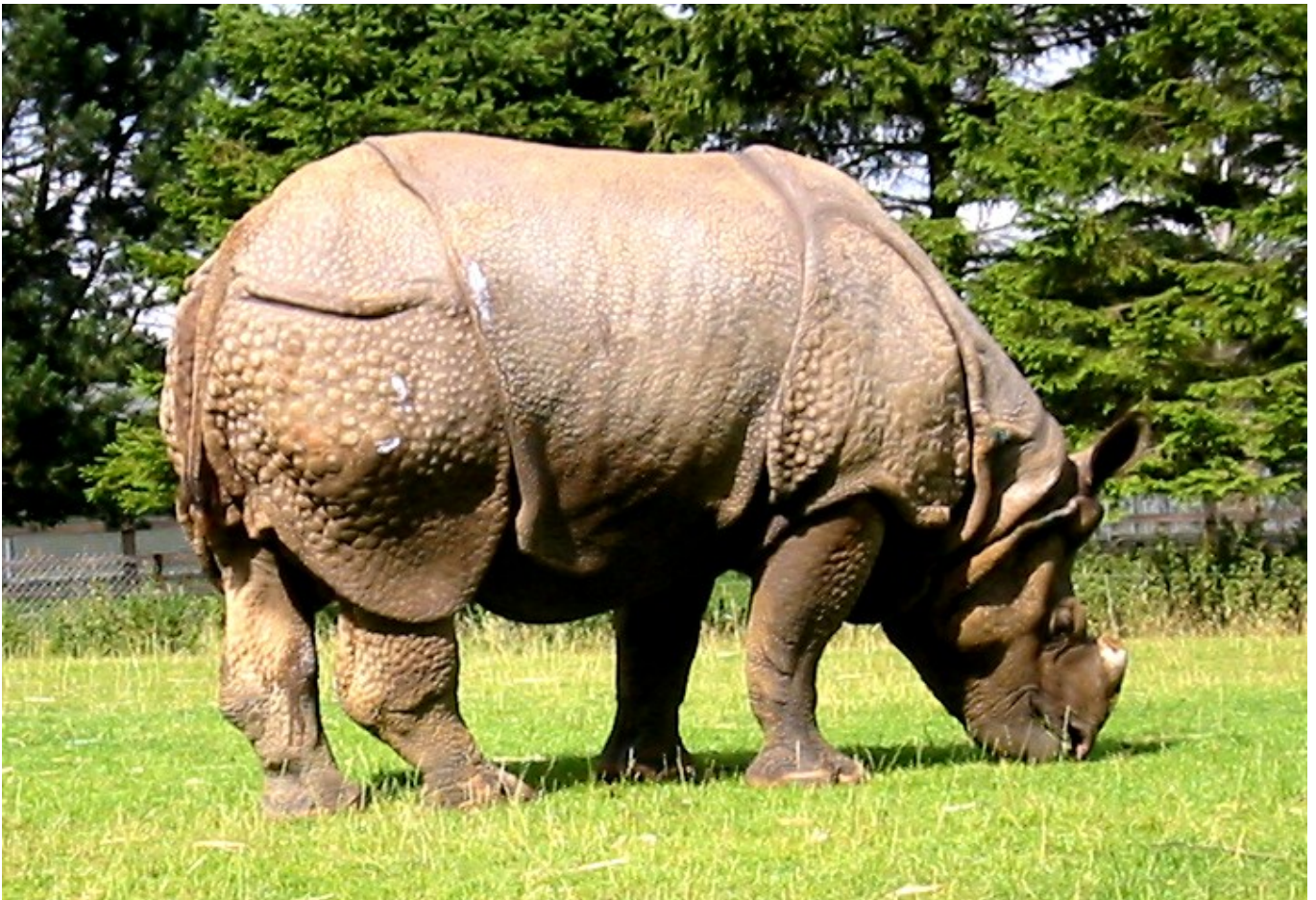


GENESIS ACCEPTED



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From the Editor

Welcome to the first edition of *Genesis Accepted*. I hope you enjoy it and appreciate what we are attempting to do.

The Book of Genesis is foundational to the Bible. It was the Book which God inspired Moses to write to introduce the plan of redemption in Christ and explain Himself and His creation to us. Without a firm grasp of its contents and messages, the rest of the Bible doesn't make much sense. Nevertheless it is probably the most written about, the most attacked and defended, the most mocked, misunderstood and undermined Book in the whole of the Bible.

No other Book, apart perhaps from Revelation, has excited so many people down the pages of history as this one has. It appears therefore that both the past and the future capture the human imagination as men try to make sense out of the present. But this one, Genesis, presents an amazing intellectual scope for the student. It has themes in almost all of the major branches of study: archæology, biology, climatology and meteorology, geology, psychology, numerology, theology and almost any other 'ology' you can name except astrology. Then there's physics, astronomy and philosophy; the list seems almost endless.

Whilst Revelation deals principally with the two major interlinking fields of prophecy and eschatology, Genesis is a Book of infinite variety like no other in the Bible, or anywhere else for that matter. It contains tales of murder, rape, adultery, homosexuality and incest, dastardly deeds, lying, cheating and betrayal, on the downside but it also contains stories of tender love, loyalty, fidelity and, of course, amazing faith, on the other.

Every major spiritual theme finds representation in Genesis: sin, repentance, faith, election, obedience, judgement, salvation, sacrifice, atonement, grace and so on. There's creation, angels, demons, giants, dinosaurs, the Flood, prophecy, genealogy and hosts of other things to explore. It is simply a never-bottomed well of interest for the biblical student.

So, what's *Genesis Accepted* going to be about—apart from Genesis? When I

conceived the idea of doing such a magazine in 1993, the world of desk-top publishing was very different. I actually typed up some articles for it on my Amstrad WPC (Word Processor) using a daisywheel printer. It was state-of-the-art at the time. In just over a decade it now seems positively antediluvian. What I then had hoped to do was far more limited in scope than now. The world of graphics, clip-art, scanners and other devices have made it possible to achieve so much more in the realm of presentation. And attractive presentation draws readers in since it is not for nothing that publishers reckon 'one picture is worth a thousand words'.

You will notice that reference is constantly made to 'Genesis' and not just to Creation or the first 11 chapters down to the Flood and on to Babel. The scope of this magazine extends across all 50 chapters so it is not another Creation magazine. That there will be regular articles on Creation and evidences is not in question since there is so much happening on that front. However by delving into the later chapters we can enter more into archæology, with special reference to Egyptology if so desired. There is a much broader sweep of study possible under this remit. To exclude articles on Creation and evidences on the grounds that there is plenty going on in this sphere through some excellent publications such as *Creation*, from the Answers-in-Genesis team, or *Reason and Revelation* put out by Apologetics Press run by our own brother Bert Thompson from America, would be unreasonable since most of our likely readership do not take these magazines.

We intend *Genesis Accepted* not to be simply a vehicle for apologetics or to engage in the Creation-Evolution debate; rather it will present thought-provoking, reflective and spiritual articles as well. The underlying rule, however, is that there must be a genuine link to the Book of Genesis in them.

We have called it *Genesis Accepted* to highlight the philosophy behind it. The 'Genesis' part is obvious, but why 'Accepted'? It is our intention for the magazine to be positively faith-building and not faith undermining, or destroying, in

intent and content! Thus it is *accepted* that it is historically accurate, that Moses was the author, as the Lord Himself indicated (John 5:45-47, Luke 16:29), and not some mysterious unknown writers called J.E.D.P., etc. We will not be writing, or accepting articles, on the Documentary Hypothesis. Also we *accept* that the account of Creation in Genesis 1 by God in six days, *ex nihilo* (from nothing), was how the universe was created around 4,004 BC. We will not be presenting material supporting the Gap Theory, Day-Age Theory, Theistic Evolution or any such nonbiblical approach to the text. We accept, as Creationists from denominational backgrounds regularly maintain (but don't follow through into the New Testament when it comes to matters such as baptism and salvation), that 'God says what He means and means what He says'. Thus the Hebrew word for 'day', meaning 24-hours, is 'yom' and that's the word used in Genesis 1, so we *accept* that God used six 24-hour days in which to create. We might well ponder why He felt He had to take as long as that to accomplish His miracle of creation but we will not fudge the issues to accommodate modern scientific thinking on these matters. We will let the Bible interpret our science and history not the other way around! Hence it is *Genesis Accepted*, as the title for the magazine.

The anticipated audience will be Christian; however it will not be edited as an in-house magazine. It can be passed on and used as an evangelistic tool if so desired. Articles can be developed in some depth and not be restricted to two sides only; however, there is no special merit in length, hence we will be looking for the succinct, rather than the unnecessarily verbose, approach.

We will welcome articles, subject to the usual editorial caveats, and we will take on board feedback and discussion if appropriate. It would be helpful if any articles or feedback came via email to make editing easier for me.

It is our prayer that this ministry will honour the Lord and provide useful spiritual food for our readers.

Graham A. Fisher

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Baptism: a Creation Event!



The Baptism of Jesus

When something is very important to God, which He wants us to learn at an inner, spiritual level, He ensures that it is emphasized forcibly in Scripture. Thus the necessity for obedience to His wishes, and that He required blood sacrifices to pay for sins, comes through from Abel, through Moses and down to Christ Himself. No Christian believer could have any doubt at all that this is a serious matter but since no group, who might wish to designate themselves as being Christian, has ever denied this as a truth, it is not a contentious issue.

Baptism, on the other hand, is contentious because many either want to deny that it has a necessary part in God's redemptive plan for mankind, or to assert that it is a sort of optional extra; you can take it or leave it depending on your fancy. We are going to see that it is a much deeper issue, far more important than many realize—even amongst those who take it very seriously indeed and practise it for the forgiveness of sins as an essential part of their obedient response to God's offer of salvation by grace through faith.

Water's importance to life

Water has always played a significant rôle in God's creative and redemptive work. We all recognize its significance to life and know that without it life of any sort is impossible. So crucial is it in the scientific world,

astronomers search for evidence of its existence, or former existence, deep in space to gauge whether life could be found on another planet. They are more concerned about this evidence than they are about evidence of a former atmosphere when it comes to pronouncing that primitive life could have once existed beyond the Earth.

That they might well find evidence of water on other planets, or of having once been on other planets, is not in dispute. They might or they might not. It would not surprise me if the planets nearest to us, namely Venus and Mars, and even the Moon, showed such evidence, believing as I do about the astro-catastrophic origin of the Flood. We will no doubt discuss this elsewhere at a later date. But as for this proving that life, even 'life, Jim, but not as we know it', once existed there because of the former presence of water, I doubt if that connection will ever be made. It may possibly be claimed, but then some scientists are so anxious to find life 'out there' they will conjecture almost anything in this field on the flimsiest of evidence, which would be laughed at in other scientific contexts were it to be presented for peer scrutiny.

But we digress. God created life and He chose to put it on Earth, which He prepared beautifully to receive it. Water

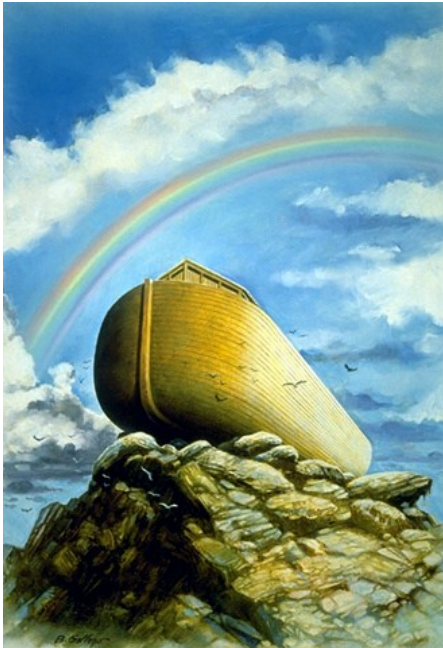
played an important part in the physical creation of life, and its re-creation after the Flood, and this is mirrored in the creation of spiritual life too.

Water in God's redemptive plan

People who believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God are commanded to be baptized in His Name, for the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The act of going down under the water is likened to a burial and the subsequent re-emergence to a resurrection with a fresh start and a new life. Indeed its symbolic spiritual significance is that in this action the new believer shows his willingness to unite with Christ by identifying himself with His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-11). As he does so, his old, spiritually lifeless past is buried and washed away and a fresh life emerges prepared and ready for God to create wonderfully what He will with it. In that one act, the redemptive and creative work of God is seen and water plays an important part in it.

Jesus submits to baptism

When we consider the redemptive work of Jesus we see that it began with His baptism. Up to that point Jesus' life had largely been unknown beyond His family and village. At the age of 30 He put this behind Him and, in order to fulfil all righteousness (Mt. 3:15) in obedience to the will of His heavenly Father, He submitted to baptism to



After the Flood

move His life on from its relative 'deadness' to the redemptive purpose God had in mind for it. Symbolically it was buried under the water and as He rose the Father gave Him His blessing and prepared to create our salvation through the life of His Son. He never returned to His former life and only occasionally went home to Nazareth where He wasn't exactly very well received. He even made His base at Capernaum during His ministry. That Jesus had no sin, and therefore didn't need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, is not the point here. He knew that creation and redemption, or in His case, the creation of redemption, had to begin under water because that was God's way, and therefore God's wish and will.

Old Testament 'Baptisms'

Baptism in the Bible is solely a New Testament phenomenon. Nevertheless the New Testament cites two Old Testament events as being a form of baptism: the Flood (1 Pt. 3:18-22) and the Exodus (1 Cor. 10:1-4). During the Flood the old, corrupt, antediluvian world was buried under water. Afterwards a whole new world was re-created in a massive new beginning. The redemption of Noah and his family through water, going from a dead, almost lifeless spiritual world into the freshly re-created new world, was a baptism. It is not insignificant that God buried the spiritually lifeless, antediluvian world under water before this amazing act of re-creation. He brought it up out of the water to newness of life, and it was a very different world from the one which perished.

The corruption and spiritual deadness of the antediluvian world can only be marvelled at. It could reasonably be estimated that at the time of the Flood there were approximately 1,000,000,000 people on the Earth yet God could only find one righteous man, Noah, who was worth redeeming! Not that

he was perfect, he wasn't. Being righteous in God's sight does not mean being perfect. Christians need to remember this as they strive towards the upward calling in Christ. Just after the Flood, as Noah sacrificed faithfully to God, God made the famous promise never to destroy the world again by a flood because He knew that there was evil continuously in men's hearts (Gen. 8:21). He'd just destroyed the Earth's land-based life because of man's wickedness and was making a fresh start with a righteous man heading up the replenishment programme, yet He realized that even Noah was still sinful so the world never would be perfect again. He could re-create and refashion the nature of the physical world but He could not completely re-create in mankind the spiritual perfection which Adam and Eve once possessed. That had gone for ever at the Fall.

The second example of an Old Testament 'baptism' occurred when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and escaped from Egypt. Their lives as slaves under the Egyptian yoke was akin to our slavery to sin in our unrepentant past. Seeking the freedom which comes from God, they escaped and, as the Pharaoh and his army perished under the water, so their past lives of slavery were gone and a new beginning was made. That they too were far from perfect was all too evident from their subsequent behaviour and punishment in the Wilderness for 40 years. Nevertheless God guided them across the land which was not their home until they were ready to enter His rest in Canaan. It's a splendid picture of our walk as Christians from slavery to heaven across the wilderness of this life in the knowledge that, as the spiritual puts it, 'This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through'. To escape from the clutches of their slavery they had to go

through the water or they would never have broken free. Pharaoh would have rounded them up and then made things even worse for them. Their only route to freedom and the Promised Land was through the water. It not only provided them with their escape route, it also killed off the past, destroying it for ever. They had a fresh start and a new beginning as God's people. Baptism does exactly the same thing spiritually for us.

The Creation Baptism

These two events, with links to baptism, are well known to students of the Bible. There is, however, an equally remarkable Creation link which is not always appreciated. Right at the very beginning of time God made the world in a most extraordinary manner. It is so much a part of the familiar story that we frequently never think about it.

When considering God's creative work, the amazing thing is not that He created in just six days but that He took so long to do it. An omnipotent God could have called His Creation into being in an instant, nevertheless He chose to take His time and do it slowly—by His standards.

Now, just look at how He did it. On Day One He created the heavens and the Earth. By 'the heavens' we must understand it to include the angelic host as His very first creative act since they were to serve as witnesses to the rest of His creative work (Job 38:4-7; specifically verse 7). That this is so would seem to be proven by the heavenly bodies of the Sun, Moon and stars not being created until Day Four.

After creating the heavens and the Earth, 'the earth was without form and void'. In other words it was sterile: a dead place. He now does a remarkable thing. Instead of moving straight on to creating light and



Pharaoh's Army destroyed in the Red Sea

immediately bringing forth life on this 'dead' planet, He buries it under water. Then He creates light, making for Night and Day, and that's all on Day One.

What does He do on Day Two? He tampers with the water, spending all Day separating the seas from the atmosphere and the waters above the atmosphere. This vapour canopy was to be critical in driving and sustaining the antediluvian climate, giving protection to life from harmful ultra-violet radiation from the Sun and providing a source of water for the ground so every living thing could indeed live. Rain was unknown until after the Flood.

It is not, therefore, until Day Three that He finally resurrects the sterile, void earth and brings it forth from under the water to form a new, fertile land mass. This could then be developed and moulded for greatness by the Creator. So the creative pattern God established right at the start of the world was to bury the sterile and 'dead' under a 'grave of waters' and then from out of that 'grave' resurrect it to newness of life. The Spirit had



Day Two: God divides the Waters

been working in, over and through the water and, as the new land appeared, so He was able to work His marvellous works in the abundant life God now had at hand and had placed at His disposal.

Water then at every turn is used to bury the life-less and thereby create the necessary conditions for new life to flourish once it emerges from beneath its embrace. Of course at Creation nothing was destroyed under the water for there was nothing there to destroy, nevertheless in every case it is out of the waters that new

life emerges. This is a truth of both God's creative and His redemptive works.

The principle has been established

The evolutionary scientists have actually got the principle right! To create life water is essential. They've got just about everything else wrong about creation but no matter, if the principle can be emphasized from the secular angle as well as the spiritual it might serve to drive it home in our minds.

Those who dismiss, or want to diminish, the effectiveness of water in God's plan of redemption, miss the whole message of how God creates, and created, both types of life: the physical and spiritual. He does it by bringing it forth from out of the waters. He even does this now every day when a baby is born. It's His creative method and therefore it must be very important to Him.

Baptism is not simply an optional extra; it is God's own chosen method; His creation principle. It is truly a Creation event.

CREATION

Before the Beginning

If there is a God, He is eternal. He always was and always will be. He has no beginning and no end. He is beyond time and space. Our human minds cannot conceive of such a Being nor can they conceive of a time before time existed when there was only God and absolutely nothing else. Man, being finite, cannot comprehend the Infinite, however, he can stand in awe of Him as he ponders such things. If there is a God, He must have existed before the beginning!

So, can we prove there is a God? Is such a proposition capable of proof in the finite way we understand the term 'proof'? Great minds down the ages have tried and below, in simplified form, is an outline of some of their solutions.

One can't prove God exists with absolute certainty



Most people don't try to prove God exists. They search for Him and find Him. Some don't bother to look.

Cause and Effect

Scientists tell us that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. At one time there was a belief in spontaneous generation in the biological sphere. Louis Pasteur, however, demonstrated the error of this notion. Things do not generate spontaneously; there has to be a cause. Nothing in our experience is uncaused.

So, if you want to examine all causes back to their origin by asking the question, 'What caused that?', and then, 'What caused the thing that caused that?', and so on in what is technically known as an *infinite regression*, you must arrive at a point where it becomes absurd to keep on asking the question, 'What caused the cause that caused...?' You have to acknowledge that you must arrive at an original 'something' which was itself not caused but began it all. That 'something' is what we want to call 'God'.

For unbelieving scientists, the point at which they stop is The Big Bang. They believe that the whole Universe was once compressed into a dot no bigger than a full stop on this page. To try to imagine that, given the massive, almost unbelievable size of the Universe, takes an enormous amount of faith but they do it without the blinking of an eyelid. Yet these self-same scientists often mock the faith of Christians who believe in a Creator God who made everything. This microdot Universe encountered something like a gravity wave about 15,000,000,000



Who started everything?

God is the first cause to which every event can be traced.

(Aquinas' Cosmological Argument)

years ago, so the theory goes, and it exploded into billions of bits which later came to form the galaxies and planets. These scientists have to start with a 'something' which was always there; it's just that their 'something' is physical not spiritual.

The Christian can suggest that he can go one stage further back than the scientist and postulate that God placed the microdot and gravity wave there. That merely begs the question. To push it one step back actually proves nothing because you still have to go outside your terms of reference in order to arrive at your answer. The argument is not logically self-consistent. And besides which, the Christian does not want to accept the validity of The Big Bang, or its accompanying gravity wave, as the origin of the Universe. It leaks too many scientific holes and is merely the latest in a long line of failed scientific explanations.

This so-called 'proof' is known as the *Cosmological* proof and goes back a long time to Thomas Aquinas at least. Though it does not prove anything it certainly is a pointer to the high probability that God exists, as do all of the 'proofs'.

Design and Purpose

The Bible nowhere argues the case for the existence of God. Its amazing opening verse simply proclaims: *'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'* (Gen. 1:1), and off it goes on that assumption. The nearest it comes to making any statement on the topic is in the Book of Romans, chapter 1, where it reads: *'... his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.'* (vs. 20). The evidence we need to prove God's existence lies in looking at what has clearly, and obviously, been made.

All scientists believe in design in nature; they couldn't function as scientists if they didn't. They look for and anticipate natural laws which they believe will operate consistently throughout the Universe under the same physical conditions. Since we cannot

go far into space at all and test this assumption, it must remain a 'faith' proposition; however, it is not an unreasonable or unreasoned matter of faith. True faith never is blind faith; it is always based on sound reasoning and experience. This goes for the Christian believer equally as well as for the scientist.

Thus scientists believe that the Law of Gravity behaves as constantly in distant galaxies as it does here on Earth. They believe that light travels at the same constant speed throughout time and space. Unlike gravity, this assumption has recently been challenged, with implications for the Creation debate. We will return to this at a later date.

William Paley (1743 - 1805), in his book *Natural Theology*, 1802, described a man walking down a path and, seeing a watch lying beside a stone, concluded that the watch had been made by somebody, even though there was no other evidence present for the watchmaker's existence. The proof that the watch was designed by an intelligence is evident in its working to an obvious end and purpose. There was nothing placed randomly in the watch and every part had a distinct function to perform. Paley postulated that nature shows clear evidence of design despite the visible absence of the designer. He has become the archetypal champion of the argument from design which is called the *Teleological* proof for the existence of God.

This has always been the strongest argument. Well it would be if it really *is* God's preferred argument for Himself! The main argument against it in many minds is not that there is a weakness in the philosophical reasoning but rather that the 'facts' of evolution have shown conclusively that you can get design from random chance events. That the 'facts' of evolution are not facts at all but are simply unproven hypotheses, is not appreciated by many. The current Creation/Evolution debate is, in fact, the modern form of the 'Does God exist?' debate. This is why it is a crucial



**Who designed everything?
- Not chance!
(Aquinas' Teleological Argument)**

debate for the Christian to be involved with.

The design argument shows that it is most reasonable to accept that there was an Intelligence behind the creation of the Universe. It can say little or nothing further at all about the nature of this 'Intelligence', namely that 'It' is omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing) and omnipresent (present everywhere), or that 'He' is a good, loving and gracious God. Nor can it say that the Universe was designed by a single Intelligence. In our world there can often be a team of designers who pool their talents to the agreed end. It takes other arguments to discover the nature of the Creator/Designer God, which are way beyond the remit of the Teleological proof.

Ideas of Perfection

The first two 'proofs' of the existence of God have a strong scientific side to them. Other 'proofs' do not. They depend on reasoning and our understanding of morality for their arguments. The first of these is probably the most difficult to follow because it is purely an exercise of the mind. As you can see from the diagram, it is known as the *Ontological* argument.



**Who is the Greatest?
God is that than which
nothing is greater
(Anselm's Ontological Argument)**

Put simply, this argument revolves around our ideas of greatness and perfection. By applying our minds to a human understanding of the greatest, most perfect Being possible, we can come up with a list of attributes we would consider absolutely necessary for such a Being to possess. These would include the three attributes of God which we know from of old, namely: omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. It would also contain the notion of Him being all good (which threw Augustine of Hippo as he considered God's rôle in the understanding of the problem of evil, pain and suffering), and all love.

Clearly no human being could be omnipotent, omniscient or omnipresent, nor could they be all good and all love because they are fallible and mortal beings. Thus it is possible to construct our list and then con-

clude that, 'A Perfect Being who exists is more perfect than a Perfect Being who does not exist, therefore God exists.' This sounds good until you realise that there is no way that existence can be a necessary attribute of perfection. For example, it is possible for us to construct an idea of what a perfect unicorn might be like. Having agreed upon all of its qualities, we cannot then conclude that, 'A perfect unicorn that exists is more perfect than a perfect unicorn that doesn't exist, therefore unicorns exist.' We know that unicorns do not exist and no amount of wishful thinking is going to change this.

Wishful thinking about a Perfect Being we would want to call God does not guarantee that He exists. The Ontological argument simply does not work.

Morality

One of the puzzles for the atheistic humanist is the presence of morality in the world. There might be some good, sociological reasons for having laws which govern any society in a given time and place but there is no logical, naturalistic explanation for what we would class as normal, human morality.

The Theory of Evolution is the basis on which atheistic humanism is founded. This, however, preaches that 'Nature is red in tooth and claw'. The survival of the fittest, the mechanism by which humans are supposed to have evolved from brute animals, has no place in its scheme for anything other than total selfishness. The unfit to survive need to be killed off to ensure the best possible gene pool is maintained for the successful furtherance of the species. In the animal kingdom the sick and old are soon polished off by predators. Incest, adultery, theft and murder are all common in the animal world and could comfortably be described as the natural way to behave. If mankind evolved, how and when did the change to morality arrive? It actually makes no evolutionary sense to have doctors and carers, policemen and monks in an animal driven society. 'OXFAM', 'Christian Aid', and many other charities too are clear denials of an animalistic origin for the human species.

Since morality does not come naturally to anybody, and therefore has to be taught, from whence did it come? It is reasonable to suggest that it came from God. The almost universality of certain moral standards in all societies argues for the notion that God gave the same moral code to all societies at some point in the past. Differences today are a sign that some societies have become more degenerate than others, not that they haven't evolved as far. The trials of the Nazi leaders after the Second World War were based on the assumption of the universal reality of this moral code, so they couldn't hide behind the claim that they were only being consistent to their belief system by slaughtering millions

of Jews. They might well have been but nobody was prepared to listen seriously to this as a defence. Morality is not just a matter of political or social and personal choice.

The Joint Witness

As we have seen, no one proof can stand as an absolute guarantor of the certainty of the existence of God. However, put them all together and the postulate that 'God exists' does not seem all that unreasonable. It's like the strands of a rope, individually they can't take the strain but weave them together and they can moor an ocean liner.

The Resurrection

There is, however, one 'proof' of the existence of God which is totally independent of the approaches which philosophers have used down the centuries, and that is the resurrection of Jesus. The claim made by Christians is that on the third day after He was cruelly crucified, Jesus rose from the dead. It is not part of our remit here to examine this claim in detail. Books have been written on the topic, one of the best being, *Who Moved the Stone?*, by Frank Morison, 1931 (and still very much in print!). This claim can be examined by all of the methods used to assess historical events and what happened, from going to documentary sources, through logical examination of the claims and counter-claims, to psychological profiling.

The Christian faith stands or falls on the truth, or otherwise, of the resurrection of Jesus. All other religious belief systems are based on somebody's ideas and teaching but Christianity is unique in challenging the sceptic to put this factual assertion under any historical microscope he may deem appropriate and then pronounce it either to be true or false.

There *was* a man called Jesus, who walked this Earth some 2,000 years ago. He taught for only three years and then was crucified, around the age of 33. Three days later the tomb where they laid His body was empty; the stone they had sealed up and guarded to prevent theft, was opened up and no trace of His body was ever found. How did this happen? There have been several theories: i) The disciples mistook the tomb and went to the wrong place on the third day. ii) Jesus didn't actually die on the Cross—He was only up there for six hours and that was quite short by crucifixion standards—He merely swooned and, in the cool of the tomb, revived and



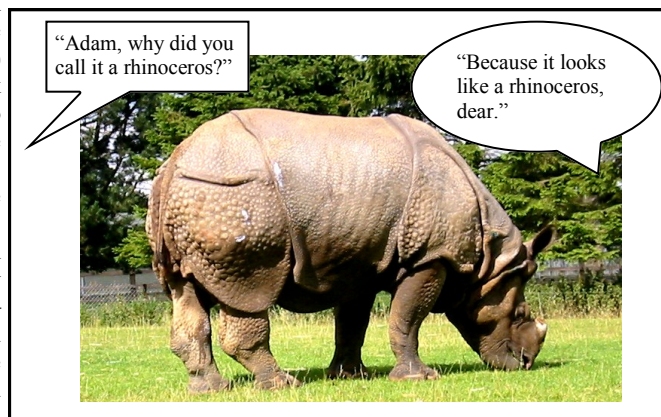
pushed back the stone to make His escape. (Muslims often teach this as their attempt to disprove the Christians' claims.) iii) The disciples came and stole the body. All three ideas do not stand critical examination.

Sherlock Holmes once said: "*How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth?*" (*The Sign of Four*). The only solution to the problem of the empty tomb which fits all the facts, no matter how improbable or nonsensical it might appear to be to our rationalistic, 21st Century minds, is that on the third day He rose, as the Bible said He did.

Now this, if indeed it is true, raises all sorts of questions about Jesus and who He really was. It shows Him to be the Son of God and, for the sake of this topic here, that there is indeed a God. Prove the resurrection to be true and you've proved the existence of God. Disprove it and you've not actually disproved the existence of God, merely the fallacy, as it then would be, of the Christian religion.

Conclusion

If, after careful examination of the evidence and arguments, it can be agreed that 'God exists', there is no problem in accepting the premise that 'Before the Beginning there was only God'. The rest then follows on logically from that.



The Mystery of Melchizedek - Solved?

If all we knew about Melchizedek was what we learn of him from Genesis 14:18-20, he would be one of those mysterious characters who pops up in scripture from time-to-time but about whom we know nothing, and care even less. Obviously the Holy Spirit never included anybody who was unimportant at the time of writing, however, we would have to conclude that this man's importance must remain lost to us in our day, whatever his importance in the biblical narrative might have been.

But then he is mentioned by David in Psalm 110:4, and the Jews always recognized this Psalm as being messianic. Here he says:

'The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
"You are a priest forever
after the order of Melchizedek."

This too would have been enigmatic in its day because its meaning was not to be made clear for another 1,000 years after David wrote. Well did Peter say that the prophets of old 'enquired carefully' about the things they were writing but had to be content in the knowledge that 'they were serving not themselves but [us], in the things that have now been announced to [us].' (1 Pt. 1:10-12).

It was, of course, in the Hebrew Letter that the 'announcement' about Melchizedek was made fully. Across three chapters, 5-7, there is an explanation of the priesthood of Jesus being likened to that of Melchizedek and therefore vastly superior to the Levitical/Aaronic priesthood the Jews had revered for about 1,500 years.

The Letter was written to encourage some Jewish Christians to remain faithful and not even think about returning to Judaism. At the time of writing, the old Levitical system was still running parallel to the new Christian system and Christians were beginning to be persecuted. The Jews were not; so some were thinking that since the old system had had God's blessing for so long, why not revert back and serve Him once more under that system. They would still be serving God and they would not be in danger. Hebrews points out the truths that the Old was simply a shadow of the good things in Christ and that Christ's sacrifice and priesthood was better too. It also pointed out the folly of apostasy and how they would be recrucifying Christ if they did so (Heb. 6:6).

Presenting Jesus as a High Priest

Jesus was presented to the Jews as being both the King and High Priest of the Christian faith. There was no problem to Jewish Christians with Him being seen as a king. He was known to be of the royal line of David

from the tribe of Judah but priests came only from the tribe of Levi, and High Priests had to be direct descendants of Aaron. Jesus was neither and to get them to accept Him as our great High Priest took some powerful persuasion based on watertight reasoning. They got it, and Melchizedek was central to the argument.

The need to know

For the argument to work, however, Jewish Christians needed to know who Melchizedek actually was, and why his High Priesthood was better than that of Aaron, or they would never have accepted the link from him to Jesus. This took some doing after 1,500 years under Moses with the priesthood focusing on Jerusalem and the Temple, where atoning sacrifices were offered on a sacred site on sacred soil, holy to Jehovah God and pregnant with meaning for them.

The same thing applied to David too. He also needed to know exactly who Melchizedek was for the same reasons. This fact cannot be overstated because it is absolutely crucial to our Christology today as much as to theirs in the First Century church.

Even more importantly, however, Abram (as he then still called) needed to know who Melchizedek was. After all, he was the one who bowed down to him and received his blessing and offered him a tithe in acknowledgement of Melchizedek's superiority in every respect. This was truly amazing! The men of the East are very conscious of protocol and who is more exalted than whom, today. It was no different then save it may have been even more pronounced. Abram was a powerful tribal leader—a sheik, we might call him. He commanded a small army of men who were good enough, and powerful enough, to chase after Lot's captors and rescue him and his fellow hostages.

Abram was also very well aware of his own massive standing with God. God had called him out of Ur, commissioned him and already made him some marvellous promises. He knew he was special to God and a spiritual giant in his generation. Yet he bowed down to Melchizedek as an inferior does to the superior (Heb. 7:7).

The sparse account in Genesis

Reading the narrative in Genesis 14, you could be guilty of thinking: 'Sodom's attacked and Lot's captured. Abram hears about it, takes off after him with his army, rescues him and passes Salem (which is Jerusalem) on his way back home. Here he

happens to bump into a king/priest called Melchizedek, who feeds him and his men with bread and wine so he gives him his thanks as he bows down, offers him a tithe and gets his blessing. Then off he goes and that's it. Would it were that simple.

Melchizedek in the Book of Hebrews

Hebrews tells us that Melchizedek is a man of mystery. Chapter 7 verse 3 reads: *'He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.'* Now, if this verse is to be understood literally, then Melchizedek could be anything from an angelic being to the Word of God, the Second Person in the Godhead, appearing in a theophany. His priesthood then would not have been known to Abram who would have encountered him miraculously and we could never know the truth. However, the narrative in Genesis does not read at all like this. Melchizedek's kingship and priesthood is well established in Jerusalem and Abram seemed to know it. Such an encounter, if Melchizedek was an angelic-type being, would not have impacted on David or the First Century Christians as it did. We would have to ask ourselves why God would apparently establish a miraculous, angelic priesthood in Jerusalem for a brief moment when a human-based, long-term one would do just as well if not better. No, this verse in Hebrews 7 indicates that there is a massive element of mystery surrounding Melchizedek which inspired awe in Abram and those who knew who he was. Melchizedek belongs to another world lost in the mists of time past and his priesthood is not a temporary one but goes on for ever, until the end of time in the future. This was unlike the Aaronic priesthood which was 'obsolete and growing old [and] is ready to vanish away' as the Hebrew writer told them (8:13). So, who was he? Let us try to unravel the mystery.

The importance of Salem (Jerusalem)

The first thing we notice is that Melchizedek's priesthood was established in Salem/Jerusalem. Here sacrifices to God were made even at this early period in the biblical story. Some years later its significance was to be further emphasized when Abraham was told to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. He had to journey for three days to get to the specifically designated spot on a mountain in Moriah (Gen. 22:1-9). This is where later Solomon was to build his temple: on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 3:1). This certainly re-established Jerusalem as the spot where atoning sacrifices were to be made under Moses, and God's Levitical priesthood was based there.



Model of the Temple in Jerusalem showing the Holy of Holies on Mount Moriah

Thus it is absolutely wonderful to see how the Lord emphasized this spot as *the* spot for such things because, of course, it was here that the final atoning sacrifice of Jesus was made once and for all, and from where He began His priesthood. Jerusalem was indeed a very special, holy place.

A priesthood of the Noachic Covenant

Melchizedek was a priest of the Noachic covenant, introduced after the Flood, with king/priests acting as intercessors. We remember that Jacob coveted this rôle and pulled a fast one over Esau in order to obtain it. This covenant has never been revoked or superseded. Acts 15 shows this quite clearly. Christ only nailed the religious practices and observances of the Mosaic covenant to the Cross (Col.2:14). The promises given to Noah still hold good and its seal, the rainbow, means exactly the same as it did when he first saw it. Christ as our king/priest is the permanent guarantor of this everlasting covenant, and so Melchizedek's priesthood is eternal, even though he himself was not.

Who could Melchizedek be?

If he were *that* important and a man Abram knew was superior even to him, who could he be? Don't be misled by his name, which means 'King of Righteousness' (Heb. 7:2). Biblical people often went under several different names sometimes making identification difficult for us.

Looking back over the biblical records which relate to Abraham's time, or before he was born, who stands out? Well, we have Adam, Seth, Enoch and Methuselah, who all died before the Flood, so Melchizedek can't be any of them. Then we have Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth who are very well known, but who else? Well, nobody actually because after Shem the next truly important biblical giant is Abraham. Japheth and Ham, though very significant to the nations of the world, were not in Abraham's genealogy so he would not revere them as he would Shem and Noah. So could Melchizedek be Noah? Could he be Shem? Well, let's see.

The credentials of both Noah and Shem

They both belonged to the mysterious 'other world' before the Flood. Many Christians do not appreciate just how different the post-Flood world was compared to the antediluvian one. It was the stuff of legends with dinosaurs, tall ferns and trees, giant-sized ferocious men (Gen. 6:1-4), no rain, no mountains, no continents (just one huge land mass), no Polar ice caps and a warm, ambient temperature all year. And this is just the half of it but it will do for now. Men, and presumably women, lived enormous numbers of years, all of which changed dramatically after the Flood, though in Abraham's time it still had not bottomed out at around 70.

Both Noah and Shem could go back to Adam in just two steps: both knew Methuselah (Noah for 500 years and Shem for 98), and Methuselah knew Adam for 253 years. What knowledge could they tell about the past and the history of the world? What wisdom and spiritual understanding could they impart to others? But could Melchizedek actually be either of them? Here's where all those boring genealogies in Genesis 5 and 10, paralleled in 1 Chronicles 1, etc., you know, the bits we all see no point in and skip quickly, come into their own!

We often forget that Noah lived for 349 years after the Flood and Shem lived for another 500. Just how did they spend their time? No doubt serving God faithfully as they always had. The Bible is silent on this so we can only speculate about it. Abraham was born in 1948 AM (*Anno Mundi*, after Creation) and Noah died in 2006 AM. Thus their lives overlapped by 58 years! Shem carried on until he died in 2158 AM. Believe it or not, Shem actually outlived Abraham by 35 years and Jacob was 70 when he died! Amazing, once you realize it.

If Shem and Noah carried on serving God as king/priests, as we have every right to assume that they did, they would carry all the necessary credentials to be identified as Melchizedek. On meeting either of them, Abram would have no trouble recognizing

them as his superiors in every possible way; and knowing who Melchizedek actually was, neither would David or the First Century Jewish Christians. This man *was* superior even to their beloved Abram, as he himself readily acknowledged.

The final clue and identification

Well we can know which of them was Melchizedek. You see, Abram was 75 when he left Haran to go south under God's direction and the encounter with Melchizedek came later. Noah had died when Abram was 58, as we said earlier, so, if Melchizedek can be identified with either of them, he has to be **SHEM**.

Abram was a Shemite, now called a Semite, so he would automatically bow down to his illustrious forefather and both desire and accept his blessing. It makes absolute sense when you realize it.

Summing up

We do not require any further proof of this identification, however, it is very interesting to note that in books of Jewish myths and legends, the compilation of the material for which dates from around the time of Christ, always talk about Melchizedek/Shem. This positive identification is not made in the scriptures, though we can get to the truth by using them, but the Jews

knew for many years who he was.

So, there we have it. The identification fits and makes sense. It only does so providing we accept the Genesis account as being reliable and historically accurate. Modern scholarship would pour scorn on such reasoning because it cannot handle the genealogies presented in the Book.

If we cannot accept this identification, Melchizedek must forever remain as a man of mystery whom we can never fathom and know at all. But I am happy that the mystery of Melchizedek is solved!

The Tree Of Life

What use, what purpose was there for the *Tree of Life* in the Garden of Eden? This is something which puzzled me for years. I can see the purpose for the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* because its rôle and function are made plain in the story, but the *Tree of Life*, what's it there for?

Genesis chapter 2 tells us of the two special trees in the middle of the Garden. The account does not say that they were planted there, just that they were there (v. 9). Whether they were normal trees which God designated as being special for the purpose of testing the love of Adam, or whether they were like nothing else in the Garden, we do not know. Whatever they were, Eve recognized that the fruit on the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* was good for food, so maybe its fruit was part of her normal diet and everyday experience. If it were so, this would compound her sin, because it offered her nothing unusual save for the thrill of eating what was forbidden. Like the horse which leans over the fence to eat identical grass from the 'forbidden' side, so is our desire for that which has been placed tantalisingly just out of our reach.

When Adam was created, he was not designed for death. Immortality was not conferred on him by his eating the fruit of the *Tree of Life* and he was neither bidden nor forbidden to eat of its fruit. The prohibition extended only to the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*; eating from the *Tree of Life* did nothing for Adam with respect to his mortality. Once he sinned, however, God had to guard the way to it to prevent him from eating and thereby regaining immortality even though he now had a sinful nature.

Therein lies the puzzle. If it were not there for Adam and Eve to eat from so that they could have immortal life before they sinned—they were created immortal—what was it there for? On the face of it, it seemed to serve no obvious function in the Garden

before sin entered the world, and access to it was forbidden once they fell. It disappears from Scripture until the Book of Revelation. It's almost like spiritual quotation marks at each end of the Bible.

The Lord promised the church in Ephesus: *'To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'* (Rev. 2:7). This also tells us nothing about its edenic function, however, in the very last chapter of Revelation we see it restored to its original glory: *'... on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.'* (22:2, emphasis added). Here the Tree is there for healing purposes. Could this then be why it was present in the middle of Eden? The answer almost certainly has to be 'Yes'.

Though Adam was created immortal, and therefore could not die, he was placed into a world where pain was a distinct possibility. The laws of nature which operate today, such as the Law of Gravity, were not lying in suspense at Creation waiting for the day when sin entered the world; they were present in Eden. They are not part of the Second Law of Thermodynamics which we understand was part of God's response to sin. This teaches that everything now moves from order to chaos and all things ultimately decay. Adam needed a world where if things dropped they would fall, and not fly upwards or float about. He was put in the Garden to act as its keeper, in other words, his job was to be that of a gardener. The use of tools, for example, would be necessary and tools can drop on the toes of an immortal man just as easily as on those of a mortal man. It would hurt equally as much. A coconut could fall off a tree and hit him on the head as hard, and hurt as much as it would today. One can imagine all sorts of healing which might be needed in Eden simply because of the nature of the world which God created. The antidote of

any physical discomforts in Eden was to have been the *Tree of Life*. A similar example of this sort of healing was the bronze serpent Moses made to cure the Israelites after their snake bites (Num. 21:8-9).



The Bronze Serpent created

Now we have a positive purpose for the *Tree of Life* in Eden, which is totally consistent with its function in Revelation, and with the nature of the created world into which God placed Adam. He did not have to suspend His natural laws, or invoke miraculous interventions whenever man was in accidental danger. Whether Adam and Eve ever used its healing powers, we do not know; nor do we know how long they spent in Eden before they fell. If it were only a short time, they might never have needed to eat of its fruit but if their stay in Eden was significant, they very well might. The impression given in Genesis is that it was not too long before Satan got to them because they had not got around to having children while they were there.

Whether the *Tree of Life* in Revelation is to be understood literally, or whether it stands for the truth that healing will be available for all who belong to Christ and that the curse will have been removed, is not ours to say with any certainty here. One tree standing on both sides of a river tends to create the notion that it must be understood non-literally in Revelation. Nevertheless it was present in Eden and carried with it the same promise as we see at the end when perfection is restored. In the beginning it had a purpose but was rarely, if ever, used. At the end it is a vital necessity to put right what Adam began and do for us what God stopped it doing for him after the curse was invoked.

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