arabic architectural influences. The kingship and rule of Judah would pass to his sons upon Herod's death and would last into the first century CE.

The Continuation of History

During Roman rule at the beginning of the first century CE, the divide between monotheistic and polytheistic religious views caused clashes between Jews and Gentiles in Judaea and its capital of Jerusalem. This friction, combined with oppressive taxation led to the Jewish revolt of 66 CE. While the revolt was successful in expelling the Romans from Jerusalem and forming a new localized government, independence was to be relatively short lived.

Roman forces were sent to Judaea to restore control in April 70 CE and they laid siege to Jerusalem, cutting off supplies. Within the walls, the Zealots, a militant anti-Roman party, struggled with other Jewish factions that had emerged, which weakened the resistance even more. By August 70 CE the Romans had breached the final defenses and massacred much of the remaining population. They also destroyed the Second Temple.

When the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed the Jewish people of Canaan lost their religious and political center, but the newly forming cult of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth found their legitimacy when it would be written in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus had prophesized its destruction and subsequent hardship for the people of Judah. The following centuries would find Jerusalem becoming a Christian and then Muslim city with importance shifting from the Jewish Temple to first the Church of the Holy Sepulcher constructed nearby, and then to the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque constructed on the Temple Mount in the seventh century CE.

The myths and stories of the people living in Canaan would reverberate down through the centuries influencing nations and people far removed from its history, giving solace to some, and misery to others. It could be said that the current horrors gripping the promised land, with the slaughter of innocent civilians by worshippers of different deities are the result of an ancient hangover.

Appendix 2 – History of the Jesus Movement



At the beginning of the first century CE, the Jewish people could be broadly defined as belonging to two distinct groups, the Hebraic or the Hellenistic Jews. The Hebraic Jews were intent on maintaining the old traditions of the Jewish religion, spoke either Aramaic (a Semitic language related to Hebrew) or Hebrew, considered the temple as the hub for ritual sacrifices and worship, and used the Hebrew bible for religious reference. The Hellenistic Jews were those Judaeans who had assimilated into Greek culture after Alexander the Great had conquered the region in the fourth century BCE, or who were included in the diaspora and may have lived, or be living, outside Judaea. The Hellenistic Jews spoke Greek as their first language, may have been accustomed to worshipping at a synagogue (Greek for assembly) instead of the temple, and used the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible) in lieu of the original scriptures.

Jesus and all his original apostles were Hebraic Jews, committed to following the Torah and worshipping in the temple whenever they were in Jerusalem. James the Just, brother of Jesus (ref: *Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3*), and Peter would become the leaders of the Jerusalem-based Jesus movement upon the death of their proclaimed messiah. Their message of living a life modeled on the example of Jesus as related in the Gospels (considered “good works”), would become part of the tenets of the early Christian church and persist with the Roman Catholic church in the decades following the Protestant reformation (see below). The original apostles would all be dead within a few decades of the death of Jesus, many reportedly martyred for preaching their new beliefs which may have been considered a threat by the Jewish priests and by the Roman authorities at that time.

Paul, the self-proclaimed apostle to the Gentiles, is believed by most scholars to have been a Hellenistic Jew from Tarsus in present day Turkey. However, Paul also claimed to be a Pharisee, or Hebraic legal scholar (*Acts 23*). Two issues which created tension between Paul and the Jerusalem movement concerned the Torah, or the need for Gentile converts to follow the Hebrew laws, and the assertion by Paul that salvation was achieved by belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus and not through good works alone. The Torah required dietary restrictions and circumcision that Paul reasoned were fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Jesus and therefore were no longer applicable (*Romans 7:1-6*). His proclamation about salvation through belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus (*1 Corinthians 15*) troubled James and Peter in that they thought his message could be misinterpreted leading to sinful lives (*2 Peter 15*). Like the original apostles, Paul would be dead within a few decades of the death of Jesus.

The Hebraic Jewish sect of early Christianity would be subsumed by the Hellenistic converts with the expansion of the Church into the Roman world. Paul’s philosophy of the sacrifice of Jesus releasing the followers of the Jesus movement from the Hebrew laws would become the norm for the new Christians as they were called after 100 CE. But Paul also had views on the

role of women in the new Church that would run counter to the patriarchy favored by those men gaining power in the movement. Paul, like Jesus, had many women followers who filled leadership positions in those communities he supported. Later letters falsely attributed to Paul, such as those to Timothy and Titus, strongly rejected the notion of women in leadership roles to maintain the Church hierarchy of men. "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (*1 Timothy 2:12*).

Reference to Paul's teachings by Church leaders during the second century is minimal, which may or may not be evidence of his disfavor during that period. Certainly, the Church was interested in supporting the notion of followers dependent on rituals and sacraments administered by male priests, a call back to the need to adhere to "the law" which Paul had rejected during his lifetime.

The Hebraic Jesus movement had a "low Christology" belief in a Jesus that was born a man, died, and was resurrected to be with God. For them, Jesus was the Messiah who would come again to usher in the reign of the Kingdom of God. The concept of a man being a god would have been anathema to their Jewish view of theology. The original apostles and Paul would have had this belief, with Paul possibly believing that Jesus was a second Adam, the first of many to be raised up to eternal life (*1 Corinthians 15*). Later Christian theologians would develop a "high Christology" for Jesus in which he was one with the Father (*1 Revelation*), and had always been a divine being, even before birth. This view would become predominant in later centuries.

A third concept of the nature of Jesus was being promulgated by separate groups of followers such as the Ebionites and later the Gnostics. The word "gnosis" being Greek for knowledge or awareness. Gnosticism may have been around in Judaea since the early centuries BCE, but its practice among Jesus followers in the first century CE would include the belief that their Messiah was human but had attained an enlightened state of being through gnosis. They believed that others could attain this enlightened state by doing as Jesus had done. The Gospel of Thomas is a gnostic writing found buried in Egypt, written sometime during the late first century CE to middle second century CE, and most certainly not by the Apostle Thomas. It's a collection of sayings by Jesus and proclaims that the Kingdom of God is already present for those who understand the secret message of Jesus. The Gnostics would be branded heretics by those promoting the belief in Jesus as God.

In the third century CE, a Christian priest, Arius revived the ancient gnostic heresy concerning the person and nature of Christ. In what would become known as Arianism, he denied that Jesus was on the same level as God the Father, but rather a person created and not self-existent. It fundamentally challenged the divinity of Jesus Christ which undermined the core Christian belief in the accepted concept of salvation through Jesus as the divine Son of God. This stirred up a great controversy among the church leaders which led to the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE where the nature of Jesus was hotly debated. There were many bishops of the Christian Church who supported the theology of Arianism. After much in-fighting, Arianism

would be declared a heresy by those supporting the proclamation of the Nicene Creed and the concept of the Holy Trinity. The divine Jesus proponents came out winners in this battle for primacy of the Christian Church.

Debate over the true nature of Jesus even with those confirming the Nicene Creed would continue for centuries. Many Christians were taught to believe in the “two-nature” doctrine that held that Jesus had both human and divine natures that were equally present in his person. Others, however, believed in a Christological formula declaring that there was one nature which became incarnate, emphasizing Jesus’ divine nature. This issue would result in divisions within the Christian Church that would lead to a series of splits and rapprochements between the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Churches. Eventually, these disagreements would lead to a major break between the Churches in 1054 CE.

The “Great Schism” came about due to a complex mix of religious and political disagreements between the western and eastern branches of the Christian Church. Added to this was the fact that the western branch was Latin-based and ruled from Rome, and the eastern Greek-based and ruled from Constantinople. Religious disagreements included whether it was acceptable to use unleavened bread for the sacrament of communion, controversy over the wording of the Nicene Creed, and whether clerics should remain celibate. These religious disagreements were made worse by a variety of political conflicts, particularly regarding the power of Rome. Rome believed that the pope should have authority over the patriarch of the eastern church. The leaders in Constantinople disagreed, each church recognized their own leaders, and a definitive break between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches ensued lasting well into the twentieth century CE.

The next major schism to take place was the Protestant Reformation of 1517, when Martin Luther, a German monk and university professor, posted his ninety-five theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. Luther thought that the Church’s focus on “good works” such as pilgrimages, the sale of indulgences to obtain forgiveness, and the veneration of relics retained by the clergy were immoral and harkened back to the actions of the Jewish elite in the Jerusalem temple back in the time of Jesus. Of course, the seeds of revolution against the church also were due in part to nationalism, mercantilism, anticlericalism, and opposition to vested property interests in the hands of the Catholic Church. Luther argued that individuals could be saved only by personal faith in Jesus Christ and the grace of God, not by any blessings from the clergy. To this last point, he specifically referenced Paul where it was written that a person is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (*Romans 3:28*).

In response to Luther’s rejection of papal authority, the Church excommunicated him, but they also knew that many of the charges leveled against the Church had merit. This hastened implementation of a counter reformation by the Church to rid it of abusive clergy and to minimize the accumulation of wealth and power by a religious elite. But they argued against Luther’s assertion that salvation could be achieved through scripture and faith alone. To this

point, they referenced the Book of James, where it was written that a person is justified by works and not by faith only (*James 2:24*).

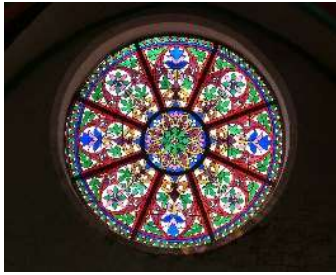
Martin Luther thought the writings of Paul and James contradicted each other, and because his arguments were based on those of Paul, he relegated the Book of James to an appendix in his translation of the Bible into German. For Luther, the fact that Jesus Christ had to die for our sins signified that salvation was achieved by believing in Christ's death and resurrection. The argument presented by Luther, faith and not deeds, lasts to this day for many practicing Protestants, contrary to that of Catholics and some Protestants. But was there necessarily a contradiction between the teachings of James and Paul in the middle of the first century CE?

Religious historians now generally agree that the Book of James was probably written near the end of the first century CE, and most likely not by James, the brother of Jesus. If so, it wasn't written to express a contemporary difference of opinion with Paul, but more likely as a response to a corrupted version of the teachings of Paul being practiced by early Gentile Christians. For the author of the Book of James, faith is a belief in the main tenets of a religion, and works are putting one's beliefs into practice. It seems that some early Christians were professing a belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus (faith) but weren't necessarily living a "Christian" lifestyle (works).

As such, the writings of Paul and the Book of James are not necessarily contradictory. The Book of James was probably attacking the position of those corrupting the teachings of Paul. Martin Luther, who wouldn't be aware of the authenticity of who wrote the Book of James, probably misinterpreted this contradiction between James and Paul thinking they were contemporaries addressing the same issue. However, Luther's contention of abusive clergy and the accumulation of wealth and power by a religious elite did still ring true, even if his later antisemitic rants lessened his moral authority.

There are three major Christian traditions in today's world: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Of the total world population of seven billion persons, those identifying as Christian is about 2.2 billion, or approximately 32% of the total. Of these, 1.1 billion are Roman Catholics, 800 million are Protestants, and 300 million are Orthodox. According to various sources, Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing religious movement in the world, with 35,000 people becoming Pentecostal or "born again" every day.

Appendix 3 - The Cognitive Science of Religion



Cognitive science is the study of how the mind works, functions, and behaves. It draws on aspects of psychology, linguistics, philosophy, and computer modeling. From this study it can be shown that beliefs play a central role in our lives. They lie at the heart of what makes us human, they shape the organization and functioning of our minds, they define the boundaries of our cultures, and they guide our motivation and behavior.

Neil Van Leeuwen in his book, *Is Religion Make-Believe?* delves into the cognitive science of religion and explores the concept of factual and imagined beliefs. Factual beliefs are based on reasoning and knowledge and provide involuntary control over how we sense the world around us. These beliefs are vulnerable to change as evidence is presented that refutes our original beliefs. We may believe the health club is open on holidays, but when we go there on Memorial Day and see a sign that states the facility is closed on all government holidays our factual belief is updated. Imagined beliefs are not necessarily based on facts, are not subject to change with new evidence, and have a more circumscribed scope.

Van Leeuwen suggests that religious credence is more like imagined beliefs in that believers voluntarily choose to accept the credence even if the belief is not based on facts. Religious belief or credence can be compartmentalized and overlaid on top of factual beliefs and turned off when the person is not in a sacred time or setting. Factual beliefs are never turned off and guide behavior in most situations, but religious beliefs can override intuition and guide behavior within this sacred time or place.

When a family member or friend dies, a person can have a profound sense of sadness and grief if they allow their factual belief in an end of life to guide their behavior. But at the same time, they can talk about going to a better place to comfort themselves or others with a religious credence of a paradisaical afterlife. Holding a credence that your ancestors exist after death and are watching is very different than a factual belief that your ancestors are watching.

A plurality of Americans believes in a creationist theory of human origins that occurred in the last 10,000 years, but barely one-fifth believe that the earth is less than 10,000 years old. This is one of many such cognitive-psychological incongruities in the public's belief system but doesn't mean that many Americans suffer from acute delusion. Rather, many hold concurrent factual and imagined beliefs that can be mapped onto each other.

Religion can be a central part of one's identity through its theological beliefs and rituals of worship, or for a sense of community and culture. For many, acceptance of a religious credence is willingly done to strengthen this personal identity and to signal to others that they belong to a particular group. This can have negative impacts when the beliefs are expanded to the persecution of others not belonging to the group.

It can be helpful to understand the psychological distinction between factual beliefs and religious credence when discussing issues with others espousing different beliefs. An avowed atheist expressing doubts about the likelihood of a virgin birth or the possibility of human existence starting less than 10,000 years ago will often fall on deaf ears when talking to a practicing Christian. Facts are not always the most important aspect when discussing religious credence. Likewise, for someone holding a certain religious credence, conflict can arise when the imagined belief is presented as a factual belief. That can be the very definition of delusional.

Appendix 4 – Zionism



Today, the term Zionist is often used pejoratively, but its original meaning was nothing more than someone striving for Jewish nationalism. Modern Jewish Zionism emerged in late nineteenth-century Europe, originating from unsuccessful attempts by Jews to integrate into Western society due to increasing antisemitism on the continent. However, Christian Zionism has roots in 17th-century English Puritanism, with some Christians advocating for Jewish restoration to hasten the second coming of the Messiah (They base their belief on Old Testament prophecies that exiled Jews will return to the Promised Land and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem as a precursor to the return of Jesus). In the 1840s, Zionist Evangelical Protestants from England may have passed their ideas on to Jewish circles.

One of the key forces in shaping the history of Palestine at the turn of the twentieth century was the Jewish Zionist movement. This movement emerged from and is rooted in political developments in Europe, but it changed and developed as it evolved from a political movement in Europe to a settlement and nation-building project in Palestine. Thus, we need to step outside the physical context of the Middle East to understand a force that ultimately changed the Middle East.

In the late 1890's, Vienna, the capital of the Austrian-Hungarian empire, was a crucible of new visions and thinking. At one time during this decade, Josef Stalin, Adolf Hitler, Sigmund Freud, Gustav Mahler, and Marshal Tito all lived in Vienna. In 1896, Theodor Herzl, an author, journalist, and playwright living in Vienna published a pamphlet called "The Jewish State" in which he promoted the idea of a Jewish homeland, and which made him a major figure in the Jewish world. Herzl wasn't a practicing Jew, but he came to the realization that assimilation would be impossible for Jews living in Europe. Many protestant Europeans thought of Jews as a separate ethnic race, as outsiders, and not worthy of being a true citizen of the nation where they lived. This view resonated with many but not all European Jews.

For Herzl and his followers, European Jews would have to start their own nation state to escape the pervasive antisemitism. They came to believe that being a Jew was more than just having a different religion but having a distinct culture with its own language and with a political sovereignty. This was the focus of the First Zionist Congress held in Switzerland in 1897. But for other Jews, including Lionel de Rothschild, a British banker who cofounded the Anti-Zionist League, assimilation was still the preferred course for the Jewish people. Those Jews emigrating from the anti-Jewish pogroms of the Russian empire, the majority of whom wanted a separate homeland, helped swing Jewish popular opinion behind the Zionists.

With the turn of the twentieth century, European political leaders began to warm to the idea of a separate Jewish state. These sentiments were not always altruistic, with some wanting to be rid of the Jews in their country. In 1903, the British government offered the Zionist Congress a portion of their Ugandan protectorate in Africa as a location of a new Jewish nation, which at the time was populated by the Maasai people. Herzl and some of the Zionists were in favor of

this proposal as official recognition of their goal for a separate homeland, but the proposal would be rejected after the death of Herzl in 1904.

Many Jews were emigrating to the United States at this time with its promise of freedom of religion and liberty, with many settling in the upper east side of Manhattan. But with an expanding Jewish population many Jews living there feared a rise in antisemitism and looked for other outlets for the burgeoning population. The Galveston Movement operated between 1907 and 1914 to divert Jews fleeing the pogroms of Russia and eastern Europe away from congested communities of the US Atlantic coast to Galveston, Texas, from where they'd be dispersed to the interior of the United States. Some 10,000 Jews made their way to Texas during this period, later making their way to other cities of the Midwest, eventually assimilating into their new communities.

During the last weeks of World War I in 1917, the foreign secretary of the British government, Arthur Balfour, issued a letter stating the British government's support for a home for the Jewish people in Palestine provided this did not adversely impact the existing communities in the area. This letter may have been written to appeal to the Jewish community in the US, who could apply political pressure on the US government to provide continuing military support for the European allies. With the Ottoman Empire surrender later that year, Palestine would come under the control of the British when the former Ottoman lands were divided among the victorious allies. The British obtained a Mandate for Palestine from the League of Nations in 1922 arguing that the existing people of the area were not competent to rule themselves. During the Mandate, the area saw successive waves of Jewish immigration and the rise of nationalist movements in both the Jewish and Arab communities. The British made conflicting promises to Arabs and Jews alike.

The British attempted to limit Jewish emigration to Palestine in the late 1930's and into the next decade which met with Jewish terrorism with the killing of Palestinians and British military personnel. Arab retaliation would follow, and the Zionist movement became more revisionist with a goal to maximize land accumulation. World War II presented a new set of political circumstances, with for instance, half the Jewish population of about 500,000 living in Germany in the 1930's emigrating to the US (95,000), South and Central America (75,000), Palestine (60,000), and Great Britain (40,000). Nazi policies would prohibit Jewish emigration after 1941.

In 1946, after the war, the British government gave up on the situation in Palestine wanting to extricate itself from the mess it helped to create and referred the Palestine Mandate to the newly created United Nations. A two-state solution was proposed, and the Zionists used this context to declare for themselves the new state of Israel in 1948 amid continued fighting. The US recognized the independent nation of Israel just eleven minutes after the declaration. About half the Arab population of Palestine would flee or be expelled from their homeland because of fighting in the next few years, and Israel would occupy more than two-thirds of the land designated for the Palestinians by the original Mandate. Jordan and Egypt would control the remaining areas. As a result, the Palestinians were effectively left to be controlled by the three countries of Israel, Jordan and Egypt.

Palestinian guerrilla attacks on Israel from bases in Syria led to increased hostility between the two countries leading up to the war between an Arab coalition of nations including Syria, Egypt, and Jordan against Israel. As a result of this conflict another 500,000 Palestinians were displaced after a preemptive strike by Israel against the Arab coalition with Israel capturing the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, the Old City of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. The tension and fighting continues to this day.

In the US, support for Israel has been strong since its inception in 1948. Many liberal politicians have felt that Israel is the only country in the Middle East that shares American values in terms of freedom of expression, gay rights and the rule of law. For many conservative politicians, with a base of evangelical Christians, there has been a belief that the US has a moral obligation to help Israel to fulfill the prophecies of the Bible, even though many think that if the Jewish people don't convert to Christianity they will be going to hell. Because of recent conflicts in Palestine, support is beginning to erode for Israel especially with younger people. The lasting impact of the myth of God's promise to his chosen people remain with us today as an ancient hang-over.

Appendix 5 – Revelations on the Apocalypse



The Apocalypse of John, or Revelations, is the most bizarre, least read, worst written, and most misunderstood of the books of the New Testament. The author gives his name as John and supposedly was residing on the island of Padmos off the coast of present-day Turkey when he wrote it. The book was originally included in the official church canon when church officials assumed he was John of Zebedee, identified as one of the original disciples of Jesus. However, Bible historians now agree that this is a completely different person, and the book was written sometime around 100 CE. The Greek writing is very poor which makes translations somewhat difficult, but we should keep in mind that 90% of the population couldn't write at all so the author was still in the upper tier of Greeks when it came to manuscript.

Because the content celebrates the attainment of eternal life in great opulence in heaven (in contrast to the teachings of an austere life in other New Testament books), and on the coming of a vengeful deity (unlike that espoused by Jesus the man), early church leaders were reluctant to include it in official church canon even with the mistaken belief that it was written by one of the original disciples. However, it had two big selling points in its favor. The first was that it offered the reward of ever-lasting life with God for those living a true Christian lifestyle, and it firmly stated that Jesus is God. After the adoption of the Nicene Creed, it was important for Christians to pronounce their belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus as God.

Revelations was written after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by Roman legions, and the author infers that the temple would have to be restored at its original location for the prophecies of the Bible to be fulfilled in preparation for the second coming of Christ and establishment of the new Kingdom of God in Jerusalem where the saints will reside. For hundreds of years, Israel was nowhere close to becoming a sovereign state and church leaders assumed that when the Bible mentioned Israel it was referring to the Christian Church.

If you ask Christian fundamentalists today what Revelations is about, they may very well say it's about predicting the future apocalypse. But Revelations was never written as a historically accurate prediction of future events. Augustine of Hippo, considered by some as the greatest Christian thinker after St. Paul, cautioned against any attempt to compute the years remaining until the coming of Christ. Augustine believed that the Kingdom of God was already established on earth with Christianity. When the final judgment occurs, those not belonging to the City of God will go to eternal misery, which is the second death. Augustine considered the new Jerusalem as a vision of the eternal heaven, the place where humans and God interact.

But evangelical predictions of the end times have been commonplace since the middle 19th century. The Great Disappointment took place in 1848 when a farmer in upstate New York

convinced thousands of people that the end of the world would occur on a certain date, which failed to materialize. Interesting enough, the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses formed in the aftermath of the Great Disappointment. In the book, *When Prophecy Fails*, by Riecken and others, it is suggested that cognitive dissonance occurs when expectations aren't met whereas people become more committed to a certain belief to relieve psychological tension. This would explain the persistence of religious cults advocating the coming apocalypse.

The Davidians (a name derived from the Bible's David) are a Christian sect established as a spinoff of the Seventh Day Adventists and from which another spin off produced the Branch Davidians in the early part of the 20th century. A member of this latter sect, Vernon Wayne Howell, would change his name to David Koresh and make claim to being the final Messiah sent to earth to bring about the catastrophes required to fulfill the prophecies of the Apocalypse of John. His first name came from the House of David, and his last name from a Hebrew transliteration of the Old Testament's Cyrus the Great who set the Hebrews free from their Babylonian captivity. The siege and disaster in Waco, Texas in 1993 would soon follow.

Appendix 6 – Gods of the Bible



It's important to understand the historical context of Bible stories to fully understand what is being said, specifically regarding other deities. Most of the stories take place in the areas around the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, but the people and customs of this region were influenced by developments in other parts of the ancient near east.

Archeological finds from the ancient city of Ugarit in present day Syria reveal a culture with a belief in a divine pantheon of gods with a chief deity El, his consort Asherah, and their children (the council of gods) which predate much of the Old Testament.

The collapse of Ugarit and much of the ancient near east during the Bronze Age in about 1200 BCE resulted in widespread chaos that may have led to the start of the Israelite civilization further to the south in what was then Canaan. The Ugaritic texts state that El and his consort Asherah had 70 sons. The people of the Bible seem to have incorporated this concept into their own beliefs, which may be the origin of the 70 nations that came from Noah's descendants listed in *Genesis 10*. In *Deuteronomy 32:8-9* the most-high (El) allocated each nation to one of his children. When Abraham came to Canaan supposedly in the early second millennium BCE, the god El was worshipped as the elder deity, Asherah was his consort and Baal was the god of fertility and rain (very important for the area). El was the god who made the covenant with Abraham making his descendants the chosen people, and the name is preserved in Hebrew names such as Isra-El, Ishma-El, and Beth-El.

Around the year 1000 BCE, there were five kingdoms centered around the area of the Dead Sea and Sea of Galilee with two situated to the west of the Jordan River, and three to the east. Those to the west included Israel with its capital of Samaria, and Judah with its capital of Jerusalem. Biblical literature presents Judah as a separate kingdom, but most likely it was just a sparsely populated region and Jerusalem was just one of a few remote highland villages. The three kingdoms to the east included Ammon with its capital of Rabbath-Ammon (located at current day Amman, Jordan), Moab with its capital of Dibon, and Edom with its capital of Bozrah. The kingdoms of Egypt with their pharaohs were further to the south, the Assyrians further to the north, the Babylonians to the east, and desert tribes to the southeast.

Each of these kingdoms or regions was affiliated with their own patron god, and the king and subjects worshipped their god to provide prosperity for the kingdom. Yahweh or Adonai (the term for Lord when speaking of Yahweh) would come to be worshipped by the people of Israel and Judah who was the divine protector assigned to them by the chief deity, El. Likewise, Milcom was the patron god for the Ammonites, Chemosh for Moab, and Qos for Edom. Henotheism is the acknowledgement of many gods but the worship of one patron deity and this was the cultural norm during this period. In 1 Kings 11, it was written that King Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, like his father David, and built a high place for the god,

Chemosh, and for the god of Ammon. It seems the wisdom of Solomon included hedging his bets on how best to secure a comfortable after-life.

Sometime in the 800s BCE, the king of Moab, Mesha, broke with the kingdom of Israel when the Israelite king died. At the time Moab was a vassal state to Israel being expected to provide a yearly payment of sheep and wool and to provide manpower in times of war. Israel enlisted the help of Judah and Edom (who may also have been a vassal state to Israel) to reign in the rebels. The Moabites were able to turn back the invading armies and became free of vassalage. This story is included in the Bible in 2 Kings, and details were confirmed by archeological finds in the early 20th century CE in present day Jordan.

2 Kings 3:1-27 relates the story of this war. The attacking kings enlisted the help of the prophet Elisha to guide them when their armies ran low on water. Elisha told them that Yahweh would provide water and that the armies should undertake a scorched-earth policy in Moab by cutting down every tree, stopping up every spring, and ruining every good piece of land. When they were on the verge of victory, the Moab king made human sacrifice to the god Chemosh and the story ends rather abruptly with the Israelites retreating to their own land. It would seem the god Chemosh had bested Yahweh for this one battle anyway.

Passages in both the Old and New Testaments reference the Israelites original polytheistic system of worship, sometimes modified to reflect the beliefs predominating when the oral stories were transcribed. *1 Kings and 2 Kings* references the worship of Baal as well as Adonai during the reign of King Ahab of Israel. Jehoram, the son of Ahab, would become king after his father. At the time there were still pillars or statues of Baal and Asherah (El's consort) in residence and in *2 Kings 3: 1-2* it states, "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father and mother; for he put away the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had made." Apparently, he stashed away the pillar of Baal for safekeeping and kept the one of Asherah prominently displayed. When the Old Testament was later transcribed, the name Baal was corrupted to Beelzebub, a term for Satan, when it became expedient to demonize this earlier venerated deity.

El and Adonai (or Yahweh) are conflated at some point in time with the latter being thought as the most high among the pantheon of gods. In *Psalms 82*, reference is made of Adonai standing in the congregation of the mighty (Divine Council) and judging among the gods. Adonai condemns the other gods presumably for allowing the people of Israel and Judah to be overtaken by the Babylonian conquest which occurred sometime in the 600s BCE. The last verse of this Psalm states, "Arise, O God, judge the earth for you shall inherit all nations". With this, Adonai has taken over control as the patron deity of all nations displacing the other patron deities.

At this point the pantheon of gods or Divine Council had been renegotiated; former gods were demoted to a lower status, and some suggest they had become angels who became the guardians of the different nations. In *Daniel 10* reference is made to the archangel Michael, one of the chief princes and the patron angel of Israel, as well as the princes of Persia and Greece who were prophesized to be in opposition to Israel (their angels were thought of as demons).

Modern belief in Christianity includes the concepts of the Trinity, angels, and Satan. Most philosophers and almost all non-believers regard the doctrine of the Trinity as a thin disguise for polytheism. The Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and Satan function as much like individual gods as any of the Divine Council of the Old Testament. That angels and demons are not called gods is merely semantics, a rather transparent attempt to conceal what is a conflation of monotheism and pagan polytheism.

Appendix 7 – King David – Man, or Myth?



Everything that we know about the life of David comes from the books of the Hebrew Bible, namely Samuel 1 and 2, Kings 1 and 2, and Chronicles 1 and 2. Other books of the Bible mention David or are accredited to David, however, there is no documentation or artifacts that can be used to substantiate or discredit what is written in these books. The only extra-biblical reference to the name of David comes from the archeological discovery of the Tel Dan Stele, a stone tablet recovered from a site in what is now northern Israel which dates to around 800 BCE. Reference on that artifact is made to a “house of David” among a list of people killed by the King of Aram Damascus.

Many Christians and Jews today are familiar with only the popular notions of a lyre-playing David and his devotional songs to God, who somehow defeated Goliath while armed with nothing more than a slingshot, and who became the first and greatest leader of the united Kingdom of Israel. His life has taken on mythical status and is held up as a model for our own lives, and for many, the dream of fulfillment of biblical prophecies. It would be easy for skeptics to simply dismiss these stories as myths, but close reading of the scriptures reveals contradictions and what seems a blatant attempt to apologize for reprehensible behavior that would be unnecessary were the stories merely invented to provide moral lessons.

If there was an historical David, he would have lived about 1000 BCE, hundreds of years after the supposed exodus of Moses and his followers from Egypt, and almost a thousand years after Abraham and his family came to Canaan from Mesopotamia. During this time there was a loose confederation of Yahweh-worshipping tribes in the land of modern-day Israel and Palestine. In the north was the ancient Kingdom of Israel, and in the south a smaller number of tribes in the region of Judah (including Jerusalem). These were separate areas of Yahweh-worshipping people and only Israel in the north would have been considered an actual kingdom at the time, led by the first king named Saul. Both regions had common enemies including the Philistines to the west, among others, and there was tacit agreement between the two regions of armed assistance should there be the need to fight their common foes.

It was written that David was born in Bethlehem, in the region of Judah, the seventh son of a family of shepherds (it would be necessary for future messiahs to trace their lineage back to Bethlehem and David to fulfill biblical prophecies – including Jesus of Nazareth). The teenage David rose to prominence from his humble origins through two main episodes related in 1 Samuel 16 and 17, namely as a talented musician playing in Saul’s court, and as the slayer of Goliath. David gained fame as the quintessential lyricist and would eventually become known as the author of the psalms of the Hebrew Bible, including songs of praise, thanksgiving and

lament. In contrast, David the warrior is exemplified by his singular stand against the Philistine giant of a man, Goliath, demonstrating his courage and trust in his God.

A careful reading of the passages from 1 Samuel reveal somewhat contradictory statements of David's role in Saul's court and his confrontation with Goliath. There are also inconsistencies between the Hebrew Bible and its Greek translation (the Septuagint), the latter of which was typically used by Christians in the following centuries. There's also the fact that many of the psalms have references to events that took place hundreds of years after David's death. It seems likely the stories of the Hebrew Bible were written with a goal of inventing the myth of David as opposed to providing a true history of his life.

The story of David and Goliath is a good case in point, a remarkable but certainly possible description of events (aside from Goliath's height of nine and a half feet). In 1 Samuel 17:4 it's David who kills the man-giant, but in 2 Samuel 21:19 it's written that a different person, Elhanan, killed Goliath. The author of 1 Chronicles, writing hundreds of years later recognized this contradiction and attempted to overcome it by explaining that the large person slain by Elhanan was Goliath's brother, Lahmi. It's noted that other stories of David's warriors are also included in the biblical text and assigned feats ranging from killing hundreds of combatants single-handedly, to killing lions, and slaying other giants. These heroic tales echo those found in Homer about the legendary triumphs of its Greek heroes. In any case, it seems improbable that biblical writers would want to duplicate David's exploits and assign them to another minor character in the Bible, Elhanan. It's much easier to believe those assigned to David came from earlier tales.

The biblical authors attempted to assign ideals to him from a young age to justify and apologize for his later actions. Assuming that there was an historical David, the only things that can be undeniable from the written words are that David was from Bethlehem and that he served in the army commanded by Saul. It seems implausible that he wrote the psalms or killed Goliath. The intention of the biblical authors was to invent a hero that would live on in our imaginations and not provide an accurate history of his life.

Deconstructing the imaginary David and reconstructing an historical David from what is written in the Bible is difficult, and impossible to do with any certainty. It's made all the more difficult knowing the biblical authors' intention was to invent a hero to serve as an aspirational identity for a chosen people. Any such attempt will have to peel back the unrealistic layers of glorification and arrive at a reasoned construction of an implied history, and examine the written record of earlier, neighboring kingdoms to determine how these previous histories may have influenced the biblical authors.

A written account of a 13th century BCE Hittite general, Hattusili, tells the story of him leading the Hittite armies to many successes with the divine assistance of the patron goddess. His

brother was the reigning king at the time whose son ascended to the throne upon the king's death. The new king became envious of Hattusili's success and divine favor and attempted to destroy his reputation and standing in the royal court, but Hattusili refused to engage with him and remained loyal. Frustrated, the boy-king led his royal army on an ill-fated attack of Hattusili and his followers, resulting in defeat of the king and the crowning of Hattusili as the new king. This was all accomplished with the blessing of the tribal deity who had foretold of his rise to power, and with the support of the Hittite people. This Hittite text is called "The Apology of Hattusili" and is almost a direct written account of David's ascension to the kingship of Israel when he took over from Saul. The genre of what is termed "Apologies" are written to demonstrate the worthiness of a reluctant hero and their divine right to power.

It was written that David was anointed early on as a future king chosen by God (1 Samuel 16), something only David, his brothers, and the prophet Samuel had knowledge. He had military success in multiple skirmishes with the Philistines and proved his worthiness in battle. Eventually Saul became outrageously jealous of the accolades David received forcing him to flee, but David continued to profess his undying loyalty to the king. David ultimately became king after the death of Saul in fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy.

There were other non-heroic events of David's life that were left in the Hebrew scripture. When David fled from Saul he was joined by a band of misfits and outlaws who attempted to shake down a wealthy landowner. The landowner denied them any protection money and soon after the man was killed, supposedly by God, and David married to the man's widow, Abigail (1 Samuel 25). In a further act of desperation, David joins the Philistines and fights with them against the Kingdom of Israel (1 Samuel 27). Not a good look for the future king. After David takes over the kingship by force, and the surviving members of Saul's family are put to death, he arranges to have one of his courageous warriors, Uriah, killed in battle so that he can marry the man's wife, Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).

There was also the typical family disfunction associated with David's life that perhaps was normal for a man with eight wives (plus other concubines) and multiple offspring. His eldest son, Amnon, raped his half-sister and was assassinated by his half-brother, Absalom (2 Samuel 13). Absalom later attempted to usurp the kingship from his father (succeeding for a brief time), but was tricked into a battle favorable to David's forces and Absalom was soon dead (2 Samuel 18). Solomon, David's son by Bathsheba, would take the kingship from his older half-brother, Adonijah, upon David's death. After Solomon secured the throne, he had Adonijah put to death (I Kings 1).

It seems bizarre by our ethical standards today that the biblical writers would leave these less than heroic events in the Hebrew Bible unless the stories were so well-known to the readership that they would have to be addressed. But leaving them in also forced the writers to come up with new stories proclaiming David's lamentations upon the many deaths of those standing

between him and the throne, and about his many glorious accomplishments, including making Jerusalem the capital of his united kingdom and bringing the Ark of the Covenant there.

At that time Jerusalem was not controlled by Israel or Judah, but rather was a Jebusite village inhabited by a separate tribe of Canaan, and was known by then name Jebus. When David proclaimed himself King of Judah after the defeat of Saul's army by the Philistines and assumed the kingship of Israel after defeating Saul's heir, he moved to conquer Jebus. He was successful in doing so, declared it the new capital of a united kingdom, and arranged for the Ark of the Covenant to be moved there from another nearby village (Solomon would later be credited with constructing the first temple in Jerusalem).

There are historical issues with this account of Jerusalem and the united Kingdom of Israel and Judah. Archeological evidence indicates that David and Solomon's homeland of Judah was conspicuously undeveloped, and there is no evidence whatever of the wealth of a great empire flowing back to it. Jerusalem at the time was nothing more than a remote, typical highland village. Likewise, there is no evidence of a unified kingdom of Yahweh worshipping people spanning the length of the ancient regions of Israel and Judah.

By the seventh century BCE conditions in Judah and Israel had changed dramatically, with Jerusalem becoming a larger economic center dominated by its temple. The northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians while the separate Kingdom of Judah with its capital of Jerusalem remained intact. Judah would be defeated by the Babylonians in the next century and the temple in Jerusalem destroyed. It would be almost a hundred years later when the descendants of displaced elites would return from exile, wanting to take up their ancestral positions among the lower classes of Yahweh worshippers who had remained in Judah carrying on with their lives. When the origin stories of the promised land were being written by these returning elites the concept of a united monarchy was used as a powerful tool of political propaganda to hold up as inspiration for a return to former glory with a main temple in Jerusalem.

The stories of David and Solomon and their rule over a large territory in the central highlands of Israel and Judah were part of this legend, probably passed down from earlier generations which found it necessary to defend David and apologize for his transgressions. The biblical authors of the succeeding centuries reconfigured David as actively righteous leader, and as a model for future kings and messiahs.

Appendix 8 – Influences on the Old Testament: Gilgamesh



The Epic of Gilgamesh tells the story of the odyssey of the King of the Mesopotamian city-state of Sumerian Uruk, located in what is present day Iraq. It is estimated to have been written in the year 2100 BCE and the earliest surviving version dates to the 18th century BCE written on stone tablets in Sumerian cuneiform. It's the oldest recorded story known anywhere to exist. The epic is regarded as a foundational work in religion and the tradition of heroic sagas and is believed to have influenced Homeric epics and the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament of the Christian Bible.

The Epic of Gilgamesh and the Hebrew Bible each are a compilation of stories on man's search for immortality, and a way for humans to deal with the inevitability of death. The search for physical immortality, instead of spiritual enlightenment, always ended in failure for the hero, Gilgamesh, and he finally realized that his community and his journey are what will keep him in memory, even after he dies. Similarly, Jews, Christians and Muslims take as deep consolation against the natural fear of death the promise of immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body disclosed in the final installments of the revelation that makes up the Old Testament.

The parallels between the stories of Enkidu/Shamhat in the Gilgamesh epic, and Adam/Eve in Genesis have been long recognized by scholars. In both, a human is created from the soil by a god, lives in nature, and is tempted by a woman. For Enkidu, engaging in sexual relations with Shamhat makes him aware of his nakedness and separates him from the animals around him, but also gives him the ability to forge a truly human connection. For Adam, eating from the tree of knowledge provides him with the same awareness. The major difference between the two stories is that the gods created man as mortal in the Gilgamesh story, and Enkidu overcomes his temporary bitterness at losing his former life. In contrast to this, man was created as immortal in the Garden of Eden and lost this with the fall from grace as punishment for disobeying God with the inevitable consequence of the loss of innocence.

The Genesis flood narrative matches that in Gilgamesh so closely that most scholars believe it derives from the Mesopotamian account. What is particularly noticeable is the way the Genesis flood story follows the Gilgamesh flood tale in the same order even when the story permits other alternatives. In a 2001 Torah commentary released on behalf of the Conservative Movement of Judaism, rabbinic scholar Robert Wexler stated: "The most likely assumption we can make is that both Genesis and Gilgamesh drew their material from a common tradition about the flood that existed in Mesopotamia. These stories then diverged in the retelling." Ziusdra, Utnapishtim and Noah are the respective heroes of the Sumerian, Akkadian and biblical flood legends of the ancient Near East.

Appendix 9 – A Virgin Birth and the Christmas Holiday



Of the 27 books included in the New Testament, there are two, and only two, that reference a virgin birth: the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The Gospel of Mark does not include a birth narrative but does have a reference to a voice from heaven acknowledging Jesus' divinity upon his baptism. This seems more important than a virgin birth for the author of Mark. For the Gospel of John, nothing is said about a supernatural birth, but rather insinuating that Jesus was a man with the divine word of God present in him and accomplishing all his marvelous deeds by virtue of the power of God.

It could be that establishing the divine birth of Jesus may have been more important when the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written (or when they were later modified), and that acknowledging Jesus' divinity at his baptism was important for authenticating his divine nature. Regardless of the reasons why a birth narrative was important for the authors of Matthew and Luke, there are differences in the two accounts of the birth as highlighted below.

The Gospel According to Matthew

1. At the start of this Gospel, the genealogy of Jesus is traced back to Abraham through Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. It is stated that Joseph was the son of Jacob. (Matthew 1:16).
2. After Mary was found to be pregnant prior to the marriage consummation, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream informing him that which is conceived in Mary is of the Holy Spirit. This would fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 which states that the Messiah was to be born from a virgin. (This may have been a misinterpretation of the Hebrew word *alma* which means young woman, but which was translated to the Greek as "*Parthenos*" which carries the connotation of a young woman who has never had sex.)
3. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and it's insinuated Joseph and Mary lived there, and no mention is made of their living in Nazareth.
4. Three wise men from the East came to Jerusalem after seeing the Star of Bethlehem and supposedly followed it to Jerusalem. They had an audience with Herod the Great who wanted them to return after confirming where Jesus was born, and then they traveled to Bethlehem guided by the star. They presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They did not return to Jerusalem after being divinely warned not to.
5. Joseph fled with Jesus and Mary to Egypt to avoid the wrath of Herod whom it was foretold would seek the young child to destroy him. This fulfilled the prophecy of Hosea 11:1 which states "Out of Egypt I called my son".
6. After Herod discovered he had been deceived by the wise men, he had all male children two years old and under put to death in the environs of Bethlehem (the Massacre of the Innocents mentioned in Matthew 2:16).

7. After Herod died, Joseph and Mary left Egypt and took Jesus to Nazareth, thinking that the area around Bethlehem and Jerusalem was still too dangerous for them. According to this Gospel this fulfilled a prophecy that the Messiah shall be called a Nazarene. However, no such prophecy is found in the Old Testament, or any other extant source.

The Gospel According to Luke

1. The Gospel begins with the story of Elizabeth, wife of Zacharias, becoming pregnant after she had been barren for many years. She would eventually give birth to John the Baptist.
2. Mary, a relative of Elizabeth, is betrothed to Joseph in the city of Nazareth. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary and informs her that she will give birth to Jesus after the Holy Spirit comes upon her. Mary then went to stay with Elizabeth “with haste” for about three months before returning to Nazareth.
3. John the Baptist is born to Elizabeth some months before the birth of Jesus.
4. A decree was issued by Caesar Augustus for a census wherein everyone would have to return to the city of their ancestors, and it’s stated that Joseph’s family was from Bethlehem. For this reason, Joseph takes the pregnant Mary to Bethlehem.
5. While in Bethlehem, Jesus is born, as foretold by the angel Gabriel. Because there is no room for them in the inn, the baby is born in a manger.
6. An angel appears to some shepherds watching over their flocks that a Savior is born in Bethlehem, and they go and glorify and praise him.
7. After eight days the baby is circumcised and given the name Jesus.
8. The family returns to their own city, Nazareth. No mention is made of wise men, the Massacre of the Innocents or a flight to Egypt.
9. The genealogy of Jesus is then given which traces his lineage back to Adam through his father Joseph. It’s stated that Joseph’s father was Heli.

The various details from these two Gospels have been conflated, and contradictions glossed over, to give us our current representations of the birth of Jesus during our Christmas celebrations. However, the birth was not celebrated in the early church; Easter was the big holiday, and it wasn’t until the 4th century CE that Christmas was declared a holiday by the Church, possibly to adopt and absorb pagan traditions of that era.

During the Middle Ages, Christianity replaced much of pagan worship in Europe, and celebrations were raucous, drunken affairs much like Mardi Gras is today. In the 17th century a wave of conservative reforms swept through Protestant Europe and attempts were made to downgrade Christmas as a holiday to eliminate this perceived immoral behavior. This conservative attitude was brought to America by the early Puritans.

In the 19th century, stories penned by Washington Irving, *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*, and Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, promoted Christmas as a time for families and peaceful

coexistence between members of different social groups. The early 19th century had been a period of class conflict and turmoil with high unemployment and gang rioting by the disenchanting classes, and Christmas was often the time when these disturbances occurred. The new Christmas stories encouraged the upper classes and governing administrations to adopt this new way of thinking and promote as such to the lower classes, and before long Christmas was reinvented.

Appendix 10 – The Bible on Homosexuality



It's unlikely that the biblical authors had any notion of sexual orientation (the term homosexual wasn't even coined until the late 19th century) as we have today, so it's important to read the Bible with an understanding of the cultural context in which it was written. There are six references to same-sex eroticism in the Bible, three in the Old Testament and three in the New. This is in addition to the possible homosexual relationship between David

and King Saul's son written in the Book of Samuel. While these passages are negative about the practices they mention, there is no evidence that these in any way speak to same-sex relationships based on love and mutuality. To the contrary, the cultural context of the time demonstrates that what was being condemned in the Bible is very different than the committed same-sex partnerships we know and see today.

In the Old Testament, the stories of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) and the Levite's concubine (Judges 19) are about sexual violence and the Ancient Near East's stigma toward violating male honor. The injunction that "man must not lie with man" (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13) coincides with a society anxious about continuing family lineages and retaining the distinctiveness of Israel as a nation, along with other injunctions that we typically choose to ignore. Each time the New Testament addresses the topic in a list of vices (1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Timothy 1:10), the argument being made is most likely about the sexual exploitation of male prostitutes or the practice of pederasty which was socially accepted at the time in the Greco-Roman world. When Paul speaks of vile passions and men with men committing what is shameful (Romans), it is part of a broader indictment against idolatry and excessive, self-centered lust.

In the Genesis story, two angels disguised as men come to Sodom and spend the night at the home of Lot. Because of their xenophobia, local men approach Lot's house and threaten to sexually abuse his guests as a way of demonstrating their dominance over the strangers. Lot tries to diffuse the situation by offering his two unmarried daughters to the angry crowd to do with them what they wish (What? And Lot isn't condemned for this heinous proposition?). Eventually the crowd is turned back, and the next day God destroys the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah sparing only Lot, his wife and his two daughters (Lot's wife is turned to a pillar of salt when she disobeys the angels' command not to look back upon the destruction). Disregarding the perverse morality of Lot offering up his daughters, the story is about the evil of sexual violence and rape and not about sexual orientation.

The referenced passages of Leviticus are included with a long list of prohibitions known as the Code of Holiness which is a collection of secular, ritualistic, moral, and festival regulations for the people of Israel. Being a member of the chosen people, the author would be interested in promoting heterosexual relations as a way of continuing their blood lines which could explain

the injunction of a man lying with a male. But those wishing to use the Code of Holiness as an argument against sexual orientation gloss over other prohibitions which we now consider anachronistic and which we choose to ignore. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed, a garment of mixed linen and wool shall not come upon you, you shall not shave the sides of your head, you shall not tattoo any marks on you. People can pick and choose Bible passages to support most positions that they hold. Polygamy and adultery are commonly thought as sinful by most Christians and Jews today, and yet there are many examples of these practices being condoned in the Bible (As there are today for people claiming to be Christian). Abraham had sexual relations with his wife's maid servant, and had a son by her, Ishmael. The maid servant and Ishmael were later banished to the desert so that Isaac could become the heir (And this was considered ethical behavior?). King David and Solomon, among others, practiced adultery and polygamy. Cultural norms do change.

In the referenced passages from Corinthians and Timothy, English translations include terms such as homosexuals and fornicators, and assert that they shall not inherit the kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul is the presumed author of these letters, and during the middle of the first century CE he would not be familiar with the term homosexual. He was writing in Greek, and he used the words "malakoi" and "arsenokoitai". The Greek word malakoi typically means soft, and can be interpreted as weak, lacking self-control, and laziness. In the ancient world this term may also have been used to refer to women, and some translators may have used this knowledge to translate the term as "effeminate".

The compound word arsenokotai is translated as male and bed. Most translations of the Bible to English since the middle of the 20th century have associated the translated terms of soft, male and bed as a reference to homosexuality, although again this would not be a concept known to Paul. After Paul's apparent coinage of the term arsenokoitai, most subsequent uses of it in ancient literature appear only in lists of vices. Some religious scholars have pointed out that the word likely relates to sexual or economic exploitation. That may involve same-sex behavior, but it would be exploitative forms of it, not loving relationships. Once again, anachronistic translations of the Greek words are open to misinterpretation and biases of the translator.

Chapter 1 of Romans provides a description of behavior of the unrighteous including the passage "For this cause God gave them up to vile passions of women exchanging the natural use for what is against nature, and for men leaving the natural use of the woman". It's hard to know exactly what is being said here but women were obviously thought of as something to be used. For Paul, the presumed author of this letter to the Romans and a Jew living in the first century CE, a pagan lifestyle and excesses practiced by many Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world would be considered idolatry and unrighteous. It's not completely clear what Paul was talking about when he wrote about vile passions, but he did not have the concept of sexual orientation that we have today. However, he most certainly was aware of pederasty, the

practice of an older man mentoring a young boy and having sexual relations with him, which was practiced in the Archaic and Classical periods.

As a first century Jew, Paul would have considered pederasty as a violation of righteous behavior, just as he did other types of unrighteous excesses like covetousness, maliciousness, and envy. However, being an unmarried follower of the laws of Moses he perhaps would not have had a tremendous amount of insight into a healthy sexual relationship. Although we can only surmise this since little is known of his personal life.

While it's reasonable to assume that Jesus and his fellow Jews in first-century Palestine would have disapproved of gay sex, there is no record of Jesus speaking on this topic, unlike those passages referenced from the Old Testament, and in the letters from Paul. He does speak about sexual immorality in general, and when asked about the practice of divorce in a heterosexual relationship he references Genesis (as related in the Gospel of Matthew) where it is written, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh". This addresses heterosexual marriage but says nothing about a caring homosexual marriage.

Just as attitudes toward adultery and polygamy have changed over the years, so have attitudes toward sexual orientation. If we are to give moral authority to the Bible about issues such as this, we must understand them within the cultural context of the community where and when they were written.

Appendix 11 – Jesus and His Siblings



Most Christians believe that Mary was a virgin who miraculously conceived of the baby Jesus by being “overshadowed” by the Holy Spirit, and who subsequently gave birth to the Son of God in fulfillment with the Old Testament prophecy, *Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)*

Immanuel, Jesus, it’s hard to get all the details right when you’re prophecizing. That Mary was a virgin at the time of Jesus’ birth is “substantiated” in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and included in their birth narratives (See Appendix 8). However, Mary’s virginity after the birth of Christ remains an open question and the answer may depend on the person you’re speaking with and their reading of the Bible. So, what’s the background for debate?

Two different Gospels recount that Mary had other sons and daughters, and the names of these siblings are provided,

“Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?” (Matthew 13:55–56)

“Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” (Mark 6:3)

And the Apostle Paul also claimed that Jesus had at least one brother. On his first trip to Jerusalem after his conversion, Paul wrote,

“But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:19).

An unbiased reading of these passages would seem to suggest that Mary had other children who weren’t exalted as was Jesus before and after his life. That would seem to suggest that these other siblings had normal human births requiring Mary to have sexual intercourse with a man. Or through in vitro fertilization which was hard to come by in ancient times.

But the official acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council held at Constantinople in 553 refer to Mary as “aeiparthenos” (i.e. ever-virgin), and this became the official view of the Christian Church. For the Church establishment it was important that the virgin birth and Mary’s perpetual virginity be signs of Mary’s total consecration to God, her single-minded service to him and utter abandonment to his will. For the mother of Jesus to have other siblings would mean she had given in to human emotions and feelings (and God forbid – had sexual relations), which may have cast a negative light on the divinity of Jesus. So, for them, the passages cited above refer to cousins or more distant relations and not actual siblings of Jesus.

But the Greek translation of these passages use the Greek words for brothers and sisters and not the Greek words for cousins or for distant relations. The Greek word for cousin is used in other parts of the Bible so it seems strange that the correct terms would not be used throughout.

The idea of a perpetual virgin is first mentioned in a writing called the *Infancy Gospel of James* or *The Protoevangelium of James*, and it is estimated to have been written in the middle part of the second century and in Greek, hence it could not have been written by the Apostle James. However, in this book James is presented as an older stepbrother of Jesus being a child of Joseph and his first wife, prior to his marriage to Mary. A midwife attending the birth of Jesus, Salome, doubts that a virgin birth is possible and physically examines Mary at which time Salome's hand falls away on fire, and she immediately drops to her knees and declares that the newborn is the Messiah. The infant Jesus then restores Salome's hand to its original form because of her adoration.

This Gospel was considered apocryphal by the early church leaders and was not included in the official Church canon. However, it may have planted the seed for subsequent Church dogma about the perpetual virginity of the mother of Jesus.

For many Catholics today, Mary is venerated as having semi-divine status whose body and soul were raised to heaven (The Assumption of Mary). This became official Church dogma by Pope Pius XII in 1950. Many Protestants do not believe in her perpetual virginity or in the Assumption of Mary because it is not supported by canonical scripture. They have no issues with interpreting the Bible literally or believing that Jesus had siblings. For them, James the Just is the brother of Jesus. For Catholics, the majority of whom do not depend on a detailed reading of Scripture, they have no problem with the contention that Mary was perpetually a virgin, but the belief that Jesus had siblings is a foreign concept to them.



Appendix 12 – The Real Ten Commandments

If there is anything in the Bible that everyone should be able to agree upon it would be the Ten Commandments. After all they were supposedly etched in stone by the finger of God. But as it turns out there are questions and differences of opinions about the exact makeup of the commandments and how they apply to Christians today.

The commandments are presented as a series of fourteen imperatives (Thou shall not....) included in multiple verses, are not specifically numbered, and could be interpreted as being ten or more commandments depending on how they are separated. Ten has been used because that specific number was referenced in other Old Testament books.

When the Levites fled Egypt to escape persecution by the Pharaoh, Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet with Yahweh at which time the Hebrew God spoke of a series of rules that have been recorded in *Exodus 20: 3-17* and in *Deuteronomy 5: 6-21*. There are slight differences between these two recordings, but they are generally the same set of edicts and are summarized in the table below. However, they're never identified as the "Ten Commandments" in these passages.

When Moses came down from the mountain and found his people worshipping other gods, he became angry and broke the tablets upon which the laws were written. After the people repented sufficiently, Yahweh rewrote the laws upon new stone tablets and gave them to Moses. These laws are noted as being the same as the first copy and are specifically identified as the "Ten Commandments", or from the Hebrew, the Ten Words (Decalogue in Latin). These laws are recorded in *Exodus 34: 14-26* and again are presented as a series of imperatives that are much different than those of the earlier version.

To make things even a bit more confusing there are slight differences between the Bible used by most Protestants, the King James Bible, and the Bible used by Catholics and Lutherans, translations of the Latin Vulgate Bible. One of the differences is the order of the Ten Commandments. Catholics and Lutherans usually use the arrangement of the commandments made by Augustine of Hippo (St. Augustine) as presented in the Latin Vulgate Bible. Most Protestants use the arrangement formulated by the Eastern Orthodox Church which was used for the King James translation. They are mostly the same with one omission, but are numbered differently.

Both the Latin Vulgate and King James English translations base their versions of the Ten Commandments on the imperatives given in Exodus 20. These are presented in the table below under the headings "King James" and "Latin Vulgate" and omit much of the unnecessary verbiage given in the Bible translations. The commandments from Exodus 34, those specifically mentioned as the Ten Commandments, are also presented under their own heading.

	King James	Exodus 34	Latin Vulgate
1	You shall have no other god before me	You shall worship no other god	You shall have no other god besides me
2	Do not make graven images	Make no molded gods	Don't take the Lord's name in vain
3	Don't take the Lord's name in vain	Keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread	Keep holy the Lord's day
4	Keep holy the Sabbath	All firstborns are mine	Honor thy father and mother
5	Honor thy father and mother	You shall rest on the 7 th day	You shall not murder
6	You shall not murder	Observe the Feast of Weeks	Do not commit adultery
7	Do not commit adultery	Men shall appear before God three times a year	Do not steal
8	Do not steal	Don't offer the blood of sacrifice with leaven	Don't bear false witness
9	Don't bear false witness	Give the first fruits of your land to the Lord	Don't covet your neighbor's wife
10	You shall not covet	Do not boil a kid in its mother's milk	Don't covet your neighbor's goods

The commandments are abbreviated in this table and the actual Bible passages are much more elaborate. As example the tenth of these rules in Exodus 20 is translated as "You shall not covet your neighbor's possessions including wife, servants, ox, donkey, or anything else." The fourth in Exodus 34 is translated thusly "*But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty.*" It's difficult to fit that passage into a table.

Christians have chosen to concentrate on the rules included in Exodus 20 as their Ten Commandments even though they aren't designated as such in the Old Testament. They have come to regard these as the Ethical Decalogue or the ethical Ten Commandments, to distinguish them from the Ritual Decalogue listing of Exodus 34. It's interesting that there are three to four commandments associated with homage to God with the remaining concerning ethical behavior. But there's no mention of slavery, torture, kidnapping, child molestation or rape which are commonly considered the most heinous acts one person can perpetrate upon another.

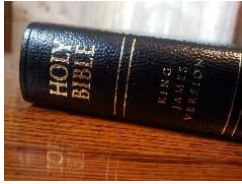
As shown, the King James version of the second commandment forbids the making of graven images or idols (idolatry), whereas the Latin Vulgate version eliminated this commandment and went right to keeping the lord's day holy. As a result, the two versions differ in arrangement by one row with the Latin Vulgate translation making up ground by splitting the last commandment of "coveting" as two separate commandments. Catholics will say their second commandment is incorporated in the first, which they contend that idolatry (worshipping graven images, or false gods, money etc.) can logically be assumed to be covered by "You shall have no other god besides me". Protestants (except Lutherans), harking back to the Reformation, contend that Catholics are practicing idolatry by having art and statues depicting divine beings. Catholics will say that they are venerable images of God and the saints which cannot be considered idolatry. And the debate goes on.

As with most of the Bible, specific passages must be considered in the context of the time and culture when they were formulated. Adultery in ancient times didn't have the same meaning to what Christians consider adultery to be now. In the Old Testament adultery was voluntary sexual intercourse between a married woman, or one engaged by payment of the bride price, and a man other than her husband. For a man, having sex with slaves, prostitutes or unmarried women wasn't necessarily an offense. Abraham had sexual relations with his wife's maid servant, Hagar, resulting in the birth of Ishmael. King David had Bathsheba's husband murdered so he could cohabit with her. And as related in 1 Kings 11, King Solomon had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines. Now that dude got around. Times change, except maybe in Utah.

Regarding the worshipping of other gods, early Israelites were polytheistic and worshipped Yahweh alongside a variety of Canaanite gods and goddesses. (See Appendix 5 for a more detailed description of these other gods). God's covenant with Abraham giving the Hebrew people the land of Canaan came with the provision that Abraham and the early Hebrews would worship their god, Yahweh, as the supreme being. This wasn't a demand to be the only god but rather the most important, so they were to worship no other god before Yahweh. The Solomon worshipped other deities as written in 1 Kings.

The commandment about keeping the Sabbath holy was always considered to be Saturday, the Jewish holy day. The Sabbath was never changed from Saturday to Sunday by Jesus Christ or his apostles who continued the Jewish practice. Sunday became the day of rest and worship for mainstream Christians through the Church claiming authority to overrule Scripture. This was most likely done to incorporate influences by potential converts and quite plausibly through anti-Semitism. The official line from the Church is that Christians celebrate on Sunday because it is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead and on which the Holy Spirit had appeared to the apostles. Like most passages in the Bible, believers pick and choose what makes the most sense for their own lives, even if they're written in stone.

Appendix 13 – The Bible on Abortion



Nothing in the Bible specifically addresses the issue of abortion or defines when life begins for humans. Anyone arguing from pro-life or pro-choice positions and attempting to use the Bible as a moral authority on this issue is not making credible assumptions. However, people try to infer what some passages mean to justify their stance, from both sides of the debate.

The concept of personhood has been debated for millennia. Aristotle and Hippocrates held a gradualist view of the development of the fetus. As the time for birth drew near, the fetus moved from the animal-like embryo to the human child. Jewish interpretation of the laws of the Hebrew Bible put an emphasis on life beginning with the first breath, or after the birth of the child. The general Islamic view is that full human life begins only after the ensoulment of the fetus, which most Muslim scholars believe occurs at about 120 days after conception. So, there has been a range of thinking on when life begins, at conception, sometime after conception but before birth, and at or shortly after birth.

The Christian Church has gone through a metamorphosis on this subject over the last fifteen centuries. Saint Augustine in the 5th century declared that homicide applied only to killing a formed fetus after a gestation period of 40 days for males or 80 days for females (apparently females needed a longer incubation time to become fully human). The Justinian code of the 6th century confirmed that fetuses under 40 days did not have souls. But in 1588 Pope Sixtus V rejected this view and promulgated the ruling which declared that abortion was to be condemned whatever stage of development the fetus had reached. In 1591, his successor, Gregory IX, rescinded that, but Pius IX reinstated the earlier ruling in the late 1800s.

In 1965, the Catholic Church ruled that abortion as the taking of a life rather than as a sexual sin. And in the 1970s white evangelicals (and white nationalists) seized the issue as a cornerstone of their movement to control the political system in the US. Still, most Catholics, Protestants and perhaps even most Orthodox Christians agree that it's a woman's right to decide. Until white evangelicals came to prominence, even Southern Baptists in the US did not have abortion high on their list of concerns for the moral well-being of the country.

For the last fifty years, pro-life activists have tried to make the argument that the Bible says life begins at conception, and that abortion is murder. They quote *Deuteronomy 30:19* which states "Choose life that you and your descendants may live", but this isn't about abortion. In *Isaiah*, they point to passages about the Lord forming someone or someplace (Jacob or Israel) in the womb. This doesn't address at what point this happened or if it's talking about the formation of a human being or the nation of Israel. In *Jeremiah 20:14-17* the author states that his father did not kill him in the womb, but the whole passage is about him wishing he'd been aborted. And in the New Testament, *Luke 1:41* relates the story of Mary visiting Elizabeth when

the latter is pregnant with John the Baptist (in the final trimester). The passage reads "...When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb". Pro-life activists will point to this passage and say that the fetus is a functioning human able to distinguish voices. But they fail to point out that Elizabeth is in the final trimester of pregnancy, that quickening (movement) does occur in a pregnancy but not at conception, and that the story is about a birth brought about by God (supernatural) and not about natural pregnancies (an angel helped Elizabeth conceive even at her advanced age).

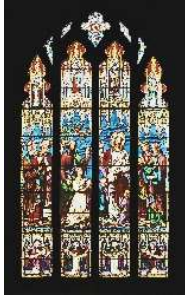
Pro-choice activists will reference *Numbers 5:11-22* and *Exodus 21:22-25*. In Numbers, to confirm a wife's faithfulness to her husband, she is brought before a priest and given holy water to drink. The belief was that if she had been unfaithful her belly would swell and her thigh would rot. The activists will suggest this is about a pregnant woman being given abortive medication resulting in a miscarriage. But it becomes apparent that this is about a woman who isn't necessarily pregnant because in the following verses it states that if the woman has not defiled herself then she shall be free and may conceive.

The Exodus passage is translated "When men fight and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out (hmmm...her children come out), but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine." For pro-choice activists the correct translation is that there is a miscarriage but the woman herself is not harmed. With this interpretation, the fetus or unborn child is not considered a human and only a fine is imposed. But this passage can also be translated that no harm occurs to either the woman or the child, in which case the baby is born and is a living person. It's not clear what is being stated here.

The Exodus passage may have been assimilated from the earlier Code of Hammurabi, a Babylonian legal text, and copied to the Hebrew Bible. In that Code, Assyrian women were punished for aborting their fetuses. This seems straight forward and a condemnation against abortion, but in the same Code fathers were allowed to kill their newborn babies. It seems apparent that the law was designed to control the woman's right to choose rather than to protect the fetus.

So, in conclusion, you will not find anything in the Bible which expressly prohibits or condones abortion. Bible passages are dependent on transcriptions and translations which have not always been unbiased or necessarily accurate. But if we wish to make a moral judgement using the Bible as our basis, we must make inferences about what was meant knowing that context is important and that what was normal or natural in ancient times does not always apply in our times. The debate about when personhood is achieved continues (Does it occur at conception, after the quickening, or at birth?). Reasonable people can have different opinions, but none can use the Bible to conclusively prove their position.

Appendix 14 – Circumcision



Male circumcision is the oldest known human surgical procedure, with historical records and archeological evidence dating the practice back to ancient Egyptians in the 23rd century BCE. A lack of proper hygiene and modern medicines made the practice advantageous for the population in that it could minimize the harmful effects of some infections and diseases affecting the male genitalia. These practices were most likely passed on to the semitic tribes of Canaan, including the Hebrews of the ancient near east.

In Genesis 17:10-14 it is written “Every male child among you shall be circumcised, and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me (God) and you.” It was further written that anyone who is not circumcised shall break God’s covenant with his chosen people, and that this shall be done eight days after birth. There are very good scientific reasons for this delay after birth in that newborn babies do not have sufficient Vitamin K production to prevent excessive bleeding, and production of this vitamin from normal bacterial action in the gut can take months to achieve sufficient levels if not supplemented. Certainly, eight days is better than none, which was probably arrived at by practical experience.

For those of the Jewish faith, circumcision is routinely performed on the eighth day of the child's life according to the referenced passage in Genesis, and it is forbidden to postpone the practice for any reason other than the health of the child. The circumcision itself must be performed by a Mohel, a pious, observant Jew educated in circumcision techniques as well as in the relevant Jewish law and tradition. Circumcision performed by any other individual does not qualify as valid regardless of whether a rabbi is presiding over it. This is because the removal of the foreskin is itself a religious ritual that must be performed by someone religiously qualified.

In Islam the performance of circumcision is one of the rules of cleanliness and it is believed that the prophet Abraham was the first person to perform circumcision. This practice has continued as a highly recommended practice of the messengers, including the Prophet Muhammed. Many Muslim scholars maintain that circumcision is an obligatory necessity with others stating that it is not obligatory but a highly recommended practice. Circumcision is recommended to be performed on the seventh day after birth, but it can be carried out up to 40 days after birth or thereafter until the age of 7 years, depending upon the health of the infant or child at the time.

The Jesus movement, and Christianity thereafter, has taken a different path for their believers. St. Paul argued that it wasn’t necessary for Gentiles to follow Jewish ritual law when they converted to a belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. As he proselytized in Asia Minor, he encountered many adult converts who were unwilling to undergo the painful ritual of circumcision. St. Paul’s argument became accepted Church policy in the early Jesus movement and became entrenched in the tenets of the Christian Church in Europe, probably

aided by anti-Semitic feelings of the expanding Church population. Therefore, circumcision was not routinely practiced in the Western World up to the 1800's.

In Victorian Britain in the 1800's the view that male circumcision could reduce the risk of venereal diseases and reduce the inclination of masturbation took hold particularly by many better educated parents. Masturbation was considered a particularly unhealthy behavior, not only because it was morally frowned on but also because it was thought to deplete energy. The remarkable success reportedly achieved by circumcision in curing the various disorders that were related to masturbation or irritation of the penis became well known in medical circles in Britain at this time. These views were subsequently transported to Puritan America.

However, in Great Britain and Canada circumcision quickly became an antiquated practice because medical practitioners in both countries felt no direct correlation between cleanliness and circumcision existed. The practice of circumcision in the United States, despite this, has remained common in the modern era because of unique cultural principles. These cultural principles make the American medical community distinct and allow a more direct view into the popularity of male circumcision in America.

According to Thomas Szasz in his book, *The Medicalization of Everyday Life*, the American enthusiasm for preventing masturbation and for promoting circumcision are manifestations of the same puritanical zeal for health as virtue that has been ever present in American society. Medical doctors intrinsically linked good morals with proper health practices, raising the popularity of circumcision in the US. A combination of religion, the medical monopoly on information, and the importance of cleanliness to medical professionals and individuals in American society created an environment in which circumcision continues to thrive in the US.

If good hygiene is practiced, there are no overriding benefits to consider circumcision as a routine medical procedure used on newborn males, especially since there are readily available medications that can be used to treat infections and diseases that may arise whether an individual is circumcised or not. The decision then becomes one based on religious or cultural factors.

It's to be noted that the practice of female circumcision, which is still practiced in parts of the world, and which many consider a ritualized form of child abuse and violence against women, is thankfully not mentioned at all in the Bible.

Appendix 15 – Are Mormons Really Christians?



The question is often asked if Mormonism is a Christian Religion. A typical definition of a Christian is anyone who puts their trust in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and who believes in his death and resurrection for the salvation of humankind. From this definition Mormons are most definitely Christian. But from a theological viewpoint, Mormonism itself diverges from traditional Christianity in some significant ways. The doctrine and beliefs of the Mormon or Church of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) differs in its views on scripture, the nature of God, the deity of Christ and the trinity, and salvation.

Mormons accept extra books in their church canon with their inclusion of a compilation of the revelations of Joseph Smith, the founder of the LDS, and the *The Book of Mormon*, a record of ancient groups coming to the Americas who have moved from Jerusalem, shortly before its destruction, followed by a visit of the resurrected Jesus Christ. Although the records, inscribed on gold plates, were supposedly lost in the fourth century CE, the prophet-warrior, Moroni, is said to have returned in the early 19th century as an angel in a revelation to Joseph Smith and led him to where the plates were buried, on a farm near Smith's boyhood home in western New York state. Smith then translated these into English as the *Book of Mormon*.

Mormon doctrine also includes a concept of God as part of a united, divine community, and one of a gendered, married and procreating being. The belief that God is married is unique to Mormonism (and to some people of the Old Testament) and this belief is integral to the Mormon belief in eternal marriage as necessary for exaltation in the afterlife. Mormons also do not believe in the Holy Trinity including a Jesus of a coeternal and coequal with God, but that prophets like Jesus and Joseph Smith are men who have been authorized and empowered to share the Word of God.

Protestant Christians believe in "Faith Alone" for salvation and criticize the LDS for a belief in salvation through good works, just as they criticize Catholic Christians. Mormons, however, feel that they are misunderstood in that their doctrine emphasizes that they should perform good works but in gratitude for God's grace.

Much of the criticism of Mormonism has to do with controversial past policies of the LDS Church including polygamy as practiced by early adherents of the religion (and by a minority of fundamentalists today) before it was banned by the Church as a condition of Utah gaining statehood in the 1890's. They also had a policy of not allowing African American men to be in the priesthood thus denying them and their families the blessings of the church. In 1978 Spencer Kimball, the LDS Church President, had a revelation that allowed him to change this Church policy that appeased critics and allowed the Church to grow. A similar revelation regarding the status of women hasn't been received from God yet.

Until the early 20th century, LDS members referred to non-members as “gentiles,” but in a move to reduce the animosity to other Christian sects, they changed LDS rhetoric to call non-members “non-Mormons” and the term now used is “friend of another faith”. LDS members believe that their church is the one true Church closest to the early Christian church, just like many other religious sects.

Many non-Mormon Christians today consider Mormonism to be just another silly, man-made set of religious ideas that have been used to enslave the minds of lots of gullible people. But is it really that different from other religious sects? What would Christians think of a man today saying he had a revelation of getting a promise from God promising that his family and offspring would be his chosen people, and that he could indulge in extramarital relations to conceive of a male heir (Abraham not Joseph Smith)? Or what of a man who came up to them saying that he received commandments from God that were etched in stone, but the tablets were lost or destroyed so he had no physical proof of their existence (Moses)? Or what would they think of an author claiming that a man that was executed as a traitor to the government seventy years ago was in fact God himself who would come again to destroy the earth (The Apocalypse of John talking about Jesus).

So, is it important whether Mormonism should be considered a Christian sect? Maybe only for people who feel their own illogical beliefs are being threatened.

Acknowledgements



Resources used for this compilation include the following:

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- *A Brief Introduction to the New Testament* by Bart Ehrman
- *A History of God* by Karen Armstrong
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- *Data Over Dogma* with Daniel McClellan and Daniel Beecher
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- *History Hits* with Dan Snow, Peter Bergamin and Rachelle Cockerell
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- *Is Mormonism Christian?* by Solveig Nilson, Luther College
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Book Reviews

- *Why the Bible Began* by Jacob Wright, as reviewed by Adam Gopnik of the New Yorker